A LOOK INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

PEF nurses rally for legislation to increase staffing levels - p19

State government shares the blame for NY’s mental health mess - p30

Chicago Teachers’ Strike, Longest in Decades, Ends - p39

#WeAreUnionStrong
New York, NY – A newly-released safety report coinciding with the one-year anniversary of Amazon’s sprawling 855,000 square foot warehouse on Staten Island recommends the online giant finally abandon its anti-union stance and implement changes to a workplace that at least one hard-pressed employee says is “beating up” workers.

This past year, between January 3, and May 7, the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health [NYCOSH] surveyed 142 Amazon employees on Staten Island and found 80-percent of them were pressured to work harder or faster; 66-percent experienced physical pain while performing work duties, and 42-percent continued to experience pain even when they weren’t at work.

According to the NYCOSH report, musculoskeletal conditions — injuries to the back, neck, knees, etc. — represent the leading cause of physical disability in the nation. The rate of injury and illness at Amazon’s Staten Island facility is nearly seven-times as high as the national average for all industries, as well as a “stunning three-times as high as the average for all other warehouses nationwide.”

In a statement Dr. David Michaels, former head of the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration and currently George Washington University School of Public Health professor, called the NYCOSH study an “eye-opening report documenting the pain suffered by the Amazon fulfillment center workers who are forced to work at dangerous speeds to ensure the packages Americans order arrive quickly.”

Stuart Appelbaum, president of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union [RWDSU], said that Amazon needs to understand that “workers are not robots.”

“Amazon has a well-documented history of mistreating and dehumanizing its workers in the U.S. and around the world,” the RWDSU leader said in a statement. “NYCOSH’s report shows the impacts at just one facility, in just its first year of operating. Testing hundreds of thousands of workers physical limits is the wrong approach to increasing productivity. Operating at speeds where 80-percent of workers feel pressured means Amazon needs to hire more workers, under more sustainable speeds that don’t put workers’ lives in jeopardy.”

The NYCOSH report recommends Amazon implement an ergonomics program, reduce line speeds — and quit trying to block workers from organizing at the Staten Island facility.

Amazon execs bristled at the notion of unionization when members of the New York City Council pressed them on the issue during January hearings aimed at probing the $3 billion sweetheart deal to build a secondary headquarters for Amazon in Long Island City, Queens.

When asked to assure the City of New York that Amazon would remain neutral should future employees seek to organize, company VP Brian Huseman said, in part, that the “direct connection” it has with its employs is the best way to “respond to the concerns of the workforce.”

Amazon unceremoniously pulled the plug on its “HQ2” plans just a couple of weeks after that, on Valentine’s Day. Amazon reportedly still holds a 10-year lease on property in Woodside, Queens where it plans to construct another warehouse or “fulfillment center.”
On February 12, an Amazon employee working at the Staten Island warehouse named Rashad Long was fired after speaking out about oppressive conditions at the facility.

In April another Amazon warehouse employee named David Jamel Williams said he was fired from his job in Edison, New Jersey after suffering an eye injury on the job and talking about the need to unionize.

“This report shows that Amazon, which has been criticized for its company culture in other cities, is running its Staten Island facility without regard for workers’ need to be treated as people, not robots. You can’t expect workers to work safely when they are going to be docked points if they take a break for a sip of water,” NYCOSH Executive Director and report co-author Charlene Obernauer said in a statement.

Debbie Berkowitz, Worker Health and Safety program director at the National Employment Law Project said NYCOSH’s new report clearly shows that Amazon workers on Staten Island are being hurt at “very high rates.”

“It is stunning that Amazon is not doing more to protect workers. The company has an obligation to provide safe conditions and make sure their workers are not sacrificing their health for company profits,” Berkowitz added.

The National Committee for Occupational Safety and Health reports that since 2013, more than a dozen Amazon workers have died on the job, or near the job.

Amazon has not yet responded to requests for comment.
Why Strikes Matter
by CWA & Economic Policy Institute News - October 17, 2019

Strikes are where our power is. Without a credible strike threat, workers are at the boss's mercy.

“Why do you rob banks?” a reporter once asked Willie Sutton. “Because that’s where the money is,” the infamous thief replied.

Why go on strike? Because that’s where our power is.

Teachers in West Virginia showed it in 2018 when they walked out, in a strike that bubbled up from below, surprising even their statewide union leaders.

No one seemed concerned that public sector strikes were unlawful in West Virginia. “What are they going to do, fire us all?” said Jay O’Neal, treasurer for the Kanawha County local. “Who would they get to replace us?” Already the state had 700 teaching vacancies, thanks to the rock-bottom pay the strikers were protesting.

After 13 days out, the teachers declared victory and returned to their classrooms with a 5 percent raise. They had also backed off corporate education “reformers” on a host of other issues.

The biggest lesson: “Our labor is ours first,” West Virginia teacher Nicole McCormick told the crowd at the Labor Notes Conference that spring. “It is up to us to give our labor, or to withhold it.”

That’s the fundamental truth on which the labor movement was built.

Strikes by unorganized workers led to the founding of unions. Strikes won the first union contracts. Strikes over the years won bigger paychecks, vacations, seniority rights, and the right to tell the foreman “that’s not my job.” Without strikes we would have no labor movement, no unions, no contracts, and a far worse working and living situation. In short, strikes are the strongest tool in workers’ toolbox—our power not just to ask, but to force our employers to concede something.

DISCOVER YOUR POWER

The key word is “force.” A strike is not just a symbolic protest. It works because we withhold something that the employer needs—its production, its good public image, its profits, and above all its control over us. As one union slogan has it, “this university works because we do”—or this company, or this city. A strike reveals something that employers would prefer we not notice: they need us. Workplaces are typically run as dictatorships. The discovery that your boss does not have absolute power over you—and that in fact, you and your co-workers can exert power over him—is a revelation.

There’s no feeling like it. Going on strike changes you, personally and as a union. “Walking into work the first day back chanting ‘one day longer, one day stronger’ was the best morning I’ve ever had at Verizon,” said Pam Galpern, a field tech and mobilizer with Communication Workers Local 1101, after workers beat the corporate giant in a 45-day strike in 2016. “There was such a tremendous feeling of accomplishment. People were smiling and happy. It was like a complete 180-degree difference from before the strike,” when supervisors had been micromanaging and writing workers up for the smallest infractions.

In a good strike, everyone has a meaningful role. Strikers develop new skills and a deeper sense that they own and run their union. New leaders emerge from the ranks and go on to become stewards.
New friendships are formed; workers who didn’t know or trust one another before forge bonds of solidarity. A few stubborn co-workers finally see why the union matters and sign on as members.

Allies from faith groups, neighborhood groups, or other unions adopt your cause. You and your co-workers lose some fear of the boss—and the boss gains some fear of you.

In all these ways and more—not to mention the contract gains you may win—a strike can be a tremendous union-building activity.

JUST THE THREAT

Sometimes coming to the brink of a strike is enough to make your employer blink. Workers at an Indiana truck plant in 2016 got as far as hauling burn barrels to work every day to show they were ready to hit the picket lines. The company, Hendrickson International, averted a strike by agreeing to phase out two-tier wages and pensions.

The benefits of a humbled employer can last beyond a single contract cycle. After Seattle’s grocery chains in 2013 came within two hours of a strike—the union dramatized the impending deadline with a giant countdown clock—the chains scrambled to avoid a repeat in 2016 by settling a new contract before the old one expired.

The transformation can also reach beyond the workplace. Strikes open up our political horizons, expanding our sense of what’s possible if we use our power.

This summer, a general strike in Puerto Rico brought down two corrupt governors in quick succession. This fall, Amazon workers struck for a day as they pushed their employer to take on climate change. Large-scale strikes will be crucial if we expect to rescue our world from the corporations that promote poverty and environmental collapse. The 1% are not going to hand us anything.

A NEW UPSURGE?

Strikes in the U.S. have declined dramatically over the past half-century. Since 1947 the Bureau of Labor Statistics has tracked strikes and lockouts involving 1,000 or more workers.

From 1947 through 1981, there were hundreds of such big strikes each year. Last year there were 20. The decline in strikes is a reflection of unions’ diminishing power and numbers—and a reason for it. But strikes aren’t dead.

Over the years it has gotten harder (in some ways) to strike and win. Some of the best tactics have been outlawed; some of the best sources of leverage have been neutralized.

A hundred years ago, striking took physical bravery. Your employer might hire armed thugs to attack you. Today in the U.S. that’s less likely. Employers have found more sophisticated ways to weaken strikes.

Still, it takes real courage to walk out. You might lose your job, and a court might deem your firing legal. If striking is illegal in your state or sector, you might have to break the law. If union leaders are reluctant to strike, you might have to out-organize them.

Or the union could miscalculate—you might find you don’t have enough leverage to win. You might have to walk back in empty-handed.
ABOUT THIS MANUAL

This booklet is meant to be of use to anyone who wants to know how to strike and win, whether you’re an officer charting a course for your union or a group of rank-and-filers who want to lead from below.

Successful strikes usually rely on months or years of groundwork. So this manual starts long before, describing the contract campaign and preparation required to put a strike on the table.

The stories and quotes included here are drawn mainly from Labor Notes reporting, often from the frontlines of the strikes described, and from our handbooks.
(WASHINGTON, D.C.) - The ability of Working People to join together to negociate with their employer for higher wages and better working conditions is a fundamental right - but for decades that right has been eroding, as employers exploit weaknesses in the law and interfere with Workers’ Rights - and face no real consequences for doing so.

The result has been stagnant wages, unsafe workplaces, and rising inequality.

The Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act will go a long way toward restoring Workers’ right to organize and bargain collectively by streamlining the process when Workers form a Union, ensuring that they are successful in negotiating a first agreement, and holding employers accountable when they violate Workers’ Rights.

It is considered historic legislation that will help put power in the hands of Workers and reverse decades of legislation meant to crush Unions.

The PRO Act will: Help strengthen protections for workers forming a Union; Prevent the misclassification of Workers as Independent Contractors; Deal a blow to Right-To-Work (for less) Laws; Protect strikes and other protest activities; and much more.

The PRO Act is an important effort to bring U.S. Labor Law into the 21st Century - giving Working People more power at a time when it is desperately needed.

Congress should pass the PRO Act immediately and give Working People what they need most: Fairness and a voice on the job.

When Workers stand together to organize, mobilize and Strike, they can build power and win the wages, benefits, and working conditions they need and deserve.
Are unions back? GM, Chicago teacher strikes show how unions can start winning again

by Chris Woodyard - USA Today - October 18, 2019

To special education teacher Maggie Sermont, the rationale for a strike against Chicago's public schools boils down to a simple "enough!"

And more workers are joining the call by showing a willingness to strike, reawakening the nation's organized labor movement after decades of mostly small gains.

