

Community Unions and the Revival of the American Labor Movement

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Today's low-wage workforce is mostly ignored by the national political parties and largely untouched by organized labor. Over the last twenty years, "community unions" have emerged to try to fill the void. They are modest-sized community-based organizations of low-wage workers that, through a combination of service, advocacy, and organizing, focus on issues of work and wages. Community unions have so far had greater success at raising wages and improving working conditions via public policy rather than direct labor market intervention. This is because low-wage workers in America today have greater political than economic power.

Keywords: *community unions; immigrant worker centers; living wages*

INTRODUCTION

In the United States today, a nation thought of as overwhelmingly middle class, close to one fourth of the nation's workforce earns poverty-level wages.¹

First-generation immigrants account for one out of eight workers in America today, but one in four low-wage workers² and 20 percent of all low-income families.³ For these 27.5 million workers, twenty-first-century jobs turn out to have other distinctly nineteenth-century features: high rates of injury, no or poor benefits and forced overtime, and, perhaps most importantly, almost no access to traditional means of representation.

Despite the need for economic and political organization, today's low-wage workforce is mostly ignored by the national political parties and largely untouched by organized labor.⁴ Membership in unions has declined steadily, from a high of 35 percent of the overall workforce in the 1950s to today's low of 13.5 per-

cent. It is estimated that unions now represent less than 8 percent of private sector workers, or fewer than one in twelve workers. For the bottom fifth of American workers (those earning less than about \$18.00 an hour) the unionization rate is 5.6 percent. Sadly, it is not much of an exaggeration to say that low-wage workers today are almost as likely to be struck by lightning as to be approached to join a union.⁵

Over the last twenty years, “community unions”⁶ have emerged that are trying to fill the void. They are modest-sized community-based organizations of low-wage workers that focus on issues of work and wages in their communities. These organizations are mediating institutions that are based in specific ethnic and geographic communities (as opposed to specific workplaces) that provide support to communities of low-wage workers, especially immigrants and African Americans. The groups have sprung from a variety of sources including: community and faith-based organizing networks, Central America solidarity movements and other left-wing organizations, legal services as well as other social service agencies, immigrant nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), churches, and some labor unions. Some, like many immigrant worker centers, were new organizations; others, like unions, were established organizations that adopted new strategies. They embody characteristics across a spectrum of American associational traditions including fraternal organizations, settlement houses, labor unions, community organizing groups, and ethnic nongovernmental organizations and often combine these elements with organizational and movement traditions from the home countries of the immigrants who participate.

As work is the primary focus of life for many low-wage, especially immigrant, workers, it is also the locus of many of the problems they experience. But while community unions place a great deal of emphasis on work-related issues, they pursue a broad agenda that includes many aspects of life including housing, healthcare, and education.

Most of the workplaces and industries in which low-wage workers work and many of the communities in which they live are deeply segregated by race and ethnicity. The large number of undocumented immigrants who are working in the United States today represents a huge reserve labor pool of workers for employers who know that because of their legal status, they can pay these workers less and hire them for this reason. Unfortunately, for many immigrant workers, lack of documentation is not a transitory position; some of them have been in the United States for five or ten years or even longer, have not been able to normalize their status, and have been stuck in low-wage employment.⁷ That is why some community unions are likely to focus as much attention on organizing to change immigration policy as they do on labor market issues. They believe that they cannot hope to significantly improve the economic fortunes of immigrant low-wage workers without confronting immigration policy and the legacy of racism and xenophobia in American employment and society.

The organizations seek improvements in workers' home lives as well as their work lives through a combination of:

- Service delivery: including legal representation to recover unpaid wages and deal with immigration and other issues, English classes, worker rights education, access to health clinics, and bank accounts and loans
- Advocacy: including the researching and releasing of exposes about conditions in low-wage industries, lobbying for new laws and changes in existing ones, working with government agencies to improve monitoring and grievance processes, and bringing suits against employers
- Organizing: building ongoing organization and engaging in leadership development among workers to take action on their own behalves for economic and political change

In community unionism, forms of identity such as race, ethnicity, and gender stand in for craft or industry as the principal means of recruitment and strongest bond between workers.

This phenomenon is young but growing. A national study of immigrant worker centers (a subset of community unions) that I direct for the Economic Policy Institute has identified close to 133 worker centers in more than 80 communities across the United States. The number has increased significantly over the past decade. In 1992 there were fewer than 5 centers nationwide. They increased dramatically in the early to mid-nineties, growing at a rate of 10-20 new centers opening per year for several years.⁸

Based on extensive case studies of two community unions, the Workplace Project in Long Island and Solidarity in Baltimore, as well as close observation of several others, it is my contention in this essay that community unions have so far had greater success at raising wages and improving working conditions via public policy than in direct labor market intervention. In the communities in which they work, they have been able to alter the climate of debate about labor market policy, immigrant labor, and community economic development and they have succeeded in passing public policies that have in some cases resulted in increased wages and other improvements. Neither tarred with the same "special interest" label nor burdened by the same institutional imperatives as traditional unions, community unions have been able to speak and act with moral authority. Their approach to politics is also quite different than that of traditional labor unions. Rather than taking a traditional electoral approach of endorsing candidates and contributing money and volunteers to individual campaigns, community unions endorse policies and work to pressure elected officials to support them.

Thus far, community unions, although engaged in a range of creative strategies, have not been as successful at large-scale direct economic interventions in the labor market. These activities include direct organizing of workers into unions, alternative mechanisms of pressuring individual employers to make con-

cessions or in bringing up wages in particular industries through cooperatives, hiring halls, or other means. I will argue, perhaps not surprisingly, that this is because low-wage workers in American society today have greater political than economic power. Regarded as “low skill,” they have little individual power in labor markets to begin with and the general oversupply exacerbates the problem. Subcontracting has made it exceptionally difficult to aggregate their numbers to build collective power of the magnitude necessary to bring direct pressure to bear on employers and industries. But given the generally low level of participation in politics in America, as evidenced by low voter turnout and low levels of active political engagement, low-wage workers organized through community unions have an impact on public policy. They propose fresh ideas, organize a base of the working poor to speak from their own experiences, and, through “relational power,”⁹ are able to augment their own modest political power with the power of individuals and institutions who have more.

In light of their failure so far to build direct economic power, how are we to assess the importance of community unions to the overall project of improving labor market conditions for low-wage workers? In arriving at an answer, two factors must be taken into consideration. First, because of the limited power of low-wage workers, there are *no other organizations in society that are succeeding* at large-scale direct economic intervention on their behalf. All organizations—unions and community organizations—are struggling to organize workers in the United States today, even in the most robust areas of the economy. Of the 19 million workers in the retail sector of the economy, only 5.2 percent belong to unions. Of the 15 million in the service sector, union density is 3 percent. Of the 10 million in the healthcare sector, little more than 9 percent are union members.¹⁰ Of course there are some important exceptions to this rule, many of which are associated with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), especially its janitorial, nursing home, home health aid, and now security guard work. But the vast majority of low-wage workers in the United States today are not in labor unions and, for a variety of reasons we will soon explore in greater detail, are not being targeted for organizing by labor unions.

Second, given existing industry structures and prevailing employment practices, to significantly improve the conditions under which low-wage workers toil in the United States, nothing short of comprehensive public policy change will suffice. This is nothing new. In the United States historically, the most significant labor market improvements benefiting the working poor, including workers’ compensation, the abolition of child labor, and the establishment of minimum wage and overtime pay, came via public policy.¹¹ Through local living wage and other campaigns, today’s community unions are forcing “first principle” discussions regarding labor market policies back onto the public agenda and encountering a receptive public.

I will conclude by arguing that the labor movement would benefit from a closer association with community unions. As it happens, community unions today are rarely associated with the AFL-CIO.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

Why is the labor movement having such a hard time organizing new members? Across the United States there have been dramatic changes in the structure of industry, the organization of work, and patterns of employment. Between 1979 and 1996, 43 million manufacturing jobs were lost, and, while millions more were created during that same period, many of these new jobs were of comparatively inferior quality. Employers have responded to the heightened pace of globalization, technological advance, and shifting markets by adopting more flexible systems of employment relations¹² characterized by strategies of outsourcing and subcontracting.¹³ Work that was once performed by employees of a single large firm is now done by employees of many separate firms.¹⁴ As relationships between workers and firms have become more contingent, workers are less able to rely upon employers for job security, training, benefits, and upward mobility.

For the nation's 27.5 million working poor, the shift from goods-producing to service-producing industries has been even more devastating.¹⁵ The widespread practice of outsourcing and subcontracting has resulted in lower wages, little access to benefits, and fewer hours. The dramatic disaggregation of production has also greatly complicated minimum wage enforcement in low-wage labor markets as a shrinking number of inspectors strains to police a larger number of firms.¹⁶ Public policy, as we will discuss in a moment, as it is currently constituted, provides less and less relief.

Historically, one of the key institutions in American society that played an important role in the overall regulation of employment relations was organized labor. Now, however, most jobs are "born" nonunion.¹⁷ Nonunion firms are in the majority in most industries and they are setting the pattern for the remainder.¹⁸ Most workers today find their wages back in competition and set through highly individualistic means. And employers resist unionization tooth and nail. The firing of workers during union organizing drives has become commonplace.

While employer opposition is one of the main reasons that unions are struggling, the mismatch between union models and the structure of low-wage work in the postindustrial economy is another major obstacle. Most American labor market, social insurance, and labor law policies at the federal and state levels passed in the 1930s were premised upon assumptions about structures of employment and employment relations that have changed enormously, especially for low-wage workers. These laws assumed long-term, stable employment at fairly large, industrial workplaces that built the provision of employee benefits into the cost of doing business.

Today, low-wage workers are often employed in small and diffuse work sites run by highly mobile and competitive employers. They move between jobs more frequently and employers have decreased their commitment to benefits provision. As a result, workers have less job security and are less likely to access health benefits, pensions, and job training through their employers.

For these reasons, traditional models of unionism have become less and less appropriate for workers in the new low-wage economy. The craft and industrial union models characteristic of nineteenth- and twentieth-century America no longer work well for large numbers of them. These workers lack the long-term relationship to an occupation that lies at the core of craft unionism; and they often lack the long-term relationship to a firm or industry that lies at the core of industrial unionism.

What made craft unionism *craft* unionism was training in a skilled trade, strong occupational identity, and the idea of rights and benefits tied to occupational employment as opposed to firm-based employment. Craft unions were powerful because they controlled the supply of labor into the occupation. What made industrial unionism *industrial* unionism was the idea of organizing wall to wall in a factory, among all the factories of a single employer and throughout a mass production industry. Industrial unions were powerful because they were able to bargain collectively with an association of firms in their industries at the national or regional level and set “patterns” for the industry as a whole. Workers “identified” as members of an industry.

While the *structure* of craft unionism—union-provided job placement, training, and benefits—is a better fit for the new low-wage workforce, “craft or occupational unionist” isn’t the right identity for workers who lack occupational consciousness as a member of a particular trade or occupation. Industrial unionism is also not appropriate to the low-wage service sector because clear boundaries between industries do not exist. Widespread practices of subcontracting, as Wial argues, result in “workers in the same general occupation but in nominally separate industries [being brought] into wage competition.” In these situations, industrial union frameworks fall short because the union is very often unable to organize across the labor market to a degree sufficient enough to take wages out of competition. Also, many workers in low-wage industries today are tremendously decentralized. It is often difficult for unions just to make contact with them at their workplaces and harder still to develop effective strategies for building and leveraging collective economic power.

What would an organization need to do in order to overcome the current problems faced by unions? To organize workers under these conditions, organizations must be able to do three things. First, given the lack of traditional craft or occupational identities in many low-wage sectors, there is a need to broaden beyond job-related identities through the development of ongoing relationships with workers not just at their workplaces but also in their communities. Second, given the

decentralized nature of many of these industries, organizing must be done not firm by firm but across a range of firms; this also requires a community-wide approach. Third, given the need both for more regulation in low-wage labor markets as well as for higher rates of unionization, it is essential to win the sympathy of the larger community. To accomplish these three objectives, organizations must be rooted in the community not just at individual workplaces. Community unions are.

COMMUNITY UNIONISM¹⁹

Community unions basically divide into four types:

1. *Community organization/no union partner*: These organizations are either new, freestanding, community-based efforts to organize around work and wages or new initiatives created by existing community organizations. The Workplace Project and most of the other immigrant worker centers around the country fall into this category.
2. *Labor union or unions/no community partner*: These organizations are either new union locals chartered by an international union for the express purpose of organizing in a given community and sector, or new initiatives undertaken as part of a labor union's organizing strategy. They may seek the support and participation of community institutions but it is not a joint effort. SEIU's national Justice for Janitors campaign is an example of an existing union developing a new strategy; some of its home healthcare organizing, like the Chicago Home-care Organizing Project (CHOP), is an example of a new local being chartered.
3. *Community/labor partnership but with community organization dominant*: In contrast to "solidarity coalitions" in which community groups are mobilized tactically to provide support for union organizing efforts, or where unions are mobilized to give contributions of money or labor to community efforts, these are relationships that are more based upon mutual self-interest and accountability in working together to improve conditions in the labor market through economic and political action. These organizations are explicit partnerships between a community organization and a union. But just as lobsters have one claw that is larger than the other, these partnerships often seem to have a dominant claw as well. In this first case, it is the community organization's leadership and culture that dominate the practice of the organization. The joint partnerships between the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) in Baltimore and the IAF and the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) in Omaha are examples of this model.
4. *Community/labor partnership but with labor union dominant*: Same explicit partnership around self-interest and accountability, but it is the union's leadership and culture that dominate the practice of the organization. The Stamford Organizing Project of the AFL-CIO was an example of this.

