

Organizing for the Common Good

Pre-Attendance Assignments



Materials used in this training are from:

NEA Center for Organizing
Marshall Ganz
The New Organizing Institute
Labor Notes
Other cited sources

Challenge the Status Quo via Common Good Strategies

The theory of “organizing for the common good” seeks to challenge the status quo. As articulated by Joseph McCartin of Georgetown University’s Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, organizing for the common good has three main tenets:

- 1) transcending the organizing frameworks written in law and rejecting them as tools for the corporate elite to remain in power;
- 2) crafting demands between local community groups and unions at the same time and in close coordination with each other from the very beginning; and
- 3) embracing collective direct action as key to the success of organizing campaigns.

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Why pre-attendance reading?

In the short time we are together, we will explore several examples of Common Good Strategies and support the tougher work of applying these examples in your own contexts. Learning like this depends on participants' willingness to see how new ideas developed in one context and scale can work- with "adjusted implementation" - in your own specific context. It also means that we will depend not just on the trainers for content delivery or expertise. We will structure the learning so that each person's own expertise can add to the learning. This reading package is designed to get you thinking about ways that unions of various sizes and needs have implemented Common Good organizing strategies. We believe that this set of pre-reading will help you transition away from the day to day responsibilities of UniServ Director work and move into the role of adult learner.

What are you asking me to do? (Not more than 3 Hours)

In this package you will find several articles that we will use in our training. Based on past-participant feedback, we are providing them in advance so that you can be prepared for our conversations. The articles share how Common Good strategies were designed and used to benefit of the union and its allies. We have selected these because we think that they outline important issues and themes we will be exploring that intersect with your work. We ask that you complete this PRIOR to attending the Organizing for the Common Good event. (2.5 Hours or less)

As you read each article, the following set of framing questions should help you make connections. A graphic organizer for any notes or questions you want to address is on page 3 of this package.

- What are the ways this example intersects with my daily work as a UniServ Director?
- As a UniServ Director, what would be my role in supporting the development of this example?
- What would I need to know to implement this example?

What should I come prepared to do?

The purpose of this focused academy is more than providing content. It is also a place for you to bring a problem of practice that implementing Common Good strategies could address. In UniServ work, we don't always get an opportunity to work and learn together. A portion of this academy will be devoted to providing a space for you to do that so that you return ready to apply your new learning.

	What are the ways this example intersects with my daily work as a UniServ Director?	As a UniServ Director, what would be my role in supporting the development of this example?	What would I need to know to implement this example?
The New Flavor of Teacher Strike...			
Bargaining for the Common Good...			
Why Labor and the Movement for Racial Justice...			
Why Unions Must Fight for Housing...			
Why Unions Must Bargain over Climate...			
Corporate Giants...			

Additional thoughts?

The New Flavor of Teacher Strike: More Than Just Pay Raises

By **Madeline Will**

January 25, 2019

After six long, sometimes raucous days of striking, Los Angeles teachers **ended their protest** claiming victories that included lower class sizes, more support staff, and commitments from the district to invest in socially minded initiatives.

In other words, the contract negotiations went far beyond the bread-and-butter issues typical in labor disputes, and instead were centered on a more philosophical discussion of how the United Teachers Los Angeles views the future of public education in the city. That's a model of bargaining that some say is likely to be replicated in Chicago this year, as well as in Oakland, Calif., where teachers are gearing up for their own strike.

This shift in collective bargaining—known as bargaining for the common good—comes **after a U.S. Supreme Court ruling last year** that many have predicted will weaken unions' coffers and membership rolls. Like in Los Angeles, teachers' unions might start bringing broader social concerns to the bargaining table in an attempt to maintain community support.

"In L.A. and in other cities, teachers are trying to transform the nature of collective bargaining," said Joseph McCartin, the executive director of the Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor at Georgetown University, which studies and advocates for workers' rights. "Historically, it's just been about wages and benefits and maybe marginally about some of the conditions. [Now], they're making the conditions central."

Los Angeles teachers were striking for a 6.5 percent pay raise, with back pay to July 2016, smaller class sizes, more counselors, nurses, and librarians in schools, and a commitment from the district to rethink the growth of charter schools.

They didn't get the pay raise—instead, the contract deal resulted in a 6 percent pay raise, with 3 percent retroactive for the 2017-18 school year. But teachers in the nation's second-largest district made progress on essentially every other demand.

Los Angeles Unified has agreed to hire 300 more nurses, 82 more teacher-librarians, and at least 17 more counselors to maintain a 500:1 student-to-counselor ratio in secondary schools. District officials have also removed a clause in the contract that allowed them to raise class sizes for financial reasons.

The union was also pushing for a cap on the **number of charter schools** in the city, which could not be negotiated as part of a labor contract. But the district did agree to allow union representatives more input in charter school co-location, which is when a charter school is on the same grounds or in the same building as a traditional public school. The union has said co-location takes away resources from the traditional schools. The Los Angeles Unified school board will also vote on a resolution asking the state to establish a charter school cap.

The district has agreed to create 30 community schools, which have wraparound social services for students. Additionally, the district and the union will form a committee that will develop a plan to reduce the number of assessments by 50 percent, and partner to look for ways to create more green spaces on school grounds. Finally, the district will eliminate random searches of students in 28 schools, and provide legal support and an informational hotline to students and families facing immigration-related concerns.

Many of these are nontraditional labor demands—but they were important to students and community members who supported striking teachers. UTLA President Alex Caputo-Pearl said in a news conference that when the bargaining process began two years ago, the union surveyed its members, students, and community members to draft a collective vision of the future of public education in Los Angeles.

“This is much more than just a narrow labor agreement,” he said. “It’s a very broad compact around things that get at social justice, educational justice, and racial justice.”

The union’s victory in Los Angeles, McCartin said, “is bound to have ripple effects.”

Indeed, in a press conference, Chicago Teachers Union President Jesse Sharkey said the contract deal in Los Angeles was “extremely important” to his union’s bargaining team, which started negotiating with the district just last week.

“It shows what we can do if there’s a will and with enough force and with a commitment to funding the schools,” he said.

The Chicago union’s four main demands echo those of teachers in Los Angeles. It’s asking for better pay and benefits, smaller class sizes, more support staff, and “improvements on social demands,” which Sharkey said include more sanctuary schools and investments in affordable housing. The current contract expires at the end of June.

In Oakland, 375 miles north of Los Angeles, teachers are preparing to vote next week on whether to authorize a strike. They’re fighting for a competitive livable wage, smaller class sizes, and more support staff. But Harley Litzelman, a high school history teacher and a school site representative to the Oakland Education Association, said teachers are also trying to address “the toxic political agenda of the district.”

Inspired by the fight in Los Angeles, teachers are fighting against the expansion of charter schools and the cash-strapped district’s proposal to close as many as 24 schools, he said.

“We are leading a political movement,” Litzelman said.

Bargaining for the Common Good

Teachers’ unions organizing for their students and the broader community, rather than just their own members’ working conditions, is called bargaining for the common good, or social unionism. The Los Angeles teacher strike isn’t the first occurrence—experts point to the **2012 Chicago teacher strike** as the seminal event—but it’s one of the biggest.

United Teachers Los Angeles had planned for a potential strike for a couple of years, working closely with the community in order to generate a groundswell of support, McCartin said.

“As one union has watched another, they’ve learned ways to bring the community in,” he said. “With L.A., this is a full-blown methodology now. I think you’ll start to see other teachers’ unions picking up on it.”

