

# Unions & Civic Engagement: How the Assault on Labor Endangers Civil Society

Andy Stern

*Abstract: American trade unions are a crucial segment of civil society that enriches our democracy. Union members are stewards of the public good, empowering the individual through collective action and solidarity. While union density has declined, the U.S. labor movement remains a substantial political and economic force. But the relentless attacks by the political right and its corporate allies could lead to an erosion of civic engagement, further economic inequality, and a political imbalance of power that can undermine society. The extreme assault on unions waged by Republicans in Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan, and at a national level must be countered by a revitalized labor movement and by those who understand that unions are positive civil actors who bring together individuals who alone have little power. Unions need both structural reform and greater boldness; there are moments in which direct action and dramatic militancy can bring about positive social change. The current assault on labor can be rebuffed, and unions can expand their role as stewards for the public good and as defenders of efforts by the 99 percent to reduce inequality and protect democracy.*

The school board members didn't see it coming. The parents at the school's town hall meeting seemed to accept that enough had been done about the safety of kids on and near school grounds. Time to move on.

But then Lucia, an immigrant from Mexico with an eighth-grade education, took the floor. A janitor in a West Los Angeles office building and the mother of two young sons, she soon captured the crowd with her outspoken complaints about why administrators were not doing more to ensure a safe place for learning.

Other parents admired Lucia, who not only had the courage to confront school officials, but also had the ability to sum up parental concerns in a clear way that ultimately brought necessary and overdue safety improvements to a school plagued by gang violence.

"I was a very timid person, honestly, a very timid person," Lucia recalled of the period soon after she

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had arrived in the United States in the early 1990s. “If I had to speak in public, I would turn red and would not know what to say.” Then she became involved with the Justice for Janitors campaign of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1877 in Southern California.<sup>1</sup>

Over time, participation in the union helped Lucia acquire the knowledge and confidence that later enabled her to speak out at her sons’ school and in other public settings. “When we were trying to deal with overcrowding at the school, I brought a lot of people to the meetings – my sisters, the neighbors, other parents,” Lucia said. Applying the training she had received in the union local, she used her new civic skills to rally collective action that often got results.

The sociologist Veronica Terriquez has studied the SEIU janitors’ local and examined levels of civic engagement among union members, including Lucia, with schoolchildren. “The findings suggest that union members – independently and without prompting from the union – draw upon their acquired skills to effect change in their lives,” Terriquez writes. “People learn to run meetings, communicate problems effectively, and use existing processes and protocols. This empowers people to help themselves and their children.”<sup>2</sup>

The study found that mobilizing union protests and participating in union-led campaigns helped the Latino immigrants transcend barriers, including limited English language skills and low formal education levels. In essence, the janitors’ involvement with their union led to greater civic engagement.

During my time as president of SEIU, I saw firsthand many examples of worker empowerment through labor-initiated programs like those in Los Angeles that helped Lucia. In New York City, for example, SEIU Local 32BJ joined with other

unions and community groups to form the New York Civic Participation Project, which seeks to galvanize workers around jobs and civic issues in their neighborhoods, such as Queens, Bushwick, Washington Heights, and the South Bronx. In Miami, United for Dignity, an independent nonprofit started by 1199/SEIU United Healthcare Workers East, offers leadership classes to low-wage immigrant workers. And in Boston, worker centers originally created by SEIU Local 615 provide English-language training, teach computer and leadership skills, and build ties to other community-based organizations. Many unions engage in similar efforts, both with immigrant workers and the broader union membership.

American trade unions are a crucial segment of civil society that enriches our democracy. Unions often give a voice at work and in the community to those who individually lack power, particularly those on the bottom rungs of our economy: immigrants, low-wage workers, people of color, and other economically disadvantaged groups.

Every day across our country, union workers like Lucia not only perform their jobs and contribute to America’s economic growth and prosperity. They also volunteer at homeless shelters, coach in youth sports programs, teach Sunday School, walk long miles in fundraising events for breast cancer awareness, register others to vote, and so on. These union members are stewards of the public good. Their daily acts of citizenship, like those of many other Americans, often do not come cloaked in the union label. While these acts flow from the innate desire people have to build a better world, those among the millions of union families benefit from both an organizational framework and a philosophical

core. Unions empower the individual, but they do so through collective action and solidarity.

The janitors in Los Angeles fought hard struggles with antiunion employers, but workers stuck together and won decent wages and benefits, as well as a voice at work.<sup>3</sup> Their union-won economic gains enable them to buy the products and services made and provided by other workers and to pay taxes to support needed public services, such as schools, roads, clean water, firefighting, and police forces. Much harder to quantify on a balance sheet are all those daily acts by unionists that contribute to the common good, whether they occur at school board meetings, church cafeterias, or environmental cleanups in the neighborhood. Those are moments of civic good that help bond our society and make it better.

Unions empower workers in a variety of sectors that are increasingly marginalized by the problems of our current economic and political system:

- Labor, for example, speaks for manufacturing workers who continue to lose jobs to technology and outsourcing of work to other countries where labor is far cheaper.
- Labor gives a voice to teachers and school support workers, who are under harsh attack from many directions even as their unions push for greater resources for schools and improved teacher performance.
- Organized labor helps health care workers stand up against unwise changes in Medicare and Medicaid funding that will hurt the most vulnerable in our society, such as disabled individuals who need home care assistance to live decent lives.
- Unions enable public workers who provide services necessary to the function-

ing of society to counter the assault waged against them, most recently by Republican governors and legislators in states such as Wisconsin, Ohio, and Michigan. *Andy Stern*

Emboldened by gains in the 2010 elections, conservative leaders in those states and elsewhere pushed quickly to abolish or severely restrict collective bargaining by unions representing public employees, teachers, and others. The Republicans hoped to weaken labor, but in fact sparked a resurgence of union and progressive activism. Within months, the backlash resulted in some GOP legislators being recalled and a successful statewide vote in Ohio overturning the law curbing union bargaining rights.

The union mobilization in Ohio, Wisconsin, and Michigan underscores that trade unions are civic actors that engage far beyond collective bargaining. By bringing together individuals who alone have little power, unions join workers into a force that regularly contributes to positive outcomes in the workplace and broader arenas, including elections and legislation.

Much of the important social legislation that has built a better society came about because of the strong political support of labor. Unions backed civil rights legislation, Social Security, Medicare, environmental laws, wage and hour laws, the ban on child labor, and much more. In recent years, unions such as SEIU have given strong support to the struggle for marriage equality and for LGBT rights. Labor's collective bargaining gains over many years have helped bring important progress for all Americans. The bumper sticker "Unions – The Folks Who Brought You The Weekend" highlights, for example, labor's role in achieving the forty-hour work week at a time when most Americans were forced to work longer hours.