Three features set community unionism apart from craft and industrial unionism: identity, geography, and politics. The first one, identity, is where this model contrasts most sharply with other forms of unionism, because membership is conditioned more by ethnic, racial, and religious affiliation than by long-term relationship to craft or industry. Discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity is a central analytic lens through which economic issues are viewed.

Second, community unions are distinguished by the fact that they are based in geographic communities more than individual work sites or industries and are defined by the geographic demarcations of community—neighborhood, city, and town—and all that this implies. They define themselves in relationship to other community-based institutions: firms, local government, schools, business associations, and other organizations of neighborhood cultural and political life. Third, community unions use politics and public policy as a central means of improving wages and working conditions for their members. They do politics not through traditional electoral and party-building activities but rather through direct action community organizing campaigns in which elected officials are directly confronted by an organized base to support specific policy initiatives. They develop labor market policies that they feel will improve wages, benefits, and working conditions and then organize to get local governments to enact them.

In the past, at least for many American workers, what one did at work was a sufficient constitutive category for organization such that it was able to sustain craft and industrial unionism. But now, for those who lack a strong occupational or industrial identity and move from job to job, it falls short of the mark. Assumptions about stable ties to occupation and industry can give predominance to a model of organizing that is based at the workplace and premised upon job-related identities. Often, low-wage workers, especially immigrants, are more strongly influenced by the networks that operate inside that ethnic community than by previous job experiences or skill sets, moving often from job to job and between industries.²⁰ In community unionism, ethnic, racial, gender, geographic, and even religious ties of low-wage workers stand in for craft and industrial identities. For example, as we will see in the case sections, the Workplace Project, the community union on Long Island, is steeped in Latino culture, and Solidarity, the Baltimore community union, is very strongly rooted in the African American, Christian community.

When ethnic or racial identity is the constitutive organizational category for worker organizing, there are a number of important implications for organizational practices. In terms of the locus of recruitment and organization building, although the workplace continues to be central, neighborhood, church, and social networks are also very important. Establishing ongoing relationships with key community institutions goes from being a nice way to garner expressions of solidarity with the union but not essential to organizing strategy to an important way

of recruiting members into the union. Craft unions logically concern themselves with policy issues that will have an impact on their craft such as licensing, prevailing wages, and the broader regulation of the industries in which they work. Industrial unions logically engage in those issues that affect their industries such as trade policy and regulation. Community unions identify with the broader concerns of their ethnic, racial, and geographic communities. The organizations view housing or civil rights or immigration issues as connected to their core mission around worker organizing—and issues of class and race, class and place, class and gender, and class and ethnicity are joined in this model.

Although it shares many features in common with social movement unionism (SMU)²¹ as well as a similar critique of contemporary union culture and practice, community unionism is different. The differences are context and size. SMU implies a thorough-going, nation-transforming moment that was the labor movement in the 1930s, civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s, or antiwar in the 1960s and 1970s. I think of social movements as those relatively rare moments in American history when very large numbers of people got into motion, the prevailing cultural norm was challenged, and the nation was transformed as a result. Few labor leaders would disagree with the idea that we need a social movement around work and wages in American life. But what can we do in the meantime? With community unions, organizations don't have to wait for the stars to align in a certain pattern in order to mount these kinds of efforts. They can *create* the climate change they need, recast the way low-wage workers and their organizing efforts are portrayed, and transform the local community even without a national movement. The term "community unionism" implies that unions and community organizations need not wait, but can organize in ways that *will* transform the debate in their communities and open the way for organizing. When community unions alter the climate they make it possible for public policy change and they lay the groundwork for organizing drives that can succeed even in the absence of a national social movement. I have always believed that the term "social movement" should be used *extremely* parsimoniously. Social movements are good work if you can get them. But most of the time, you can't.

In addition to the practical role they are attempting to play in communities, the approach community unions typically take implies a break with long-held patterns and traditions in worker organizations in America. It is prevailing wisdom in American political science that there is and has existed since the Civil War era a sharp bifurcation between the politics of work and the politics of community. This "work/home divide" is one of the central tenets of the American Political Development (APD) perspective on U.S. working-class formation. In the workplace, the theory goes, workers acted on the basis of their class position and developed class consciousness because they were forced to engage in militant struggles with employers bent on denying them improved wages, improved working conditions,

and recognition of their unions. But in the community, the opposite was true. Instead of denying workers political voice, the formal institutional structures were open to them.²² In comparison to Europe's relatively closed system,²³ white male suffrage was extended to a large percentage of the white working class in America by the late eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century, local political machines connected to mass political parties actively recruited working-class men to play a role. Thus, a militant politics based on class that might have been the basis for a working-class party was trumped by party politics organized along ethnic, religious, and territorial lines.

Today, when we look at the associational landscape of some American urban and suburban communities, we see new organizations emerging that bridge this traditional work/home divide. Community unions are young and weak but they are interesting because they organize workers around class and ethnicity, *both* at their workplaces *and* in their communities. Since participation in party is no longer synonymous with pursuit of politics, rather than mitigating against them, core identities like ethnicity are helping to reinforce class-based appeals. Community unions are combining features of labor unions, ethnic associations, and community organizations to engage in organizing activities at the local level that establish a set of labor market protections for low-wage workers. In contrast to most U.S. labor unions, there is no bright line separating the economic program (in unions usually pursued through collective bargaining with employers) from the political program (in unions usually pursued through electoral and legislative activity in close cooperation with the Democratic Party).

So far, community unions have seldom pursued their economic programs through traditional union organizing campaigns. They are more inclined to rely upon local community organizing and coalition building with organizational allies to pressure employers as well as upon passing local living wage and other pieces of legislation that compel employers to make improvements. So far, community unions have seldom pursued their political program through political parties. Instead they pursue their political goals by crafting new laws and then organizing direct members and allies to bring pressure to bear on elected officials to support them. For community unions, economic and political issues are all part of a strategic whole. The organizations move back and forth between work site and community organizing and use a combination of economic and political strategies to achieve their goals.

Since the contemporary community unions were such a new phenomenon when my work began, I selected my cases on the basis of which organizations were the most promising exemplars of the new model. The two principal cases I studied are the Workplace Project in Long Island, New York (community based with no union partner), and Solidarity in Baltimore, Maryland (community/labor partnership with community dominant).

TACKLING THE SUBURBAN SWEATSHOP:
THE WORKPLACE PROJECT

The Workplace Project of Hempstead, Long Island, is an organization of the displaced, disorganized, and undocumented. It was created in 1992 without the institutional sponsorship of church, union, or state. In twelve years, the organization has successfully brought together “bottom of the barrel” immigrant workers who had little in common beyond their lowly station to create an effective organization with a membership base and a governing board made up entirely of low-income immigrant workers. Since 1992, the Project has targeted employers and secured hundreds of thousands of dollars in back wages for its members. It has transformed the way that immigrant workers are portrayed in the media and perceived by elected officials and the general public, and has led a successful campaign in the state legislature to pass the strongest unpaid wages legislation in the United States.

The organization was founded by Jennifer Gordon, a young Harvard Law School graduate. The seeds of the idea for the Project were sown in the 1980s, when she worked part-time at Centro Presente, a Cambridge-based multiservice organization for Central American immigrants. At Centro, Gordon helped file political asylum cases and later conducted training on federal immigration law for the heavily Latino workforces at area factories.²⁴ But, convinced that organizations like Centro had a political stake in Salvadorans returning home, she grew frustrated.

They were involved in the political left in El Salvador which had a stake in saying those people were going to go back home and were only here temporarily . . . stable jobs, long term housing and political power in the United States were not seen as an important part of the strategy because they did not fit with the political view that this was a temporary resettlement of refugees.

Gordon began to look around for alternative organizing models. It was at this time that she began to think seriously about the immigrant worker center model. With start-up funding secured, she set up shop in the heart of downtown Hempstead, in Nassau County.

Between 1980 and 1990, Long Island’s Latino population grew by 78.8 percent in Nassau County and 49.7 percent in Suffolk County. Many of these were Salvadoran refugees, fleeing a country torn by a bitter civil war.²⁵ By the early 1990s, various estimates placed the number of Latinos living on Long Island at between 165,000 and 250,000 and, according to the 2000 U.S. Census, 282,693 persons of Hispanic origin currently reside in the two counties.

They chose the Long Island suburbs because friends and relatives recently settled in Hempstead and other cities and towns in Nassau and Suffolk counties, told them of the large number of jobs available, and touted it as a safer and cheaper alternative to New York City.

In Long Island at the time of the Workplace Project's founding, there was a high demand for personal services like housecleaning and landscaping, but a tight labor market and the stigma of certain jobs meant that native workers spurned most of them. This created a wealth of opportunities for immigrants willing to fill these jobs.²⁶ The thousands of undocumented immigrants who arrived in Long Island found a tremendous demand for their labor both in the informal sector (working for small contractors and private families) as well as in the lowest-paying formal sector jobs (restaurant work, car washes, and light manufacturing), but none of these provided much opportunity for upward mobility.²⁷ In the year 2000, 86 percent of Nassau and Suffolk Counties' non-farm-related employment was in service-producing industries.²⁸

There are about 521 union locals in Long Island and Queens and an estimated 150,000-200,000 unionized workers living on Long Island.²⁹ While there has been a huge influx in the number of low-wage workers into Long Island between 1986 and 2000, unionization numbers in these sectors have not increased. For the most part, Central American immigrant workers have not been able to look to labor unions for help in upgrading their wages and working conditions. There have often been problems with local union officials making immigrant members feel welcome and providing them with representation and support. In the first three years of the Workplace Project, 8 percent (70 out of 917)³⁰ of the cases workers brought to the organization's legal clinic were from immigrant workers who were having trouble with their unions. In some cases, workers claimed that the union representative was looking the other way when employers were not applying the terms of the contract to immigrant workers; in others, that the union was not representing workers when they had grievances including unfair dismissal, sexual harassment, or nonpayment of wages. Overwhelmingly, the unions had no bilingual staff or capacity.

Here was the central problem that the Workplace Project was created to address. There was a phenomenal number of immigrants who, while able to tap into social networks of relatives, friends, and acquaintances to find places to live and work, found little in the way of union, nonprofit, or governmental support for employment-related problems. The Workplace Project opened its doors in November of 1992 to fill this void.

In its first few years, the Project offered employment-related legal services for immigrant workers, a workers' rights course, and ongoing community education and outreach around immigrant worker rights. Early on, the organization printed and distributed one-page fliers that provided tips about how to behave during an INS raid, and in 1995, it published a bilingual comic book that gave information about employment rights in the context of worker organizing efforts. The Workplace Project estimated that, in its first four years, it reached 7,000 workers through community presentations and over 75,000 through the Spanish language media. During that same period, more than 1,200 workers walked through the

door seeking help from the organization's legal clinic. In its first seven years of operation, the organization recovered over \$562,000 for workers in back pay and benefits.³¹

Even after employers were found guilty and ordered to pay settlements to workers, they often refused to do so. As a result the Project created the Justice Committee to organize Workplace Project members and allies to picket outside of the homes and business establishments of exploitative employers. The Committee targeted employers who were not paying minimum wages, were refusing to satisfy legal judgements, or were actively opposing union organizing efforts.

At an early picket organized in front of a restaurant owing back wages to three workers, demonstrators chanted and held signs that said "Eat, Drink and Feel Guilty" and the owner became so incensed that he called the police. Much to his surprise, when the police officers arrived on the scene, they supported the picketers' right to be there.³² Twenty minutes later, that owner emerged from his restaurant yelling about blackmail but taking out his billfold.

Because these tactics were so unusual for the suburbs, they were very effective, especially when they blocked the flow of commerce at retail venues like restaurants. They were empowering not only for those workers directly wronged by the employer in question, but also for all those who participated in the actions. Learning that they could take part in a public confrontation without feeling that they were placing their lives in jeopardy was an important lesson about civic participation in their new home. Most importantly, the actions themselves were newsworthy, and *Newsday*, Long Island's paper of record, as well as other radio and television stations, covered them sympathetically.

Another major program of the organization was the workers' rights course begun in 1997. It was divided into three sections: legal rights, organizing models, and labor/immigrant social movement history; and each class, regardless of the topic, always made the link to organizing. During the time that it was offered regularly, more than 700 workers took the course and became members of the Workplace Project.

About the Membership of the Workplace Project

The Workplace Project, insofar as it is billed as a Latino worker organization, sounded homogeneous on the outside but on the inside it is anything but. In interviews, almost no one related to "Latino" as an effective descriptive term. People preferred to be called "Colombian," "Mexican," "Dominican," or "Salvadoran." People shared a common language (and a common limitation in terms of their inability to speak English) and a common set of experiences as low-wage workers, but that was where the commonality ended. There were enormous differences by country and region as well as levels of education, social and economic class, and politics. As Jorge Coronel from Peru put it: "There is a lot of rivalry among the Hispanic community. Colombians fight with the Venezuelans, the Peruvians

with the Ecuadoreans. But when we leave our country, we shouldn't think that way, we should just get together as Hispanics."

