

PERPETUAL STRUGGLE:  
SOURCES OF WORKING-CLASS IDENTITY AND ACTIVISM  
IN COLLECTIVE ACTION

by

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To James, Noah and Gabriel

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## Abstract

Whereas previous scholarship on popular mobilization has focused on its *sources* or *causes*, this study redirects attention to its *effects* on participants—in particular, to the subjective consequences of different modes of collective action. In dialogue with a rich theoretical tradition focused on the tension between workplace/production versus community/citizenship as competing sources of class formation, my central research question is: How do contrasting patterns of collective action differentially transform working-class consciousness and subjectivity? To answer this question I compare what I conceptualize as “economic” versus “political” logics of collective action as empirically represented, respectively, by a workplace strike at a small auto parts manufacturer in the industrial Midwest and a community-based campaign to secure a “living wage” in Chicago. Drawing primarily on in-depth interviews, and comparing respondents from the two cases in a way that accounts for the possibility of selection bias, the project analyzes how these two modal types of collective action yield distinct forms of consciousness and subjectivity.

The key difference that emerges in the two cases is the development of a “perpetual struggle orientation” where conflict and protest are perceived as ongoing. Although Chicago’s living wage campaign was profoundly diverse, participants nevertheless developed an expansive solidarity with other workers and a long-term

commitment to struggle on their behalf. In contrast, the striking autoworkers—despite their structural power, denser social networks, and immediate success against their employer—failed to develop any such orientation toward future struggle or understanding of their place as part of a wider social class. These findings challenge our usual assumptions about the divisive dynamics of diversity, about the solidity of concrete networks, and about the role of the workplace in working-class life. More generally, the analysis demonstrates how key features of collective action—constituency, emotion, duration, and type of leverage used—are constitutive of distinct working-class identities and understandings of struggle. This study traces how solidarity with other workers, an activist identity, and a sense of collective efficacy emerge as participants are transformed through mobilization, advancing our theoretical understanding of group formation, collective action, social movements, and social change.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

People we'd bumped into everyday and never known suddenly became close friends, and we felt our own power and determination almost for the first time. Previously dull eyes glowed, grumblings turned to laughter, and unwilling submission was transformed into total resistance. . . . During the uprising people changed so much from their depressed demeanor at work that they were scarcely recognizable, even to themselves.

—Millard Berry et al., *Wildcat: Dodge Truck, June 1974*, 1974:3-4,29

There is good reason to believe that people are transformed by their participation in collective action. Anecdotal accounts, such as this one from a wildcat strike at a Detroit area truck factory, offer compelling evidence of such changes. Academic observers who have studied these intense moments of mobilization on the ground have examined how personal transformations occur through engagement in collective struggle (Fantasia 1988; Hirsch 1990). Such transformations have been characterized as “explosions of consciousness” (Mann 1973) or “moments of madness” (Zolberg 1972), where new forms of consciousness and interaction are born. But are all such transformations the same? Do all forms of collective action breed similar consequences for participants? If not, how do distinct forms of collective action engender particular kinds of consciousness and understanding for those engaged in protest?

Most important for the understanding of social movement trajectories is the extent to which protest experiences generate ongoing and long-term activist commitments. Although the biographical consequences of activism can take many forms—from marriage and occupational patterns to political beliefs—it is participants’ future involvement in protest activities that will have the greatest impact on social movements and social change. This study investigates the subjective component of social movement sustainability, focusing on how collective action experiences differ in terms of generating what I call a *perpetual struggle orientation* where conflict and mobilization are perceived as ongoing.

We will see how participants in a community-based “living wage”<sup>1</sup> campaign did indeed emerge from their protest experience expecting, and embracing, perpetual struggle:

We fighting for a living wage again. So, we never stop. We might pause, but we don’t never give up. . . . We’re going back again and we’re going to succeed again for one more dollar, then after that we’re going to fight again. The fighting’s never over. It just began. . . . There’s always going to be a struggle. A struggle is fighting. . . . We’s not through fighting, we not satisfied, we not content. The fight will still be going on.

Instead of shying away from further conflict campaign participants embraced it, insisting that the struggle must go on. Conflict came to be expected as a routine part of life, rather than being an isolated event. The campaign’s success failed to bring closure to conflict but, rather, inspired continued activism.

In contrast, strikers at an auto parts assembly factory showed little interest in sustaining struggle in the aftermath of the walkout. Although the strikers, in withdrawing

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<sup>1</sup> Activists have embraced the term “living wage” in response to how the wages mandated by minimum wage legislation have been insufficient to bring those at the bottom of the economic ladder out of poverty.

their labor, exercised their collective muscle in a highly confrontational fashion, their commitment to struggle was confined to the strike and did not extend past it:

It's like a constant fight [with management] and it really kind of—sometimes I'll participate in it and sometimes I'll just do [what management wants me to] just because I don't want the fight. I really don't like to do that. . . . I didn't fight [that job assignment]; I should have. I really should have, but I don't have the energy for it sometimes. . . . You know what?—you just want to go to work, get your job done, and go home. People just don't have the energy for all that.

Experiencing struggle and conflict as draining, the strikers were not as compelled to engage in further protest. Instead of embracing the prospect of ongoing struggle, they avoided it. In this way their expectations for the future were quite different from those of the living wage campaign participants. They expected peace with elites, instead of anticipating more conflict.

Both groups went through intense experiences of collective action. And both of these cases involved grassroots efforts that relied heavily on the mobilization of working-class rank-and-file recruits. In the strike as in the community campaign, regular people challenged elites and were successful in meeting their collective goals. In each instance one might expect to see the kind of “explosions of consciousness” that make collective action experiences so powerful and so transformative for participants. Why, then, did a perpetual struggle orientation emerge in one case and not the other? Why the sharp divergence in the two cases such that one group was poised and ready for continued activism whereas the other was not? How are we to understand the way in which these events produced such different legacies despite their common origins in highly visible, successful, grassroots protest?

In addressing these questions, this study contrasts a traditional economic strike with a community-based campaign targeting public officials to highlight a fundamental divide: that of economic versus political protest. The constraints on, and possibilities for, organizing in these two arenas are particularly salient in the contemporary context of neoliberal restructuring and globalization. Protestors can target corporations where, arguably, the real power lies, but economic elites lack the kind of public accountability that would make them amenable to change. Alternatively, protestors can turn to the state which has historically offered some protections from the abuses of the marketplace, but which has grown weak with the growth of transnational economic agreements and institutions. In this context, protestors may leverage economic disruption of one kind or another or they may pressure elected officials who are publicly accountable. They can make demands on unreceptive corporations in the private sector or on the public sphere in the context of a weakened state.

The labor movement, in particular, is at a crossroads. Perhaps more than any other group, labor finds itself caught between the twin pressures of waning state protections and increased corporate power. In order to better understand the consequences of protest in this context, this study treats two cases from the contemporary labor movement drawn from the economic and political realms, demonstrating how these two distinct types of collective action produce different kinds of consciousness and understanding among participants.

## I. THE SUBJECTIVE CONSEQUENCES OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

An abiding interest in the sources of popular contestation has been present since the emergence of sociology as a field of study, and it remains today one of the discipline's most important and distinctive contributions to the social sciences. Sociologists have produced a number of influential studies, including more than a few classics, addressing the social origins of insurgent efforts ranging from low level mobilizations seeking personal or lifestyle changes (Gusfield 1963; Lofland 1966) to more ambitious mass actions targeting a perceived injustice (Blum 1991; Gitlin 1980; Morris 1984), to high-risk insurrectionary movements (Moore 1966; Paige 1975; Skocpol 1979; Tilly 1978). Spanning movements that vary widely in their tactics, constituency, and objectives, this otherwise disparate body of work is unified around its common search for the underlying social mechanisms that trigger collective action in the first place.

