



Cornell University  
ILR School

Cornell University ILR School  
**DigitalCommons@ILR**

---

Articles and Chapters

ILR Collection

---

11-2006

# Comprehensive Strategy: The Key to Successful Organizing

Kate Bronfenbrenner  
*Cornell University*, [klb23@cornell.edu](mailto:klb23@cornell.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/articles>

 Part of the [Unions Commons](#)

Thank you for downloading an article from DigitalCommons@ILR.

Support this valuable resource today!

---

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the ILR Collection at DigitalCommons@ILR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Articles and Chapters by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@ILR. For more information, please contact [hlmdigital@cornell.edu](mailto:hlmdigital@cornell.edu).

---

# Comprehensive Strategy: The Key to Successful Organizing

## Abstract

[Excerpt] For the last two decades, organizing has continued to be the central focus of the U.S. labor movement. In the past year, the effectiveness of organizing has been influenced by the split in the AFL-CIO, by discussions of labor's political leverage and strategy in the fall 2006 elections, and by the debate over which groups of workers should be targeted for organizing.

Nearly every top union leader talks about "changing to organize" – committing more resources to organizing and running campaigns more strategically. For the majority of unions, unfortunately, this talk has yet to turn into action. Indeed, most unions are continuing to organize much as they did twenty years ago (Bronfenbrenner and Hickey, 2004). In this article, we'll look at what's been happening to union organizing – in education and generally, in Ohio and nationally – and the reasons why these trends continue.

This article will also spotlight research that provides some answers for those looking for a model of successful union organizing.

It is now becoming clear that a new comprehensive model of union organizing is emerging – a model that can be adapted by the OEA and its locals to build membership and influence.

## Keywords

labor movement, unions, organizing

## Disciplines

Labor Relations | Unions

## Comments

### Suggested Citation

Bronfenbrenner, K. (2006). Comprehensive strategy: The key to successful organizing [Electronic version]. In *The state of the union report for the Ohio Education Association* (pp. 10-27). Columbus, OH: Ohio Education Association.

### Required Publisher Statement

© [Ohio Education Association](#). Reprinted with permission. All rights reserved.

# Health of Unionism and the OEA

## Comprehensive Strategy: The Key to Successful Organizing

---

---

Written by Kate Bronfenbrenner<sup>1</sup>  
School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University

### INTRODUCTION

For the last two decades, organizing has continued to be the central focus of the U.S. labor movement. In the past year, the effectiveness of organizing has been influenced by the split in the AFL-CIO, by discussions of labor's political leverage and strategy in the fall 2006 elections, and by the debate over which groups of workers should be targeted for organizing.

Nearly every top union leader talks about "changing to organize" – committing more resources to organizing and running campaigns more strategically. For the majority of unions, unfortunately, this talk has yet to turn into action. Indeed, most unions are continuing to organize much as they did twenty years ago (Bronfenbrenner and Hickey, 2004). In this article, we'll look at what's been happening to union organizing – in education and generally, in Ohio and nationally – and the reasons why these trends continue.

This article will also spotlight research that provides some answers for those looking for a model of successful union organizing.

It is now becoming clear that a new comprehensive model of union organizing is emerging – a model that can be adapted by the OEA and its locals to build membership and influence.

First, let's look at what's been happening to union membership and organizing.

### TRENDS IN UNION MEMBERSHIP DENSITY

It should come as no surprise to most OEA members that annual union density figures reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) in January 2006 showed that union density stood still – despite all the discussion.

---

<sup>1</sup> Kate Bronfenbrenner is Director of Labor Education Research at the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, Cornell University (Ithaca, NY).

Overall density remained the same in 2005 as it was in 2004 (12.5%); Private sector density declined from 7.9% to 7.8%, while public sector density increased from 36.4% to 36.5%. Gains from organizing, first contracts from certification elections, card checks in both the public and private sectors, and job growth in already unionized industries were only enough to offset the total number of union jobs lost through outsourcing, downsizing, privatization, or just plain union busting (Gifford 2006).

Although there were some bright spots, most of these trends have been in place for more than a decade (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Density increased among women workers, particularly African-American women, and unions continued to make gains among professional workers, particularly in occupations with a concentration of women (such as education, library science, and health care). There was even a slight increase in density among manufacturing workers, from 12.9% in 2004 to 13% in 2005 (Gifford 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

No matter how you parse the data, they do not suggest any union resurgence as a result of new organizing in the aftermath of the split in the AFL-CIO. Overall union density remained flat.

### *Union density in school districts*

When discussing union organizing across the country, most pundits have failed to notice that each year both the NEA and the AFT have continued to organize thousands of food service workers, teacher's aides, bus drivers, and other paraprofessionals and support staff in the nation's public schools. Like their counterparts in hotels, laundries, hospitals, and building services, most of these workers are women, and many are immigrants and workers of color. Almost all of them organize into a union as the only means to secure a living wage, health care, retirement benefits, and regular, full-time hours.

In this environment, it might be easy for a union such as the Ohio Education Association or its parent, the National Education Association, to feel removed from that discussion. Union density in local school districts stands above 60% in Ohio and above 42% nationwide (BLS 2005). In addition, according to the NEA's latest research, NEA win rates in public school elections average 89% (Bronfenbrenner, 2004).

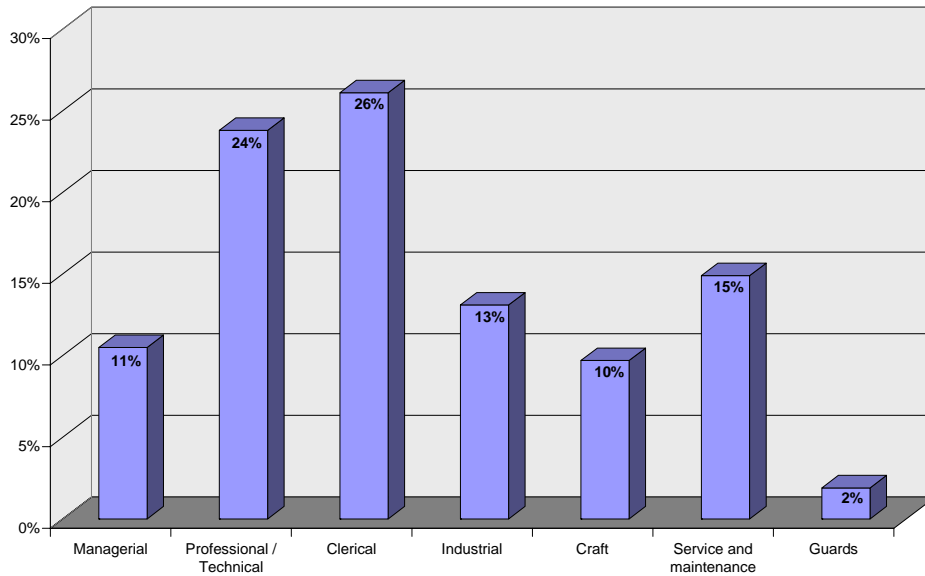
As a result of these figures, the Ohio Education Association and its parent, the NEA, might think that the discussion surrounding organizing is not relevant to them. This is not the case. Resolving the crisis of public education depends on a strong and vital labor movement – and maintaining a strong and vital labor movement will require changes in organizing at a pace and scale that the U.S. labor movement has not yet attempted.

