

CWA news



AI IS MOVING FAST. WORKER POWER HAS TO MOVE FASTER.

CWA Is Leading a Worker-Centered Approach to AI and the Future



By CWA President Claude Cummings Jr.

As artificial intelligence reshapes our jobs faster than lawmakers can respond, union contracts are the most effective way workers can set enforceable rules for the future of work. CWA is leading the labor movement in developing strategies to empower workers in the age of AI. We know that only union contracts can move at the speed of technological change, and we are working to give workers a voice in creating guardrails.

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New AI technology has the potential to create economic benefits and improve lives. However, it also presents profound challenges to the rights and livelihoods of workers. Out-of-touch C-suite executives promise starry-eyed investors that AI tools will replace skilled workers. More often, our members correct AI errors while new AI tools are used to cut jobs, intensify surveillance, and automate management.

In previous eras of technological transformation, as our jobs changed dramatically, we have seen management use new technologies to degrade the dignity of our work.

We've seen the adoption of new technologies that have intensified and sped up our work, seeking to control workers and turn the complex jobs of technicians and customer service professionals into deskilled box-checking at the expense of customers. We've seen new job opportunities created by technology, such as internet and wireless communication technologies—but those jobs were often created outside the union's jurisdiction, and employers sought to keep us from organizing them. The tactics of the tech CEOs are nothing we haven't seen before.

CWA has a long and proud history of bargaining over new technologies.

CWA has a long and proud history of bargaining over new technologies, limiting their negative impacts on workers, customers, and the public while ensuring that workers win their fair share of the economic gains that new innovations bring.

We are not opposed to the use of new technologies like artificial intelligence. We recognize its potential for scientific advancement and economic benefit. Like all tools, the outcome depends on who is allowed input. The best way to protect people—as workers, customers, voters, parents, and members of their communities—is for all of us to have a say in how these tools are used.

Workers impacted by technology must guide how it is implemented.

CWA members and leaders do not accept that the effects of AI systems are inevitable or predetermined. What we've learned in our decades of worker advocacy is simple: workers impacted by technology must guide how it is implemented. Otherwise you risk technology being turned into a weapon by which the billionaires hold on to power while impoverishing the rest of us.

In every district and sector of our union, CWA members and leaders are facing AI challenges head-on, using existing contract language to shape the implementation of AI technologies in the workplace, bargaining new protections into our contracts, and building strength by mobilizing and organizing around AI concerns. Our solidarity is our strength, and CWA members and leaders have shared their knowledge, empowering other working people to organize for a seat at the table.

We can shape AI into a tool for progress, not exploitation.

AI has the potential to build prosperity and unleash human creativity, but only if it works for working people. Together, we can ensure that AI serves as a tool for progress, not exploitation. We can build a future where technology enhances human potential, supports good jobs, and strengthens our communities.

As a union, we will continue to fight tooth and nail for our jobs, for our futures, and for the dignity of our work.

The Future of AI

THE UNION DIFFERENCE IN TELECOM BUILDS ON PAST FIGHTS OVER WORKPLACE TECHNOLOGY

Telecommunications workers have always been at the center of the fight for good jobs in the face of new technologies in the workplace. Where our union once represented telephone operators, we have responded to technology-driven job destruction by organizing the next generation of workers for internet and wireless communications. Today, CWA members are again on the forefront of a technological revolution, having used AI tools on the job long before the general public first heard of ChatGPT.

CWA members know the union difference when technology disrupts the workplace. While workforce statistics have pointed toward a clear reduction in jobs since 2022, AT&T employees without union representation—including non-bargaining unit software positions, HR positions, and management positions—were three times more likely to experience job losses when compared to union-represented positions at AT&T. CWA members on the frontlines at AT&T have seen new AI tools used to automate tasks traditionally performed by managers, like surveilling workplace behaviors and automating employee feedback. Across the economy, those roles have often been the first to be eliminated when companies invest in workplace AI.

CWA members know the union difference when technology disrupts the workplace.

As billionaires and CEOs seek to use AI tools to cut costs, worker power and union contracts serve as the best ways to fight against future AI-related job losses.

