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Working for Us All

How the labor movement benefits the entire community.

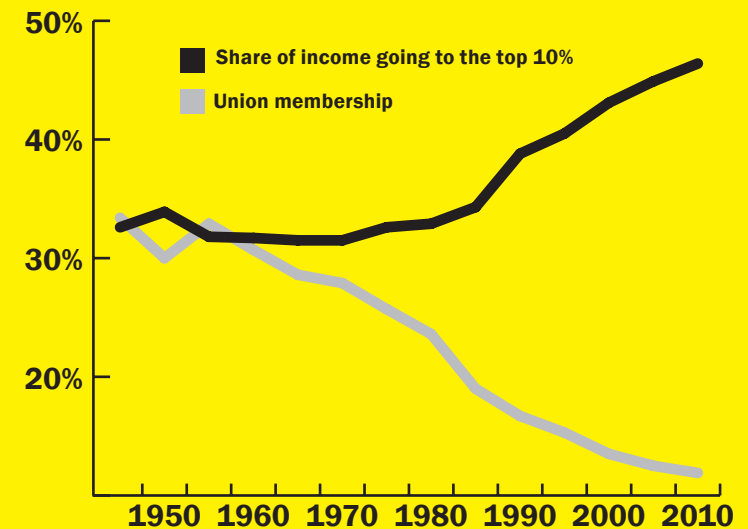
A Special Advertising Supplement

Why We Need Labor

BY COREY RODDA



SOURCE: U.S. Census Bureau and Piketty and Saez (2013), Economic Policy Institute



Decline in union membership has coincided with growing income gap

'A UNION OF UNIONS'

Founded in 1889, the Sacramento Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO represents the interests of over 100 unions and has over 170,000 union members in the Sacramento region. It was created to consolidate the power of individual unions so that they could stand a chance against big corporations in the political arena. It is the local incarnation of the national AFL-CIO, which represents more than 12.5 million workers.

Workers of every stripe make up the union including electricians, teachers, state workers, janitors, supermarket workers, nurses and journalists.

"Our unions are very democratic institutions — the union is created when all workers have a voice in the workplace," said Fabrizio Sasso, the Executive Director of the Sacramento Labor Council, AFL-CIO.

Sacramento Central Labor Council activities:

- Legislative & Political Action
- Working Family Advocacy
- Union Leadership Development
- Candidate Development
- Community Engagement & Organizing
- Building Union Solidarity



Union membership in America hit an all-time high in 1956, when one in three workers belonged to a union. In their glory days, labor unions fought for better wages, benefits and more time off for all Americans. Non-unionized companies would have to compete with good union employers in the labor market. In doing so, they began to offer better wages and benefits to compete with union contracts that were already offering these things.

"When unions are strong, union members are able to negotiate a better way of life for all workers," said Fabrizio Sasso, executive director of the Sacramento Central Labor Council, which advocates for the rights of workers in the Sacramento region.

Strong unions also fuel a strong economy. America owes its post-World War II boom to the growth of unions and the middle class.

"Businesses like to say all the time that they are the job creators, but in a capitalistic system, job creation is based on demand," Sasso said. "Demand is created when people have the money to consume and they have expendable income when they are paid a living wage."

But since the 1970s, union rank-and-file has eroded because corporate America has embraced free trade, resulting in what has been described as a "race to the bottom" to deliver cheaper and cheaper products.

Politicians pushing right-to-work legislation essentially undermine unions. With the U.S. Supreme Court closing in on the

Janus v. AFSCME case, it is likely that all public sector workers will lose their freedom to join together and negotiate for a fair return on their work.

When unions fall, it has a domino effect on our local economy. Weakened unions will weaken contracts, which in turn will drive down all wages. This affects working people's ability to afford things that drive our local economy (like housing, restaurants and retail) and, ultimately, economic development. Lower wages will push more people into poverty, where they will be forced to rely on public assistance just to survive.

"People are working more hours and more jobs and they are still struggling to get ahead," Sasso said. "This is not the America we want."

Sasso said everyone should be concerned about the decline in union membership. This is especially important in the Sacramento region, where our economy is dependent upon government and the good jobs it provides. He pointed to 2008 when the state furloughed so many workers, causing many local businesses to shutter.

"[The weakening of unions] would be a sustained catastrophe on our economy," he said. "Unions are the first, last and best defense against economic injustice."

"People are working more hours and more jobs and they are still struggling to get ahead. This is not the America we want."