As a result, the OEA and NEA need to actively engage in the discussion and its resolution as much as any other union in the United States.

### *The organizing discussion: Correcting the numbers*

The current discussion about the status of organizing is undermined by a lack of knowledge concerning where organizing success has been concentrated (in which sectors and occupations), and which unions have been most effective at organizing. This lack of knowledge has, in turn, contributed to misperceptions about demographic and sectoral trends in the U.S. workforce.

**Figure 1: U.S. Private and Public Sector Workforce by Occupational Groupings<sup>2</sup>**



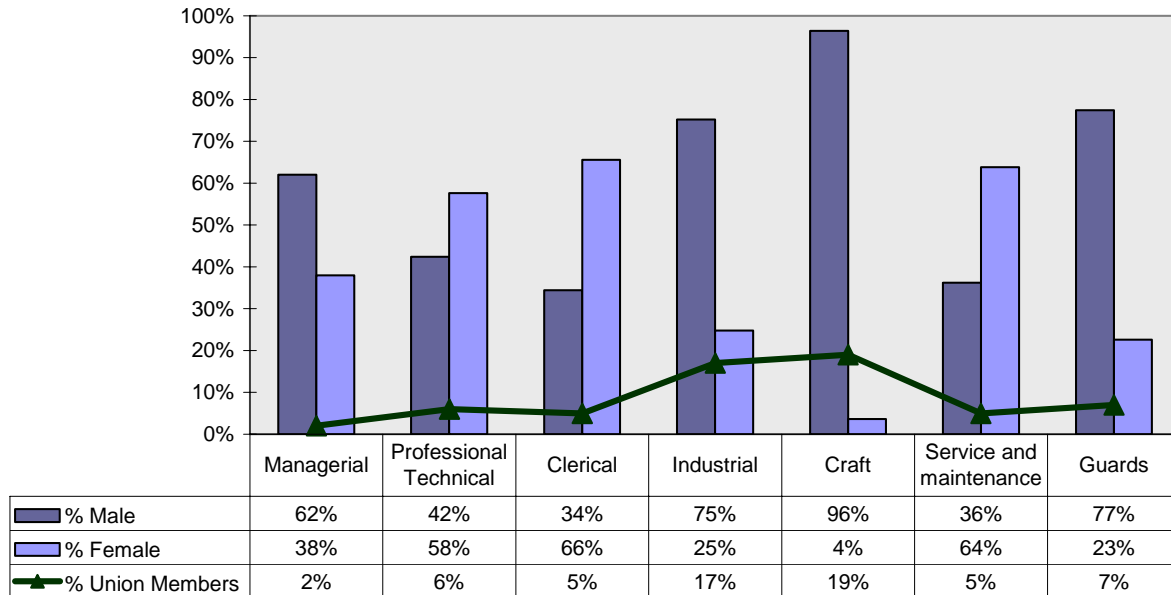
As shown in Figure 1 (above), professional and technical occupations constitute 24% of the workforce; clerical occupations, 26%; service and maintenance occupations a distant third at 15%; and industrial occupations, 13%.

For most occupational groupings, gender divisions remain extreme. Skilled craft occupations, security guards, blue-collar industrial jobs, and managerial jobs remain largely the domain of men, while clerical jobs and pink- and gray-collar service and maintenance jobs (in food service, health care, educational support, hotels, building services, and home care) remain primarily female (Figure 2, below).

---

<sup>2</sup> The occupational, industry, and workforce demographic data in Figures 1 and 2 and Table 1 were derived from the Current Population Survey (CPS) data compiled from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) "Current Population Survey: Merged Outgoing Rotation Groups with Earnings Data" (BLS 2004).

**Figure 2: Breakdown of U.S. Workforce by Occupation, Gender, and Union Membership**



Although the gap is not huge, women also dominate in professional and technical occupations, holding 58% of all professional and technical jobs. Union density, however, continues to remain significantly higher in industrial and craft units where men predominate, despite the fact that the majority of union organizing gains have been concentrated in service and maintenance, professional, and technical units dominated by women (Bronfenbrenner and Hickey, 2004; Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

There is enormous variation between and across industries. Table 1 (below) gives an overview of the workforce demographics for each industry category.

**Table 1: Breakdown of Workforce Demographics by Major Industries for Total Private and Public Sector Workforce**

|                                    | Percent of total work force | Percent union members | Percent women | Percent people of color | Percent professional technical workers |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|-------------------------|--|
| Airlines and railway               | 1%                          | 54%                   | 31%           | 25%                     | 4%                                     |
| Accommodation and food services    | 7%                          | 3%                    | 56%           | 34%                     | 1%                                     |
| Business and professional services | 9%                          | 2%                    | 46%           | 24%                     | 39%                                    |
| Health care and social services    | 11%                         | 6%                    | 81%           | 25%                     | 44%                                    |
| Education                          | 3%                          | 12%                   | 66%           | 20%                     | 62%                                    |
| Entertainment                      | 2%                          | 5%                    | 48%           | 21%                     | 28%                                    |

|                                     | Percent of total work force | Percent union members | Percent women | Percent people of color | Percent professional technical workers |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|-------------------------|--|
| Other services                      | 5%                          | 3%                    | 53%           | 25%                     | 15%                                    |
| Communications and IT               | 3%                          | 14%                   | 43%           | 22%                     | 32%                                    |
| Wholesale and retail trade          | 15%                         | 6%                    | 47%           | 22%                     | 7%                                     |
| Finance, insurance, and real estate | 7%                          | 2%                    | 57%           | 20%                     | 22%                                    |
| Manufacturing                       | 12%                         | 13%                   | 32%           | 25%                     | 15%                                    |
| Sanitation and utilities            | 1%                          | 25%                   | 22%           | 19%                     | 15%                                    |
| Transportation and warehousing      | 3%                          | 18%                   | 20%           | 28%                     | 3%                                     |
| Construction                        | 7%                          | 16%                   | 10%           | 24%                     | 3%                                     |
| Other private sector                | 3%                          | 4%                    | 23%           | 17%                     | 5%                                     |
| Public sector education             | 6%                          | 42%                   | 71%           | 20%                     | 68%                                    |
| Other public sector                 | 8%                          | 32%                   | 48%           | 29%                     | 30%                                    |

The data summarized in Table 1 are interesting for several reasons. First, it is worth noting that public sector education includes 6% of the workforce, of which 42% are union members, 71% are women, 20% are people of color, and 68% are professional and technical employees. The only sector more unionized than public education is the airlines and railway sector, which, because of flight attendants and ticket agents, also has a significant female workforce (31%).

