50M People
Building
A Movement for
Economic
Justice &
Democracy

CWA
Communications Workers of America
This booklet and our work in the past several years demonstrate, there are blocks to our democracy that are preventing real change. The House of Representatives under Speaker Nancy Pelosi passed more than 400 bills from 2009 through 2010 that never survived a motion to proceed in the Senate. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid told me that during the six years that Lyndon Johnson served as majority leader, Johnson faced one filibuster. In Reid’s first years, he faced 386.

In the federal elections alone in 2012, Republican and Democratic candidates, parties and outside groups spent a total of $7 billion. This is not what democracy looks like.

More than 30 states passed voter suppression legislation in the past three years. These measures were designed solely to lower turnout among working, young and older Americans who would likely vote for change. Voter fraud isn’t a problem in the U.S. Blocking the democratic right of citizens to vote is.

Eleven million immigrants are currently blocked from any path to citizenship. Most, if they could vote, would vote with working Americans and against the 1% who control so much.

This booklet is about how we combine the democracy issues (voting rights, broken Senate rules, money in politics and comprehensive immigration reform) with our years of work on our four key economic justice issues (secure jobs and trade, health care, retirement security, bargaining and organizing rights). We are trying to chart a path to a movement of 50 million Americans, ready to join together and fight back!

Our bargaining and organizing, the other two sides of the CWA triangle, have never been tougher, and many ask, “Why?” This booklet helps answer that question and suggests a path forward.

Copies of this booklet in bulk quantities are available by mail. CWA partner stories can be found at www.cwa-union.org/stories.

Together we will make a difference, not only in CWA, but in our communities.

In solidarity,
The following charts tell a story of increasing economic crisis for workers.

**THE CHALLENGES WE FACE**

This chart is critical for two reasons:

From 1930 to 1960, we see how working Americans built a movement to obtain union representation and collective bargaining. More than 10 million Americans won private sector bargaining rights during this time.

But the last 50 years of systematic and relentless attacks on the right to form a union and bargain collectively have diminished bargaining to levels not seen since the era before the Great Depression. This affects all of our bargaining, including the public sector, where workers gained ground over the past 50 years, but now are also under attack.

As collective bargaining coverage declines, so do real wages for workers.

**The Rise & Fall of Private Sector Collective Bargaining**

**How American Workers’ Wages Got Left Behind**

Actual wages compared to estimated increases if they had risen with productivity

U.S. workers now work more for less. When we look at real wages of American workers over the past 70 years, we see that the decline in collective bargaining has brought about a corresponding decline in wages. It affects all working Americans.

Real wages means pay adjusted for inflation. Productivity means the total value of what we produce, divided by the number of workers.

This chart shows that when collective bargaining was growing, and for some years after that, real wages kept up with productivity gains. But as collective bargaining in the private sector declined over the last 40 years, real wages trailed productivity.

The gap between real wages and productivity, shown in gold, is currently more than $500 per week. This wage stagnation has dire consequences for workers and their families’ standard of living.

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Sources: Bureau of Labor Statistics - Productivity, Average Wage of Non-Supervisory Production Works, Consumer Price Index

Workers in many other countries enjoy greater collective bargaining rights than U.S. workers. This chart shows that the global economy can exist and flourish along with organizing and bargaining rights that increase workers’ standard of living. The United States’ 12% collective bargaining coverage ranks last among the democracies shown. Nations like South Africa and Brazil have seen huge increases in the percentage of workers with bargaining coverage and a corresponding increase in real wages.
Part II: A DEMOCRACY MOVEMENT IS NECESSARY IF WE ARE TO MOVE FORWARD TOWARDS ECONOMIC JUSTICE

1. Pay after inflation has not risen in the US in decades—despite economic growth nearly all of the gains have gone to the wealthiest 1%. US trade policy has made this worse, depressing wages and increasing the return on capital.

2. The percent of workers covered by collective bargaining has declined to a level not seen since the era before the Great Depression.

3. Progress on our key economic issues; sustainable jobs, fair trade, health care for all, retirement security and bargaining and organizing rights has been blocked.

4. Our partners focused on climate change, fighting housing foreclosures, civil rights or student debt face the same blocks in our democracy.

