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<http://unionosity.com/report/unions-in-decline/>

## **As Union Membership Declines, Organizers Must Adapt**

Matthew McDermott January 24, 2013 7:37 am

On Wednesday, the Bureau of Labor Statistics released its Union Members Summary, which contains sobering statistics for unions, workers and the disappearing middle class. Union membership declined from 11.8 percent of workers in 2011 to just 11.3 (the lowest level since the Great Depression) in 2012 — the decline evidencing cash-strapped state and local governments and the full frontal assault of activist anti-union governors.

The loss of nearly 400,000 workers was concentrated in the public sector, which accounted for 234,000 of the decrease in union membership, but unionism is down across the board —private sector union membership decreased from 6.9 to 6.6 percent, even as 1.8 million jobs were added to the economy.

The Associated Press reported on the one-two punch the shaky economy and the anti-worker GOP agenda are delivering to public sector employee unions:

Until recently, there had been little resistance to unions organizing government workers. But that began to change when Republican Gov. Scott Walker of Wisconsin signed a law in 2011 eliminating most union rights for government workers. The state lost about 46,000 union members last year, the vast majority in the public sector.

The recession that began in 2008 also led to much deeper cuts in state and local government than any previous recession, according to a report this month from the Nelson Rockefeller Institute of Government at the State University of New York at Albany. Since August 2008, state government employment has declined by 135,000, while local government employment fell by 546,000.

Indiana, which went right-to-work in early 2012, jettisoned 56,000 union members between 2011 and 2012. Teachers' unions were among the hardest hit, losing 123,000 members last year. Union membership reached its apex in 1954, and the 2012 numbers represent the latest in a slow decline of union density. Yet the economic benefits of unions for all workers is still undeniable.

The report also shows that union members took home a median \$943 in weekly earnings in 2012 — \$200 more than their non-union counterparts. The report is being taken as a call-to-arms by many organizers and worker advocates. AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka recognized the need for unions to organize where the jobs are:

Union membership impacts every other economic outcome that matters to all workers – falling wages, rising health care costs, home foreclosures, the loss of manufacturing jobs and disappearing retirement benefits. Collective action through unions remains the single best way for working people to effect change. But our still-struggling economy, weak laws and political as well as ideological assaults have taken a toll on union membership, and in the process have also imperiled economic security and good, middle class jobs.

...We enter 2013 with our eyes open and understand that these challenges offer real opportunities for working people to reshape the future. Working families are building community alliances, engaging with young workers and immigrants, fighting right-wing politicians and organizing in innovative ways. From taxi workers to teachers to nurses to Wal-Mart workers to port workers to freelance writers, working Americans are committed to building a new movement for the future and to creating good jobs and an economy that works for all.

Alternet writer Sarah Jaffe (@sarahjaffe) was more blunt in her reaction to the numbers. She tweeted:

Dear labor folks: if your response to today's statistics is anything other than "ORGANIZE" you lose.