Very few of the members interviewed cited work in only a single occupation or industry since coming to the United States. In terms of occupation, social class, or economic position in their home countries, the vast majority of the members interviewed had been downwardly mobile since they had come to the United States. Some members of the Workplace Project had been factory workers or agricultural workers in their home countries and were engaged in occupations of similar social standing and education levels in the United States.

In conversations with members about what was important to them about their involvement with the Workplace Project, what was said over and over again was that it restored to them a sense of individuality, connectedness, and efficacy that had been lost in emigration. Although people usually chose Long Island because they had family or friends or countrymen already living there, the community and civic infrastructure of home were by and large missing.³³ Organizational participation in the Project gave people a way to reconcile who they had been at home with who they had become in the United States.

Most of the workers interviewed were not resentful of performing menial labor, per se. As Lina Castro of Colombia said, "I don't think it [working as a housekeeper, factory, and restaurant worker] is bad, because I see it as a ladder, go step by step, do certain things and better things happen later." Immigrant workers had expected to start out working in the low-wage labor market; what shocked them and made them seek out the Workplace Project was their treatment at the hands of employers as well as the attitude of the larger society toward them. "Any job is a job," said Castro, "I loved cleaning houses and I like to do various things but what bothered me the most was the mistreatment. The way people treat you because you are doing this kind of job. They think you are stupid because you don't speak English." Like many Workplace Project activists, Castro sought out the legal clinic first for help with an employer. She was told that her problem did not have a legal remedy, but she stayed anyway and decided to take the course and become involved.

Political Organizing:

Legislating Immigrant Worker Justice

The Workplace Project has fought on the local, county, and statewide levels to improve conditions for immigrant workers. Largely successful defensive battles have been fought in the villages and towns over the right of day laborers to gather at shape-up sites in public places. County legislatures have been arenas of struggle over this issue as well as other perceived anti-immigrant measures including "English-only initiatives" and housing regulations designed to make living in many of the communities in which they seek work extremely difficult. Ironically,

it was in the notoriously impenetrable New York state legislature where the organization achieved its most important victory: a strong statewide unpaid wages bill.

From the first day the Workplace Project's legal clinic opened its doors to immigrant workers on Long Island, nonpayment and underpayment of wages were by far the most common complaint it received.³⁴ While state and federal laws require all workers, documented or not, to be paid the minimum wage,³⁵ enforcement of the law in relation to low-wage immigrant workers is generally nonexistent and the penalties for violators ineffectual. The New York Department of Labor (DOL) had approximately one investigator per 7,000 private workplaces; employers found not to be paying the minimum wage were subject to only a 25 percent civil penalty, and repeated nonpayment of wages carried only a misdemeanor, not a felony, conviction. For an immigrant workforce in search of enforcement of the law and due process, Long Island was a wild, wild west of exploitative employers and hostile, or at best ineffectual, regulatory bodies. The Project took dozens of cases to the state DOL³⁶ only to be rebuffed. Undocumented workers or workers working under the table were told inaccurately that they were ineligible to file claims, cases were taking up to eighteen months to be investigated, and a Spanish translator was available for only three hours every other week. DOL staff often refused to accept the claims of housekeepers, restaurant workers, and day laborers, instead subjecting them to lectures about illegal aliens not paying their taxes.

In the summer of 1996, the organization voted to mount a campaign to pursue passage of a law they had drafted called the "Unpaid Wages Prohibition Act," during the 1997 state legislative session. The members of the Workplace Project believed that only by dramatically increasing the penalties would unscrupulous employers be compelled to change their ways. While the organization knew that passing legislation was an extremely remote possibility, it viewed the campaign as a way to publicize the problem of unpaid wages and to provide major learning opportunities for members and leaders.

The Workplace Project succeeded in getting the two most important small business associations on Long Island to endorse the bill. They also received the endorsement of a large assortment of religious organizations, unions, central labor councils, and community organizations. Over the course of the winter and spring of 1997, the Project organized numerous meetings with legislators. They met in lawmakers' Albany or district offices and conducted the discussions in Spanish. Workplace Project members who went on these visits loved doing them. To be able to participate, they often took time off from work or paid someone else to work for them.

In late April, *Newsday* ran a front-page story about the plight of immigrant workers on Long Island that featured a full-page picture of a worker who came to the Workplace Project for help after being paid approximately thirty cents a day for working twelve hours a day, seven days a week, for fifty-seven days and even-

tually even sleeping on the floor of the freezing restaurant at night. The article featured the unpaid wages bill and contained a boxed section that listed the names of Long Island employers charged with violations of the state wage and hours laws.

Over the objections of the 27,000-member New York Farm Bureau, the bill's biggest opponent,³⁷ eventually ten Republican state senators signed on as cosponsors of the bill, including five from Long Island. Surprisingly, several of the senators that sponsored or cosponsored the unpaid wages law had been at the forefront of efforts to pass virulent anti-immigrant legislation. Some were the chief architects of a New York bill that was nearly identical to Proposition 187 in California. Others had earlier championed an English-only campaign in the Senate.

To the amazement of virtually everyone involved in the campaign, the bill moved through the Assembly unimpeded and fared similarly well in the Senate. On July 1, it passed both chambers unanimously, and on September 17, Governor Pataki signed the Unpaid Wages Prohibition Act into law. The Act increased the maximum civil penalty for the worst wage offenders from 50 to 200 percent of the amount owed and it raised the criminal penalty for repeat violating employers from a misdemeanor to a felony, doubling the maximum penalty to \$20,000. In addition, the bill prohibited settlements of less than 100 percent of what the worker was owed unless the worker agreed and it required regulators to continually update workers about the status of their cases. Finally, the law shifted the burden of proof from workers to employers, in cases when employers have failed to maintain proper records.

Economic Organizing:

Targeting Day Laborers and Domestic Workers

The Workplace Project also dedicated itself to the direct economic organizing of a variety of workers, including day laborers and domestic workers, rather than through working with existing unions. In fact, the organization did not have a strategy for its approach to union work and was not in any deep ongoing relationships with union locals. A small number of unions were supportive of the organization, occasionally requesting help with translation, training, organizing campaigns, and making infrequent, small donations. In the main, the Workplace Project's economic strategies involved direct targeting of employers and public policy efforts, not union organizing.

Over a two-year period, during 1996 and 1997, the Workplace Project launched a campaign to improve wages and working conditions for the hundreds of day laborers who gathered at shape-up sites across Long Island to wait for work. The day laborers were targeted by the organization because the leadership felt that these workers were suffering at the very bottom of the labor market and most acutely in need of help, often showing up at the Project's legal clinic to complain of not being paid for their work. Also, they were under attack from the communities in which the shape-up sites were located. Because these sites were

located in public, commercial places sometimes just on the edge of residential areas, angry civic organizations were trying to shut them down and local governments were grappling with what to do.

At the corners, workers collected very early in the morning and waited for contractors who would pull up in pickup trucks and vans, roll down their windows, and shout out their labor needs and the rate of pay they were offering. The workers would shout out their qualifications in reply, and once chosen by the contractor, jump into the cabs of trucks or backseats of vans and be off for a day of work with no idea of where they were going and no assurance that this employer could be trusted to bring them back at the end of the day or pay them what he had agreed to. The Workplace Project members observed that very little bargaining took place: workers basically accepted what they were offered. In visits to the Legal Clinic, they also rarely had any documentation about the hours they had worked and they often didn't even know the name or address of their employers.

Over time, "corner committees" were organized whose goals were to try to establish a corner-wide minimum daily wage as well as to put systems in place to ensure wages were paid and safety conditions were improved. The strategy was to go daily or several times a week to the corners talking up the need to organize, identifying potential leaders among the regulars, visiting them at their homes, and winning support for the establishment of a corner-wide minimum wage.

By the conclusion of the second season of organizing in the fall of 1995, an estimated 150 workers had gone from receiving a daily wage of \$45 to demanding and receiving \$60 a day. But maintaining the higher wage was extremely difficult, especially during lean times on the corner when work was harder to come by and workers felt compelled to take whatever they could get. Also, there was no enduring organizational infrastructure at the corners—no organizer on the scene every day to reinforce the wage.

By the end of 1997, in the absence of consistent leaders on each of the corners, a strong staff organizer, or any ongoing organizational structure (like a hiring hall), things slid back to a chaotic status quo. In addition, changes in immigration law in 1996 created a more desperate situation for immigrant workers. As a consequence, they were less willing to forego work.³⁸ Once again, contractors were pulling up, calling out their needs and wage offers, and workers were jumping into the back of their trucks. After an evaluation process by the board and staff, a decision was made to shift the focus away from day laborer organizing.

In 1999, the organization was compelled to return to day labor after a series of efforts by local anti-immigrant organizations with strong ties to far-right national groups to close sites and to pass legislation making it illegal for contractors to pick up day laborers. But the organizing strategy focused more on politics and less on direct economic organizing. The organization initiated a new Day Labor Organizing Project dedicated to winning more day laborer participation in political decision-making processes, achieving more worker control over the

shape-up sites and hiring conditions, and building a broader coalition with community groups to defend immigrant workers' rights. The organization worked to build worker committees on a number of corners across Nassau and Suffolk Counties, eventually organizing a Long Island-wide coalition that represented over 2,000 day laborers. The Workplace Project also helped to initiate a national network of day laborer organizations that is one of the very few national networks that presently exists among immigrant worker centers.

In March 1997, after years of hearing expressions of interest in the idea of worker-owned businesses, the Workplace Project launched a cooperatives program.

The first cooperative created was the Cooperative Landscaping Innovation Project (CLIP). The initial team of four worker/owners consisted of experienced landscapers who had prior experience with cooperatives in their home countries and long histories with the Workplace Project as founding members. The Workplace Project advertised CLIP through the media as well as through sympathetic churches and synagogues. The hope was that they could build a client base of liberal Long Island families, businesses, and nonprofits who would be attracted to the idea of hiring a worker coop to meet their landscaping needs. Within five months, CLIP was fully insured, owned its own truck, and had over forty clients. After two seasons, CLIP had developed a client base of over fifty customers and one church, was able to pay \$12 an hour to its employee/owners, and in early 1999 became independent of the Workplace Project as a self-sufficient worker-owned cooperative.

A more modest organizing campaign around domestic workers was initiated through Fuerza Laboral Feminina (FLF), the women's committee at the Workplace Project. Although they don't gather at shape-up sites for day labor jobs, Long Island's "*domesticas*" are in some important ways the female counterparts to the day laborers. They all work "under the table" in the informal sector where wages are paid in cash and no records are kept. Many are new arrivals, speak little English, and have no acquaintance with American labor laws. Steered by friends and family to one of several employment agencies that place housekeepers, the women are often charged a steep fee in exchange for placement at the home of a Long Island family, either as live-in or live-out help. These women show up at the Workplace Project with terrible stories of conditions of work being radically different than what they were first told, unpaid wages, sudden dismissal, fourteen-hour days, and verbal and physical abuse by employers. Isolated in a workplace of one, with odd days off during which they have to take care of basic personal business, the Project knew from the women who did make it to the Center that *domesticas* needed support, but it was very difficult to get in touch with them.

In looking over the cases of *domesticas* that had been brought to the attention of the Workplace Project, the women of FLF identified a common set of problems. In addition to the cases of verbal and physical abuse and unpaid wages, there

were certain structural problems in the way the industry operated. Women who sought employment through agencies were charged a high fee and sometimes, when their initial placement did not pan out for one reason or another, they were forced to pay the fee all over again. Contracts specifying the terms and conditions of work between the women and their employers were virtually unheard of. As a result, they had no set schedule of work including the number of hours and days per week, or a regular day off that they could count on. Often they were not paid the minimum wage and did not know that New York State labor law required it. Despite their long hours and inability to leave the house, they were not provided by their employers with three meals a day or compensated for the cost of purchasing their own.

As the outreach proceeded, one issue that always resonated with the housekeepers was going after the placement agencies. The women were often paying fees to the agencies that were far higher than New York State labor law that stipulated that an agency placing women for domestic work can charge a worker no more than 10 percent of her first month's wages and must allow for that fee to be paid over ten weeks. Instead the agencies were charging double or triple what the law allowed and demanding that it be paid upfront. In addition, although the law states that all live-in domestic workers be paid \$4.75 per hour for the first forty-four hours and \$6.38 for hours worked above that,³⁹ they were knowingly placing women in jobs that paid much less than the minimum wage, sometimes as little as \$2.00 an hour.⁴⁰

Eventually the women decided to proceed with a campaign against the agencies. In July 1997, the organization kicked off a campaign to get Long Island agencies that referred immigrant women to domestic jobs to sign on to "The Workplace Project Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights." The statement required the agencies to agree to charge fees in accordance with the law and to refer women only to jobs that complied with basic wage laws including the minimum wage. The idea was that the Workplace Project would create a "Good Agency List" that would be distributed through the media, area churches, and synagogues to Long Island families who would be encouraged to choose only agencies that were on the list. Agencies that refused to sign would be subjected to negative publicity, demonstrations, and letter-writing campaigns from homeowners letting them know that they would not be using their agency until they complied. Forty-two organizations were recruited to the cause and sent letters to each of the agencies urging them to sign and letting them know they would circulate the list.