Even so, Randi Weingarten, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, said bargaining for broader social issues has been happening in pockets for years. Notably, teachers in St. Paul, Minn., have pushed for a reduction in standardized testing, smaller class sizes, and less severe disciplinary measures for students in their contract negotiations.

"This notion of bargaining for the common good is something AFT locals have been involved in for a long time, but because of the [Los Angeles] strike, it gets the attention it deserves," Weingarten said. "Teachers want what children need."

Just last month, Chicago charter school teachers **went on strike** for smaller class sizes and pay raises—but also for the 15-campus Acero charter network to provide sanctuary for undocumented students.

And of course, teachers in a half-dozen states walked out of their classrooms last year. A push for higher pay was a driving force behind many of those widescale protests, but teachers also framed their walkouts as a fight for their students.

Teachers across the state of Virginia will rally at the state Capitol on Jan. 28 for more school funding. Organizer Sarah Pedersen said in an email she expects between 2,000-3,000 teachers, at least.

Denver teachers are also **planning a potential walkout**, though with salaries at the forefront.

Becoming More Political

Jon Shelton, an associate professor of democracy and justice studies at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay who writes about the history of teacher strikes, said many big-city teachers' unions have inner caucuses that are progressive and take stances on racial and social justice. In places like Los Angeles and Chicago, those progressive members are in leadership positions, he said.

"I think for unions who have these caucuses and teachers who are becoming more politically conscious, this is becoming a more effective model of organizing," Shelton said. "It's proven to really galvanize a discussion about the present and the future of public education."

There's another factor that could influence the spread of social unionism: Last year, the **U.S. Supreme Court ruled** that public-sector unions **could not collect "agency" or "fair-share" fees** from workers who declined to become members but were still represented in collective bargaining. The unions had argued that the fees only cover collective bargaining, and not political activities, but the justices ruled 5-4 that the arrangement still violated the free speech rights of nonmembers.

"Once the court took that position, then the natural response of unions is, 'OK, if everything we do is political, we'll get political,'" said McCartin, pointing to UTLA's demand for an immigration defense lawyer, among other things. "We can now take off the straitjacket that we used to live under, where we could only ask for our wages, and we're going to use the bargaining process to ask for much more."

This tactic could also be another way to retain and recruit members, McCartin said. Because teachers can now stop

paying dues to the union and still be represented in collective bargaining, observers expect teachers' unions to lose members. The National Education Association has projected **about a 10 percent membership decline** over two years.

But people like being part of an organization that fights not only for them, but for their community, McCartin said. In Los Angeles, he said, teachers can now say the union "doesn't just fight for me, it makes L.A. better."

WEB ONLY



Bargaining for the Common Good: Teachers' unions craft demands for whole community

March 20, 2019 | 2:21 PM CDT | BY JOSEPH A. MCCARTIN



Students are welcomed with high-fives and hugs by teachers upon their return to Evelyn Thurman Gratts Elementary School in downtown Los Angeles, Wednesday, Jan. 23, after the teachers strike. | Richard Vogel / AP

The week-long strike by the [United Teachers of Los Angeles \(UTLA\)](#) in January 2019 marked the most significant struggle yet in a movement by teachers and other public-sector workers called [Bargaining for the Common Good](#). By striking over a long list of community-generated demands and with the support of a dense network of allies, L.A. teachers moved bargaining away from the union-versus-taxpayer framework into which public employers routinely push

such conflicts. Instead, UTLA made itself the spearhead of an effort to reshape L.A.'s priorities around a common good agenda.

Drawing on several years of experimentation by public-sector unions around the country, and coming hard on the heels of the #RedforEd teachers uprisings of 2018, the L.A. strike illuminated a significant shift in union strategies, one that holds profound implications for the future of organized labor and the relationship of unions to working-class communities.

Judged by the “pure-and-simple” union standards of a generation ago, the UTLA strike might have been deemed a failure because it did not add a penny to the six-percent raise the L.A. school board had offered teachers prior to the walkout. But the strike was anything but a failure. The union fought over issues that went far beyond salaries, issues at the heart of public education and its centrality to the aspirations of working-class Angelenos.

The teachers won commitments from the school district to reduce class sizes by four students by 2021, increase investment in the schools, hire school nurses and full-time librarians, reduce standardized testing and random searches of students, and launch a dedicated hotline for immigrant families who need legal assistance.

Many of these demands were crafted with allies like the [Association of Californians for Community Empowerment \(ACCE\)](#), and they explicitly challenged the austerity agenda of L.A. school superintendent [Austin Beutner](#), a wealthy philanthropist and former investment banker who was installed by the L.A. school board in 2018 despite having no prior experience in education.

The UTLA strike was the most recent iteration in a string of post-Great-Recession public-sector union battles that have consciously attempted to rethink the *participants*, *processes*, and *purposes* of collective bargaining. If mid-twentieth-century collective bargaining was binary, involving only employers and unions, more recent efforts have sought to give community stakeholders a voice at the bargaining table. If traditional bargaining was done behind closed

doors and focused on issues like salary, these fights have been waged in public around broader demands. And if traditional bargaining concluded with signed contracts and the demobilization of the union's membership, these efforts have made bargaining one step in an ongoing strategy of worker and community empowerment.

This approach can be traced back to the depths of the Great Recession when President Barack Obama's agenda became mired in the politics of austerity and Tea Party activism was installing anti-union Republican governors like Wisconsin's Scott Walker and tightening the grip of austerity on all levels of government. In that toxic environment, some public-sector unions began to realize they could no longer do business as usual.

That realization helped elect Karen Lewis and her Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators slate to the leadership of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) in 2010. Lewis and her colleagues immediately challenged the austerity agenda that had been forced upon Chicago schools by aligning the union's fight with the interests of community allies. Calling for smaller class sizes, improved facilities, and a host of other demands that went beyond wages and other narrowly defined work issues, the CTU staged a precedent-setting strike in 2012, vilifying Rahm Emanuel as "Mayor One Percent."

The CTU's success was soon replicated by the St. Paul Federation of Teachers (SPFT) in 2013. It patiently built an alliance with parents and community groups, with whom it drew up twenty-nine bargaining demands, including one insisting that the school district cease doing business with banks that foreclose on their students' families. After rallying broad community support, the St. Paul teachers won most of what they sought. "I had negotiated almost a dozen previous contracts for the SPFT," explained Mary Cathryn Ricker, the union's leader. "But, for the first time, I felt that signing a contract was just one step in building a larger movement."

A new strategy of alliance-based bargaining emerged from these campaigns. By May 2014, when many of its practitioners convened to compare notes at Georgetown University, the strategy had a name: **Bargaining for the Common Good**. Soon it spread beyond teachers' unions. In

2014, a coalition of unions and community allies launched Fix LA, an effort to break the grip of austerity politics on the city's municipal services. That coalition exposed the fact that Los Angeles spent more taxpayer money paying fees to the Wall Street firms that marketed municipal bonds than it spent maintaining the city's streets. Fix LA demanded that the city use its \$106 billion worth of assets, payments, and debt issuance as leverage to “demand better deals with Wall Street,” which would allow taxpayer money to be invested in the community and not transferred to wealthy bankers.

