

LOCAL 1180 BIRD UNION RALLIES AT AUDUBON Tells CEO to Settle a Fair

The 2023 Audubon Leadership Conference in Colorado was about more than just conservation efforts. Thanks to National Audubon Society union employees represented by CWA Local 1180, attendees also saw first hand what it means to fight for a fair contract.

By rallying outside the conference and talking to attendees about their 20-month struggle for a contract, Bird Union members continued to pressure Audubon CEO Dr. Elizabeth Gray to stop ducking her responsibility to settle a fair contract.

Their effort even included a billboard truck that brought the workers' message directly to national and chapter leadership. Under the leadership of **Local 1180 Organizer Leslie Fine**, a large contingent of Bird Union members donned winter coats and hats to march with signs and send a message that Grey needs to give a hoot about her workers.

"At the bargaining table, we've been fighting for benefits our families need, like expanding paid parental leave beyond two weeks," said **Lindsay Buckland, a bargaining committee member**. "While dragging out negotiations, Audubon expanded parental leave benefits for non-union staff but denied that benefit to us. For my coworker who had a baby this year, that is time that they will never get back with their family."

At the convention, hundreds of Audubon chapter leaders, campus chapter leaders, partners, and staff

heard directly from Local 1180 Bird Union members about the contract fight. Members passed out red Bird Union bandanas and "Fair Contract Now!" buttons for attendees to wear during the opening plenary and during CEO Gray's speech.

Fine said the fun didn't stop there. At lunchtime, Union members held a rally outside of the lunchroom where they spoke their truth about why they formed a union, what they want and need in a union contract, and why they need protections and support. Members marched around with signs featuring selfies of members who could not be there in person — along with a bird pun or two — and chanted about fair pay and firing management's union-busting bargaining chair.

Then an Audubon C-suite manager invited union members to talk during lunch. Fine said they shared how bargaining was not progressing and how the impact of unilateral decisions like worsening health care and rolling out improved benefits only to non-union staff are making some of members' lives extremely difficult.

"We gave concrete examples of what we are asking for in a union contract and how those changes would improve staff retention and help staff survive at this organization," Fine said. "We asked that he and other management team members join bargaining sessions in order to see the tone in which Audubon is presenting itself. He said he would consider it and take our request back to the executive team."

Since March, contract negotiations have been overseen by a federal mediator. In October, union members won a critical victory when the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) determined that Audubon violated federal labor law during its negotiations with the Bird Union-CWA by bargaining in bad faith and violating the rights of its workers. Earlier this year, Audubon rolled out new, enhanced benefits only to non-union staff while withholding the benefits from union staff, then presented them to the union as contract proposals and urged the union to quickly accept the substandard and incomplete contract in order to access the new benefits.

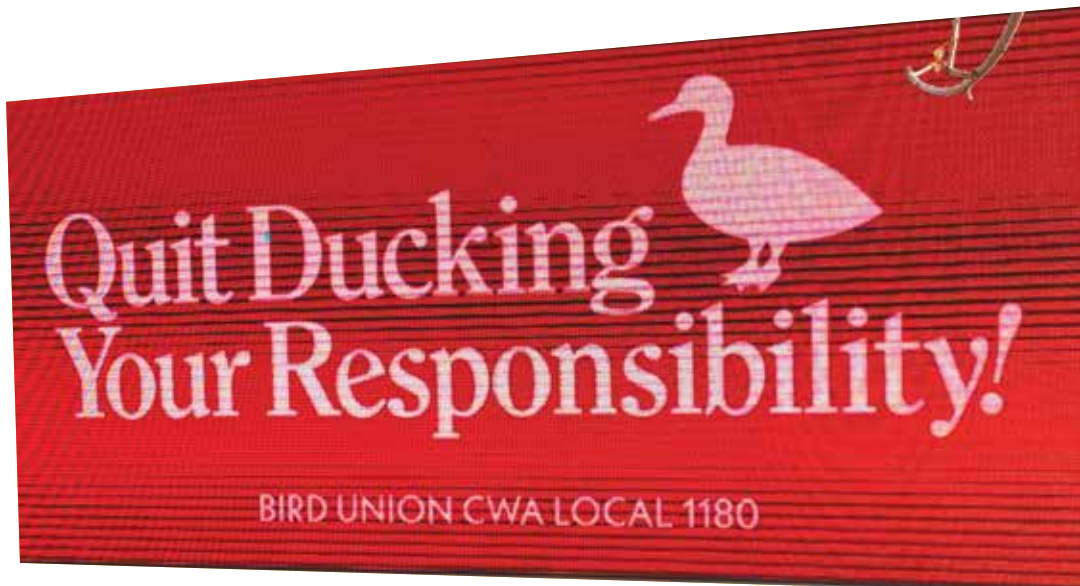
Across four cases, the NLRB determined that Audubon has bargained in bad faith or violated the rights of their union employees by:

- Refusing to bargain with union members over minimum salaries and refusing to share data used to develop the new salary structure.
- Unilaterally imposing changes with higher costs to union members' health care plan without negotiating with the union. Health care benefits are a mandatory subject of bargaining.
- Denying union members new and enhanced benefits that were given to non-union employees.

In several other instances, Audubon has failed to provide certain financial documents to the union that were relevant to negotiations.



CONFERENCE Contract &



"Since day one, we've urged Audubon to respect federal labor laws," said **Local 1180 President Gloria Middleton**. "Dr. Gray's spokesperson dismissed our concerns, but the NLRB's decision to issue a complaint on the four charges vindicates our case. We'll continue to defend our members using all legal means. Just as Audubon safeguards birds, we will safeguard our members until the company gives them the protections they deserve."

Despite the workers' collaborative approach to forming a union and negotiating a fair contract that strengthens the organization, Audubon management has taken multiple actions to delay and derail the process. After a majority of eligible workers demanded recognition in 2021, Audubon forced workers to go through 12 separate regional union elections overseen by the NLRB instead of voluntarily recognizing the will of their employees.

Since negotiations began, Audubon has hired the notoriously anti-union law firm Littler Mendelson and has at times gone months without meeting with the workers' bargaining committee.

"We have been fighting for so long to have a voice in making Audubon a better place to work and we remain committed to bargaining in good faith," said **Kassandra Smith, a union negotiating committee member**. "We urge Dr. Gray to join us at the bargaining table to get a fair contract now." ■



Check out more photos from the week from [@thebirdunion](#) on [Instagram](#) and [X \(formerly Twitter\)](#)

Sign the Solidarity Letter: cwa.org/birdunionsolidarity



HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH STAFF MOBILIZATION & PERSISTENCE LEAD TO LANDMARK CONTRACT VICTORY

In a resounding display of unity and determination echoing the activism of the past, CWA 1180 members employed by Human Rights Watch (HRW) achieved a historic victory after a year-and-a-half-long struggle for fair wages and improved working conditions. In a remarkable show of solidarity reminiscent of their 2006 mobilization, HRW staff utilized various strategies, culminating in the ratification of a groundbreaking contract on Nov. 20, 2023.

HRW, a globally recognized NGO dedicated to upholding the universal declaration of human rights, found its internal champions for justice when its own employees took a stand against what they perceived as a disparity between the organization's principles and their treatment.

The call for fair compensation echoed loudly as HRW staff members, donning red shirts and badges demanding a fair collective bargaining agreement, initiated a multifaceted campaign spanning social media, petitions, altered signatures, changed Zoom backgrounds, and public demonstrations. Their collective efforts were a testament to their commitment to justice.

The core grievance stemmed from the stark disparity between the soaring living costs in cities like New York, where HRW is headquartered, and the low starting salaries for unionized staff members, which were well below the required minimum for a decent standard of living. The disparity was staggering; while the median household income in New York City hovered around \$70,000, HRW's entry-level salaries began at a mere \$52,000.