FABRIZIO SASSO
Executive Director, Sacramento Central Labor Council

Cheryl Allen's union fought for her when she had to relocate for work. Not having to worry made the situation a lot less stressful, she said.
PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES



Fighting for a Good Life

Union representation takes the burden off the worker

BY LAURA HILLEN

In January 2010, Cheryl Allen faced a serious choice: relocate from San Diego to Sacramento as part of the state-mandated furloughs, or lose her job as a state worker. She chose the former.

Allen, now a state employee of 24 years, knows she made the right choice. But Allen said that protection from her union guaranteed the transition was a successful one, instead of potentially traumatic.

"[When I relocated] the union played a very strong hand in that to ensure that all of my contractual needs were met," Allen said. "The funny thing about that is they [first] contacted *me*."

Allen's union paid close attention to all aspects of the move, including the most important one — Allen's daughter. With union negotiations, Allen was able to temporarily split time working between San Diego and Sacramento while her daughter finished the school year. As a single mother, knowing she could make this big adjustment even easier for her daughter provided priceless peace of mind.

"They wanted to make sure that my mental and emotional health was just as in tact as the actual move," said Allen, now a corporate documents examiner for the Secretary of State. "I'm very grateful for that."

Part of Allen's passion for unions comes from that personal experience, and witnessing other effects on state workers from the furlough. Some of her peers lost their homes and cars.

"Not only that, but [area restaurants and stores] were severely impacted with the closures on Friday, not to mention the 15 percent deduction of [workers'] pay," said Allen, who is also a senior steward/member organizer at SEIU Local 1000.

"People just did not have the money or funds to generate back into those businesses."

That's because there's a connection between employees and the success of our communities, said Margarita Maldonado, vice president for bargaining at SEIU Local 1000.

"If something happens to my job and I'm not able to be sustainable and have a stable life for my family — it would have a direct impact on what's happening to my children, the neighborhood that I live in, the house that I live in," she said. "The union is ... making sure that the community that we live in can prosper as well as the people."

And for those that have no benefits or union help at all? The situation can be dire.

"Just the alleviation of worry about health care is, in and of itself, worth its weight in gold," said Allen.

"Just the alleviation of worry about health care is, in and of itself, worth its weight in gold."

CHERYL ALLEN
Corporate documents examiner, Secretary of State and Senior steward/member organizer, SEIU Local 1000

BATTLING INEQUALITY

Today's economic climate, coupled with the competitive job market, makes a healthy community more important than ever. Communities that prosper are ones where people feel supported, safe and presented with opportunity — individually and together. Unions ensure that all community members receive proper professional treatment and are given tools for betterment.

As inhabitants of the same spaces, it is our duty to make sure everyone is treated fairly and well, both at home and in the workplace.

What kind of community do you want live in?

On average, union workers have:



Higher wages: 30 percent more earnings than non-members



Pensions: 68 percent have guaranteed pensions, compared to 14 percent of non-members



Benefits: Over 97 percent get compensation packages, only 85 percent of non-members do



Gender equality: Women earn almost \$9,000 more in a year than non-member women



Racial equality: African-Americans get \$9,000 more in a year, Latinos more than \$11,000 than their non-member counterparts

Source: SEIU Local 1000

Protecting Those Who Protect Us

Following firefighter's injury, union fought for safer equipment

BY COREY RODDA

When faulty equipment results in tragic consequences, unions step in to fight for the well-being of workers.

In 1967, City of Sacramento Firefighter Ed Luttig collapsed from carbon monoxide poisoning while attempting to rescue a woman whose Oak Park home was engulfed in flames.

At the time, Luttig was breathing through a faulty designed canister mask used by coal miners and firefighters throughout the western United States — unlike the safer self-contained breathing apparatuses (SCBA) being worn by firefighters on the East Coast.

The canister mask — difficult to breathe through in the best of circumstances — contained chemicals that filtered carbon monoxide. But those chemicals would break down when exposed to moisture, allowing toxic fumes to enter the face mask and lungs of Luttig and other vulnerable firefighters.

Luttig, who was discovered unconscious minutes after his mask failed, suffered severe brain damage.

"He was comatose," said Dick Mayberry, a member of Firefighters Local 522 and Luttig's co-worker. "He was a young firefighter with a young son, so medically they tried to do everything that they could to bring his brain back to life."

Unfortunately, Luttig's doctors weren't able to reverse his brain damage. He was 31 years old at the time of the accident and lived for 23 more years, immobilized and in need of full-time care.

Luttig's injury prompted an out-of-court settlement of \$1.1 million from MSA (Mine Safety Appliance) Company, which manufactured the mask.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, Local 522 prevailed on the city to purchase the safer self-contained breathing apparatuses for all of its firefighters.

