

# U.S. union ranks grow despite tough economy

Union membership in the United States rose from 12.1 percent to 12.4 percent last year, according to an annual survey released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The number of all workers covered by collective bargaining agreements, including those who choose not to be union members, also grew in 2008, from 13.3 percent to 13.7 percent, bringing an additional 518,000 workers under union contracts in 2008.

Overall, the number of workers belonging to a union last year rose to 16.1 million. In 1983, the first year for which comparable union data are available, the union membership rate was 20.1 percent, and there were 17.7 million workers carrying union cards.

"This growth is remarkable given the overall decline in employment in 2008 (a loss of 900,000 jobs in the nonunion sector)," said Lawrence Mishel of the Economic Policy Institute. "This is also the first time in the 30 years of this data series that union density rose two years in a row.

In Oregon, union membership grew

by 32,000 — to 259,000, or 16.6 percent of the workforce. Another 13,000 workers were represented by a union.

Washington State remains ranked No. 4 in the nation in terms of union density, with the state's 578,000 members accounting for 19.8 percent of the overall workforce. Membership actually slipped by 1,000 from a year ago. However, the number of workers represented by a union increased from 616,000 to 626,000 (21.5 percent of the workforce).

The BLS survey also reported on the union advantage workers receive on payday. In 2008, full-time union workers earned a median weekly salary of \$886 while nonunion workers were paid 28 percent less per week — \$691.

Union growth was broadly shared across demographic lines and occupations. Growth was strongest in the public sector, among Hispanics, and in Western states.

The highest shares of unionization by age were among workers aged 55-64 and 45-54 (nearly 17 percent), while the lowest share (5 percent) was among workers aged 16-24.



**Iron Workers help IBEW #48 go green**

IBEW Local 48 is installing a 78 kW solar array at its union hall. The all-union project, when completed, will not only provide 40 percent of the local's electrical usage for the next 30 years, but also will be used to train members on the design and installation of solar arrays. Late last month, apprentices from Iron Workers Local 29 — including Seth Meeks (kneeling, photo above) and Brandon Lesbo — helped put up the steel structure. Installation of some 360 solar panels will be performed by Local 48 apprentices and volunteers. Electrical equipment and supervision is being provided by signatory contractor Dynalectric. The iron beams were designed by Oregon Iron Works. And Campbell Crane donated equipment and an operator to set the steel. "The solar array will be a showcase for all prospective parties interested in installing their own solar arrays," said Dave Johnston, a Local 48 business rep. "Future apprentices will be able see a large solar installation right next door." The array should be up and running by mid-April. Iron Worker apprentices getting class credit for working on the project were: Victor Labach, Brian Russo, Ron Sather, Chris Estoos, Shane Jones, Jake Crow, Kathryn Lakey, Davis Curley, Kyle Schmidt, Brandon Lesbo, Mark Fleet, Mike Billeter, Greg Fitzhugh, and Seth Meeks. Assisting the apprentices were instructor Mark Lautenschlager (project supervisor) and Iron Workers Apprenticeship Coordinator Lee Worley.



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