Few such gains seem possible in today's harsh antiunion climate. Those at the very top of our society in terms of wealth, income, and power have captured virtually all of our society's economic gains in recent years. Suffering is worsening for those at the bottom, and the broader middle class is rapidly eroding. Unions are one of the few forces that can help counterbalance this increased power of corporations and the wealthy.

The Occupy movement, which began in a park in New York City as a protest against Wall Street's abuses and the corrosive power of multinational corporations over our democratic process, went on to define the inequality issue powerfully and simply as the 99 percent versus the 1 percent. Unions are a crucial and incontestable component of that 99 percent, seeking greater economic and political fairness.

Today, the tremendous resources devoted to harsh attacks on unions by GOP political candidates and officeholders, conservative pundits such as Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh, and their corporate and right-wing allies might lead one to think that labor has gained massive power over America's businesses and politics. But a clear look at the current state of unions provides a different and more complex picture. In reality, unions have significantly less agenda-setting power than the GOP would have voters believe; yet they still function as a significant counterweight to other, less-democratic power centers of American life.

The union membership rate in 2010 was 11.9 percent, down from 12.3 percent the previous year<sup>4</sup> and down from about 36 percent in 1945. The percent of wage and salary workers who were members of unions in the private sector in 2010 dropped to 6.9 percent. By contrast, some

36.2 percent of public-sector workers belonged to unions—one factor in the recent round of campaigns against public employees. Over the last half-century, union levels in the private and public sectors have swapped places. Unionization rates in the public sector at the end of World War II were below 10 percent, while the private sector was at 36 percent.

While union density has declined, the actual numbers make clear that the American labor movement remains a substantial force. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that unions represented 16.3 million wage and salary workers in 2010. Of those, 14.7 million were themselves union members, and 1.6 million had jobs covered by—and benefiting from—union contracts. When family members are included, unions represent a sizable and important bloc of people despite lower union membership rates. (Declines in membership cannot simply be taken to mean that fewer Americans want unions to represent them. Other factors, such as the decline of unionized manufacturing through off-shoring and displacement of jobs owing to new technologies, have contributed to fall off in union membership. The economic collapse that began in 2008 has also been a factor.)

Unions are still a powerful force in key states as well. New York, for example, is home to 2 million union members (24 percent) and California to 2.4 million (17.5 percent). Not unexpectedly, the eight states with union membership rates below 5 percent in 2010 were all in the South, with the lowest being North Carolina (3.2 percent).<sup>5</sup>

It pays to belong to a union that can bargain collectively for its members. Despite declining membership rates, workers who belong to unions had median weekly earnings far above their nonunion counterparts. In 2010, union

members took in \$917 per week, compared to only \$717 per week for nonunion workers.<sup>6</sup>

One of labor's contributions to the broader good over the years has been that many Americans not in unions have seen their wages and benefits improve as a result of union gains at the bargaining table. In their efforts to keep unions out, employers have had to raise pay, at times provide health care/pensions, and even treat workers with more dignity on the job. Even opponents of labor tend to concede that a rising union tide lifts many nonunion boats, particularly in tight labor markets. That may be one reason why historically pacesetting unions, such as the United Auto Workers (UAW), have been vilified in recent years. Employers and union opponents understand that forcing concessions in flagship collective bargaining sectors can help slow, and even reverse, worker gains throughout the economy, union and nonunion.

One might hope that more Americans would examine the strong contracts negotiated by the UAW, Teamsters, police/firefighters, SEIU, and other unions and say: "Look at the good wages and benefits they have; what do we need to do to get our employers to start paying the same?" Too often, however, the argument is made that union workers have it too good and they should be brought down. That is the path to the low-road economy we are on, rather than the high-road economy that we need – and that other nations, such as Germany, have achieved.

The United States needs a prosperous middle class if it is to be economically strong. Henry Ford understood this nearly a century ago when he increased Ford workers' pay dramatically because he wanted them to be able to afford to buy the cars they were building. Some of the downward economic pressure on work-

ers today comes because of the declining union membership rates that erode labor's ability to win a fair share of the economic pie. Increasingly, larger and larger pieces of that pie go to shareholders, executives, Wall Street bankers, and others at the top. *Andy Stern*

The Occupy movement, and the alliances that unions formed with it in 2011, represented popular dissatisfaction with the status quo – a status quo that has arisen as unions have been vilified and have lost leverage to fight for a fair share of economic gains not only for their members, but for the American middle class in general. It is stunning, in fact, that weekly earnings for rank-and-file employees today have not increased in real terms for decades. Some segments of the current workforce now earn less in real terms than they did thirty years ago.

Government data released in October 2011 revealed that median pay for all American workers fell in 2010 to \$26,364, down 1.2 percent from the previous year. Median pay was at the lowest level, after adjusting for inflation, since 1999. Certainly, factors such as increased globalization, expanded use of technology, new entrants into the workforce, and the economic collapse that began in 2008 all contributed. But another major factor is the decline in the bargaining power of unions.

Research on income numbers by David Madland and Nick Bunker at the Center for American Progress has found that if unionization rates increased by 10 percentage points – to roughly the level they were at in 1980 – the typical middle-class household, unionized or not, would earn \$1,479 more. "One thing is clear," the study's authors argue, "stronger unions make a stronger middle class." They continue:



A stronger middle class is the foundation for a vibrant American economy. [Unions] ensure that workers are considered in corporate decision-making and provide job training that helps workers advance in careers. In the political arena, unions get workers involved to boost voting rates, and are champions of economic programs that create a strong middle class. They pushed for and have defended Social Security, Medicare, family leave, the minimum wage, and more recent policies, such as health care reform.<sup>7</sup>

Other research by sociologists Bruce Western and Jake Rosenfeld has found that the decline of unions accounts for one-third of the rise in inequality in the United States over the last thirty years.<sup>8</sup> Inequality is the enemy of a strong democracy that has the vital civic engagement of its citizens. The share of pretax income taken by the richest 1 percent of Americans more than doubled between 1974 and 2007, rising to 23 percent from 9 percent according to the U.S. Census Bureau. And the ultra-rich, the top 0.1 percent of Americans, took an astounding 12.3 percent of America's total pretax income – four times what they took in the mid-1970s.

