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# Label Letter

Union Label & Service Trades Department, AFL-CIO

## UAW Members at GM Ratify Agreement, End Longest Auto Workers Strike in Nearly 50 Years



**O**n September 16, 2019, members of the United Auto Workers began what would become one of the longest work stoppages for auto workers in nearly five decades. Some 48,000 workers employed by General Motors went on strike, seeking fair wages; affordable quality health care; a share of the profits; job security; and a defined path to permanent seniority for temporary workers.

Less than 48-hours into the strike, workers were shocked to find that General Motors had stopped health care coverage for striking members. The company was roundly criticized by UAW members and the community, causing them to quickly change course on their decision.

The strike ended when UAW member ratified the contract, winning pay raises, factory investments, a path to permanent positions for temporary and transitional workers, signing bonuses and maintenance of health care costs.

### THE FIGHT AT GM DIDN'T END WHEN MEMBERS RATIFIED CONTRACT

UAW Local 2250 is reporting that its president Glenn Kage was suspended recently by management at the GM Wentzville plant. The union says that Kage is being retaliated against for his involvement in the strike.

In an article in the Labor Tribune, Kage says, "It's retaliation because we stood up to them and went on strike."

"General Motors Wentzville has sent a clear message to every member of UAW Local 2250. If you stand up for the members, they will come after you. I am disappointed in General Motors that after a 40-day strike resulting in a ratified agreement that they have chosen to come after union officials and members of UAW Local 2250.

This isn't just about them coming after me, they're going after the union members and union officials all over the country.

The intention of this could not be clearer, they are going after UAW members sending a message that if you go on strike in the future, they will come after you. They are trying to break the union."

Kage was told by GM management that he was suspended for 30 days for "attempting to intimidate and harass the workers coming into the plant."

During the strike, Kage says he and other members went to a nearby Walmart parking lot because there were rumors that the company that handles building maintenance and facility management at the Wentzville plant, Ledec Industrial Service, which also employs members of UAW 2250, were attempting to hire and bring scabs into the plant.

UAW 2250 said if that were true, the union would need to take appropriate action.

Kage and the other members observed a woman in a van and Jeep when they arrived at the Walmart. The Jeep drove off after they arrived, and no one ever showed up to get into the van after.

The police did show up after the Jeep left and the officer told Kage and the others they would be arrested for unlawful assembly if they picketed around the van. Ledec complained that employees felt intimidated entering the plant. A point that Kage says he addressed by issuing gate passes to Ledec management to put their minds at ease.

Two additional members of the Shop Committee, a safety Rep and an activist third shift member were also disciplined. The Local has filed grievances on behalf of the workers. ■

# Celebrate the New Year with Union-Made Champagne

- » Andre champagne (UFCW)
- » Arbor Mist (UFCW)
- » C.K Mondavi (UFW, UFCW)
- » Chateau Ste. Michelle (UFW, IBT)
- » Cook's champagne (UFCW)
- » Gallo Estate Wines (UFCW)
- » Gallo of Sonoma (UFW)
- » St. Supery (UFW)
- » Tott's champagne (UFCW)
- » Turning Leaf (UFCW)

# Resolve

to Buy Union in 2020

**DO BUY**



# Walk in My Shoes

## Max Feige, AFGE Local 3599 Regional Steward, Investigator for Equal Employment Opportunity Commission



### STANDING UP FOR EMPLOYEE RIGHTS

AFGE Local 3599 is one of eight local EEOC unions that make up AFGE Council 216

I am an investigator for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in Miami and an AFGE Local 3599 regional steward.

In August, I attended my first American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Council 216 meeting. It was an awesome experience that really opened my eyes to how powerful our union is as we work hard for the employees of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

At the meeting, I had an opportunity to meet not only current Council officers, but also past officers, Levi Morrow, Danny Lawson, and attorney Barbara Hutchinson, who are still a strong part of who we are. It was great to learn that we are not just an EEOC Council, but that we are AFGE!