To better inform bargaining priorities, CWA's National Committee on Artificial Intelligence has led member discussions to understand how new AI technologies at AT&T and across telecommunications employers are changing the workplace. With a voice on the job, CWA members are lending their expertise and experience to shape how AI tools are implemented.

We are the experts in effective and safe technology usage in the workplace, not corporate executives.

Over 25 years ago, CWA members went on an 18-day strike at Bell Atlantic (now Verizon) to demand workplace protections against abuse of new technologies during the early 2000s that similarly increased workplace stress and job insecurity—eventually securing protections against electronic surveillance in the workplace, gaining time off the phones, and defining what it meant to work on the internet.

As a continuation of this history, we are called once again to organize against the technologies of today, not only to protect the workplace but also the customers and communities that we serve nationwide.

IT'S IN YOUR

Advances in artificial intelligence may be moving fast, but CWA's union contracts are moving faster.

While lawmakers debate and corporate executives experiment, CWA members are using the power of collective bargaining to write enforceable rules for how AI is implemented on the job. A union contract is a binding agreement, backed by our power to grieve, arbitrate, and enforce. That's how CWA members are turning our AI principles into protections.



Across our union, CWA members are bargaining over the implementation and use of AI technologies. Through our CWA National Committee on AI, we are sharing contract language and bargaining strategies with state and local leaders through our AI Bargaining Toolkit.

CWA members across the tech and video game industries are showing how collective bargaining gives workers the power to regulate artificial intelligence at some of the largest tech companies in the country.

Beginning with an historic contract for workers at Microsoft subsidiary ZeniMax, CWA negotiated a bilateral agreement with the tech giant that defines collective principles on the usage of artificial



CWAers at Microsoft subsidiaries in tech through ar

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People-Powered Principles for AI

CWA has taken a member-led approach to AI, harnessing the expertise of CWAers with direct experience working in diverse industries, including call centers, telecommunications, journalism, airlines, manufacturing, tech, and the

Our goal in bargaining is not to stop new technologies but to ensure that the benefits of new technologies are brought to workers through the creation of good, high-paying jobs. CWA members and leadership do not accept that the effects of AI systems should be borne by workers. We will hold company executives accountable for the impact that workplace AI systems have on workers, and we will be proactive by bargaining for guardrails that:

- Give workers a voice in implementing AI tools in the workplace;
- Center humans in AI processes and ensure human oversight of AI decisions;
- Protect workers' personal data, intellectual property, and digital likeness;
- Protect against invasive surveillance and unfair automated employment decision-making, including hiring;
- Guard against unsafe and stressful work intensification and speed-up;
- Ensure that new technologies are not solely used for cost-cutting and instead improve our ability to serve our customers;
- Provide a plan for the transition of workers displaced or affected by new AI tools and systems;
- Allow workers to refuse work on AI systems they deem unethical; and
- Secure workers their fair share in the economic gains when AI tools increase productivity.

In the policy arena, CWA members will continue to work with the broader labor movement to engage policymakers and ensure the benefits of AI across our industries. Government policy should recognize the need for collective bargaining and strengthen workers' bargaining power.

It Starts With Us

OUR CONTRACT: How CWA Members are Shaping AI through the Power of a Union Contract

intelligence in the workplace, ensuring that new technologies work for the people, not the other way around. Union-represented workers at Microsoft have also established articles in their collective bargaining agreements that require the company to provide notice to the union when the implementation of AI technology impacts work performed by bargaining-unit employees.



NewsGuild-CWA members rallied against AI Slop in December 2025.

but also upholding journalistic standards and protecting the public from AI-generated slop flooding the news.

AI protections in our union contracts have teeth. Members at POLITICO have already used newly bargained AI contract language to win a landmark arbitration case against POLITICO management over the company's unilateral introduction of artificial intelligence tools that bypassed negotiated safeguards and undermined core journalistic standards. CWA members set the precedent that employers cannot use AI technology as an end-run around contractual obligations.

At Frontier Communications in California, a new three-year contract ratified late last year includes a structure for addressing the implementation of AI tools. Instead of unilateral decisions handed down from management, workers now have a seat at the table.

