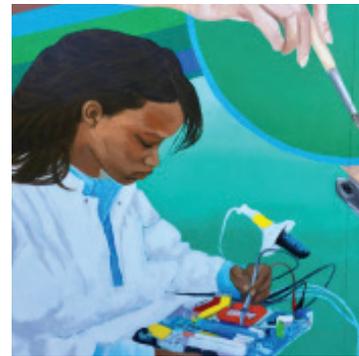
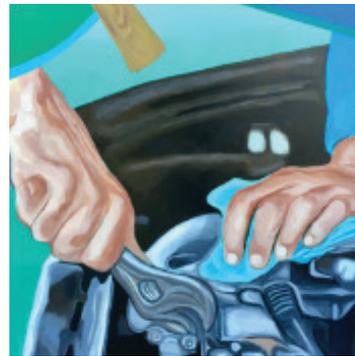


MARCH 2019

Labor Takes the High Road:

How Unions Make Western New York More Prosperous and Equitable





Snapshot of the 16 Million Union Members in the United States Today

46%

are women

36%

are people of color

42%

have a college degree or more

53%

work in health, education,
or public administration

Finely Tuned

Alongside the Niagara River in Tonawanda, New York sits General Motors' largest engine plant, where 1,380 members of the United Auto Workers Local 774 build award-winning engines. In the heart of Buffalo, the iconic Kleinhans Music Hall is home to the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, where 73 members of the American Federation of Musicians Local 92 create Grammy-winning classical music. Both finely tuned workplaces are producing finely tuned products in a revitalizing regional economy.

Whether a machinist or a violinist, these workers, empowered through their collective union voice, play important roles making our economy strong. Like many other unions, Local 774 and Local 92 are credited by their employer counterparts with innovative collective bargaining that preserves not just quality jobs but also quality institutions and a quality community.

This report surveys the impact of labor unions on the economy and social fabric of Western New York. The data show that unions raise wages and benefits for the region's workers. They make workplaces more safe, healthy, and fair – reducing turnover and offering workers a voice. But the impact of organized labor reaches far beyond individual workplaces.

Through community service, civic engagement, worker assistance, workforce development, and public policy advocacy, union members build the high road that makes the entire community more prosperous, united, and inclusive.





Western New York's Unions Today: a Snapshot

*Healthcare workers meeting to prepare
for collective bargaining.*

Examples of Larger-Sized Unions In the WNY Area Labor Federation: Approximate WNY Membership

PUBLIC SECTOR

New York State United Teachers
(NYSUT), 23,700 members;

Civil Service Employees Association
(CSEA), 18,400 members;

American Federation of State, County,
and Municipal Employees (AFSCME),
2,800 members;

Public Employees Federation (PEF),
2,100 members;

National Association of Letter Carriers
(NALC), 1,200 members.

PRIVATE SECTOR

Communications Workers of America
(CWA), 8,700 members;

Teamsters, 8,000 members;

Service Employees International Union
(SEIU), 8,000 members;

United Food and Commercial Workers
(UFCW), 6,200 members;

United Steelworkers (USW),
5,100 members;

United Auto Workers (UAW),
4,700 members.

Western New York's Unions Today: a Snapshot

Organized labor is one of the most important civic institutions in Western New York, with more than 140,000 union members in the eight-county region.¹ In the Buffalo-Niagara metropolitan area alone, one out of every five workers is a union member, for a total of 101,240 members.² Of those members, 57 percent are public servants, while 43 percent work in the private sector.³ Roughly seven out of ten public sector workers in Buffalo-Niagara belong to unions, as do one out of ten working for private employers.⁴

Union members are one of the most diverse groups in the region, by race, ethnicity, gender, religion, political party, and many other measures. They wear both white and blue collars. They teach our children, care for our sick and elderly, build our cars, deliver our mail, play in our orchestras, and provide many other crucial services. Major private employers with large union workforces in the region include Kaleida Health, General Motors, Ford, Tops Markets, Catholic Health, Sumitomo Rubber, National Fuel, National Grid, Aurubis, Blue Cross-Blue Shield, Cutco, and General Mills.

New York boasts the highest union density of any state, with 23.8 percent of workers in unions, compared to a national rate of 10.7 percent.⁵ Buffalo-Niagara's union density (19.9 percent) is a lower than the state average; it is lower than the unionization rate in Albany (32.2 percent), Syracuse (23.7 percent), and New York City (21.8 percent), but higher than that in Rochester (17.9 percent).⁶ Interestingly, Albany owes its higher union density not so much to its public sector (72.8 percent union, compared to Buffalo-Niagara's 70.5 percent), as to its private sector (19.4 percent union, compared to Buffalo-Niagara's 10.2 percent).⁷

Of course, Western New York's unions bargain collectively regarding wages, benefits, and working conditions, but unions also aid their members, other workers, employers, and the broader community in many other ways. Research shows that unions have positive impacts on everything from public health to voting participation. **Two overarching aspects of unions make them uniquely important to a healthy community. First, they are democratic institutions, with leaders elected by members; this makes them particularly responsive to the needs and goals of working people, and it makes them training grounds for democratic participation in all other areas of public life. Second, they are intensively collaborative, constantly seeking win-win resolutions. Union members want the companies where they work to succeed, and they want their local economies to grow and flourish.**

Forming a Union In the Private Sector

Unionization in the private sector is governed by the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) of 1935. If 30 percent of the workers in a bargaining unit indicate that they want to form a union, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) holds an election, and, if more than half of the workers in the unit vote in favor, the NLRB certifies a union. The employer then has a duty to bargain in good faith toward a collective bargaining agreement with the union over wages, hours, and conditions.

Mission Statement of the WNY Area Labor Federation

Our mission is to improve the lives of and increase the power for working families, bring fairness and dignity to the workplace and secure social equity.

We are working to build a strong, diverse, free and democratic labor movement in order to give a political voice to workers in our area.

We fight for a public policy agenda at all levels of government which benefits all working families, both union and non-union.

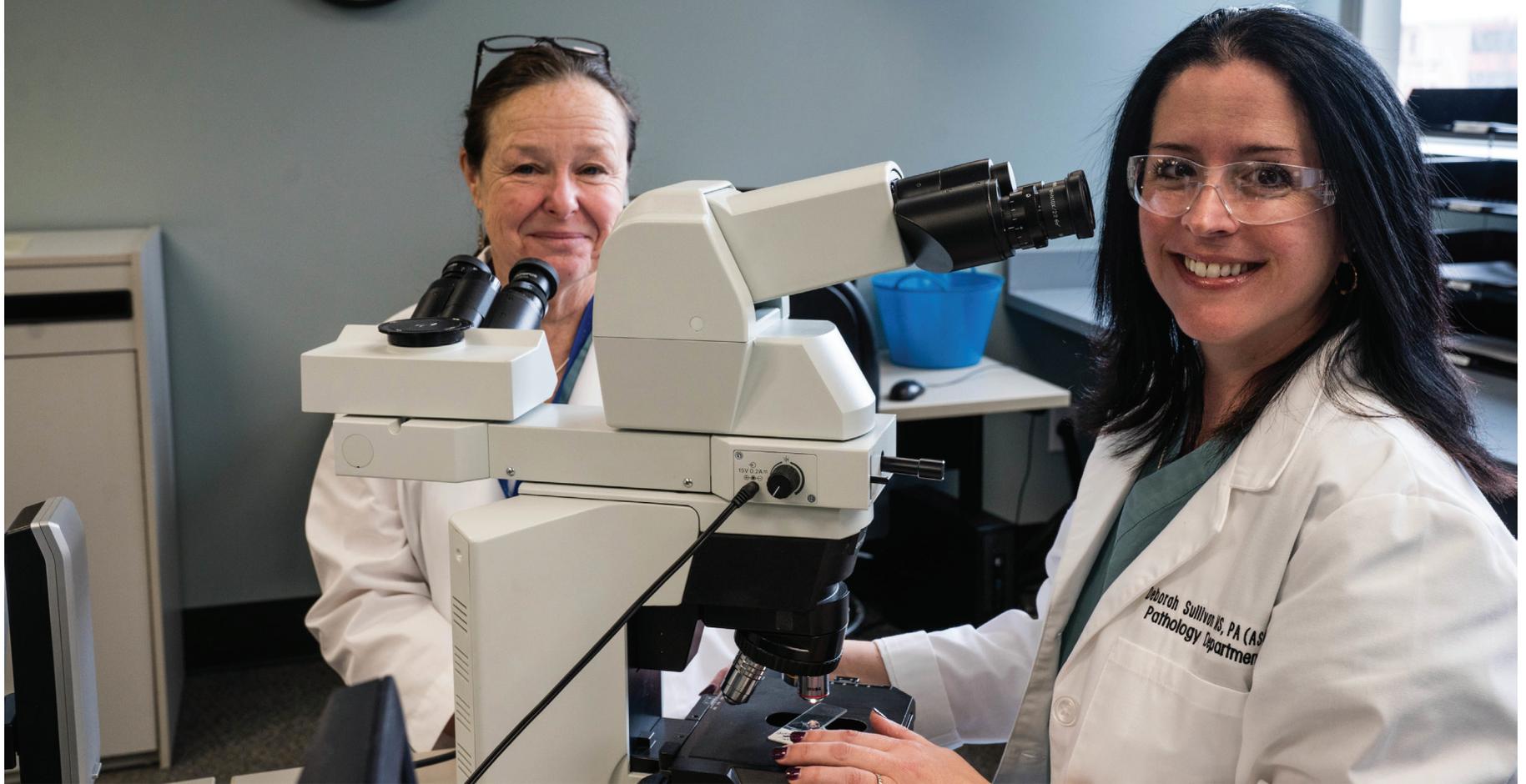
We are active in our community and strive to create a broad progressive coalition for social and economic justice.