This research paradigm has roots in Olson's (1965) formulation of the "free rider" problem, which would become a dominant frame for subsequent theorists. Olson sought to explain the conditions under which collective action was more or less likely to occur, while operating under the assumption that it would be hindered by individuals acting in their own self-interest. His use of a rational choice framework has underwritten formal models of collective action (Granovetter 1978; Heckathorn 1993; Oliver et al. 1985) and the classic Prisoner's Dilemma.<sup>2</sup>

But the essence of this "collective action problem"—how it is that atomistic individuals are able to act in concert?—has been taken up by social movement scholars of

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<sup>2</sup> In game theory the Prisoner's Dilemma is characterized by a variety of outcomes for participants who must choose to either defect or cooperate. The game assumes rational actors that are acting in their own self-interest, but the dilemma occurs when cooperation leads to better outcomes.

many stripes. It can be traced back to the early collective behavior school (Smelser 1963), through resource mobilization (McCarthy and Zald 1977) and political process theory (McAdam 1982), and is likewise present in more recent work on culture and framing (Benford and Snow 2000). In all of these approaches collective action, or the development of social movements, is generally the outcome to be explained. Whether the focus is on grievances, resources, political opportunity, collective identity or cultural frames, the central problematic of social movement theory has been to understand the circumstances under which these factors facilitate or constrain the emergence of collective action.<sup>3</sup>

These research programs have contributed enormously to our understanding of collective action. But for all that we have learned about the causes of collective action, much less attention has been paid to its *consequences*. When scholars do turn their attention to the outcomes of social movements, they most often focus on consequences that are external to the movement itself. The question of social movement success is addressed through analysis of macro level structural outcomes including political, institutional, and cultural change (Amenta 2006; Andrews 2004; Gamson 1990; Giugni 1998; Giugni et al. 1999; Zald et al. 2005).<sup>4</sup> Similarly, in examining the reactions of elites, dominant groups, counter-movements, and the state, the focus remains on the reactions of external agents (see, for example, Friedman 1988; Goldfield 1989; McAdam

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<sup>3</sup> This framing of the problem is as dominant among scholars of the labor movement as among social movement theorists generally. There is, for example, a focused concern with the causes of strikes (recent examples include Dixon and Roscigno 2003 and Dixon et al. 2004). And this frame has likewise informed the “American exceptionalism” paradigm, prominent among scholars of labor, which seeks to explain why there is a relatively weak labor movement and no socialist party in the United States (Lipset 1977; Lipset 1996; Sombart 1976 [1906]; Voss 1993).

<sup>4</sup> With living wage campaigns in particular, much attention has been paid to their effects on the economy, in particular with respect to businesses, municipalities and the labor market (see, for example, Pollin and Luce 1998). Similarly for strikes, there has been a focus on how they affect wages and the labor market (see Rosenfeld 2006).

1983; Meyer and Staggenborg 1996). While this has proved to be a fruitful line of inquiry, some of the most profound effects of collective action lie elsewhere—in the subjective transformation of social movement participants themselves.

Despite anecdotal evidence for the immediate effects of collective action on participants, skeptics have questioned the extent to which these changes are lasting (Langford 1994, Mann 1973). Fantasia (1988), for example, in one of the most engaging and oft-cited studies of the topic, meticulously documents transformations of consciousness that occur during collective action but offers little insight into the aftermath of such events and whether or not the transformations endure. It is thus difficult for this important work to substantiate any claim about lasting change.

The idea that such changes are enduring is bolstered, however, by a historical sociological perspective. In Sewell's call for an "eventful" sociology he conceives of events as "sequences of occurrences that result in durable transformations of structures" (1996a:878; 2005). Events instigate a "cascade of consequences" (Sewell 1996a:872) that extend well beyond any direct or immediate effects.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the concepts of "path dependence" (Sewell 1996b:262-3) and "turning points" (Abbott 1997) are meant to elevate those moments when historical trajectories have altered course, or when a new trajectory is established. These notions capture how events at a particular moment in time can alter the historical course of subsequent events, and have lasting consequences.

Taken together, such historical sociological concepts suggest that the consequences of salient events and experiences do indeed endure. While these theoretical and methodological interventions treat events generally and generically, we

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<sup>5</sup> In an attempt to impart some methodological formalization to this approach, event-structure analysis has been used to make causal connections between sequences of events (Brown 2000; Griffin 1993).

can nevertheless expect that the intense moments of mobilization of concern in the present study are particularly likely to spark a “cascade of consequences” extending well beyond their immediate effects. Events where people break from daily routines, unite in new ways, and clash with elites will be particularly pivotal turning points. And although Sewell and others tend to focus on macro-structural change, the present study offers a fresh vantage point from which to view the equally important subjective effects of events on those most closely involved.

Between these highly abstract approaches to events and anecdotal testimony from isolated cases, there has been some research exploring the subjective consequences of collective action for participants more concretely and systematically.<sup>6</sup> It appears from these studies that many people are deeply and, in some cases, permanently transformed by earlier social movement participation.

Recent studies of democratically governed mobilizations, for example, have uncovered their capacity to instill in participants a lasting commitment to the values and goals of democratic, grassroots organizing. Poletta (2002), for example, addresses the “developmental” benefits of participatory democracy in her account of a variety of twentieth-century U.S. social movements. Markowitz (2000) presents a similar account in her study of two union organizing drives. She compares a top-down organizing approach to a more democratic model where workers were more heavily involved, concluding that the two different experiences had enduring effects on workers’ ideas about and relationship to their unions.

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<sup>6</sup> Some scholars have examined “cognitive liberation” (McAdam 1982) or “oppositional consciousness” (Mansbridge and Morris 2001) with an eye toward how they bring about social movements, but the focus of this study is on how protest experiences themselves create and shape consciousness.

Earlier research, focusing mainly on former student activists from the 1960s (Fendrich 1993; Fendrich and Tarleau 1973; Fendrich and Turner 1989; Jennings 1987; Klatch 1999; Marwell et al. 1987, 1993; McAdam 1988a, 1989; Whalen and Flacks 1989), examined the effects of activism on a variety of biographical outcomes, from marriage patterns to career choice. Perhaps most importantly, these studies have shown that political attitudes and commitments forged in the heat of battle have tended to persist across the life course, contrary to popular predictions that youthful activists would become more conservative or apolitical with advancing age.

In a similar vein, the idea of “political generations” emphasizes how the experiences of youth in particular historical contexts—especially protest experiences—have long-term effects on generational cohorts (Mannheim 1972 [1928]; Zeitlin 1966). Kimeldorf draws on this idea to explore the enduring transformations that occurred among participants in the 1934 West Coast maritime strike which amounted to “one big lesson in labor solidarity” (1988:100-1,109-10).

In an attempt to get some purchase on the effects of participation in protest activities, there has been in these studies some comparison of participants and non-participants in particular social movements. These studies have lacked, however, a comparison of different kinds of protest experiences. And so we have little comparative perspective on how particular forms of collective action might shape activists in distinct ways. Are the changes wrought by participation in social movements in some sense generic? Or do they depend on the specific kind of collective action involved? Can we identify underlying patterns that link different types of collective action to distinct forms of consciousness? In seeking to answer these questions, the present study finds that

“explosions of consciousness” are not generic and that, indeed, different forms of collective action lead to specific subjective consequences. Specifically, I will argue that in the two cases treated here distinct orientations toward ongoing struggle emerged due to the particular kinds of collective action involved.

It could be argued that this emphasis on the “structure” of collective action fails to appreciate the role of leadership and ideology in framing these outcomes. But as Kimeldorf (1999) has documented, leadership ideology does not necessarily shape the practices of rank-and-file workers. And as union organizers on the ground have learned: “in order to be a union you have to act like a union,” regardless of leaderships’ framing and consciousness-raising activities.

This is not to deny the importance of leadership in shaping the trajectories of social movements, as others have argued (Aminzade et al. 2001; Nepstad and Bob 2006; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003; Voss and Sherman 2000). But such framing efforts do not take place in a social vacuum; rather, they are part of an ongoing dialogical process in which interpretations offered by leaders are constrained by, and in conversation with, the lived experiences of the rank-and-file (Steinberg 1999). Although there is an unfortunate tendency to present consciousness as “strangely ethereal” and “detached from social action” (Marshall 1983:280,282), here I take an approach that conceives of ideology as representing “lived relations” (see Eagleton on Althusser 1991:18-22). Rather than being prescriptive, as an emphasis on leadership implies, “ideology is best understood as the descriptive vocabulary of day-to-day existence, through which people make rough sense of the social reality that they live and create from day to day” (Fields 1990:110).

In the context of this study, it is difficult to imagine the social reality of the living wage campaign effectively mobilizing around tropes of narrow self-interest since, as we will see below, few among its broad-based constituency would be covered by the ordinance. At the same time it is inconceivable that the strike would have materialized through a discourse that appealed to expansive notions of solidarity and social change, which would have seemed grandiose given the very circumscribed nature of the constituency involved. In short, leadership and ideology can be seen, to some extent, to map onto the collective action forms examined here, or at least to be constrained by them. Given this close correspondence between leadership ideologies and types of collective action, it becomes impossible to completely isolate the effects of one from the other. The decision, then, to focus on the lived experiences and understandings of those at the bottom, rather than framing efforts carried out at the top, is not meant to deny the pervasive impact of leadership but to draw attention to what is happening on the ground as an equally significant causal force in its own right.

