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Label Letter

Union Label & Service Trades Department, AFL-CIO

The Rise of Women in Labor Union Leadership: *Breaking Barriers and Paving the Way*

Traditionally, labor unions have been male-dominated spaces, both in terms of membership and leadership. Yet, as workplace dynamics evolve and women increasingly enter various sectors, a significant shift has taken place: more women are stepping into leadership roles within unions. This transformation not only mirrors broader societal changes but also brings fresh perspectives to the table. Women leaders in labor unions are championing inclusive, progressive policies that uplift all workers, and create equity and justice in the workplace.

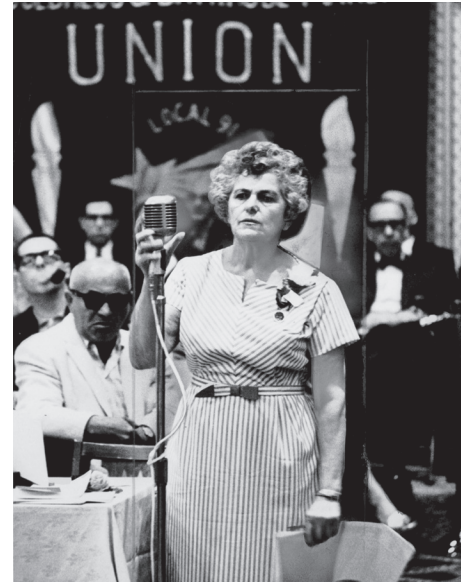
In today's economic landscape, particularly as the United States grapples with the aftermath of the pandemic and the challenges of the "she-cession" caused by the pandemic, the role of women in unions and their access to collective bargaining is crucial for advancing women's prosperity. More women labor leaders are key to expanding women's access to the benefits of unionization.

Trailblazing Women

KATE MULLANY, COLLAR LAUNDRY UNION

"You show me the women and I'll turn them into organizers."

Kate Mullany was a pioneering labor leader in the 19th century and is considered one of the first women to organize a successful labor union in the United States. She is best known for helping to create the Collar Laundry Union in Troy, New York, in 1864. At the time, many women worked under poor conditions in the city's booming collar and cuff industry, enduring long hours and low pay. Mullany and her coworkers grew increasingly frustrated. She and around 200 other laundresses organized a strike demanding higher wages and better working conditions. After a week-long strike, they won a 25% pay raise, a significant victory at the time. The Collar Laundry Union became one of the earliest examples of women



Rose Pesotta addresses the floor at the 1965 ILGWU convention, December 15, 1965. Photo by Kheel Center

leading a labor movement in the U.S., and Mullany's leadership and efforts laid the groundwork for future labor activism among women.

ROSE PESOTTA AND THE ILGWU

"Nothing will ever be won by waiting around. You've got to put your shoulder to the wheel to get ahead."

Rose Pesotta was a prominent labor leader who played a key role in organizing garment workers in the early 20th century. Born in Ukraine in 1896, Pesotta immigrated to the United States in 1913 and became deeply involved in the labor movement. She is best known for her work with the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), where she rose to the position of vice president—the first woman to hold such a high-ranking office in the union.

Pesotta's contributions to labor organizing were significant. In the 1930s,

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she led successful strikes and organizing campaigns in various cities, including Los Angeles, where she helped to establish the ILGWU as a major force in the West Coast garment industry. Her efforts were notable for their inclusivity, as she worked closely with immigrant workers and advocated for women's leadership in the labor movement.

Despite her achievements, Pesotta was frustrated by sexism in her union. Discouraged by the ILGWU's reluctance to prioritize women's issues, she eventually resigned from her vice presidency in 1944, though she remained active in labor causes.

Pesotta was also a writer and chronicled her experiences in the labor movement in her autobiography, "Bread Upon the Waters" (1944). Her legacy as a trailblazing woman in the labor movement remains influential, as she fought not only for workers' rights but also for women's equality within labor organizations.

ADDIE L. WYATT AND THE UNITED PACKINGHOUSE WORKERS

"I didn't know what the union was. But I know that I needed help and here was the place that I could get that help. I knew that I wanted to help other workers, and I found out that I could help them by joining with them and making the union strong and powerful enough to bring about change."