Some pundits argue that workers are just caught up in a world economy where inequality is inevitable. But a study by Thomas Harjes, an economist for the International Monetary Fund, reported that from the late 1970s to the early 2000s, inequality in Europe “rose modestly or even declined” while it skyrocketed in the United States. Those European countries where unions were strong faced the same globalization and technology challenges, yet did not develop the wide inequality gap seen in the United States. France, for example, saw a decline in inequality over the last twenty years, according to Harjes.<sup>9</sup>

Germany, as noted above, has a strong labor movement and has not developed

an inequality gap, nor do we see the broad corporate and right-wing attack on unions that characterizes our current American dilemma. German employers generally work cooperatively with their unions. Both custom and statute require that unions and works councils have key decision-making powers.

Instead of the U.S. model of weakening unions, Germany's model of a strong labor movement has helped yield higher wages than those in America, huge trade surpluses, six weeks of annual vacation time, and other benefits by law. As opposed to the anti-labor warfare that we have seen in Wisconsin, Ohio, and Michigan, German employers, labor, and government normally all pull together. Not everything is rosy, and there are exceptions in Germany; but results there show alternative approaches that could strengthen labor-management outcomes here.

The assault on organized labor in the United States comes at a time when Americans of all demographics and persuasions need to act collaboratively to develop creative new ideas to move our economy into the twenty-first century, and to put our country back on a path of sustainable growth. The German example is illustrative of the economic power, and social prosperity, that arises from a healthy working relationship between organized labor, companies, and government.

I sometimes hear people (some of them liberals) argue that unions were needed earlier in our country's history when abuses such as child labor and unrelenting work hours were real problems. Now, they assert, unions have outlived their usefulness in the modern economy. When one reads of janitors at the nonunion company Wal-Mart being locked inside stores for their entire shifts, coal miners killed in disasters like the nonunion

Massey tragedy in West Virginia, and the Latina women at Chef Solutions in Connecticut being forced to trade sex with managers to keep their jobs, it is difficult to ignore how weak this argument really is. Unions need to adapt their practices for a new era, but there is no discounting their necessity in protecting the rights of workers.

The constant anti-labor drumbeat from corporate powers, the right wing, and much of the media, led by Fox News, has an impact on our society and its workers. But there are many indicators that a substantial number of workers would choose to be represented by a union if they could. In 2007, a poll by Peter D. Hart Research Associates found that among nonunion workers, a majority (53 percent) said they would vote to have a union tomorrow, given a free choice.<sup>10</sup> Were that to occur, more than sixty million workers would be added to the union rolls. As the veteran labor expert Philip Dine writes, "If even one-quarter of those 60 million workers actually formed unions, the size of the labor movement would double overnight."<sup>11</sup>

The harshness of today's economy has added to support for labor. In 1984, only 30 percent of nonunion workers polled said they would vote to join a union if they could. That support rose to 39 percent in 1993, 42 percent in 2001, and then 53 percent in 2007. The desire to have union representation thus grew over a period when employers' economic and political power expanded and that of labor weakened. It is no coincidence that the concentration of wealth at the upper echelon of society and the downturn of a prosperous economy occurred at a time when workers' voices were often suppressed by employers and antiunion politicians.

What explains the gap between those majorities now expressing support for joining unions and the failure of that to

occur in most workplaces? The clearest reasons involve the harsh antiunion campaigns waged by companies and their hired consultants, as well as the overall weakness of our labor laws and their enforcement, as Dine has pointed out. In a 2007 study, the Center for Economic Policy Research found that one in five active union supporters is fired illegally as a result of union organizing activities.<sup>12</sup> Another study, by labor expert Kate Bronfenbrenner, reported that 80 percent of employers who face a union organizing campaign force workers to go through one-on-one, captive-audience meetings in which they pressure workers with threats, such as the closing of the plant/workplace or transfer of work elsewhere.<sup>13</sup> Only about 1 percent of companies make good on threats to close, but 51 percent of them threatened such closures (even though it is illegal to do so). Bronfenbrenner also found that more than half of the employers with immigrant workers threaten to call immigration officials during union drives.

Human Rights Watch, which conducts highly respected objective examinations of abuses occurring around the world, focused more than a decade ago on American workers' freedom to form unions and engage in collective bargaining. "Our findings are disturbing, to say the least," said the study's authors. "Loophole-ridden laws, paralyzing delays, and feeble enforcement have led to a culture of impunity in many areas of U.S. labor law and practice. Legal obstacles tilt the playing field so steeply against workers' freedom of association that the United States is in violation of international human rights standards for workers."<sup>14</sup> A similar study today would find the situation even worse.

The modest reforms in the Employee Free Choice Act proposed after the 2008 election would have helped restore some balance and would have given workers a

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fair chance to join unions. But that did not occur, largely due to the filibuster process in the Senate.

Labor issues are not the only ones derailed by the filibuster and other forms of political obstructionism. The threat of filibusters has effectively required a supermajority of sixty votes in the Senate to pass legislation. This severely weakens democracy and undermines civic engagement by discouraging the sense among workers and the broader public that positive change can occur if people work hard to win popular support for it. As we look to the future, it is hard to see meaningful labor law reform absent a change in the filibuster rules, even if a majority of the Senate and House as well as the president and the public all support it (as they did early in President Obama's tenure).

The inability to win a supermajority to pass labor law reforms and the renewed attacks on labor following the 2010 elections, particularly on public employees and teachers, bode ill for the future, despite President Obama's reelection and Democrats' success in 2012 Senate races. A key issue then is how labor can expand civic engagement of its members if it must devote almost all its energy to survival amidst this onslaught.

I strongly believe that the relentless attacks that weaken American unions will likely lead to an erosion of civic engagement in the United States, further economic inequality, and a political imbalance of power that can undermine society. Those who support a democracy with the thriving civil engagement of its citizens need to lend their voices in support of organized labor and necessary measures to strengthen unions, rather than allow the erosion that is occurring today. The extreme and unacceptable assault on unions waged by Governors Scott Walker (Wisconsin), John Kasich (Ohio), Rick Snyder (Michigan), and others truly

stands out. Their actions in 2011 not only denied workers the right to collective bargaining, but violated both international norms described below and also, inextricably, delivered a harsh blow to the principles of civic engagement that uphold and strengthen a robust democracy.

Although much of the attack on unions following the 2010 elections has been at the state level, it can be seen also at the national level: in the Republican-controlled House of Representatives and on the campaign trail for the 2012 GOP presidential nomination. Mitt Romney, the 2012 Republican presidential candidate (and one perhaps less extreme than others he defeated for the nomination), repeatedly blasted unions during his campaign appearances. He lavished praise on Wisconsin Governor Walker for winning passage of the bill to outlaw public-sector bargaining, and he ended up supporting Ohio Governor Kasich's sweeping antiunion agenda that then was rejected overwhelmingly by Ohio voters in November 2011.