The Workplace Project and FLF worked with the housekeepers they had been able to recruit, as well as other women's committee members and community allies to conduct meetings with the employment agencies. Backed by rabbis, priests, and Workplace Project staff, the women told their stories. These included scouring an oven without protective gloves until their fingers bled, being attacked by employers attempting to rape them, and cleaning six houses in a single day

without breaks for rest or food. They also included stories of being charged exorbitant fees by agencies and then being placed into homes with absolutely no idea what their rights were in terms of wages, hours, duties, or conditions of work.

By the end of the year, five out of the six agencies that specialized in domestic workers had signed on to the statement of principles and agreed to establish contracts between employers and employees to be used in job placement. What had they agreed to? Essentially, to comply with state labor law. Although the domestic worker campaign on the agencies resulted in all of the targeted ones signing on, the victory turned out to be largely symbolic. It had little or no effect in practice because there was no way to enforce the agreement or to effectively monitor the agencies' compliance. Frustrated with their inability to hold the employment agencies to their pledges, the Workplace Project and the women of the FLF became interested in trying to launch a housecleaning cooperative called UNITY.

UNITY was initially composed of twelve immigrant women who spent a year working with staff to develop the structure and marketing plan. Based upon market research, outreach to potential clients through local churches, organizational allies within close proximity to the town of Hempstead, and early media coverage, ten families became UNITY's initial clients during January, February, and March 1999, providing employment for all twelve members of the cooperative. With this initial client base, UNITY placed ads in a local newspaper and received a strong response. Now it gets most of its customers through word of mouth.

According to its leaders, UNITY's core mission is raising consciousness among, building the leadership of, and providing greater economic independence to house cleaners. There is a very strong emphasis on leadership development throughout the cooperative's activities: through biweekly meetings and other cooperative activities there are multiple opportunities to develop skills from how to set an agenda and run a meeting to public speaking. The Workplace Project organizes frequent in-house trainings and also sends members to outside trainings as well. "The cooperative was founded for the betterment of women in general, not just so women could have work, but also to give the women self-worth," said Lilliam Araujo, the co-op director and former vice president of the board of the Workplace Project. Said Araujo,

In each home, a woman suffers different kinds of problems. The first thing we did was attract members and look for work. Through that process we began to learn the problems that the women faced. We have various trainings about domestic violence, health in general, so that the women would be ready to deal with their problems.

Members of the co-op go out and speak in area churches and other venues where they hope to find house cleaners and interest them in joining the co-op. As it markets the cooperative in the larger community through talks at congregations, at community organizations, and in the media, it also works to raise the conscious-

ness of opinion makers, local leaders, and potential customers about the problems immigrant women workers face.

The women of UNITY are all required to participate in a special course developed by the Workplace Project on cooperatives. Each member participates in one of the co-op's committees (Finance, Marketing, Rules, and Education), which meet every two weeks. After participating in the first co-op class in 1999, members of the Education committee engaged in an extensive evaluation, revised the curriculum, and have taught all subsequent courses.

The co-op developed a system for distributing jobs to members that is based upon the level of each member's participation in the cooperative's activities. "The most active members are the first to receive new jobs. Subsequent jobs are distributed to members with decreasing participation. Once every member is assigned a client, the cycle starts anew from the beginning of the sequence."⁴¹ Members earn \$20 an hour and contribute 10 percent of their wages earned through the cooperative to help cover operating expenses. In the spring of 2004, the cooperative had grown to eighty-one members. According to Araujo, some members are able to work full-time through the cooperative, and others are able to get two or three days of work a week through the co-op.

CLIMBING JACOB'S LADDER TO ECONOMIC JUSTICE: SOLIDARITY IN BALTIMORE

Like the Workplace Project, this too is a story of organization among the dispossessed. But unlike the Workplace Project, Solidarity was built on a strong foundation of organized church and organized labor. Founded in 1993, the organization was a joint venture of Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD), a faith-based organizing affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), and AFSCME, the national public employees' union.

In Baltimore for more than a century, race has been the key factor in determining one's place in the labor market and in the city's neighborhoods. The city's economy and physical geography are heavily segregated by race and have been for a very long time. For much of its history, African American and white workers in Baltimore occupied separate labor markets with whites predominating in much of trade and manufacturing, black men consigned to laboring jobs, and black women to domestic service.⁴² As a result of more than a century of strongly racially biased local, state, and federal housing and zoning policies, neighborhoods became dramatically segregated. Blacks were crowded into certain neighborhoods by design, and these neighborhoods were redlined, disinvested, and in the most extreme—but certainly not unusual—cases, even demolished.

While up until the 1970s, manufacturing and other blue-collar jobs employed more than 50 percent of Baltimore's workers, between 1970 and 1985 the city lost almost 40,000 manufacturing jobs—a decline of 45 percent. Between 1988 and 1998, employment in the City of Baltimore declined by about 70,000 jobs while

employment in the Baltimore suburbs increased by more than 136,000.⁴³ In general, the eighties marked a period of heightened deterioration in Baltimore's neighborhoods as not just industrial but also financial and commercial capital fled the city. By the late seventies Baltimore had lost a great deal of its white, ethnic middle class to the suburbs. All told, between 1949 and 1998, 300,000 people—close to one out of three city residents—left the city.⁴⁴

With “urban renewal” a failure and fewer financial resources to bring to bear on its problems, the city's schools and neighborhoods continued to decline. The downtown-centered urban revitalization efforts of the 1980s and 1990s did little to reverse the downward spiral. As Solidarity lead organizer Jonathan Lange recalled,

Over two billion dollars had been spent in Baltimore to subsidize the development of a downtown hospitality industry. Early on, that development was endorsed by the same churches that make up BUILD. But the promise to the churches was that downtown development would provide new job opportunities for African Americans. As it turned out, those high paying jobs were filled with people from outside Baltimore and the remaining jobs were low wage dead end jobs with no benefits.

In the fall of 1992, the Maryland Food Bank conducted a study of the people using its affiliated 140 soup kitchens and food pantries and found that 27 percent of them worked every day, many of them in downtown Baltimore. The study reinforced the disillusionment BUILD pastors felt about downtown redevelopment as an economic strategy. The condition of the BUILD churches in the early 1990s was a direct reflection of Baltimore's decline. While the churches were still there physically, they were struggling to keep the doors open and meet the demands of the impoverished residents of their neighborhoods. Mounting social problems—the large number of people coming in for food, the high levels of drug use and violence, AIDS, and homicide—were overwhelming them.

As the middle classes of both races fled the city for the suburbs, they often maintained connection to their old congregations, commuting back on Sundays for services, but becoming increasingly uninvolved and disconnected from the life of the neighborhoods in which those churches were situated. As Kathleen O'Toole, BUILD lead organizer at that time, described it,

The churches were becoming older and smaller and dying. Congregants were moving away. The churches were less connected to the communities they served. . . . There were people who came to the soup kitchen and Head Start program that the churches were serving, but were not in meaningful relationship with . . . the church was only viewing them as clients.

This situation presented a number of challenges to church clergy. First, they were struggling under the burden of serving the needs of two distinct congregations under one roof: the “Sunday church” of worshipers and the “Monday

through Saturday” church of the poor. Second, they were aware of the danger of remaining dependent upon Sunday commuters who might eventually develop new relationships to churches closer to where they lived. Most of all, several ministers worried that their ministries lacked a clear mission—something they viewed as essential to the historical survival of the black church. Arnie Graf, the IAF national staff person overseeing BUILD, described these discussions.

Some pastors recognized the disconnection between the two congregations under one roof as more than just a matter of survival, they recognized that the most important institution in the black community is the black church, not just for spiritual life but for political, economic and social life as well. If you lose the prophetic thrust and connection to the next rung of poor people . . . unless the church moves out and folds in people who live and work around it, the black community itself will lose strength and mission.

BUILD organizers and leaders considered many possible responses, eventually deciding to build two new organizations: the Solidarity Sponsoring Committee, an organization of low-wage service workers, and Child First, an organization of parents of public school students and their children. Graf explained, “Our conclusion was that we needed to rebuild our city and recreate our neighborhoods, and to do so we needed a whole new series of mediating institutions.”

AFSCME, the public sector union and, with a national membership of 1.3 million, one of the nation’s largest, had been a significant presence in Baltimore for many years with a membership of approximately 10,000 drawn from municipal and state agencies.⁴⁵ Stung by increased contracting out of city services in Baltimore as across the country, the international union was interested in exploring strategies to halt and reverse privatization. AFSCME viewed the living-wage issue as a way to stem privatization. Bob Linehard, the AFSCME attorney who worked closely with BUILD and Solidarity, described the union’s thinking:

Privatization is the maquiladora of the public sector, so we had been wrestling with how do we confront this low-wage competition in an environment that is hard to organize and where people are paid well below a living wage you could raise a family on.

In addition, at the time Solidarity was getting started, the union was planning to expand its membership ranks by launching a major campaign for collective bargaining rights for state workers. The union felt that the alliance with BUILD would also help this effort. It won the campaign in 1996 and has since built the state membership to more than 30,000. Thus began Solidarity, a community-labor alliance that over the next ten years would enact groundbreaking public policy change.

From the beginning, the organizing had two main thrusts. The first was to re-establish a set of low-wage labor market protections through the pursuit of a public policy agenda. The second was to organize low-wage service sector workers

into a union. As we will see, just as was true of the Workplace Project, the political organizing was much more successful than the economic organizing.

Solidarity Members

Virtually all members of Solidarity are African American. The majority of members are women. Many of the older members had extensive job histories, holding each job an average of 2-4 years, but most also had fairly lengthy breaks from employment due to marriage, illness or injury, drug problems, or problems with their children. In more unusual cases, workers spoke of having been at previous positions for ten or eleven years until the factory closed down, the company went out of business, or the public sector job was eliminated. Many of the older members were working part-time jobs as bus aides or janitors to supplement their social security, veterans' administration pensions, and Medicare or Medicaid payments, which they said did not provide enough income to live on. Many of the bus aides and cafeteria workers spoke of filing for unemployment insurance in the summer months. The younger members (forty-five years or younger) were more likely to be working more than one job because of the part-time hours of each job, and, in general, expressed a strong preference for full-time employment. A majority had moved between jobs in several different sectors including manufacturing, janitorial, food service, bus aide, and low-end healthcare positions. No one talked about having had a career in anything. A minority had attended some type of postsecondary program—vocational school or community college—but few had completed them.

Almost all the members interviewed had no health insurance. The older workers were more likely to have once held jobs that provided decent health insurance whereas many of the younger members had really never had health insurance through a job and used emergency rooms for their healthcare or relied on some type of free care program.

Fewer than half of those interviewed belonged to other organizations including churches. Those who did belong to groups most often mentioned a church, some other small (and often black-oriented) civic organization, or Alcoholics or Narcotics Anonymous. About half said they had heard of BUILD before they were approached to join Solidarity. A minority of members belonged to churches that were affiliated with BUILD. Most belonged to churches that were not BUILD members. Many who mentioned going to a particular church often said they weren't really formal members, or didn't go every week. Whether or not they belonged to a church or attended one regularly, most viewed Solidarity's connection to the church as a very positive thing. They said that it made them trust the organization more because they knew it was telling the truth and trying to make things better for people.

A number of Solidarity members had once belonged to a union and almost all of them said positive things. When describing what unions provided for their

members, workers spoke primarily about higher wages and better benefits. Most thought it was a good idea for Solidarity to think of itself as a union. When pressed to distinguish between their experiences of belonging to a union in the past versus being a member of Solidarity, most talked about union membership as having been a much more passive relationship. Very few seemed to have ever attended union meetings, and those who had sounded more like spectators than participants; although two or three made reference to union leaders as insiders separate from the workers, no one characterized them as corrupt. Most said the difference between their union experience and Solidarity was that Solidarity really reached out to them, involved them, asked them questions, and took the time to explain things. Several said that in comparison to unions, their experience with Solidarity felt more like a conversation.

In almost every interview, when asked about why they had joined Solidarity, members cited social as well as economic reasons. Many talked about the need to raise wages, and some talked about wanting to fight for the living wage at their jobs where their bosses were resisting paying it. But usually in the same breath members talked about liking to help others, wanting more respect from their bosses, and enjoying the opportunity to learn new things, take part in a group, and testify at City Hall or the state capitol. Members of Solidarity often mentioned the need to come together because of low pay and a desire for a better life. They expressed strong kinship with other workers in Solidarity but never in occupational terms. Not a single person ever said anything like “we need to come together as bus aides or as cafeteria workers or janitors.” The group they understood themselves to be a part of was one of workers struggling to earn better than a poverty wage.

Transforming the Debate in Baltimore

After a series of workshops and discussions, BUILD pastors and AFSCME leaders formulated an analysis about the central problem that ailed many of Baltimore’s neighborhoods and families. Their conclusion was that the old social compact—that companies would reward hard work and high productivity by including their employees in the prosperity through increased wages and benefits, and providing opportunities for upward mobility—had been cancelled. They became convinced, especially in light of the huge public subsidy that had already gone to private corporations, of the need to develop a new social compact in place of the old.