## II. THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL LOGICS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

Despite the vast body of work on collective action and social movements, there has been almost no attempt to understand how different kinds of collective action might produce distinct forms of consciousness. What is usually examined is the presence or absence of collective action, its existence or non-existence, so that collective action is most often treated as a generic or monolithic category. From formal models to historical event-centered approaches, to more processual accounts of mobilization, the *different forms* of collective action remain under-theorized.

The one major exception to this lacuna is the categorization of social movements as either instrumental or expressive (Pizzorno 1978:293), which is rooted in Weber's (1978) concepts of instrumental rationality versus affectual social action.<sup>7</sup> The instrumental/expressive distinction has been theorized most extensively by scholars of the 'new' social movements who see such mobilizations as being distinguished by an expressive quality while characterizing 'old' social movements as typically displaying a more instrumental orientation (Melucci 1985; also see Inglehart 1990). Other theorists complicate the picture (Koopmans 1995; Rucht 1988, 1990), usually by recognizing that some new social movements exhibit instrumental traits. Nevertheless, these scholars are united in the project of attempting to relegate particular social movements to one or the other category.

'Old' and 'new' social movements have been characterized as having, among other things, distinct grievances, constituencies, and mobilization processes (Buechler 1995; Offe 1985). While particular social movements may indeed have a tendency toward, for example, either instrumental or expressive action, I aim instead to uncover dynamics that are at once more abstract and more fundamental than the those found in individual movements. In short, I seek to conceptualize not types of social movements but forms of collective action that can be found in a variety of social movement contexts. The cases examined here show that the 'old' labor movement can exhibit either instrumental or expressive forms of collective action, and I posit that the same is true for

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<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Zald and Ash (1966) make a distinction between solidary versus purposive incentives in social movement organizations. There is also Tilly's (1978) typology of collective action based on competitive, reactive, and proactive claims, but this distinction says more about the nature of interaction between rival groups than the actual form that mobilization takes.

social movements generally. Put differently, I highlight how a given social movement can utilize a diversity of collective action forms.

Specifically, I conceptualize the variety of collective action forms in terms of different *logics* of collective action. I use the idea of *logics of collective action* here as Offe and Wiesenenthal do, seeing them as patterns of “associational practices” by which groups try to improve their position (1980:76). Offe and Wiesenenthal identify a constellation of traits that make up each of the logics that they examine, pertaining to the nature of the groups in question and the routes through which they pursue their goals. I similarly use the term “logic” in reference to how particular features of collective action tend to cluster together in patterned ways.

Offe and Wiesenenthal, however, contrast one logic of collective action for capitalists with another that applies to workers, and this is true of other classic works on the subject. Parkin (1979), for example, presents a similar formulation in his work on social closure, where he outlines the distinction between dominant groups’ use of “exclusion” versus “usurpation” as used by subordinate social groups. Therborn likewise is concerned with the ability of both subordinate and dominant classes to act collectively with respect to the “capacities of a given class to act in relation to others and the forms of organization and practice thereby developed” (1983:38). In short, existing theories have generally outlined one form of collective action for dominant groups and another for subordinate groups, instead of conceptualizing the different categories of insurgent efforts or grassroots protest that are of concern in the present study.

In focusing on the kinds of collective action that are available to subordinate groups, the conceptualization of distinct logics of collective action put forward here

draws on the long-standing distinction between workplace versus community as competing sources of group formation and, more specifically, class-based identities. The first theoretical strand, where group formation is seen to occur primarily at the workplace, may be traced back to Marx, who emphasized how workers' identities are shaped by their experiences on the job. Contemporary variants of this idea can be found among scholars who emphasize the point of production as the locus of group formation and class-based identities in particular (Hodson 2002; Kimeldorf 1999; Przeworski 1985).<sup>8</sup> This can be contrasted with a neo-Weberian approach that conceptualizes group formation as occurring through status groups or political communities. This approach highlights non-economic "fields" (Bourdieu 1984;1985) in the production of class and other identities. On this view citizenship and the fight for political-legal rights are seen as the building blocks of group struggle and class formation (Somers 1997). In dialogue with these rich theoretical traditions, this dissertation investigates the tension between workplace/production versus community/citizenship as competing sources of group formation. It asks: what are the different contours of group formation in the workplace versus the community?

Instead of treating the work/community divide merely as geographically distinct sites of struggle, I conceptualize it as embodying different logics of collective action which take the form of distinct patterns of mobilization, with consistent characteristics and systematic inter-relationships.<sup>9</sup> In conceptualizing these logics, I delineate an axis

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<sup>8</sup> Following in this tradition, the theme for the 2004 United Association for Labor Education (UALE) conference, and subsequent issue of *Labor Studies Journal*, was "Bringing the Study of Work Back into Labor Studies" (see Juravich and Bronfenbrenner 2005).

<sup>9</sup> There are parallels here to Kimeldorf's (1999) conceptualization of "business" versus "industrial" syndicalism, although these are two brands of economically-oriented, workplace-based, collective action (1999). (Note also that the present study does not treat "business unionism" but instead concerns two different cases of rank-and-file grassroots mobilization.) Also see Kimeldorf's discussion of collective

along which collective action can be categorized with respect to the workplace versus community distinction. The logics of action at each end of this continuum are ideal types that provide an analytical map with which to approach the complexities of real world cases. They represent these two classic arenas of struggle.

On one end of the continuum is the economic logic of collective action, which disrupts production and capital accumulation. Its classic form is the strike, where workers exert a positional or structural power as they withdraw labor at the point of production. Characterized by an intense disruptive capacity, the economic logic of collective action, in its pure form, takes place over a limited period of time. And it relies on a narrow constituency, limited in some way by location, identity, etc. Workers target a particular worksite or company, and mobilization is generally limited to laborers who are directly employed. It thus mobilizes those who stand to benefit most immediately from collective action, without reaching beyond the walls of the workplace. This promotes a more instrumental mode of action where mobilization is based on common interests.

On the other end of the continuum is the political logic of collective action, which disrupts the ideological reproduction of political legitimacy. It challenges the legitimacy of political officials and relies on public pressure campaigns. Lacking the kind of structural or positional power found in workplace mobilizations, participants must engage in mass mobilization over an extended period of time in order to exert sufficient leverage to achieve their goals. Rather than targeting one company or a particular work site, it relies on a broad community constituency involving multiple and diverse groups,

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action in the workplace versus the streets in the labor and global justice movements (2005) and Pizzorno (1978) on the distinction between traditional labor conflicts versus “political exchange.”

crossing over a variety of worksites, industries, neighborhoods, and ethnic groups. Among such diverse constituencies, some participants benefit more directly than others. The political logic of collective action is thus less clearly instrumental, exhibiting instead a more expressive and emotional basis for mobilization. The two logics of collective action are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. The Economic and Political Logics of Collective Action

<b>Economic Logic of Collective Action</b>	<b>Political Logic of Collective Action</b>
• disruption of capital accumulation	disruption of political legitimacy •
• structural or positional power/leverage	lack of structural power/leverage •
• short duration/limited time horizons	long duration/extended time horizons •
• narrow/homogeneous constituency	broad/diverse constituency •
• instrumental	expressive/emotional •

Empirical cases of collective action will typically exhibit both economic and political traits, and so there are many points in between these two ideal-typical modes of action. Indeed, in the contemporary U.S. strikes have come to depend increasingly on various kinds of community mobilization. Community-labor coalitions, such as the organization Jobs With Justice, have coalesced around strategically mixed campaigns in which a traditional strike is supported by mobilizations that take place outside the workplace.

And it is of course the case that not all workplace actions will exhibit such brute economic force or see such rapid resolution. At the same time, not all community struggles are so broad-based or long lasting. Thus the conclusions drawn about the cases examined here should not be generalized to all strikes or to all community campaigns.

The selected cases are not meant to encompass the wide range of empirical variety that exists, but instead were chosen to represent theoretically the opposite and extreme ends of the economic-political spectrum.

Using ideally typical cases facilitates an analysis of the differential impact of these conceptually distinct phenomena. As ideal types, they represent “pure” forms of economic and political mobilization, and thus provide especially revealing cases for observing the ideational consequences that flow from each mode of collective action. I would argue that other mobilizations that share their particular qualities—workplace-based with a circumscribed constituency and strong economic leverage, a protracted political campaign with a broad-based community constituency—are likely to yield similar consequences with respect to participants’ subjective experiences of collective action.

Although there are many cases that fall in between these two extremes, the economic and political logics of collective action are not mere abstractions. Nor do they represent some rare or inconsequential empirical phenomena. Instead, these two logics of collective action, as conceptualized here, are emblematic of trends occurring in the contemporary American labor movement, and so the conclusions drawn will have a wider relevance.