While these campaigns were carefully planned, their groundwork laid months if not years in advance, the teacher uprising of 2018 showed that common good bargaining was also adaptable on the fly—even in states where collective bargaining isn't allowed. In a shutdown that closed all 55 of West Virginia's school districts in January 2018, teachers first denounced tax policies that allowed the state's richest citizens to evade paying their fair share and then refused to return to work until other state employees won the same wage increase they were offered. Soon thereafter, Oklahoma teachers protested the state's failure to fairly tax wealthy oil and gas interests, and Arizona teachers demanded that the state enact no further tax cuts until its per-pupil spending on education reached the national average.

In some ways, Bargaining for the Common Good harkens back to the origins of teacher unionism and figures like Margaret Haley, leader of the Chicago Teachers Federation at the dawn of the twentieth century. She crusaded against corporate tax dodgers who collected public subsidies at the same time Chicago was, as Haley put it, “closing the schools, cutting the teachers' salaries, increasing the number of children in each room, and otherwise crippling the service for want of money!”

Yet if it borrows from labor's past, Bargaining for the Common Good also represents a creative adaptation to the needs of workers and communities under twenty-first-century capitalism. Financialization, privatization, increasing inequality, and, most recently, judicial attacks on unions' ability to collect fees from the workers they represent, which culminated in

the Supreme Court's 2018 *Janus v. AFSCME* decision, have undermined traditional bargaining. Bargaining for the Common Good responds to these changes by recasting unions as defenders not only of their members but the community's very well being. "In bargaining for the common good, we see great possibilities for a style of campaign that puts forward a vision for the city as well as for the schools," UTLA president Alex Caputo-Pearl [explains](#).

By reframing collective bargaining as a community endeavor advancing broad demands that transcend the narrow wage-hour-and-working-condition economism the predominated in the twentieth century, the Bargaining for the Common Good movement is helping us imagine a revived twenty-first-century labor movement.

As teacher unionism continues to boil in recent days—from [Oakland](#), California, to [Jefferson County](#), Kentucky—a common good agenda that unites public workers with the communities they serve is taking clearer shape, and inhibitions against striking that long held workers in check are dissipating. More workers [struck](#) in 2018 than in any year since 1983.

Many worried that the *Janus* decision would be the final blow to the labor movement, but a new community-centered organizing model suggests otherwise. Not only are unions weathering *Janus*, they are beginning to find their voice—a voice that has too long remained silent. Not a moment too soon.

This article originally appeared at the [Working-Class Perspectives](#) site, hosted by Georgetown University's [Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor](#).

TAGS: collective bargaining Labor unions

CONTRIBUTOR



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Working » September 2, 2016

Why Labor and the Movement for Racial Justice Should Work Together

BY [Maurice Weeks and Marilyn Sneiderman](#)

The Movement for Black Lives (M4BL) has made tremendous strides in exposing and challenging racial injustice, and has won real policy victories. The policies, while often imperfect, are a testament to the strength of the organizing and activism of the moment. Not coincidentally, this uprising comes at a time when income and wealth inequality are at peak levels and the economy for most black people looks markedly different than the economy for their white counterparts.

Just as we are in a critical moment in the movement for racial justice, we are in a critical moment for the right to unionize. Unions, which have been a major force for economic justice for people of color in the past 50 years, have been decimated to historically low levels.

Labor should work alongside the Movement for Black Lives, a coalition with more than 50 organizations, to usher in a radically new economic and social order. The path won't be easy. But recent history has shown that one of the ways to get at this new reality is through union bargaining. Consider the example of Fix L.A.

Fix L.A. is a community-labor partnership that fought to fund city services and jobs alike, using city workers' bargaining as a flashpoint to bring common good demands to the table. The coalition started after government leaders in Los Angeles drastically cut back on public services and infrastructure maintenance during the Great Recession. The city slashed nearly 5,000 jobs, a large portion of which had been held by black and Latino workers. Not only did these cuts create infrastructure problems—like overgrown and dangerous trees and flooding—but they also cost thousands of black and Latino families their livelihoods.

Fix L.A. asked why the city was spending more on bank fees than on street services, and demanded that it renegotiate those fees and invest the savings in underserved communities.

What was the result of this groundbreaking campaign?

The creation of 5,000 jobs, with a commitment to increase access to those jobs for black and Latino workers, the defeat of proposed concessions for city workers and a commitment from the city to review why it was prioritizing payment of bank fees over funding for critical services in the first place!

Bargaining for the common good

Fix L.A. may seem novel, but the context is no different from many places. We have seen massive disinvestment from public services in a way that disproportionately affects black people. This structurally-racist disinvestment is often driven by the corporate interests that bankroll elected officials' campaigns and by Wall Street actors that use their influence over

public finance to push an austerity agenda. Everywhere you look, public officials are making the choice between paying fees and providing critical services.

Chicago Public Schools paid \$502 million to banks in toxic swap fees at the same time that it was slashing special education programs and laying off teachers to close a budget deficit. Detroit raised its water rates and paid \$537 million in Wall Street penalties, setting the stage for mass water shutoffs when tens of thousands of poor residents of the overwhelmingly black city could not afford the higher water bills.

Wall Street and other corporations don't hesitate to profit off of and perpetuate disinvestment in communities of color, and too often we forget to look up the food chain to see that at the other end of community crises there are rich bankers and billionaires lining their pockets. Campaigns, like Fix L.A., that involve direct actions targeting banks, hedge funds, corporations and billionaires are effective.

This sort of organizing can be hard. In order to isolate workers from their broader communities, the other side has done a terrific job of narrowly defining the scope of bargaining as wages and benefits. In many states, labor laws prohibit public sector workers from bargaining over issues that concern the welfare of the broader community or the quality of the services they provide.

The theory of "bargaining for the common good" seeks to challenge this status quo. As articulated by Joseph McCartin of Georgetown University's Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, bargaining for the common good has three main tenets: 1) transcending the bargaining frameworks written in law and rejecting them as tools for the corporate elite to remain in power; 2) crafting demands between local community groups and unions at the same time and in close coordination with each other from the very beginning; and 3) embracing collective direct action as key to the success of organizing campaigns.

These may seem like simple ideas, but they stand in complete opposition to the way the power elite expects union bargaining to be done. Therein lies their power.

Therein also lies the opportunity for unions to partner with the Movement for Black Lives. For all of their complicated racial histories, unions are some of the largest organizations of black people in the country. About 2.2 million black Americans are union members—some 14 percent of the employed black workforce.

That's a huge number of black people who are already members of organizations with the capacity to organize and mobilize. And these black workers, like all black people in America, face real challenges of structural economic racism in almost all aspects of their lives. Their communities have been underfunded; their schools are being dismantled; they face massive poverty and are under economic assault; and they regularly encounter police violence.

Stronger together

Widening the scope of bargaining in Los Angeles led to real wins for the city's black and Latino communities. The rest of the labor movement should take note. Imagine the power that could be added to the Movement for Black Lives if unions, recognizing the trauma that systematic racism wreaks on their membership, brought solutions that have been elevated by the Movement for Black Lives to the bargaining table in negotiations with employers ranging from the City of Baltimore to private equity giant Blackstone.

But unions cannot do this unilaterally and expect unconditional support from the black community.

Unions must make the effort on the front end to build a real relationship with Movement for Black Lives groups and members, and partner with them in developing common good bargaining demands that start to go on the offense against Wall Street and the structurally-

racist economic power structure. There are groups of people organizing for racial justice under the banner of the Movement for Black Lives near every union local in the country. The onus is on labor leaders and rank-and-file union members to reach out to those groups and start to build a strong relationship where one does not exist. This process will not be easy, especially because of the history of racism that plagues unions, especially police unions. But the truth remains that there is a real opportunity to leverage the power of both movements to win real gains for black people and other people of color through a strong partnership.