Romney in mid-October 2011 reversed his earlier opposition to right-to-work laws and came out in strong support of national right-to-work legislation that would bar even union security agreements requiring nonmembers to pay for representational services. In his television ads, Romney began to feature his support for right to work. He also devoted great energy to attacking the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), particularly on the now-resolved complaint filed by NLRB Acting General Counsel against Boeing's decision to relocate work to South Carolina from Washington State in order to retaliate against unionized workers engaging in activities protected under labor law.<sup>15</sup> Romney went so far as to appoint Boeing's lead counsel in the NLRB case as his labor advisor for the presidential campaign.<sup>16</sup>



Not to be outdone, Republicans in the House passed legislation on November 30, 2011, to negate an NLRB rule that sought to give workers a timely vote on whether or not to be represented by a union, rather than the current procedure that allows long delays by employers opposed to unions. Although the Senate is unlikely to pass such legislation, the GOP-led House persists in its war on labor.

Why? Harold Meyerson, a columnist for *The Washington Post*, analyzed Republican motives this way:

When it comes to elections, unions are still the most potent mobilizers of the Democratic vote – getting minorities to the polls and persuading members of the white working class to vote Democratic. Indeed, Republican gains among working-class whites (whom they carried by an unprecedented 63 percent to 33 percent in 2010) are, above all, the result of the deunionization of that class. An analysis of exit polling over the past 30 years shows that unionized white working-class men vote Democratic at a rate 20 percent higher than their non-union counterparts. For political reasons, Republicans are determined to deunionize workers even more.<sup>17</sup>

For unions to be a catalyst that encourages and reinforces positive levels of civic engagement by their members, unions have to exist in the first place. The countries that scholars regularly judge to have the most vital civil societies often are those in which unions thrive and are accepted, usually as one of the three “social partners” along with business and government.

I would challenge labor opponents, such as those in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Ohio and in the Republican-controlled House, to name a true democracy that does not have a labor movement participating in the debates on major public

questions. For example, the Nordic countries, where democracy and civic engagement thrive, have very strong unions, very low levels of inequality, and good economic growth. Canada, our neighbor and trading partner to the north, has strong unions (including SEIU) and a union density of above 30 percent – more than twice that of the United States. Germany, as noted, has powerful trade unions and tough laws that give workers a strong voice in corporate decision-making. Yet business thrives in these countries, and everyone benefits from unions and management working together for common goals.

Both the hostility of the corporate and political right toward unions and labor’s powerful role as a steward of the common good have roots in American history. Unions actually predate our country’s founding, as some nonagrarian workers pushed for a greater say than that of the old master-servant relationship.<sup>18</sup> Despite current reverence for the founding fathers, it is important to remember that civic engagement and political democracy had clear limits in America’s opening century and even beyond. Voting in most states was restricted primarily to white property-owning males. Women, Native Americans and people of color (both slave and free), and most wage earners had their civic participation severely restricted by law, as John Kretzschmar, director of the Brennan Institute for Labor Studies, has pointed out.<sup>19</sup>

Judges here relied on British law in the absence of statutes on unions and bargaining; as a result, America’s early unions were viewed as illegal criminal conspiracies. Employers could form groups to advance their interests, but employees who did so by joining unions engaged in illegal behavior. Over time, wage earners who were not property holders agitated

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and often got voting rights; workers also began fighting for expanded rights on economic matters.

Unions remained illegal conspiracies in many jurisdictions until the 1930s. As unemployment rose to 25 percent by 1932, a series of laws were passed that helped unions. The National Industrial Recovery Act adopted in 1933 sought greater fairness for workers through provisions that stated: "Employees shall have the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing, and shall be free from the interference, restraint, or coercion of employers." Although a conservative U.S. Supreme Court quickly deemed the pro-labor legislation unconstitutional, the Wagner Act passed by Congress in 1935 led to expanded union organizing in the years that followed.

By the end of World War II in 1945, union membership rose to more than 14.3 million from about 8.7 million in 1940. Predictably, as labor's numbers and power expanded, political enemies mobilized. A conservative Congress targeted unions in 1947 with the Taft-Hartley Act, passed over President Truman's veto; significantly, he called it the "slave labor act." It severely limited labor's right to strike, outlawed secondary boycotts, and banned closed shops that required an employer to hire only union labor. Opponents of the legislation pointed out that it had been drafted not by Congress, but by corporate lawyers working for the Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the setback of Taft-Hartley in the United States, there remained a broad and global consensus that labor was an important component of democracy. The Nazi party viewed unions as a threat, and in 1933 Hitler seized funds of German unions, arrested labor leaders, sent them to concentration camps, and replaced

collective bargaining. After World War II, a consensus emerged that unions were crucial to democratic societies as war-torn nations sought to rebuild. Japan had abolished unions, but General MacArthur and the Allies restored them in 1946.

Most significant from the standpoint of civil engagement was the discussion and adoption, with U.S. support, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. The declaration is widely viewed as a central pillar of international human rights law. It spells out a range of rights to which every individual is entitled, including the rights to life, liberty, equality of treatment before the law, freedom of movement, right to own property, freedom of thought and religion, freedom of expression, and many others. Article 23 specifically provides: "Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests." It also details other accepted rights, such as equal pay for equal work and decent working conditions.

The global concurrence about the right to form and join unions was further solidified by what are commonly referred to as Core Labor Standards, a set of four internationally recognized basic rights and principles that countries have agreed to follow. They are: freedom of association and the right to bargain collectively; the elimination of forced labor; abolition of child labor; and the elimination of discrimination in employment.

The discussion of unions and civil society expanded significantly as workers in Eastern Europe struggled for democracy. In my late 20s, I watched Lech Walesa, the Polish trade union leader, rally shipyard workers in Gdańsk in a series of strikes that led to martial law and a vicious crackdown by the Communist government. Walesa and the *Solidarnosc* union movement went on to topple the repressive regime in Poland.

President Reagan and many on the political right embraced the *Solidarnosc* union very publicly and repeatedly. But here at home, almost simultaneously, Reagan succeeded in busting the air traffic controllers' union in 1981, setting off a war on labor that has yet to moderate. (The bizarre affection the right has for unions abroad but not at home could be seen yet again in late 2011 during the campaign for the Republican presidential nomination. Former GOP Senator Rick Santorum issued a strong call in Iowa for federal government support for labor unions – unions, that is, in Iran. Santorum wanted the United States to “have several avenues of getting money into Iran to help striking labor unions.”<sup>21</sup> But on labor issues on his home turf, Santorum wants to abolish unions that represent federal, state, and local workers; he regularly attacks the NLRB; and he opposes most everything American unions support.)