With respect to the economic logic of collective action, trade unionists, labor movement strategists, and scholars alike have turned their attention in recent years to workers who are in strategically critical locations in the economy. This focus was hastened by the increasing use of tight supply chains, a practice spearheaded by Walmart, whose business model dominates large sectors of the economy. While this

“logistics revolution” has catapulted Wal-Mart and other large corporations into positions of economic dominance, at the same time it presents for such companies new vulnerabilities, since long supply lines and just-in-time production leaves employers increasingly vulnerable to disruptions at key bottlenecks in today’s highly integrated production networks (Bonacich 2003; Bonacich and Wilson 2007; Brenner 2008; Olney 2003). Distributors, manufacturers and retailers alike are vulnerable, since even a small disruption can have immediate effects far down the supply chain. Such economic leverage has been exerted repeatedly by autoworkers—not unlike the ones examined in this study—now laboring under just-in-time production and other such systems. And it has been exhibited on a grand scale by the economic ripple effects springing from the job actions of longshoremen in recent years. The labor movement’s hope for renewal rests in large part on workers in such advantageous positions.<sup>10</sup>

The political logic of collective action is equally important for understanding the contemporary American labor movement. It illustrates labor’s growing reliance on community-based strategies, in part a response to increased hostility from both employers and the state to conventional workplace organizing (Bronfenbrenner et al. 1998; Clawson 2003; Reynolds 2004). The traditional route to unionization—union certification elections through the National Labor Relations Board—has been undermined by an increasingly inhospitable political-legal environment and repressive employer anti-union campaigns. In response, labor has sought to address its grievances through community-

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<sup>10</sup> The labor movement has also relied heavily on organizing successes in the service sector in recent years. Although service sector workers do not have as much power to exert economic disruption, they are at times in a similarly strategic position with respect to pressuring employers. Service sector work, for example, is not easily relocated. And some employers, such as nursing homes and hospitals, for example, are often able to tolerate only brief work stoppages. Although employers have been increasingly instituting systems to import strikebreakers in such situations, the leverage that can be exerted by workers at such places has the potential, as in the strike case examined here, to bring rapid resolution to labor-management conflict.

based initiatives such as Jobs with Justice and immigrant workers' centers. While these initiatives have taken many forms, the living wage movement in particular has become something of an icon of the trend. It has been both widespread and remarkably successful, with campaigns springing up across the country, and nearly 150 city or county ordinances in place (Living Wage Resource Center 2007). In short, the logics of collective action examined in this study reflect these two principle types of contemporary class-based organizing. The cases examined here are thus both analytically powerful and representative of major trends.

It is important to note, however, that living wage campaigns have been characterized as an example of how union and community-based organizing strategies are brought together, which is a hallmark of “social movement unionism” (Clawson 2003; Fantasia and Voss 2004; Kelley 1997; Reynolds 1999a). Such characterizations emphasize the *melding* of union and community strategies and they do indeed capture an important dynamic. But they likewise obscure important developments in the opposite direction. I suggest that there is a different trend underfoot that has received far less attention—that is, the *bifurcation* of strategies, with only those workers in strategically powerful locations being in a position to take the economic route, like the autoworkers in this study, while others, like Chicago living wage campaign participants, must resort to seeking change through mobilization in the political sphere.

As Fine has argued, “low-wage workers in American society today have greater political than economic power” such that they have had more success achieving changes in public policy than addressing grievances through direct labor market intervention

(2005:156, also see Black 2005:31).<sup>11</sup> Finding themselves in a weak labor market position, with tenuous connections to employers and occupations, most low-wage workers are unable to muster the kind of economic leverage traditionally utilized in working-class mobilizations. Indeed, the rank-and-file of the Chicago living wage campaign was full of workers who were unable to address their grievances through economic action—home care workers whose wages were constrained by public funding, candy factory workers whose wages and benefits were being cut while their hours increased, casual workers and day laborers who had no stable employer to which they could appeal. These workers were, however, able to make their voices heard in the political arena and find redress for their grievances by appealing to the state.

Much has been made about the distinction between old bureaucratic unions versus social movement unions along with the need, according to some trade unionists, to “put the movement back in the labor movement.” The incorporation of social movement strategies within the house of labor is indeed a noteworthy practice given the historical proliferation of top-down bureaucratic unions. Nevertheless, social movement unionism is a brand of unionism, and I suggest that the trend exemplified by living wage campaigns is best conceptualized as a shift away from unionism (with its attendant focus on employers) all together. Instead of a laundry list of new tactics and strategies, the shift underfoot is more fundamental—that is, class struggle in the United States is moving away from the economic sphere and toward the political realm. When appeals are made to the state, people are mobilized not only as workers but also as citizens, and they engage in mobilization processes that are specific to that arena. Understanding this shift

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<sup>11</sup> This is particularly noteworthy in the American context given the history of syndicalism and the dearth of working-class party politics.

is crucial because the economic and political spheres offer distinct constraints on and possibilities for social change—including, among other things, those that impact how protestors themselves are transformed.

### III. TWO CASES OF WORKING-CLASS MOBILIZATION

The two cases examined in this study exhibit some striking similarities with regards to the participants, objectives, and resolutions to the conflicts. The participants themselves, for example, had much in common, in particular with regard to their position in the economy. Both the strike and the living wage campaign drew upon the less privileged ranks of the working class in terms of income, education, and job security. Both groups were comprised of low-wage workers—all in the Midwest—whose lives bore little resemblance to the idealized image of the ‘bourgeois’ working class that often circulates in both academic and popular circles. And since both cases are drawn from the contemporary labor movement, their objectives and goals were parallel. Compared to the “new” social movements’ middle-class attention to “post-materialist values,” these were working-class mobilizations seeking redress for employment-related grievances with financial concerns prominent in both cases.

In both cases workers were breaking new ground and winning first victories: the auto shop was previously unorganized while the living wage campaign saw a unique coalition achieve unprecedented gains against an entrenched political machine. The resolutions to the conflicts were likewise parallel, since each group secured gains in codified form—a union contract in one case, and city-wide legislation in the other. More generally these cases must be viewed within a larger political economic context where a

combination of state and employer hostility toward labor have made traditional routes for resolving labor-management conflict, such as state sanctioned National Labor Relations Board elections, less attractive. In both of these cases workers were compelled to shun more bureaucratic or legalistic routes and instead press their claims through collective protest. Propelled toward victory by rank-and-file mobilization, participants in both struggles realized their goals only after undergoing intense experiences of collective action. For all the similarities in class background, rank-and-file mobilization, and movement success, however, the experience of collective action for these two groups was otherwise distinct, as they mobilized through the contrasting economic and political logics of action.

### *An Auto Strike*

Strikes, as the embodiment of the economic logic of collective action, are the most time-honored of labor's strategies, holding a particularly important historical place in the American context since underwriting the surge of unionization in the 1930's and the founding of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Before labor-management relations became institutionalized with enactment of the Wagner Act in 1935 (and, later, the more restrictive Taft-Hartley Act) militancy was the only route through which workers could seek redress for their grievances. Although the strike rate has decreased significantly since the wave of strikes that gave birth to the CIO, it nevertheless remains a key strategy for labor. It has been used in recent years by a variety of workers: from longshoreman and truckers who are in strategic positions with respect to the delivery of commodities, to university employees who lack such strategic

positioning but have nevertheless defied public sector bans on the practice. The erosion of the post-war “labor-management accord” may in fact be inadvertently rejuvenating the strike.

The first of the two cases treated in this study is a traditional workplace strike that took place within the last few years at a relatively small auto parts assembly factory located in a medium size industrial community in the Midwest.<sup>12</sup> The shop, Auto Parts Inc., was relatively new, which facilitated decent physical conditions. But the low-wage labor force of slightly more than 100 workers—composed largely of White workers with a third being from racial and ethnic minority groups, primarily African American and Latino—were subjected, in their view, to unfair treatment, favoritism, and intimidation and found the atmosphere at work tense. Since management made a habit of firing people, workers lived in constant fear that they would be next to be sent through the “revolving door.”

They began to organize in the fall. Union meetings were attended by a relatively small group of core activists. Most workers were not heavily involved in the organizing drive, but there was a substantial majority who supported the union as demonstrated by signatures on a union authorization petition and on union membership cards. The union staff was nevertheless uncomfortable with the idea of going through a National Labor Relations Board election. Concerned about the effects of management’s ongoing anti-union campaign (which consisted of a combination of intimidation, threats and bribes) they decided to pull their petition for an election.