It is exciting to imagine potential bargaining demands major unions could undertake alongside racial justice organizations. For example, they could demand that their employers make a commitment to job training programs to strengthen the pipeline for black workers; city and state workers could demand progressive taxation measures that raise funds from corporate actors to fund schools and services in black communities; teachers could demand school districts enact restorative justice policies to stem the school-to-prison pipeline; hospital workers could bargain for targeted health care access programs in communities of color; retail workers could demand that their employers “ban the box” and let the formerly incarcerated work. The list is almost infinite.

Bargaining for racial justice is a radical idea and will not be easily won. It will require concerted direct action targeting the real decision makers in both the public and private sectors that have a vested interest in keeping racial inequities in place. The Movement for Black Lives has proven that it can execute effective and creative direct actions backed by solid demands. They are also innovating creative tactics that move beyond traditional marches and picket lines to new types of disruptive actions that make power holders directly confront those they are harming. By combining the vision and militant tactics of the Movement for Black Lives with the membership and resources of the labor movement, we can usher in a more just and equitable society.

ABOUT THIS AUTHOR

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<https://prospect.org/labor/unions-must-bargain-affordable-housing-and/>

Why Unions Must Bargain for Affordable Housing—and How

With housing costs gobbling up wage increases for union members and almost everyone else, labor must prioritize housing affordability.

BY STEPHEN LERNER & CHRISTINA LIVINGSTON FEBRUARY 19, 2019

For many millions of Americans, winning decent, safe, and affordable housing is an urgent necessity. Housing costs are putting the squeeze on working families in urban and suburban settings alike, especially in communities of color that have long been targeted by predatory housing schemes. Since the financial crisis, housing affordability has grown even worse for workers, as gentrification, rising rents, and the corporatization of rental properties—both multifamily and single-family homes—displace communities of color and increase homelessness.

It's time for the American union movement to put the issue of affordable housing at the center of its quest to better the lives of American workers. In much of the country, the wage gains that its members may win in their contracts lag far behind the increasing costs they confront when they rent or try to purchase a home. By expanding the scope of the issues they bargain for, by making common cause with the many community organizations demanding more affordable housing, unions can play a crucial role in creating more such housing for their members and the broader public, in the process establishing new connections with a working class badly in need of unions.

IN THE YEARS FOLLOWING the 2008 recession, developers and private-equity landlords such as Blackstone and Cerberus seized the opportunity to buy up recently foreclosed homes in key markets heavily populated by working-class and poor people of color. Residents in these communities have seen landlords raise rents to unreasonable levels, while systematically neglecting building maintenance to force out working-class tenants and gentrify their neighborhoods. These problems are markedly worse in communities hammered by hurricanes, rising oceans, wildfires, and other climate change-induced weather. After each climate-related disaster, profiteers have moved in, looking for ways to build luxury properties to replace the affordable housing destroyed by storms. Communities in Puerto Rico, Houston, North Carolina, Florida, the New Jersey Shore, and New York's Rockaways have all witnessed this pattern.

Despite the acute shortage of affordable housing, national and local real-estate lobbies still advocate trickle-down housing solutions that mirror the failed theory of trickle-down economics. Finance and real-estate companies, often in partnership with so-called “nonprofit housing champions,” have won bipartisan political support for the idea that we can “build our way out” by removing “red tape” and giving tax breaks and incentives for developers to create “market rate” housing (which most people can't afford) and luxury housing with minimal affordable housing requirements.

These forces have also used their wealth and political power to beat back progressive efforts like California's 2018 Proposition 10, a citizen-led initiative that would have allowed local governments to expand rent control to cover more tenants. Adding insult to injury, developers and private-equity firms have tapped the capital of public-employee pension funds and college endowments—using workers' retirement savings to oppose progressive legislation, buy up housing, and price workers out of the cities where they work.

Unions have an undeniable interest in confronting the housing crisis. Raises won through collective bargaining aren't keeping up with ballooning housing costs. All too often workers whose wages have stagnated are forced out of their communities and into sometimes hours-long commutes to work, leading to increased transportation costs, declines in mental and physical health, worsened traffic congestion, deteriorating roads, and greater air pollution. Nor can unions help their members borrow their way into better housing: Many are already saddled with crushing student debt that leaves them little disposable income to apply to a mortgage.

Yet while racial justice, housing, and community groups have been leading the fight for affordable housing in recent years, unions have been slow to join the struggle. We argue that labor should prioritize housing justice, partner with groups that are fighting for it, and build a broader housing movement that addresses inequality and racial injustice. Not only will reducing the cost of housing prevent landlords, lenders, and developers from pocketing the lion's share of collectively bargained raises from union members, but it will also weaken the political power of those groups—a necessity if unions hope to build meaningful power of their own.

IN RECENT YEARS, coalitions across the country have been using an innovative tool we can apply to the housing issue: Bargaining for the Common Good (BCG). Built around the idea that unions, in partnership with community allies, need to expand collective bargaining demands to include issues that go beyond wages and benefits to confront the structural forces that are driving inequality and worker disempowerment, BCG first emerged among public-sector unions in the aftermath of the financial crisis. BCG campaigns have seen unions bring community partners into the bargaining process to help define the goals of bargaining and raise demands that confront structural inequalities and target the powerful financial interests that are invested in perpetuating them.



Recent months have witnessed an upsurge in strikes that include common-good demands, from the teacher walkouts of 2018, to AFSCME Local 3299's work stoppage at the University of California, and most recently, the teachers strike in Los Angeles. These and other struggles have helped shape BCG demands on issues from creating community centers and green spaces in inner cities, to ending the school-to-prison pipeline, to hiring from disadvantaged communities and ending predatory banking relationships. The BCG approach is now expanding into the private sector as the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the

CWA-backed Committee for Better Banks organize around the idea that workers can play a central role in stopping banks from engaging in predatory lending practices.

Organizing and bargaining for common good on housing can build on and expand the work of developing broad labor-community alignments, and add a new dimension to the housing fight.

Why should community and tenant organizing groups and housing advocates include BCG campaigning in their housing justice fights?

- To win massive increases in affordable housing, they have to expand the base of housing advocates, and BCG campaigns bring in unions at a critical moment.

- BCG campaigns open up another arena in which to battle for affordable housing—the collective-bargaining table. Public-sector employers, universities, hospitals, and major corporations have not been confronted in contract negotiations or organizing campaigns with housing demands.
- The audacity of a well-run BCG fight, like the recent LA teachers strike, makes wins possible at a larger scale than we have been able to win through more-established housing campaign strategies.

Why should unions prioritize the housing issue? In addition to their obvious interest in preserving the value of the wage increases they win and ensuring their members can find affordable housing in the communities where they work, five reasons stand out:

- Fighting for affordable housing offers public-sector unions the opportunity to recruit and retain members in this post-*Janus* environment by addressing an issue vital to public workers' lives.
- The same entities with which unions negotiate collective-bargaining agreements play a role in making housing unaffordable. The private-equity giant Blackstone, for example, employs 500,000 workers and is also the nation's biggest landlord. Universities and hospitals where unions are either organized or organizing are often drivers of gentrification and destruction of affordable housing.
- Non-union corporations like Amazon and other "new economy" firms help drive rising rents and gentrification. By holding them accountable for their impact on housing, unions lay the groundwork for making them accountable for their labor policies as well.
- Public pensions are currently investing workers' capital in companies that are destroying affordable housing. Redirecting that capital toward affordable housing will end this self-defeating practice.
- Focusing on housing will allow unions to partner with and support the work of racial and housing justice groups, recasting bargaining as not just for those covered by the contract but the entire community—strengthening the unions' ability to win economic and other gains at the bargaining table.