The civic role played by unions threatened those in power not only in Eastern Europe, but also elsewhere in the world. The ruling elites in El Salvador in the 1980s were complicit in the killing of trade unionists; tens of thousands died at the hands of military-backed death squads. Under apartheid rule in South Africa, independent black trade unions developed negotiating and organizing skills, despite suffering torture and death. Labor was key to the broad mobilization in the period from 1986 to 1994 that brought an end to apartheid; it was then mineworkers' leader Cyril Ramaphosa who negotiated the transition to democracy, and many union leaders entered top levels of post-apartheid government.

Lula da Silva, the thirty-fifth president of Brazil, is another example of the important leadership roles unionists have played in building civil society globally. He left school after fourth grade and went

on to work as a metalworker in the São Paulo auto industry. Lula led strikes during the late 1970s and was jailed by the military junta. The skills he honed in the union movement enabled him to go on to become president of his country. *Andy Stern*

The crucial role that unions have played in Brazil, South Africa, and other countries – from South Korea to Germany – contrasts with the United States, where the voices of corporations and their political allies in the 1 percent have dominated public debate in recent years. This has occurred for a confluence of reasons, but it is important for labor to take a hard look at itself and accelerate the process of change if workers are to play a significant role in shifting the status quo toward progressive outcomes.

Just as unions in other countries have evolved to address tough challenges, so, too, must American unions adapt and change.<sup>22</sup> Labor's 2011 victory in Ohio, overturning the harsh restrictions on collective bargaining rights by a 62-38 percent margin, showed a strong reservoir of public backing for union rights and underscored labor's ability to reach beyond its own ranks to build broad coalition support. A similar show of public support for unions could be seen in California when voters rejected Proposition 32, which was backed by the anti-union Koch brothers (Charles and David). That proposal would have decimated labor's ability to participate in the political process.

Nevertheless, many middle-class Americans have mixed views on unions, and some feel strongly negative. Much of the hostility toward labor is driven by the relentless antiunion drumbeat of the right wing as well as corporate America. But some is a by-product of labor's own shortcomings and the instances in which unions have acted in ways that cut

against their role as stewards for society. Let me focus briefly on a few of the issues that have fed negativity toward labor.

First, while unions have a lower rate of corruption than that found in either business or government, there still is a need for strong efforts by unions to root out wrongdoing within their own ranks. As a young activist in my SEIU local union in Pennsylvania, I saw the corrupt president of the United Mine Workers, Tony Boyle, tried and convicted in federal court near Philadelphia for the murder of his election opponent, Joseph “Jock” Yablonski, and Yablonski’s wife and daughter. Six years later, James R. Hoffa, who had led the Teamsters union from 1957 to 1967, went missing near Detroit never to be found – presumably murdered by organized crime elements opposed to his regaining power within the union. Such high-profile crimes, while infrequent, have severely harmed labor’s image over the years.

Unions, as institutions with millions of members, are not immune to wrongdoing. During my tenure at SEIU, I had to trustee a large local in Los Angeles and permanently ban from membership a member of our International Executive Board after evidence emerged that he had misused member funds. In response, we established a Commission on Ethics and Standards and named outside authorities to it, such as James Zazzali, former Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court, as well as rank-and-file members and local union leaders. We sought to strengthen an ethical culture in which emerging leaders understand that they are the stewards of their members’ resources; this cannot be done in one training session, but rather must be built into leadership development at all levels. Tough internal controls also are needed so that unions protect the workers’ money and, more broadly, so that labor’s

role as a positive civic force is seen by the public.

I think, too, of the case of Barbara Bullock, the former president of the Washington, D.C., Teachers’ Union, who served five years in prison for a scheme involving the embezzlement of nearly \$5 million of union funds to pay for a lavish lifestyle of fur coats, jewelry, trips, and parties. Her actions unfairly tarred D.C. teachers who every day gave their all in tough classroom environments starved of the resources needed to provide quality education for mainly poor kids.

The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the D.C. teachers’ union leaders took appropriate action in that sad situation, but whatever damage done by Bullock’s malfeasance was minor compared to that inflicted by a much broader and far more sophisticated attack on teachers’ unions in the years that followed. A sustained campaign has been waged for some time based on the central (but false) premise that teachers’ unions are a root cause of America’s education problems.

Many who urge education reform are people of good faith; but some, such as the antiunion Walton family, who owns Wal-Mart, and Michelle Rhee, former D.C. school chancellor, are not. Improving education in America involves developing and supporting our teachers, not constantly attacking them. A study released in 2011 found that teacher morale in the United States was at a twenty-year low. Attacks by those like the Waltons and Michelle Rhee serve only to prevent a climate in which teachers, school administrators, parents, and others can work together to build a more effective student-centered educational system and mobilize to win adequate funding for public education.

It will come as no surprise that I sympathize with the AFT and the National Edu-



cation Association in this debate. But I do think the attacks on teachers' unions have helped fuel a false narrative of American labor as a special interest that selfishly protects its own at the expense of the broader society. That narrative has a special resonance with the public when it involves America's children, who in fact do deserve far better from our education system. It is easy for teachers' union opponents to attack the "rubber rooms" in New York City, where tenured teachers accused of incompetence or wrongdoing received full pay to sit in sparse rooms and do nothing (until this practice was ended in 2010). It is far harder to shift the focus to innovative labor-management partnerships, such as those in Cincinnati, Oklahoma City, and Pittsburgh, where students are benefiting from teachers and school administrators working together to transform schools servicing primarily low-income communities.

*The Washington Post*, to its credit, last year highlighted the success of the Montgomery County (MD) Education Association, which has worked cooperatively with the school system there to win a role in personnel decisions, teacher training, and budget decisions. The teachers' union helped create a peer review system that seeks to assist struggling teachers, but also facilitates firing in cases where it is clearly justified. Contrary to the argument of "reformers" such as Michelle Rhee who say that it is nearly impossible to fire a unionized teacher, more than five hundred have been dismissed or resigned in the last decade in Montgomery County with the union contract in place. At the same time, the union has helped convince school authorities that many of the "reforms" advocated by the Walton family, Rhee, and others will not help students in the end. By emphasizing student achievement as their primary goal, the union has won a broad role in shaping Montgomery

County's educational program. School employees voluntarily gave up scheduled raises in the last three years to help cope with the budget crisis in the aftermath of the economic downturn, yet the union has protected important health and pension benefits highly valued by its members.<sup>23</sup>