Unions are making a powerful comeback. Americans approve of labor unions by 64%, only two percentage points shy of the highest mark recorded in the past 50 years and 16 points above the low in 2009, Gallup reported two months ago.

Last year, there were 20 major work stoppages across several industries, the highest total since 2007. The strikes and walkouts included a lot of school districts, but also big corporate names like AT&T and Marriott. The number of workers involved, 485,000, was the highest since 1986, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reports.

The Chicago teachers' walkout comes as more than 46,000 General Motors workers start voting Saturday on a tentative agreement won after a five-week strike that scored gains for the United Auto Workers union.

As for the Chicago teachers' action, the walkout followed a string of similar strikes around the country, including ones in conservative states like Kentucky and West Virginia that might not, on their face, seem sympathetic to labor actions by public workers.

The strike that started it all: How a West Virginia teacher’s Facebook post started a national movement

Earlier this year, 34,000 Los Angeles educators struck for six days. Their resulting contract not only raised their pay by 6% but lowered class sizes while creating additional school nurse and librarian positions. In fact, teachers across the country have nabbed win after win.

Now, Chicago teachers are striking, hoping that their timing is right.

"It is really a unique opportunity right now in American politics of unionism and especially the teaching profession," said Sermont, who teaches at Chalmers Elementary and who is also a union delegate. "We have seen instances of teachers' unions standing up saying: 'This is enough!'"

People love teachers: Even when teachers strike, Americans give them high grades, poll shows. Unions fare worse.

To those following unions' newfound power, the explanations seem obvious. Wages for workers are up – median wages for full-time and salaried workers have risen 3.6% to $919 a week over the past year. But it's not enough for many, especially given the yawning income gap with the super-rich.

"The average person is observing the good economic times, not sharing in it. In fact, they may be losing ground," said Harley Shaiken, a University of California-Berkeley professor who specializes in work, technology, and global production issues. "It doesn't do any good to watch the stock market climb," he said, if you can't participate in it.
Workers didn't fight just for themselves, but for their coworkers. Creating a pathway for permanent status for GM's temporary workers, who earn a fraction of the pay despite often doing the same job, became a big issue in the strike. It was ultimately resolved as part of the package won by the UAW, or more formally, the United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America.

"The UAW strike touched a nerve," said Kent Wong, director of the UCLA Labor Center in Los Angeles. Paying factory workers differently for the same tasks divides them and "will continually transform middle-class jobs into low-wage jobs."

For Chicago's teachers, the issues are different, but the mood is the same. The union wants the nation's third-largest school district to hire more support staff, limit class sizes and offer higher pay to workers like school secretaries and classroom aides.

"I don't think we're asking for too much," said Dian Palmer, president of the Service Employees International Union Local 73, which represents some of those workers like custodians, bus drivers or special-education assistants. "We're looking to lift our members out of poverty."

'Can't pay their bills with love': In many teaching jobs, salaries can't cover rent

Chicago's teachers, who have been offered a 16% raise over five years, have shown they can attain big goals, said Jane McAlevey, a labor organizer, negotiator and author of several books on labor, including her next, "A Collective Bargain." She credits the Chicago teacher strike of 2012 with raising up union leaders who won't back down and showing other teachers around the country they can do the same.

Teachers don't just walk out and picket, she said. They use their skills as communicators and educators to show Chicagoans why they deserved more.

"It's workers standing up for themselves," McAlevey said.
“The de Blasio administration has weaponized the land use process in a manner designed to steamroll any opposition to their plans to build a new Bronx jail on the wrong site—the Mott Haven tow yard.

“Without a doubt, Rikers Island must be closed. I am glad that this long-awaited outcome will finally be moving forward in a meaningful way following today’s City Council vote. On the other hand, I remain troubled by the precedent set in making such a monumental urban planning decision by lumping all four sites into one ULURP process.

“The closure should have been handled in the right way, with elected officials and stakeholders in all four boroughs having substantial input to ensure that future generations do not suffer from the consequences of poor planning and political expediency.

I want to thank those elected officials and borough activists, especially New York City Council Land Use Chair Rafael Salamanca and the residents of the Diego Beekman Houses, who have understood throughout this process that the city has selected the wrong site in The Bronx and have worked to open the eyes of the administration to select a more appropriate site for this jail.

“Throughout this process I have been advocating to build the new jail Bronx adjacent to the existing Bronx Hall of Justice. With our citywide inmate population at a historic low, the Mayor’s Office has already admitted that the size of these jails can be reduced, which further validates that the Bronx jail could be moved to its proper location next to the court system, like the other boroughs.

“I sincerely hope that the city’s failure to engage with the community on-site selection for such a major infrastructure project will not adversely impact this borough for decades to come.”
The Buffalo AFL-CIO Labor Council Swears In New Interim President
– CWA Local 1168’s Denise Abbott, Who Becomes The First Female
President In The History Of the Buffalo Central Labor Council

by WNYLaborToday.com Editor-Publisher Tom Campbell

(BUFFALO, NEW YORK) – Denise Abbott, a Critical Care Registered Nurse (RN) represented by Communications Workers of America (CWA) Local 1168, has been sworn in as the interim President of the Buffalo AFL-CIO Labor Council – in the process becoming the first female President in the history of the Buffalo Central Labor Council.

Abbott, who works at DeGraff Hospital in North Tonawanda and who also serves as Health and Safety Officer for her CWA Local, steps in for outgoing Buffalo AFL-CIO President John Mudie, President of CWA Local 1122 in Buffalo – who announced he was stepping down “immediately in order to devote more time” to his own Union Local.

“This is a ‘great’ opportunity,” the 49-year-old Abbott told WNYLaborToday.com on Wednesday (October 9th). “I’m ‘proud to be part’ of the Buffalo Labor Council ‘and what better way’ (to play a more prominent role). ‘It also feels great and wonderful being the first female President of the Council - to have that distinction.’ ‘Hopefully it will (inspire) more Women of Labor to come out and get involved and have their voices heard - to be a part of all this.’”

The Buffalo Labor Council and its affiliated Member Unions combine to represent 88,500 Unionized Workers employed in the Public and Private Sectors and in the Building Trades.

Mudie, whose CWA Local represents nearly 1,400 Members who are employed by Verizon, AT&T Wireless, the Visiting Nurses Association - as well as several other employers, described Abbott’s approval by the Buffalo Labor Council’s Executive Board as a “tremendous choice.”

“I am ‘very happy’ with it,” Mudie told Your On-Line Labor Newspaper. “(Abbott) has a ‘great work ethic, she’s everywhere and she’s young – and it feels good (passing the baton of leadership) to another CWAer.’ Denise and I have ‘worked together closely over the past eighteen months and she’s been my right arm.’”

Western New York AFL-CIO Area Labor Federation (WNYALF) President Richard Lipsitz said of Abbott: “She’s a ‘good’ person ‘and she’ll do a good job’ (for the Buffalo Labor Movement). ‘We’re very proud to have her and the WNYALF looks forward to working with her.’”

Abbott will serve out Mudie’s remaining term as Buffalo Labor Council President, chairing its monthly meetings in November, December and January. An election will be held in February for another full-term post, which Abbott says she will run for.

Mudie waited until the end of Tuesday’s meeting to make the announcement that he was stepping down, immediately, before calling Abbott up to the podium where she was sworn in by WNYALF President Lipsitz and presented with a bouquet of flowers.

However, after being sworn in, Abbott began to walk away – but was called back by Mudie, who told her “it was her meeting to run.”

“I asked her, ‘Where are you going?,’ Mudie laughed. “Gee, I didn’t even get any flowers.”
“I thought to myself: ‘Wait, wait, wait.’ I didn’t want to see him do a ‘mic drop’ and head off. I ‘wanted him to be next to me, working together.’ ‘He’s been such a mentor to me and he has told me that he’ll be there for me - that he’s only a phone call away.’”

Looking back, Mudie’s tenure as head of the Buffalo Labor Council was extremely important as it transitioned out of financial problems under its previous president several years ago.

Providing a calming influence, Mudie was able to close the gap and build positive bridges at the same time, as well as heightening the involvement of the Council in many community-oriented initiatives - from helping raise and deliver 22 tons of donated water for the residents of Flint, Michigan to involving the Buffalo Building Trades in helping rebuild homes in Buffalo’s Fruit Belt to enhancing the Council’s Workers Memorial in Chestnut Ridge Park and building upon the support for Buffalo’s annual Labor Day Parade and Picnic and the Council’s Summer picnic, to name but a few.

“That ‘sticks out,’” Mudie said of helping Flint residents, who are still battling with tainted tap water brought about mismanagement of government officials in Michigan. “I’ll ‘never forget that - delivering and handing out cases and cases of water to those in need and the overwhelming way (Buffalo’s Unions and their Members came through with monetary donations).’”

Abbott took time to praise Mudie - telling WNYLaborToday.com: “He ‘lit a path of us to follow, to make us even more proud of what we do.’ He ‘filled’ the room (of the monthly Buffalo CLC meetings) ‘with people who wanted to do such things.’ ‘That says a lot about John and he will certainly be a tough act to follow.’”

Abbott also thanked the leadership of CWA Local 1168, notably President Cori Gambini, for their “support and blessing.”

“Cori told me to ‘go for it,’” she said. “And I think ‘that says a lot about the CWA too.’ ‘How strong we are.’”

As Buffalo President, Abbott told Your On-Line Labor Newspaper that among her goals are to continue Mudie’s legacy by making the Council’s Workers Memorial “even better,” to work closely with the Council’s Affiliated Member Unions - “To be there when they need us,” and to continue to involve the Labor Council in the Buffalo Community with the annual Variety Club Telethon and the United Way.

And, concerning the local political community, she said: “I want to continue to build and foster good relationship, as well as them having them come to us.”
NEW YORK, N.Y.—Should New York follow California and enact legislation limiting when employers can hire workers as “independent contractors”?

The answer is “very simple,” New York State AFL-CIO President Mario Cilento told a 4½-hour state Senate hearing in Lower Manhattan Oct. 16. Workers “should be considered employees” and have all the rights and protections that come with that, “including the right to unionize.”

By classifying workers as independent contractors, he said, employers, particularly those who hire workers through apps, can avoid paying minimum wage and for overtime, sick leave, disability coverage, and workers’ compensation. For example, if someone delivering a pizza is injured in a fall after they’ve dropped off the pie, they’re eligible for workers’ compensation if they’re a pizzeria employee—but if they’re working through a delivery app, they’re not, because they’re off the clock until their next assignment. The practice is also unfair to traditional employers, he added, who have to pay into the funds for unemployment benefits and workers’ compensation.

“We can’t allow any group of workers to be carved out,” he said, and any law the state passes should specify that workers redefined as employees have the right to unionize. The federal Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 prohibits independent contractors from organizing unions, because it’s considered businesses stifling competition.

Business lobbyists argued that the state should not redefine independent contractors as employees, but create a “third way” between the two statuses, especially to cover workers for app-based services. “Making everyone an employee isn’t a modern solution,” said Frank Kerbein, director of the Business Council of New York State’s human-resources department.

