

Anti-Union Companies Are Anti-Worker: A Long Island Guide to Union Busting

By Alan Singer

The National Labor Relations Act of 1935, the New Deal’s “Magna Carta for labor,” explicitly prohibits private sector employers from interfering with the right of workers to organize labor unions. Unfair labor practices include firing pro-union employees or threatening to close a workplace if workers vote to unionize. The law has not stopped prominent corporations from union busting. Even if workers form a union local, that does not mean an employer will negotiate fairly about wages, hours, and conditions or even recognize the existence of the union. John Oliver on his *Last Week Tonight* did a special feature on union busting in the United States. It is worth watching.¹

Below is an alphabetical list of some of the worst anti-union, anti-worker companies in the United States that operate on Long Island. I confess that I shop at a number of them, but I know I need to find alternatives. Stop and Shop, where I buy most of my groceries is a pro-union chain. 60,000 Stop and Shop employees at over 400 stores in the northeastern United States are members of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union. Stop and Shop has 20 Nassau County stores and 19 in Suffolk.²

Apple: I am typing on an Apple desktop computer. Apple is historically an anti-union company. In June 2022, Apple store workers in the Baltimore area became the first of the tech giant’s U.S. retail stores to vote to organize. The pro-union vote was 2-to-1. There are also unionizing campaigns in New York City and Atlanta. In response to the organizing campaigns, Apple vice president Deirdre O’Brien, who was caught on an internal video, told Apple employees “I worry about what it would mean to put another organization in the middle of our relationship. An organization that does not have a deep understanding of Apple or our business. And most importantly one that I do not believe shares our commitment to you.” Apple was then accused of union busting in a complaint to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) because Apple managers presented anti-union propaganda at mandatory all-staff morning meetings. Apple tried to defend itself by claiming that attendance at staff meetings, called “daily downloads,” was really voluntary. There are Apple stores in Manhasset and at the Roosevelt Field Mall.

Amazon: Amazon, the e-commerce giant and second largest employer in the United States, constantly battles against unionization. Amazon has been employing anti-union consultants to defeat union organizing efforts in Great Britain (2004) and Virginia (2016) and has an anti-union training video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQeGBHxIyHw>) for its managers explaining the company’s anti-union stance. “We do not believe unions are in the

best interest of our customers, our shareholders, or most importantly, our associates. Our business model is built upon speed, innovation, and customer obsession—things that are generally not associated with union. When we lose sight of those critical focus areas we jeopardize everyone’s job security: yours, mine, and the associates.” Amazon calls its workers “associates.” More recently, Amazon hired the Pinkerton Agency to undermine union efforts at its Whole Foods subsidiary. While a small independent union won a union election at Amazon’s Staten Island warehouse, an organizing campaign by the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union in Bessemer, Alabama failed. There is a new Amazon Fresh outlet in Plainview and a number of Amazon owned Whole Foods stores across Long Island.⁴

Chipotle: In June, 2022, Chipotle, which owns and operates about 3,000 locations in the United States, permanently closed an Augusta, Maine store because workers there filed union paperwork with the National Labor Relations Board. Chipotle notified workers that they were fired just hours before a scheduled hearing. Currently none of the Chipotle stores are unionized. In a 1965 Supreme Court decision, *United Textile Workers v. Darlington Manufacturing Co.*, the Court held that employers violate labor law by closing part of their operations in order to block union activity. In New York City, Chipotle recently was forced to pay over \$20 million in back pay to its employees for violating scheduling and sick-leave laws. Hourly employees at its New York City operations will receive \$50 for each week that they worked between November 2017 and April 2022. There are over 30 Chipotles operating in Nassau and Suffolk counties.⁵

Costco: About 20% of Costco workers in the United States are unionized, but that is because of a 1993 merger between Costco and Price Club where employees were unionized. Costco itself was non-union and almost thirty years since the merger, only 17,000 out of Costco’s 200,000 employees are union members. Costco has nine stores in Nassau and Suffolk counties.⁶

Home Depot and Lowe’s: According to the Teamsters Union, when 60 Home Depot drivers joined the Local 287 in San Diego in 2019, they were the first and only Home Depot employees to successfully unionize. Lowe’s is an anti-union company. In the past, government investigators have found evidence of store managers intimidating workers who express an interest in joining a Teamster’s local. An in-house training video for store managers instructs them to call the company’s “labor hotline” if they suspect union activity. There are nine Home Depots in Nassau County and fourteen in Suffolk County and there are ten Lowe’s.⁷

IKEA: Ikea has an uneven history with labor unions. IKEA operates over 400 stores in 49 different countries and many of the company's international employees belong to trade unions. However, in 2018, when there were more than 15,000 employees working in 40 IKEA retail stores in the United States, none of them are unionized, although some IKEA warehouse workers were union members. In 2016, IKEA used the anti-union law firm Ogletree Deakins to defeat a union effort in Stoughton, Massachusetts, but in 2019, workers at Ikea distribution centers in Illinois voted to unionize as members of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers. There is an IKEA in Hicksville.⁸

McDonald's: Chicago-based McDonald's claims it should have to deal with labor unions because it doesn't employ workers, because almost all of its 14,000 restaurants in the United States are franchises. Yet corporate McDonald's has been spying on employees involved in the Fight for \$15 campaign using data collection software. According to the website Vice, McDonald's collects "strategic intelligence" on workers involved in efforts to secure higher wages, better working conditions and organize a labor union. There are over 85 McDonald's fast-food restaurant on Long Island.⁹