Addie L. Wyatt was a prominent African American labor leader, civil rights activist, and women's rights advocate who made significant contributions to the labor movement during the 20th century. Born in 1924 in Brookhaven, Mississippi, she moved to Chicago and began working in the meatpacking industry at Armour & Co. in the 1940s. She quickly became involved with the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA), now a part of the UFCW, rising through the ranks to become an international vice president, making her one of the highest-ranking African American women in the labor movement.

Throughout her career, Wyatt advocated for workers' rights, focusing on the intersection of labor, civil rights, and women's equality. She worked closely with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and was active in the civil rights movement, emphasizing the importance of labor unions in secur-

ing social justice for African Americans. Wyatt was also a strong advocate for gender equality, co-founding the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) in 1974.

Wyatt's activism extended beyond her union work. She was a vocal proponent of economic justice and participated in organizing campaigns and protests that addressed racial and gender discrimination in the workplace. Her efforts helped pave the way for more women, particularly women of color, to assume leadership roles in unions and other social justice movements.

In 1984, Wyatt retired as vice president of UFCW International. Her legacy is one of tireless advocacy for marginalized workers and her belief in the power of solidarity across race and gender lines.

LILLY LEDBETTER AND THE FAIR PAY ACT

"The truth is, I never thought about



Lilly Ledbetter
Photo by US DOL

suing my employer. I thought that they would do the right thing. It was a bitter pill to swallow when I found out they would not."

Lilly Ledbetter is a vital figure in the fight for equal pay and gender equality in the workplace. After working for nearly 20 years at Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company, Ledbetter discovered she was paid significantly less than her male colleagues for the same work. Ledbetter was a supervisor at Goodyear, so not a union member, but her advocacy resonates as part of the union experience. She challenged pay discrimination and her ground-

breaking work culminated in a landmark legal battle that brought attention to the systemic issues facing women in the workforce.

Despite the initial defeat of her case in the U.S. Supreme Court, Ledbetter became a fierce advocate for the Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, signed into law in 2009. This legislation marked a significant change in the landscape of workplace equality, making it easier for women to challenge pay discrimination.

THE CURRENT LANDSCAPE

In recent years, the number of women in union leadership positions has significantly increased. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the percentage of women union members has steadily risen, with women making up 47.3% of union members as of 2023.

Women leaders are now heading national unions, local chapters, and labor federations across multiple industries. They are at the forefront of labor movements, advocating for better wages, fair working conditions, family leave policies, and protections against harassment and discrimination.

Current Women Labor Leaders

LIZ SHULER – AFL-CIO PRESIDENT

As the first woman to lead the AFL-CIO, Liz Shuler represents a milestone in labor union history. Shuler became president in 2021 after the sudden passing of Richard Trumka and has since prioritized diversifying the labor movement. Under her



AFL-CIO President, Liz Shuler

leadership, the AFL-CIO has focused on growing union membership among women and marginalized groups. Shuler has been a fierce advocate for worker protections, collective bargaining, and gig worker rights. She is also driving initiatives to modernize unions and expand into non-traditional sectors like tech.

SARA NELSON – PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION OF FLIGHT ATTENDANTS (AFA-CWA)

Sara Nelson has become a national face of labor activism, especially following the 2019 government shutdown, during which she called for a general strike to end the political impasse. Nelson has long championed the rights of women and



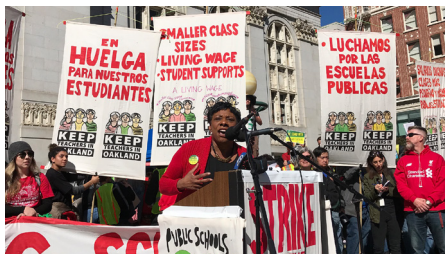
AFA President Sara Nelson addressing the AFGE Convention-Photo by AFGE

working mothers in the aviation industry, advocating for improved pay, better working conditions, and protections against harassment. She is also a prominent voice for women's rights in male-dominated spaces and is often cited as a potential future leader of the AFL-CIO.

