

Two hundred bucks a week

Show this column to your friends and neighbors, particularly your friends and neighbors who toil for non-union shops. Ask them how they would like to earn two hundred bucks more a week, every week.

How? By organizing their colleagues into unions, and then bargaining for their rights—including better wages.

Don't believe us? Then look at the data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The median weekly earnings figure for union workers nationwide last year was \$833.

The median for non-union workers was \$642. That's just about two hundred bucks a week, for the workers at the mid-point of the national earnings scale.

The gap is even wider in some specific occupations, when you compare medians—the point at which half of all workers earn more and the other half earn less.

In service occupations, the gap is \$234 a week: \$638 for unionists, \$404 for non-unionists. That's a 58 percent union advantage.

In construction, the gap is \$359 a week: \$969 for union workers, \$610 for their non-union colleagues. How'd you like a 59 percent raise?

Even in utilities, the highest-paying of all regular occupations (as opposed to folks like Wall Street stockbrokers), the gap between the medians was more than \$100 a week: \$1,041 for union workers, \$939 for non-union workers.

And it was just as big in the lowest-paying occupation we saw: Bars and restaurants. The median for unionized workers there: \$480. The median for non-unionists: \$381.

The same pattern holds for working women. They still earn less than working men, but the gap is smaller if you're unionized. And the medians for both are

higher than the medians for their non-union colleagues.

The median for unionized working men last year was \$887, \$129 more than the median (\$758) for unionized working women. That produced a median pay gap of 14.6 percent in favor of union men.

The median for non-union working men last year was \$717. That's \$138 more than the median (\$579) for non-union working women. That gap is 19.25 percent.

Not only that, but the pay gap shrunk between unionized men and women from 2005 to 2006, and grew (slightly) between non-union men and women.

So all you non-unionists set aside, for a minute, all the other benefits union contracts bring: Protections against favoritism, arbitrary bosses, and sudden firings, democracy and a say in the workplace, more job safety and security, and—yes—the weekend.

Just think for a minute of your bottom line: Two hundred bucks more a week. Then go out and join—or organize—a union.

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