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<sup>12</sup> In order to maintain respondents’ confidentiality, some characteristics of the strike case have been omitted or altered. Any obvious omissions—specific location, dates, and company names, for example—are intentional. Although some of the identifying details have been changed, features that are crucial to the research design and analysis are represented in spirit.

But they were determined to make inroads into the ranks of auto parts sub-contractors that had eroded unionization of the industry. In a bold move, the union's leadership decided that the only way to organize the shop was to strike. Since it is extremely rare for non-unionized workers to strike in the contemporary U.S., it was a remarkable event when, a year after the union drive began, workers at Auto Parts Inc. walked off the job. Although it was technically an unfair labor practice strike, which guaranteed some legal protection from job loss and the use of replacement workers, for strategic purposes it amounted to a strike for union recognition.

The strikers at Auto Parts Inc., capitalizing on a “just-in-time” production process that reduced inventory to the bare minimum, immediately idled a much larger “Big 3” final assembly plant—Final Assembly Inc.—that was its sole customer. Their structural power, and ability to exert such acute economic leverage, was a key feature of strikers' experience and their narratives about what happened, from the perspective of rank-and-file workers and strike leaders alike:

*I: Did you think it was going to be a short strike?*

*R: Oh yeah. On time delivery, I knew we had 'em. . . . Couldn't go on that long really. . . . If they was going to stretch it out for a couple of months, stock up stuff in their warehouses and stretch it out—ain't no warehouse to stock up though. That on time delivery got them.*

Operating in the context of such extreme positional power, the strikers were able to affect the corporate bottom line in short order, which is exactly what they needed to do if they were to secure recognition of their union and a labor agreement with the company.

According to both union and media accounts, most workers did not report to work. Strikers, maintaining a sturdy picket line, were joined by some supporters from the local union, drawn primarily from their closely related customer shop. But they lacked

any broad-based community support. As a union staff member explained: “We didn’t really do any community organizing in that strike. . . . We had a whole plan for that for this strike but we didn’t have time to do any of it.” This strict attention to mobilizing only those working at the parts factory was betrayed by one strike leader when discussing the role of the media. Although media coverage is often seen by social movement activists as being important for public relations generally, he saw it as most important for the people working in the shop:

So when the news media came out, they had like a special bulletin and they talked about Auto Parts Inc. going on strike and stopping Final Assembly Inc.’s production and so on, and then they talked about the money lost and it made a lot of people realize—especially in the shop because those are the most important, you know, it’s not the people around the community at the time. It wasn’t Final Assembly Inc. at the time; it was these people here at Auto Parts Inc. And it made those people realize—man, we’re doing something really, really big.

With mobilization limited to those who were directly connected to this particular workplace, there was a powerful instrumental quality to the strike. Those who were mobilized for the walkout would feel the effects of the strike’s success or the benefits of mobilization in direct, tangible, and material ways.

Management, for their part, pressured workers to stay on the job and brought in extra security personnel. But their attempts to keep production going with the few workers who crossed the picket line were unsuccessful. It quickly became clear that it was impossible to maintain production with a skeleton crew, so the strikebreakers reportedly swept the floor, sat and talked, and ate lunch. The company “eventually just stopped trying to have production and everything shut down.”

Life on the picket line saw signs and songs and chanting. There were moments of excitement and moments of anxiety. As the strike commenced, picketers encountered

workers on their way into the factory, urging them to join the picket line instead. The key to success was the participation of those who labored within the four factory walls of Auto Parts Inc. They alone had the power to exert the requisite economic leverage on the company. The vast majority of the autoworkers, however, had never been on strike before, and so many came with feelings of fear and uncertainty about confronting the boss and about loss of jobs or income. But as time went on, with production stopped, the strikers felt more confident in their ultimate victory. It was just a matter of time.

After only three days it was announced that the company, unable to withstand such extreme economic pressure any longer, had agreed to recognize the union. In relying on employees of a single workplace and using a conventional picket line to disrupt production, the walkout's success hinged on mobilizing a strategically positioned and narrowly circumscribed group. Contract negotiations would begin soon thereafter, and an agreement was reached in short order. Union representatives were elected to their posts, local union meetings began, and committees were put into place. Workers had succeeded in establishing union recognition, securing a contract, and building an organization.

### *The Chicago Living Wage Campaign*

The second case is a community-based living wage campaign in Chicago that exemplifies the political logic of collective action. It involved a protracted political campaign, punctuated by large rallies aimed at city council members and the mayor. Since the mid-1990s, the call for a "living wage" has become a key part of efforts to keep working families above the poverty level—an objective that existing minimum wage

laws have failed to secure. The intent is to hold public entities accountable for their labor practices, and to legislate a living wage for the employees of firms and organizations receiving public contracts or subsidies. Although usually taking place at the municipal level, living wage campaigns have also targeted counties, universities, and other entities.<sup>13</sup> They are a prominent example of how mobilizations around economic justice have taken the struggle away from the workplace to target political officials who are accountable to the community at large.

The Chicago Jobs and Living Wage Campaign involved a large and diverse coalition of organizations and workers coming at the issue from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives. More than 60 organizations were involved, from neighborhood groups to unions and community organizations. Spearheading the effort was the Chicago-based Illinois ACORN (the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now), a grassroots membership-based organization that has typically focused on neighborhood-driven initiatives around such issues as housing, education, safety, and redlining.<sup>14</sup> The living wage campaign was a marked departure from the organization's previous activities since it involved a labor-related demand and a city-wide initiative with more widespread appeal. ACORN was joined in the campaign by its long time ally, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 880, a union of home care workers (who provide services to the elderly and disabled) and childcare providers.<sup>15</sup> But new allies came on board as well. The Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH) brought shelter residents

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<sup>13</sup> There have been, in addition, an increasing number of state-level initiatives to increase the minimum wage above that which is federally mandated.

<sup>14</sup> In January 2008 the staff and board of Illinois ACORN left ACORN and started another grassroots community organization called Action Now, and so interview respondents are now part of this new organization.

<sup>15</sup> Home care workers are personal assistants for the elderly and people with disabilities. Clients, requiring assistance with personal care and other basic needs, are cared for in their own homes in lieu of being institutionalized.

and day laborers into the campaign, establishing a close connection with ACORN for the first time. Traditional labor unions were also brought into the fold, a noteworthy development in a city where unions and community groups normally operated in separate spheres, and where their relationship had been characterized by distance and mistrust. In short, the living wage campaign was characterized by new partnerships between organizations that had been operating apart from one another, and a novel alliance of labor and community the likes of which had seldom if ever been seen in the world of Chicago's grassroots activism.

The campaign was racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse, with a strong base in both the African American and Latino communities. Participants were drawn from virtually all sectors of the economy, spanning manufacturing to services, and including casual workers and day laborers. Extending its reach beyond the workplace, the campaign also mobilized large numbers of retirees, the homeless, the unemployed, and others not even engaged in paid labor. Compared to the limited diversity of the auto strikers who saw racial and ethnic differences but were in other ways quite homogeneous, the diversity of the living wage campaign was multiple and complex, cross-cutting both demographic and occupational categories and including those outside the standard employment relationship. Precisely because of this diversity most participants would not in the end be directly affected by the ordinance which covered only city contractors. With the vast majority of participants having no direct material interest in the outcome, the campaign was characterized by an expressive and emotional, rather than an instrumental, quality.

Thousands of people mobilized throughout the course of the campaign, with individual events drawing hundreds—and up to a thousand or more—demonstrators. The campaign began in June of 1995, employing a variety of grassroots tactics to put pressure on public officials, including many large rallies and demonstrations. Following on the heels of several smaller demonstrations, the first major event occurred in December of that year when 750 supporters rallied at a local Teamster hall. A defining moment, the event set in motion dynamics that would characterize the campaign for the duration. In the first place, as representatives of various community and labor groups addressed the animated crowd they were welcomed with loud cheers from their respective rank-and-file contingents, demonstrating the broad spectrum of groups that were able to mobilize their constituencies for the cause.<sup>16</sup> As described by an ACORN staffer who had been organizing in Chicago for many years:

Having that many labor unions and community organizations, all with their signs, t-shirts, banners, insignia, in the room—I had never seen anything like it in Chicago organizing history. And I remember thinking: “Okay God, you can take me now. It doesn’t get any better than this!” It was just the beginning of the campaign but it was so significant that I was just thrilled.

Second, members of the Chicago City Council, who were to vote on the issue, were invited to speak if they publicly signed on to living wage principles at the event.

Campaign strategists wanted to make it clear that they would be holding aldermen publicly accountable for their stance. Participants recounted with excitement how alderman Ed Burke, not typically on the side of progressive Chicago politics, signed on as the hall erupted in cheers:

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<sup>16</sup> This is not particular to the Chicago living wage case. Reynolds notes that living wage activists across the country repeatedly describe “the breadth of support and level of involvement in living wage campaigns as something new and unique” (1999b:63).

