



# Label Letter

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Union Label & Service Trades Department, AFL-CIO

## UNIONS OPEN NEGOTIATIONS WITH U.S. POSTAL SERVICE

The American Postal Workers Union (APWU) and the U.S. Postal Service began negotiations in February over a new contract for the first time in more than four years.

The APWU is asking the new postmaster general, Megan Brennan, for fair wages and benefits, longer and more convenient hours for customers and a series of bold improvements, including postal banking, public notary services and the sale of licenses.

In a statement to the membership, APWU President Mark Dimondstein warned “[T]o be victorious, we will have to conduct our fight for a good contract very differently than we have in the past. Negotiations will still go on at the bargaining table, but to be successful we must win support from the people of the country for our goals—good, stable postal jobs and a strong Postal Service that belongs to them. As postal workers, we understand that the demise of a strong, public Postal Service would mean the end of our jobs. But we must take that understanding a step further.

“We must make sure the people of the country realize that dismantling the nation’s postal system doesn’t only harm postal workers,” Dimondstein continued. “It also robs the people of speedy delivery of their medicine, their online purchases, local newspapers, bill payments, letters and invitations. And it robs communities of a vital public service, secure jobs, a strong tax base, and important infrastructure.”

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## RIGHT-TO-WORK (FOR LESS) LEGISLATION POPPING-UP AROUND THE COUNTRY

New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof recently wrote an op-ed about the need to strengthen unions. An outspoken opponent of unions in the past, Kristof writes that we should, “strengthen unions, not try to eviscerate them.” The article, “The Cost of a Decline in Unions’ points to the checks and balances that unions provide in an era of corporate corruption.

Citing the history of American unions in the fight against inequality in the 1940s and 50s, Kristof asserts that when union membership is high, inequality is low. A claim that is backed by Joseph Stiglitz’s new book *The Price of Inequality*. Stiglitz, a Nobel laureate and a professor of economics at Columbia University Business School, argues that the exercise of political power by moneyed interests over legislative and regulatory processes are the real reason workers today are struggling. “While there may be underlying economic forces at play,” he writes, “politics have shaped the market, and shaped it in ways that advantage the top at the expense of the rest.”

So it comes as no surprise that we see Governors in states like West Virginia, Indiana, Nevada, Missouri, New Hampshire, and Wisconsin introducing “right-to-work” legislation.

In Wisconsin, Governor Walker and the GOP-dominated legislature, introduced an ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council, a corporate-funded group designed to write state level legislation that often directly benefits huge

corporations) ‘right-to-work’ bill word for word. After attacking public sector unions in 2011 under the guise of budgetary needs, Walker is now going after private sector unions for no reason at all—except that killing family supporting jobs is high on the wish list of the Koch brothers and their corporate cronies at ALEC. The legislation passed on March 6, 2015, making Wisconsin the 25th state to pass right-to-work.

Workers in Wisconsin fought back against the fast-tracked legislation but frequently had their voices silenced by legislators who weren’t interested in democracy. “We must stand together for our rights as workers and raise our voices in our democracy to stop ‘right-to-work’ legislation from moving forward in Wisconsin,” declared the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 159 on its website.

Just as they did in 2011, unions in Wisconsin rallied their troops to fill the state Capitol with protestors.

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# WALK IN MY SHOES



## Lee Heise

### STEAMFITTERS

LOCAL 439 EAST ST. LOUIS, IL

I worked non-union for two years before I joined the UA.

I remember when I first started working non-union it surprised me how I was treated. I made decent money, \$28 bucks a hour to weld straight out of school. Green as could be, 19 years old, I didn't know a thing and, I quickly learned nobody

wanted to teach me anything. One guy told me if he taught me to weld better I would take his job.

Safety was out the window.

"Get the job done, or we'll find someone else to do it." Wish I had a dollar for every time I heard that. Working conditions were poor. Not only did you have to provide all your own tools, you had to take breaks on your job box. Sitting there in a dirty plant eating a sandwich. \$28 bucks a hour, so I kept saying this is worth it. I remember seeing guys getting hurt on the job. Never failed, they were laid off or fired soon after that. 19 years old... who needs health insurance... well, it's not provided by your employer. Neither is 401k, pension, or anything for that matter. So buying all that stuff cost me a ton but, my mother thought I needed it.

Long story short, I've been in the union 6 years now, and I've never been happier. I make more money, receive benefits, and I am treated like a professional.

The union has changed my point of view on everything. Organized labor is the only way. You get treated fairly for a skilled craft you are taught to do, and taught to do right. You get paid a decent wage that you can actually live off of! And, receive benefits!

But those damn union dues!?!? I'll pay that chump change any day to never work non-union again.