It is also worth noting that manufacturing continues to employ 12% of the workforce, of which 32% are women and 15% are professional and technical. Service sector industries (such as accommodations and food services; health care and social services; and business and professional services) have relatively low union density, but high concentrations of women and workers of color. As we will see later, union activity and success have been highly concentrated in these service sector industries.

## **ORGANIZING UNDER THE NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS BOARD<sup>3</sup>**

Table 2 (below) provides summary statistics for all workers organized under the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) between 1999 and 2003, before the 2005 split in the AFL-CIO that spun off the Change to Win coalition as an independent entity. Although this period shows an overall decline in union organizing activity, the decline does not hold true across all industries and occupational groupings.

The data in Table 2 show a negative trend: a steady decline in the number of elections and the size of the units involved in these elections. The data also show that election wins were concentrated in smaller and smaller units. Because of this, only 43% of the million-plus workers who voted in NLRB elections between 1999 and 2003 were in units in which an election was won.

---

<sup>3</sup> National NLRB data summarized in Table 2 are compiled from specialized databases prepared by BNA Plus. These databases cover all NLRB certification elections that took place from January 1, 1999 to December 31, 2003 (BNA 2003), and include an updated list of unit data from the 13,300 closed cases for the same five-year period (BNA 2004), as well as online data sources such as Lexis-Nexis, Hovers, and NLRB online reports and litigation.

There is a dramatic variance across industry and unit. For example, unions were able to gain representation for 57% of the workers they attempted to organize in health care and social services; during the same period, unions gained representation for only 34% of eligible voters in the wholesale and retail sales industry. There is no evidence that employer opposition is any greater in the wholesale and retail sales industry than in other industries, where the percent of eligible voters in winning units is much higher (Bronfenbrenner and Hickey, 2004).

Union organizing in the service sector accounts for only 34% of all elections, but 51% of voters in units where the election was won. In contrast, elections in blue-collar units in manufacturing, transportation, construction, and sanitation, which account for more than half of all elections, account for only one-third of eligible voters in winning units.

**Table 2: Summary Statistics for all Workers Organized under NLRB, 1999–2003**

|                                     | Number of elections | Percent of all elections | Election win rate | Mean number of voters | Total number of eligible voters | Number of eligible voters in elections won |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>Election type</b>                |                     |                          |                   |                       |                                 |  |
| Election                            | 13,734              | 100%                     | 54%               | 74                    | 1,019,688                       | 434,569                                    |
| <b>Year</b>                         |                     |                          |                   |                       |                                 |  |
| 1999                                | 3,108               | 23%                      | 52%               | 79                    | 244,204                         | 106,681                                    |
| 2000                                | 2,996               | 22%                      | 53%               | 76                    | 228,634                         | 98,256                                     |
| 2001                                | 2,578               | 19%                      | 54%               | 79                    | 203,700                         | 73,741                                     |
| 2002                                | 2,705               | 20%                      | 56%               | 71                    | 192,604                         | 80,510                                     |
| 2003                                | 2,347               | 17%                      | 58%               | 64                    | 150,546                         | 75,381                                     |
| <b>Industry</b>                     |                     |                          |                   |                       |                                 |  |
| Accommodations and food services    | 381                 | 3%                       | 52%               | 68                    | 25,924                          | 10,032                                     |
| Business and professional services  | 845                 | 6%                       | 69%               | 47                    | 39,343                          | 24,374                                     |
| Health care and social services     | 2,214               | 16%                      | 64%               | 118                   | 262,015                         | 150,358                                    |
| Education                           | 211                 | 2%                       | 75%               | 89                    | 18,841                          | 11,924                                     |
| Entertainment                       | 191                 | 1%                       | 60%               | 64                    | 12,288                          | 5,271                                      |
| Other services                      | 844                 | 6%                       | 60%               | 41                    | 34,706                          | 18,784                                     |
| Communications and IT               | 441                 | 3%                       | 53%               | 47                    | 20,565                          | 6,733                                      |
| Wholesale and retail trade          | 1,528               | 11%                      | 51%               | 48                    | 72,658                          | 24,422                                     |
| Finance, insurance, and real estate | 121                 | 1%                       | 68%               | 43                    | 5,238                           | 1,457                                      |
| Manufacturing                       | 3,098               | 23%                      | 41%               | 113                   | 349,197                         | 102,923                                    |
| Sanitation and utilities            | 711                 | 5%                       | 51%               | 55                    | 39,353                          | 14,986                                     |
| Transportation and warehousing      | 1,653               | 12%                      | 54%               | 61                    | 100,779                         | 44,949                                     |
| Construction                        | 1,496               | 11%                      | 56%               | 26                    | 38,781                          | 18,356                                     |



*The State of the Union Report*

| Unit type                           |       |     |     |     |         |         |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-----|-----|-----|---------|---------|
| Professional/technical              | 659   | 5%  | 63% | 130 | 85,406  | 45,963  |
| Mixed, prof/tech/cler               | 652   | 5%  | 64% | 108 | 70,717  | 37,203  |
| Clerical                            | 413   | 3%  | 57% | 97  | 39,973  | 10,298  |
| Service and maintenance/cross dept. | 2,558 | 19% | 56% | 67  | 171,386 | 83,146  |
| Industrial                          | 3,858 | 28% | 48% | 89  | 342,835 | 116,396 |
| Craft                               | 1,392 | 10% | 58% | 42  | 58,711  | 27,242  |
| Truck driver                        | 1,545 | 11% | 47% | 50  | 76,540  | 28,724  |
| Guards                              | 326   | 2%  | 74% | 60  | 19,629  | 13,997  |
| Other                               | 2,299 | 17% | 57% | 66  | 152,787 | 70,569  |
| <b>Union</b>                        |       |     |     |     |         |         |
| AFSCME                              | 359   | 3%  | 67% | 84  | 30,083  | 17,518  |
| AFT                                 | 81    | 1%  | 77% | 147 | 11,916  | 7,613   |
| ANA                                 | 66    | 1%  | 74% | 150 | 9,884   | 4,634   |
| CWA                                 | 345   | 3%  | 53% | 72  | 24,804  | 7,928   |
| IBEW                                | 714   | 5%  | 54% | 47  | 33,417  | 13,255  |
| IBT                                 | 3,675 | 27% | 45% | 54  | 197,397 | 62,953  |
| SEIU                                | 1,061 | 8%  | 71% | 115 | 122,178 | 80,922  |
| UAW                                 | 402   | 3%  | 55% | 177 | 71,169  | 33,031  |
| UFCW                                | 996   | 7%  | 51% | 85  | 84,538  | 30,188  |
| USWA                                | 567   | 4%  | 42% | 136 | 77,247  | 17,809  |
| Independent unions                  | 1,575 | 12% | 66% | 76  | 120,131 | 63,905  |