I got to meet AFGE representatives who are actively working hard to support us in our Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) campaign so that we can stand up for employee rights and the betterment of our mission. ■

### WHAT'S YOUR STORY?

In 150 words or less—accompanied by a picture of you at work...Help us walk in your shoes. We're open to all union members, active, retired, laid off.

"We want rank and file members to help us to illustrate the rich, diverse tapestry of hard working men and women who make up the American labor movement. They are proud of their work and proud of the contributions they make to their communities," explains Union Label Department President Richard Kline. "We want to demonstrate to American consumers and businesses that union labor gives added value in quality and reliability to products and services that are bought and sold."

The pictures and stories we get will be published in the Label Letter and posted on the Department's website—and perhaps in posters and other promotional materials. E-mail a Walk in Your Shoes to: [unionlabel@unionlabel.org](mailto:unionlabel@unionlabel.org); or send by regular mail to:

#### Walk In My Shoes

c/o Union Label Dept. (AFL-CIO)  
815 16th St. NW,  
Washington, DC 20005 ■

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## WGAE Organizes Hearst Magazines

Writers Guild of America East (WGAE) has broken its own organizing record, reporting it has a "substantial majority" of signed union cards from editorial employees at Hearst Magazines. Hearst, publisher of Cosmopolitan, Esquire, Harper's Bazaar, O the Oprah Magazine and 20 other brands — employ some 500 editorial employees.

The WGAE has said it will seek voluntary recognition of the union as the collective bargaining agent for editorial, video, design, photo and social media staff.

In 2017, WGAE organized Vox Media's 450 editorial employees setting the previous record for the union.

In a November 11 statement, WGAE Executive Director Lowell Peterson said that "the staff at Hearst has demonstrated today that there is always power in a union. Hearst's union drive comes as the media industry continues to consolidate, as companies become platform-agnostic and offer content on paper, over the airwaves, and online. We are proud and pleased to build the movement for collective bargaining for the professional storytellers at Hearst. Unionizing, winning recognition, bargaining contracts, this is how people who craft content ensure that their voices are heard, and their workplace needs are met." ■

# EPI Issues New Report on How the NLRB Has Systematically Eroded Workers' Rights Under Trump

The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) issued a scathing new report analyzing the actions that the Trump Administration's National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) has taken to significantly weaken worker protections under the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA).

In the report, the authors explain that the Trump NLRB has "faithfully acted on 10 out of 10 items proposed by the Chamber of Commerce as a corporate action wish list in 2017, and has gone beyond the Chamber's list to advance additional measures that give employers more power while stripping away workers' rights."

In addition to issuing significant decisions that hurt working people, the Trump NLRB has embarked on an unprecedented number of rulemakings aimed at overturning existing precedent that protects workers.

After outlining the egregious list of damages that the Trump NLRB has inflicted on working families, the report goes on to list more "damage on the horizon."

First on the list to watch in 2020, is the extermination of Scabby the Rat. This is a fight that has been ongoing for decades. Under George W. Bush, the Republican general counsel brought several complaints against unions, trying to ban Scabby. After a short reprieve under Obama's NLRB, Scabby is once again in the crosshairs as NLRB general counsel, GC Robb, has called for the agency to find the inflatable rat unlawful.

Next on the list is Robb's desire to limit what counts as "protected, concerted activity." Robb has urged the board to rule that the NLRA's protection of "concerted activity" does not protect workers who file group legal claims. According to the EPI, if this theory were to be adopted, it would mean that workers who act collectively to file claims for wage theft would not be protected by the NLRA against retaliation by their employer—undermining the definition of "protected, concerted activity."

Workplace communications could also be on the chopping block under the Trump NLRB. Robb would like the board

to find that employers can legally prohibit employees from using the company email system to discuss workplace issues, including unionizations. In August 2018, the board asked for amicus briefs on this issue. The case is still pending before the board, but if this rule is adopted, it will dramatically restrict the ability of employees to discuss workplace issues with each other.