Starbucks: Starbucks has 15,000 company-owned and licensed outlets in the United States including 100 on Long Island. So far, workers at 200 stores in 32 states have voted to unionize and employees at another 300 stores have petitioned to hold union elections. Starbucks alleges vote irregularities and has petitioned the NLRB to suspend balloting. As part of its anti-union campaign, Starbucks announced that it would reimburse abortion travel expenses for some employees enrolled in its health plan, but would not "make promises or guarantees about any benefits" for unionized stores. It is also accused of firing over 20 union leaders to quell organizing drives. The NLRB has demanded reinstatement and backpay for fired employees in Tennessee, Kansas, Arizona, and Buffalo, New York. The NLRB accused Starbucks management of over 200 violations of federal labor laws between late 2021 and May 2022 alone. New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy recently announced his support for striking workers at a Hopewell, New Jersey Starbucks. In Ithaca, New York, Starbucks suspiciously announced that it was closing its Collegetown store two months after workers in the store voted to unionize. The Starbucks employees received a one-week notice that they were being fired.

On Long Island, workers at three Starbucks outlets are battling with the company for union recognition and a contract defining wages, hours, and benefits. In May, Starbucks workers in Massapequa voted to unionize and in June, Starbucks workers in the Gallery at Westbury Plaza and at Wantagh Starbucks decided that they wanted to become union members as well. The pro-union movement was joined by in July by Starbucks employees in Farmingville. So far, the only Starbucks outlet where workers decided not to unionize is in Great Neck, but management at that store is charged with unfair labor practices including firing a union organizer. On August 15 over a hundred people rallied at the Great Neck store demanding that the fired worker be reinstated. Starbucks Workers United

charges that the company has fired seventy pro-union employees in its latest anti-union campaign.¹⁰

Target: Target workers at Store 1292 in Christiansburg, Virginia have petitioned for collective bargaining with the National Labor Relations Board. Currently, there are no unionized workers in any of Target's 1,750 stores. In 2011 and 2014, Target, the third largest retailer in the United States, launched anti-union campaigns with videos addressed to employees. According to the website Gawker, the 2014 video featured "Dawn and Ricardo, a cool, knowing, multiracial pair of Target employees who are here to talk to you, the Target team member, about the dangers of unions." In the video, Ricardo warns "Someday, someone you don't know may approach you at work, or visit you at home, asking you to sign your name to an authorization card, petition, or some other union document." Ricardo explains, "We're a target, because unions are threatened by us. And here's why: when we take business away from retailers that are unionized." On that point, Ricardo is right. Target has ten locations in Nassau County and twelve in Suffolk County.¹¹

Tesla: Elon Musk is worth an estimated \$200 billion, but none of the workers in his Tesla or SpaceX facilities in California, Nevada, New York or Texas is represented by a labor union. Musk is a vocal opponent of labor unions and has openly challenged the United Auto Workers Union to try to organize workers in any of his plants. The UAW is pursuing charges against Musk and Tesla with the NLRB. Musk recently moved Tesla headquarters to Austin, Texas because Texas is an anti-union state. There are Tesla dealers in Manhasset and Smithtown.¹²

Trader Joe's: Trader Joe's has 50,000 employees at 500 stores and workers in only two if its stores are unionized, one in Hadley, Massachusetts and one in Minneapolis, Minnesota. A spokesperson for Trader Joe's said "we are concerned about how this new rigid legal relationship will impact Trader Joe's culture." In 2020, Trader Joe's chief executive, sent employees a letter accusing unionizing efforts of trying to "create some sort of wedge in our company through which they can drive discontent." Trader Joe's operates five stores in Nassau County and two in Suffolk County.¹³

Walmart: Walmart is the largest private-sector employer in the United States with 1.6 million employees and it is one of the most aggressive anti-union companies. Walmart claims "We are not anti-union; we are pro-associate," but in 2000, two weeks after butchers at Walmart's Jacksonville, Texas store organized a union, the company announced plans to sell prepackaged meat and replace butchers at the Texas store and 179 others. At Walmart, new hires are required to watch an anti-union video denouncing unions; the company has a hotline so managers can report suspected union activity; it issues managers a confidential "Toolbox To Remaining Union Free"; defense contractor Lockheed Martin was hired to spy on activist workers; a "Delta teams" is dispatched to quash any pro-union sentiments; and protesters are labeled as terrorists in an effort to garner federal anti-terrorism funds. There are twelve Walmart stores on Long Island.¹⁴

NOTES:

- ¹ Last Week Tonight: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gk8dUXRpoy8&t=2s>
- ² County (<https://stopandshop.com/pages/ss-union-pension-fund>). The list was updated August 18, 2022. Nassau and Suffolk County stores were located using Google Maps.
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- ⁷ International Brotherhood of Teamsters. “First Teamsters at Home Depot,” *IBT News*, November 9, 2019. Nolan, H. “Lowe’s Anti-Union Training Video Walks a Fine Line,” *Gawker*, March 13, 2015.
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- ⁹ Durbin, D. “NLRB rules for McDonald’s in long-running labor union case,” *USA Today*, December 12, 2019. Franceschi-Bicchierai, L. and Gurley, L. G. “McDonald’s Secretive Intel Team Spies on ‘Fight for \$15’ Workers, Internal Documents Show,” *VICE*, February 24, 2021.
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No Contract, No Coffee! Pledge to Act in Solidarity with Starbucks Workers United
The Starbucks Workers Organizing Committee is asking people to sign and circulate a potential boycott pledge. Unionized workers’ best hope to achieve substantive gains is to bargain a national “master contract.” They need to go to the bargaining table with a list of 50 million pledges.
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