Early in 1993, Solidarity called upon the mayor and the City Council not to vote for any subsidies unless companies agreed to three things: (1) full-time positions at living wages, (2) benefits for workers, and (3) opportunities for training and advancement for African American service workers. They called upon the mayor and the Board of Estimates⁴⁶ to cut off any future subsidy to developers until hotels and office buildings agreed to negotiate on the social compact.

While BUILD was unsuccessful in getting the mayor or the City Council to cut the subsidies, they did discover that the city itself was a major source of contracts. At that point, the organization began to target these city contracts, which included custodial work at schools, recreation centers, and sports arenas, and food services at school cafeterias.⁴⁷ The organization decided that if it could not get the city to cut off subsidies to downtown developers, it could demand that the city mandate that municipal service contractors pay a “living wage.”⁴⁸

The contracting out of municipal jobs was a natural focus for another reason. In terms of wages, benefits, and opportunities for training and upward advancement, public sector jobs for the African American population of Baltimore were in many ways the equivalent of blue-collar manufacturing jobs—and privatization had decimated them.⁴⁹ The reduction of public sector jobs had been taking place for more than twenty-five years. In 1971, the City of Baltimore had 38,082 total salaried and per diem positions; by 1998 it was 25,904.⁵⁰ These jobs, by and large, had been contracted out to private companies that took over the administration and delivery of city services.⁵¹

After a two-year campaign to persuade the mayor and the City Council to pass the law, the City Council signed the living wage ordinance into law in December 1994. It required companies bidding for service contracts after July 1, 1995, to pay employees on city jobs at least \$6.10 an hour and put into motion three annual increases. The ordinance set the contract wage at 110 percent of the poverty income for a family of four, assuming a forty-hour workweek. It included a \$50 per worker per day fine for nonpayment of the wage and stipulated that a contractor who had been repeatedly fined could be barred from the bidding process for up to three years. Solidarity and BUILD mounted campaigns for each increase of the living wage and also looked for ways to extend the living wage to a larger number of workers.

In the months following passage of the law, some “republicization” of privatized services took place: sixty-three school custodial jobs affecting six Baltimore schools went from the private sector back to the public sector. As a result, wages for these custodians increased significantly and for the first time they were given sick leave, vacation, and healthcare benefits. They also became members of the AFSCME city workers’ local. In July 2000 the living wage rose to \$8.03, 55 percent higher than the federal minimum wage of \$5.15 an hour.

Baltimore’s living wage campaign struck a chord among economic justice organizers across the country. In the months after Baltimore’s victory, similar efforts got underway in scores of cities and local communities across the country. By June 2003, 103 living wage ordinances had been passed in cities and counties across the country including Miami, Los Angeles, San Antonio, Boston, St. Louis, Cleveland, Omaha, Hartford, and Denver.⁵²

Living wage was just one of a series of innovative public policies Solidarity gave birth to. In the five-year period between 1993 and 1998, the organization cre-

actively fought to reconstruct a set of labor market protections for low-wage workers who had been denied them by the effects of privatization. It passed a municipal right to organize ordinance that asserted workers' right to organize and denied contracts to union-busting employers. It tried to stabilize contracted-out workers' employment situations by passing a "right of first refusal" ordinance that allowed workers in good standing to keep their jobs even when the contractor of record changed. As already discussed, it provided some 4,000 part-time contract workers with a "living wage" several dollars higher than the federal minimum wage. And, when advocates for the poor across the country were reeling from the passage of the 1996 federal welfare reform bill, Solidarity brought together its base of low-wage workers with welfare recipients who were shouldering new work requirements and got the governor of Maryland to promulgate a "non-displacement policy" through executive order, whereby government agencies were barred from replacing regular paid positions with sub-minimum-wage workfare positions. It was one of the first organizations to recognize that state governments had enormous flexibility in implementing the federal law and also one of the first to exploit that flexibility to the advantage of its constituents, as it did when it compelled the governor to sign onto its "School Counts" campaign to count attendance at community college as fulfillment of the law's work requirement.

A More Perfect Union

The victories described above are all examples of Solidarity's successes in the political sphere. But the organization's founders had not set out to build a political organization alone. They viewed the living wage victory as a victory for a small part of their base—workers employed by city contractors—but, more important, as a way to stabilize the workforce so that it could be organized into a union. Unlike the Workplace Project, Solidarity aspired to becoming a union from the beginning. It wanted to organize large numbers of low-wage workers into a new model union that, in its organizing strategies and structures, would be more suited to the realities of the service economy.

In downtown Baltimore in the early 1990s, there were no unions approaching the low-wage service sector workers who worked around the redeveloped inner harbor. Thus Solidarity had no competition from other unions in its efforts to recruit workers. In reality, it was in competition with itself to figure out an approach that would succeed where essentially no other unions thought it was possible. Lange and Graf were convinced that most of these jobs were not conducive to the NLRB election process, and instead set out to develop a viable model of "minority unionism." In Lange's words, "If there were 20 people in a building, 5 can sign up and the company has to offer payroll deduction for the five."

The Solidarity organizing model was to build an initial membership by recruiting from service sector workers at downtown contractors and other employers. By

spending time in different service industries, Solidarity organizers could both recruit individual members and evaluate that industries would make promising targets for concentrated organizing. Under this model, Solidarity would train and place workers, and then bargain on their behalf by negotiating multi-employer agreements through master contracts. They did not want to organize through the NLRB election process for another reason: the expectations of members. Solidarity did not want to be viewed as a traditional union by workers who joined because they did not want to have to fulfill the servicing function of a traditional union. They were convinced that having separate agreements at dozens of different employers would mean having to spend an enormous amount of time just negotiating and keeping on top of the contracts. In their view, it was better to be able to sign individual workers up through their employers, but not via an election and a contract.

From 1993 through 2000, as it solidified a benefits package and a system of dues deduction, Solidarity mounted a number of organizing efforts in several segments of the low-wage labor force including hotel housekeepers, downtown janitors, school bus drivers, food service workers, and childcare workers. Most of them were unsuccessful. Here are two examples.

Solidarity's early strategy was to organize a union among janitors in downtown office buildings and work toward a master agreement along the same lines as the SEIU's Justice for Janitors (J for J) campaign. But the organization's strategic approach differed from that of J for J. Lange posed the difference this way: "When you are organizing people who are virtually powerless, the question becomes: with what power do you ask people to take the first step—power they can muster themselves or like-minded power from allied institutions?" The organization's strategy differed from the J for J approach in that it hoped to win by leveraging the power of BUILD's network of black churches, political connections, and foundation allies, rather than by, in Lange's words, "unfairly asking minimum wage workers to go into a dubious battle of disruption." Just as it had worked with foundation allies in town for national conventions to bring pressure to bear on hotels and leave notes urging housekeepers to join Solidarity, it worked with them in similar ways to help with the building service organizing. The organization's initial modus operandi was to rent a bus; bring the foundation directors downtown, along with fifty or sixty workers; and hold meetings with every tenant in an office building. During one such action, Solidarity organizers met Greg Pinkard, the largest owner of downtown commercial office space, who was also the head of the local chapter of the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA).

Initially, Pinkard offered to try to broker a deal between Solidarity and BOMA. If Solidarity would drop the living wage campaign, BOMA would agree to a collective bargaining relationship, albeit at a significantly lower hourly rate than that being proposed through the living wage campaign. Graf and Lange decided that they could not agree to that because the living wage would benefit a greater num-

ber of workers. Over a series of meetings, Pinkard offered to participate in a pilot project whereby the living wage would be extended to three buildings. Between these three buildings and Baltimore's World Trade Center, the organization hoped to have the beginnings of a base downtown from which to organize toward a master agreement.

The organization was able to create a very strong organizing committee at the World Trade Center, which was operated by the state Port Authority. By February 1996, a majority of custodians were signed up on Solidarity "recognition" cards and BUILD and Solidarity began to press Rentokil, the cleaning contractor at the World Trade Center; the Port Authority; and the governor to recognize the union and extend the living wage to the workers there. Over the course of these negotiations, Solidarity discovered that Rentokil, which was refusing to pay the living wage, was charging 40 percent more than the local industry average for similar property. The organization made the case to the governor that Rentokil's fees were so inflated that he could build living wage into the next bid and it would still not cost the state any more money. The governor agreed to require the living wage, and when the contract was put out for bid, Rentokil lost out to Red Coats. Red Coats honored the Right of First Refusal ordinance and retained the existing workforce and pay increased from \$4.40 to \$6.60 in a single stroke. They also agreed to offer payroll deduction for Solidarity benefits and dues to World Trade Center workers. In July 1996, Solidarity organized a major celebration at the World Trade Center where Governor Parris Glendening personally handed out the first paychecks at the new living wage rate.⁵³

Although the World Trade Center effort did succeed, the other forays into building service organizing did not. Pinkard reneged on his commitment; the BOMA pilot project never came to pass. In the end, Solidarity did not pursue an organizing drive of downtown janitors. The sixty workers of the World Trade Center continued to pay dues to Solidarity right up until the time the organization negotiated with the SEIU to turn the workers over to form one of the nuclei of the Justice for Janitors effort that began in Baltimore in the spring of 2000. In their work with members and with the press, Solidarity portrayed the effort as the unfinished business of the living wage effort in Baltimore.

In the late spring of 1998, after their failure to organize the hotels and janitors and after it began looking less likely that they would succeed in organizing Aramark food service workers, Solidarity decided that childcare was the next logical industry to organize and began organizing Head Start workers.

It was during the Head Start campaign that Solidarity finally ended its prohibition on collective bargaining campaigns. When asked what convinced them, Lange replied,

Three thousand people who joined that we never see. The membership benefits we offered, the political empowerment we were doing, worked for a small part of the membership and we can't sustain it. The number of people who actually joined and paid dues at some point

is 3,000 but the active dues-paying base today is about 500. The irony is that the SEIU organizer told us they consider themselves members of Solidarity, even if they have not paid dues for two or three years.

Lange and Graf also knew that AFSCME's patience with Solidarity's minority union approach was fading in the light of their inability to make its system of dues check-off work to consolidate a union membership of any size. Lange said,

Our winning will demonstrate the power of community-based organizing to the unions. They will not accept as a victory what we have done so far if it is not tied to collective bargaining because they only have one measure of success—the number of people covered under a collective bargaining agreement.

AFSCME granted Solidarity permission to mount a collective bargaining campaign of Head Start workers. The organization decided on a strategy of signing up a majority of workers on union authorization cards and then asking the director of the agency for voluntary recognition of the union. Taking this approach, they signed up three Head Start agencies, each with about forty workers.

Solidarity also organized Head Start directors and workers across the city to participate in a legislative campaign to win a grant to the program from the state as well as to create a childcare multi-employer fund. The idea was to create a Taft-Hartley multi-employer health and welfare fund in which each employer would make a contribution to the fund as mandated by their collective bargaining agreement that would specify that a certain percentage of the total payroll go into the fund. It would be administered by a joint committee of Solidarity and the employers' association who would set the rate of contribution and purchase benefits on behalf of all the members. Lange wrote the charter for the fund in such a way that it could include other childcare employers, not just Head Start.

After the 1998 election in which BUILD again played a central role in getting out the vote for Governor Glendening's reelection, he fulfilled his promise to include \$5 million in funding for Head Start in his budget proposal. But in the legislature this proposal met with some opposition from the for-profit wing of the industry. Lange recalled,

It was in Annapolis that we began to understand how strong the low wage childcare lobby is. The childcare advocates are not monolithic in their politics. The for-profit part of the industry was very interested in BUILD not raising the wages or benefits of low wage Head Start workers. They were very clear that they were operating in the same labor market . . . they felt that any increase in wages would put upward pressure on them to raise wages as well.

In the end, in 1999 the legislature earmarked \$2.5 million for Head Start—the first state funds ever contributed in the history of the program. The organization claimed a partial victory and planned to go back during the next legislative ses-

sion for funding to endow a multi-employer health benefit fund for Head Start workers.

During the 2000 session BUILD and Solidarity succeeded in getting the governor to allocate \$500,000 to set up the first multi-employer healthcare plan for childcare workers in the country. The next year the groups were able to win a supplemental budget allocation of \$3 million to put the benefits plan into place. In the end, Solidarity was never able to make it happen because local Head Start affiliates opposed using the money for this purpose and wanted to use it instead for expanding their programs. The extra \$3 million did free up other money that could then be used to raise wages at the bottom of the salary scale up to the living wage.

While Solidarity was glad for the wage increases and received a lot of the credit from the workers for having gone to bat for them, the leadership strongly regretted their inability to create the multi-employer fund. “The fund would have built the organization—wages won’t. We would have controlled the health and welfare fund. We would have used it to help organize other sets of low wage workers.”

The following year, AFSCME decided to withdraw from the Head Start organizing campaign, and Solidarity discontinued its union organizing efforts.

WHY ARE COMMUNITY UNIONS SUCCEEDING AS POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS BUT FAILING AS ECONOMIC ORGANIZATIONS?

While Solidarity and the Workplace Project differ in terms of structures and strategies, there are important commonalities. As discussed earlier, identity, place, and politics were the three pillars on which both organizations rested. In place of craft or occupation, both relied on racial and ethnic identity to facilitate recruitment into the organizations and to provide a strong sense of common purpose for the workers who joined. Although one was based in the inner city and the other in the suburbs, both organizations were deeply rooted in their geographic communities. Both organizations pursued public policy as a central strategy for improving conditions in low-wage labor markets.