5. Blocks in our Democracy:
   - Broken Senate Rules
   - Money in Politics
   - Voter Suppression
   - Path to Citizenship

6. The Democracy Initiative with 45 endorsers from labor, green, faith, civil rights, democracy groups, community organizers, students and with more than 30 million members offers us a path to eventually break down these democracy barriers.

7. If we join our key economic fairness issues to the democracy issues we bring together a movement of millions that can Stand Up and Fight Back in the workplace and in our communities.

This chart shows the major issues for CWA and progressives and spotlights how our ability to move forward on our agenda is obstructed.

CWA has worked hard for bargaining and organizing rights, sustainable jobs, fair trade, good healthcare for all, and retirement security, but we have been blocked.

Our progressive allies have also been blocked from achieving climate change legislation, the DREAM Act, measures to decrease home foreclosures and other issues.
1. BROKEN SENATE RULES.

The U.S. Senate doesn’t work. In fact, it’s become a block to democracy because too many important issues don’t get even one minute of discussion and debate on the Senate floor. An individual senator can hold up appointments and nominations, as well as block the consideration of important legislation. To move forward on anything, a supermajority of all senators, or 60 votes, is needed.

In recent years, the Senate has passed fewer than 5% of the bills that have been introduced. That means too many critical issues never made it to the Senate floor for debate.

**FILIBUSTERED**

To Death

These bills had majority support and would most likely have passed the Senate if it wasn’t for the filibuster.

1. DREAM Act
2. DISCLOSE Act
3. Employee Free Choice Act
4. Health care public option
5. Paycheck Fairness Act
6. Permanent extension of the middle-class Bush tax cut
7. Repealing the Bush tax cuts for people making more than $1 million
8. Public Safety Employer-Employee Cooperation Act
9. Emergency Senior Citizens Relief Act
10. Creating American Jobs and Ending Offshoring Act

**Number of Times Bills/Nominations Were Blocked From Debate on Senate Floor**
2. MONEY AND POLITICS.

The U.S. Supreme Court’s *Citizens United* decision in 2010 opened the floodgates to limitless corporate contributions and secret money in elections. During the 2012 election cycle, candidates, parties and outside groups spent a total of $7 billion. *Citizens United* also overturned laws prohibiting employers from forcing their employees to listen to their political views – legalizing the one-sided, on-the-clock propaganda tactics that have long been a hallmark of anti-union campaigns.

Corporate campaigning at work is not free speech, whether directed against collective bargaining rights or in favor of a political candidate. Money and economic power are not speech and cannot substitute for the rights of all members of our society to be engaged in their own decision making.

Corporations are not people and shouldn’t be extended the rights of individuals. This is harming our democratic political process.

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*Presidential election cycle  Source: Opensecrets.org

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3. VOTING RIGHTS.

Voter suppression is a growing strategy to influence elections by preventing individuals from exercising their lawful right to vote. Tactics include reducing the number of polling places and hours in certain areas, eliminating same-day voter registration, limiting or ending early voting, implementing restrictive ID laws and not permitting student ID cards as proof of identity, and much more. In 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a key section of the Voting Rights Act. Immediately, states like North Carolina, Texas and others passed laws that will restrict groups of citizens — including students, minority voters and the elderly — from exercising their right to vote. We need a system of universal registration in the United States, similar to what most democracies already have.
Part III: BUILDING TO A MAJORITY

HOW DO WE GET TO A MAJORITY (50 MILLION STRONG) AND ENACT CHANGE?

Here’s the math:

- 120 MILLION people voted in 2012
- 82.5 MILLION people voted in 2010
- 131 MILLION voted in 2008

A voting electorate of 50 million organized progressives would shake up the status quo. Getting 50 million people to act together on shared critical issues may seem daunting, but we know from experience that it is possible.

Success starts with relationships and joint activism.

BLOCKS IN OUR DEMOCRACY

4. COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM.

The labor movement shares a common goal with faith and civil rights groups, immigrant organizations and many others: we must fix our nation’s broken immigration system. CWA has been working with our partners for comprehensive immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship for 11 million undocumented immigrants and 9 million green card holders.