Professional/technical and clerical workers account for only a small number of elections. Many of these workers – particularly workers in finance and insurance, female professional athletes, paralegal workers, private sector clerical workers outside of universities, and laboratory technicians – are not targeted for organizing, largely because they are not considered to be within the primary jurisdiction of any union.

Because win rates and unit sizes averaged higher in the professional/technical and clerical units than in non-professional units, these occupational groups accounted for as much as 22% of all workers organized under the NLRB during the five-year period 1999–2003.

*Card-check organizing outside the NLRB*

In the last decade, the environment for organizing in the private sector became increasingly challenging. As a result, more and more unions focused their efforts on organizing outside the traditional NLRB process, using card-check certification and, to a lesser extent, community-supervised elections. Because there is no government-mandated reporting requirement for private-sector organizing that occurs outside the NLRB, data on the nature and extent of these campaigns are very limited.

In fact, the only readily available data come from two sources: (1) weekly organizing numbers reported in the AFL-CIO’s *Work in Progress* (WIP) reports (2004), which were

discontinued shortly before the AFL-CIO/CTW split; and (2) a regularly updated list of successful card-check campaigns compiled by the Center for Employee Rights (Center for Employee Rights 2004).

The data from these two sources are incomplete and typically do not cover organizing activity by independent unions not affiliated with the AFL-CIO. The data depend entirely on self-reporting by affiliates, and do not include organizing in industries that routinely organize outside the NLRB, such as the construction and entertainment industries.

On the other hand, data from these sources do capture major private sector card-check victories that have occurred outside the NLRB since 1999. In doing so, the data provide important insights into the increasing significance of non-NLRB campaigns and the industries, occupations, and unions that tend to be involved.

**Table 3: Private Sector Card-Check Campaigns Won by AFL-CIO Affiliates, 1999–2003**

|                                     | Professional and technical units <sup>4</sup> |                            | Clerical             |                            | Service              |                            | Craft and production |                            |
|-------------------------------------|---|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
|                                     | Percent of campaigns                          | Total workers in units won | Percent of campaigns | Total workers in units won | Percent of campaigns | Total workers in units won | Percent of campaigns | Total workers in units won |
| <b>All industries</b>               | 15%   | 11,226                     | 13%                  | 14,340                     | 55%                  | 67,016                     | 17%                  | 28,314                     |
| Accommodations and food services    | 0%  | 0                          | 0%                   | 0                          | 100%                 | 38,075                     | 0%                   | 0                          |
| Business and professional services  | 2%  | 20                         | 0%                   | 0                          | 98%                  | 13,937                     | 0%                   | 0                          |
| Health care and social services     | 48%   | 7,871                      | 3%                   | 330                        | 49%                  | 11,592                     | 0%                   | 0                          |
| Education                           | 55%   | 490                        | 0%                   | 0                          | 44%                  | 125                        | 0%                   | 0                          |
| Entertainment                       | 67%   | 922                        | 0%                   | 0                          | 33%                  | 900                        | 0%                   | 0                          |
| Other services                      | 0%  | 0                          | 0%                   | 0                          | 100%                 | 2,477                      | 0%                   | 0                          |
| Communications and IT               | 32%   | 1,820                      | 63%                  | 8,471                      | 0%                   | 0                          | 5%                   | 600                        |
| Wholesale and retail trade          | 2%  | 23                         | 42%                  | 5,315                      | 0%                   | 0                          | 56%                  | 5,241                      |
| Finance, insurance, and real estate | 0%  | 0                          | 33%                  | 35                         | 67%                  | 33                         | 0%                   | 0                          |
| Manufacturing                       | 0%  | 0                          | 3%                   | 189                        | 0%                   | 0                          | 97%                  | 18,547                     |
| Sanitation and utilities            | 0%  | 0                          | 0%                   | 0                          | 0%                   | 0                          | 100%                 | 88                         |
| Transportation and warehousing      | 10%   | 80                         | 0%                   | 0                          | 0%                   | 0                          | 90%                  | 2,665                      |
| Construction                        | 0%  | 0                          | 0%                   | 0                          | 0%                   | 0                          | 100%                 | 1,173                      |

<sup>4</sup> Professional and technical units include combined professional, technical, and clerical units.

According to these two sources, 121,469 private sector workers were successfully organized through 415 card-check campaigns between 1999 and 2003. While this does not represent the total number of private sector workers organized outside the NLRB, I believe the breakdown of these campaigns by unit and industry (as described in Table 3, above) is reflective of the total population of private sector campaigns during this period.

As these data show, during this five-year period the most notable card-check gains have been accomplished by UNITE HERE in accommodations and food service and in retail distribution centers; the UFCW in retail stores; SEIU in health care and building services; and CWA in communications and IT.

In the five-year period, 15% of all card-check campaigns were in professional or technical units, where a total of 11,226 workers were organized; 13% were in clerical units, where 14,340 workers were organized – primarily retail sales clerks (UFCW and UNITE HERE) and customer service representatives (CWA); 17% were in manufacturing, construction, and trucking; and the majority, 55%, were in service sector industries, primarily workers in laundries and hotels (UNITE HERE), health care and building services (SEIU), and home care (AFSCME and SEIU).

These data confirm findings from earlier research: Unions with the greatest success in card-check campaigns are those that organize in industries where women and workers of color predominate, across all industries and bargaining unit types (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

These data also confirm that the NLRB remains an imperfect source for collecting data on organizing in the telecommunications industry. This is because more than 10,000 professional/technical and clerical workers organized through card-check campaigns, while only about 2,000 organized through the NLRB. In the retail sector, as well, more workers are organized through non-NLRB means than through NLRB campaigns.