Another step in the right direction occurred in November 2012, when the teachers' union in Newark, New Jersey, ratified a historic agreement that rewards teachers with higher pay and bonuses based on performance. Newark teachers will have a seat at the table evaluating one another, and the contract empowers a majority of teachers in any school with authority to decide issues such as how to adapt school schedules or how to use training and preparation time as they deem in the best interests of their students.<sup>24</sup>

Public employees face a challenge similar to teachers. Again, much of the attack on public workers is driven by forces strongly hostile to unions. But labor's cause is hurt when citizens read of firefighters in St. Louis who receive large disability pensions for being totally and permanently incapacitated, yet who go on to work at new jobs involving physical labor while collecting those pensions. We all honor our firefighters for going into harm's way to save lives, but support for them and their union can erode if the public believes it is paying for a costly entitlement that is unfairly administered. In California, an outcry occurred in 2010 when an administrator for the Forestry Department retired with a check for \$294,440 for unused time off—one of nearly four hundred employees who left state jobs with checks equal to or exceeding their previous year's salary. Most people understand that there needs to be some "banking" of time off when public workers, such as prison guards or public safety officers, are denied vacation or holidays due to emergencies or special

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circumstances. But the backlash to the huge payouts in California clearly hurt public unions and played into the political narrative orchestrated by those whose primary goal is to weaken labor.

Public employee unions needed over the years to break out from the narrow constraints of traditional collective bargaining and negotiate instead not only for wages and benefits, but also for the delivery of high-quality public services. Management usually resisted such efforts, but public worker unions are gaining citizen support by partnering with government to improve public services. Citizens often are frustrated by inefficiencies and bureaucracy and need to see public workers siding with them in the effort to have services delivered better and at fair cost.

Yet another problem unions must confront is the need for greater racial, ethnic, and gender diversity in the labor movement. Looking back in history, African Americans had to fight to join unions, and many American Federation of Labor (AFL) unions in their early years barred blacks from membership, particularly in the crafts. My own union, SEIU, by contrast brought together white and black janitors in Chicago in the early 1900s and, indeed, had an elected vice president and three executive board members who were African Americans. By the 1930s, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), made up of industrial unions, aggressively recruited black members and became an important force for desegregation and antidiscrimination before many other segments of American society.

In the 1960s, African Americans made up about 25 percent of U.S. union members, but some unions, such as those in the construction trades, continued to bar black apprentices and otherwise limit African American membership. But at the same time, unions such as the UAW

and SEIU embraced the civil rights movement, fought racism in the workplace, and joined in the push for antidiscrimination legislation. Unions helped organize the Montgomery bus boycott, joined the Selma to Montgomery march in force, and worked with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who was assassinated while in Memphis to support striking union members.

Given their mixed record through the years, unions today need to face the challenge of becoming more diverse throughout their leadership, from local unions to the very top positions. I used to say frequently that union leaders are too often “male, pale, and stale.” In SEIU, more than a million new members joined between 1996 and 2010, and a majority of them were women and workers of color. A concerted effort was made to reflect that in our leadership, and by 2005 we had an executive board that was 40 percent women and 33 percent people of color. But there is so much more that needs to be done in this area.

Unfortunately, many other unions do not do as well at reflecting the diversity of their memberships. If labor is to prosper in the decades ahead, all unions must do a far better job of developing multicultural leadership that is more inclusive of women and people of color. We need more people like Mother Jones and A. Philip Randolph. I am proud that SEIU is today led by a woman, Mary Kay Henry, a veteran labor organizer who also is a leader in America’s LGBT community, and Eliseo Medina, a respected figure in the Latino community who has helped lead the national immigration reform effort.

As part of the broad effort for gender and racial equity, labor needs to embrace the movement for immigrant rights more vigorously than it has so far. America needs comprehensive immigration reform that provides a meaningful legal path to citizenship for undocumented workers.

In the past, unfortunately, some unions saw immigrants from Mexico and Central America as threats to their jobs and mistakenly supported bad immigration policies. Today labor is united in pushing for immigrant rights and works closely with grassroots coalitions of religious and community groups both for changes in federal law and also in opposition to racist and reactionary laws recently enacted in states such as Arizona and Alabama. Unions need to be out front on the immigration issue both because it is the right thing to do and because they will benefit as our country's demographics grow more diverse in coming years.

As labor faces strong attacks from antiunion corporations and the political right, there are a number of other changes that must occur if it is to win and expand public support. I pressed to modernize and streamline union structures during my tenure as SEIU president. I based my suggestions for reform on changes that had been made within SEIU over a number of years. Those changes enabled my union to more than double, to 2.1 million members, during my time in office. After a long period of internal discussion within the AFL-CIO in the early to mid-2000s, needed reforms did not seem likely. SEIU and a group of other unions withdrew and formed Change to Win.

Unfortunately, real reform did not develop out of those events, and changes are still needed to strengthen unions. The labor movement needs to:

- Embrace the mission of seeking justice for *all* workers, including, but not limited to, current union members;
- Confront labor's own underlying structural impediments and those of its affiliates;

- Refocus on membership growth through reinvigorated organizing of nonunion workers;
- Modernize strategic approaches to employers in the new, competitive global environment;
- Improve labor's messaging to the broader public, using all the tools of modern technology and communication;
- Widen efforts to build coalitions with citizens' groups, civil rights advocates, church activists, environmentalists, the LGBT community, and others who share a progressive outlook; and
- Expand and improve labor's political effectiveness by further involving workers and their families in the civic process.<sup>25</sup>

In future, unions need to streamline. Many members are divided into national unions that do not have the size, strength, resources, and focus to win for workers against today's ever-larger employers. As the attack on public workers escalated, we had thirteen unions with significant numbers of public employees. Transportation workers were divided into fifteen different unions, health care workers into more than thirty, and manufacturing workers into nine. We need consolidation so that labor can bring size, power, and focus to the table. There are too many small unions that lack what is needed to deliver for their members. When I pushed for change, only fifteen of the sixty-five AFL-CIO national unions had more than two hundred fifty thousand members, and forty had fewer than one hundred thousand. Many of these unions, even with good leadership, do not have the strength to unite more workers in their industry in order to improve workers' lives and civic engagement.

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I have proposed, as have others, that we seek to unite the strength of workers who do the same type of work (or are in the same industry, sector, or craft) to take on their employers. And we need to ensure that workers are in national unions with the strength, resources, focus, and strategy to help nonunion workers join together to improve pay, benefits, and working conditions. This also means that unions will have to adopt new strategies of incorporating nonunion workers into their structures, and that they must constantly look to protect the rights of all workers while simultaneously fighting for the rights of their own members.