Business Council vice president Kenneth Pokalsky said this “third way” could include benefit pools run by intermediaries to provide health insurance, retirement benefits, and workers’ compensation. App-based workers trade minimum wage for flexibility, he added, and allowing workers hired through intermediaries to bargain collectively “would require major reforms of federal labor law.” Hiring workers as employees increases labor costs by 15-20%, he concluded.

“New York should not make the same mistake as California,” Kathryn S. Wylde of the Partnership for New York City told the committee. The state should not “interfere with voluntary business relationships.” She proposed judging whether workers are employees by how many hours they work, whether they’re occasional or steady, whether they do an auxiliary or core function of the business, and whether they’re low-paid or professional workers.

The California law, signed last month by Gov. Gavin Newsom, sets up an “ABC test” to define when workers are genuine independent contractors. They have to be working without being controlled by the hiring entity, doing work “outside the usual course of the hiring entity’s business,” and be “customarily engaged in an independently established trade, occupation, or business” doing that kind of work. It does not specifically guarantee workers it defines as employees the right to collective bargaining, however.

There is no similar bill currently pending in the New York State Legislature, Sen. Diane Savino (D-Staten Island), who chaired the hearing, told LaborPress afterwards. She introduced one last session, but “nobody liked it.” The hearing was to collect information to shape future legislation, she said.
“The idea of collective bargaining without employee status makes no sense,” responded Bhairavi Desai of the New York Taxi Workers Alliance. “In the absence of labor law, workers don’t have a floor to stand on.”

If any legislation passed gives tech companies an exemption, she testified, they will find a way to evade labor protections.

“What is less about us as workers that we don’t need minimum wage or paid time off?” asked Saibou Sidibe, a yellow-cab driver and NYTWA organizer.

The NLRB ruled in January that SuperShuttle airport-van drivers in the Dallas-Fort Worth area who were converted to independent contractors in 2005 can’t legally form a union. It voided an Obama-era ruling that said the board had to consider whether they were genuinely independent entrepreneurs.

However, the IDG’s argument that New York State can give app-based drivers the right to collective bargaining “may be at least a short-term path,” says Rebecca Smith of the National Employment Law Project. The federal 9th Circuit Court of Appeals’ May 2018 ruling on Seattle’s law that gave the drivers collective-bargaining rights, she said, “indicates that states can establish collective bargaining for independent contractors.”

“In my view, it’s a strategy worth pursuing, but there are also a number of unresolved legal issues that counsel for deep research and thinking,” she added. “There is a much clearer path for workers who are employees, under the National Labor Relations Act—but of course the NLRA is far from perfect. If you just focus on collective bargaining without any baseline rights, workers are bargaining from zero. And any collective-bargaining bill that the state passes would also be subject to litigation, as we saw in Seattle.”

The yellow-cab industry, NYTWA staff attorney Zubin Soleimany said, eliminated the taxi drivers’ union in the early 1980s, when it switched from paying drivers a percentage of the fares collected to having them lease the cabs as independent contractors. The technology used by app-based taxi services, he added, has intensified the control they have over their supposedly independent drivers: They monitor drivers’ routes and even when and how they brake.

Savino said several times that cab drivers should be defined as employees, possibly by amending the state Fair Play Act, which protects truck drivers against being misclassified as independent contractors.

Tech-industry trade groups also argued for a “third way.” App-based gigs give workers the ability to stop and start when they want to, and that’s “unique to the on-demand economy,” said Julie Samuels, executive director of TechNYC.

But Rocío Alejandra Avila, a staff attorney at the National Domestic Workers Alliance, called the idea that gig-economy work is different from other kinds of work a “false premise.” The app-based cleaning service Handy.com’s defining its workers as independent contractors, she said, means they have no protections against wage theft, such as being forced to work off the clock or being charged fees that reduce their pay below minimum wage. Nail salons are another sector where workers are routinely classified as independent contractors, both in brick-and-mortar salons and online beauty services.

Larry Engelstein, secretary-treasurer of 32BJ SEIU, also rejected the “third way” concept, citing cleaning services—both online and off—that call workers independent contractors to shift the costs to them and avoid paying minimum wage. The argument for such a third category, he said, ignores the fundamental power relationship between workers and employers in the “guise of technology and the aura of progress.”
CSEA President Danny Donohue Look Forward To Retirement After Leading New York State’s Public Union & Its 280,000 Members For The Past 25 Years

by New York State AFL-CIO Podcast & Spectrum News via WNY Labor - October 20, 2019

In the years Danny Donohue has lead the Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA), the Labor Movement around the country has faltered and Membership has declined – but not so in New York, which remains the highest Unionized State in the United States.

"The real trick though is the fact across the country Labor Unions have been falling off, I believe because Labor Unions got lazy. They need a good swift kick to go out and do what they did in the fifties and thirties. Go and organize, go talk to their Members, go find out what the Members want," said Donohue, the longest-sitting President in CSEA History.

Donohue announced this Summer he will not seek re-election to the Labor Union he's led for the past 25 years.

His time in office included fights with both Republicans and Democrats.

"The truth of the matter is the Democratic Party takes advantage of it because they believe, well, you're a Labor Leader, you've got to be with the Democratic Party. I like to argue we've been screwed by the Democrats as much as the Republicans. But we remember both," Donohue said.

One of the most high-profile disputes was with Governor Andrew Cuomo amid a debate over less generous Retirement Benefits for new State Workers.

At the time, Donohue called Cuomo “a moron and a monkey,” but things changed last year, when a landmark Supreme Court case made it easier for Government Workers to not pay Union Dues.

Cuomo backed efforts to soften the blow and his relationship with CSEA improved.

"The Governor had to make a choice. Does he believe the rhetoric we are the enemy? Or does he believe we can work together? He stood up for us," Donohue said.

CSEA represents mostly Blue-Collar Workers Public Service Workers across New York and as a debate rages over Democratic Socialism, Donohue says his Members are skeptical.

"Most of them are smart enough to understand there are no free lunches. When people talk about we're going give you free health care, we're going to give you free education, free this and free that, it's nice and it's a great idea (but) somebody has got to pay. We understand that," he said.

And Donohue says he hopes his successor will listen to the Union's Members and reflect their concerns.
This Looks Like the Start of a Great Time for Unions
by Conor Sen/Via Bloomberg - October 21, 2019

(Bloomberg Opinion) -- The tight labor market in the U.S. is leading to a shift in the balance of power between labor and capital, giving more leverage to workers. This manifests itself in a variety of ways. For instance, workers are less reluctant to leave their jobs in search of better pay or working conditions.

This is showing up in the rate of workers quitting their jobs at the highest level since 2001. It also gives unions the confidence to go on strike in hopes of getting a better deal, as we've seen with the United Auto Workers in its negotiations with General Motors Co. In this environment, the rationale for joining a union hasn't looked this good in a very long time. Unionized workers tend to receive higher wages and greater benefits than their non-unionized peers.

Who wouldn't want that? There are, of course tradeoffs with being in a union: loss of flexibility, membership dues, contract negotiations with employers that can come up empty, and periods without work in fallow economic times or during strikes. But all else being equal, a good union job that lowers the risk of unemployment would be the best of both worlds for many workers. Employers on the other side of the negotiating table are understandably less keen on offering more in wages and benefits if they don't have to.

Every profit-seeking enterprise wants to keep costs as low as possible. And for most of the past 50 years, employers haven't had to worry very much about labor shortages. Although full employment is hard to define, at most we had only a brief period of it in the late 1990s and then again perhaps in the past year or so. With labor readily available whenever it was needed for the past five decades, employers sought to lessen their reliance on unions, and used the threat of hiring non-unionized workers as leverage to keep work stoppages and pay increases to a minimum.

But there are signs in the data that conditions have changed. Last year, more laborers were involved in work stoppages than any year since the mid-1980s. Through the middle of this year that trend had continued. A way to think about the scale of the UAW strike is that mass work stoppages in 2018 led to 2.8 million lost work days. With the UAW still needing to ratify its proposed deal, its 46,000 workers have already been out of work for more than a month, and by the end of the strike will have contributed to more than 1 million lost work days.

Employers now find themselves negotiating with emboldened unions, who have shown they're willing to strike and stay on the picket line for weeks. Further evidence: Industrial employers are choosing to cut hours rather than resort to layoffs amid a slowdown in demand for manufactured goods. They're worried they won't be able to find new workers if things pick up. Public opinion on organized labor has improved alongside the tightening in the job market.

Gallup's annual survey of confidence in institutions shows that organized labor's net approval is at its highest level in 15 years. Democratic presidential candidates have expressed support for striking workers, and even President Donald Trump, wanting to show solidarity with part of his coalition, has pushed for a deal between GM and the UAW rather than siding with big business.

The smartest thing to do for businesses worried about securing an adequate supply of labor is to embrace unions; part of unions' mandate is to ensure that there are enough workers to meet demand. A rise in unionized jobs would lead more workers to see the benefits of unions. And a greater number of workers in unions would increase their political clout, making it more difficult for politicians to cross them and neglect the interests of workers. Perhaps of less benefit would be the pressure -- on the margin -- on employers unable or unwilling to pay higher unionized wages or secure access to an adequate pool of labor.
This would put non-unionized laborers at even more of a relative disadvantage in terms of pay and working conditions vis-à-vis unionized workers. Although changes in the nature of the economy over the past several decades contributed to the decline in organized labor, some part of it was also because labor markets were often slack, giving employers a lot of leverage over workers. Those conditions, at least for now, have dissipated.

As long as tight labor markets persist, work stoppages and pockets of labor shortages are going to continue. The rationale for unions has increased. The public, workers and employers should embraced it.
The number of workers on strike hits the highest since the 1980s

Olivia Raimonde - NY Daily News - October 22, 2019

With unemployment rates at record lows, the number of people who have gone on strike in the U.S. has soared.

The number of striking workers ballooned to nearly 500,000 in 2018, up from about 25,000 in 2017, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. This is the largest number of people who have walked out on work since the mid-1980s.

As employment numbers have rapidly risen over the 10-year expansion, wages have struggled to keep up. And as the labor market tightens, workers are becoming more confident about striking for better salaries and benefits.

In September, workers for General Motors walked out in what has now become the company’s longest strike in decades. The strike began after the auto manufacturer could not reach a contract agreement with labor union United Auto Workers. The walkout is estimated to have cost General Motors upwards of $2 billion, according to Bank of America.

Not only are people striking, but the number of people who have voluntarily quit their job, which can be viewed as a measure of job market confidence, hit an all-time high in July. The percentage of striking workers in the total workforce is currently at about 0.3%, compared with 0.4% in the mid-1980s.

Workers are feeling left behind in the expansion. As the gap between executive salaries and worker pay expands, more people are becoming discontent. In the recovery, corporate profits stabilized long before household income, acting as a spark for the surge in strikes, according to The New York Times, which was the first to report on this data.