MARY KAY HENRY – PRESIDENT OF THE SERVICE EMPLOYEES INTERNATIONAL UNION (SEIU)

Mary Kay Henry became SEIU's first female president in 2010 and has led the union's efforts to organize low-wage workers, particularly in healthcare, janitorial services, and food service industries. Under Henry's leadership, SEIU has been at the forefront of the "Fight for \$15" campaign, which advocates for a \$15 minimum wage, and has played a crucial role in pushing for healthcare reforms and immigrant rights.

BECKY PRINGLE – PRESIDENT OF THE



NEA President Becky Pringle at an Oakland Teacher's Rally

NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (NEA)

Representing more than 3 million educators, Becky Pringle leads the largest labor union in the U.S. As a Black woman in this influential role, Pringle has made diversity, equity, and inclusion central to her agenda. She has also been a vocal advocate for educational reforms that protect both teachers and students and for investments in public education, particularly in underfunded communities. Pringle's leadership is key in fighting for gender and racial equity in education.

RANDI WEINGARTEN, PRESIDENT OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS (AFT)

The current president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), Randi Weingarten, has served in her role since 2008, playing a significant role in shaping labor policy and educational reform in the U.S.

Before becoming the president of the AFT, Weingarten was the first female president of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) in New York City, the largest local union of the AFT. As one of the highest-profile openly gay labor leaders in the U.S., she is also a prominent voice for LGBTQ+ rights, using her platform to fight for workplace equality and inclusion.

Weingarten is known for her innovative approaches to collective bargaining, negotiating teacher contracts that focused not only on pay and benefits but also on improving student learning conditions and championing the idea of "solution-driven unionism," where the union actively engages with local communities to solve educational problems and fight for better schools.

Key Statistics and Trends

Representation Growth: Women now make up nearly half of union members in the U.S. In 1983, women accounted for just 35% of unionized workers; today that number is close to parity.

Unionization Trends: Sectors where women are more highly represented, such as education, healthcare, and service industries, have seen some of the highest rates of unionization efforts. For example, in 2022, 77% of the workforce in the healthcare and education sectors were women, making their role in union organizing essential.

Pay Equity: Research shows that women in unions have narrower gender pay gaps compared to their non-union counterparts. In unionized workplaces, women earn on average 94 cents for every dollar a man makes, compared to 82 cents in non-union workplaces.

A FORWARD-THINKING APPROACH

The increasing visibility of women in labor union leadership is not just a reflection of changing demographics but also an indication of the evolving priorities of the labor movement. Women's leadership brings a fresh perspective on issues like paid family leave, affordable healthcare, and equal pay, which are essential for creating fairer workplaces. Women leaders are also more likely to champion policies that address issues such as gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and caregiving responsibilities, which disproportionately affect women workers.

The future of labor unions will see more innovative approaches to organizing, as women continue to break into leadership roles in tech, digital platforms, and non-traditional industries.

The rise of women in labor union leadership is reshaping the labor movement for the better.



Longshoremen Strike Ends After Just Three Days

The International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) officially ended its nationwide strike after securing a tentative agreement on wages with the U.S. Maritime Alliance (USMX). The strike began on October 1, 2024, and disrupted cargo movement across 36 ports from Maine to Texas. Over 45,000 dockworkers participated in the walkout, demanding higher wages and protections against automation in the shipping industry.

On October 3, the ILA and USMX reached a temporary deal that included wage increases and extended their contract until mid-January 2025. The extension allows both parties to continue negotiating unresolved issues, such as job security and port automation, without further economic disruptions. ILA's president, Harold Daggett, expressed optimism about the agreement, stating, "This is a significant win for our members. Their demands for a fair wage have been recognized, and we remain committed to ensuring job protections in the face of automation."

The ILA strike was the first since 1977 and had far-reaching effects, halting all shipments at affected ports and raising concerns about billions of dollars in potential losses. Economists warned that the prolonged stoppage could damage the supply chain and increase freight costs. As soon as the agreement was reached, port operations resumed, alleviating some of those concerns.

Labor Secretary Julie Su commended both sides for reaching a compromise, noting that "the resilience and unity of dockworkers in this negotiation underscore the importance of collective bar-

gaining for achieving fair and equitable outcomes."

Business leaders in the shipping industry, while relieved at the resumption of work, continue to monitor negotiations closely as the two sides reconvene to address long-term issues.