To see him just going to that board [to sign on]—that’s why we were screaming and shouting. . . . To see him come on board, it just changed the whole atmosphere of that place—the place was just tore up. And it was just a defining moment to see that . . . there was a chance that the city [government] was going to work with the people in the city.

Although Burke would eventually backpedal, the fact that he signed on at the rally demonstrated to campaign participants their ability to move politicians on the issue. They were discovering that with sufficient numbers and strategic pressure they had some measure of political power.

This first major rally was followed by many other mobilizations. In February of 1996 supporters rallied at the same union hall, this time drawing a crowd of 1,100 to see more aldermen sign on to the campaign. April saw an even larger demonstration when SEIU members, in town for their national convention, marched in the streets with living wage supporters. Protesters again rallied in August at the Democratic National Convention. As the mayor rolled out the red carpet, so did living wage supporters who greeted delegates as they entered Navy Pier. A banner at a nearby Teamster building, clearly visible to the delegates, stated: “Mayor Daley, why won’t you support the living wage?” The campaign saw lobbying days, town hall meetings, petition drives, holiday events, prayer services and, in a bold move, a march on an alderman’s private residence. Perhaps most important, supporters packed city council meetings throughout the campaign, which drew hundreds of people when the living wage was on the line.

These major events supported an underlying strategic plan to hold politicians accountable for their stance on the living wage issue. The campaign kept close tabs on, and contact with, each of the 50 aldermen throughout the campaign. Their task was to force each member of city council to take a stance on the issue, to put pressure on those

who did not support the living wage and to rally around those who did. Although a majority of the city council endorsed the concept of a living wage in the beginning, with Mayor Daley eventually going on record in opposition to the ordinance only 17 aldermen voted in support of a living wage, with 31 against, in July 1997.<sup>17</sup> The campaign clearly faced an uphill battle. But in a city dominated by “machine politics” where aldermen rarely opposed the mayor, those 17 votes were something of a watershed, a significant victory in their own right.

Living wage supporters had pushed for a vote on the issue in order to make the council’s stance a matter of official public record. Individual aldermen could now be held accountable for their position. With the 1999 elections approaching, the living wage slogan became “Payback Time in ‘99!” This was more than an idle threat. Because of a vacated council seat and a special election, living wage supporters had the opportunity to demonstrate that they could force a candidate to take a positive stance on the issue. It was becoming clear that they had the political muscle to effect the outcome of city council elections and that there would indeed be consequences for those who did not support a living wage.

The campaign finally came to a head when the aldermen and mayor decided to give themselves a pay raise, just prior to the election cycle as mandated by law. Living wage activists seized on the issue, demanding no raises for politicians unless low-wage workers in the city also received a raise. Aldermen were keen to avoid a public relations disaster over such a charged issue during election season. Finally, after three long years of struggle and countless meetings, marches and protest actions, the Chicago city council

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<sup>17</sup> The council technically voted to table a motion to have a vote on a living wage ordinance, but it was widely viewed as a surrogate up or down vote on the measure.

passed in July of 1998 a living wage ordinance covering for-profit city contractors and subcontractors.<sup>18</sup> In contrast to the acute economic leverage exerted by the auto strikers, the campaign succeeded by pressuring the political process over an extended period of time.

#### IV. DATA AND METHODS

This study relies on in-depth interviews with 42 respondents, primarily drawn from the rank-and-file, but also with key leaders and staff, conducted in the spring and summer of 2004. Respondents were mainly selected through snowball sampling using recommendations from participants, and then further screened to assure representativeness in terms of demographic characteristics and, in the living wage case, organizational affiliation.<sup>19</sup> That said, these are obviously not meant to be statistically representative samples since the goal in selecting participants was depth more than breadth. Rather than aiming for a more superficial yet statistically “reliable” account of subjectivity achieved through survey methods, the point of this study is to dig more deeply into the meanings and interpretations of collective action experiences as understood by participants themselves. The findings, moreover, can be seen as reliable by the standards of qualitative research—that is, “saturation” occurred such that there was a redundancy to the data being gathered by the end of the data collection process.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The final ordinance, subject to last minute negotiations, required at least \$7.60 an hour and included the following job categories: home and health care workers, security guards, parking attendants, day laborers, cashiers, elevator operators, custodial workers and clerical workers.

<sup>19</sup> In order to maintain confidentiality, pseudonyms have been used instead of respondents’ real names.

<sup>20</sup> More generally, there is in fact a long-standing critique directed at the value of surveys for studying working-class consciousness, accompanied by arguments in favor ethnographic and other qualitative methods (see, for example, Blackburn and Mann 1975:156; Fantasia 1988:6-7; Glaberman 1980:121,129-31,133; and Marshall 1983:289-93).

To probe the consequences of collective action for participants' subjectivities, respondents were asked a set of questions about their understandings of class and mobilization before, during, and after participating in the strike or the living wage campaign. The interviews were supplemented by archival data drawn from both the mainstream and alternative press including metropolitan-area, local, community, and union publications. In addition to newspaper and magazine articles, the data include organizational meeting minutes, leaflets, newsletters, educational materials, and internal memos. In addition, I engaged in some limited participant observation which consisted of attending meetings and doing field work at offices of the relevant unions and community organizations.

Given the dearth of research on the subjective outcomes of different collective action forms, the method of analysis was necessarily inductive. The concept of a "perpetual struggle orientation," for example, did not frame the research proposal at the outset but, rather, emerged from respondents' interview testimony. Moreover, the long interview format in particular, where questions were relatively open-ended and followed up as necessary, was most amenable to the exploration of consciousness and subjectivity, allowing a deeper probing of cultural meaning and resonance. The use of qualitative, semi-structured interviews opened up space for subjects to relate how they experienced and understood the campaign, and to do so in their own words. Without imposing the yardstick of "revolutionary" or "socialist" consciousness (Katznelson 1986), this more inductive approach instead allowed for exploration of how group formation and the dynamics of social class were articulated by working-class people themselves.

The interview data are used to show how the distinct logics of collective action, and not other features of the cases, led to contrasting forms of class consciousness among auto strikers and living wage campaign participants. Participants were asked direct yet open-ended questions about the subjective impact of the campaign and how it affected them more generally. Their own perspective on the extent and nature of change could thus be taken into account. And these self-reports, which comprise the bulk of the data, are supplemented by interviews with staff members who reported their perceptions of cognitive transformation among the rank-and-file.

Sociologists and oral historians alike are well aware of the pitfalls associated with the use of retrospective accounts. They have pointed to concerns with the recollection of factual data, along with the need to verify such accounts with other sources; at the same time scholars are aware that such careful verification must accompany the use of any sources, and so have pointed out that retrospective accounts are far from unique in this regard (for example, see Dunaway and Baum 1996, especially Part Two). Nevertheless, retrospective accounts present their own specific set of concerns—in particular with respect to how people view the past through the lens of the present.

This study, however, does not rely on retrospective accounts primarily to reconstruct or verify the facts of the matter of how past events occurred. Instead, it seeks to understand people's experiences of collective action events, and how those experiences endure. This study is, in short, about how people understand the transformative events of their past in the present. As articulated by Grele, the retrospective or oral historical interview presents "evidence of the ways in which history live[s] on in the present" (2006:59). He summarizes the more important developments in the field:

All of this work has been predicated upon the proposition that oral history, while it does tell us about how people lived in the past, also, and maybe more importantly, tells us how that past lives on into and informs the present. (2006:61)

The goal of the present study is to examine how collective action events live on as a legacy in people's lives. Respondents' narratives do not amount to a twisted, 'biased' lens onto some other kind of factual data; instead, respondents' present understanding and interpretation of past events, and their reconstruction of such events in the present, is exactly the data that are being sought. In this study, viewing the past through the lens of the present is not a 'problem' to be overcome. Instead, the experience of the past in the present is very much the object of concern.