The consequences of these unlivable wages were dire, resulting in a high turnover rate of staff members who departed due to the financial strain, heavy workloads, and limited prospects for professional growth. This exodus of talent threatened the fundamental work HRW undertakes in advocating for the vulnerable and marginalized across the globe.

"While the negotiation process was longer than we would have hoped for, the outcome was worth the wait. The overall low wages were not sustainable for those whose mission is truly about conquering human rights issues. We are passionate about what we do but we still need to be able to pay our bills," said Local 1180 HRW worker Tess Hill.

After months of arduous negotiations, marked by the unwavering determination of the workers and the bargaining committee, a remarkable 97% of HRW staff ratified a transformative contract. The victory marked a significant turning point, ushering in an era of unprecedented gains for employees.

The newly approved contract heralds immediate wage hikes of up to 12.5%, complemented by substantial annual increments and increased salary differentials. Notably, by July 2024, the minimum salary for an Associate, even without any formal education or prior experience, will be set at \$60,000. Beyond salary adjustments, the contract introduces a host of comprehensive enhancements. These include increased sick leave allowances, guaranteed health care coverage during leaves of absence, a fortified disciplinary process encompassing structured Performance Improvement Plans aimed at nurturing members for success within the organization.

Furthermore, the contract solidifies essential safeguards, encompassing explicit layoff protections that mandate a six-week notice period, provision for severance payments, and a clear pathway for fixed-term employees to transition into permanent staff roles. Another pivotal provision is the contractual continuation of remote work policies for union staff members, backed by a transparent notification and bargaining procedure, ensuring protection before any potential elimination of this benefit by HRW.

Finally, the agreement also incorporates a Neutrality and Voluntary Recognition Process, designed to facilitate the organization of other workers within HRW seeking to join CWA. This groundbreaking neutrality agreement introduces a card-check process, empowering employees to democratically determine if they wish to enlist CWA as their exclusive representative.



On Nov. 20, after a year and a half of bargaining, 97% of Human Rights Watch workers ratified a groundbreaking contract. Current and former members of the Bargaining Committee show their excitement about the deal: Donna Birdsong, Melissa He, Blaire Palmer, Subhajit Saha, Camilo Moraga-Lewy, Ash Pria Persaud, Tess Hill, Yuki Nishimura, and Grace Makhoul. They are joined by **CWA District 1's Chief Negotiator Luis Benitez-Burgos** and **Local 1180 Private Sector Staff Rep Tomas Laster**, both in back.

This triumph is not merely a win for HRW staff; it is a testament to the power of collective action and the unwavering belief in justice. The commitment, resilience, and unwavering resolve of the HRW members have not only secured improved conditions for themselves but also reaffirmed the organization's commitment to the principles it champions worldwide.

"This was a long battle but one with a successful outcome. I learned a lot during the negotiation process about what it takes to come up with an agreement and just how long and complicated it can be. We knew what we wanted, and needed, and we worked with Luis and Tomas until we got to the finish line," said Ashley Pria Persaud, a bargaining committee member.

HRW worker Melissa He agrees.

"We definitely needed to address a disparate salary scale, but negotiations were about more than just the money. Working conditions and lack of room to advance were leading to higher-than-normal staff turnover rates. Being part of Local 1180 made a huge difference in us securing a contract package that enables us to continue the work we do while being able to actually pay our bills."

The hard-fought victory stands as a beacon of hope, demonstrating that within an organization dedicated to advocating for human rights, justice, and equality, the welfare and fair treatment of its own workers are fundamental to achieving these noble goals. ■

Have an **UPDATE**
or **NEWS** from your
Private Sector Shop?

Send information and photos to either:

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OR Staff Rep Tomas Laster: tlaster@cwa1180.org