WHAT WOULD A NATIONAL Bargaining for Housing Justice fight look like and what themes should inform it? Right to the City frames housing as a "human right"; People's Action calls for "guaranteed housing"; the Partnership for Working Families asserts that housing is a necessity, not a commodity, and that everyone has a right to safe, affordable housing where they choose to live. These and other groups working on housing justice seek to lift up the idea that people's access to housing shouldn't be determined solely by "market forces." This must also be one of any campaign's central themes.

The campaign should include these six elements:

- **Expanding and connecting city, state, and national work.** In addition to robust statewide campaigns in New York and California for universal rent control, a growing consortium of groups is working on affordable housing all over the country. It is essential to ground labor's efforts by supporting and expanding the ongoing work in cities like Detroit, Minneapolis, and Chicago, and other places where housing is now a priority for organizers on the ground. In these cities, the crisis gives organizers an opportunity to expand their bases and to connect to other cities fighting similar fights. Linking work in different geographies by focusing on common landlords, investors, developers, and banks that finance them offers the potential to magnify the work nationally and increase the power of local work.
- **Organizing tenant unions to negotiate directly with corporate landlords.** Private-equity landlords like Blackstone and Cerberus operate all over the country. Blackstone is the nation's largest single-family landlord and the largest owner of housing more generally, with investments in tens of thousands of single-family homes, apartments, manufactured home communities, and mortgages. A number of

private-equity companies have been buying up manufactured housing parks and then jacking up the rent on the land and inflating other charges for people unable to move their homes to new locations. Unions know how to confront corporate giants like these. Both Hilton Hotel workers and office-building janitors have successfully faced off against Blackstone before. Tenants who live in homes owned by Blackstone and similar entities have also successfully confronted these behemoths. In recent years, a number of tenant unions have pulled off successful rent strikes. MHAction, an organization of mobile-home tenants in rural and exurban areas from California to Florida to New York, has won rent victories in Humboldt County, California, and is conducting an ongoing rent strike in Akron, New York. Tenant unions can and should negotiate over rent control, needed repairs, and a grievance procedure to address ongoing disputes. Labor unions and tenant unions could partner on national campaigns demanding that private-equity companies respect the rights of unionized and non-union workers alike, and agree to bargain with newly formed tenant unions. Together, tenant unions and labor unions could pressure endowments and public-employee pension funds that invest in private equity to divest from companies that won't respect the rights of their tenants and workers.

- **Fighting for universal rent control and local rent control laws.**

Rent control to protecting the existing stock of affordable housing. There is growing and political pressure to pass and expand control policies around the country. While California's rent control initiative—Proposition 10—was defeated in 2018, it nearly five million votes despite the misinformation spread by the landlord and the more than \$70 million raised by its corporate opponents. The Proposition 10 fight nonetheless lifted up the importance of rent control as a critical tool to save affordable housing. Other fights must follow. In New York, there is now a statewide effort to strengthen rent laws. Legislation for rent control is also being introduced in Illinois, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, and Orlando.



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- **Targeting corporate landlords' reliance on tax breaks and public-pension-fund capital.** Corporate landlords benefit from huge local and federal tax breaks and get much of their capital from public-employee pension funds. Both the local and national campaigns should prioritize persuading pension funds to divest from corporate landlords, invest in affordable housing, and push to change laws that subsidize luxury development at the expense of working-class communities. This effort must demonstrate the long-term economic benefit of increasing affordable housing, even if initial returns are lower than investing in predatory corporate landlords. Continued investment in predatory housing schemes threatens the long-term stability of pension funds and undermines the interests of the workers whose retirement incomes they invest.
- **Experimenting with innovative community-centered solutions.** Community organizations and policy partners over the past years have developed many strategies to reverse the housing crisis. A major part of the campaign will be expanding these efforts nationally. This includes but is not limited to strengthening the Community Reinvestment Act, developing stable community land trusts and housing trust funds, and funding and expanding public housing. In 2018, the California-based community organization Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE) was able to organize

against a local predatory landlord and, working with the Oakland Community Land Trust, acquire that landlord's properties for the trust—thereby making the housing permanently affordable and avoiding yet another Bay Area eviction for profit. Such efforts need to be duplicated in other settings.

- **Working for federal housing legislation.** Introducing a federal housing bill that addresses rent control and massively expands funding for public housing will help nationalize the issue, setting the stage for housing justice as a central theme in the 2020 elections. Such legislation will also help highlight the role corporations are playing in driving up rents and challenge the idea that the solution to the crisis in public housing is to privatize it or dismantle it altogether. Making housing a key issue in 2020 will be critical to building momentum and support for increased affordable housing.

We do not claim to offer a silver bullet by presenting these strategies, nor suggest that one initiative alone can address the overall housing crisis. Yet knitting together the elements of local and national housing fights, and illuminating how they interconnect, is crucial to figuring out where traditional housing groups and labor can work together to build the power necessary to address this issue.

THIS WOULD NOT BE the first time that unions have grappled with the housing issue. Historically, unions have played a role in the development of affordable housing in cities with significant union membership. In addition, unions are involved in a variety of ongoing efforts to fund and support affordable housing.

- The Amalgamated Clothing Workers and the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union developed cooperative housing units for their members in New York in the late 1920s. Subsequent to this, IBEW Local 3 built upon their model in the late 1940s and 1950s, developing 38 buildings with roughly 2,500 units. In 1951, 19 unions worked alongside community organizations to create the United Housing Foundation, building tens of thousands of cooperative housing units over the ensuing two decades.
- The AFL-CIO's Housing Investment Trust (HIT) fund has put Taft-Hartley pension funds to work in developing affordable housing and elderly housing, using an exclusively union workforce. Building upon the work of its predecessor, the Mortgage Investment Trust, the HIT has focused on Boston, Chicago, New York, Minneapolis-St. Paul, St. Louis, and the Bay Area, investing in more than 70,000 affordable units—some for designated groups of workers, such as teachers, others for that sector of the public priced out of much market-rate housing.
- In Seattle, locals of AFSCME, the Laborers, the Teamsters, SEIU, UAW, and UNITE HERE have worked together with community allies (including the Low Income Housing Institute, Transit Riders Union, Sierra Club, the Church Council of Greater Seattle, and the Coalition of Immigrants, Refugees and Communities of Color) as members of the U District Alliance for Equity and Livability, a coalition focused on ensuring that existing communities stand to benefit from the substantial growth and expansion of the University of Washington. The U District Alliance has won Seattle City Council support for a UW expansion plan that includes free transit passes for over 10,000 UW workers and 450 units of affordable workforce housing.
- The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) has proposed in its upcoming contractual bargaining that the city's Board of Education support rent control efforts and ensure the city enacts a real-estate transfer tax, a corporate head tax and a millionaire's tax to fund more affordable housing.

CENTRAL TO ANY LABOR EFFORT to advance housing justice must be the development of bargaining campaigns that expose the role key employers may play in making housing unaffordable and identify ways they can contribute to creating affordable housing. In order to do this, unions must ascertain whether the employer's

expansion is eliminating affordable housing, whether its pension plan or endowment is invested in institutions (banks, private-equity firms) that are driving housing unaffordability, and whether the employer's board members are involved in business activities that lead to displacement and higher rent.