NABET-CWA members on the



CWA has been an international leader among unions, sharing our experience in shaping AI guardrails.

hit podcast "Snap Judgment" negotiated intellectual property rights for creative workers, including protections from transfers of their work to artificial intelligence models.



Frontier Communications members in California ratified a contract including AI provisions.

These victories reflect a simple truth: workers are the best people to shape how AI technologies are used. Through collective bargaining, CWA members are proving that AI's impacts are not inevitable. With union contracts and worker power, we can shape new technologies to strengthen jobs, protect the public, and uphold the dignity of our work.



ZeniMax subsidiary ZeniMax are helping to shape AI policy in a historic contract protecting video game workers.

Bargaining units with the NewsGuild-CWA have ratified 58 union contracts that include language covering the use of AI in newsrooms across the country. TNG-CWA journalists are negotiating for job protections

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Subscribe to our union-wide weekly email newsletter and follow our social media accounts to learn about the bargaining, organizing, and mobilizing that is happening across our union. Visit cwa.org/stay-informed for links.

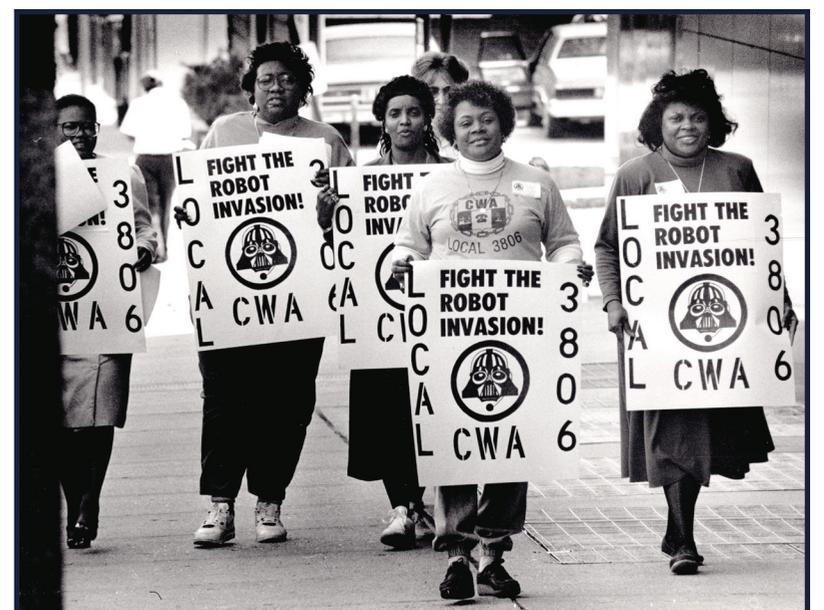


Designed by K.J. Pargeter

The Historical Fight for Skilled, Human Labor

From switchboards to software, CWAers have always been on the frontlines of the fight to protect the dignity of work against the siren's call of cost-cutting through automation and new technologies. Throughout the decades, CWAers have organized to ensure that new technologies augmented our labor, rather than replacing us.

Pictured at left: CWA Local 3806 members marched as part of the National Operator Awareness Week demonstration in Memphis, Tenn., in 1991.



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Union Member Rights and Officer Responsibilities Under the LMRDA

The Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act (LMRDA) guarantees certain rights to union members and imposes certain responsibilities on union officers to ensure union democracy, financial integrity, and transparency. The Office of Labor-Management Standards (OLMS) is the Federal agency with primary authority to enforce many LMRDA provisions. More information is available at www.dol.gov/agencies/olms.

CWA's Policy on Mutual Respect

CWA's Policy on Mutual Respect calls on all members to fight discrimination, including sexual harassment, whenever and wherever we see it. The policy states:

Freedom from discrimination within our Union is a right and privilege of all CWA members. Any abridgement of this right and privilege shall be subject to a complaint under the CWA Internal Appeals Procedures and should be investigated immediately without fear of reprisal and retaliation.

Members who experience or witness discrimination or sexual harassment, whether by another CWA member, a supervisor, or customer should immediately report it as a violation of

the Policy on Mutual Respect to their steward, Local Officer, or member of the Local's Human Rights committee. If the Local's governing body fails to take appropriate action to address the complaint, or if the member wishes to appeal the decision of the Local about how to address the complaint, the member should contact their CWA District office for further specific guidance on how to proceed. To learn which CWA District covers your location, visit cwa.org/about.