General Motors workers aren’t the only ones walking out on the job. About 3,500 Mack Truck employees, who are also UAW members, are currently striking across three states for the first time in 35 years over their contracts. The union is seeking better contract terms on issues ranging from wage increases and holiday schedules to health care coverage and retirement benefits.

Among other notable actions, Chicago public school teachers are in their third day of a strike, demanding higher salaries, better benefits and more resources for the classroom. The strike has effectively canceled classes for approximately 361,000 students.

Leading up to the 2020 presidential election, worker pay and employee benefits have been a central campaign point for a growing number of politicians, including Sens. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., and Bernie Sanders, I-Vt. In August, CEOs from nearly 200 companies said shareholders should no longer be the main focus of businesses and that companies should be focusing more on investing in stakeholders such as employees and customers.
NYC nurses rally for legislation to increase staffing levels
Anna Sanders - NY Daily News - October 22, 2019

Nurses rallied for the state health care system to establish higher patient-to-staff ratios in Manhattan on Tuesday.

The nurses and health care workers pointed out that studies show adequate staffing decreases patient complications and death — and they want a legislative or regulatory solution.

“Not just for us — but the patients that we serve,” said Alizia McMyers, a registered nurse who’s worked at Harlem Hospital for 27 years. “We need safe staffing ratios — it saves lives.”

Union leader Debbie Hayes said nurses and health care workers worry about ensuring care for all patients and described “the feeling of sadness that overcoming them when they can’t do the job they were hired to do.”

“They’re going to their cars and crying before they can drive home,” said Hayes, a registered nurse in Buffalo.

The rally with the Communication Workers of America, the Public Employees Federation and the New York State Nurses Association was held outside a state Department of Health hearing on a study the agency will conduct to examine how staffing increases can improve patient safety and the quality of care in hospitals and nursing homes.

“The time is now to make sure that we have nurse-patient ratios and enough support staff in our hospitals to get the job done — before one more patient dies, before one more patient gets hurt, before one more nurse quits her job,” Hayes said.

Comptroller Scott Stringer agreed: “I am sick and tired of having to come to rallies to simply say, ‘Let us respect the human beings who help other human beings.’”

A state Department of Health spokesman said they would use comments from the hearing "to help inform our report which will be ready by the end of the year.”
NEW YORK (WCBS 880) — Nurses say they are short staffed in health care facilities across New York State and they want the government to intervene.

As WCBS 880’s Rich Lamb reported, scores of nurses rallies calling on the state Health Department to establish minimum staffing ratios in hospitals and nursing homes.

Elizia McMeyers, who has worked at Harlem Hospital for 27 years, outlined what they are asking for.

She says they need, “Ratios that are clear and defined, that say, in a critical care area, you have one nurse to possibly two patients, not four or five. In med surge unit, you have one nurse to maybe 6 or 7 patients – not 15 and 20. There's a huge difference there as you can see.”

The nurses say the staffing shortages can literally be a matter of life and death.

The rally drew the support of multiple local lawmakers, including City Council Speaker Corey Johnson and Comptroller Scott Stringer, who are supporting any legislative or regulatory remedy that would establish safe staffing ratios to ensure patient safety.
WASHINGTON – Employees in the Michigan Air National Guard have voted for the American Federation of Government Employees to become their exclusive labor representative.

The election solidifies AFGE as the exclusive representative for all Title 5 and Title 32 bargaining unit employees in the Michigan Air National Guard. The Association of Civilian Technicians (ACT) previously represented Title 32 technicians across the state, while AFGE represented Title 5 civilians at Selfridge Air National Guard base.

In May, the Federal Labor Relations Authority ordered a new union election for employees in the Michigan Air National Guard after a reorganization blurred the distinction between Title 5 and Title 32 employees. The vote was 2-1 in favor of joining AFGE over ACT, according to results certified by the FLRA on Oct. 4.

AFGE District 7 National Vice President Dorothy James, whose district includes Michigan, credited the district’s organizers and national representative for their instrumental work in winning the vote.

“AFGE fought hard to win the right to represent these workers and we could not be more excited to roll up our sleeves and get to work,” James said.

AFGE Local 2077 now represents 602 employees in the Michigan Air National Guard, including 213 who were previously part of AFGE and 389 who were previously covered by ACT. Most of the employees work at Selfridge Air National Guard Base performing base-wide operational and support functions, including air traffic control, civil engineering, aircraft maintenance, firefighting, and deployment.
Organized Labor Lauds Governor Cuomo’s Announcement Involving Finalized Contracts for Empire Wind and Sunrise Wind Offshore Wind Projects That Will Deliver Nearly 1,700 Megawatts Of Clean & Affordable Renewable Energy to New Yorkers

by New York Governor Andrew Cuomo’s Press Office via WNY Labor Today - October 22, 2019

(ALBANY, NEW YORK) – Organizing Labor is lauding Governor Andrew Cuomo announcement that the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) has finalized contracts with Equinor Wind US LLC for its 816 megawatt Empire Wind Project and Sunrise Wind LLC for its 880 megawatt Sunrise Wind Project to deliver clean, affordable renewable energy to New Yorkers.

As the largest procurement for offshore wind in the Nation's history, the announcement advances Governor Cuomo's Nation-leading Green New Deal goal to develop 9,000 megawatts of offshore wind by 2035 and position New York State as the regional hub of this rapidly growing industry in the United States.

"New Yorkers know all too well the devastating impacts of climate change and the catastrophic consequences if we do not act urgently," Governor Cuomo said. "By finalizing the contract awards for the Nation's largest offshore wind procurement, we are realizing the positive impacts these projects will have on the environment, while diversifying our economy and bringing significant economic benefits to the Empire State."

Gary LaBarbera, who serves as the President of the 100,000 member Building & Construction Trades Council of Greater New York, said: "Governor Cuomo and his Administration continue to lead the Nation around climate change. The investment in offshore wind is a significant step for New York State and will lead to the creation of thousands of good paying Middle Class Jobs with benefits."

John Durso, the President of the Long Island AFL-CIO Labor Federation, said: "In July, Governor Cuomo announced the first large procurement of offshore wind power in New York State in the fight against climate change. This is an opportunity to develop good Union Jobs in an emerging industry. With the announcement of finalized contracts we have taken another historic step on the journey to creating good union jobs, growing our economy and continuing the necessary fight against climate change."

NYSERDA also concurrently submitted its comprehensive filing: Launching New York's Offshore Wind Industry: Phase 1 Report, to the New York State Department of Public Service (DPS). The Report documents the successful results of New York's first large-scale offshore wind solicitation with a combined total capacity of nearly 1,700 megawatts and provides important details about these highest scoring projects.

As detailed in the report submitted to DPS, the State's first large scale offshore wind solicitation resulted in Offshore Wind Renewable Energy Certificate prices approximately 40% less than projected by NYSERDA's 2018 analysis, signaling that the costs to deploy offshore wind are rapidly declining.

An OREC represents the environmental benefits associated with one megawatt-hour of electricity generated from offshore wind resources and consumed by retail customers in New York State. By compensating offshore wind generators for these investments, ORECs provide financial support necessary to lay the groundwork for the industry to take root, which will yield growing dividends for New Yorkers as the industry matures, the Governor’s Office said. These projects are priced competitively relative to recent results from New Jersey and several New England States, while also delivering significant new port infrastructure investments, Public-Private Workforce Training commitments and thousands of well-paying job opportunities.
New Book Shows AFSCME’s Role in Key Fights that Shaped Labor

Pablo Ros - AFSCME News - October 24, 2019

Steven Greenhouse’s new book, Beaten Down, Worked Up: The Past, Present, and Future of American Labor, is an account of labor unions and worker power in our country. It is not a comprehensive history of labor in America but features key episodes that helped shape the labor movement, including victories and setbacks for workers.

Among those key episodes are two in which AFSCME features prominently: the Memphis Sanitation Workers’ Strike of 1968 and the unsuccessful fight in 2011 to stop Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker from taking away collective bargaining rights in the public sector.

Greenhouse is a former New York Times labor reporter who was on the beat for nearly two decades. As this review of his book points out, he “probably knows more about what is happening in the American workplace than anybody else in the country.” This week, he visited AFSCME International to talk about his book and the future of labor.

The overall picture that emerges from Greenhouse’s book is of a labor movement diminished in strength but potentially on the mend.

“When the labor movement was robust, we as a nation moved toward greater economic and social justice, but with the union movement diminished – and with many billionaires and corporations seeking to cripple it further – we as a nation are moving toward more inequality and unfairness,” Greenhouse writes.

Nevertheless, there are reasons for hope.

Union popularity among the general public is at its highest in 50 years, with nearly two out of three Americans approving of unions. Moreover, nearly half of nonunionized workers say they would join a union if given the opportunity.

There has been a resurgence of worker activism since 2018. Last year, the number of workers who participated in sizable strikes reached almost half a million, the largest since 1986. And when workers mobilize and stand up to defend their rights and dignity, they tend to inspire others to do the same.

Worker issues are front and center in the 2020 general election. In his 19 years covering labor, Greenhouse said, he’d never seen so much importance given to worker issues by presidential candidates as reflected today in the current crop of Democratic candidates’ labor platforms.

To describe AFSCME’s key role in the history of labor, Greenhouse interviewed AFSCME members past and present, including Elmore Nickleberry, a former sanitation worker in Memphis and one of the original members of AFSCME Local 1733, and Paul Spink, president of the newly unified AFSCME Council 32 in Wisconsin and an AFSCME International vice president.

“If we didn’t have a union, we would get nothing,” Greenhouse quotes Nickleberry as saying. “We’d be in the same shape as before. You got a union to back you, you achieve more. The more people you have in a union, the more you get. They can talk for you more than you can talk for yourself.”
Chance the Rapper advocates for Chicago teachers as host of 'Saturday Night Live'

Amir Vera - CNN - October 24, 2019

(CNN) Chance the Rapper donned a red Chicago Teachers Union sweatshirt while hosting "Saturday Night Live" in a show of support to the teachers who have been on strike.

Chicago teachers have been on strike since October 17 demanding more support staff, higher raises and limits to class size. Chicago Public Schools is the third biggest school district in the country.

"To the teachers in Chicago, I know you guys are on strike right now. I fully support you," Chance said Saturday, adding the joke "I just wish that when I was in school my teachers had gone on a strike."

Chance, who is from Chicago, also rapped about the city's nickname "The Second City" and how he's a fan of all things in second place.

Michelle Gunderson, a public school teacher and trustee for the teacher's union, tweeted during SNL that the bargaining team was working but took a break to watch the rapper.

"Your teachers thank you," Gunderson tweeted.