Unions must also prepare their members for this kind of innovative, community-centered campaign so members are engaged and committed. Tacking on community demands that members haven't invested in doesn't work. If these demands are to be more than mere window dressing jettisoned when bargaining gets tough, the union must go deep with members long before negotiations begin to make clear how such demands could benefit them as both union members and members of the community.

Specific bargaining demands can then be tailored to employers of different kinds. Consider these possibilities:

- Universities and hospitals often eliminate affordable housing through expansion into surrounding neighborhoods. Unions could develop bargaining demands and bargaining campaigns that call on these institutions to finance and rebuild any affordable housing lost to expansion, develop workforce housing that allows workers to live closer to their jobs, and end support for or membership in business associations (such as the Chamber of Commerce or ALEC) that oppose rent control and affordable housing initiatives.
- Public-sector unions can expand their ongoing battle against privatization to fight the selling off of public property to private developers—often with additional tax subsidies that undermine government's revenue streams. These unions could demand that public property be preserved for community land trusts and affordable housing, insist that governments secure workforce housing that allows their workers to live in the communities they serve, and use their pension funds to advance affordable housing.
- Amazon's announcement that it is canceling its HQ2 in New York in the face of community and labor protests over the \$3 billion in subsidies the company demanded shows how a community-labor alliance can flip the script. Future Amazon-targeted campaigns can link demands for better working conditions with demands that Amazon invest in affordable housing and other community benefits. This is already happening in Minneapolis and St. Paul. There, the Atwood Center has demanded that Amazon contribute millions of dollars to local initiatives determined by community groups in the Twins Cities' East African community, which provides the majority of Amazon's warehouse workers in the region.
- Banks have long played a major role in undermining affordable housing through foreclosures, redlining, and other forms of discrimination. As part of a campaign to organize bank workers, CWA and the Committee for Better Banks are exposing practices that force bank workers into selling products that aren't in their customers' best interest. Bank workers could demand the right to refrain from peddling predatory mortgages.
- As part of bargaining, unions can demand that employers stop investing in and partnering with private equity firms that destroy jobs and affordable housing.

Some might argue that it is foolhardy for unions to challenge corporations on multiple fronts beyond wages and benefits. To the contrary, we believe that an unambitious strategy condemns unions to a continued slide toward

irrelevance, and that it was precisely the boldness of the teachers', hotel workers', and other campaigns over the past year that led to their successes. Only by engaging in campaigns that confront the unjust structures that increasingly dominate every part of workers' lives can unions hope to rebuild power and transform the country. Organizing and bargaining for housing justice will be central to that task.

In These Times · <http://www.inthesetimes.com>

Working » March 12, 2019

Why Unions Must Bargain Over Climate Change

BY [Nato Green](#)

Union contract negotiations include mandatory and permissive subjects of bargaining. Employers are required by law to negotiate over mandatory subjects—wages, benefits and working conditions. Permissive subjects, such as decisions about which public services will be provided and how, have historically been the purview of management. We only negotiate over how managerial decisions affect members' jobs. Employers may voluntarily agree to negotiate permissive subjects, but unions can't legally strike over them.

In recent years, some unions have embraced “bargaining for the [common good](#),” which use the union campaign to win broad, righteous public benefits. The best current example of this is [the Los Angeles teachers' strike](#), which opposed the underfunding, privatization and overcrowding of schools—all of which hurt students. Common good goals often bump against the constraints of what is legally bargainable. For instance, does a demand from teachers' unions that school districts use district-owned property to fund and build affordable housing for teachers affect working conditions? While shortages of affordable housing affect teachers very directly, how school districts use their land and invest their money is normally considered a managerial prerogative.

But last fall's [report](#) from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is a game-changer. It concludes that humanity has 12 years to cut greenhouse gas emissions enough to hold global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius—and avoid civilization-threatening consequences of climate change. There is a lot of space between projected best- and worst-case future scenarios. It's the difference between bad and apocalyptic. That space represents hundreds of millions of people dying. Avoiding worst-case scenarios, in strictly scientific terms, requires everyone to do everything, immediately.

The looming timeline of the IPCC report means unions must have a right to bargain over climate change, especially in the public sector. What good is it to negotiate the assignment of overtime when the sky is on fire? Does a public employer really want to claim that its direct complicity in the potential collapse of civilization has no bearing on working conditions? Can government claim that abandoning its workforce to die or flee their homes doesn't affect working conditions? If employers don't accept that every choice made today affects the near future, they're denying science. Local and state governments in Democratic strongholds may find it politically challenging to posture about resisting Republicanism nationally while denying the local implications of that stance.

Thanks to the Sunrise Movement and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-N.Y.), the Green New Deal [provides a framework](#) for us to declare our part in everyone doing everything immediately. The Green New Deal calls for a government-funded jobs program to carry out a just transition to a carbon-free economy at the rates called for by the IPCC report. This is a perfect common good framework for unions to respond to the most urgent challenge of our time, while simultaneously promoting a high-functioning public sector as antidote to neoliberalism's degradation of public services.

Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 1021, the union where I work, supported the campaign to [divest](#) the San Francisco pension plan from fossil fuels and to [stop](#) a new coal shipping terminal at the Port of Oakland. In my union, we advance our goals on parallel tracks via collective bargaining and public policy, using each to reinforce the other. The nexus between

the functions of local government, climate change and jobs goes even further. San Francisco has already made significant commitments on many of these initiatives, and [plans to do more](#). A local government Green New Deal collective bargaining platform would include climate mitigation strategies to reduce emissions:

- Divest pensions from the fossil fuel industry.
- Convert to 100 percent renewables for utilities.
- Retrofit public buildings for energy efficiency and disaster resilience.
- Immediately transition to renewable energy vehicles for public buses, transit and car fleets, which [could achieve](#) that critical 1.5 degrees Celsius target.
- Plant trees and expand parks and bike infrastructure.
- Fund and expand public transit.
- Reduce carbon emissions in food procurement by public agencies by encouraging local, [real food](#), and reducing meat.

It would also include climate adaptation strategies to prepare vulnerable communities to survive coming floods, fires, droughts and diseases:

- Mandate inclusion of climate change in land use and planning.
- Build climate-adaptive infrastructure.
- Develop procedures and train personnel on emergency response, especially to care for our [unhoused neighbors](#).

Perhaps the best climate policy is transit-oriented, high-density affordable [housing](#). It reduces commute times, and helps public workers and the people who depend on their services. In San Francisco, public services suffer from housing costs as workers move away and commute further distances. Housing drives teacher turnover, makes buses late because the Municipal Transportation Authority can't hire drivers, and compromises emergency response when many first responders live far away.

For unions dealing with State governments, a Green New Deal platform might also include:

- Funds for wildfire response and prevention, including forestry, strengthening oversight of utility regulators, and firefighters, all of which are carried out by public workers. Since wildfires are both the [consequences of climate change](#) and the cause of [more accelerating carbon emissions](#), state government needs greater investments in rapid response.
- Funds to support indigenous people to do [forest management](#).
- The transformation of private utilities into public agencies.
- Funds for climate research at public universities.
- The promotion of unionization in green jobs like electric car manufacturing and solar.