It's changed my life and lifestyle and I'm grateful everyday for my job. Not once before was I able to work close to home and make decent money. I just told my girlfriend this weekend how I would die for my union and to protect my way of life and my family. It's all about a better way of life. Good money, good benefits, being treated fairly, and a backbone to be there when you need them like my union brothers and sisters. Being a part of something bigger, something more then a corporation or huge company. I'm proud to be a union steam fitter. ■



## SPOTLIGHT THE LABEL

### United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)

UFCW members work in all 50 states and in Canada, and belong to more than 400 local unions. UFCW boasts a large percentage of younger workers, many of those under the age of 35, in both full- and part-time positions.

While the history of the UFCW begins in 1979, the history of the various industries that make up the union is long and proud. The industries that UFCW members work in were involved in the earliest stages of trade unionism in North America, and many times these workers acted as a catalyst for early change within the labor community.

The progression the UFCW has experienced since its inception is due in large part to its leaders. These men and women dedicated their lives to the Labor Movement, and pledged life-long service to UFCW members and all working people. As a result of their efforts, the workers of North America have initiated change and gained a strong voice on the job for themselves and for future generations. ■

# 2015 Union Made SPRING CLEANING

**As hard as it may be to believe, spring is just around the corner. And that means it is just about time for some spring cleaning.**

Erma Bombeck once said “my idea of spring cleaning is to sweep the room with a glance.” Unfortunately most of us don’t get off that easy.

So if you plan to join in the ritual here are some union-made cleaning products to help you get your home to sparkle and shine.

From our friends at IUE-CWA; UFCW; IBT; USW; IAMAW; IBB; CWUC-UFCW; IUOE; GCC-IBT.



- 
- Ajax Laundry Detergent
  - Ajax Cleaning Powder
  - ALL Laundry Detergent
  - Arctic Bright Bleach
  - Blanco Bleach
  - Bowl Fresh Toilet Bowl Sanitizer
  - Clorox Bleach Tabs
  - Clorox
  - Clorox Disinfecting Wipes
  - Dynamo Laundry Detergent
  - Fab Laundry Detergent
  - Fiberguard Carpet Cleaners
  - Final Touch Fabric Softener
  - Fresh Start Laundry Detergent
  - HiLex Bleach
  - J.R. Watkins Laundry Detergent
  - J.R. Watkins Naturals
  - Lysol
  - Love My Carpet
  - Mini Safe Scour
  - Minwax
  - Mop & Glo
  - Mountain Pine
  - Palmolive Dishwashing Soap
  - Palmolive
  - Purex Laundry Products
  - Snuggle
  - Spic N’ Span Clean Wipes
  - Soft Scrub
  - Sunlight
  - Tide Soap
  - Top Job Household Bleach
  - Wisk





# BUY UNION

## WAGES

The median weekly earnings of union workers are 28% more than non-union workers .....

**NON-UNION \$717**

**UNION \$917**

Median Weekly Earnings

**UNION WORKERS MAKE**

**28% MORE THAN NON-UNION WORKERS**

**LIV**

**PAID**

Union workers get

**28**

more days of paid vacation, on average, than non-union workers



# LIVE BETTER



**14.6  
MILLION**

**NUMBER OF U.S.  
UNION MEMBERS**

Every time we buy union-made products and services we support good middle-class jobs. With more than 14 million union members in the U.S. our buying power can help support and sustain the middle-class.

**WE UNION**

**AND VACATION**

**%**

ation, on  
n workers.

Union workers are more likely to have health and retirement

**BENEFITS**

than their non-union counterparts.

**TTTER**



In West Virginia, Republican State Senate President Bill Cole was pushing a right-to-work law by arguing it would attract businesses to the State. That bill died in session, which ended March 14. Americans for Prosperity, another political advocacy group founded with donations from conservative donors Charles and David Koch, has pushed relentlessly for a right-to-work law in West Virginia. In automated emails to legislators, the group says that the legislation signals to the business community “that our state is a good place to do business.”

### **BUT WHAT DOES RIGHT-TO-WORK REALLY MEAN FOR WORKERS?**

Right-to-work means lower annual wages for workers. The Economic Policy Institute (EPI) says an average of \$1,500 less a year. And the assertion that West Virginia Senate President Cole makes that the legislation would “attract new business,” well, that’s not true either. Based on national trends there is no proof that it would bring in new businesses.

“Seven of the 10 states with the highest unemployment rates today are also right-to-work states,” says Ross Eisenbrey, vice president of Washington, DC-based think tank EPI. “I would not say that right-to-work legislation is responsible for higher unemployment. But it is not a cure for unemployment either.”

And, the 12 States with the highest wages, well, they are non right-to-work states. Because union members earn more than their non-union counterparts, it is easy to see why the billionaires and corporate special interest groups are pushing this legislation around the country, they want to keep more profits for themselves. Profits are the highest they have ever been, when will enough be enough? ■

“Seven of the 10 states with the highest unemployment rates today are also right-to-work states.”