Several SNL cast members were seen at the end of the show wearing Chicago Teachers Union T-shirts. This isn't the first time Chance has shown support for Chicago educators. In 2017, he donated $1 million to the city's public schools to support arts and enrichment programming.
Due to bad work that was done by an anti-union ABC contractor, three people lost their lives and more than 30 were injured when the Hard Rock Hotel in New Orleans collapsed. Video evidence emerged in the days after the collapse showing support beams buckling under the weight of the building.

The building was so unstable that the search for two of the three murdered workers had to be stopped until two cranes were imploded on Sunday. Unions in New Orleans told UCOMM that the contractor Citadel Builders was using unlicensed plumbers and electricians on the job. Citadel had pled no contest to these charges in August in another case.

The developer of the site, Kalias, also has a long history of cutting corners and neglecting their properties. In 2017, a man died at one of their properties after they failed to fix a broken elevator. The son of owner Mohan Kalias also spent 30 months in prison after he pled guilty to theft of government funds. At the sentencing, the judge accused Mohan of letting his son take the fall for him.

UCOMM also reported this week on the Chicago teachers strike. Teachers in the third-largest school district in the country are striking in an effort to get smaller class sizes, better pay and benefits, and more prep time for teachers.

In advance of the strike, the Chicago Teachers Union released a heart-wrenching video from one of their members who is a special education teacher on the South Side of Chicago. She had her gas cut off, is behind on her bills, and is about to be evicted from her home. She drives Uber in her free time to try and make ends meet. The Chicago Teachers are striking over social issues and are testing this strategy. This fight is proof positive that organized labor can not rely on Democrats anymore.

On this week’s UCOMM Live podcast, we had clips from myself talking about the Hard Rock Hotel Collapse with a local podcast in New Orleans and discussed the actions of some brave, union ironworkers who raced to the scene to help out, only to be told that they didn’t want any union men near the job. We also took a look at the agreement between the UAW and GM to end the strike.

While an agreement has been reached, UAW members will continue to walk the picket line until the deal is voted on by the full membership. A UAW member was killed on the picket line in Tennessee on October 22nd.

The UAW is also dealing with another strike, this time at Mack Trucks, so UCOMM took a look at why they walked out. Plus Social Security checks are getting bigger thanks to a Democratic Congress in 1975, not the person currently sitting in the White House.
Several GM employees fired for social media posts during strike

FLINT (WJRT) (10/28/2019) - Sources say several United Auto Workers members at two Flint facilities have been fired because of threatening posts they made on social media during the strike.

Several members of UAW Local 598 were fired when they returned to work after the strike due to violations of GM policies.

General Motors confirmed several workers from the Flint Assembly plant have been fired due to company policy violations, but they didn't comment on specifics.

Union officials say the same happened to employees at a GM Customer Care and Aftersales facility in the Flint area over the weekend and on Monday, as well.

Sources say the posts by UAW Local 598 members at Flint Assembly were regarding some violent incidents that happened on the picket line.

One post allegedly involved a worker smashing out the windshield on a vehicle near a picket line with two people inside. Another post allegedly referenced a bomb threat.

UAW Local 659 President Steve Gruener couldn't comment on specifics of why his members at Customer Care and Aftersales were terminated.

The firings come just three days after the UAW ratified a contract with GM. Gruener said the situation should serve as a warning for all UAW members.

"I just ask every UAW member to be careful what you put on social media," he said. "Obviously, GM will or has and will use it as a possibility of losing your job or terminated, depending on what you said. We just worry about that and keep it close to us to be careful what you put on social media."

Gruener said one of his members reported for work at a Customer Care and Aftersales facility on Saturday and got walked out by GM Global Security due to his actions during the strike.

He said two more workers were walked out at the same facility today.

Gruener could not comment specifically on what those workers did that warranted them getting fired, because an investigation is under way. The UAW has filed grievances about the situations and they are waiting on a response from GM.

"It's very disappointing that after we've been on strike for our contract for our members, that we come back to work and GM is still fighting that battle with harassing our workers or suspending our workers due to actions that happened during a strike that really weren't associated with General motors or from social media posts," Gruener said. "It's very disturbing for our membership."
CPS support workers make tentative deal to end strike but won’t cross teachers’ picket lines

By Nader Issa and Jacob Wittich - Chicago Sun Times - October 27, 2019

Chicago Public Schools and the union representing 7,500 striking school support staff have reached a tentative agreement on a new labor contract, but the workers won’t be going back to schools just yet.

The deal with SEIU Local 73 was announced Sunday night, but a strike by the Chicago Teachers Union will continue Monday, meaning 300,000 students will miss their eighth day of classes.

The support staff union’s bargaining team is still reviewing the final terms of the deal before the full membership can officially end the strike.

Speaking with reporters at Malcolm X College Sunday evening, Dian Palmer, president of SEIU Local 73, celebrated the union’s agreement with the city.

“This is a victory for working people in Chicago and shows what is possible when we unite and take action,” Palmer said. “The lowest-paid workers, who are the backbone of our schools, are going to see raises that mean their families won’t have to struggle living in an expensive city where costs keep going up.”

Despite the tentative deal, Palmer said her union’s members will be on the picket lines Monday morning in support of CTU. This is the first time in history both union’s went on strike at the same time. In 2012, some SEIU workers went to work while teachers walked the picket, causing some friction.

Schools chief Janice Jackson said at a Sunday night news conference at City Hall that she was “incredibly thrilled” to reach a deal with SEIU.

“The custodians, bus aides, special education classroom assistants and security officers who make up SEIU are absolutely essential to our schools,” Jackson said. “These are the tough jobs that ensure that our schools run effectively, and I’m so glad that we’ll be able to provide them with the strong and fair deal that results in a very generous raise and real improvements to their working conditions.”

But speaking to the elephant in the room, Jackson said there won’t be much of a difference for the city’s kids until an agreement is reached with the CTU.

“While we’re very happy to have reached a deal with SEIU, the fact still remains that tomorrow will the eighth consecutive day where our students throughout Chicago will wake up and they’re unable to head to class,” Jackson said. Terms of the SEIU agreement were not released, but the district had offered SEIU a 16 percent pay raise over five years, the same offer made to CTU. CPS had also offered to limit security guards’ duties to their regular job responsibilities and to give bus aides six additional personal days.

Bus aides were also being offered a stipend when they’re let off a bus outside city limits, and special ed classroom assistants would be moved up through the salary schedule faster than before.

Insurance costs under a recent district proposal would remain unchanged for three years and go up a combined .75% in during the next two years. The district had also offered to establish a path for bus aides — who work part-time and only during the school year — to become full-time employees by staying at school with kids after they’re dropped off in the morning.
Court-Officer Unions Get Backing on Disability Bill

By RICHARD KHAVKINE - The Chief Leader - October 28, 2019

Union presidents representing court employees, who have long lobbied for improved accidental-disability pensions for their members, recently gained a prominent advocate in Chief Administrative Judge Lawrence K. Marks, who endorsed the proposal in a letter to Governor Cuomo’s Special Counsel.

Although the measure passed both houses of the Legislature by wide margins last year, it was vetoed by the Governor—for the fourth time.

‘Crucial Functions’

Outlining the “crucial functions” court officers provide in terms of security and “the inherent hazards” they face, Judge Marks wrote that his office “urges approval.”

“We believe that this measure would benefit the Judiciary,” he wrote in his Oct. 2 letter.

The legislation, sponsored by Assemblyman Peter Abbate and Senator Andrew Gounardes, both of Brooklyn, if enacted would give Tier 3, 4, 5, and 6 officers in the court system tax-free pensions equaling 75 percent of their final average salary, minus Workers’ Compensation, if they were unable to return to their jobs as a result of an assault or other disabling injury on the job.

Currently, Court Officers get one-third of final average salary as their disability pensions if they are assaulted and incapacitated. The union leaders highlighted that Police Officers, Firefighters, Sanitation Workers and Correction Officers all have the three-quarters disability benefit.

Peter Piciulo, the president of the Court Officers Benevolent Association of Nassau County, citing a hypothetical scenario, said that should officers from Nassau County Police, the Sheriff’s Department and County Courts all get assaulted during an arraignment, “and all three officers get hurt, we’re the only ones not covered.”

Frustrating Paradox

“We’re covered if a ceiling tile falls on us, but not if we’re actually doing our jobs,” he said.

Of the 800 members his union represents, Mr. Piciulo estimated that roughly 40 percent would have access to the benefit, including 280 Court Officers.

Despite his past vetoes, union leaders were encouraged by the Governor’s spirited support for law-enforcement during his re-election campaign last year and were hopeful he would at last sign the bill.

But in his December veto message of that legislation and several other bills that would have provided enhanced benefits to public employees, Mr. Cuomo called it fiscally imprudent.

‘A Substantial Burden’

“As the Legislature has failed to appropriate any funds to pay for these benefits, I cannot support a package of bills that would necessarily impose a substantial and unplanned burden on New York State taxpayers,” the Governor said.
Since he joined his union’s staff as a delegate in 2000, Mr. Piciulo said he could recall just two officers, both Sergeants, who would have benefited from the disability payment. Instead, both are getting pensions equaling one-third of their pay—and having those allowances taxed—which he said was insufficient to live on Long Island.

A Priceless Benefit

Peter Meringolo, the chairman of the NYS Public Employee Conference, which is comprised of 82 unions representing public employees, said the Governor’s argument that the benefit would amount to a pension enhancement was illogical. Notwithstanding that, he said, the benefits to officers' morale would far outweigh the cost of the legislation.

Bill Dobbins, the president of Suffolk County Court Employees Association, said the letter’s signatories, who also included Glenn Damato, the president of the New York State Court Clerks Association, and Dennis Quirk, the president of the New York State Court Officers Association, met just after Labor Day with the Governor’s staff to discuss the legislation.

“We never had that opportunity before,” he said. “They were very, very receptive. All the (union) presidents got to speak. They heard us and they seemed very genuine.”

The legislation, he said, doesn’t write a blank check. This opens the door for court officers or clerks to get what they really deserve. Right now the door is shut.”

The president of the New York State Supreme Court Officers Association, Patrick Cullen, had actively campaigned for support from Chief Judge Janet DiFiore and Judge Marks.

'More Than Happy'

"I’m more than happy,” he said. “It’s important that we go about it with the full support of the court system.”

He said he was especially pleased that Judge Marks had emphasized the minimal cost associated with the legislation should it become law. “It’s not something that’s cost-prohibitive,” Mr. Cullen said.

He said he would discuss the inclusion of any needed funds in the court system’s budget with administrators.

He said he was also hopeful a meeting with the Governor’s Special Counsel, Elizabeth Garvey, “to discuss the merits [of the bill] and address any concerns the Governor may have.”
Mayor Bill de Blasio deserves much blame for the city’s recent rash of violence by the mentally ill. But Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s actions — and lack of them — have played a big role, too.