A full copy of the Policy on Mutual Respect is available online at cwa.org/mutual-respect. Information on CWA's complaint and appeals process is available online at cwa.org/appeals.

Notice Regarding Union Security Agreements and Agency Fee Objections

As a general matter, employees covered by a collective bargaining agreement containing a Union security clause are required, as a condition of employment, to pay an agency fee equal to normal Union dues (and, where applicable, initiation fees). While the wording of these clauses are not perfectly uniform, none require more than the payment of this agency fee to retain employment.

The Communications Workers of America policy on agency fee objections is the Union's means of meeting its legal obligations to employees covered by Union security clauses and of effectuating those employees' legal rights as stated in the applicable decisions of the United States Supreme Court (including *Beck v. CWA*) and the companion lower court and labor agency decisions. Under the CWA policy, employees who are not members of the Union, but who pay agency fees pursuant to a Union security clause, may request a reduction in that fee based on their objection to certain kinds of Union expenditures.

The policy provides an objection period each year during May, followed by a reduction in the objector's fee for the twelve months beginning with July and running through June of the following year.

Briefly stated, CWA's objection policy works as follows:

1. The agency fee payable by objectors will be based on the Union's expenditures for those activities or projects "germane to collective bargaining, contract administration, and grievance adjustment" within the meaning of applicable United States Supreme Court decisions. Among these "chargeable" expenditures are those going for negotiations with employers, enforcing collective bargaining agreements, informal meetings

with employer representatives, discussion of work-related issues with employees, handling employees' work-related problems through the grievance procedure, administrative agencies, or informal meetings, and Union administration. In the past, approximately 70-75% of the International Union's expenditures have gone for such activities. The percentages of Local Union expenditures on "chargeable" activities have generally been higher.

Among the expenditures treated as "nonchargeable," which objectors will not be required to support, are those going for community service (including participating in charitable events), legislative activity, cost of affiliation with non-CWA organizations, support of political candidates, participating in political events, recruitment of members to the Union, and members-only benefits (including members-only social events). In the past, approximately 25-30% of the International Union's expenditures have gone for such "nonchargeable" expenditures. The percentages of Local Union expenditures on "nonchargeable" activities have generally been lower.

Agency fee payers will receive an advance payment in July following the beginning of CWA's fiscal year to reimburse them for the nonchargeable amount of their dues for the coming year. This advance is a projection based on the current information available to CWA.

2. Objectors will be given a full explanation of the basis for the reduced fee charged to them. That explanation will include a more detailed list of the categories of expenditures deemed to be "chargeable" and those deemed to be "nonchargeable," and the independent certified public accountants' report showing the Union's expenditures on which the fee is based. In addition

to any other avenue of relief available under the law, objectors will have the option of challenging the Union's calculation of the reduced fee before an impartial arbitrator appointed by the American Arbitration Association, and a portion of the objector's fee shall be held in escrow while he or she pursues that challenge. Details on the method of making such a challenge and the rights accorded to those who do so will be provided to objectors along with the explanation of the fee calculation.

3. Objections for the period of July through June must be sent during May. Objections will be honored for one year unless the objection specifically states that it is continuing in nature. Continuing objections will be honored for as long as the agency fee payer remains in the bargaining unit and current in their dues. Agency fee payers who are new to the bargaining unit, or who are returning to the bargaining unit, may object within thirty days of receiving this notice. In addition, employees who resign Union membership may object within thirty days of becoming an agency fee payer. Employees filing these objections in either circumstance should state that circumstance in their letter of objection. New bargaining unit members are to receive this notice prior to any demand being made upon them for the payment of agency fees. If, however, for any reason a new unit member begins paying agency fees prior to the receipt of this notice, he or she may object retroactively to the commencement of such payments and for the duration of the current annual objection period.

The letter of objection should include name, address, CWA Local number, and employer. Objections must be mailed to the Agency Fee Administrator, CWA, 501 Third Street, NW, Washington, DC 20001-2797.