Because the economy today is global, unions must speed the building of a global labor movement. Transnational corporations move country to country, without national loyalties, to find and exploit the cheapest labor. Today's global corporations have no permanent home, recognize no national borders, salute no flag but their own corporate logo, and move their money to anywhere they can make the most and pay the least.

Global firms have won trade agreements that make it easier to move production, while providing no rights to help workers improve pay, working conditions, and job security. The result of globalization is that workers in any one country cannot set and maintain high labor standards without uniting to raise standards everywhere. If American manufacturing is to recover, unions need to work to level the global playing field so that corporations are made to decide where to locate their production operations based on where the best labor force is, rather than the cheapest.

I also believe that unions need to learn from the success of the Occupy movement, which helped shift the public debate dramatically a year ago. There are moments in which direct action and dra-

matic militancy can change things. Labor needs a greater boldness, like that evidenced by unemployed workers, students and young people, those who suffered home foreclosures, and others in the diverse Occupy movement.

At the onset, the media and many politicians – conservative and liberal – scoffed at Occupy for not serving up a ten-point program or outlining detailed legislative solutions to the problems it protested. But as time passed, the Occupy movement forced a broad and ongoing national discussion about the central issue of income inequality in America. Unions did the right thing by supporting Occupy while refraining from actions that would have infringed on its independence.

In the face of harsh police repression, Occupy receded from public focus in 2012, but Occupy still serves to remind labor of the importance of direct action and confrontation, which can yield more results than speeches by union leaders at the National Press Club. This is particularly so in an era when strikes by unions happen infrequently given the huge balance of power currently possessed by employers.

Workers going forward need to develop even more effective political action efforts; this is crucial to labor's role as a steward of the common good. With the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United* to allow unlimited political spending by corporations, the challenge to unions today is severe. While unions also are free to spend politically, everyone knows that corporations can far outspend labor and other progressive forces.

With the intensity of the 2012 campaign now behind us, one cannot help but remember the movement of hope that occurred at the beginning of the Obama administration four years ago. It



came about in part because union members did what the civic textbooks urge: they participated in the electoral process.

SEIU implemented a program a few years ago called “Walk a Day in My Shoes” that put politicians to the test. Candidates had to earn the union’s endorsement in part by spending time at home and on the job with workers. So in August 2007, then-Senator Barack Obama arrived before dawn at the home of Pauline Beck, an SEIU home care worker in Oakland, California.<sup>26</sup> Together that day, Beck and Obama helped John Thornton, an 86-year-old former cement mason with a broken hip and a prosthetic leg, get out of bed, bathe, dress, eat breakfast, and prepare for the day. Obama mopped floors, did some sweeping, and ran loads of laundry. As SEIU member Beck began to outline more tasks for the future president, patient Thornton laughed and said, “She’s working the hell out of him.”

Other candidates, such as Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton, also got a taste of life as an SEIU member. Biden walked a day in the shoes of school custodian Marshall Clemons, and Clinton went through a shift with a registered nurse. John McCain and the other GOP candidates all declined to participate.

SEIU members also challenged presidential candidates in 2008 to release a detailed health care reform plan. And the union pressed them on immigration reform, jobs, and workplace fairness issues, among others. SEIU initially let state councils go their own way, but after Obama’s win in Iowa, there was strong rank-and-file pressure to endorse the Illinois senator, which the union did in February. SEIU members in their purple T-shirts and jackets went out knocking on doors, passing out campaign literature, calling voters from union phone banks, and using every modern campaign tool available.

Underscoring its civic engagement role, the union had done extensive training of members in their locals. Those skills had been honed in political races from local school boards to state legislature campaigns, House and Senate contests, and, of course, the presidency. More than three thousand SEIU members and staff worked full-time in the 2008 Obama campaign, pounding the pavement and talking with voters in nineteen target states. More than one hundred thousand SEIU janitors, nurses, home care and child care providers, and others volunteered to work after their shifts and on weekends.

Data were not yet available for the 2012 elections at the time of this writing, but a nationwide survey of SEIU members commissioned by the union after the 2008 election found that 77 percent voted for Obama and 21 percent for McCain. Of the nineteen states that SEIU targeted, Obama carried seventeen. SEIU members helped win eight of the eleven targeted Senate races and twenty-two of twenty-nine targeted House races. SEIU workers knocked on 3,571,955 doors seeking support; made 16,539,038 political phone calls during that election cycle; sent out 5,125,378 pieces of campaign mail; registered more than 227,000 new voters in battleground states and California; and helped 10,992 voters to cast early ballots or vote absentee.

Catalist, a data services firm, issued an analysis of the 2008 election using its detailed database of all voting-age individuals in the United States. The firm provided data services to a majority of the progressive political community that year, including SEIU, so it had the ability to compile an increasingly accurate picture of the American electorate and the forces influencing it. Catalist independently was able to break out data on the efforts of SEIU members, finding that

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they turned out at higher rates than nonunion workers.

Catalist also reported that 88 percent of SEIU activities were done person-to-person through live phone calls (64 percent) or in-person interactions (24 percent). That was about 50 percent more than the average of all progressive organizations in 2008. SEIU alone did more overall voter contact in Virginia (20 percent), New Mexico (13 percent), and Colorado (8.5 percent) than any force, including the campaigns themselves and the party committees.

In Indiana, after subtracting the work of the Obama campaign, data showed that more than 40 percent of all voter contact was done by SEIU. Catalist reported that SEIU members knocked on 118,765 doors in Indiana; made 186,145 phone calls to voters; and registered 14,003 Hoosier voters. That huge outpouring of individuals engaged in electoral participation had a big impact: Obama won the state by a margin of 25,000 votes.

Other unions also performed at high levels in 2008. And if we look more broadly at the rate of voter participation as one metric for civic engagement, it is clear that unions are an important element of increased turnout. Political scientist Benjamin Radcliff and Patricia Davis, of the U.S. Department of State, studied nineteen industrial democracies around the world and all fifty U.S. states. They found that aggregate rates of turnout are affected strongly by the strength of the labor movement: "The results indicate that the greater the share of workers represented by unions, the greater is the turnout."<sup>27</sup>

De Tocqueville feared domination of society by the state and saw the Americans he studied in the 1830s to be joiners of private associations that counterbalanced the state. He also argued that eco-

nomic greed fosters political apathy. Unions historically have helped counter that apathy, but Tocqueville's fear of greed can be seen in the growth of inequality, as discussed above.