After a review of the cases, it should be clearer why craft and industrial union models were not suited to organizing these low-wage workers. The Central American workers who came to the Workplace Project by and large had no set occupations and moved often between industries. The African American workers of Solidarity also had no set occupations and worked in contracted-out jobs in the service sector where clear boundaries between industries often did not exist. This made these jobs difficult to organize and these workers unlikely to identify strongly with a particular industry. They were drawn into active participation in the Workplace Project and Solidarity because they identified as low wage, exploited, Latino, or black.

The Workplace Project and Solidarity ended up with a strikingly similar set of strengths and weaknesses. Both organizations created dynamic organizations of constituencies who had no place else to turn to pursue work-related issues, and

developed strong leaders from within these constituencies. Both organizations have had a very concrete impact on the way the media reports and the larger public perceives low-wage workers and their issues—dramatically changing the climate and altering the terms of debate.⁵⁴ They have drafted, campaigned for, and won important and imaginative new public policies and been successful in opposing other policies that would have exacerbated workers' problems. But neither organization has succeeded so far at large-scale economic intervention or worker organizing. Their numbers remain small by union standards and they have not been able to regularize membership through systematic collection of dues. At present, they are best at bringing community organizing strategies to bear on labor market issues through politics and worst at doing so through economic strategies. There are several reasons for this including organizational cultures that incline toward community organizing and politics and away from labor organizing. But the most important reason is because in politics, despite the distortions of personal wealth, special interest money, and skewed structures of representation, when it comes to the weighing of actual votes, each one is counted equally.

Organizations that demonstrate that they have the ability to influence or mobilize a large number of votes for or against elected officials, whether those voters are rich or poor, black or white, have political power. While Solidarity was a fledgling organization, its close connection to BUILD, Baltimore's most powerful community organization that had a strong connection to black churches totaling hundreds of thousands of members, gave it real political power. Although nonpartisan, BUILD engaged in extensive voter participation activities. During the summer of the living wage campaign, a close gubernatorial race was shaping up between the state's sitting liberal democrat and a very conservative republican challenger. BUILD worried that Glendening was relying upon a big African American voter turnout in Baltimore that was not there. Mayor Kurt Schmoke, who had promised a big turnout, was out of town for much of the summer and although his top operative was working on the campaign, Lange and Graf were unconvinced that Schmoke was capable of transferring his base to someone else, especially a candidate for whom there was little enthusiasm among black voters. As the race continued to narrow, BUILD decided to help Glendening. The organization felt that if it could deliver a large part of Baltimore County for him, he would probably win. Before they put anything into motion, they asked him to appear before the top leadership of BUILD and other Maryland IAF affiliates to pledge support for their agenda. Glendening, having made the same political calculus as Graf and Lange, was anxious to meet, and agreed to their agenda in its entirety.

BUILD conducted an intensive voter education effort during the last four weeks of the election in a large number of precincts, which included phone calling and door knocking conducted by a core of 350 people. In keeping with their organizational philosophy—"we don't endorse candidates, candidates endorse us"—

BUILD never formally endorsed Glendening. Instead, they publicized the candidates' positions on various issues, which made it clear that the governor was the better candidate on their issues. In one of the closest elections in Maryland history, Glendening won the gubernatorial race by approximately 5,000 votes. Mayor Schmoke, facing his own reelection challenge from the president of the City Council (who was the main sponsor of the living wage bill), came around to supporting the living wage ordinance.

Beyond electoral power, Solidarity was able to "expand the scope of conflict"⁵⁵ by portraying its members' wage and work-related struggles in a sympathetic light and garnering sympathetic media coverage for their plight. Although there was no public opinion polling done at the time, in economically hard-hit and strongly Democratic-leaning Baltimore, it seems reasonable to assume that a larger number of voters, even beyond the membership of BUILD churches, was aware of and sympathetic with the living wage campaign, and that elected officials believed this to be the case.

On the surface, the Workplace Project's political influence is more difficult to account for and almost certainly weaker, but it turns out to have had more in common with Solidarity than was suggested at first blush. While its majority non-citizen base had no direct political power, it had organizational allies on Long Island who did. In addition, the number of Latinos who were registered or eligible to vote was certainly growing on Long Island and politicians could have felt that this was a way of showing support for the community. In terms of the unpaid wages campaign, it won powerful Long Island and statewide interest groups to its side and both *Newsday*, Long Island's newspaper of record, and the *New York Times* provided strong editorial support. Like Solidarity, it is a plausible assumption that the Workplace Project was able to translate its high visibility and strong moral standing into voter sympathy that extended beyond the membership bases of its closest organizational allies and that elected leaders knew it.

While an argument can be made that at least once a voter makes it to the voting booth, all individuals count equally, as workers in the labor market this is definitely not the case. For the most part, the workers of the Workplace Project and Solidarity had little power in the labor markets in which they worked because there was an overabundance of them and they were considered to be unskilled. Skilled workers wield more power over employers than unskilled workers, for several reasons. Obviously, the possession of higher levels of training and education imbues these workers with higher market value to begin with and this gives them greater ability to pressure employers as well as a more realistic exit option. Their level of skill means that firms rely upon them heavily and do not view them as easily replaced. For these reasons, companies are willing to pay higher wages and invest in additional training. Through unions, trade associations, and apprenticeship programs and the role they are able to play in licensing and regulation, skilled workers are also more capable of controlling entry into the occupation.

Thus in skilled occupations, there is more likely to be a restricted supply of workers. Finally, their incomes and market power enable them to make significant contributions toward self-organization.

While labor markets vary by industry and occupation, firms that are competing in low-end service sector industries have a reduced incentive to minimize turnover. In fact, sometimes they are incited to do the reverse—to employ people for shorter periods, keeping base wages and benefits low. Many of these industries have become decentralized as a result of subcontracting and privatization. Small firms that are dealing with tighter profit margins are less capable of raising wages or improving job quality on their own anyway. These firms face greater barriers to organization and cooperation. It is harder for them to form networks, trade associations, and the like. In turn, their employees face much higher barriers to organization. They can't close off entry into the labor market. Working at individual small firms they are isolated from each other and hard-pressed to devise effective strategies to bring pressure to bear across the industry. They have less money to put into self-organization. They face immigration and language barriers that make them fearful of collective action, and because they are poor and have fewer resources to fall back on, the stakes are higher in terms of the consequences of job loss. In this type of situation, the workers most in need of economic organization are least likely to achieve it. Unable to control the supply of labor into the industry, they have to organize large numbers of workers in order to take effective collective economic action. Low-wage workers at larger firms and corporate behemoths like Wal-Mart face many of the same obstacles to organization as mentioned above, but on top of these, they confront employers with huge resources with which to oppose union drives.

While establishing producer cooperatives like the landscaping and housekeeping ones at the Workplace Project is an intriguing alternative strategy for building economic power in a specific geographic/industrial or geographic/occupational niche, so far, most organizations seem to be less focused on the labor market aspect and more focused on the self-sufficiency, leadership development, and empowerment of members. The director of UNITY, in explaining the purpose of the co-op, spoke eloquently about the opportunities it has provided for the women to build their self-confidence but could not describe an economic strategy for growing the operation. She was excited that the co-op had grown to eighty-one members but was not keeping track of how many jobs the co-op was getting, how many it would need in order for all eighty-one to have full-time employment, or what type of individuals and families were using it. She was not looking at other housecleaning agencies as a benchmark for judging her own. I find this to be the case among most of the immigrant worker centers that are experimenting with cooperatives. Cooperatives are familiar to organizers and leaders who were aware of them in their home countries, so they are favorably inclined to experiment with

them, but so far the models they are creating lack sophisticated market research, targeting, and marketing components.

The exception, for a period of time, was a strong temporary worker cooperative that grew out of Solidarity. At its height in 2000, it was placing 70 to 90 temporary workers a day and developing a niche in the banquet sector of the hospitality industry. While it has pursued a much more sophisticated labor market strategy, the co-op's fortunes have been erratic and have not grown significantly beyond the numbers it reached in 2000.

In light of all of the above, despite affinities of class, race, and ethnicity across workplaces, turning them into a union or any kind of effective labor market strategy is enormously difficult. This is why there is so little union organizing or any other economic collective action taking place among low-wage service sector workers.

With such limited economic power and the barriers to building it so high, it makes sense that low-wage worker organizations turn to politics. As Marks has argued in attempting to explain variations in economic and political strategy among unions, those workers less able than craft workers to control the supply of labor into their occupations were historically more likely to pursue "open" unionism strategies like industrial unionism. They were also more likely to turn to public policy in order to accomplish through politics what they could not achieve through economic organizing. While he asserts that both craft and industrial unions "politicize the labor market by introducing power relations in place of the impersonal logic of market competition," it is the "open" or industrial unions that have "had to introduce political considerations in a more explicit way, by force of numbers rather than by controlling the supply of labor, and this has led them to support extensive political regulation of the labor market."⁵⁶

In order to win on a public policy issue, a community organization often just needs to mobilize a dedicated minority, but in order to alter the labor market dynamics of a particular sector of the low-wage service economy, a significant number of individual workers and workplaces have to be organized. For a community organization that is pursuing a strategy of passing public policy to alter labor market dynamics—at least in many cases—far fewer recruits are necessary. Given the generally low level of participation in politics in America, as evidenced by low voter turnout and low levels of active political engagement, well-organized minorities are often capable of mounting successful campaigns in the public policy arena. There is an often unspoken multiplier effect at work when legislators are contacted by constituents: when a legislator receives fifty phone calls, the assumption is they are representative of a much larger number. In addition, while low-wage workers' oversupply in the labor market might be a disadvantage in terms of building economic power, their large numbers are a decided advantage, of course, when it comes to engaging in politics.

Finally, in thinking about the current economic power of workers, it is tempting to accept as a given the categories of “skilled” and “unskilled” rather than understanding them to be socially constructed. An essential strategy for increasing the labor market power of workers currently considered to be unskilled must involve a deeper societal debate about the values underlying our decisions about which types of jobs and industries are accorded high and low levels of market power and respect. Does it make sense that childcare providers who care for millions of the nation’s toddlers are viewed as unskilled and compensated so poorly? Does a society with a rapidly aging population and a nursing home industry now larger than auto and steel combined⁵⁷ really want to label as menial, and compensate accordingly, the work of caring for our country’s elders? Given their greater level of political rather than economic power, low-wage workers are more likely to win this debate through politics and public policy than direct labor market intervention.

HOW IMPORTANT IS PUBLIC POLICY CHANGE
TO IMPROVING THE LIVES OF LOW-WAGE WORKERS?

In the United States today, individualized approaches to raising wages simply won’t do the job. Broader public policies that require firms to pay living wages, provide health insurance, deal with contingent workers more equitably, and honor the right to organize may well need to come first. In addition, in recent years, the nation’s immigration policy has become one of its most important de facto labor market policies, trapping immigrant workers without legal documentation in dead-end jobs and depressing the wages of all low-wage workers. Immigration reform is essential to raising wages and improving working conditions. In recent years, the overwhelming success of municipal living wage campaigns demonstrates that given the opportunity, the public may well support policy initiatives that begin to put a new social compact between business and society into place.

When it comes to governing the market and regulating the structure and behavior of individual firms, the United States today is hewing to an exceptionally radical hands-off approach. But it has not always been this way. American political parties once offered strongly contrasting points of view about the role and function of the economy in a democratic society.⁵⁸ Historically, many of the most significant labor market interventions benefiting low-wage workers came via public policy and these policies began at the state and local level, eventually becoming national policy. During the Progressive Era, in state legislatures across the country, reformers fought to strengthen labor regulations and enact unemployment insurance, old-age and widow’s pensions, disability, and workers’ compensation laws. Sometimes, these efforts began locally, as in Massachusetts, where between 1915 and 1916 eight cities in Massachusetts overwhelmingly approved old-age pensions by popular referenda.⁵⁹ The Fair Labor Standards Act, passed in 1938, which mandated a nationwide minimum wage, outlawed child labor in manufac-

turing, and established the forty-hour workweek by requiring employers to pay time and a half for hours worked above that number, was the culmination of many local and statewide efforts.

The recent corporate governance and accounting scandals, bottoming out of the high-technology sector, extreme growth of very low-wage jobs, rising number of Americans without health insurance, lasting recession, and “jobless recovery” create an opening for a national conversation about the need for a new social contract. Absent support from above, these conversations are most likely to be opened from below, through grassroots campaigns at the local, state, and national levels. Through local living wage and community benefits campaigns, they have shown how to make local labor market policy contested terrain once again. Their organizing has already placed fundamental questions about work in America back on the table and has the potential to catalyze a new generation of public policies regarding low-wage work. So far, the living wage policies have largely been limited to firms that do business with the public sector. But across the country, local organizations are struggling to draft policies that would cover private sector firms as well and statewide groups are considering legislative campaigns and referenda to raise the minimum wage. In San Francisco in 2003, a coalition of unions and immigrant worker centers mounted Prop L, a successful campaign to pass a citywide minimum wage of \$8.50, the highest rate in the nation. The law, like the federal minimum wage, applies to all employers, not just those doing business with the city. These campaigns point the way to a broader strategy—one can imagine dozens of local and statewide campaigns that could be mounted on aspects of labor market and employment policy.

