

# Building a Labor-Community Movement: Make the Road New York

by Wade Baue

I grew up here on Long Island, and when I went to college, I was the only member of my family who lived up until my family came, and we were the last family to come, in 1996.

My family first came here to Hempstead in the late '60s. My first uncle came here on a trip with a friend who was wealthy and had other relatives around here, and my uncle was just sort of like his low-income friend from school or the neighborhood, and that's how my uncle first came here. While they were here, after a couple of months, they had some sort of argument, and my uncle decided that they couldn't be friends anymore. Then he was stuck in a place that he didn't know anything about, and he didn't speak English. And that's really the story of how my family came here about 40 years ago. Since then, many more generations have come here to the Island. My maternal side of the family all live here exclusively, mostly in Nassau County. My uncle still owns that home, the home where essentially every member of my family lived up until my family came, and we were the last family to come, in 1996.

I think this is relevant because the story of immigration is also a story of Long Island. The Island first began drawing larger numbers of Asians and Latinos in the '60s, when the Immigration Act was passed. Inevitably, it continues to reflect demographic changes and this outward push. Many of our members are actually people who first came to the city, but are finding jobs or more affordable housing here on Long Island, or oftentimes, what they consider better schools. So that outward push, I think, is particularly visible here on the Island, with us being an island and being so connected to the city. But that's in essence, I think, what we're seeing.

Part of the reason why immigrants are having such a hard time is because of the way that

decisions are being made on the issues that matter to them.

So just this morning we were actually outside the state office building in Suffolk County with a couple of our members. We had a press conference because one of the senators that represents the district in Brentwood has introduced a bill at the state level that would repeal or turn back many of the reforms and protections that we have worked really hard to ensure that the police and immigration adhere to here on Long Island. We were out there with a couple of our members. One of them spoke, and that's at the very core of the work that we do. We all see ourselves as facilitators of community leadership, and so in everything we do, we try to engage members. That's at the very core of the work that we do.