Respondents' accounts of their experiences are not utilized here as a tool to retrieve other, more 'factual,' data; instead, they *are* the data. Portelli's discussion of the importance of oral history is instructive:

The first thing that makes oral history different, therefore, is that it tells us less about *events* than about their *meaning*. . . . the unique and precious element which oral sources force upon the historian and which no other sources possess in equal measure is the speaker's subjectivity. If the approach to research is broad and articulated enough, a cross section of the subjectivity of a group or class may emerge. Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did. Oral sources may not add much to what we know, for instance, of the material cost of a strike to the workers involved; but they tell us a good deal about its psychological costs. . . . [T]he diversity of oral history consists in the fact that 'wrong' statements are still psychologically 'true,' and that this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts. (1991:50-51)

As a study of subjectivity, the 'facts of the matter' that are most relevant here are workers' subjective experience; there are no other data that better speak to this than their own reports, and in this sense retrospective accounts are not as problematic as they may be when used for other purposes. How people remember and articulate their experiences

of an event is crucial, and can be more instructive than an “accurate” reconstruction of events themselves (Portelli 1991:2,26). How people think about and talk about and narrate and understand their experiences of collective action—and how this diverged in the two cases—is the focus of this study.<sup>21</sup>

At the same time, this study does examine what happened during the strike and the living wage campaign, and I do make claims about how people were transformed in the heat of collective action based on their own accounts of these changes situated within an analysis of the two logics of collective action. In assessing the validity of these accounts it is first crucial that the narratives of each group are viewed as a collective product. Years after the fact the respondents in each group have very different “presents” through which they are looking at the past—not to mention the demographic, occupational, and other differences that have existed throughout. So when accounts of the subjective impact of the events coalesce in each case, we can expect that this reflects something about the common, shared experience of a unique and momentous event. The power of collective action is revealed, in fact, when in each case the accounts coalesce, rather than reflect the idiosyncrasies of each person’s life as they have developed years later.

There are clear benefits to collecting data at the time that an event occurs in the interest of examining how things unfold on the ground during such intense and transformative moments. Some scholars, however, have questioned the import of such

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<sup>21</sup> An understanding of the role of narrative is likewise crucial since it is difficult, in short, to separate some supposed “actual” subjective experience from the stories people tell about those experiences: “Eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organize memory, to segment and purpose-build the very ‘events’ of a life. In the end we *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we ‘tell about’ our lives” (Bruner quoted in Grele 2006:70).

data, suggesting that the subjective consequences of such events are in fact fleeting and unlikely to endure (Mann 1973; Langford 1994). The benefit, then, of examining the consequences of such events some time after the fact is that we are better able to address the question of their enduring legacy. The advantage of conducting interviews some years after the events occurred is that it puts us in a position to assess the enduring ideational consequences of collective action, not merely its transient and ephemeral effects.

## V. EXPECTATIONS ABOUT ONGOING STRUGGLE

In the aftermath of the living wage campaign and the auto strike, a fundamental difference between the two cases emerged in workers' expectations about struggle and their ability to sustain protest over the long haul. After the living wage campaign, participants expected ongoing conflict with elites so that protest came to be seen as a way of life. In contrast, the autoworkers expected labor-management peace after the strike. They hoped that conflict would dissipate and felt that protest should be limited to exceptional moments instead of becoming a routine part of everyday life.

Even though they had achieved a great victory with passage of the city ordinance, and although the Chicago Jobs and Living Wage Campaign was technically over, there was a sense among participants that their battle was part of a continuing war. This was the case with those coming from a variety of perspectives, both African Americans and Latinos, members of unions and members of community groups, the employed and the unemployed. Regardless of their background, participants' testimony coalesced around this same theme:

We must keep fighting.

We want to have another increase in the minimum wage within two years. . . . So this is not finished, it is just beginning.

[The living wage campaign] was the beginning of my wanting to organize.

The campaign's success heralded the beginning—rather than the end—of the struggle for a living wage and for participants' activism more generally.

Living wage campaign participants spoke explicitly of how the campaign inspired continued struggle. An ACORN member, for example, when asked what had changed since the living wage campaign, replied:

Well, it motivated people. It motivated the people to continue—not only to continue to be involved but to even get more involved in fighting for your community, for your rights, and that kind of thing. It was a motivational kind of thing. . . . And it inspired me. It inspired me to get more involved; to promote ACORN even more.

Similarly, a union member described how she thought the living wage campaign affected the people who were involved:

It make them feel like: “Okay, I can go at the next one, now.” I can go at the—okay, just like if we won that living wage campaign right: that was just the city. But then they think about: “Okay, we're trying to organize [company name].”

Instead of resting on their laurels in the wake of victory, participants' experience of the campaign encouraged them to move on to the next organizing target. This theme was echoed by a participant from the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, who articulated how the campaign was a springboard for continued mobilization:

I felt excited. I felt excited. I felt like I had won and made a difference in a large number of people's lives. So, I was real excited about that and I felt like, you know, the other delinquents that we're dealing with, we need to do the exact same thing. Mobilize and get out there and start screaming and hollering and yelling and bring about change.

The crucial point is that participants' testimony coalesced around the theme of perpetual struggle despite the fact that they came to the campaign from a variety of organizations and experiences. Through their common experience of collective action their understanding of struggle converged.

In contrast to living wage campaign participants, workers at the auto shop were not prepared psychologically to continue the struggle post-strike. Instead, they expected peace and labor-management accord. Although no such accord existed—there were constant skirmishes over work pace, job elimination, discipline, and health and safety issues—workers resisted the idea of using ongoing mobilization to solve the many shop floor problems they faced.

It might be argued that the achievement of a union contract would bring about this expectation of peace among the strikers. But the living wage gains were similarly codified in legislation and, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, a union contract does not assure “labor peace.” Unionized workers are in fact more prone to acting collectively than unorganized workers, which makes the strikers' stance all the more puzzling.

The difference between the two cases was embodied in the contrasting emotional tenor of struggle for the two groups: strikers were disappointed by it while living wage participants became excited, animated, and alive. When management was intransigent, or when strikers were unable to make their voice heard around a particular issue, for example, the strikers expressed frustration and exasperation. In contrast, frustration took on a different meaning in the living wage case: “It's very frustrating dealing with [politicians]. But you know what? I will not give up. I don't care how frustrating it is, I will not give up. I'm gonna keep on fighting until I can't fight anymore.”

Living wage campaign participants were energized. Perpetual struggle was not merely accepted and expected. It was also desired and couched in a positive emotional tone. Although one might expect the concept of perpetual struggle to lead to demoralization and feelings of futility, that was not the case. Instead, living wage participants rose to the occasion. A union member described what it felt like to be at one of the campaign's large rallies, and feeling "always upbeat" about struggle:

Oh, we was fired up; fired up! We won't take it no more. We are fired up! That's our theme song—we fired up; we not going to take this anymore. We be always upbeat, whether we get it or not. Because you can't down yourself; you gotta keep fighting if you want to win something.

Perpetual struggle was not something accepted as a grim reality, but was exciting and uplifting. A retiree echoed these positive sentiments in responding to a question about if she had any new experiences during the campaign:

Yes, yes, I met a lot of people that I admired that was willing to fight and take a chance to get things better, you know—for us. And it was very gratifying, I must admit. I enjoyed what I was doing.

She experienced satisfaction and enjoyment through the process of struggle itself, not just because of its success. As an unemployed participant simply put it: the living wage campaign "was a great satisfaction for me." Participants experienced joy, pride, gratification, and satisfaction through protest in the living wage campaign and beyond. Instead of experiencing perpetual struggle as a burden, they embraced it as something that contributed to their quality of life.

It could be argued that the outcomes might reflect a selection bias among those who participated in each struggle. From this perspective, the observed differences could boil down to distinct recruitment mechanisms in which living wage participants are more

likely to be self-selected activists, ostensibly predisposed to a heightened sense of class consciousness, whereas strikers are, for the most part, involuntarily drawn into their struggle simply by virtue of their employment relationship. Though I recognize that it is not an ideal solution, I address the possibility of selection bias by systematically identifying in my analysis a subset of strikers—those who volunteered for leadership—and comparing them to similarly self-selected participants in the living wage campaign.<sup>22</sup> Given their common voluntary recruitment to activism, along with the fact that strike leaders and campaign participants were more likely to have had prior organizing experiences (as compared to rank-and-file strikers), it might be assumed that they would also be predisposed to developing a perpetual struggle orientation. And yet their understandings of class and struggle took on radically different forms depending on each group's experience of collective action. In the end, the strikers' disapproval of ongoing struggle sprung from their participation on the picket line such that they had more in common with each other—whether or not they were voluntary leaders and whether or not they had prior organizing experience—than with their counterparts in the living wage campaign. Campaign participants likewise came to embrace a distinct understanding of struggle as a result of their own, very different experience of collective action.