One statistic is telling: With 19.5 million residents, New York has less than 3,000 beds available in state psychiatric hospitals — just 15 beds per 100,000, when the minimum ratio generally considered necessary is 50 per 100,000. In 1955, the state had 600 per 100,000, as mental health expert DJ Jaffe has reported — 40 times today’s level.

Cuomo has closed hospitals and let the number of psychiatric beds drop, but the mentally ill haven’t disappeared. They’re just swelling shelters, jails and prisons, sprawled out on sidewalks — or roaming the streets, creating mayhem.

The city just saw Randy Santos allegedly fatally bludgeon four homeless men and Kwesi Ashun smash a cop with a metal chair — plus at least two scary subway pushers.

It was a case like one of those last horrors that led New York to adopt Kendra’s Law, which lets judges order sick, potentially dangerous people to get treatment. It’s proven highly effective — but the Assembly refuses to go along with closing loopholes and making it permanent. Cuomo should hold Assembly feet to the fire and get the law strengthened.

The Legislature also needs to remove obstacles to committing mentally ill people who pose a serious threat. Most states set a “need for treatment” or “grave disability” standard; New York is one of just a few requiring someone to be a danger to himself or others.

As Jaffe argues, “Laws should prevent violence, not require it.” Yet when Ashun’s sister told a city Mobile Crisis Team she feared he might hurt someone, they told her to call 911 if he did. Uh, that would be too late.

Fact is, like de Blasio, Cuomo and the Legislature simply haven’t made serious mental illness a priority. It’s not just the sick who are now paying the price.
Students and former workers urge boycott of Ithaca Coffee Company over unionizing attempt

Edwin Viera - Ithaca News - October 29, 2019

After several years attempting to unionize, Ithaca Coffee Company (ICC) workers' efforts to unionize took a big step forward with a National Labor Relations Board decision earlier this year, which has now inspired those workers to call on area residents to boycott of the popular local coffee brewery.

Three employees from Ithaca Coffee Company won back pay and one had disciplinary actions removed from their files according to the Buffalo office of the NLRB. After this, ICC was supposed to post a sign where all workers can see somewhere in both of their stores.

Several students from Cornell University and members of the Ithaca community came together under the leadership of William Westlake, a former Ithaca Coffee Company-employee, who worked at the location at Gateway Commons to boycott ICC’s Triphammer location. Westlake said he had attempted some organizing during his time at the company, but that it was discouraged.

“That narrative was maintained by anyone at my location who had ever interacted with the owners and I was able to corroborate that myself once I got to meet the owners,” Westlake said. “Throughout my time, I talked to other workers about starting an organizing committee. It was Brenden Lukosavich who was our head organizer to start to rally workers but, I think, it was not even the first week of the campaign where a manager told a worker they would close down the Gateway [Commons] location if they voted to unionize.”

Following that, Westlake said, it was difficult to get anyone to show public support for the union. Up until that point, Westlake claimed that 80 percent of workers were pro-union, which dropped drastically afterwards. Westlake is joined by Yana Kalmyka, an undergraduate student with the Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations (ILR School) who came to support Westlake and the workers at Ithaca Coffee Company earlier in October to start their boycott.

“We have a lot of community volunteers, students, and Ithaca folks,” Kalmyka said. “This is our kick-off event, which is why we have a lot of people here, but going forward we are going to have two to four people out here every day during all the busy shifts asking people not to go in. One of the main reasons we are out here is because we believe that a large percent of their revenue comes from this location.”

Other students from the ILR School Westlake and Kalmyka are looking to gain more community support but are working to ensure there is some boycott going on but would like to expand the boycott to the Gateway Commons location. The stated goals of the boycott are: Julie Crowley, the owner of Ithaca Coffee Company, to apologize to the workers and apologize to the Ithaca community, to offer a former employee who lost his job with ICC his job back and to sign onto and honor Workers United’s Non-Interference Principles for union organizing campaigns so workers can organize without interference or intimidation from the company.

ICC still does not have a union contract and, according to Westlake, the environment of fear lives on among workers and the community needs to help stand up for workers. He made a prepared statement at the event and has made a call for the community to additionally call on Crowley, who was unable to be reached for comment, to change her stance. “The community of Ithaca has a choice, we all do as consumers, to make Julie Crowley see that she is wrong,” Westlake said. “We will stand up for workers in the fight against any company that does not value the rights of its employees. And we will make certain that changes are made in the behavior of employers in Ithaca.”
Judge Halts Extended HA Shifts After Union Beefs
by CRystal Lewis - The Chief Leder – October 29, 2019

A Manhattan Supreme Court Justice Oct. 18 granted a temporary restraining order blocking the Housing Authority from further scheduling Caretakers, Supervisors and other titles to work evenings and weekends after Teamsters Local 237 cited concern for its members’ safety.

In January, the union negotiated a contract that included the first work-schedule change in 50 years. Previously, shifts were confined to weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Greater Flexibility

The agreement allows Caretakers, Supervisors of Caretakers and Superintendents to work one of five schedules: the traditional weekday hours, or four other schedules that provide four-day work weeks. Staff can choose to work four days a week from 6 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., or from 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m., with weekend assignments every other week.

The extended work schedules are a key part of NYCHA’s efforts to meet deadlines imposed under the city’s agreement with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to address unsafe and unsanitary conditions such as leaks, pests and mold.

NYCHA kicked off the alternative work schedules in April at 13 developments in Brooklyn and Manhattan, and expanded to 39 other developments by late June.

But Gregory Floyd, president of Local 237, which represents about 8,000 NYCHA employees, said that the agency has not remedied safety hazards that labor officials repeatedly brought up. He said that the union wants doors to be secured (many buildings across NYCHA’s 325 developments have broken front doors) and for broken lights to be repaired.

“We said from the beginning that we wanted safety checks. At 7 p.m. during the winter it’s dark—and crime goes up in NYCHA when it’s dark,” Mr. Floyd said during a phone interview. “We’re seeking the Housing Authority to address our checklist of safety concerns, I don’t think that’s too much to ask for.”

Crime Up Within HA

While there has been a dip in crimes citywide so far this year, there was a 5-percent increase in the seven index crimes within NYCHA developments, according to Police Department data. Murders jumped 17 percent between January and Sept. 1 compared to the same period last year, and shootings increased 13 percent.

Staff at 38 additional developments who chose an alternative work schedule were supposed to start working the extended hours this month, but in response to the union’s petition, a judge temporarily blocked NYCHA from assigning any of the substitute shifts. Employees will instead work traditional shifts with scheduled weekend overtime, according to the agency.

“We are disappointed that Local 237 took this action, especially given the hard work that went into the negotiations leading to AWS, and the benefits it will bring to our residents,” said NYCHA spokeswoman Barbara Brancaccio. “We look forward to making full arguments to the court next week, resolving this matter and moving forward with this important program, which is key to meeting our obligations under the HUD agreement.”
A hearing on the matter has been set for Oct. 31, according to the Local 237 website. The alternative work schedules were set to become available at every development by early next year, NYCHA stated.

Protest Late Wednesdays

The union has also filed an improper practice petition with the Office of Collective Bargaining regarding NYCHA’s unilateral decision to have Housing Managers work until 7:30 p.m. on Wednesdays. HA extended Housing Managers, Assistant Housing Managers and Housing Assistants’ Wednesday hours temporarily over the summer, but the union stated that the Authority has “ignored our previous agreement to stop scheduling” evening hours after Labor Day.

Local 237 officials argued that this was in direct violation of its contract, which states that “in the event that NYCHA seeks to add titles other than Caretakers and Supervisors to the AWS program, NYCHA must negotiate with Local 237 over the terms, conditions and implementation of AWSs for those additional titles.”

The grievance also cited safety concerns for Housing Managers working evening hours, claiming that they were “oftentimes alone” and “[bore] the brunt” of tenants’ anger because they were responsible for collecting payments from those who were behind in rent.
Google employees are accusing the company’s leadership of developing an internal surveillance tool that they believe will be used to monitor workers’ attempts to organize protests and discuss labor rights.

Earlier this month, employees said they discovered that a team within the company was creating the new tool for the custom Google Chrome browser installed on all workers’ computers and used to search internal systems. The concerns were outlined in a memo written by a Google employee and reviewed by Bloomberg News and by three Google employees who requested anonymity because they aren’t authorized to talk to the press.

The tool would automatically report staffers who create a calendar event with more than 10 rooms or 100 participants, according to the employee memo. The most likely explanation, the memo alleged, “is that this is an attempt of leadership to immediately learn about any workers organization attempts.”

A representative for Alphabet Inc.’s Google said, “These claims about the operation and purpose of this extension are categorically false. This is a pop-up reminder that asks people to be mindful before auto-adding a meeting to the calendars of large numbers of employees.”

The extension was prompted by an increase in spam around calendars and events, according to Google. It doesn’t collect personally identifiable information, nor does it stop the use of calendars but rather adds a speed bump when employees are reaching out to a large group, the company said.

Growing Tensions

The conflicting views of the tool underscore growing tension between Google’s leadership and rank-and-file employees. On Oct. 21, several dozen workers at Google’s office in Zurich held an event about workers’ rights and unionization despite their managers’ attempts to cancel it, and last month, contract workers for Google in Pittsburgh voted to join the United Steelworkers.

In the last 18 months or so, employees have protested leadership’s handling of sexual harassment complaints and launched internal campaigns against some Google projects, including a censored search engine in China and a contract with the Pentagon to analyze drone footage.

The employee’s memo suggests that the new Chrome extension is intended to help Google employees apply newly unveiled “community guidelines,” which discourage employees from debating politics, a shift away from its famously open culture. A Google spokeswoman said in August that the company was also building a tool to let employees flag problematic internal posts and creating a team of moderators to monitor conversations on company chat boards.

It’s not known if that tool is same as the Chrome extension related to employee calendars and meetings. Google didn’t immediately respond to a question seeking to clarify.

The Chrome tool is expected to be rolled out in late October, according to the employee’s memo, which was posted on an internal message board earlier this week, according to one of the employees. Two other Google staffers in California said the tool was added to their work computers this week. And another employee said the issue was the most requested topic to discuss at the weekly all-staff meetings, typically held on Thursdays.
‘Trojan-Horse’

Work on the tool appears to have begun in early September, according to two Google employees who reviewed the memo and said they independently verified parts of the plan. In late September, it was subject to a review by Google’s privacy team, which is the norm for any new planned product launch at the company, the employees said. The team approved the release of the tool, but noted that there were “a number of concerns with respect to the culture at Google,” according to the employee’s memo.

Google said the tool has been in development for months and went through standard privacy, security and legal reviews.

In early October, the engineers responsible for developing the extension wrote that employees would not be able to remove it once it was installed on their computers and that it would be “used for policy enforcement,” according to the review and two Google employees. The plans began attracting attention within the company, the two employees said, and in mid-October, some Google employees were blocked from accessing internal design documents related to the project.

The author of the review described the extension as “creepy” and suggested, apparently in jest, that the Chrome extension should be named, “not-a-trojan-horse_dot_exe”.

