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# Building Our New Electric Fleet

Today on TAP: In a signal victory last week, an activist group prevailed on a major bus manufacturer to hire its workers from local, historically disadvantaged communities.

BY HAROLD MEYERSON MAY 31, 2022

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Meyerson on Tap 053122.jpg

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In 1997, after a campaign of several years' duration, the Los Angeles City Council voted to establish the nation's first living wage ordinance. Under its terms, businesses with which the city had contracted to do its work—for which the city's taxpayers were footing the bill—were required to pay their employees a specified, decent wage, as well as offering them a modicum of benefits.



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minorities began to gain much greater entry to union construction jobs that offered pay and benefits that otherwise would have remained out of reach.

### **More from Harold Meyerson**

As living wage ordinances and community benefits agreements spread across the nation's cities in the aughts, Janis moved on to an even more challenging task, or, more precisely, a dual task: bringing manufacturing back to America, and ensuring that the jobs created in the process hired locally and from historically disadvantaged communities. She created Jobs to Move America (JMA), which sought to ensure that the new railcars and buses that city and county governments purchased (an increasing number of which are electric) were manufactured in the U.S. by the same kind of workers who'd benefited from CBAs. (In the last decades of the past century, when a transit district had bought new railcars, they had had to buy them from abroad, so no one was building them in the States until



abroad, as no one was building them in the States until JMA came along.)

Last week, Jobs to Move America won a signal victory when bus manufacturer New Flyer agreed that 45 percent of its new hires would go to minorities, women, and veterans at its Anniston, Alabama, plant, where it manufactures buses under a \$500 million contract with Los Angeles's L.A. Metro transit district. New Flyer has a number of factories across the nation that now may also come to adopt similar standards. And as the largest purchasers of railcars and buses are the transit authorities of major cities, where Democrats dominate politically, it's likely that those authorities will favor such standards in their contracts going forward, and that Jobs to Move America will take manufacturers to court if they don't comply. It required the combination of these two strategies to convince New Flyer to come to terms.

Like the railcars and buses themselves, the campaign to bring manufacturing home, with a representative workforce at good wages, has many parts. Earlier today, United Auto Workers president Ray Curry and American Federation of Teachers president Randi Weingarten called on local governments to purchase their new electric fleets from unionized and local workers. The transit allocations in President Biden's \$1.2 trillion infrastructure act certainly give local governments the means to do that. The campaigns waged by Jobs to Move America—modeled in part on the campaigns Janis herself initiated a quarter-century ago—gives them the way.



## **HAROLD MEYERSON**

Harold Meyerson is editor at large of The American Prospect.