Support from the broader labor movement was crucial to the strike's success. The AFL-CIO stood firmly behind the longshoremen. AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler declared, "The longshoremen's fight for a fair contract is the entire labor movement's fight. USMX holds the power to end this strike," stressing that the shipping companies, which had profited significantly during the pandemic, could afford to share that wealth fairly with the workers who kept the ports running.

Despite the temporary resolution, the broader conversation about automation's role in the shipping industry continues. A spokesperson for USMX acknowledged, "We are committed to working through these complex issues. Automation is part of the future, but we are also committed to supporting the livelihoods of our dockworkers." The ILA remains firm in its stance against automation displacing jobs without adequate protections for workers.

The AFL-CIO's involvement and the support of unions nationwide highlighted the ongoing struggle against corporate greed and the fight for fair wages across all industries. Shuler summed it up by stating that this was not just about one union or one industry but about setting a precedent for the rights of workers everywhere.

"The resilience and unity of dockworkers in this negotiation underscore the importance of collective bargaining for achieving fair and equitable outcomes."

—Julie Su, Acting Labor Secretary

Industry-Leading Boeing Contract Delivers Historic Wage Increases for Frontline Workers

Photo credit John Froschauer/AP



In a landmark agreement, 33,000 Boeing frontline workers, represented by the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) Districts 751 and W24, have ratified a union contract that sets a new standard for wages in the aerospace industry. This contract offers a compounded wage increase of 43.65% over four years, a \$12,000 ratification bonus, health care improvements, and strengthened retirement benefits.

The deal followed a nearly two-month strike across Boeing locations in Washington, Oregon, and California. With public backing and bipartisan political support, the workers' strike focused on achieving fair compensation and job security. Acting U.S. Secretary of Labor Julie Su, on behalf of the Biden-Harris administration, played a key role in bringing the parties back to the table, facilitating discussions that had stalled.

IAM District 751 President Jon Holden and IAM District W24 President Brandon Bryant praised the outcome, in a joint statement:

"Working people know what it's like when a company overreaches and takes away more than is fair. Through this strike and the resulting victory, frontline workers at Boeing have done their part to begin rebalancing the scales in favor of the middle class – and in doing so, we hope to inspire other workers in our industry and beyond to continue standing up for justice at work. Through this victory and the strike that made it possible, IAM members have taken a stand for

respect and fair wages in the workplace. Our members perform high-quality and flight-critical work for the airplanes we build and deserve a return on their labor investment that provides for the quality-of-life worthy of that labor.

"This contract also creates a new foundation to build on for the future and that future begins today. We are ready to help Boeing change direction and return to building the highest quality and safest airplanes in the world. Our members are critical to that mission, and now have a stronger voice in the decision-making process to ensure those needed improvements are made. 'There is no Boeing without the IAM' has been our battle cry, and we are ready, again, to do our part to bring this company back to the standard that it never should have strayed from.

"Livable wages and benefits that can support a family are essential – not optional – and this strike underscored that reality. This contract will have a positive and generational impact on the lives of workers at Boeing and their families. We hope these gains inspire other workers to organize and join a union. Frontline Boeing workers have used their voices, their collective power, and their solidarity to do what is right, to stand up for what is fair – and to win."

Brian Bryant, IAM International President, added:

"This agreement represents a new standard in the aerospace industry – one that sends a clear statement that aerospace jobs must be middle-class careers in which workers can thrive. Workers in

the aerospace industry, led by the IAM — the most powerful aerospace union in the world — will not settle for anything less than the respect and family-sustaining wages and benefits they need and deserve. This agreement reflects the positive results of workers sticking together, participating in workplace democracy, and demonstrating solidarity with each other and with the community during a necessary and effective strike."

CONTRACT HIGHLIGHTS:

- **Wage Increases:** The contract includes a 38% wage increase over four years (13%, 9%, 9%, 7%), compounding to 43.65%.
- **Ratification Bonus:** Workers receive a \$12,000 ratification bonus, with flexible options for allocation.
- **Retirement Benefits:** A 401(k) match of 100% up to 8%, a 4% special retirement contribution, and a \$105 pension multiplier per year.
- **Healthcare and Disability Improvements:** Enhanced long-term and short-term disability plans, with healthcare cost controls.
- **Job Security and Overtime Rules:** Strengthened job security provisions and improved overtime rules.