In a time where many Americans are concerned about polarization, the lack of civic cohesion, and the vulnerability of the working class, unions have an unmatched ability to bring people together around the shared values of equality, justice, and opportunity.

The building block of a union is a local: a locally based group of workers who work for the same company, in the same region, or in the same sector. A local has a charter from a national or international union, such as Communications Workers of America or United Auto Workers. In the private sector, some of the major types of union are industrial, craft, service, transportation and utility, and arts/entertainment. Of Buffalo-Niagara's 43,359 private sector union members, more than half belong to industrial unions such as CWA, UFCW, USW, UAW, and the Teamsters. (Names do not tell the whole story; many members of CWA are nurses, not industrial workers or communications workers.) Over 8,400 union members belong to craft unions such as the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) and the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOP); and roughly 8,500 workers belong to service unions such as SEIU and New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA). Approximately 1,400 workers belong to the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), including the bus drivers and mechanics for the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA).⁸

Various unions also join together in councils and federations. The Western New York Area Labor Federation (WNYALF) of the AFL-CIO, established in 2001, unites over 130,000 members from the five central labor councils in Western New York: Buffalo/Erie County, Niagara/Orleans, Cattaraugus/Allegany, Dunkirk, and Jamestown. Different constituency and affinity groups also have formed national organizations with local chapters, such as the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, and the Next Up Young Worker Program.

Understanding the Context: Changes in the Economy and Public Policies



Researchers, Roswell Park Cancer Institute

From an Interview with
Richard Lipsitz, Jr., President,
WNY ALF

When did you first realize that fighting for working class people was your passion?

“I was a teenager in the mid-1960s, and one of my teachers at Temple Beth Zion was a Freedom Rider. He was in Mississippi during those summers. I remember the stories he told us of the struggles that people faced in our country. I knew then, in light of the civil rights and anti-war activities of the late 60s, that fighting against social inequity was what I wanted to do.”

Understanding the Context: Changes in the Economy and Public Policies

Understanding the role of unions in Western New York requires us to understand the dramatic changes the region and the nation have experienced in recent decades. From roughly 1935 to 1970, labor unions were the backbone of a societal transformation in which working people gained economic and political strength, which they used to make the United States dramatically more equal, productive, and prosperous. During the period between 1945 and 1975, unionization accompanied a surge in income equality and the creation of a large middle class. Workers became more productive, and their pay increased correspondingly. After 1973, workers continued to get more productive, but the fruits of their labors went increasingly into corporate profits (i.e., to shareholders and executives) instead of wages. As the New York Times summarized recently, “Corporate profits have rarely swept up a larger share of the nation’s wealth, and workers have rarely shared a smaller one.”⁹

Nationally, union membership peaked in 1954 at 34.8 percent; by 2017, it had fallen to 10.7 percent.¹⁰ Private-sector membership fell by over two thirds between 1972 and 2009. This decline was only partially offset by the rise in public sector union membership, which rose rapidly in the 1970s and has since stayed steady at about one third of public sector workers.¹¹ With de-unionization, inequality surged; the Economic Policy Institute reports that declining unionization accounted for about a third of the increase in wage inequality among men and one fifth among women between 1972 and 2007.¹²

One explanation for de-unionization is the changing nature of work. The nation lost jobs in more unionized sectors such as manufacturing and gained them in less unionized sectors such as retail. Other nations, however, went through similar economic changes without seeing the deep plunge in unionization. In 1973, union density in the United States and Canada was quite similar, at close to 30 percent.¹³ By 2009, it had plunged in the U.S. and yet remained roughly the same in Canada.¹⁴ What differed were not economic changes so much as public policies and employer opposition. In Canada, most workers could form a union simply by filling out cards indicating their preference, without the added step of a certification election. Also, in Canada, once a union is formed, the first contract negotiations are subject to binding arbitration, whereas in the U.S., management need only show that it is bargaining in good faith, and has many tools to delay and stymie the process.¹⁵

Labor Laws Left Weak

“Unions try and organize workplaces, and employees are interested, but as soon as the employer gets a whiff of it, it’s very easy to fire the lead organizer. That usually will stop an organizing effort dead in its tracks. The labor laws are intentionally very, very weak.”

Catherine Creighton, Labor Attorney

Legal Violations Go Undeterred

“An employer who violates the law in the most outrageous and devastating fashion – firing a worker simply because he or she supports the union – can delay any penalty for years, cannot be penalized more than a token amount, and has absolute legal protection if it libels the worker during the process.”

*Dan Clawson, The Next Upsurge:
Labor and the New Social Movements*

The attitude of U.S. workers toward unions has changed very little; in fact, in recent years, they have grown even more interested in forming unions. In national surveys taken in 1977 and 1995, roughly one third of non-union workers said they would vote for a union if given a chance; in a 2017 survey, this percentage had risen to 49 percent.¹⁶ **In other words, if every worker in the nation who wanted to be in a union could be in one, union density would rise from 10.7 percent to 54 percent, with 58 million more unionized workers.**¹⁷ Whereas in Canada, over three fourths of those workers who want to be unionized are unionized, in the United States less than half are.¹⁸ The public consistently supports unions as well; in fact, the approval rating for unions recently reached its highest point in fifteen years, with majority support among all age, gender, race, and geographic groups.¹⁹

What *has* changed in recent decades is the intensity of management opposition to unions, aided by court interpretations and new policies, such as “right-to-work” laws, that have shifted the balance of power to management. Today, there is an entire industry of union-busting consultants, lawyers, industrial psychologists, and strike management firms unlike anything in other developed nations.²⁰ Roughly three fourths of employers who are facing a union organizing drive hire anti-union consultants.²¹ In 2007, employers illegally fired workers in 30 percent of certification elections, up from 1 percent from 1996 to 2000.²² Due largely to management delay tactics, fewer than half of unions are able to finalize a collective bargaining agreement within the first year of certification.²³ Hiring permanent replacements for striking workers, once very rare, became common in the 1980s and has helped to shrink the incidence of strikes in the United States.²⁴ In the early 1950s, there were roughly 500 strikes per year involving over 1,000 workers; in 2018, there were twenty, which was the highest number since 2007.²⁵

The Changing Job Picture in Buffalo-Niagara



Teacher and Students, Art Class, Lafayette International High School



UNION STRONG

Debbie Hayes serves as the Region 1 Director for CWA. Years ago, as a nurse at Buffalo General Hospital, Hayes helped to unionize the staff and became the first president of CWA Local 1168. Their first contract was difficult to negotiate, and it was won only after an 81-day strike. It was well worth the struggle, Hayes says. Before CWA, the nurses were seen as handmaids to the doctors and worked in often deplorable conditions. Unionizing brought better wages and benefits, but it also provided the intangible benefits of dignity and respect, while, at the same time, increasing the quality of health care for patients.

As Hayes' career has progressed, she has worked on innumerable campaigns and projects, including getting laws passed on safe patient handling and exposure to chemicals. She can be found one day helping to serve dinner at a community event in Buffalo's Fruit Belt; another day speaking in Niagara Square on the urgency of climate change. "What we have," says Hayes, "is the people power. That unity, that working together, is what makes things doable."

“What we have is the people power.”

The Changing Job Picture in Buffalo-Niagara

Buffalo-Niagara offers a dramatic example of the consequences of the nationwide shift from unionized jobs in sectors such as manufacturing to nonunion jobs in sectors such as retail and personal service. In 1986, 106,428 of the region's private sector workers belonged to a union (26.9 percent), of whom more than half worked in manufacturing.²⁶ By 2017, the number of private sector union members had shrunk to 43,359 (10.2 percent).²⁷ As of November 2018, only about 11 percent of workers in the region work in manufacturing.²⁸ This trend is expected to continue. The New York State Department of Labor predicts that between 2014 and 2024, the region will lose 1,520 jobs in manufacturing while gaining 10,730 in accommodation and food services.²⁹

The loss of middle-wage jobs is particularly sharp in Buffalo-Niagara. Between 2007 and 2017, the region lost 22,000 middle-wage jobs while gaining 18,000 high-wage jobs and 16,000 low-wage jobs.³⁰ One-third of the Buffalo-Niagara workforce works in an occupation with a median wage of less than \$15 per hour. Common low-wage occupations include food servers, retail salespeople, cashiers, personal care aides, receptionists, janitors, teacher assistants, nursing assistants, home health aides, and security guards. In Buffalo-Niagara, there are 89 occupations with median wages below \$15. Almost all of them are concentrated in the following nine occupational categories.³¹

OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORY	NUMBER OF WORKERS	AVERAGE HOURLY WAGE
Food Preparation and Service	49,420	\$11.83
Sales and Related Occupations	33,660	\$13.46
Personal Care and Service	17,570	\$12.09
Office and Administrative Support	16,290	\$13.21
Buildings/Grounds Cleaning/Maintenance	16,120	\$13.67
Transportation and Material Moving	14,790	\$12.13
Education, Training, and Library	10,440	\$13.28
Healthcare Support	10,050	\$13.66
Protective Service	7,690	\$12.24

Raising Wages For All Workers

“Anywhere we have union and non-union companies working side by side — whether it’s school bus drivers, dump truck operators — anytime we get a raise, it makes it more and more difficult for the non-union employers to attract people. Therefore, non-union employers are forced to increase their wages. We set the standard for school bus wages in Western New York.”