Outside these two industries, findings on card-check campaigns through 2003 suggest that unions organizing private sector white-collar and manufacturing workers seem likely to stick to a traditional NLRB strategy. They are less likely to use a comprehensive campaign to bargain for neutrality card-check agreements with existing employers, or put pressure on suppliers, investors, customers, regulators, or the broader community in order to gain neutrality card-check agreements.

## **ORGANIZING UNDER THE RAILWAY LABOR ACT**

Under U.S. labor law, workers in the airline and railway industries continue to be organized under the Railway Labor Act (RLA). The RLA is under the supervision of the National Mediation Board (NMB) rather than the NLRB.

The airline and railway industries show some of the highest union density among private sectors in the U.S., including professional workers. In particular, there is a great deal of organizing activity in the airline sector, particularly among flight crews, air traffic controllers, technicians, flight attendants, and ticket agents. For the purposes of this study, these groups are considered part of the professional/technical and clerical workforce.

Unlike the NLRB, the RLA allows both elections and card-check certifications. During the five-year period from 1999–2003, there were a total of 208 elections and 26 card checks. Two-thirds of all campaigns were in the airline industry.

Overall election win rates under the RLA average higher (62%) than under the NLRB (54%). This is the case even though: (1) The average unit size is much larger; (2) In many cases units are spread across regions or the entire country; and (3) The union is required to win more than 50% of the eligible voters, rather than a simple majority of those who turn out to vote. In addition, while the percent of eligible voters in winning units was high – 61% of professionals and 74% of technical workers, on average – the percent of eligible voters was much lower for

clerical workers (44%) and flight attendants (46%). This is due to some election losses that were particularly significant because of the large national units of this industry. In one of the largest losses during the 1999–2003 period, 19,033 Delta Airlines flight attendants lost a national election. If the union had won the election, the total percentage of workers organized in the airline industry during this period would have been as high as 32% (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

## **ORGANIZING IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR**

Table 4 (below) provides an overview of certification elections and card-check campaigns in state and local units that occurred between 1999 and 2003. Table data were drawn from a representative sample of five states with public sector collective bargaining laws covering public employees: California, Illinois, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Washington.

Between 1999 and 2003, a total of 1,273 elections and 321 card checks were held in these states. In stark contrast to the private sector, the public sector win rate averaged 90% in the five states combined. This was an increase from an 85% national average for all state and local elections in 1991–1992 (Bronfenbrenner and Juravich, 1995a). This highly successful win rate, combined with additional card checks, added 346,032 workers to union rosters in the public sector.

Two of the states we examined, Minnesota and New Jersey, allow only elections; the majority of Minnesota elections are mail ballots. The remaining three states permit card checks to some degree – card checks are the primary means of certification in Washington, while they are relatively rare in Illinois.

Although there were almost twice as many elections in Illinois than in each of the other four states, the overwhelming majority of new workers organized in public sector campaigns during this period were in California. This was the result of extremely large elections in home care for both SEIU and AFSCME, including the historic election of 75,000 home-care workers in L.A. County in 1999. This home-care election may be the single largest union election victory in the U.S. since the UAW won at the Ford River Rouge plant more than a half a century ago (Greenhouse 1999).

**Table 4: Summary Statistics for Workers Organized in the Public Sector, 1999–2003**

|                                 | Number of campaigns | Percent of all campaigns | Election win rate | Card-check win rate | Mean number of voters | Total number of eligible voters | Number of eligible voters in campaigns won |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| <b>Election type</b>            |                     |                          |                   |                     |                       |                                 |  |
| Card-check                      | 321                 | 20%                      | -                 | 100%                | 102                   | 31,943                          | 31,773                                     |
| Election                        | 1,273               | 80%                      | 90%               | -                   | 271                   | 331,381                         | 314,259                                    |
| <b>State</b>                    |                     |                          |                   |                     |                       |                                 |  |
| California                      | 277                 | 17%                      | 92%               | 100%                | 1,071                 | 276,270                         | 269,785                                    |
| Illinois                        | 588                 | 37%                      | 89%               | 100%                | 43                    | 25,189                          | 21,419                                     |
| Minnesota                       | 166                 | 10%                      | 84%               | -                   | 52                    | 8,553                           | 3,305                                      |
| New Jersey                      | 287                 | 18%                      | 93%               | -                   | 59                    | 16,765                          | 15,274                                     |
| Washington                      | 276                 | 17%                      | 89%               | 100%                | 132                   | 36,547                          | 36,249                                     |
| <b>Year</b>                     |                     |                          |                   |                     |                       |                                 |  |
| 1999                            | 298                 | 19%                      | 90%               | 100%                | 348                   | 103,719                         | 98,079                                     |
| 2000                            | 318                 | 20%                      | 89%               | 98%                 | 140                   | 44,535                          | 42,234                                     |
| 2001                            | 248                 | 16%                      | 89%               | 100%                | 43                    | 10,477                          | 9,431                                      |
| 2002                            | 340                 | 21%                      | 91%               | 100%                | 443                   | 144,724                         | 143,345                                    |
| 2003                            | 390                 | 25%                      | 89%               | 100%                | 158                   | 59,869                          | 52,943                                     |
| <b>Entity</b>                   |                     |                          |                   |                     |                       |                                 |  |
| Public education                | 401                 | 25%                      | 90%               | 100%                | 125                   | 50,171                          | 42,024                                     |
| Other public sector             | 1,193               | 75%                      | 89%               | 100%                | 268                   | 313,153                         | 304,008                                    |
| <b>Division</b>                 |                     |                          |                   |                     |                       |                                 |  |
| Health care and social services | 138                 | 9%                       | 87%               | 100%                | 1,924                 | 257,858                         | 251,798                                    |
| Higher education                | 68                  | 4%                       | 84%               | 100%                | 400                   | 27,178                          | 20,835                                     |
| Judicial                        | 79                  | 5%                       | 86%               | 100%                | 114                   | 8,785                           | 8,504                                      |
| Local government                | 358                 | 23%                      | 87%               | 99%                 | 61                    | 21,386                          | 20,104                                     |
| Public safety                   | 393                 | 25%                      | 94%               | 100%                | 27                    | 10,467                          | 9,670                                      |
| Public works                    | 177                 | 11%                      | 85%               | 100%                | 51                    | 8,821                           | 8,096                                      |
| School district                 | 329                 | 21%                      | 92%               | 100%                | 69                    | 22,729                          | 20,925                                     |
| State government                | 31                  | 2%                       | 96%               | 100%                | 180                   | 5,584                           | 5,584                                      |
| Transportation                  | 22                  | 1%                       | 100%              | 100%                | 26                    | 516                             | 516  |
| <b>Unit type</b>                |                     |                          |                   |                     |                       |                                 |  |
| Professional                    | 170                 | 11%                      | 90%               | 100%                | 200                   | 33,575                          | 27,532                                     |
| Technical                       | 78                  | 5%                       | 94%               | 96%                 | 40                    | 3,118                           | 2,730                                      |