Low-wage immigrant workers are vulnerable to exploitation, as employers cut corners to pad their own profits. This pushes down wages and working conditions for all workers — regardless of citizenship status.

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BUILDING TO 50 MILLION STRONG
Note: 131 million people voted in 2008, 82.5 million voted in 2010, and 120 million voted in 2012

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CWA has always worked with coalitions in the fight for progressive change.

In 1987, CWA founded Jobs with Justice, a national network of local coalitions that bring together labor unions, faith groups, community organizations, and students — all of whom committed to “be there for each other’s fights.” Today, JwJ organizes actions and stands up for economic justice in 46 cities in 24 states.

In 2012, CWA joined with 60 progressive groups that trained 100,000 activists for the 99% Spring movement building and direct action. Those activists are standing up against foreclosures, predatory lending and other notorious financial practices, and are taking a stand at corporations’ annual shareholder meetings across the country.

In 2013, CWA and the NAACP, Sierra Club and Greenpeace founded the Democracy Initiative, an umbrella coalition to mobilize members determined to break through the barriers to our democracy.

Now, more than ever, on every level, we need to develop and sustain active coalitions with like-minded groups to fight for economic justice and democracy. To do that, CWA leaders and activists need to reach out, get to know members of these groups and start working together.

You can find stories of the great work that CWA Locals are doing to build coalitions and work with allies for economic justice and democracy at www.cwa-union.org/stories.
Employee Free Choice Act
Results and Next Steps

From 2006 to 2009, CWA and our allies worked hard to pass the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA) as a critical part of the economic justice program that produced a Democratic majority in Congress from 2006 through 2010. Health care for all, campaign finance legislation, climate change, the DREAM Act, public safety, and collective bargaining didn’t fare any better than EFCA. All were passed by strong margins by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s chamber, but never got to the Senate floor for even one minute of debate. This was despite the fact that in 2009, there were 60 Democratic senators—the supermajority needed to move legislation to the floor, end debate and secure a vote for or against passage.

EFCA was no different than any of the other progressive legislation. The 40 Republican senators were in lockstep, opposing the motion to proceed. Therefore there was no debate. There wasn’t really a filibuster either, since the legislation never advanced to the Senate floor. That’s not the image many remember from the classic Hollywood film “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington.” There’s nothing heroic about blocking debate or discussion on issues that are critical to our nation.

Yet five years later, many so-called labor proponents write about EFCA as if the legislation was flawed rather than a victim of the worst interpretation of Senate rules ever. They write that we should not have attempted any version of majority sign up (card check) even though in virtually every other global democracy employers recognize unions without elections and in most cases without majorities.

Critics forget that first contract arbitration was as much a lightning rod for Senate Republicans as majority sign up.

For labor and our allies, the failure of the Senate to debate EFCA and the other major legislation of the 111th Congress should be a wake-up call. Playing by these rules is our only failure. Playing constant defense in the Senate so things don’t get worse ensures that we will never go forward. A starting point for change must be Senate rules reform along with the other key building blocks in our fight for a 21st century democracy.

We soon will organize around a new version of federal labor legislation designed to spotlight the collapse of workers’ rights for all Americans and the consequences to union and non-union workers alike. This time we realize that Senate rules reform is critical before there is any hope for democracy in our workplaces or anywhere else.

Fix the Senate Now Mobilizes Millions and We Save the NLRB

In 2009, we learned that the Senate rules, which require a 60-vote supermajority on virtually every motion, blocked our economic change agenda. Absurdly, this 60-vote requirement is necessary even for a motion to adjourn. Only the U.S. Senate, of any parliamentary body in the world, operates this way — more like the Senate of ancient Rome than a 21st century democracy.

In 2010, we began Fix the Senate Now, a broad coalition of membership and democracy groups that realized that meaningful change was impossible without reversing the obstruction that had become the norm in the Senate. A combination of party polarization, complacency and misplaced seniority had converged to allow the so-called filibuster, one that now doesn’t require any talking, to prevent debate and resolution.