"His death was not in vain from our standpoint," Mayberry said, "in that other firefighters' lives were saved nationally with the use of SCBA breathing apparatus."

Since then, firefighter unions on the local, state, national and international levels have won battles for a variety of lifesaving equipment, including flame-retardant turnout gear and clothing, and thermal imaging equipment capable of penetrating blinding smoke to locate civilians and firefighters in peril.

The unions also have won worker compensation victories for firefighters and retired firefighters who have suffered medical maladies linked to their profession, including heart disease, hearing loss, pulmonary dysfunctions and cancer. Now, the legal burden to prove that an illness is not the consequence of work falls on the city instead of firefighters.

Currently, the union is fighting city demands to cut staffing on fire engines and trucks.

"Most of our public agencies have been slow to respond to the needs of our health and safety issues," said Mayberry, who served as president of Local 522 union from 1985-98. "It is an ongoing struggle with the funding priorities of our city's budget, but we are never going to let up."



ED LUTTIG

"His death was not in vain."

DICK MAYBERRY
Retired firefighter, former
president of Local 522

Retired firefighter Dick Mayberry worked with Ed Luttig (inset photo), a firefighter who collapsed on the job in 1967 while using a canister mask. Following the incident, which left Luttig with brain damage and paralyzed, Local 522 fought to get the city to purchase safer self-contained breathing apparatuses.

PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES



SAFETY
FOR ALL
WORKERS

Workers today have many safety and health protections because of unions. The Occupational Safety and Health Act, enacted in 1970, was the first time that the federal government stepped in to protect the health and safety of all workers in the private

and public sector. The law was a product of years of union efforts to establish national health and safety standards.

Before OSHA, employers could expose workers to dangerous chemicals and life-threatening

hazards without legal consequences.

"The passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Act has paved the way for many laws and regulations that help all workers," said Doug Parker, executive director of Worksafe, an advocacy

organization for labor safety. "The best way to ensure that workers are safe is to ensure that they have a genuine say and power in the workplace through unions. Workers shouldn't have to sacrifice their safety to earn a living."

With support from her union, Monique Carden is able to care for her 79-year-old mother, Waverly Shaw, at home and provide her a better quality of life.
PHOTO BY MELISSA UROFF



How the Union Family Functions

Unions protect workers, while looking out for the greater good

BY LAURA HILLEN

If family is what keeps someone strong, then unions have enough resilience to hold up millions of people. In fact, that's their mission. Built off a foundation of communication, compromise and empathy — the same core values that strengthen a family — unions pride themselves on their ability to extend a deep level of care to the nation's workers.

"Unions put people first," said Dr. William Reed, vice president of United Domestic Workers of America, District 6. "It's also very much like a family simply because a family takes care of each other. That's what a union does."

Unions, unlike any other organization in the U.S., are the primary advocate for all workers rights, including health, safety and retirement. Understanding the worker as a whole means unions also understand that what happens to a worker can directly impact their community.

"All of a union's money is spent within our community," Reed said. "Most workers live in the community they work in. [Their wages and taxes] increase their economy."

For people like Monique Carden, having a "union family" is vital. Carden has been the at-home caregiver for her mother since 2012, and soon after became a member of the United Domestic Workers.

"It helps just knowing that if there is something that needs to be brought [up], that this is the place to do it," Carden said. "They're there to listen and sympathize, and to possibly give you that extra minute to get your mind together."

Reed noted that it can be much harder for workers without a union to be heard by their employers. Unions help alleviate this stress by engaging employers in negotiations, called bargaining. This act secures workers stipulations that are necessary to support safety and equality.

"Bargaining is both sides together coming to agreement on how to create a win/win situation both for employers and employees," Reed said.

Unions are an ally to workers and secure a more stable workforce for employers. But negotiations have to occur in good faith on both sides.

"Striking is a last resort," Reed said. "It's when we come to an impasse. Striking really has everyone understand a worker's worth and value, and hopefully brings us back to the bargaining table."

The best way a worker can help direct the action of a union, Reed emphasized, is by attending meetings and adding their voice to the discussion.

Since joining arms with her union, Carden has received support for higher wages, gas compensation and overtime — which have allowed Carden's mother to continue to live at home. As Carden is the only family member that is able to take care of her mother full-time, the extra peace of mind is invaluable.

"Life is better at her house," Carden said. "That's how she wanted it."

"Unions put people first."

DR. WILLIAM REED
District 6 vice president, United Domestic Workers of America

DIFFERENT JOBS, ONE CAUSE

A union's family extends further than just the workers it advocates for — other unions are also included under its umbrella of unity.