Legal scholar Lawrence Lessig and Glenn Greenwald, a writer now at *The Guardian*, have argued effectively that policy outcomes today often are indifferent to the will of the people and to democratic debate.<sup>28</sup> The power of money in politics has enabled elites to shape outcomes that are at odds with most voters. In a discussion of Lessig's book *Republic, Lost: How Money Corrupts Congress – and a Plan to Stop It*, he and Greenwald agreed that the Occupy protests in late 2011 expanded rapidly and developed resonance because people now understand that voting no longer fixes systemic problems in our "money for influence" culture. Greenwald says that "the only recourse for citizens becomes either passive acceptance of their powerlessness (i.e., apathy and withdrawal) or disruption and unrest fomented outside the electoral system." More people today, including union members, fear that both political parties are too subservient to corporations, which seem to own the political process, and that citizens, as Lessig argues, have largely lost the ability to affect what government does.

When we look at the period following the 2008 economic collapse, one might have expected very tough legislation and regulations on banks and Wall Street aimed at preventing a future reoccurrence. Instead, even the very modest Dodd-Frank reforms – far short of the retooling of the financial sector that is needed – continue to be resisted and watered down by members of Congress whose campaigns are funded by the very institutions opposing regulation.

We have thus entered an era that is very threatening to civic engagement and

democratic society. People who vote for “change they can believe in” understandably become disillusioned by not seeing that promise become reality.

America is a country divided. The process has broken down. The danger is we no longer seem capable of transcending our divisions to accomplish anything. Our checks and balances allow a minority – usually a small minority – to block the will of the majority on issue after issue. Debt ceiling approval and disaster aid end up being levers for political hostage-taking by Republicans in this new era.

The *Citizens United* decision by an extremist and activist conservative Supreme Court will only worsen the huge and corrosive impact of money – mainly corporate and right-wing money – that now further floods our public debate. The current voter suppression agenda gives further cause for concern, as Republicans and their corporate/right allies push to deny voting rights through new restrictions (allegedly intended to prevent fraud that most observers agree is minimal).

Unions are the only segment of civil society with the resources and grassroots

numbers to provide some counterbalance on both the political and economic fronts; that is why labor has been targeted by state politicians in Wisconsin, Ohio, and Michigan, and by GOP presidential and congressional candidates nationally. Those who believe in strong civic engagement as a foundation for a vigorous democracy need to speak out against the wave of anti-labor legislation and action around the country. And they need to support new steps to strengthen workers’ abilities to exercise their endangered right to join unions and participate fully in our system as a counterbalance to the growing inequality, both political and economic.

There are millions of workers out there like Lucia, the immigrant janitor in Los Angeles fighting for a better life for her children with the skills she gained through the union – the same union that also helped her to win decent wages and a better life for her family. Lucia’s future, as well as America’s, will be bright indeed if the current assault on labor can be rebuffed and unions can expand their role as stewards for the public good – and as defenders of efforts by the 99 percent to reduce inequality and protect democracy.

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#### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> SEIU Local 1877 is part of SEIU United Service Workers West, which represents more than forty thousand janitors, security officers, airport service workers, and other property service workers in California.
- <sup>2</sup> Veronica Terriquez, “Schools for Democracy: Labor Union Participation and Latino Immigrant Parents’ School-Based Civic Engagement,” *American Sociological Review* 76 (4) (August 2011). The quotes from Lucia in the preceding paragraphs are taken from Terriquez’s article.
- <sup>3</sup> Don Stillman, *Stronger Together: The Story of SEIU* (White River Junction, Vt.: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2010).
- <sup>4</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Union Membership (Annual),” press release, January 21, 2011.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

- 7 David Madland and Nick Bunker, "As Unions Weaken So Does the Middle Class: New Census Data Shows the Importance of Unions to the Middle Class," Center for American Progress Action Fund, September 23, 2011, [http://www.americanprogressaction.org/issues/2011/09/madland\\_unions.html](http://www.americanprogressaction.org/issues/2011/09/madland_unions.html).
- 8 Bruce Western and Jake Rosenfeld, "Unions, Norms, and the Rise in U.S. Wage Inequality," *American Sociological Review* 76 (4) (August 2011).
- 9 The study is cited in Thomas Geoghegan, *Were You Born on the Wrong Continent? How the European Model Can Help You Get a Life* (New York: New Press, 2010), 187.
- 10 Philip M. Dine, *State of the Unions: How Labor Can Strengthen the Middle Class, Improve Our Economy, and Regain Political Influence* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008). Dine, whose work I draw on here, was the highly respected labor reporter at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* for many years and now works for the National Association of Letter Carriers.
- 11 *Ibid.*, 140–141.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 138.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 137.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 139–140.
- 15 See John Logan, of San Francisco State University, writing in *The Hill*, <http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/presidential-campaign/185651-romney-puts-anti-union-politics-front-and-center>.
- 16 The NLRB-Boeing issue may have helped Romney in South Carolina, a state not in play in 2012. Romney's broader attack on labor did not help him in key swing states, such as Ohio and Michigan.
- 17 Harold Meyerson, "The GOP's War on Labor Unions," *The Washington Post*, December 1, 2011.
- 18 John Kretzschmar, "A Little History of Unions and Civic Engagement," William Brennan Institute for Labor Studies, University of Nebraska at Omaha.
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 Philip Dray, *There is Power in a Union: The Epic Story of Labor in America* (New York: Doubleday, 2010), 497. Dray's history of the American labor movement is a good source for those interested in how unions evolved.
- 21 Evan McMorris-Santoro, "Santorum: Labor Unions Are Force For Good . . . If You're Iranian," Talking Points Memo, November 19, 2011.
- 22 A discussion of the union reforms that I and others proposed to the AFL-CIO during the last decade can be found in Stillman, *Stronger Together*.
- 23 Michael Alison Chandler, "Redefining Unionism: Montgomery Teachers' Path Values Partnership, not Confrontation," *The Washington Post*, March 10, 2012.
- 24 Andy Stern and Eli Broad, "Teachers Deserve This 'Thank You,'" *The Huffington Post*, November 15, 2012.
- 25 For more detail, see *Stronger Together*, from which these recommendations, as well as the following discussion of streamlining, are drawn.
- 26 See Stillman, *Stronger Together*, chap. 27, from which this discussion of SEIU's role in the 2008 election is drawn, along with internal SEIU reports.
- 27 Benjamin Radcliff and Patricia Davis, "Labor Organization and Electoral Participation in Industrial Democracies," *American Journal of Political Science* 44 (1) (January 2000): 132–141.
- 28 See Glenn Greenwald's discussion with Lawrence Lessig on the blog FireDogLake's Book Salon, <http://fdlbooksalon.com/2011/10/08/fdl-book-salon-welcomes-lawrence-lessig-republic-lost-a-declaration-for-independence/>.