Fix the Senate Now focused on changing the rules at the convening of both the 112th and 113th congressional sessions (2011 and 2013). At the beginning of each Congress, rules are adopted for that Congress. In both instances, despite great leadership by Senators Tom Harkin, Jeff Merkley and Tom Udall and more than 40 senators ready for change, we failed. These changes would have placed the burden on the minority of 41 senators to show up and speak if they wanted to block a motion for legislation, a presidential nomination or adjournment for a recess.

Fix the Senate Now mobilizes millions of individuals who want to save the NLRB, the key agency that ensures that workers have a voice in their workplace. We soon will organize around a new version of federal labor legislation designed to spotlight the collapse of workers’ rights for all Americans and the consequences to union and non-union workers alike. This time we realize that Senate rules reform is critical before there is any hope for democracy in our workplaces or anywhere else.
As Presidents Bush and Clinton had also done, President Obama used his constitutional power to make recess appointments to fill the gap and keep federal agencies running. But now the Senate could not adjourn before a recess. The Republican minority believed that without adjournment, recess appointments were not possible. In the minority’s game plan, federal agencies like the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) could be impaired, if not completely shut down, if the president could not make recess appointments.

In 2012, faced with the shutdown of the NLRB and CFPB, President Obama recess-appointed three members of the NLRB (bringing the total to five) and Richard Cordray as CFPB director. A year later, and one day after the Senate narrowly decided to leave its rules unchanged, the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that since the Senate had not adjourned, the recess appointments to the NLRB (and others) were invalid. The Court then overturned a case decided by the NLRB after the recess appointments were made.

In November, the Republican minority again blocked other nominations and after weeks of discussion, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid led the caucus and they changed the rules to provide that a simple majority of the Senate could order an up or down vote on all nominations. This was a critical step towards the fundamental reforms that are needed to make the Senate function as it must if we are to have a 21st century democracy!

The Democracy Initiative had helped lead this effort and proved its value in its first year. Fix the Senate Now remains a critical part of the Democracy Initiative’s work as there still remain too many ways for the minority to prevent discussion and debate on key issues we face.

In 2013, Fix the Senate Now, focused on the shutdown of federal agencies, as well as the inability of this president to make judicial appointments. More than 2 million Americans mobilized and demanded that the Senate use its constitutional powers to get an up-or-down vote on the president’s nominees to the NLRB, CFPB, EPA and other agencies. The coalition included labor, led by CWA, greens, financial reformers, foreclosure fighters and others. This is a foreshadowing of the 50 million activists we must mobilize for democracy and economic justice.

Literally on the eve of a vote to change the procedure on nominations, enough Republicans told Democrats they would agree to a vote on the NLRB, CFPB, EPA and other key nominations, and all five NLRB members were confirmed! A few months later as part of the deal the General Counsel of the NLRB was also confirmed.

In January 2013, CWA joined forces with the Alliance for Citizenship, a national coalition of unions, community, faith-based, immigrant and civil rights groups to pass comprehensive immigration reform with a path to citizenship. Members of the coalition include Campaign for Community Change (CCC), NAACP, AFL-CIO, SEIU, Immigration Equality, National Council of La Raza, National Lesbian and Gay Task Force, Sierra Club and Gamaliel to name a few.

In addition to the coalition, CWA worked closely with CASA de Maryland, a large community-based immigrant rights and Latino advocacy organization. CWA provided financial support for rallies and demonstrations, turned out activists to actions and provided office space at CWA Local 2201 in Richmond, Va. CASA provided CWA with experienced immigration staff and strategic political targets and plans.
CWA, along with CASA and the Alliance for Citizenship, worked on the historic April 10th rally that brought out more than 100,000 supporters to the West Lawn of the Capitol in Washington, D.C. More than 200 CWA activists attended, including CWA Local 2204 members from Lebanon Va., who drove eight hours each way to participate. Echo events were held across the country with CWA engagement particularly strong in Bakersfield, Calif., — Republican Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy’s district — where CWA Local 9416 played a leadership role with the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) and Kern Coalition for Citizenship, the major allies for citizenship on the West Coast.

Together CWA, CASA and the Alliance for Citizenship held lobby days, fly-ins and vigils and initiated 60,000 patch-through calls to 29 targeted senators.