Of course, many efforts to enact policies that expand labor market protections for low-wage workers may not succeed right away. But, by shining a light on the working poor and forcing the issues to be debated, community unions are laying the groundwork for a new national policy on low-wage work. In so doing, they are catalyzing Americans to feel a moral stake in supporting not just policy change, but union organizing efforts as well. As the national AFL-CIO renews its “Voice at Work” campaign to educate the American public about the need for federal labor law reform, it would do well to heed these lessons and work closely with these groups. Because although the Federation has tremendously strengthened its electoral work in order to mobilize labor’s resources and membership to support candidates for office, to succeed in labor law reform, the right to organize must be cast in moral terms.

GETTING BETTER AT ECONOMIC INTERVENTION

Although they have not yet demonstrated it, community unions bring some important resources to bear on the struggle to rebuild union density. They are place-based, which is a good start for building density geographically. They excel at altering the terms of the debate and creating the mini-social movement atmo-

sphere in which union organizing is most likely to thrive. In terms of union organizing drives, these groups are sometimes in deeper relationship with targeted workers from specific ethnic groups than the unions are. On the other hand, as I have documented, they are not sectorally strategic. While they bring together organizations of low-wage workers around common bonds of class and race or ethnicity, their industry-specific campaigns have thus far had limited impact.

To play a role in effective, sector-specific union organizing, community unions not only need to learn the tools of analysis and strategy that good union organizers know, but they also need to be connected to a larger institution that has membership and resources and can protect and support them when they are battling with employers. The best scenario would be for more of them to be in an ongoing relationship with union partners who recognize their value and want to work together in a respectful, cooperative way. Unions need community unions, too. For the labor movement to have the opportunity for organizing on a massive scale again, it must be perceived as speaking on behalf of the whole. As Freeman has shown, the American labor movement has always grown in great spurts as opposed to slow accretion. It grew the most in the 1930s, during the height of popular unrest over the economic crisis.⁶⁰ What today's unions need in order to succeed is the moral legitimacy that the community unions have demonstrated they have in their successful public policy campaigns.

Community unionism is a phenomenon that is growing. New immigrant worker centers are coming into existence every month as more and more groups grapple with how to improve the lives of low-wage workers in their communities. But if they are to develop into a viable alternative model for organizing workers, or even as a crucial component to joint organizing efforts with unions, they must develop closer links to each other. There is a need for refining their organizing practices and developing a system for learning from the experiences of individual organizations, disseminating this learning, and making strategic adjustments in the ongoing work. At present, there is really no umbrella organization to which they belong that is speaking on their behalf to the larger polity or charting out a course for strengthening the organizations.

WIDENING THE CIRCLE

In earlier times, American labor federations and unions drew a much larger circle around who was considered to be "inside" versus outside of the labor movement.⁶¹ As labor historian Dorothy Sue Cobble has written, in earlier periods, organizations akin to today's community unions participated directly in the labor movement either as members of the AFL through its direct affiliation strategy of providing federal labor union charters to them or through other means.⁶² As Katheryn Kish Sklar's work has shown,⁶³ Settlement Houses and organizations of middle-class reformers like the Women's Trade Union League felt a part of the labor movement and it in turn viewed those organizations as close allies in the

struggle for better wages and working conditions. But now instead of viewing them as potential allies and even as potential members, unions too often look upon organizations like immigrant worker centers as outsiders trespassing upon their domain.

Community unions, frustrated with what they perceive as a lack of interest on the part of most unions in organizing among low-wage workers, often function in a slightly alienated parallel universe apart from unions. But feminist scholars like Karen Pastorello have demonstrated convincingly that it was not this way in earlier times. Her research demonstrates that without the intercession of Jane Addams and the immigrant organizing that took place through Hull House, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America (ACWA) would never have gotten its first contract with Hart, Shaffner and Marx.⁶⁴ Through its narrow outlook and limiting structures of affiliation and membership, the contemporary labor movement is cutting itself off from too many nongovernmental organizations, grassroots community groups, worker centers, and others who are actively working to improve the work, wages, and job opportunities of low-income Americans and new immigrants.

Most labor leaders and observers would agree that the signature accomplishment of the new leadership of the AFL-CIO has been improving the effectiveness of labor's political operation, and not new member organizing. This has certainly not been for lack of trying. Since taking the helm in 1995, the Sweeney administration has tried many strategies to reinvigorate union organizing among affiliates. In the early years, the new team at the Federation tried to play a leadership role in organizing. It set a goal of a million new members a year and aggressively challenged internationals to devote 30 percent of their budgets to organizing the unorganized. In addition, the AFL-CIO initiated large-scale organizing efforts including the strawberry campaign in partnership with the United Farm Workers and the "geo projects" in Stamford, Seattle, and Las Vegas. Disappointed with the results, frustrated with the recalcitrance of many internationals to recommit to organizing, and getting a clear message from those that were that they did not think it appropriate for the Federation to play a direct role in organizing, the Sweeney administration has recently altered course. It has dropped the rhetoric of "one million new members a year" and is now focusing on building the grassroots "Voice at Work" campaign to build a national movement in support of workers' right to organize unions. While it is too early to predict how effective it will be at altering the environment for unions to organize, the strategic mission of the campaign makes sense.

There are a handful of international unions, led by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE), and the Communication Workers of America (CWA), that have broken new ground in terms of developing new union strategies and organizational models for organizing nonunion workers. SEIU's home health aid campaign in California

resulted in 70,000 low-wage workers winning union representation—the largest single victory since the organization of the automobile industry in the 1930s. Over the past several years, CWA has patiently pioneered a number of promising experiments in minority unionism in several instances working closely with community organizations.

Working America, the Federation's latest project launched in 2003 to create a national individual membership organization of nonunion workers and their families to support labor's political agenda, is laudable and important, but, in its current incarnation, too limited.⁶⁵ First, rather than focusing on creating new forms of union membership for nonunion workers who desperately need to be able to access benefits, pensions, training, and job placement, the individuals and families who join Working America become members of a national political pressure group—not a union. Second, Working America offers a top-down way of recruiting sympathetic *individuals* to support the labor movement but not *groups*—and it is unclear whether or how those individuals who join to support labor's political agenda will be organized collectively. Rogers and Freeman's excellent "Open Source Unionism"⁶⁶ (OSU) proposal to offer services and benefits to nonunion workers, which is focused on extending the benefits of labor unions to the millions who cannot access them now, is the direction Working America should take. OSU goes straight at the problem by offering a way for groups of workers, not just individuals, and whether they represent a majority of workers in their workplaces or not, to affiliate directly with the labor movement and receive services.

What OSU and the community unions represent are pathways through which new collective organizations of workers are built that could be affiliated with the labor movement. It has always been the labor movement above all other organizations in American history that, as a form of collective power, stood as an antidote to the culture of individualism. It is the labor movement that has offered an alternative vision of what the market is ultimately for—developing the democratic capacity and enhancing the welfare of all the people of the United States. It is time to widen the circle.

NOTES

1. For whites it is 20 percent, for women it is 29 percent, for blacks it is 30 percent, and for Hispanics it is 40 percent. The poverty level wage is the hourly wage that a full-time, year-round worker must earn to sustain a family of four at the poverty threshold, which was \$9.04 in 2003. In 2003, 24.3 percent of the workforce earned poverty-level wages. Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein, and Jeff Chapman, *The State of Working America 2003-2004* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2004).

2. See Diane Schmidley, *Profile of the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 2000*, U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, Special Studies no. P23-206 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 2001); and Randolph Capps, Michael E. Fix, and Jeffrey Passell, "The Dispersal of Immigrants in the 1990s," brief no. 2 in *Immigrant Families and Workers: Facts and Perspectives* (November 26, 2002).

3. Michael Fix, *Tabulations of Current Population Survey* (Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute, November 2001).

4. Notwithstanding the Justice for Janitors, nursing home, and home health aid organizing of the Service Employees International Union.

5. The Economic Policy Institute estimates that there are approximately 27.5 million low-wage workers in the United States today. In the aggregate, the AFL-CIO organizes about 400,000 new members a year. If we assume generously that half of these workers, 200,000, are actually low wage we can see what a tiny percentage are actually gaining representation through unions annually—0.07 percent, or seven hundredths of 1 percent.

6. These ideas about community unionism have been developed through a series of discussions with Michael Piore and Richard Locke as well as through a few key articles of theirs. Piore's are "The Future of Unions" in G. Strauss, D. G. Gallagher, and J. Fiorito, eds., *The State of the Unions* (Madison, Wisc.: Industrial Relations Research Association Series, 1991); and "Unions and Politics," paper presented for the Conference on the Future of Unionism in Manufacturing, Lake Bluff, IL June 21-23, 1978. Locke's is "The Demise of the National Union in Italy: Lessons for Comparative Industrial Relations Theory," *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 45, no. 2 (1992): 229-49. Others have used the term before. In 1964, James O'Connor, in observing SDS's turn to community organizing and especially the Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP) projects, wrote "Towards A Theory of Community Unions," *Studies on the Left* 4, no. 2 (1964): pp. 143-148. Also during the 1960s, the Industrial Union Department at the AFL-CIO, working with the United Auto Workers and the War on Poverty program administrators, initiated some organizing projects that were also explicitly referred to as community unionism.

7. In a random survey of 153 of their members in Boston, SEIU 615, the heavily Latino janitor's local and worker center with a large number of part-time, non-English-speaking workers, found that 42 percent of their members had been in the country for ten years or more and 71 percent for six years or more. Weezy Waldstein, *Building Services Industry Career Path Project Investigation*, funded by the Boston Workforce Development Initiative 2004, available through SEIU #615, <http://www.seiu.org>.

8. Janice Fine, *Immigrant Worker Centers: Building A New American Community at the Edge of the Dream* (Washington D.C.: Economic Policy Institute, forthcoming Fall, 2005).

9. This term originated with philosopher Bernard Loomer, who talked about unilateral and relational power. The Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) uses it to connote the power that is built through the initiation and multiplication of "effective public relationships." See Michael Gecan, *Going Public* (Boston: Beacon Press 2002), esp. 162-66. Warren talks about the process of creating these cooperative relationships as building social capital. See Mark Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 68.

10. These figures are from the Research Department of the Service Employees International Union.

11. The primary regulatory foundation for the economic rights of the working poor is the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which abolished child labor in manufacturing, guaranteed a minimum wage, and established the forty-hour workweek as the national norm. Initially, it excluded agriculture, domestic service, retail, and the restaurant trades from coverage, but over the years it was amended to cover many more workers. When first enacted, it covered perhaps 20 percent of American workers, but by 1996 it covered an estimated 65 percent. See Willis Nordlund, *The Quest for a Living Wage* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1997).

12. Whereas in the fifties, sixties, and seventies, most U.S. workers, but especially blue-collar workers, were shielded from competitive unstructured labor markets, today a growing number of workers are not. Doeringer and Piore estimated that, in the 1960s, fewer than one in five members of the U.S. workforce could be found in these markets that were characterized by temporary work, transient labor, low formal skill levels, and unstable, unstructured capital-labor relationships at the point of production. Peter B. Doeringer and Michael J. Piore, *Internal Labor Markets and Manpower Analysis* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1971).

13. According to the Economic Policy Institute, almost 30 percent of all jobs in the United States are in nonstandard work arrangements (NSWAs)—independent contracting, working for temporary help agencies, contract or on-call work, day labor, self-employment, and regular part-time employment—which are typically inferior to normal full-time jobs.

14. See U.S. Bureau of Census (1997), 544, table 845, as cited by Howard Wial, “Minimum Wage Enforcement and the Low-Wage Labor Market,” MIT Task Force on Reconstructing America’s Labor Market Institutions Working Paper #11, August 1, 1999, 18.

15. The 18.1 million net jobs created between 1979 and 1989 involved a loss of manufacturing (1.6 million) and mining (266,000) jobs and an increase in the service sector (19.3 million) jobs. The largest amount of job growth (14.2 million) was in the two lowest-paying service sector industries—retail trade and services (business, personnel, and health). Taken together, these two industries accounted for 79 percent of all new net jobs over the 1979-1989 period and 72.9 percent of all new jobs in 1989-2000. Lawrence Mishel, Jared Bernstein, and Heather Boushey, *The State of Working America 2002-2003* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), 121-34. In 2003, 24.3 percent of the workforce earned poverty-level wages. Mishel, Bernstein, and Chapman, *The State of Working America 2003-2004*.

16. Whether measured by inflation-adjusted budgets, the number of investigators, or the number of Fair Labor Standards Act Compliance actions taken, the enforcement resources of the Wage and Hour Division are smaller today than they were 20 years ago. The WHD’s inflation adjusted budget for fiscal year 1998 was 7% below its level in fiscal year 1979. The number of investigators dropped by 11% between 1979 and 1998, and the number of compliance actions were 34% lower. (Wial, “Minimum Wage Enforcement and the Low-Wage Labor Market,” 6.)

As an illustration of the problem, in the garment industry today, David Weil estimates that “given the probability of inspection and the expected civil penalty, the predicted cost of noncompliance is about \$780 compared to the cost of compliance of \$6700.” Weil goes on,

Facing this trade-off, a rational contractor should choose noncompliance on a period by period basis—even given a moderate level of aversion to being caught. This simple calculus, played out in the context of extremely competitive product markets for sewing contractors, explains the economics underlying the intransigence of the sweatshop problem, even with more aggressive enforcement activity. (David Weil, “Regulating Noncompliance to Labor Standards: New Tools for an Old Problem,” *Challenge* [January-February 2002]: 47-74.)