One obstacle to bargaining the Green New Deal is buy-in from members. Union members, like a lot of us, worry about climate change but are demoralized that it is too vast for them to do anything about. They've taken it on the chin from neoliberalism for a long time, so have urgent goals about fighting to protect public services from privatization and their jobs from being dragged yet further down in a race to the bottom. Tackling the Green New Deal can understandably feel like one more burden added to an already stuffed agenda.

Unions have long been waging defensive fights to maintain basic workplace protections in an era of austerity, but we're changing. Where common good strategies succeed, most recently showcased with the Los Angeles teacher strikes, the membership's readiness to strike for the community resulted from lengthy deep internal education, organizing and coalition-building. Union leadership would need to see the Green New Deal as a tool against austerity politics. We'd need to educate members about their collective power to make a difference on the most fundamental crises of our time—and raise expectations of what an expanded public sector could do.

The Green New Deal is basically the reverse of Naomi Klein's concept of the "[shock doctrine](#)," which refers to the process whereby capitalists take advantage of crises to reorder policies in their interests. Civilization is menaced by the Two Horsemen of the Apocalypse: climate change and inequality. Inequality is so bad that the richest 400 Americans own [more wealth](#) than the poorest 60 percent. The [percentage](#) of young people who will earn more than their parents is plunging. Public workers and their unions belong at the center of the solution to both. The policies of a Green New Deal require a robust and well-funded public sector with good union

jobs. Because of the nature of public sector work, an expanded public sector as part of a Green New Deal disproportionately [benefits](#) women and people of color.

On Friday, the AFL-CIO issued a [letter](#) criticizing the Green New Deal, apparently on behalf of building trades unions who work in the fossil fuel business. Those unions are inexplicably concerned that the Green New Deal's expressed goals of meeting the challenge of climate change with a job guarantee to protect affected workers doesn't include them. Contrary to labor skeptics who think the labor movement is hopeless, labor critics of the Green New Deal are optimists, believing that there are in fact jobs on a dead planet.

Any seasoned union campaigner worth her salt loves a contract fight because it has a hard deadline that focuses everyone's attention—expiration and a strike threat. We already know that the ruling class' answer to climate change is doomsday bunkers for billionaires, while the vast majority become climate refugees. For the rest of us, every labor victory in recent years has involved worker militancy and broad demands that link workers with their communities. Similarly, throughout history, every significant social movement has found an expression in labor struggles. The climate crisis will be no different. Climate science gives us a new deadline and an opportunity to show that we're up to the task. We have 12 years.

ABOUT THIS AUTHOR

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ACTIVISM

Targeting the Corporate Giants that Target Communities of Color to Extract Wealth

Part of understanding how systemic racism works today is to understand how the extraction of wealth from people of color is part of the business model of some large corporations.

BY SARAH JAFFE | MAY 18, 2017



Fix LA is a community-labor partnership that fights to win a fair contract, improve Los Angeles by restoring vital services and ensure that the banks and corporations the city government does business with pay their fair share of revenue. It began after

LA government leaders slashed public services and infrastructure maintenance during the Great Recession. (Photo courtesy of Fix LA)



This Q&A is part of Sarah Jaffe's series [Interviews for Resistance](#), in which she speaks with organizers, troublemakers and thinkers who are doing the hard work of fighting back against America's corporate and political powers.

A new organization based in Chicago, the [Action Center on Race and the Economy \(ACRE\)](#), aims to support groups pushing for structural change in our economy by targeting the “financial elite responsible for pillaging communities of color, devastating working class communities and harming our environment.” In this interview, the co-founders of ACRE, Maurice BP-Weeks and Saqib Bhatti, talk about how labor unions can leverage their bargaining power to improve communities, fighting Wall Street and how racist policies also hit white working-class communities.

Sarah Jaffe: Your organization is just getting off the ground. Tell us about the idea behind it and why you're launching now.

Maurice BP-Weeks: The idea behind ACRE is that there is lots of really great economic justice work being done looking at the role that Wall Street plays in everyday people's lives. But what we do is work

that goes after Wall Street and corporations that we all know are extracting wealth from communities, with an explicitly racial justice lens.

The way that we have talked about economic justice work and race in the past on the left has been through a lens of disparate impact. We say, “Bad guys do stuff at the top and it disproportionately affects people at the bottom.” What we do here at ACRE is look at campaigns through a slightly different lens, saying that the way these companies operate is built on the extraction of wealth from people of color. It is not an afterthought, it is actually core to their business model. All the campaigns that we do live at this intersection of corporate accountability, Wall Street accountability, economic justice and race through that particular lens.

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Organizing to Hit Trump's Corporate Cabinet and Allies Where it Hurts

BY SARAH JAFFE | MARCH 10, 2017

SJ: Can you talk a little bit about some of the background, some of the campaigns that led to this point?

Saqib Bhatti: Both Maurice and I have been involved in various Wall Street accountability campaigns for many years and have worked together in many capacities. Some of the other campaigns that have informed this new project include the [ReFund America Project](#), which focused on municipal finance deals and the increasing power of the financial sector within state and local governments — the way that drives austerity policies that are particularly problematic in communities of color.

It is not just the case that communities of color are disparately impacted by cuts to budgets; it is that the most drastic, the most draconian cuts are justified by doing them in communities of color. The bankruptcy in Detroit and the debt crisis in Puerto Rico are two great examples of places where debt has been used to try to upend people's lives, to undermine democracy — and we see that it starts with communities of color.

We have already seen them try to [export the Detroit formula](#) to other places. You create the formula by targeting communities of color, and then once you have that, you can also try to push in other places.

Another relevant campaign is the [Hedge Clippers campaign](#), which focuses on holding accountable hedge fund managers, private equity firm managers and billionaires who are very often financial folks who are trying to control our politics. They are increasingly on the wrong side of a whole host of issues, whether they are “pharma bros” who are [increasing the price of pharmaceuticals](#) or whether they are folks who are trying to push for [the charterization of entire school districts](#).

Maurice can probably talk about some of the other work that we have done around housing and gentrification.

MW: The housing work has really spanned several years, back to the peak of the foreclosure crisis, where really I cut my teeth as an organizer in California going after Wells Fargo and some of the other banks that were foreclosing en mass on black and Latino families.

The nature of housing in this country has obviously changed since the foreclosure crisis. A lot of our recent work has been around [Wall Street buying up](#) formerly distressed properties, foreclosed properties in bulk, often aided by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) or other federal agencies. Last year we ran a campaign that targeted HUD for their involvement in this program

around distressed asset pools, which was basically just a program to, in bulk, hand homes off to Wall Street. We were making the case that these were mostly people of color who were foreclosed on and had these distressed properties. We shouldn't give these homes right back to the people who caused the crisis. There is a huge need in black and brown communities for affordable housing and lots of people who really want to move back into these homes that were lost. We should be focusing on that instead of giving lots of properties directly to Wall Street.

We have also been [targeting specifically Blackstone](#), which was both a key actor in that program and also is one of the largest single-family-home landlords. They are just buying up thousands upon thousands of homes in the country and we just think it is really troubling that this private equity group essentially has their hands on so much of American property.

We have continued beating the drum [about Wells Fargo](#). Wells Fargo is an interesting case because it is not just that they foreclosed on so many black and brown families and caused that massive loss of black and Latino wealth. They are also involved through investments in [private prisons](#) and the [Dakota Access Pipeline](#), donations to police foundations and their role in the [student loan crisis](#). They are this perfect intersection of all of these ways of screwing over and extracting wealth from people of color coming together to create their business model, essentially. That has been part of the foundation of our [Forgo Wells campaign](#).