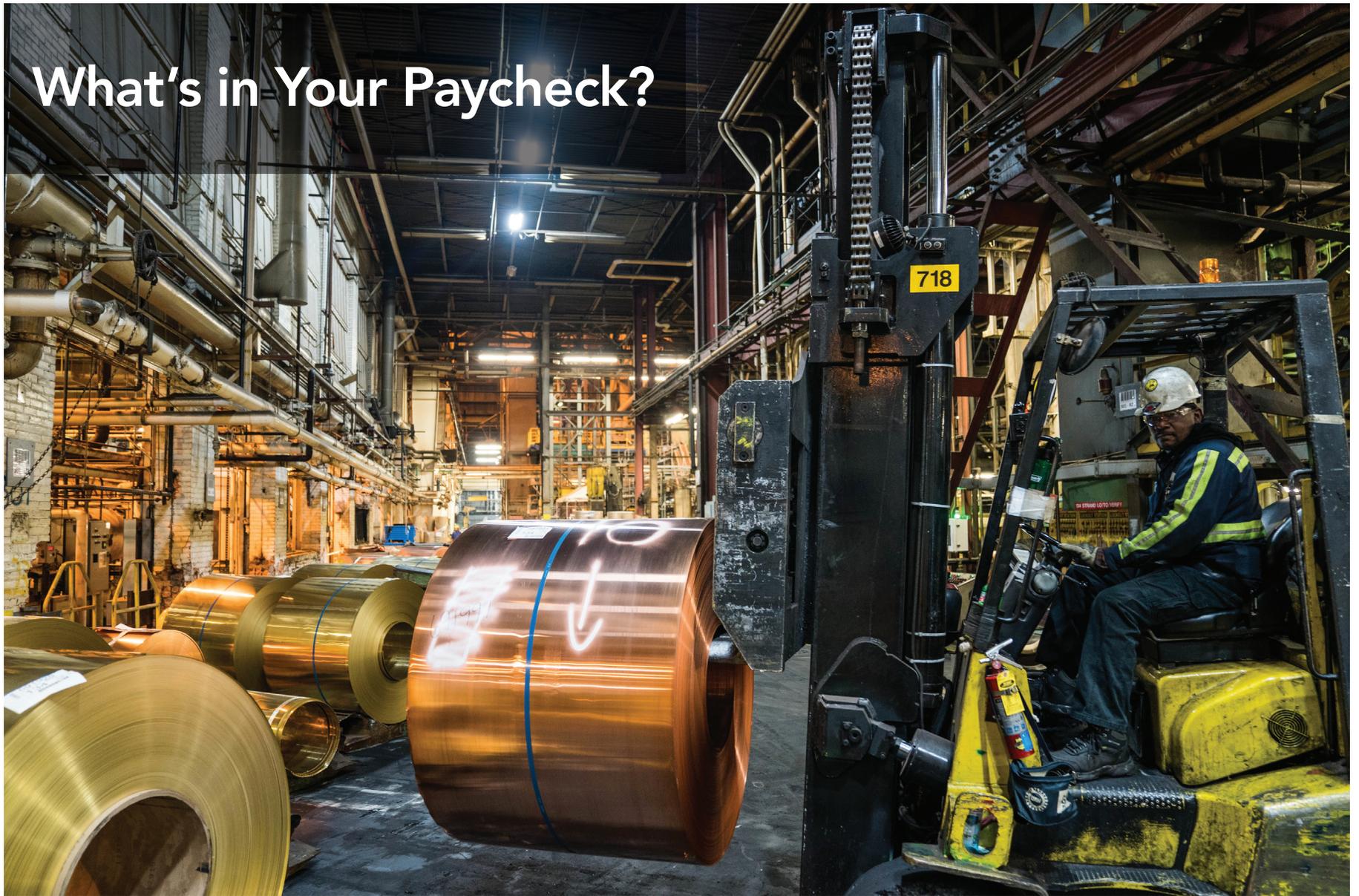
*Jeff Brylski, President/Business Agent,
Teamsters Local 449*

Inadequate wages are only part of the story. Many of the region’s jobs lack other basic components of job quality: pensions; health care; paid sick days and vacations; full-year, full-time employment; fixed schedules; workplace safety; and freedom from exploitation. In a 2017 survey of Buffalo workers, 58.9 percent of low-wage workers reported at least one wage and hour violation, and 56 percent reported at least one potential health and safety violation. When it came to benefits, only

- 37.7 percent received health insurance through their employer;
- 34.3 percent received paid sick time;
- 36.6 percent received paid vacation time;
- 24.1 percent received retirement benefits; and
- 14.9 percent were entitled to paid parental leave.³²

Given that the loss of manufacturing and other middle-wage jobs is expected to continue, it is vital to improve the pay, benefits, and conditions of service sector jobs, and there is no viable way to accomplish that policy goal without organized labor. To understand the critical role of unions, we now turn to a more detailed analysis of how unions help members, other workers, employers, and communities.

What's in Your Paycheck?



United Steelworker at Aurubis Buffalo Factory (Formerly American Brass)



**WINNING A FAIR CONTRACT:
JEFF RICHARDSON, ATU, AND THE NFTA**

Growing up in a union family, Jeff Richardson saw the benefits of unionization firsthand in his parents' wages, health insurance, and other benefits. Today, as president and business agent of ATU Local 1342, he fights to win those same benefits for the drivers and mechanics of the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA).

In 2017, the workers had been without a contract for eight years, and the starting salary for a driver was only \$12.95. Not only were the drivers suffering, so were the riders.

“The benefits you have – down to the uniforms you wear, the health insurance, your vacation, your sick days, your personal days, your hourly wage – all this is because of the union.”

Because NFTA was having trouble hiring qualified drivers at such a low wage, a driver shortage was causing route cancellations. After hard negotiations over salary, health benefits, pension contributions, and more, Richardson and his team won a contract that is fair to the workers and ensures that the NFTA will continue to attract the best workers possible.

What's in Your Paycheck?

WAGES

Unions raise their members' wages by bargaining collectively on their behalf. In Buffalo-Niagara, men covered by union contracts have a median annual wage of \$64,000, whereas men who are not covered have a median wage of \$34,000.³³ For women, the gap is smaller but still dramatic: \$40,000 compared to \$26,000.³⁴ Not all of the difference can be explained by the presence of unions, but for many decades scholars have shown a persistent “union advantage” in wages. On average, a worker in the U.S. covered by a union contract earns 13.2 percent more than a non-union worker in the same job with similar education and experience.³⁵ In earlier decades, when union density was greater, the differential was greater, running between 15 percent and 20 percent over the course of the twentieth century.³⁶

MEDIAN ANNUAL WAGES

BUFFALO-NIAGARA REGION, 2008-2017

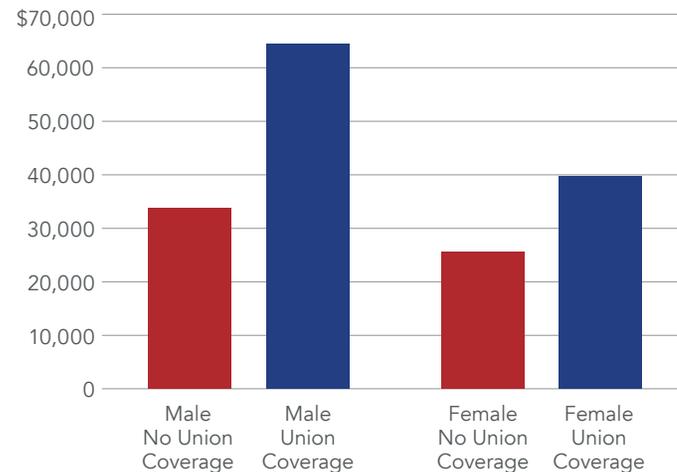


Figure 1. Calculations based on IPUMS Current Population Survey data.



FULL OR PART-TIME WORKERS
BUFFALO-NIAGARA REGION, 2008-2017

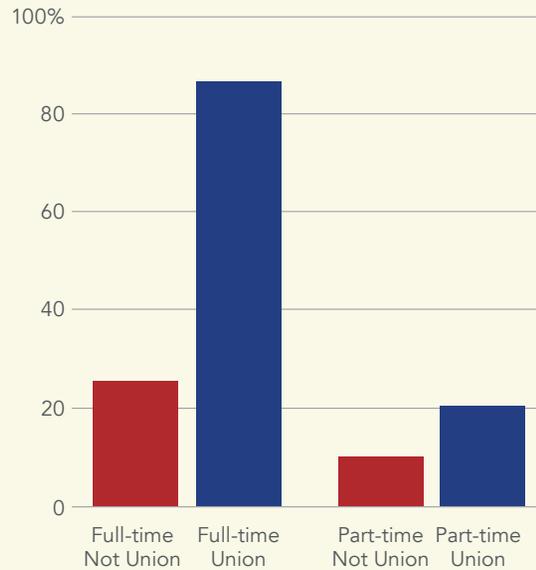


Figure 2. Calculations based on IPUMS Current Population Survey data.