## Thousands of Oil and Petroleum Workers Forced Out on Unfair Labor Practices Strike

**O**n February 1, 2015, United Steelworkers (USW) members at nine refineries and chemical plants were forced out on an unfair labor practice strike as industry negotiators failed to address serious concerns raised by the USW regarding the health and safety of workers and their communities. Since the strike started, workers at six more facilities have joined the fight. Right now, some 7,000 workers from 15 locations across the country are out on an unfair labor practice (ULP) strike.

In addition to health and safety issues, contracting out and health care, the USW unfair labor practice strike is over the oil companies’ bad faith bargaining, including the refusal to bargain over mandatory subjects; undue delays in providing information; impeded



The oil industry’s refusal to meaningfully address safety issues through good faith bargaining gave the USW no other option but to engage in a work stoppage. Right now, some 7,000 workers from 15 locations across the country are out on an ULP strike.

bargaining; and threats issued to workers if they joined the ULP strike.

You can read more about the strike at [www.oilbargaining.org](http://www.oilbargaining.org). ■

### **UNIONS OPEN NEGOTIATIONS** *Continued from page 1*

Dimondstein points to the 2012 Chicago Teachers Union strike as an example of getting the community involved by uniting the demands of the teachers with the needs of the students and parents they served.

Pledging assistance to local and state organizations that hold worksite actions in support of bargaining activities, APWU national officers have asked all members and union leaders to mobilize APWU members, friends, other union workers in the labor movement to support their efforts.

As part of the negotiations, Dimondstein intends to make establishing postal banking a major demand.

Postal banking isn’t a new idea. For 50 years the United States Postal Savings System, the predecessor of the U.S. Postal Service, offered financially secure savings accounts for small depositors. At its peak in 1947, the system held almost \$3.4 billion in deposits.

The APWU isn’t alone in its call for the postal service to establish postal banking. A new campaign “The Grand Alliance” is a coalition of more than 60 national organizations and unions repre-

senting people from all walks of life that back the proposed additional services.

Statistics show that 28 percent of U.S. households either have no checking account or rely heavily on non-bank services such as currency exchanges. With the number of financial institutions at an all-time low, many people, especially those of color, have limited access to bank services. United for a Fair Economy (UFE), a financial reform group and part of “The Grand Alliance,” report that more than one quarter of Americans with little—or no—conventional banking services encompasses 53.6 percent of black households and 46.8 percent of Latino households, but only 19.5 percent of non-Latino, white households.

For those relying on banking alternatives, like payday lenders, that could mean they are paying as much \$2,500 annually in fees and interest to access their money. Dimondstein and the organizations that make up the “Grand Alliance” believe that the U.S. Postal Service can play a new role in stopping the fleecing of a quarter of American families. ■

PERIODICALS  
POSTAGE PAID  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME VALUE

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# EndNotes

By Rich Kline, *President, UL&STD*



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**T**he Jones Act has served the United States, the maritime industry and hundreds of thousands of working Americans by sustaining a vital element of our nation's strength. Shipbuilding

and maritime coastal transportation have repeatedly been critical in times of war and peace.

Now the Jones Act is under attack. Some of its opponents want to buy cheap foreign vessels and others want to conduct business through foreign operatives. In either case, an important part of our economy would be undermined along with a key component of our national defense. Once there were numerous naval and commercial shipyards, now there are only a few. The US Navy owns four Naval Shipyards—Portsmouth, Norfolk, Puget Sound and Pearl Harbor—to maintain,

repair and modernize our Naval ships, systems and components.

But defeating the attack on the Jones Act is becoming ever more complicated because of impending foreign trade legislation. The Jones Act and all preferential Buy American programs are in jeopardy. Trade agreements that open our markets to other countries have certainly proven harmful to American workers and jobs.

Yet the Obama Administration has allied itself with corporate and financial interests that see great benefits for themselves in getting these deals done fast. The President is calling for Fast Track Authority to push through the Trans Pacific Partnership on an up or down vote with no Congressional debate or amendments.

Despite what President Obama says, no trade agreement has increased jobs, wages, benefits, labor rights, environmental or safety protections for Americans. Why would they? These agreements are concocted in secret, by corporate lawyers and lobbyists.

For various reasons, some bipartisan opposition to Fast Track Authority has sprung up in Congress. Whether the opposition stems from concern for jobs and workers, a loss of sovereignty or simply to spite the President, we see it as a means to derail the Trans Pacific Partnership. TPP encompasses 12 nations. Some like Mexico, Malaysia, Vietnam and Brunei have wretched records on labor rights. Some manipulate their currencies to gain an unfair advantage over American-made goods and services. Currency manipulation is not restricted by TPP.

TPP's investor-state provision gives corporations equal status with countries and undermines the rule of law.

All in all, Fast Track Authority, TPP and other trade deals have little to offer American workers. Sign the AFL-CIO petition at [www.nofastrack.com](http://www.nofastrack.com) to register your opposition. Then contact your legislators, too. Help prevent another NAFTA fiasco. ■