|                      |     |     |     |      |       |         |         |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|------|-------|---------|---------|
| Mixed prof/tech/cler | 113 | 7%  | 86% | 100% | 188   | 21,267  | 20,686  |
| Clerical             | 143 | 9%  | 90% | 100% | 27    | 3,848   | 2,736   |
| Non-professional     | 278 | 17% | 88% | 100% | 999   | 272,745 | 265,497 |
| Blue collar          | 249 | 16% | 90% | 100% | 37    | 8,878   | 8,277   |
| Police/fire          | 286 | 18% | 94% | 100% | 30    | 8,225   | 7,749   |
| Wall-to-wall         | 141 | 9%  | 79% | 100% | 53    | 7,542   | 6,832   |
| Supervisory          | 101 | 6%  | 95% | 100% | 28    | 2,820   | 2,722   |
| Security             | 35  | 2%  | 93% | 100% | 38    | 1,306   | 1,271   |
| Union                |     |     |     |      |       |         |         |
| AFSCME               | 210 | 13% | 86% | 100% | 417   | 87,069  | 86,252  |
| AFT                  | 54  | 3%  | 96% | -    | 287   | 15,524  | 15,124  |
| AFT / NEA            | 17  | 1%  | 82% | -    | 274   | 4,665   | 536     |
| IAFF                 | 40  | 3%  | 97% | 100% | 17    | 688     | 615     |
| IBT                  | 181 | 11% | 90% | 100% | 29    | 5,206   | 4,891   |
| IUOE                 | 81  | 5%  | 84% | 100% | 22    | 1,725   | 1,291   |
| LIUNA                | 85  | 5%  | 86% | 100% | 32    | 2,646   | 2,407   |
| NEA                  | 138 | 9%  | 89% | 100% | 72    | 9,944   | 7,104   |
| SEIU                 | 139 | 9%  | 88% | 100% | 1,427 | 196,903 | 193,296 |
| Other AFL-CIO        | 246 | 15% | 91% | 99%  | 66    | 15,919  | 15,327  |
| Independent unions   | 403 | 25% | 92% | 100% | 59    | 23,035  | 19,189  |

According to the data in Table 4 (above), organizing remains alive and well in state and local units in the public sector, despite recent setbacks in Missouri and Indiana. With the exception of California, the number of elections has decreased in the period between 1991–1992 and the present, but the average unit size has increased. For every year except 2001, the number of workers organized each year in these five states was nearly as great, if not more than, the 45,000 new public sector workers who were organized nationwide each year in 1991 and 1992.

Table 4 also suggests that there has not been a great deal of change in where public sector organizing is concentrated. In 1991–1992, 24% of elections were taking place in school districts, while 4% were taking place in higher education. A decade later, 25% of all campaigns take place in public education (both public schools and public higher education). Elections are concentrated in public safety (25%) and local government (23%). These findings are comparable to the findings of the 1991–1992 study.

Unit type also remained relatively constant from the 1991–1992 study. Professional units increased slightly from 10% to 11%, and mixed professional/technical and clerical units increased from 4% to 7%. Organizing activity, however, continues to be concentrated in police/fire units (18%); non-professional units, primarily in public schools (17%); and blue-collar units (16%).

When we look at the actual number of workers organized, the results shift due to a combination of unit size and win rates. While the largest group of newly organized workers by far are the 265,497 non-professionals (most of whom are California home-care workers), it is worth noting that in the same five-year period, 27,532 workers in professional units and 20,686 in mixed professional, technical, and clerical units were organized.

These professional/technical and clerical workers – teachers, librarians, social workers, and health care workers, the majority of whom are women – are proof once again that professionals can and will organize, if the labor movement gives them the opportunity. In addition, they can organize in a climate free from the coercion and intimidation that has become pervasive in the private sector workplace (Bronfenbrenner, 2000; Bronfenbrenner and Juravich, 1995b).

When we look specifically at the NEA, we find that across these five states the NEA organized a total of 7,640 workers in 155 campaigns over the five-year period, including: 168 in California; 3,221 in New Jersey; 2,652 in Illinois; and 536 in Minnesota (where the NEA is merged with the AFT). The average win rate for the NEA was 89%. Sixty-two percent of NEA campaigns were in non-professional units, 7% were in clerical units, 11% were in mixed professional and non-professional units, and 20% were in teacher or professional units.

## **ORGANIZING ACTIVITY DURING AND AFTER THE AFL-CIO SPLIT**

An active debate within the AFL-CIO that surfaced in 2004 resulted in a decision by the SEIU, UNITE HERE, UFCW, LIUNA, IBT, and the UFW to leave the AFL-CIO and join with the UBC, which had left the AFL-CIO several years earlier to form the Change to Win Federation.

As the 1999–2003 data suggest, prior to the split there was great variation in organizing activity and success across the CTW affiliates. SEIU had consistently organized more workers through NLRB elections and non-Board campaigns; because of home-care organizing, it was one of the most successful unions organizing in the public sector as well. UNITE HERE had been the most successful union organizing in manufacturing in the 1980s and early 1990s; by 1999–2003, the union had largely switched to non-Board campaigns in laundries, hotels, and distribution centers, where it was second only to SEIU in its non-Board organizing gains.

In contrast, the Teamsters ran more NLRB elections than any other union. Because most of their wins were concentrated in small units, however, only 32% of all eligible voters in IBT elections ended up in units where the election was won. The UFCW had a similar record, with, on average, only 35% of eligible voters in UFCW elections in winning units. On the other hand, the UFCW, unlike the IBT, did have some wins in non-Board campaigns. The Laborers, in 2003, had not made significant progress in organizing on either front.

Organizing reports after the split suggest that the unions that were making the most significant organizing gains in the public and private sectors before the split – SEIU, UNITE HERE, CWA, AFSCME, AFT, and NEA – are continuing to do so, regardless of which federation they belong to. Overall organizing numbers, on the other hand, are staying the same, or possibly declining.

According to 2005 NLRB reports, the number of elections dropped from 2,361 in 2004 to 2,117 in 2005, while the win rate increased from 58.4% to 61.5% (BNA 2006). Due to the smaller number of elections, particularly in larger units, the total number of workers in winning units was only 63,744 voters (51% of those who voted in elections).