As well, Robb is advocating for the NLRB to make it easier to scrutinize unions and their practices by changing the threshold for evaluation of whether a union has met its "duty of fair representation."

"As we enter 2020, we can expect more attacks on workers' rights from the Trump NLRB," says Rich Kline, Union Label and Service Trades Department president. "We need real, meaningful reform to U.S. labor laws that give workers the protections they deserve. The PRO Act is a step in the right direction, but it may take decades to undo the harm this administration has inflicted on working families." ■

## Miners Win Backpay from Blackjewel

In late October, laid off coal miners who blocked the train tracks in Kentucky for nearly two months over the summer to protest against unpaid wages from their bankrupt employer, Blackjewel LLC, were vindicated when the court ordered the company to pay the miners backpay amounting to nearly \$5.5 million.

The saga began when Blackjewel abruptly declared bankruptcy in July, leaving more than 1,000 coal miners in Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia without pay. On July 29, five miners blockaded a train full of coal preparing to leave a company facility in Kentucky.

The original five were then joined by hundreds of others in what would become a nearly two-month standoff.

As miners and their families took turns blocking the train, they held signs saying, "no pay, we stay."

"We get our money, this load of coal that's on this train can go by. But until

then, there'll be no trains coming in, there'll be no trains going out," miner Shane Smith told WYMT as he protested.

The workers' protest drew support from local and national political leaders and allied worker organizations as well as national and international press coverage.

"The protest made people realize that working Americans—when united—can be a powerful force," said Collin Cornette, a former coal miner.

While laid off miners physically blocked the train tracks, the Associated Press reported that the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) had stepped in to prevent the company from moving thousands of tons of coal. The DOL said "that the coal violated the Fair Labor Standards Act, which prohibits the transportation of goods if the workers who produced them had not been paid."

An attorney representing some of the miners, Ned Pillersdorf, explained in early

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**"I feel relieved to finally be getting the pay that I worked for, which is what all of us miners wanted"**

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October that the DOL intervening helped facilitate a deal. "I'm thrilled with the Department of Labor," he said. "It's a very positive step, and sounds like it's going to happen."

Later that month, a deal was reached, and miners were promised backpay and in exchange the DOL withdrew its motion to stop coal from leaving Harlan County over fair labor violations.

"I feel relieved to finally be getting the pay that I worked for, which is what all of us miners wanted," said Cornette in a text message to the Associated Press after the settlement was announced. ■

# Trumka to Congress: ‘It is time to make the Pro Act the law of the land’

“We need big change,” reads a petition supporting the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act (H.R. 2474) on the Communications Workers of America (CWA) website. The union’s Executive Board voted unanimously to make supporting the PRO Act a litmus test for 2020 incumbent political candidates to receive a CWA endorsement.

“At a time when wages haven’t even kept pace with inflation, the PRO Act will give workers a fighting chance to make sure they’re compensated fairly for their hard work,” said CWA President Chris Shelton.

The PRO Act, introduced in early May, would radically change the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). Among its many provisions, the legislation would ban employers from forcing employees to sign away their right to pursue collective or class-action litigation and from permanently replacing workers who go on strike. It would require employers to begin bargaining a contract no later than ten days after a union has been certified.

The legislation would also revise the definition of “employee” and “supervisor” to prevent employers from classifying employees as exempt from labor law protections, make it an unfair labor practice

to require or coerce employees to attend employer meetings designed to discourage union membership, expand penalties for labor law violations, and allow any person to bring a civil action for harm caused by labor law violations for unfair labor practices.

In September, AFL-CIO Director of Government Affairs William Samuel issued a letter to Congress calling for support of H.R. 2474 saying “[F]or too long, employers have been able to violate the National Labor Relations Act with impunity, routinely denying workers our basic right to join with coworkers for fairness on the job. As a result, the collective strength of workers to negotiate for better pay and benefits has eroded and income inequality has reached levels that predate the Great Depression.”