"[Other unions are] like your cousins," said Margarita Maldonado, vice president for bargaining at SEIU Local 1000. "We have this commonality that we come from, and that we are both in this very similar struggle trying to make sure that the workers that we represent have the kinds of protections and opportunities that they deserve."

Just as workers have more power when they join together, unions also find greater strength in numbers: When one rises, they all rise.

"If [another union] is not doing well, that has a direct impact because we're all under the same name," Maldonado said. "We're not in competition of each other. People that unite together can do anything."

The Road to \$15

Central Labor Council fought for minimum wage increase that benefits all workers

BY COREY RODDA AND LAURA HILLEN

As a single mother making minimum wage, Diane Sandoval constantly makes a choice no one should have to — pay rent or pay the bills. And extras for the house or field trip money for her four children? Impossible.

“I work so hard and I can’t even have a little extra. It makes me feel bad when I have to say no [to my kids],” said Sandoval.

Her wage as a fast food worker in 2017 was \$10.50 an hour, a wage Sandoval said is not livable for the Sacramento area and leaves her with tough choices to make when providing for her family. The livable wage for a single parent in Sacramento County with only three children would be at least \$37.32 an hour, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

But Sandoval and other workers like her are getting a raise. In January 2018, the minimum wage rose from \$10.50 to \$11 for organizations that employ more than 26 workers in the state. At smaller organizations, the minimum wage will jump from \$10 to \$10.50. By 2023, the minimum wage will be \$15.

The Sacramento Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO was pivotal in the fight to increase the minimum wage in California.

The effort began in 2013, when the Labor Council began lobbying politicians to raise the minimum wage in the city of Sacramento, a year after fast food workers started organizing nationally for a living wage.

“The fast food workers who started the Fight for \$15 put their jobs on the line to fight for their families,” said Fabrizio Sasso, executive director of the Labor Council. “We supported them and

were able to work collectively with other unions and community and faith-based organizations to raise the minimum wage in California.”

Sandoval joined the Fight for \$15 movement to connect with other low-income workers — people who, just like Sandoval, forgo comforts like new clothes and family outings, and use food stamps and Medi-Cal assistance in order to make ends meet.

“The first rally that I went to, I saw all the people that ... were like me,” said Sandoval. “People trying to take care of their families, [just] trying to get by.”

The Labor Council put pressure on former Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson to boost the minimum wage. Johnson appointed a task force of business owners, policy experts and labor representatives to study the proposal. Sasso was appointed to the task force, which he said was heavily tilted in favor of business interests.

“I was in the minority in the room. We were pushing for a higher minimum wage and they wanted to keep it low,” Sasso said.

In 2015, the Labor Council criticized the wage hike adopted by Johnson’s task force to be “too low and too slow.” Along with other unions, community organizations and faith-based groups, the Labor Council launched a campaign across the state to increase the minimum wage further.

Legislators finally agreed to increase the minimum wage, also embracing the following pledge: “I choose to lift California families out of poverty by raising the minimum wage.” The bill was signed by Gov. Jerry Brown in 2016.

“It took us all — from community groups to statewide organizations to international unions — to get this passed,” Sasso said.

Sasso said that although most members of the Sacramento Central Labor Council earn more than the minimum wage, the union is invested in raising the standard because it creates more equity across California.

“Income inequality is the biggest challenge facing our country and if we don’t act to represent all working people, I don’t know who else will,” Sasso said. “It’s the biggest reason why it is so important for unions to be active in politics.”

As for Sandoval, she will keep standing alongside Fight for \$15 and other low income workers who deserve a better life than they’re currently able to have.

“[Fight for \$15 shows] if we come together and try, we can definitely change the future,” Sandoval said.

“The first rally that I went to, I saw all the people that ... were like me. People trying to take care of their families, [just] trying to get by.”

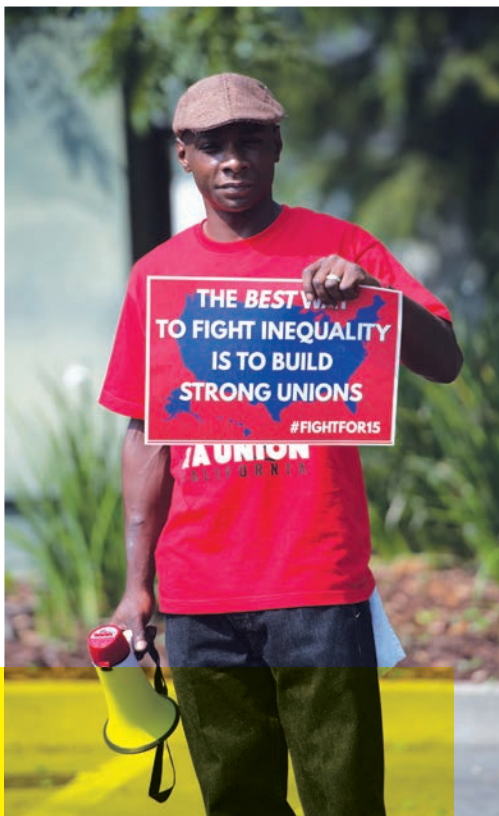
DIANE SANDOVAL
Fast food worker and Fight for \$15 advocate