On an internal Google message board, employees have posted satirical memes mocking the plan. One meme contained an image of a group of men in suits laughing, with a caption that reads: “And then we told them, ‘WE WILL NOT make it appear to you that we are watching out for your protected concerted activities’ as we pushed a Chrome extension to report when someone makes a meeting with 100+ people.”

Another meme contained an image from a scene in a Harry Potter film, in which the character Professor Dolores Umbridge teaches a class on how to defend against “dark arts.” The caption reads: “Google decree number 24: no employee organization or meeting with over 100 participants may exist without the knowledge and approval of the high inquisitor.”
CHICAGO — More than 300,000 public school students prepared to return to school as Chicago leaders on Thursday announced an end to an acrimonious teachers’ strike that lasted 11 days, the longest here in decades, and turned life upside down for families across the nation’s third-largest school district.

In the end, the clash between the teachers and Chicago’s new mayor, Lori Lightfoot, appeared to have brought mixed results. The city agreed to spend millions of dollars on reducing class sizes; promised to pay for hundreds more social workers, nurses and librarians; and approved a 16 percent salary increase over the coming five years. But not all union members were satisfied; a vote to approve a tentative deal was noticeably split, and some teachers wanted to press on to seek steeper reductions in class sizes, more teacher preparation time and aid for special education.

Still, the strike in Chicago, which followed a series of major teacher walkouts in conservative states like West Virginia and Oklahoma as well as liberal cities like Los Angeles and Denver, reflected a renewed wave of activism from teachers.

“What it says is that West Virginia and Oklahoma wasn’t sui generis; it wasn’t an isolated moment,” said Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, who made several trips to Chicago during the strike. “This is now a strategy.”

Teachers in Chicago drew attention to matters far beyond salary to broad issues of social justice, casting their fight as a battle for equity among the city’s poor and rich families, for safety for immigrants and for affordable housing in an ever more expensive city. And some Democratic presidential hopefuls and others were quick to line up behind the teachers, a pivot from the political mood a decade ago when even some on the left criticized the power of teachers’ unions.

“I think the entire wave of teachers’ strikes that we’ve been seeing should have school boards quaking in their boots,” said Ileen DeVault, a professor of labor history at Cornell University. “I think more and more teachers are going to be saying, ‘Gee, I have some of the same problems. Look what the Chicago teachers, look what the L.A. teachers, look what all these other groups of teachers got when they went on strike.’”

The strike was a blow to Ms. Lightfoot, a political novice five months into her first term as mayor. Elected by winning all 50 of the city’s wards, the mayor has portrayed herself as a reformer who wants many of the very goals that the teachers were demanding, including full-time nurses, social workers and librarians in all city schools; expanded counseling services; and recruitment of more black and Hispanic teachers.

Yet throughout the walkout, Ms. Lightfoot found herself pitted against the teachers, many of whom said she was failing to keep her promises. At the same time, opponents of the teachers’ strike said Ms. Lightfoot was giving too many concessions at a time when the school system’s finances, like that of the city, are shaky. And all the while, residents spoke of the tumult that the strike created for parents with few child-care options, for student athletes who could not play in games and for high school students with standardized tests that had to be delayed.

In an interview on Thursday, Ms. Lightfoot, who had been a target of protest signs along picket lines, said that the agreement was “without a doubt” good for the city — for the city’s students and teachers and for taxpayers. “When you pick apart the pieces of this deal, whether it’s individual pieces or comprehensively, what you’re going to find is a lot of things that are focused on advancing the educational gains and outcomes for our students,” she said.
Working Theater: Where Workers’ Voices Take Center Stage
By Maya Wasserman - Labor Press – October 30, 2019

Working Theater celebrates its 35th year of producing plays for, about and with working people. It has deep connections with the labor movement, striving for positive representations of working people on its stages.

Some of their most acclaimed works have been “La Ruta” which was an immersive theater experience staged entirely inside a trailer truck and “Hold Please,” a story about complex office politics and power struggles between two generations of administrative assistants.

The theater and labor communities have had a long history of bringing together the needs of workers with the arts. “Workers’ theater” broadly describes theater from the working class about working people.

The movement began in American theater in the 1920s to address issues about the working person by truthfully telling their stories. The plays themselves were captivating, moving, and occasionally frustrating pieces that explore the possibilities of the workers’ movement.

Working Theater continues this legacy by endeavoring to bring issues concerning working people to light. This season’s off-Broadway show is focused on themes of immigration, migration and making a home in the United States- a topic that is very poignant and at the forefront of our society today.

The company’s milestone season includes Border People (premiering off-Broadway and touring the five boroughs) and Best of TheaterWorks!, an off-Broadway production of some of the best plays written by union members over the last 19 years.

Next up, Working Theater is sharing a sneak peek and information session about their upcoming season, with a light breakfast, on November 12th at 8:30 am.
New Ford deal with UAW includes $6 billion in investments, thousands of jobs

By Michael Wayland - CNBC – October 30, 2019

The deal includes $6 billion in new investments from Ford and the creation or retention of 8,500 U.S. jobs, according to the United Auto Workers.

Other details of the proposed four-year deal were not disclosed.

However, the pact is expected to share many of the same terms as the union’s recent contract with General Motors.

DETROIT — Ford Motor and the United Auto Workers reached a tentative deal on a new labor contract Wednesday night without a strike. The four-year deal includes $6 billion in new investments from Ford and the creation or retention of 8,500 U.S. jobs, according to the union.

Other details of the proposed contract were not disclosed. However, the pact is expected to share many of the same terms as the union’s recent contract with General Motors. That deal included 3% raises or 4% lump-sum bonuses each year of the contract, retention of roughly 3% out-of-pocket health-care costs and a path for temporary workers to become full-time employees. GM also agreed to $11,000 ratification bonuses for most of its roughly 48,000 UAW employees, however, previous contracts have included lower bonuses for Ford and Fiat Chrysler workers.

Ford confirmed the proposed deal, which must be approved by local union leaders and members, but declined to provide further details.

“These were long and hard hours, but I feel confident they were able to secure a contract that protects our member’s future,” UAW President Gary Jones said in a release announcing the deal.

The union traditionally uses “pattern bargaining” with the Detroit automakers. It selects a “target” company to negotiate with first. Once a deal is agreed upon and ratified, the union uses the contract as a template for negotiations with the other two automakers.

Ford’s negotiations with the union were expected to be less contentious and move more quickly than the UAW’s talks with GM, which included a 40-day strike that ended Friday and cost the automaker billions.

The Ford contract is likely at least a week or two away from being approved or rejected by rank-and-file union members. It still needs approval from local union leaders who will meet Friday in Detroit to vote on the deal. If the local UAW leaders approve the proposed contract, Ford’s roughly 55,500 UAW members must then vote on it. If members vote the deal down, negotiators would be expected to return to the bargaining table and a strike would once again be an option for the union. The UAW, if the deal is ratified, would next turn its attention to Fiat Chrysler, the last of the Detroit automakers the union needs to negotiate with for 2019.

The UAW’s discussions with Fiat Chrysler are expected to be more contentious than those with Ford amid a federal probe into union corruption that started with the Italian-American automaker. There’s also uncertainty about the company’s future amid a potential merger deal confirmed this week with French automaker PSA Group.
Chicago Teachers’ Strike, Longest in Decades, Ends
Teachers in Chicago Public Schools, the country’s third-largest district, said they would return to school after an 11-day walkout.

By Mitch Smith and Monica Davey – The New York Times – October 31, 2019

(Across New York State) - Continuing a trend that has been building for years, 53 candidates who came through the New York State United Teachers’ (NYSUT) Pipeline Training Program are currently running for local offices in the November 5th elections across the State.

The Pipeline Program provides extensive training and support for Working People who share the Union’s values and agenda and are willing to put in the effort required to mount a campaign.

Forty-one of the 53 are Members of NYSUT Local Unions.

Here are some examples of union members stepping up to lead in their communities.

Joe Cantafio, who serves as President of the West Seneca Teachers Association and is a Member of the NYSUT Board of Directors, is running for West Seneca Town Council. A life-long resident of the community, Cantafio teaches history and government and has coached football, wrestling and lacrosse. He said the Union’s support has been key. “Now more than ever, West Seneca needs a proven leader, and NYSUT has prepared me for the task,” Cantafio said. “Through the Pipeline Training, the Member Organizing Institute, and Leadership Training, I am able to bring a proven record to our community.”

Ralph Smith, a Member of the Putnam Valley Federation of Teachers, is running for Putnam Valley Town Board after three decades as an Educator and community resident. He’s taught elementary and secondary levels, and he staunchly supported Putnam Valley launching its own school system.

Nicole Herkey is running for West Seneca Town Council. The 12-year Literacy Specialist in the Buffalo Public Schools is a Member of the Buffalo Teachers Federation (BTF) Executive Committee, a NYSUT and American Federation of Teachers (AFT) Delegate and a MOI graduate. She’s lived in West Seneca for 22 years.

Angela Riley is a United University Professions (UUP) Member in Binghamton University’s School of Pharmacy running for Binghamton City Council. She’s been a PTA Leader and a member of nearly a dozen community boards. Riley won a contested primary with the support of the Binghamton Teachers Association.

Michelle Roman, a Member of the Holley Central School Teachers Association, previously won an upset in a Special Election to fill out the rest of the term for the outgoing Mayor in Lockport and is running for re-election. With Labor’s support, she prioritizes issues important to Unions and Working Families.

The General Election is Tuesday, November 5th and polling places will be open from 6 a.m. to 9 p.m.
Jesse Sharkey, the Chicago Teachers Union president, held a news conference that made no secret of lingering bitterness on both sides.

“We feel like we achieved a lot of things,” he said. “There’s some things we didn’t achieve. But it’s not a day for photo ops.”

Chicago’s finances are deeply troubled, struggling with huge unfunded pension liabilities and budget shortfalls that have led to tax increases in recent years. In recent days, the editorial boards of the city’s two major newspapers, The Tribune and The Sun-Times, cited those difficulties repeatedly and wrote critically about the teachers’ union.

“They made outlandish demands as if City Hall owed teachers not just a big wage bump but a utopian version of Chicago,” The Tribune’s editorial board said.

With an annual budget of $5.98 billion, the city’s school system has also long faced fiscal struggles. In recent years, major credit agencies have rated the school system’s bonds below investment grade, though over recent months, its financial outlook has stabilized somewhat, in part because of increased state aid. Laurence Msall, the president of the Civic Federation, a Chicago-based budget watchdog, said the school district had little room to spend more at a time of tight budgets and sustained enrollment losses. “The long-term sustainability of Chicago Public Schools remains a question,” Mr. Msall said, “and the viability of this contract and what has been offered remains to be seen.”