On June 27 the Senate passed S.744 by a bipartisan vote of 68-32.

The fight then moved to the Republican-controlled House where Speaker John Boehner rejected the bill. The House left for its August recess without taking action on immigration reform. As a result of the months of inaction, the coalition prepared for home district mobilizations targeting 41 Republicans during the summer recess. Hundreds of actions including town hall and delegation meetings, rallies and demonstrations were held in their districts. In Washington, D.C., on Aug. 1 the Alliance organized a peaceful civil disobedience action resulting in the arrest of 41 leaders from CWA, CASA, CCC, CHIRLA, AFL-CIO, Sierra Club, SEIU and others.

Over the Labor Day weekend, the labor movement held 170 immigration events. More than 600,000 people — including 18,000 CWA activists — signed petitions demanding that Boehner move to a vote on immigration reform.

As a direct result of the summer actions, House Democrats introduced H.R. 15, a comprehensive immigration bill modeled after S.744.

On Oct. 5, CWA participated in a National Day of Action for Immigrant Dignity and Respect. A total of 183 events were held in 40 States. CWA came out in Freehold, N.J.; Springfield, Ohio; San Antonio; Detroit; Cleveland and other cities. In Bakersfield, CWA hosted a Rock 4 Citizenship concert with hundreds of participants calling on their representatives to act and vote on immigration.

The fight continues for immigration reform legislation with a path to citizenship. This joint work has strengthened the coalition and deepened our commitment for a stronger democracy and rights for all workers.

Our democracy work over the past several years led to CWA, NAACP, Greenpeace and the Sierra Club to start the Democracy Initiative. More than 50 large membership organizations have since signed on, representing 20 million activists.


Moral Mondays, led by the NAACP in North Carolina, are demonstrating the power of a broad coalition focused on voting rights and legislation that hurts working families. In New York, we came close to passing a state public financing law that would have encouraged candidates to seek small donations with public matching funds. Our Senate rules work has resulted in the confirmation of a full-functioning National Labor Relations Board and other executive nominations.

The Democracy Initiative links national organizations to both state and federal reform efforts. All organizations don’t necessarily work on all the campaigns, but they do share a broad commitment to gaining economic justice and democracy for all.
Part V: MOVEMENT BUILDING: REACHING OUT AND JOINING WITH PARTNERS

01 Identify strategic organizations that have membership [both labor unions and community-based groups.]

02 Review strategic organizations’ websites – pay attention to the mission statement and recent campaigns. Take a quick look at organizational structure.

03 If the organization is local or regional in scope, first ask someone you may know from another organization to introduce you. If no one you know has a connection, then call the executive director and ask for a meeting to get to know one another and your respective organizations.

04 Prepare for the meeting.
  - What questions do I have about the organization I have identified as a potential partner? How can I start the conversation about their organization? (Consider asking about a recent campaign that they did.)
  - How will I portray CWA and our policy agenda? Why is it important that we explore working together? What recent campaigns have we done?
  - How might we work together? How can we build unity across mutually important issues?
  - What is the next step to build our work together?

05 At the meeting, ask what the organization is currently working on as well as what their priorities are for the near future. Is there a place we can work together on an issue or campaign? Where might we support one another’s work? Use the first meeting to get to know one another as individuals and as organizations.

06 Try to identify any assistance you might be able to offer the organization. No resource is too small. Examples: meeting space, phone bank, copies, volunteers for an event/canvass.
Follow up after the meeting with a note or email that shows why you wish to continue working together and any new ideas for doing so. If the meeting resulted in any commitments for information or action, be certain to follow through on things you said you would do.

Take the results of the meeting and ongoing relationships with local organizations back to the Executive Board and membership. In our urgency to build a movement, we need to recognize that relationships are fluid and meant to be shared. Invite 1 to 2 activists in your local to the next conversation and invite leaders of community organizations to give issue briefings at local membership meetings. Report out the results of your new relationships through LPAT coordination calls.

Download the CWA Movement Builder app and receive information directly on your phone.

• Be the first to know about events and opportunities for action in your area and breaking news.
• Earn points by taking action, checking in to events, and sharing information on Facebook and Twitter.
• Send photos easily from your phone to CWA.

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