SJ: Over and over again we see these cuts to social services policies targeting communities of color. But they don't only hit communities of color; they screw

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There is a wealth extraction plan that

up the whole economy. Then somebody like Trump, in turn, manages to consolidate his own power, in turn, by further blaming people of color. I wonder if you could talk about the way all of this has worked.

MW: To me the Trump administration is actually a perfect example of the demonstration of our analysis. On the one hand, you have a group of people who are just outright racist, who are just pushing forward the most hateful, xenophobic ideas that you could possible imagine. And on the other side, you have these economic justice targets that we have been fighting for the past 20 or 30 years — people from Goldman Sachs, Steven Mnuchin and that whole bunch.

In our analysis it makes a lot of sense that those two camps of people came together. There is a wealth extraction plan that they are pushing forward and the tool to do it is racist hate language, including blaming the problems of the economy on blacks, Latino folks and whoever else they can.

SB: I would add that one of the original sins of the Democratic Party going into the 2016 election was the failure of the last administration and the supermajorities in Congress to actually offer meaningful relief to struggling families in the aftermath of the financial crisis. The focus was on “How do we make sure that we can keep the financial

they are pushing forward and the tool to do it is racist hate language, including blaming the problems of the economy on blacks, Latino folks and whoever else they can.

— MAURICE BP-WEEKS

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system afloat?” and they left working families, struggling families behind.

One of the ways in which Wall Street ensured that they were able to push through their agenda was by racializing the issue. [The narrative] was that the homeowners who were facing foreclosure were irresponsible black and Latino families who got into loans they couldn't afford and so they didn't deserve help. The reality is, we know, that black and Latino families were actually targeted with predatory mortgages.

The other side of that, though, is that while it is true that black and Latino families are disproportionately the people who were impacted by the foreclosure crisis, in raw numbers it was a lot more poor white folks who were foreclosed on because there are a lot more poor white folks in the country than there are poor black and Latino families.

The white working class were impacted by the same pro-Wall Street policies that were justified by scapegoating people of color. What is interesting now, of course, you had Donald Trump who really appealed to a lot of folks who felt left behind by the Democratic Party by saying the system is rigged. He wasn't wrong; the system was rigged. Of course, it was rigged by the very people that he has put in his Cabinet. So it is this vicious cycle. As Maurice said, this is the perfect example of how race and class and racial and economic analysis go hand in hand and come together to give us the moment that we are in now.

SJ: I want to talk about “bargaining for the common good.” For people who are reading who don't know, explain what that means. What is bargaining for the common good?

SB: Bargaining for the common good is this idea that when you have unionized public or private sector workers that they don't need to,

and in fact they shouldn't, limit their bargaining demands to issues that are workplace issues. That in fact, workers' lives don't end when they go back to their communities and what is good for the communities is also good for the workers.

With that in mind, workers should form long-term partnerships with community partners in the communities in which they live. For public sector workers, the communities they live in are also the communities that they serve and they should bring the demands of the broader community to the table when they walk into bargaining. By doing this, by politicizing bargaining and aligning their interests and making bargaining something that is a platform for moving broader issues, workers can make their bargaining process relevant to the broader community. By doing that, there is both added power at the bargaining table for workers, and it also helps community organizations and members of the broader community more effectively fight for a better future for themselves.

MW: In Los Angeles, the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment, along with SEIU 721, Scope LA and lots of other partners in the Los Angeles area have formed this campaign called Fix LA. As municipal workers were coming up for contract, Fix LA said, let's not just bargain around just the contract itself; how do these issues affect the community and specifically the black and brown community in south Los Angeles? One of the things that they focused on was that the city's sanitation workers had been cut by an enormous amount and it led to real problems in the city. There were

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Workers can make
their bargaining
process relevant to
the broader
community.”

– SAQIB BHATTI

more floods than normal because the city's workers weren't able to clean out sewer traps. It also led to terrible road conditions, broken street lights and overgrown trees — things that were all happening in black and brown Los Angeles.

So, this group came together to say, the excuse that we don't have money to hire back these workers is not acceptable. There actually is money. Los Angeles is in several bank deals. Let's go after them, get that money back and study other places where we are in bad bank deals as a way to fund rehiring these workers, expanding the work that they do and fixing Los Angeles. Money for our streets, and not for Wall Street. That is an ongoing campaign, but they were able to win a restoration of local jobs based in south LA for black and brown folks. They were able to look at the bank deals that the city is in and how they can get out of the bank deals that are just costing them lots of money.

That is a long-term partnership. That is not the kind of thing that after SEIU 721 won the contract they are like, alright, ACCE. I will never talk to you again. It is a real, deep partnership that lasts way beyond the contract. The contract was a piece in a broader puzzle. Another example is the Chicago Teachers Union, which Saqib can talk about.

SB: A lot of work the Chicago teachers have done over the course of the last couple of contract cycles really is a good frame. In the most recent Chicago Teachers Union contract cycle this past fall, one of the key issues was tied to the budget — the Chicago public school system does not have enough money coming in and it needs more revenue. The revenue is being held hostage at the state level by a governor who refuses to pass a budget unless he gets a series of anti-union reforms.

In the meantime, you have this devastating budget crisis in which a lot of state universities are losing their funding. The ones that are

impacted particularly hard are Chicago State University, home to a large black student population, and Northeastern Illinois University, where a large number of undocumented students attend. Those are the two that are being hit the hardest. Chicago State has been on the verge of closure for the past year. This time last year, every single person who worked there was asked to turn in their keys, and ultimately about 40 percent of its staff was let go.

What was great about the Chicago teachers contract fight was that at bargaining they raised demands around the need to have new revenue. Last year on April 1, they went on a one-day strike. That strike was all about getting funding for the state budget. The theme of the day was “Fund Our Future.” Through that, they were able to align a broad coalition of folks across the state and across the city of Chicago who joined them in fighting for revenue.

In the end, when they settled their contract in October, the notice of the settlement came out minutes before the midnight deadline. At the very last second Rahm Emanuel and the school board finally agreed to put new revenue at the table. That was a thing that they were holding out for, saying, “Unless more money is coming into the district, no contract is worth the paper it is printed on because there simply is not enough money to be able to provide our students with the type of education that they deserve.” By leading with that and sticking with that, they were able to win new revenue and build long-lasting relationships.

MW: We just hosted a conference on bargaining for the common good for racial justice. We think this tool can be used to push forward racial justice victories and racial justice outcomes. One of the things we talked about at the conference is, “What would it look like to put into the contract that the school district will refuse to bargain with any contractor who agrees to build the southern border wall?” or

“What does it look like to put in the contract that the district will refuse to do business with any bank that forecloses on students during the school year?” Let’s also bring those issues to the bargaining table and get both unions and community members doing the work of having those conversations and pushing those things forward through bargaining. Not just using it just as a revenue tool — although it is extremely effective for that — but using it to ensure racial justice outcomes, in particular, too.

SJ: How can people keep up with you and your work?

MW: You can visit our website at acrecampaigns.org. If you are interested, in particular, in the Forgo Wells work, you can go to forgowells.org, as well. We are also on Twitter at twitter.com/ACREcampaigns and Facebook at facebook.com/ACREcampaigns.

Interviews for Resistance is a project of Sarah Jaffe, with assistance from Laura Feuillebois and support from the Nation Institute. It is also available *as a podcast* on *iTunes*. Not to be reprinted without permission.



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