This is a negligible number in an economy in which it is estimated that, in the previous year, nearly twice as many union jobs were outsourced overseas (Bronfenbrenner and Luce, 2004). Although overall numbers in NLRB elections were down for both the CTW and AFL-CIO, unions in both federations continued to make gains in non-Board and public sector elections.

The most significant of these gains included:

- ◆ The organizing of more than 16,000 wireless workers at Cingular by CWA (Moberg 2006)
- ◆ The 5,000 janitors organized by SEIU in Houston (Greenhouse 2006)
- ◆ Other victories by UNITE HERE at Angelica Laundry (Feldstein 2006)

- ◆ The ongoing UAW campaign to organize auto parts dealers (such as Freightliner) using card-check campaigns across the South (Moberg 2006)
- ◆ The AFSCME and SEIU successful nationwide campaign to organize more than 60,000 childcare workers (Keystone Research 2006).

These numbers are significant for many reasons.

First, they demonstrate that the worst fears about what the split would do to organizing were never realized: The breakdown in central labor bodies and state federations did not happen. Indeed, these labor units were able to continue helping unions work across federations and support each other in organizing and contract campaign efforts.

Second, there has been considerable innovation in both federations as a result of the split. SEIU and UNITE HERE have been assisting the Teamsters, Laborers, and, most recently, the UFCW in beginning to set up strategic research and campaigns departments to help run more targeted, aggressive, and effective organizing and first-contract campaigns. The AFL-CIO strategic campaigns department has been working with the Ironworkers and the IBEW to support them in running more strategic campaigns in the construction and the energy industry. In addition, more and more industrial unions – in particular, the Steelworkers and Autoworkers – are beginning to bargain to organize.

## **THE ORGANIZING CHALLENGE**

As we have seen, none of these changes has resulted in any improvement in the organizing numbers. In an ironic sense, however, there is good news in these numbers. If the U.S. labor movement were doing everything right and union density were still dropping (in the private sector) and stagnating (in the public sector), then the numbers would indicate that there was nothing left to do but wait for labor law reform. Unfortunately, without organizing and political power, the labor movement would never get labor law reform. No one knows better than public sector unions such as the NEA that the reason these unions don't have public sector collective bargaining in certain states is that the labor movement doesn't have political power in those states. The first step to gaining collective bargaining rights is organizing and getting political power.

What is the answer? It is to change the one thing over which unions have the greatest control: the strategies they use in organizing. We know from our research that in all organizing – public or private, large multinational body or locally-based family business – union strategies matter. These strategies in large part determine which types of workers and which unions have the greatest organizing success in the current organizing climate (Bronfenbrenner and Juravich, 1998; Juravich and Bronfenbrenner, 1998; Bronfenbrenner and Hickey, 2004).

In today's more hostile, more complex, and more global organizing climate, unions must base their organizing strategies on a new, comprehensive model. Union success in both certification elections and card-check campaigns depends on a union-building strategy that incorporates 10 elements, each of which is a cluster of key union tactics that are critical to organizing success (Bronfenbrenner and Hickey, 2004):

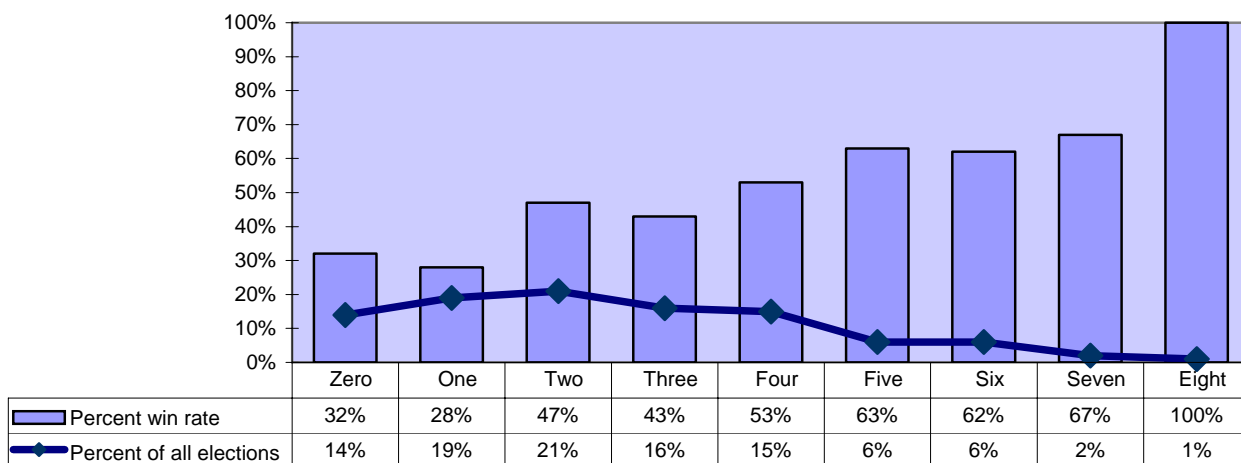
1. Adequate and appropriate staff and financial resources
2. Strategic targeting and research
3. Active and representative rank-and-file organizing committees
4. Active participation of member volunteer organizers
5. Person-to-person contact inside and outside the workplace
6. Benchmarks and assessments to monitor union support and set thresholds for moving ahead with the campaign



7. Issues that resonate in the workplace and in the community
8. Creative, escalating internal pressure tactics involving members in the workplace
9. Creative, escalating external pressure tactics involving members outside the workplace, locally, nationally, and/or internationally
10. Building for the first contract during the organizing campaign.

While each of the 10 elements of the model is important in itself, and each is individually associated with higher win rates, a tactic’s ultimate effectiveness depends on its integration into a comprehensive campaign that includes as many of the 10 elements as possible. Each tactic will enable and amplify the effectiveness of the others.

**Figure 3: Percent of Elections and Election Win Rates by Number of Comprehensive Tactics Used**



As described in Figure 3 (above), win rates increase dramatically for each additional tactic used. There was a 32% win rate when no comprehensive organizing tactics were used; a 44% win rate associated with one to five tactics; a 68% win rate associated with more than five tactics; and a 100% win rate for the 1% of campaigns in which unions used eight tactics.

At the same time, the percentage of campaigns in which unions use the tactics steadily declines as the number of tactics increases. Fourteen percent of all campaigns use no comprehensive organizing tactics; 54% use fewer than three tactics; and only 10% of all campaigns use more than five tactics. No campaigns use more than eight tactics. These results apply across all industrial sectors, occupational groups, and company groupings.