As well, AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka testified before the House Education and Labor Committee in support of the PRO Act. In his remarks, President Trumka stated, “[T]he union



movement and all working people are hungry for pre-worker reforms to our existing labor laws. The Pro Act would do many important things, chief among them provide more substantial relief for workers whose rights have been violated...ensure a process for reaching a first contract once a union is recognized...and create a true deterrent, so employers think twice before violating the law.

Something is happening in America. Workers are embracing collective action with a fervor I haven’t seen in a generation. It is time for our laws to catch up. It is time to make the Pro Act the law of the land.” ■

## Will You be the Next Union Member to Run for Public Office?

In the 2018 midterm election, 964 union members were elected to public office across the country at all levels of government. Their successful campaigns were, in large part, due to a program set up by the AFL-CIO called the Union Member Candidate Program.

The Candidate Program — modeled after the more than 20 year-old New Jersey State AFL-CIO program that recruits and assists NJ union members to hold public office — was established as a result of a 2017 AFL-CIO Convention resolution passed by delegates to replicate, grow and support a national union candidate program across the country.

“Our efforts recruiting, training and supporting labor candidates have led to

the passage of pro-worker legislation from coast to coast and everywhere in between,” say AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka.

Two years after implementing the program, the AFL-CIO is highlighting its successes with a new website (unioncandidates.org) designed to spotlight candidates, cultivate new union members to run for office, and train and support the campaigns of prospective candidates. As well, the program works with newly elected union members in passing pro-worker legislation to help working families around the country.

“When union members hold public office, they champion labor’s values and

work hard to shift the balance of power for working people.”

According to the website, this year alone, union members elected to public office have introduced, championed and helped pass legislation that directly affects the lives of working people in Connecticut, New Jersey, Maine, Illinois, Nevada, New Mexico, and Rhode Island.

The website also states “Our work to develop and elect union members to public office is just beginning. We anticipate voters to elect even more true champions for working people in 2020.”

You can get more information and find out how to get involved by filling out the form on the website. Will you be the next union candidate? ■

# Labor Loses Ally at USPS as Postmaster Brennan Retires

When Postmaster General Megan Brennan announced she will be retiring early next year, leaders from the four big postal unions became alarmed. With talk of privatizing the U.S. Postal Service emanating from the White House since President Trump took office and stalled contract negotiations for three of the four unions, the presidents of the American Postal Workers Union (APWU), National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC), National Postal Mail Handlers, and National Rural Letter Carriers are left to wonder what it will mean for the more than 500,000 union members.

"It kind of caught us by surprise," Paul Hogrogian, President of the National Postal Mail Handlers told Bloomberg Law in October. "While I didn't always agree with the postmaster general, I appreciated the fact that her door was always open. She was able to work with the unions, postal management, the board and the major mailers."

Postal Service, which shouldn't "be treated like a Fortune 500 company" because its purpose is to serve the U.S. public and not to generate profits, Hogrogian said.

APWU President Mark Dimondstein issued a statement on Brennan's retirement, "[T]he APWU calls on the Board to appoint a PMG deeply dedicated to the public good and the public Postal Service and who respects the contributions, safety, well-being and union rights of postal workers. We need a Postmaster General committed to protecting universal service to every person, no matter who we are or where we live and to expanded postal services such as financial services and vote by mail."

As President Dimondstein points out, the USPS could provide basic, affordable, consumer-driven financial services via its existing infrastructure. The USPS is the most trusted federal agency in the U.S. according to a Gallup poll administered earlier this year. With 31,000 branches

payday loans, trapping many in a cycle of debt.

According to the Campaign for Postal Banking, a coalition of labor unions and community organizations fighting to bring financial services to the USPS, the United States offered financial services from 1911 to 1966, accepting savings deposits guaranteed through the full faith and credit of the U.S. The program was started in response to the banking crisis of the early 1900s when bank failures caused a loss of public confidence and failed to serve the needs of working people.