17. Henry S. Farber and Bruce Western, “Round Up the Usual Suspects: The Decline of Unions in the Private Sector, 1973-1998,” Working Paper #437, Princeton University Industrial Relations Section, April 2000.

18. According to Mishel, Bernstein, and Boushey among high school graduates, between 1978 and 1997, the unionization rate was almost cut in half—from 37.9 to 20.8 percent. The authors add that between 1978 and 1997, unionized high school graduates earned

about 21 percent more than nonunion high school graduates. Mishel, Bernstein, and Boushey, *The State of Working America 2002-2003*, 182.

19. There have been few formal efforts made to comprehensively catalogue the set of organizations that I refer to as community unions. The most extensive list is the database that has been put together by the Phoenix Fund, a project of the New World Foundation that supports grassroots organizing efforts among low-wage workers. Out of this database of more than 300 organizations, there are approximately eighty organizations that fit the profile of community unionism.

20. See Roger Waldinger, *Still the Promised City? African-Americans and New Immigrants in Postindustrial New York* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996); and Alejandro Portes and Ruben G. Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

21. On social movement unionism see Bruce Nissen, "What Are Scholars Telling the U.S. Labor Movement to Do?" *Labor History* 44, no. 2 (2003): 157-65.

22. See Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

23. Katznelson argues that in Europe, the franchise was

expanded by fits and starts. . . . Expansion was accompanied into the twentieth century by elaborate household, property and residence criteria. This political experience located class at the heart of the political process, and it thus helped create and perpetuate working classes that had the capacity to act politically. (Katznelson, *City Trenches*, 62.)

24. Centro Presente hired her to work as an "organizer/advocate" to develop a response to the employer sanctions that were part of the federal Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986. For more information, see Francisco Rivera-Batiz, Selig Sechzer, and Ira N. Gang, eds., *U.S. Immigration Policy Reform in the 1980s: A Preliminary Assessment* (New York: Praeger, 1991).

25. In her research, Sarah Mahler found that in contrast to the more urban and educated Salvadorans who tended to settle in the central cities, the Salvadoran immigrants who migrated to Long Island tended to hail from rural parts of the country. (These areas, the eastern provinces of La Union, Morazan, and San Miguel, were among the most impacted by the war.) Sarah Mahler, *America Dreaming: Immigrant Life on the Margins* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

26. In the immigrant taxonomy of Portes and Rumbaut, there are four main categories of immigrants: (1) "Labor migrants," foreign workers (both legal and undocumented) in search of menial and generally low-paid jobs; (2) "Professional immigrants," who according to the U.S. visa allocation system are "members of the professions of exceptional ability and their spouses and children"; (3) "Entrepreneurial immigrants," self-employed immigrants; and (4) "Refugees and Asylees," refugees who have been granted asylum by the U.S. government, which affords them the right to work legally and access to certain government services. Labor migrants have represented the bulk of immigration in recent years. Portes and Rumbaut, *Immigrant America*, chap. 1.

27. Saskia Sassen-Koob's observations about New York City's informal economy are applicable to Long Island's as well:

Changes in the sectoral composition of New York City's economy and in the organization of work generally over the last decade have brought about (1) an expansion of low wage and of high income jobs and (2) a proliferation of small units of production. Both trends contrast with what was typical in the post World War II era, when growth was characterized by the vast expansion of a middle class and ever larger scales of production.

See Saskia Sassen-Koob, "New York City's Informal Economy," in Manuel Castells and Alejandro Portes, eds., *The Informal Economy: Studies in Advanced and Less Developed Countries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

28. See Pearl M. Kamer, *The LIPA Annual Business Fact Book: A Comprehensive Guide to Business Activity on Long Island* (New York: Long Island Power Authority and the Long Island Association, 2001).

29. A significant portion live there but work in New York City and belong to New York City unions.

30. These figures are from the Workplace Project's internal database.

31. From the Workplace Project grant proposal to the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, January 2000.

32. Whereas in the fifties, sixties, and seventies, most U.S. workers, but especially blue-collar workers, were shielded from competitive unstructured labor markets, today a growing number of workers are not. Doeringer and Piore estimated that, in the 1960s, fewer than one in five members of the U.S. workforce could be found in these markets that were characterized by temporary work, transient labor, low formal skill levels, and unstable, unstructured capital-labor relationships at the point of production. Doeringer and Piore, *Internal Labor Markets and Manpower Analysis*.

33. There were "community of origin" clubs and church-related organizations and activities, but with a few exceptions, people didn't characterize them in the same way as their participation in the Workplace Project.

34. During the period between the Project's founding and the end of 1995, 40 percent of the total labor complaints (accounting for about 360 workers) brought to the clinic had to do with non- or underpayment of wages.

35. Although perhaps counter-intuitive at first glance—how could a person who is not allowed to work be entitled to a minimum wage?—Congress has recognized that the only way to remove the incentive for an unscrupulous employer to hire undocumented workers and pay them sub-minimum wages is to punish those who do so. (Jennifer Gordon, "The Campaign for the Unpaid Wages Prohibition Act: Latino Immigrants Change New York Wage Law: The Impact of Non-Voters on Politics and the Impact of Political Participation on Non-Voters," report to the Carnegie Foundation, 8.)

36. According to Gordon, immigrant workers went to the state Department of Labor as opposed to the federal DOL for two reasons. First, many of them were exempt from the federal wage laws because their employers had less than \$500,000 in gross revenues a year and did not put goods into the stream of interstate commerce. Of course, this included the vast majority of restaurants, contractors, and landscaping companies for whom they worked. Second, because of the link between the federal Department of Labor and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, even those workers who were covered by the federal minimum wage laws preferred to deal with the state Department of Labor. Gordon, "The Campaign for the Unpaid Wages Prohibition Act," 7.

37. The bill was also opposed behind the scenes by the state DOL until it began to look like a fait accompli.

38. These changes included the passage of Proposition 187 in California, which sent shock waves through immigrant communities across the country; federal welfare reform, which excluded undocumented immigrants from many programs; and the federal Anti-Terrorism Act. All of these added up to a palpable anti-immigrant climate. Rumors were rife about increased deportations.

39. New York State Department of Labor, Division of Labor Standards, *Labor Law Information for Household Employers and Domestic Workers/Summary of the Minimum*

Wage Order for Miscellaneous Industries and Occupations Effective April 1, 1990 (Albany: New York State Department of Labor, 1990).

40. From the Workplace Project leaflet titled "Campaign against Agencies That Place Domestic Workers in Exploitative Jobs."

41. Workplace Project Annual Narrative Report to the Public Welfare Foundation, January 1–December 31, 1999.

42. With the exception of a few middle-class professionals, most African-Americans experienced emancipation principally as a move from slave labor to cheap labor. At the beginning of the twentieth century, most black men were low-paid, irregularly employed laborers and personal service workers. Black women, about half of whom worked, were overwhelmingly laundresses and domestics. (Karen Olson, "Old West Baltimore: Segregation, African-American Culture and the Struggle for Equality," in Elizabeth Fee, Linda Shopes, and Linda Zeidman, eds., *The Baltimore Book* [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991], 61.)

43. The City of Baltimore accounts for about 17 percent of total statewide employment.

44. Gerard Shields, *Baltimore Sun*, Sunday, November 22, 1998, 1A.

45. Exact numbers are difficult to come by, as AFSCME does not organize its membership exclusively by city. Some of the locals that have Baltimore city members are statewide locals. According to the director of the International Union Area Office, Local #44, the city workers' union has about 5,000 members, Council #67 has a number of other Baltimore city locals including the housing authority, and there are five or six other locals that include municipal employees; there are also a large number of state workers who live in the city.

46. The City of Baltimore now has three citywide elected offices: comptroller, City Council president, and mayor. The Board of Estimates must approve every contract over a few thousand dollars. It meets weekly, and is made up of the mayor, the president of the City Council who chairs it, the comptroller, the head of public works, the city solicitor, and one other mayoral appointee. Thus the mayor has a built-in majority on the Board. The Baltimore City Council is elected by district. It has eighteen members in six districts. There is one at-large seat and that person runs citywide to be president of the City Council. It is a strong mayoral system. The City Council can subtract from, but cannot add to, the budget. It cannot independently appropriate funds independent of a recommendation from the mayor. The City Council meets weekly as well, but the mayor does not attend those meetings.

47. In 1971, the City of Baltimore had 38,082 total salaried and per diem positions; by 1980 this number was down to 34,835, by 1987 it was 28,786, and by 1998 it was 25,904.

48. The original living wage movement in the United States grew out of the national railroad strike of 1877, according to historian Lawrence Glickman, as quoted in Robert Pollin and Stephanie Luce, *The Living Wage: Building a Fair Economy* (New York: New Press, 1998), 27.

49. Also, regulations that barred discrimination in hiring created opportunities for upward mobility in the public sector that were much less available to blacks in the private sector.

50. City of Baltimore, Maryland, Fiscal Budgets (1971, 1973, 1976, 1979, 1980, 1983, 1985, 1987, 1995, and 1998).

51. In a letter to the president and members of the City Council introducing his 1998 budget, Mayor Schmoke wrote:

As we cope with harsh fiscal realities, we will have to make tough choices about the kind of City workforce we can support. We already have reduced the size of City government from 30,000 to 25,904 employees (which of course includes the public school system employ-

ees) between 1989 and 1997. . . . To reduce the workforce even more drastically may be self-defeating.

52. Report of the Living Wage Resource Center, Boston, June 2003.

53. An interesting side note was that WTC workers at the weekly meetings began to express worry about losing their jobs. According to Lange,

Every day people lined up to get jobs because of the publicity around the wage increase. For the first time, workers are in the position of really wanting to keep their jobs, so we are doing training on what they can and can't do. We have spent the last month meeting with them at McDonalds explaining what it is to have a job you want to keep and how to hold onto it . . . fulfilling this regular union function.

54. One measure of how new ideas and phrases were introduced into the public lexicon is mentioned in the newspaper of record. While the words "social compact" and "living wage" never appeared in the *Baltimore Sun* during the years 1980 through 1992, in 1993, they were mentioned 537 times; in 1994, 600 times; and in 1995, 507.

55. E. E. Schattschneider, *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America* (Hinsdale, Ill.: Dryden Press, 1975), 1-19.

56. Gary Marks, *Unions in Politics: Britain, Germany and the United States in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 46-49.

57. Susan C. Eaton, "Beyond 'Unloving Care': Linking Human Resource Management and Patient Care Quality in Nursing Homes," *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 11, no. 3 (2000): 591-616.

58. "In contemporary American politics, most of our economic arguments revolve around two considerations: prosperity and fairness. . . . But our debates about economic policy have not always focused solely on the size and distribution of the national product. Throughout much of American history they have also addressed a different question, namely, what economic arrangements are most hospitable to self-government? Along with prosperity and fairness, the civic consequences of economic history have often loomed large in American political discourse." Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), 124.

59. Ann Shola Orloff, "Origins of America's Welfare State," in Margaret Weir, Ann Shola Orloff, and Theda Skocpol, eds., *The Politics of Social Policy in the United States* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988).

60. Richard B. Freeman, "Spurts in Union Growth: Defining Moments and Social Processes," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper no. w6012*, April 1997.

61. Not all workers agreed [with Samuel Gompers's assertion that workers had to be grouped by trade]. Many saw their "community of interest" grouped along industrial or geographic lines rather than craft. The union names requested by local petitioners, for example, clearly suggest worker identifications other than craft. In the 1890s, the Federation issued charters to the "Working Women's Guild," "The Workingmen's Benevolent Organization," "The Cooperative Labor Union," "The Pioneer Union," "The Working Girls of Toledo," and "The Progressive Union" (Dorothy Sue Cobble, "Lost Ways of Organizing: Reviving the AFL's Direct Affiliate Strategy," *Industrial Relations* 36, no. 3 [July 1997]: 278-301).

62. "Direct affiliation with the Federation allowed them autonomy while linking them organizationally and in spirit with the larger labor movement. Where no international existed of course, affiliation with the Federation could rescue many a local from isolation

and provincialism.” Dorothy Sue Cobble, “Reviving the Federation’s Historic Role in Organizing,” paper for the George Meany Center, Silver Springs, Md., 1996, 14.

63. Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation’s Work: The Rise of Women’s Political Culture, 1830-1900* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995).

64. Karen Pastorello, “A Power among Them: Bessie Abramowitz Hillman and the Making of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America,” 60-64, 76-77; manuscript in possession of author.

65. From the website:

Join Working America: As a member of WORKING AMERICA, a community affiliate of the AFL-CIO, you are part of the most powerful force for working people in America. Together we will demand that politicians address the priorities that matter most to working people—not just wealthy special interests. Together, we will work for—and win—good jobs, strong communities and the right set of priorities from the right set of leaders.

The statement goes on to list the benefits of membership, essentially news and action alerts, voting records, and “partnering with the 13 million union men and women of the AFL-CIO and millions of non-union workers to hold politicians accountable.”

66. See Richard B. Freeman and Joel Rogers, “A Proposal to American Labor,” *The Nation*, June 24, 2002.

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