Officials were still piecing together the exact price of the deal, which some have estimated to cost about $500 million, but Ms. Lightfoot said that fiscal limits had been carefully weighed throughout weeks of negotiation. “We were very, very conscious of making sure that we only agreed to things — on an individualized basis but also in the aggregate — that were sustainable and financially responsible, and that’s part of the reason we weren’t able to reach an agreement any sooner,” Ms. Lightfoot said.

Chicago was a birthplace of unionization among teachers in the late 1800s, and the heavily Democratic city has remained a center of teacher activism. For days, clusters of teachers — many of them wearing red — gathered outside schools, marched through downtown and met in parks for rallies.

Returning to work on Friday will be about 25,000 educators in the city’s schools, where about 47 percent of students are Hispanic, 37 percent are African-American and 10 percent are white; some 76 percent of students are economically disadvantaged.

The strike, which was the first multiday work stoppage by Chicago Public Schools teachers since 2012, lasted longer than any teachers’ strike in Chicago since 1987. The Chicago Teachers Union clashed with Rahm Emanuel, Ms. Lightfoot’s predecessor as mayor, during the 2012 strike, which lasted seven school days. In December 2018, Chicago was the site of the first teacher strike at a charter school network.

For parents, the last two weeks brought a daily scramble to find ways to keep their children safe and occupied. Juliet de Jesus Alejandre said she had taken a few days off work to look after her 8-year-old twin boys, and had left them with family members on other days. She said she was pleased that more social workers and nurses would be assigned to schools, and credited the teachers with forcing an overdue conversation about racial equity.
Thousands of NYC transit workers shut down street outside MTA HQ, some say they’re ready to strike

By CLAYTON GUSE – New York Daily News – October 31, 2019

The union that moves New York decided to slow things down a bit Wednesday.

Thousands of members from Transport Workers Union Local 100 clogged the streets outside of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority’s lower Manhattan headquarters for a massive rally that at times almost doubled as a music festival.

The union set up an enormous stage in the middle of Broadway, complete with a band. The group had drums. They had bullhorns. They even had a man dressed up in a giant inflatable bear costume.

Despite the festivities, the workers weren’t happy — and they said their angst is all due to difficult contract negotiations with the MTA.

Utano, who has worked in transit for 40 years, said the MTA “never seems has any money during contract time.”

The MTA and Local 100 have been without a contract since May 15, and negotiations between the two sides have since turned ugly.

In August the MTA submitted a contract offer that Utano disparaged as “insulting.”

The offer would have required workers to put in more than 40 hours in a given week to receive overtime. They now get overtime whenever they work more than eight hours a day.

The offer also would have cut health care benefits for workers, and included a provision that would allow MTA bosses to alter elements of the contract if too many workers take too many days off.

The negotiations hit a new low earlier this month when MTA chairman Pat Foye sent a fiery email to Utano alleging him of running a “specialty drug scam.” The comment led one union official to threaten to “tar and feather” Foye at the rally.

Local leaders said they are not officially planning a strike, but several of them shouted to the crowd that they will “shut it down” if the MTA does not meet their demands. They counted the crowd at roughly 5,000 members but said a late swell might have taken it up to 8,000 attendees.

“This is the biggest rally Local 100 has ever had in my time here,” TWU International president John Samuelsen told The News.

Samuelsen said the union’s members are at their wit’s end with the MTA. While the union is not legally allowed to go on strike, the workers could take things into their own hands if they don’t get a new contract soon, he noted. “I don’t think transit workers are going to wait months for their fair shake,” said Samuelsen. “I think this situation will organically spin out of control, and the workers will say they’re done.”

MTA spokesman Tim Minton said the agency does not negotiate in the press.
Elias Maysonet, a subway car cleaner Local 100’s vice chair of the Pitkin Yard in Brooklyn, said transit workers are being priced out of New York City. He thinks negotiations are moving too slowly.

“We’re in a billion-dollar city and all we want is a living wage,” said Maysonet. “We could stop the city if we wanted to, and maybe we will.”

[More New York] He’s outta here — Trump ditches Fifth Avenue for Mar-a-Lago »
Some workers at the rally had grave concerns over their workplace safety.

“You have people out there who are crazy and attack us and cuss us out,” said Amy Orgeta, who was began working as a subway station agent in April. “Some of these people know our schedules and constantly follow us, wait for us and attack us.”
The WNY Council On Occupational Safety And Health Celebrates Its 40th Anniversary - Honors Several Locals For Their Work In Fighting Toxic Exposures & Illnesses, Including Niagara-Orleans Labor Council President & USW District 4 Rep Jim Briggs

by WNYLaborToday.com Staff – October 31, 2019

(BUFFALO, NEW YORK) – The Western New York Council On Occupational Safety and Health (WNYCOSH) celebrated its 40th Anniversary Wednesday (October 30th) during an event held in Buffalo where it honored several locals for their tireless work in fighting toxic exposures and illnesses to Workers and residents alike - including Niagara-Orleans AFL-CIO Central Labor Council President and United Steelworkers (USW) District 4 Staff Representative Jim Briggs.

New York State Lt. Governor Kathy Hochul was among those notables in attendance during the reception that was held at the Tri-Main Building, where famed Photojournalist Earl Dotter (https://earldotter.com) was also honored. In addition, Dotter presided over the opening of his exhibit, entitled: Life’s Work, A 50 Year Photographic Chronicle of Working in the U.S.A.

Those singled out by WNYCOSH (https://wnycosh.org/) included: Briggs; Lee Smith, the first Executive Director and one of the founders of WNYCOSH; Lou Jean Fleron, Director of the Cornell University ILR Buffalo Co-Lab; Louise Simon Schoene, NYARNG 342nd FSB Co C-, 9/11 Family Support Coordinator; and Mary Lister from the Ain’t I A Woman Campaign.

"Jim Briggs has been a 'leader' in fighting for Workplace Safety and Health since 1979 when he was President of OCAW (Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union) at the Niagara Falls Goodyear Plant," WNYCOSH Executive Director Germain Harnden said. "Jim fought to protect the Workers exposed to ortho-toluene. And for the last forty years, he's never slowed down."

Briggs has been an outspoken and very public fighter for Worker safety across Western New York, standing up for the health of Workers employed in a variety of plants who work with and handle a variety of toxic chemicals and compounds on a daily basis.

“WNYCOSH has been a ‘great addition’ to Worker safety here in Western New York. ‘I don’t have the words.’ ‘It is a tremendous honor.’ ‘I accept in on behalf of so many people who helped me to protect Workers on the job,’” Briggs (Pictured Above/WNYCOSH Photo) told WNYLaborToday.com prior to the event.

As a Steward and then President of his Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW) Local in 1979, Briggs was instrumental in uncovering information on high bladder cancers impacting Workers employed at the Goodyear Plant in Niagara Falls. Working with his Union and Staff Attorneys, Briggs helped negotiate a settlement that guaranteed exposed Workers and Retirees would be monitored for the cancer four times a year.

MTA spokesman Tim Minton said the agency does not negotiate in the press.

“As Chairman Foye has said on multiple occasions, we are focused on bargaining in good faith with TWU Local 100 and reaching a mutually acceptable contract," Minton said. “The ‘amount’ of bladder cancer ‘was alarming and I was lucky enough to be surrounded by good people’ (who more than adequately addressed the problem),” he told WNYLaborToday.com. “And there was another bladder cancer situation at the local DuPont Plant with its Workers. (DuPont) ‘knew about the cancer and did not tell us.’ A lawsuit ‘wound up with a lot of good changes at the plant and ($3million) in back pay to the Workers.’”
“From Workers’ exposure to toxic chemicals to repetitive injuries, I’ve been involved in ‘far too many’ (health and safety) situations in plants that can be counted (over the years),” continued Briggs - who went on to the Paper, Allied-Industrial, Chemical and Energy Workers International Union (PACE), which was merged into the USW in January 1999.

Briggs also took the time to single out his wife of 40 years, Bonnie, who he credited for “really allowing me to do” the job that he performs. “It was (all done) ‘with the understanding of my wife and I really appreciate her support,’” he said.

WNYCOSH was founded in 1979 by a coalition of Organized Labor and Environmental and Public Health Activists, who joined forces to fight for safer workplaces and improved environmental conditions. WNYCOSH’s founding conference of more than 300 initially worked together to raise public awareness about toxic exposures and illnesses at the infamous Love Canal and at the Goodyear Plant in Niagara Falls.

Over the past 40 years, WNYCOSH - which has fought for significant Worker and Environmental Protective Legislation and trained hundreds of thousands of Workers, has continued to build its membership base and expanded it to many public health and legal professionals and individuals who are interested in occupational safety and health issues.

At the same time, WNYCOSH has empowered hundreds of thousands of Workers - including young Workers, Refugee and Immigrant Workers, Low-Wage Workers and Workers in high hazard industries through direct training to identify, evaluate and control hazards in the workplace.

And - WNYCOSH has helped build Local, State and National Coalitions, including the Coalition for Economic Justice (CEJ), the New York State Labor-Environment Network, the Western New York Fair Trade Coalition, Occupational Safety and Health (OSHA)-Environmental Network and the New York State Zero Lift Task Force to protect, as well as secure, important new Labor and Workplace Safety and Health Standards.

Meanwhile, Photojournalist Dotter’s career began in documenting the Farmington Mine Disaster in 1968. Since then, he has photographed work and workplace hazards around the world.

Dotter’s work was again brought to world-wide prominence with the release of the Mueller Report into Republican President Donald Trump, as a Russian Troll Farm had appropriated a well-known Dotter photo of black lung survivor in a pro-Trump poster.

Working with WNYCOSH, Dotter is continuing to document work and workplace illnesses while in Buffalo. He took the this week time to photograph former and local Bethlehem Steel Workers, 9/11 First Responders, Local Artists, Refugee Farmers, Workers at St. Joseph’s Suburban Buffalo Hospital and members of Communications Workers of America (CWA) 1168, among others.
In September, all 13 workers at Scottie’s Pizza at 2128 SE Division Street in Portland signed a petition announcing their decision to unionize with the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the storied union whose members are known as Wobblies.

On Sept. 22, half of them delivered the petition to owner Scottie Rivera … and found him happy to recognize the union. It wasn’t a big surprise: When Rivera opened the parlor in 2015, he won acclaim for paying employees at least $15 an hour.

The business also provides health benefits, free shift meals and beverages, and an annual stipend for safe work footwear. Walls in the restaurant’s tiny dining area are covered with political posters and framed photos of lefty luminaries.

“The general attitude among workers in the restaurant industry is that it’s impossible to have a union,” says Scottie’s employee David Adams. “But we think workers need to be represented and have a voice in decisions that are made in the restaurants where they’re living their lives.”

Rivera and the workers expect to negotiate a first collective bargaining agreement in the coming months. Adams says workers hope it will serve as an example to other pizza enterprises.

“We want to show that you don’t have to exploit and manipulate,” Adams said. “You can have a relationship with your workers that will make your business stronger.”