Importantly, the union premium is even higher for low-wage workers. Between 2003 and 2007, unionization raised the wages of a typical low-wage worker by 20.6 percent, compared to 13.7 percent for a middle-wage worker and 6.1 percent for a high-wage worker.³⁷

A vivid local example of the union advantage comes from the Teamsters’ work with the drivers of Student Transportation of America. School bus drivers play a critical role in ensuring children’s safety, but they often labor for low wages. Before the Teamsters organized the drivers at Student Transportation of America, they were earning an average of \$13 per hour. Through organizing and collective bargaining, the Teamsters raised wages immediately to \$18 per hour, to reach \$21 per hour by 2020.

In today’s economy, when many workers are involuntarily part-time, union workers also have an edge in gaining full-time employment. Nationally, 91.9 percent of unionized public sector workers have full-time jobs, compared to 82.5 percent of non-union workers; in the private sector, 86.6 percent of union workers are full-time, compared to 79.6 percent of non-union workers.³⁸ Locally, 79.8 percent of union members work full-time, compared to 71.8 percent of non-union workers.³⁹

Union workers also benefit from fairer schedules. Union workers in the U.S. are much more likely to get at least one week’s notice of work schedule changes (34.4 percent, compared to 23.2 percent of non-union workers), and they are more than twice as likely to have some input into the number of hours they work.⁵¹ A Buffalo-area nurse and union member describes the difference between her work and that of her mother, who was a nurse not covered by a union. “She didn’t have a union, and she didn’t have a right to say anything about unhealthy work hours and work expectations that would change totally arbitrarily.” Moreover, the union nurse, as an entry-level employee, made better wages than her mother did with twenty years of experience. Those higher wages, and the fact that she received health insurance, made a huge difference for this young nurse; in fact, they were the key factor in enabling her to leave an unhealthy marriage and make a better life for herself and her children.

Unions raise wages even for non-members, in two different ways. First, as unions bargain for higher wages at one employer, non-union employers tend to raise wages to compete for workers and to stave off union organizing at their own firm. Second, unions tend to advocate for higher wages for all workers through policies such as minimum wage and living wage laws (discussed more fully below). Unions do not want huge wage differentials, because that incentivizes employers to resist unions; rather, they want to “raise the floor” and “take wages out of the equation,” so that all workers get paid better and employers compete with each other not by cutting labor costs but by innovating and becoming more productive and efficient.

HEALTHCARE COVERAGE

BUFFALO-NIAGARA REGION, 2008-2017

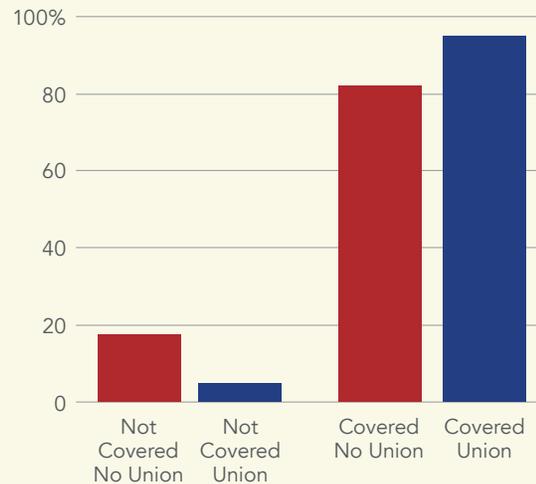


Figure 3. Calculations based on IPUMS Current Population Survey data.

The impact of unions on nonmembers is particularly strong for male workers in the private sector. Researchers have estimated that if national union density had remained at 1979 levels, in 2013 these workers would have earned an average of \$2,704 more per year. The impact is even greater on men with high school education or less; they would have earned an average of \$3,016 more per year.⁴⁰

When more workers are paid a living wage, the whole community benefits. As Chrissy Cassata, director of labor engagement for the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County, explains it, “When union membership decreases, the wages decrease, and when wages decrease, the community as a whole hurts, so, as nonprofits and social services, we need to pick up that slack. As wages go down, the need for social services goes up. If individuals are being paid a living wage, they’re able to provide for themselves.”

BENEFITS

Job quality depends on benefits as well as wages, and, here, too, union members have a strong advantage. Nationally, unionization raises the chances of employer-provided health insurance by 17.1 percent in the private sector and 10 percent in the public sector.⁴¹ Furthermore, unionized employers pay 77.4 percent more per hour toward health coverage than non-union employers.⁴² In Buffalo-Niagara, we find that 97.1 percent of workers covered by union contracts have health care coverage, compared to 89.2 percent of non-union workers.⁴³

Nationally, union members have much better access to paid sick days (87 percent, compared to 69 percent of non-union workers).⁴⁹ They are more likely to get paid holidays (80 percent, compared to 75 percent). Unions help their members access other types of benefits as well, by educating them on their rights and available programs, helping them navigate workplace management systems, reducing the fear of employer retaliation, representing them in grievance procedures, and facilitating conflict resolution. A study of blue-collar workers found that union representation increased the chances of an eligible worker receiving unemployment insurance by 23 percent.⁵⁰

PENSION PLAN COVERAGE

BUFFALO-NIAGARA REGION, 2008-2017

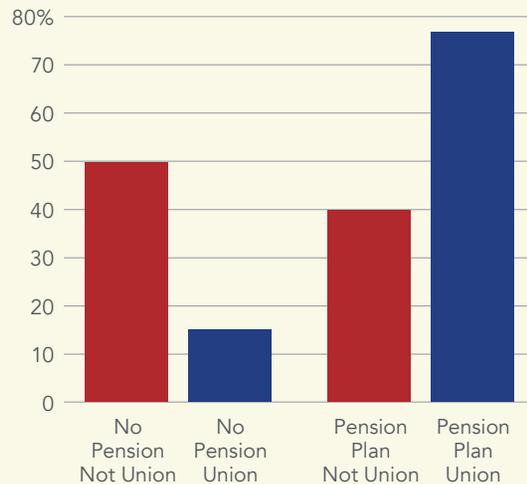


Figure 4. Calculations based on IPUMS Current Population Survey data.

Union membership also dramatically increases the chance of a pension. Nationally, unionization raises the chances of a pension by 21 percent in the private sector and 10 percent in the public sector.⁴⁴ **Locally, 77 percent of union members have pensions, compared to 39.8 percent of non-union workers.**⁴⁵ Union members are also much more likely to have traditional defined-benefit plans that provide a guaranteed income, as opposed to defined-contribution plans, such as 401(k) plans (74 percent of union members, compared to 15 percent of non-union workers).⁴⁶ Union employers spend 56 percent more on retirement for their workers than comparable non-union employers.⁴⁷

The benefits of pension funds ripple out into the community. For example, the pensions earned by the members of the Buffalo Building and Construction Trades amount to \$100 million dollars per year.⁴⁸ These pension payments ensure that the retirees have a secure and dignified retirement, and they also flow back into the local economy as the retirees patronize local businesses.



Job Quality and Solidarity at Work

Firefighter, Buffalo Fire Department

Unions Bring in the Experts

“Sometimes, management is just very glad that a union brought me in. I had a union that brought me into a crucible manufacturing plant because they believed that they were getting eye and respiratory irritation symptoms. I told them, ‘this is what the contaminant is, and this is what you need to do for it.’ After that, because management liked what I’d done for the union, they wanted me to come in and fix other problems, except they didn’t want to ask me themselves; they would ask the union to invite me in.”

*Nellie Brown, certified industrial hygienist,
Cornell University*

Job Quality and Solidarity at Work

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Unions have a long history of promoting workplace health and safety through policy advocacy (discussed below), collective bargaining, and training. One result of this union impact is that workplace fatalities are significantly lower in unionized workplaces and in more unionized states. Harvard professor Michael Zoorob calculates that every one percent increase in unionization is associated with a 2.8 percent decline in occupational fatalities.⁵² He goes on to estimate that “right-to-work” laws, by decreasing unionization in 28 states, have led to a 14.2 percent increase in workplace mortality. As noted above, a survey of Buffalo workers found that 58 percent reported at least one potential health and safety violation on their job; thus, the work of unions remains critical to keeping Western New Yorkers safe on the job.

As Cornell University industrial hygienist Nellie Brown puts it, “When I look at workplaces that have really good health and safety programs, that was achieved because of worker input, and that worker input happened only because there was collective bargaining.” USW is a union with a long history of making work more safe. Dave Wasiura, organizing director at USW District 4, explains that USW has its own OSHA-trained inspector who can evaluate workplaces. This not only helps keep workers safe, it also helps employers by alerting them to issues without having to face charges of OSHA violations.

