

STEVEN P. DINKIN A Path Forward

WORKERS GAINED IN '23, BUT CHILD CARE CRISIS PERSISTS

As 2023 comes to a close, I am struck by the advances that workers made this year, across sectors.

Some of you may be nodding your head and thinking: "It's about time. Workers have played second fiddle to corporate profits for too long." Others may have a more pragmatic view: Since there aren't enough workers to fill all the jobs in our country, it's no wonder they have the upper hand.

The most recent jobs report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated that thousands of individuals are joining the workforce, a positive sign.

However, the labor force participation rate still does not match what it was before the pandemic, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce; if it did, there would be an additional 1.47 million people in the workforce.

The biggest win for workers — dollar-wise — was the \$1 billion in concessions notched by the United Auto Workers, following strikes against Detroit's three automakers, General Motors, Ford and Stellantis. Auto workers will get a 25 percent base pay increase over four years (to around \$42 an hour for

people in top assembly jobs), with cost-of-living raises and other benefits reinstated.

Union members were undoubtedly pleased: Nearly two-thirds of them voted in November to ratify their new contracts.

Since the settlement, Honda, Hyundai and Toyota have announced pay increases for their employees — likely an effort to ward off unionization efforts in their own factories.

Readers in the "it's about time" camp might point to the fact that after accounting for inflation, auto workers' wages have fallen about 5.4 percent between 2019 and July 2023, according to an analysis in The Wall Street Journal. That bit of data was accompanied by a headline reading, "Auto CEOs Make 300 Times What Workers Make."

There were other worker victories during the year, thanks to the efforts of labor unions and a series of crippling strikes — 354 in all, at companies including United Parcel Service, Kaiser Permanente, Netflix, Disney and Starbucks.

Kate Bronfenbrenner of the

Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations described the dynamics at play. For many workers, these were the first contract negotiations since COVID-19.

The strikes were spurred on by "anger and frustration over the pandemic and lockdowns, skyrocketing corporate profits, deteriorating working conditions, rising prices, and decades of concessions and wage stagnation."

In the tech sector — which is not unionized (although organizing efforts have begun) — workers at OpenAI emerged victorious after a mass resignation threat. The OpenAI board decided to fire the company's CEO, Sam Altman, in a surprise move, saying he had not been completely candid with them. They believed Altman was more focused on growth than safety.

Employees expressed their frustration with the process in a letter to the board, saying it jeopardized OpenAI and undermined its mission.

Rather than higher wages or better working conditions, they issued a plea for transparent

leadership. Altman was reinstated.

While workers prevailed this year, the gains are not sustainable unless we address our country's child care crisis.

In a recent interview with Maggie McGrath of Forbes, philanthropist Melinda French Gates talked about the lack of structural support for caregiving, which forces women (most often) to "devote their time and money to work that doesn't pay, at the expense of work that does."

"We still expect women to do the unpaid labor that our societies are built on the backs of, and our economies are built on the backs of," French Gates said. "We have got to solve the caregiving-problems crisis around the world."

Here in the U.S., that problem-solving needs to start now. As McGrath noted, \$24 billion of federal child care funding (part of the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act) expired at the end of September. It left 70,000 facilities — serving more than 3 million children — at risk of closing.

Parents who cut back on their working hours or leave the work-

force to fill the gap stand to lose a collective \$9 billion in earnings — with an additional loss of \$10.6 billion in annual economic activity, according to research from the Century Foundation.

Certainly wages matter. But accessible, affordable and assured child care is equally important, when you consider that we already have millions of unfilled positions across the country — and a risk that more people will be leaving the workforce.

For the sake of our economy — and our families — we must do better.

On Jan. 24, the National Conflict Resolution Center will host a conversation with Marc Braun, CEO of Emerging Leaders, about the urgent need for transparent leadership in workplaces — and how to achieve it. Registration information can be found at NCR-Conline.com.

Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center, a San Diego-based group working to create solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCR's programming, visit ncrconline.com.

SCENE

Jewish Family Service of San Diego

Annual benefit Signature Luncheon

BY U-T STAFF

Jewish Family Service of San Diego hosted its annual Signature Luncheon last month at the Hilton La Jolla at Torrey Pines with nationally renowned rabbi and author Sharon Brous appearing via a video feed.

Brous explored the topic of human connection and its power to transform the way people think, feel and live.

Newsweek magazine named her the most influential rabbi in America. Her first book, "The Amen Effect: Ancient Wisdom to Mend Our Broken Hearts and World," will be released in January.

Ticket sales for the luncheon benefit Jewish Family Service's programs and resources. The organization helps more than 70,000 people a year.

If your organization has

held an event, you're welcome to email a high-resolution photo along with information on the event to society@sduniontribune.com.

Please clearly identify those in the photo, make them aware their image might appear in print and online, include the photographer's name for credit and be sure to include the who, what, where, when and why information on the event.



JEWISH FAMILY SERVICE
From left, Jewish Family Service Board of Directors Chair Deborah Bucksbaum, CEO Michael Hopkins, Center for Jewish Care Senior Director Carole Yellen and Chief Operating Officer Dana Toppel.

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Worship Directory

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH OF VISTA

Christmas Events

Sunday, Dec. 24
Christmas Eve
10 a.m. - Worship with interpreter for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing
5 p.m. - Family Candlelight Worship

Sunday, Dec. 31
New Year's Eve Online Worship
10 a.m. - (Check our website, umcvista.org, for link to worship)

Rev. Dr. Leigh Ann Shaw, Pastor
490 South Melrose Drive, Vista
760-726-0442 • umcvista.org

Community Lutheran Church and Preschool

Christmas Worship Times

Escondido Campus
3575 East Valley Parkway
Dec. 24, 5:00 pm and 7:00 pm
Dec. 25, 9:30 am

San Marcos Campus
340 Rancheros Drive, Suite 160
Dec. 24, 5:00 pm
Dec. 25, 9:30 am

1-760-739-1650 • www.clcfamily.org

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SUNDAY, DECEMBER 24 at 5 p.m.
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New Year's Eve Morning Worship Service

We look forward to seeing you at 10 a.m. on Sundays in 2024!

Senior Pastor/Rev. Holgie Choi
1800 N. Broadway, Escondido, CA 92026

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CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES:

- 12:00pm - **Family Service** (featuring live animals & more)
- 4:00pm - **Contemporary Service**
- 8:00pm - **Traditional Service**

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