"The United States has two separate banking systems today—one serving the well-to-do and another exploiting everyone else. There are millions of individuals whose otherwise stable financial lives can be upended by one unexpected event that snags them in an otherwise temporary liquidity crunch," says professor Mehra Baradaran, University of Georgia School of Law, and author of *How the Other Half Banks: Exclusion, Exploitation and the Threat to Democracy*.

Baradaran continues, "After years of experience and research in banking law, I have come to the conclusion that the best way to level the playing field for credit in the United States is postal banking. In fact, postal banking was the largest and most successful experiment in financial inclusion in U.S. history and remains the primary tool for financial inclusion across the world. A public option in banking would balance the scales of government support for the banking industry and could potentially drive out the usurious fringe-lending sector, which profits from American's financial woes."

For more information on Postal Banking, visit the Campaign for Postal Banking website at: [www.campaignfor-postalbanking.org](http://www.campaignfor-postalbanking.org).

The four major postal worker unions are members of the following community organizations dedicated to saving the USPS:

- Campaign for Postal Banking — [www.campaignforpostalbanking.org](http://www.campaignforpostalbanking.org)
- U.S. Mail is Not for Sale — <https://usmailnotforsale.org>
- A Grand Alliance to Save Our Public Postal Service — <https://agrandaalliance.org> ■



One of the major concerns for labor leaders is the fact that the White House has made it clear that it would like to privatize the Postal Service. "The best-case scenario is they pick someone similar to Megan who wants to keep the USPS as a public service," including the continuation of six-day mail delivery to all U.S. addresses, Hogrogian said. The worst-case scenario would be a postmaster general who wants to privatize the

servicing every urban, suburban, and rural community in the country, adding financial services to the USPS' offerings could help some 28 percent of U.S. households who do not have access to affordable financial services. For many, traditional banks are out of reach either geographically, or due to high fees and other obstacles to opening, maintaining and accessing accounts. This lack of access drives millions, mainly the working poor, to rely on costly, predatory services such as check cashing and



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UL&STD thanks Ullico for supporting our mission.

# EndNotes



## Label Letter

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By Rich Kline, *President, UL&STD*

## Behind the Headlines



Headlines blaze out stunning achievements touted by government and industry. Employment growth, trade talks and new technologies, all win acclaim. The headlines are positive.

Reading between the lines, not so much.

Employment growth, begun under the Obama administration, has been steady. Unemployment is low. Beyond the headlines though one learns that many workers still have multiple low wage jobs to meet financial needs. The minimum wage remains inadequate and many low wage jobs, such as waiting tables and bartending, are more precarious as the Trump administration seeks to change the rules on tipped jobs to favor employers.

Trade negotiations usually result in trade agreements that benefit corporations and rich investors. Global trade for the past 60 years has upended American workplaces and exported American jobs in both manufacturing and service industries. As the jobs go elsewhere, some workers are granted Trade Adjustment Assistance if the government and employers that

foreign trade was responsible. All too often new jobs for which workers prepare with TAA are either non-existent or low-paid. The headlines were so positive, though.

TAA, commonly referred to as burial insurance for good jobs, is policymakers' tacit acceptance of the collateral damage their trade deals cause. Maximizing corporate profits has been the main concern in trade negotiations, past and present. Jobs and working people receive only the verbal attention required to win passage of the measure (see NAFTA-related job losses).

And technology has made old-style automation seem positively ancient. Stopwatch and clipboard practitioners of time and motion studies could never have imagined the use of algorithms to monitor every move made by delivery drivers or to calibrate the pace of warehouse workers. Other industries are taking note and seeking to gain similar valuable seconds in job performance by making workers responsive to digital controls whose data can result in disciplining and firing workers.

We used to fear robots. Some would have us be robots. But you won't find it in the headlines. ■