FAIR TREATMENT AND WORKER RIGHTS

It is no secret that workplaces are not always fair. As scholar James Kaufman writes, “employers often have a power advantage over the individual employee and sometimes exercise it in ways that range from petty and arbitrary to oppressive and unjust.”⁵³ A union contract guarantees equal treatment, prohibits discrimination and confers other rights and protections. Rooted in the principle of dignity of work, unions negotiate for fair procedures and then help workers understand and use their rights to fair treatment. Elected local union representatives also help members navigate workplace management systems, represent them in grievance procedures, reduce the fear of employer retaliation, and facilitate conflict resolution. Unionized employers tend to use more formal procedures regarding hiring, promotion, lay-offs, work scheduling, and dispute resolution, with good results for both the employees and the firms themselves. As one researcher summarizes it, “The overall picture that emerges from these studies is that union workplaces are more formal in their adoption of certain HR practices that are known to create efficiencies for management.”⁵⁴



Sharon Ivey

A Life of Giving Back



Sharon Ivey was working as a mental health therapy aide at the Buffalo Psychiatric Center when the president of her CSEA local asked her to serve on a women’s committee. For Ivey, who served four years in the army and 12 in the National Guard, giving back is second nature, and so she said yes. Her union involvement continued to grow, including roles as president of the local and as a regional secretary. Today, she works full-time for CSEA as a labor relations specialist and serves as the treasurer for the Buffalo chapter of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists (CBTU), which describes itself as “the fiercely independent voice of black workers within the trade union movement, challenging organized labor to be more relevant to the needs of black and poor workers.” As Ivey puts it, “the more you learn, the more you want to share.”

Ivey is proud of CSEA’s impact on the community. One cherished memory is the way CSEA members partnered with children, parents, and elected leaders such as Senator Patrick Gallivan to save the Children’s Psychiatric Center in West Seneca, when the state was planning to

close it down. That teamwork, she says, was “something really beautiful to see.” She also values the work of CBTU on voter registration and voter education, stressing that “working together we can make change.”

Ivey represents CBTU on the City of Buffalo’s Living Wage Commission. “There is dignity in all work,” she says, in explaining the importance of the living wage movement to her. “People shouldn’t have to work three jobs to make ends meet.”

What keeps Ivey going, giving back to her community in so many ways? “The smallest things can have ripple effects,” she says. It is

satisfying to see the stress leave a worker’s face, when they realize that the union has been able to help them continue to provide for their family. “And when people are helped, they pay it forward,” Ivey notes – just as she has done, through her whole life.

“The smallest things can have ripple effects.”

When employers do violate the law, unions help their members know and enforce their rights. Wage and hour violations are shockingly common in the United States. Failure to pay minimum wage, for example, costs workers over \$15 billion per year.⁵⁵ In a 2017 survey of Buffalo workers, 58.9 percent of low-wage workers reported at least one wage and hour violation. National research shows that workers not covered by unions are twice as likely to be victims of this abuse.⁵⁶

The New York Foundation for Fair Contracting is a good example of the important watchdog role that unions and their allies can play in making sure that laws are followed. Founded in 2011 and headquartered in Hamburg, New York, the FFC makes sure that public works contractors obey important laws regarding wages and safety, preventing abuses such as the misclassification of workers to avoid paying them the correct prevailing wage.

One impact of unions on fair treatment is a reduction in racial discrimination on the job. For decades now, African-Americans have had higher unionization rates than whites, and researchers have concluded that one of the key reasons is that black workers are seeking the protection from discrimination that unionized jobs offer. Interestingly, the most powerful predictor of pro-union attitudes among non-union workers is race, precisely because black workers perceive this union advantage.⁵⁷ In fact, workers of color are 2.4 to 3.5 times more likely to vote for a union in an organizing drive.⁵⁸

VOICE AT WORK

Scholars have found that employee participation generally improves workplace productivity, particularly when it involves day-to-day workplace issues, it includes substantive decision making rights, not just consulting, and it happens in an environment of commitment and trust.⁵⁹

In a recent book, Thomas Geoghegan presents a fascinating comparison of the auto industries of the United States and Germany. Germany's autoworkers are heavily unionized. In 2011, they were making an average of \$66 per hour, twice the rate of US workers. And yet, Germany was making 5.1 million cars per year, compared to 2.9 million in the US.⁶⁰ What makes the German car industry so productive and innovative, according to Geoghegan, is that workers actually help run the companies. In Germany, workers elect half the directors to the boards of large companies. The idea is that innovation comes from the bottom, not from the top, and that giving workers real decision-making power leads to better corporate outcomes.

Western New York has a rich history of unions working with management to foster this type of collaborative commitment to productivity and innovation. For a 2000 report, *Champions @ Work: Employment, Workplace Practices and Labor Relations in Western New York*, Cornell researchers conducted an original survey of the region's employers and unions, finding that:

- Unionized employers and unions overwhelmingly reported their relationship as positive;
- 63 percent of unions and employers reported that joint labor-management programs improved productivity, with less than two percent thinking their impact was negative;
- The turnover rate of workers was only 6.2 percent among unionized employers, compared to 17.6 percent at non-union employers; and
- WNY employers and unions exhibited above-average high-performance and flexible workplace practices.⁶¹

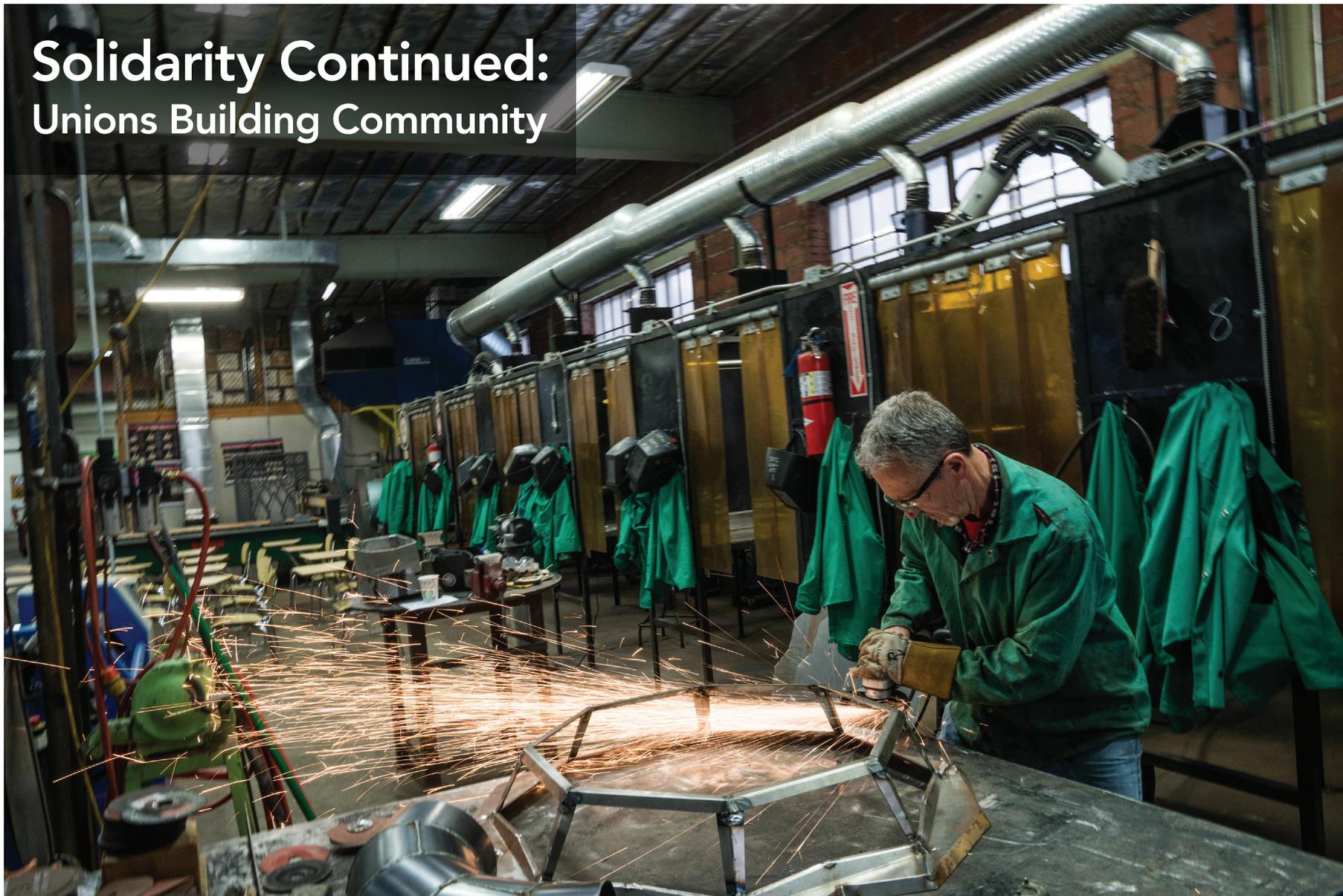
Having a voice at work is also a matter of human dignity. As scholars Rafael and Juan Gomez explain, "Workplace democracy actually speaks to an ever-present need: i.e., advancing the fundamental rights of employees to associate freely, to have some say over business decisions that affect their lives, to respect the expertise that employees develop day in and day out on the job, and importantly to strengthen the protections and extend rights to marginalized and racialized workers, often women, who are bearing the brunt of the shift to low-wage, insecure, part-time, contract and other forms of temporary and precarious work."⁶²

MUTUAL ASSISTANCE AND SOLIDARITY

In addition to the more formal benefits that unions provide their members, they also provide a large range of benefits that are harder to quantify but no less important. When workers need help, they often turn to their union or their fellow members. A good example is CSEA's Sunshine Fund; union members contribute voluntarily to the fund, and then have the ability to apply to it for aid after an emergency such as a house fire, a death in the family, or unexpected medical bills.