Gary R. Allen, IAM Western Territory General Vice President, celebrated the victory, calling it the most significant contract upgrade in a decade, setting an example for the industry. IAM Resident General Vice President Jody Bennett added that the union members' unity and resilience throughout the strike led to substantial gains for wages and working conditions.

With approximately 600,000 active and retired members across North America, the IAM represents workers in aerospace, defense, healthcare, automotive, and other industries. The new contract with Boeing underscores the union's commitment to securing livable wages and benefits that support families and communities.



Holiday Dining

TURKEY

- » Boar's Head
- » Butterball
- » Foster Farms
- » Thumann's

HAM

- » Cook's Hickory Smoked Spiral Sliced Ham with Honey
- » Tyson

DINNER ROLLS

- » Arnold
- » Bimbo Mini Croissants
- » Bimbo Dinner Rolls
- » Pillsbury Crescent Rolls
- » Pillsbury Ready-to-Bake Dinner Rolls
- » Sara Lee
- » Schmidt
- » Wegmans Dinner Rolls

VEGETABLES

- » Birds Eye
- » Del Monte
- » Dole
- » Hanover Foods
- » Ore-Ida

CRANBERRIES / CRANBERRY SAUCE

- » Dole
- » Ocean Spray

STUFFING

- » Arnold
- » Kraft Stove Top
- » Oroweat
- » Stroehmann
- » Schwebel's

SIDES

- » Betty Crocker
- » Kraft Mac & Cheese

DESSERT

- » Cool Whip
- » Dianda's Bakery (San Francisco)
- » Entenmann's Cookies and Cakes
- » Marie Callender's
- » Reddi-Wip
- » Sara Lee Pies and Cheesecakes

RETAIL BAKESHOPS

- » Albertsons
- » Cub Foods
- » Dave's Supermarket
- » Fred Meyer
- » Giant
- » Haggen
- » Jerry's Foods
- » Jerry's County Market
- » Kroger
- » Lunds & Byerlys
- » Roseauers
- » Roth's Fresh Markets
- » Safeway
- » Schnucks
- » SuperValu
- » Vons

WINE

- » Almaden
- » André
- » Arbor Mist
- » Balletto

- » Barles & Jaymes
- » Black Box
- » Carlo Rossi
- » CK Mondavi
- » CR Cellars
- » Charles Krug
- » Chateau Ste. Michelle
- » Columbia Crest
- » Farron Ridge
- » Gallo Estate
- » Gallo of Sonoma
- » Saddle Mountain
- » Scheid Vineyards
- » St. Supéry
- » Tott's
- » Turning Leaf

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Please advise the Department if you see a product listed in error. While we do our best to verify accuracy of our listings, some products may be incorrectly listed on occasion.

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EndNotes



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By Rich Kline, *President, UL&STD*

Across the Labor Movement, Women are Leading and Workers are Winning

This issue of the *Label Letter* presents a brief history of women in the Labor Movement and salutes the many women who have achieved leadership roles in labor organizations at every level.

The rise of women to leadership positions coincides with the current nearly 50% female membership in unions. Women in unions fight for equal rights, safe and fair working conditions, family leave policies, workplace protections against harassment and discrimination. In fact, they seek the same goals as men who belong to a union and enjoy a union contract.

If the Labor Movement continues to support goals of union members both female and male, it will improve conditions across all workplaces.

The International Longshoremen's Association strike against port operators reached a temporary end with the major issue of automation yet to be resolved. The supplanting of workers

by machines and technology is an old one. In the 1700s and early 19th Century, the cotton gin, steam engines and electric motors revolutionized work in factories and farms. Advantages were enjoyed by some people while in many cases workers were harmed by job losses.

Now comes a new technology, Artificial Intelligence, riding on the computer technology that has already occasioned many workplace changes. Profound changes are promised by AI proponents as workers' advocates see threats to jobs.

The ILA strike brought acute attention to the automation issue as the economy was faced with major disruptions. The threat from AI and automation to the livelihood of dockworkers should receive as much attention.

The ILA is fighting for workers beyond its membership. Job security in the face of technology will be one of the most critical points in many future negotiations.