Equally important, the effectiveness of this model remains true even when faced with the most aggressive anti-union employer campaigns. In elections with moderately aggressive employer campaigns, win rates average 93% when the union runs a comprehensive campaign, but drop to 35% when the union fails to run a comprehensive campaign.

Even when unions face aggressive employer opposition, win rates average 52% overall in elections in which the union runs a comprehensive campaign, but fall to 29% when the union fails to run a comprehensive campaign. This is consistent with our model: Although employer anti-union campaigns can and often do have a devastating impact on union organizing success, unions can increase win rates by running comprehensive campaigns – even in the face of the most aggressive employer opposition.

Finally, it is worth noting that the importance of this model goes well beyond the certification election campaign. Campaigns in which the union used more than five comprehensive tactics during the organizing election campaign are associated with higher first contract rates as well. First contract rates average 74% in elections in which the union ran a comprehensive campaign using more than five tactics; 66% when the union used one to five comprehensive organizing tactics; and only 58% when the union failed to use comprehensive organizing tactics.

These findings are also consistent with our previous research, conducted with Tom Juravich, on first contract rates in the public sector. We found that even in the context of extremely weak employer opposition, unions organizing in the public sector were more likely to win first contracts and to have higher post-first contract membership rates in open and agency shops when they ran more aggressive and comprehensive organizing campaigns (Juravich and Bronfenbrenner, 1998).

These data are further supported by my interviews with lead organizers in card-check campaigns. I found that this comprehensive model of organizing – the model that was essential to organizing success under the NLRB – was even more critical in pulling together the kind of local, national, and often international campaigns necessary to gain card-check neutrality. At the same time, this model was also essential in building the union among rank-and-file workers to gain and maintain majority support.

## **CONCLUSION**

Members of the NEA depend on the revitalization of the U.S. labor movement through organizing. Although NEA leaders may not realize it, Association members are as caught up in the global race to the bottom as every industrial and retail worker in this country. The trade and investment policies that have led to hundreds of thousands of jobs leaving this country each year (Bronfenbrenner and Luce, 2004) are the same policies that reduce money for education and social services; create a context in which more students come to school hungry, only to return to problems at home; and reduce labor's power to lobby for more public access to high quality education and public sector collective bargaining laws.

The NEA depends on labor's revitalization as much as every other union in this country. NEA leaders and members should not only actively support the organizing and bargaining struggles of other unions in their communities, but also join together with public and private sector unions across the country to renew the effort to organize more workers in states that do not have collective bargaining laws. In doing so, the NEA would gain the political power necessary to get workers in public education the right to organize in those states.

At a time when the U.S. labor movement as a whole is grappling with future directions for organizing, one thing is clear: NEA members and leaders should be part of the discussion and part of the action. Public education depends on a powerful, progressive, and inclusive labor movement – and a powerful, progressive, and inclusive labor movement depends on all unions organizing together locally, nationally, and globally. The NEA needs to be part of that movement.

## **WORKS CITED**

AFL-CIO. 2004. January 7, 1999-December 20, 2003. *Work in Progress*. Paged electronic document. Retrieved February 2005 from <http://aflcio.org/aboutaflcio/wip/>.

Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). 2004. "Current population survey: Merged outgoing rotation groups with earnings data." Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Labor Statistics. Produced by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), Cambridge, MA. Also

known as “NBER CPS Labor Extracts, Earnings File Extract” available on CD-ROM, Codebook: CPH-013.

Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). 2005. “Current population survey: Merged outgoing rotation groups with earnings data.” Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Labor Statistics. Produced by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), Cambridge, MA. Also known as “NBER CPS Labor Extracts, Earnings File Extract” available on CD-ROM, Codebook: CPH-013.

BNA Plus. 1999-2003. “Database of NLRB certification elections 1999-2003.” Prepared specifically for the Cornell Office of Labor Education Research by BNA PLUS, the research division of The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc., Washington, D.C.

BNA Plus. 2004. “Database of NLRB certification elections 2004.” Prepared specifically for the Cornell Office of Labor Education Research by BNA PLUS, the research division of The Bureau of National Affairs, Inc., Washington, D.C.

BNA Plus 2006. *NLRB Election Statistics: Year-End 2005 Report*. Washington, D.C.: BNA Plus.

Bronfenbrenner, Kate. 2005. “Organizing Women: The Nature and Process of Union Organizing Efforts among U.S. Women Workers Since the Mid-1990s.” Forthcoming in *Work and Occupations*.

Bronfenbrenner, Kate and Robert Hickey. 2004. “Changing to Organize: A National Assessment of Union Organizing Strategies.” In *Organize or Die: Labor's Prospects in Neoliberal America*, edited by Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, Kate and Tom Juravich. 1998. “It Takes More Than Housecalls: Organizing to Win with a Comprehensive Union-Building Strategy.” In *Organizing to Win: New Research on Union Strategies*, edited by K. Bronfenbrenner, S. Friedman, R. Hurd, R. Oswald, and R. Seeber, 18-36. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, Kate and Stephanie Luce. 2004. *The Changing Nature of Corporate Global Restructuring: The Impact of Production Shifts on Jobs in the U.S., China, and Around the Globe*. Commissioned research paper submitted to the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission. October 12.

*Business Wire*, 2006. “Hilton, N.Y. Hotel and Motel Trades Council Reach Tentative Agreement; Hilton Also Agrees with UNITE HERE on ‘Partnership for Future Growth.’” July 29.

Center for Employee Rights. 2005. “Successful Card-Check Campaigns.” Paged electronic document. Retrieved February 2005 from <http://www.employee-rights.org/protect/campaigns/> (inventory of workplaces).

Feldstein, Mary Jo. 2006. “Angelica, union settle long dispute.” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. June 16, pg. B1.

Greenhouse, Steven. 1999. “In Biggest Drive since 1937, Union Gains a Victory.” *New York Times*: February 25.

Greenhouse, Steven. 2006. "Union Claims Texas Victory With Janitors." *New York Times*: November 28, A1.

Juravich, Tom and Kate Bronfenbrenner. 1998. "Preparing for the Worst: Organizing and Staying Organized in the Public Sector." In *Organizing to Win: New Research on Union Strategies*, edited by Kate Bronfenbrenner, Sheldon Friedman, Richard W. Hurd, Rudolph A. Oswald, and Ronald L. Seeber. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.

Keystone Research. 2006. *Unions in Child Care*. Harrisburg, PA: Keystone Research Center.

Moberg, David. 2006. "Paradigm Shift." *In These Times*: February, 41.