Diane Sandoval works at a minimum wage fast food job and joined the Fight for \$15 movement to connect with other low-wage workers, many of whom are not represented by unions. Leaders within the Sacramento Central Labor Council advocated on behalf of all workers, even non-union workers like Diane, when they successfully got the state Legislature to increase California’s minimum wage to \$15 by the year 2023.

PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

The Truth About Unions

Putting the power back into the people's hands, unions are focused on uplifting all working people — union members or not. Although unions have been advocating for workers' rights in our country for around 150 years, there is still a lot of misinformation about who unions are and what they do. Here are a few commonly asked questions on unions and how they stand in solidarity with all working members of society.



BY LAURA HILLEN

► Can my employer fire or punish me for unionizing?

NO. The law is very clear that it is illegal for your employer to fire or retaliate against you for organizing with coworkers at a workplace. Corporations may use things like union avoidance firms to pressure workers into not joining unions, but the law protects workers' ability to organize. Employer retaliation is illegal, and employers can be held liable for their actions if that does occur. This is part of the reason unions exist in the first place.

► Don't unions have too much power?

Workers have very little power in today's economy, which is part of the reason why we have such a large gap between the wealthy and everyone else. The problem isn't that people have too much power, but far too little power. Unions start to begin the process where that power becomes more balanced.

► Are union dues worth the expense?

If you look at the numbers in terms of what union versus nonunion members make, it's pretty significant — especially for those who are people of color, have low income jobs and others who are being left behind economically. You may have to pay a few dollars in dues, but you'll get more in terms of your wages, health care, safety and security. Dues are a small price to pay for making your workplace and life better and more manageable.

► Doesn't the union leader make all the choices?

The union is the workers. Unions are simply working people standing together, and when that happens, they gain a little power. In a union environment, workers decide what their priorities are. Every worker has a chance to vote in a very democratic process that guarantees everybody's voice is heard.

► What happens if I become unemployed?

Unions exist to ensure you don't become unemployed and that there are processes followed related to an employment change, including worker layoff stipulations and severance packages. Unions make sure you aren't fired for no good reason — even if you're an "at will" employee.

► I'm not going to join, so why do unions matter?

Unions raise the bar for all workers — not just their own members — by taking a leadership role in making improvements a reality for workers. Actions like passing laws for a higher minimum wage, more sick days or new safety measures are all things that unions are responsible for, even though they don't directly benefit members (members already have a contract). If there were no unions to act as a counterbalance to the unchecked corporate power in America today, all workers would suffer greatly.

► Why are there so many unions?

Having specialized unions allows each profession to receive specific advice and provides more workers everywhere with access to union guidance. It would be too difficult for one union to focus on the needs specific to each industry.

► Aren't unions outdated?

Every day, corporations are thinking of ways to cut corners and take advantage of workers so more money goes into the pockets of the executives. Because unions are there to stand up to corporations, society has been able to avoid the deplorable workplace conditions of the early 1900s, including child labor and work accidents.

Source: California Labor Federation and Sacramento Central Labor Council

When Labor Is Strong, Our Community Is Strong



#FightFor\$15 Rally



Labor Day Picnic



Fabrizio Sasso, Executive Director, Sacramento Central Labor Council

Here's how you can support the labor movement:

Working people in unions make improvements at the workplace, and they fight to improve the rights of all people. Union members helped create workplace health and safety standards, the Americans with Disabilities Act, Family Medical Leave Act and many other laws we all rely on. When workers are paid a fair wage and have access to benefits like health insurance and retirement, they contribute to our economy and are less likely to rely on social safety net services.



Register to Vote

Voting is the cornerstone of our democracy. Voting is the great equalizer to money and power. Let your voice be heard and support candidates who know what's best for workers.



Be a Conscious Consumer

Vote with your dollars by patronizing socially responsible organizations that support fair wages and businesses that support union labor.



Contact the Sacramento Central Labor Council

Learn more about the 90 unions that are affiliated with the Sacramento Central Labor Council, AFL-CIO and how to be a champion for workers' rights.

Sacramento Central Labor Council

www.sacramentolabor.org

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