Union members belong to an organization, and not just any organization but one that is dedicated to civic values such as democracy, equality, and solidarity. They are part of a broad movement that aims – to quote the mission statement of the WNY Area Labor Federation – to bring "fairness and dignity to the workplace and secure social equity." This sense of belonging, this transcendence of individual interests for the common good, is one of the most important ways that unions add to their members' lives.

Solidarity Continued: Unions Building Community



Retired sheet metal worker volunteering to replicate an historic lighting fixture for Buffalo's Central Terminal.

Going Above and Beyond

Chrissy Cassata, Director of Labor Engagement for United Way of Buffalo and Erie County, relates this anecdote.

“Several union members were walking down a street in Buffalo’s Fruit Belt neighborhood after completing a community service project, when they met an older woman who needed help replacing her windows. After they helped her, she mentioned that her neighbor’s porch was about to collapse; and so they fixed the neighbor’s porch, too.”

Solidarity Continued: Unions Building Community

Research has shown that states with higher levels of unionization have “lower poverty levels, higher average incomes, lower workplace deaths, higher educational outcomes, and higher pension and health insurance coverage, even for workers not in unions.”⁶³ We now explore how unions help Western New York thrive through community service, worker assistance, workforce development, and public policy advocacy.

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Western New York’s unions have a long and proud history of community service. As Cornell University’s Art Wheaton puts it, “the unions are helping to sponsor baseball teams, soccer leagues, church youth group movements . . . They support the local community because the union *is* the community.” George Harrigan, Principal Officer of Teamsters Local 449, says “We don’t consider ourselves just a labor organization; we’re also a community outreach organization. We fund toy drives and food drives, not only to help our own members but to help the community.” While most of the community service is local, Western New York’s unions have also mobilized impressive resources in helping people farther from home as well – as seen in the huge responses to lead poisoning in Flint and the hurricane in Puerto Rico.

Here are just a few examples of community service:

- Buffalo Building Trades donated \$30,000 for a playground in the long-term pediatric unit at Kaleida Health’s HighPointe on Michigan (the Trades donate roughly \$250,000 each year in financial contributions and volunteer labor for local charities such as Make-A-Wish, Camp Good Days, and the Variety Club Telethon).⁶⁴
- Buffalo’s mail carriers typically lead the nation in their annual food drives.
- Women of Steel, a group within USW, does service throughout the year, including annual “Holly Day” parties at local community centers.
- CWA provides toiletries, school supplies, and other support for students at Health Sciences Charter School.
- For several years, retired sheet metal workers have been spending time in their union local’s shop to custom fabricate historically accurate fixtures for Buffalo’s Central Terminal building.

WNY Apollo Alliance and the HECK Project

The Apollo Alliance is a coalition of labor, business, environmental, and community workers dedicated to catalyzing the clean energy revolution. A decade ago, Frank Hotchkiss, an organizer with the United Steel Workers and co-chair of the WNY Apollo Alliance, had an idea for a hands-on volunteer project to promote energy efficiency; he brought his idea to Cornell University ILR School's Buffalo office, and the Home Energy Conservation Kit (HECK) project was born.

Coordinated by Cornell's Art Wheaton, HECK has united volunteers from local unions with students and other community members to bring simple energy-saving measures and education to homeowners and renters in Buffalo neighborhoods. Over the past ten years, with support from the Workforce Development Institute, the HECK project has served roughly 500 households: putting money back into residents' pockets while decreasing the pollution that comes from fossil-fuel energy usage.

- Labor leaders often host United Way drives at their workplaces; for example, Buffalo Teachers Federation members coordinate contributions at each Buffalo public school. In 2017, the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County raised \$14.6 million in workplace contributions, including 150 workplaces with union members.

In addition to helping countless community members, these union efforts build civic cohesion, a sense that we are all in it together. As Jeff Brylski of Teamsters Local 449 puts it, “We need to be engaged and concerned with our fellow human beings. We can’t lose empathy and compassion.”

WORKER ASSISTANCE

Labor unions in Western New York have a long history of supporting programs and services that aid all local workers. A prime example is the Western New York Center for Occupational Safety and Health (WNYCOSH), which was founded in 1979 by a group of labor, environmental, and public health activists. WNYCOSH members include union locals, other organizations, and individual members, and nine local labor leaders serve on its board. In addition to its policy advocacy work, described below, WNYCOSH has provided direct training, education and technical assistance to thousands of workers in Western New York, helping them to identify, evaluate, and control hazards in their workplaces. WNYCOSH also runs a Worker Center, which focuses especially on low-wage, temporary, refugee, and other vulnerable workers in the community, serving them with worker rights trainings, free legal clinics, and help organizing around workplace issues.

Labor leaders were also critical in establishing the Center for Occupational Health and Medicine at Erie County Medical Center in 2015. The Center prevents work-related illnesses and injuries through increased awareness and health education, early diagnosis and treatment. The director of the Center explains that due to all the major industry in the region over the decades, Western New York has one of the highest rates of occupational disease and injuries in the nation. The Center is building an informational database on the community and its workplaces—from Tonawanda Coke to Love Canal—and the diseases that may be associated with them.⁶⁵ It includes state-of-the-art diagnostic and testing equipment for breathing, hearing, vision, and the cardiovascular system, and it provides a wide range of services, including screening exams, education, help processing worker compensation claims, social and mental health counseling, and multiple language capabilities.

Getting Out the Vote

“It’s so important to vote... it’s a right we fought for. In the union, we always hold trainings and workshops about the issues, what legislation is out there, what bills have been passed. Our goal is to have 100% of union members voting. We’re getting there. Vote, vote, vote!”

Maurice Brown, Political Coordinator, 1199 SEIU



VOTING, VOTER EDUCATION, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Unions increase civic engagement of many kinds. One critical role is encouraging people to vote. Union members are more likely to vote than non-members; among public sector workers, the difference is 74.1 percent (union) to 69.9 percent (non-union); in the private sector it is 56.3 percent to 51.7 percent.⁶⁶ Research proves that unions, along with churches, are one of the few groups that increase voting among people with low incomes.⁶⁷ It is not just that union members themselves vote; it is also that unions do large-scale voter education and get out the vote efforts. As Maria Whyte, Erie County’s Deputy County Executive, explains, “Nobody does canvassing like organized labor. You have to talk to your neighbors. You have to go door to door canvassing. And a lot of organizations don’t have the infrastructure to do that, but organized labor still has that kind of grassroots infrastructure.”

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Unions play a critical role in workforce development: training workers so that the regional economy does not suffer from skills gaps or mismatches; aiding disadvantaged residents to get the skills they need to find family-sustaining jobs; building career ladders so that workers can advance within companies and sectors to increasingly skilled jobs; and maximizing productivity, health, and safety through proper training.

In 2003 the New York State AFL-CIO and the state’s area labor federations helped to found the Workforce Development Institute, a statewide nonprofit that works to grow and keep good jobs in New York in partnership with businesses, unions, other nonprofits, educational institutions, and governments. With board members drawn from organized labor and funding support from the state government, WDI has had a major impact by providing grants, technical assistance, training, and networking. In 2017, WDI funded 338 projects across the state, including roughly 30 in Western New York; in 2018, it was able to fund even more in Western New York.⁶⁸ Roughly two thirds of WDI’s projects are in manufacturing, but WDI is active in all sectors, from construction to health care.⁶⁹

Investing in the Future

The Buffalo Building and Construction Trades spend over \$3.5 million each year on facilities, instructors, and materials for their apprenticeship programs, which enroll roughly 125 new apprentices per year.

2018 WNY Construction Career Day

Held at the training center of the Operating Engineers Local 17 in Lakeview, the WNY Construction Career Day attracted 927 students from 40 schools in eight counties. The students got the chance to operate heavy equipment, pour concrete, go up on lifts, and get hands-on experience in many other ways. Participating unions included the Operating Engineers, Painters, Bricklayers, Carpenters, Electrical Workers, Plasterers, Insulators, and Laborers.

A good example of a project supported by WDI is the American Apprenticeship Initiative of the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County. WDI had observed a decline in apprenticeships as the state lost manufacturing jobs. Employers were increasingly cautious about the paperwork and time involved in starting new apprenticeship titles. Under a new model, however, intermediaries such as the United Way, aided by federal funding, are able to reduce the administrative burdens and costs, submitting the apprenticeship application to the NYS Department of Labor and then managing the paperwork. The United Way has 300 slots for apprentices in Western New York and is busy filing them. WDI provides up to \$750 per participant to pay for the equipment they need in their apprenticeships.⁷⁰

Holly Hutchinson, United Way project director, reports that “Our union colleagues have been wonderful: they’ve been passionately supporting our apprenticeship project.” Hutchinson notes that apprenticeship is an “earn and learn” model. The apprentice is a full-time employee, but also receives both classroom training and on-the-job training. She says that apprenticeship is sometimes called a “four year degree without the debt,” because within four years, without accumulating student loan debt, the apprentice becomes a skilled journeyworker in a trade that is highly in demand.

Another successful workforce development collaboration is between the Erie Workforce Development Board, Erie I BOCES, and WDI: a thirteen-week program in which participants earn Certified Production Technician certificates while also working for two days per week and getting on-the-job training. All of the participants who completed the first course were offered jobs.⁷¹

Apprenticeship can be a powerful tool for diversifying occupational sectors. Carpenters Local 276 increased its minority membership from nine percent in 2012 to 17 percent in 2015 through wide-ranging outreach and recruitment into its apprenticeship program. Local 276 member Jomo Akono built bridges with groups such as the Buffalo Urban League and We Are Women Warriors, and that relationship building paid off.⁷²

Empowering Women

“We interviewed three of the women union apprentices at Ford, and they were talking about a sense of empowerment that they feel by having these skills, by making a good income, and by the pride they feel in seeing something they’ve worked on drive down the street.”

*Holly Hutchinson, Project Director,
United Way of Buffalo and Erie County*

Pre-Apprenticeships can serve as important gateways into apprenticeship programs. A good example is Buffalo’s Building Trades Pre-Apprenticeship Program. This program was first funded through a project labor agreement that was part of the Buffalo Joint Schools Reconstruction Project with a primary objective to “seek out and provide training to the traditionally underserved communities, in particular minorities and women.”⁷³ In 2017, the Buffalo Building and Construction Trades Council reached a project labor agreement for the construction of the Northland Corridor project, which is creating a light industrial hub anchored by the new Western New York Workforce Training Center in a former factory at 683 Northland Avenue. The project labor agreement includes goals of 25 percent minority participation, 5 percent female, 30 percent city residents, and 20 percent apprenticeships.⁷⁴

The agreement also includes pre-apprenticeship – in this case up to 20 participants in an eight-week program aimed at people in the Northland zip code (14211) and surrounding areas. Working with the City of Buffalo and the Buffalo Urban Development Corporation, the program offers the students hands-on training from skilled union tradespeople.⁷⁵

Workforce training is about much more than getting hired; it is also about ongoing training to help workers advance in their careers and help Western New York’s businesses adapt to fast changing circumstances. As WDI Western New York Regional Director Mike LaBerta points out, many of the region’s businesses are part of the supply chains for large national and international companies. When that larger company announces a new need, if the local company cannot quickly meet the need, it may lose its biggest customer. A good example of collaborative success is the way that USW Local 135 has worked with Sumitomo Rubber at its Tonawanda factory. With help from WDI, USW Local 135 has enrolled roughly 30 workers in six-month programs with CNC Technical Solutions. The workers get the skills they need to move to a higher pay grade, and the company gets a better trained workforce. As LaBerta puts it, “Go to the USW hall at Sumitomo, and you find a level of collaboration between management and unions that is just worn into the wood around here.”



High Road Public Policy

Musicians in Rehearsal, Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra

Erie County First Source Hiring Policy for County Construction Projects

All hours worked by in-state residents will be worked by residents of the 8-county region;

70 percent of these work hours will be worked by residents of Erie County;

30 percent of these work hours will be worked by residents of zip codes with poverty rates over 20 percent or by disadvantaged workers.

2019 Living Wage Rates: City of Buffalo

\$12.04

per hour with health insurance

\$13.52

per hour without health insurance

High Road Public Policy

One of the most important ways that unions help the community is by advocating for high road public policies. High road policies are those that invest in people and in the planet as well as in long-term profits – as opposed to low road practices that do damage to communities in pursuit of short-term profits. The American Sustainable Business Council, which represents over 250,000 businesses in the United States, provides a good list of high road practice:

- Provide Family-Friendly Benefits;
- Offer Flexibility;
- Pay a Livable and Fair Wage;
- Invest in Employee Growth and Development;
- Cultivate Inclusion;
- Govern Fairly and Transparently;
- Engage with Communities;
- Manage the Supply Chain Responsibly;
- Drive Environmental Sustainability;
- Promote Health and Safety.

Labor organizations in Western New York have a long and proud history of fighting for the high road in areas such as civil rights, environmental protection, public health, public education, and responsible economic development.

TARGETED HIRE

In 2016 and 2017, the WNY Area Labor Federation joined with civil rights groups such as the NAACP and community groups such as the Buffalo Urban League to commission reports from the Partnership for the Public Good on racial disparities in employment in western New York; the groups then worked together to hold community events and educate the public and elected officials on the issues. One of the main recommendations in the *Working Toward Equality* report was to craft targeted hire policies under which employers would be asked to look first for workers in pools drawn from high-poverty zip codes. In response, Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz worked closely with labor and community leaders to create a targeted hire policy for the County's public works projects.



UNITED STEELWORKERS



Dave Wasiura A Union Life

Growing up in the Riverside neighborhood of Buffalo, Dave Wasiura wanted to be a steelworker, like his father and his great-grandfather. And so, as a young man, he took a job at the American Brass factory. He had seen firsthand how a unionized job could support a family – how, thanks to his father’s pay and benefit package, he and his brother could play three different sports throughout the year; how his family could afford to take vacations together; how, when his father’s hip gave out, he was able to get good medical care and then return to work. After a few years on the job, Wasiura approached the president of his USW local and asked how he could give back. “Congratulations,” said the president (who knew something of Wasiura’s character and skills), “you’re the new chief steward on your shift.”

While Wasiura enjoyed his seventeen years at American Brass, he liked the idea of making a bigger impact on the lives of workers, and so, when a full-time job opened up at USW, he went for it. His work took him away from Buffalo – including stints in Pittsburgh, New Jersey and Boston – but eventually brought him back home as the organizing coordinator at District 4.

The key to Wasiura’s approach is community engagement. He has built relationships with groups such as the Coalition for Economic Justice and the Clean Air Coalition. USW members volunteered to help residents of the Seneca Babcock neighborhood of Buffalo, who were working with Clean Air to fight pollution from an illegal stone-crushing operation. A few weeks later, Wasiura was delighted to see Seneca Babcock residents showing up at a picket line to demonstrate their solidarity with the steelworkers.

“There could be no more rewarding career than helping people, who, on their own, would have no power over their work life.”

Moments like these make it easy to see why, for Wasiura, “there could be no more rewarding career than helping people, who, on their own, would have no power over their work life.”

MINIMUM AND LIVING WAGES

Local unions have strongly supported efforts to raise the state minimum wage and to pass a living wage policy in the City of Buffalo. The Coalition for Economic Justice (CEJ) unites labor organizations with faith and community groups in western New York. CEJ led the fight for the passage of Buffalo’s living wage law in 1999 and has worked tirelessly since then to make sure that the law is fully and fairly implemented. Thanks to this law, thousands of workers, including recycling sorters, sanitation workers, parking lot attendants, security guards, and emergency medical technicians have received raises to boost them up and out of poverty. In 2010 CEJ campaigned successfully for the Buffalo Public Schools to pass a living wage policy, bringing raises to food service workers and bus aides.

More recently, CEJ, 1199 SEIU, and other labor allies led local efforts in the Fight for 15 campaign. Labor sought to “raise the floor” for all workers, unionized or not, and succeeded in winning dramatic increases to New York State’s minimum wage, which (for upstate workers) rose to \$10.40 per hour in 2018 and will go up by 70 cents per hour in each of the next three years. CEJ is part of the national Jobs With Justice movement, which “builds ties with community groups, and asks members to support each other’s struggles, and to pledge to ‘be there’ at least five times a year for one of the group’s officially endorsed actions.”⁷⁶

Bargaining for the Common Good

Visiting Buffalo in September 2018, Professor Joseph McCartin delivered a lecture titled *Theodore Roosevelt, the Labor Question and 'Malefactors of Great Wealth': Lessons for a New Age of Inequality*. Professor McCartin connected the role of unions in creating industrial democracy with President Roosevelt's belief that the federal government ought to advance the common good, even when that meant confronting "malefactors of great wealth."

Today, unions are reinventing collective bargaining to respond to the 21st Century economy. Across the country, teachers are bargaining for and with the community to win public support for quality schools for *all* students. Teachers' strikes have mobilized parents, students, and allies in places as different as West Virginia, Arizona, and Los Angeles in a movement called Bargaining for the Common Good.

The Bargaining for the Common Good Network is made up of unions, community groups, racial justice organizations and student organizations. In their campaigns, these diverse groups demand that corporations and the wealthy pay their fair share so that our communities can thrive. The unions and their allies are fighting for quality of life, not just contracts. As one participant observed after the recent victory in Los Angeles: "The strike was not just a fight for public schools, but a fight for the very idea of the public good."

HEALTH, SAFETY, AND EDUCATION

Some of the biggest high road victories have involved health and safety, for workers and the general public. Nationally, perhaps the greatest legislative victory of organized labor after World War II was the passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Act, signed by President Nixon in 1970. Why was a new policy necessary? Consider the fact that, in the two years prior to the Act, 14,000 workers died per year and another 2 million were disabled or maimed.⁷⁷ In addition, the environmental movement had called attention to myriad new chemicals being used in industrial processes with little care for the safety of the workers, the public, or the natural environment. The Act created the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and a duty of employers to protect workers from hazards. Local groups such as WNYCOSH, profiled above, rely on the law and on OSHA to ensure workplace safety.

A little-known fact is that nursing assistants have some of the highest rates of musculoskeletal injuries of any occupation – almost three times the rate of construction workers, for example. Many of these injuries come from lifting and moving patients. In 2014, unions such as CWA and the New York State Nurses Association won passage of the Safe Patient Handling Act, which required hospitals and nursing homes to establish labor-management committees to develop safe patient handling policies. For example, Buffalo General Hospital is now a "no lift" facility, meaning that it has all the proper equipment to lift patients and prevent injuries to nursing assistants, nurses, and other staff, as well as patients.

Today, CWA and NYSNA's top legislative priority is passage of the Safe Staffing for Quality Care Act, which would protect patients and staff from dangerously high caseloads. Not surprisingly, keeping staff-to-patient ratios lower saves lives, reduces hospital stays, and improves the quality of care.⁷⁹

Just as nurses are drawn to protect their patients, teachers are drawn to protect their students, and teachers have stood in the front lines in seeking quality public education for all students in Western New York and throughout the state. As Mike Deely, regional staff director for NYSUT, explains, "After the big crash in 2008, the state dramatically reduced education funding. Many schools that aren't rich had to cut AP courses, foreign language courses, sports, band, everything that makes education great. We've been fighting tooth and nail to recover in many, many school districts."

TONY MAZZOCCHI, INVENTOR OF THE TERM “JUST TRANSITION”

Labor leader Tony Mazzocchi, sometimes called the “Rachel Carson” of the American workplace, was a driving force behind the enactment of OSHA. Among other roles, he served as vice-president of the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers International Union, which later merged with the United Steelworkers. Mazzocchi’s widely quoted remarks include the following:

“There is a Superfund for dirt. There ought to be one for workers.”

“There is a dawn approaching that is indicating and shouting to us that it’s our moment. But we’ve got to seize that moment and use what we know so well—how to organize and, fundamentally, how to fight!”

“They call me a dreamer. They call me impractical. But look at the mess that they’ve made of things. Isn’t it about time that we tried something different?”

CLEAN ENERGY AND JUST TRANSITIONS

Unions play a critical role in the transition to a clean energy future and the fight against global warming. IBEW, for example, has vigorously promoted solar energy in New York State. In 2017, IBEW worked closely with the Cornell University ILR School Worker Institute and Governor Cuomo on the Clean Climate Careers Initiative, which includes a \$1.5 billion investment in renewable projects and 40,000 new clean energy jobs by 2020.⁸⁰

As the region and nation move away from fossil fuels, public policy must protect the workers and communities that have depended on fossil fuel companies for jobs and tax revenue. Labor leader Tony Mazzocchi coined the term “just transition” to express that ideal. The issue hit home in Western New York when NRG decided to close the Huntley Plant, which had burned coal to make electricity. Shutting down Huntley meant cleaner air (it had been the number one source of air pollution in the region) and fewer greenhouse gas emissions, but it also meant the loss of well-paying unionized jobs and millions of dollars in taxes for the local town, school district, and county. Two or three schools might have had to close, with a loss of 150 teachers, and almost unimaginable consequences for local schoolchildren.

Labor groups including the WNY ALF, the Kenmore Teachers Association and the IBEW worked alongside environmental justice advocates from the Clean Air Coalition and municipal leaders to advocate successfully for state funding to offset some of these costs. In 2015, the State created a Fossil Fuel Plant Closure fund with a budget of \$19 million to replace up to 80 percent of lost tax revenue for up to five years following the closure of an electric plant. In 2016, upon further advocacy, the State increased the fund to \$30 million.⁸¹ The same labor, environmental, community, and governmental partners then collaborated on a community planning effort called Tonawanda Tomorrow to envision a new future for the site and the town, winning funding from the United States Economic Development Administration.⁸² As WNY ALF President Richard Lipsitz puts it, “We did something that hadn’t been done anywhere in the country, in a community that would have been gutted by the plant closure.”

ILR Buffalo Co-Lab: Where the High Road Works

Union support and collaboration has been vital to the success of Cornell University's ILR Buffalo Co-Lab. For seven decades, the Cornell ILR School has helped build the high road in Buffalo, linking Ivy League scholarship to real world-practice.

Since 2009, over 100 Cornell students have spent the summer as **High Road Fellows** working in Buffalo with more than 40 community organizations affiliated with the PPG, including the WNY Area Labor Federation, WNYCOSH, and the Coalition for Economic Justice. The Fellows have contributed research on economic development issues – including research used in this report.

Together with PPG, the Co-Lab has also created the **Buffalo Commons**, which includes a digital library of action-oriented research about western New York; a research exchange linking community groups to scholars; and regular workshops and forums.

Cornell ILR has worked with organized labor on many other high road projects: presenting the national High Road Runs Through the City conference in 2007; serving alongside labor representatives on the City of Buffalo's Living Wage Commission; preparing studies of the local labor market and workforce; and offering training and consulting through ILR's Worker Institute, to name just a few.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Organized labor has provided essential leadership in the efforts to reform state and local economic development programs. Many business incentive programs have failed to fulfill their promises when it comes to the creation and retention of quality, family-supporting jobs. Unions have advocated for new laws and regulations and have commissioned important research on the topic (including the 2011 PPG report, *Generating Waste: Problems with NYPA and the IDAs and How to Solve Them*). County Executive Poloncarz recognized labor's leadership when he appointed Richard Lipsitz as vice-chair of the Erie County Industrial Development Agency, where he also serves as chair of the policy committee.

With Poloncarz' vision and Lipsitz' policy leadership, the ECIDA has adopted a series of high road reforms that make their programs more tightly focused, efficient, and equitable:

- **Local labor.** In 2013, the ECIDA adopted a policy under which their recipients must hire 90 percent of their workers from within the eight-county region.
- **Recapture.** In the past, the ECIDA lacked a process to recover funds when companies did not meet their promises of job creation and retention. In 2014, the ECIDA passed a new policy allowing it to recapture assistance, and it has since used it in a number of cases.
- **Senior housing.** While in the past the ECIDA sometimes offered incentives for market-rate senior housing that did not produce meaningful community benefits, in 2015 the ECIDA passed a policy with criteria such as affordability, walkability, and distinctive services to make sure that its projects serve the public good.
- **Unpaid property taxes.** In 2015, the ECIDA tightened criteria to ensure that applicants for assistance are current on their property taxes.
- **Pay equity.** In 2015, the ECIDA's research revealed that women working full time in the region made \$40,346 per year, whereas men made \$50,790. In response, it passed a policy that applicants need to certify that they are in compliance with all state and federal pay equity laws that prohibit employers from paying women less than men for the same work. Once a year, the ECIDA will randomly audit up to 12 companies to ensure compliance.

The Need for Deep Democracy

“We can have democracy in this country, or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of the few, but we can’t have both.”

*Louis D. Brandeis, Associate Justice,
United States Supreme Court*

Taken together, these policies constitute a well-grounded, well-executed approach to creating high road economic policy – a great example of democracy at work.

Labor has also worked closely with Erie County on the redevelopment of the old Bethlehem Steel plant site. During World War II, Bethlehem Steel’s Lackawanna plant was the world’s largest steel factory, employing over 20,000 people on a 1300-acre site. Those jobs peaked at roughly 22,000 before starting to decline in 1965, hitting 8,500 in 1977, before the plant closed in 1983, leaving giant brownfields and giant holes in local employment, tax bases, and civic morale.⁸³

Local labor has strongly supported efforts by County Executive Poloncarz and the ECIDA to redevelop the site. The County purchased 148 acres and is closing on an additional 93 acres on the site for new industrial development, as well as biking and walking trails that take advantage of the site’s location by Lake Erie.⁸⁴ Already, the old Bethlehem site hosts the 14 Steel Winds turbines, which provide enough power for 15,000 homes, and several companies, including the Welded Tube Company, which makes steel tubular products and provides roughly 100 quality jobs for unionized steelworkers, and hopes to add some 250 more.⁸⁵

Conclusion: Unions are Vital to Progress in Western New York

Western New York has seen a surge in economic development and a major boost to civic morale. Buffalo’s waterfront, medical corridor, and downtown have attracted large public and private investments, and the Buffalo Billion initiatives have brought new life to old industrial sites on Buffalo’s south and east sides. And yet severe challenges remain: middle wage jobs continue to vanish, and the city of Buffalo has the fourth highest child poverty rate in the nation. The research gathered in this report demonstrates that organized labor is critical to forging a sustainable and equitable path forward. Western New York’s unions have proven that they raise benefits and wages, improve working conditions, invest in their communities, increase civic engagement, and promote sound public policies. Labor builds the high road – the road to shared prosperity in a thriving region.

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