It should be noted that the strike leadership consisted exclusively of Whites and African Americans. As a consequence, all of the auto shop respondents are from these groups, and none are Latinos. There are two reasons for this. First, I essentially over

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<sup>22</sup> The question of selectivity—operationalized as “controlling” for predispositions—naturally arises in any study on the subjective effects of activism since it is difficult to obtain reliable data on participants' consciousness prior to their involvement in mobilization (see, for example, Fendrich and Turner 1989, Marwell et al. 1993, and Ness 1998). It thus becomes unclear whether such studies are investigating the ideational consequences of activism per se or if they are simply describing interior mental states several years after a period of intense mobilization. In contrast, my analysis focuses specifically on how participation in collective action affects subjectivity by highlighting a comparison of those who volunteer for activism in each case, used as a proxy for their predispositions.

sampled from the strike leadership in an effort to address the selection bias issue and support a sturdy comparison with the living wage campaign. Second, due to the use of snowball sampling it was easier to get interviews with rank-and-file Whites and African Americans, who were referred to me by the leadership. For future iterations of the project I intend to interview some of the Latino strikers as well. But for present purposes this focus on the leadership serves to address possible concerns with selection bias, and so it has made for a more robust comparison.

In contrast to living wage campaign participants, then, local union leadership in the strike expressed the same sentiments as their rank-and-file coworkers regarding continued struggle and conflict. When asked if workers had any confrontations with management since the strike, one leader (who was himself generally willing to challenge management) replied: “I’ve had some [confrontations], but workers not really. Not so much that type of thing. They’ll come to me because they’re ticked off and I’ll lose it, but they’ve been pretty good about that.” The idea that workers had been “good” about not confronting management implies that the ideal worker and union member is one who is not struggling to solve shop floor problems. In a similar vein, when this leader was asked if workers had been involved in any group protest or collective action since the strike he replied: “No, we haven’t had any problems like that. I hope we better don’t get that far.” Worker protest was seen as a problem, as a divergence from what should be expected during the normal course of labor-management relations.

Indeed, when asked if there had been any group protest or collective action since the strike, workers coming from a variety of perspectives—Black and White, leadership and rank-and-file, first shift and second—answered with a swift and definitive negative

response. Despite the fact that they reported a constant string of confrontations over working conditions which had become the backdrop of shop floor life after the strike, these autoworkers did not see protest and collective action as a regular part of this dynamic. It was expected only under extreme circumstances, perhaps if management threatened to close the plant, or if ‘normal’ labor-management relations somehow fell apart.

For the autoworkers the strike was behind them. It was a thing of the past, as articulated by this middle aged worker: “You know, now to talk about the strike in the plant is not really a big deal. Don’t nobody even talk about the strike or what the issues were at the strike or what happened at the strike. It’s in the past.” In contrast, the struggle for a living wage lived on in participants’ imagination—and in their daily lives.

As will be discussed in more detail in the analysis that follows, these contrasting outcomes fly in the face of received theorizing which locates the sources of solidarity and class consciousness in groups that are demographically similar, occupationally homogeneous, and strategically powerful—characteristics that fit almost perfectly the strikers. Yet it was the demographically diverse, occupationally heterogeneous, and strategically disadvantaged participants in the living wage campaign who emerged with a greater commitment to sustaining struggle as a class. What explains this surprising pattern? How can we account for these divergent and unexpected attitudes toward sustained protest? What accounts for the finding that, contrary to expectations, a diverse constituency can actually facilitate, instead of hinder, ongoing struggle? Why did the strikers, on the other hand, after employing labor’s ultimate weapon against capital, fail to embrace their militancy for the long-term?

In order to answer these questions the concept of perpetual struggle must be broken down into its constituent parts. In the case of the Chicago living wage campaign, a perpetual struggle orientation consisted of three ideological pillars: an expansive solidarity, an activist identity, and a sense of collective efficacy. To understand the origins of divergent orientations toward ongoing protest, I will trace the roots of these three pillars to specific features of collective action.

This dissertation consists of three empirical chapters, each treating one of the three pillars of perpetual struggle. Each chapter examines a specific subjective outcome, tracing it to particular components of the economic and political logics of collective action. Chapter 2 treats the first pillar of perpetual struggle and one of the most fundamental aspects of class consciousness: group cohesion and solidarity. I trace the divergent forms of solidarity found in the two cases to the contrasting constituencies mobilized through the economic versus political logics of action. This chapter addresses the question: do movements with diverse constituencies lead to stronger, more sustainable collectivities, or to the dissolution of common identity and collective strength?

Chapter 3 treats the second pillar of perpetual struggle—an activist identity—and traces its emergence to the emotional qualities of collective action. Although scholars have recently called for the inclusion of emotions in social movement research, there has been little comparative work on the topic. In this chapter I ask: what are the consequences of more instrumental versus more expressive mobilization?

Chapter 4 examines how the economic and political logics of action lead to contrasting understandings of power and efficacy. These understandings of power spring

from the extent of workers' structural or positional power, along with the duration of mobilization, but it turns out that they manifest in some unexpected ways. This chapter highlights the idea of *collective efficacy*—the third and final pillar of a perpetual struggle orientation.

While each pillar of perpetual struggle can be isolated from the others and traced to a specific feature of the political logic of collective action, the ultimate goal is to understand how they work in concert with one another. Just as the components of each collective action form fit together and complement one another such that they can be viewed holistically as logics of action, so too are the various subjective consequences of these logics analytically distinct yet theoretically cohesive. A perpetual struggle orientation comes about because of the way in which an expansive solidarity, an activist identity, and collective efficacy complement and reinforce one another.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Emergent Solidarity: Transforming the Meaning of Difference

“Solidarity Forever” is perhaps the most well known rallying cry in the American labor movement, a song heard across decades in the U.S. and beyond. Fantasia and Voss capture the potent qualities of this “sacred narrative”:

. . . a successful labor movement must have the capacity to rise above its corporeal or institutional form through a kind of sacred narrative, or myth, and solidarity has been a cornerstone of the foundational myth of labor movements everywhere. Solidarity represents a potent mythic theme that carries remarkably transcendent qualities. Under certain conditions and at certain moments, demonstrations of solidarity can summon powerful spiritual forces in the social world (in groups, in collective activities, and in organizational forms) that are capable of producing extraordinary degrees of selflessness and of collective identification. (2004:107)

Theories of social class have reflected the centrality of solidarity, posing group cohesion—or people’s identity with one another—as one of the primary axes along which class formation occurs (for example, see Lockwood 1966, Mann 1973, and Thompson 1963). Cohesion, moreover, can perhaps be viewed as the most basic aspect of group formation more generally.

But solidarity is not best conceptualized as either wholly present or entirely absent. Nor does it merely rest on a spectrum from stronger to weaker. Rather, it can take different forms and exhibit a variety of qualities—being more expansive and inclusive versus more circumscribed and constrained, more concrete versus more

abstract, or attaching to different kinds of groups. In the auto strike and the living wage campaign, distinct types of collective action produced different kinds of solidarity and group identity. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the class identity of the more homogeneous strikers was curtailed when compared to the much more heterogeneous body that comprised the living wage campaign. Why did diversity—long considered the Achilles’ heel of class consciousness in the U.S.—generate a stronger and more inclusive understanding of solidarity among those who participated in the struggle to secure a living wage?

I will argue that the answer lies not in the degree of diversity as such but rather in how its meaning was transformed by the experience of participating in collective action. Specifically, the narrower strike mobilization, while strengthening its participants’ identification with one another as combatants against a common employer, limited the development of empathy and solidarity for other workers outside their immediate experience of struggle. In contrast, the living wage campaign, which required for its success a wider mobilization aimed at a more broad-based constituency, created through the experience of collective struggle a more expansive conceptualization of “people like us” (Lamont 2000) and a more inclusive understanding, and practice, of solidarity.

The living wage campaign led participants to reconceptualize their relationship to each other as former identities rooted in social differences gradually lost ground to their common experiences forged in the heat of battle. Where diversity had previously signaled differences that defined opposing groups, those same differences now became the basis for redrawing social boundaries more inclusively to encompass all low-wage workers as part of a broader “symbolic community” (Lamont and Molnar 2002). With its

meaning transformed by collective action, diversity now came to underwrite a wider understanding, and expression, of class solidarity. In short, experiencing the living wage campaign allowed participants to subjectively recast diversity from a source of division into one of unity.

## I. SOURCES OF SOLIDARITY

One of the most persistent claims in the literature on social movements is that homogeneity breeds solidarity. This formulation has become nothing short of axiomatic among students of class formation for whom internal “divisions,” “fractions,” and “segments” are seen as antithetical to group cohesion and solidarity (Poulantzas 1978; Wright 1997). In Offe and Wiesenhal’s pithy statement of the problem, labor unions—precisely because of their heterogeneous interests—face serious obstacles to collective action. Unlike business associations which can more easily coalesce around their shared interest in maximizing profits, working-class organizations typically lack a “common denominator” to which their “heterogeneous and often conflicting needs can be reduced” (Offe and Wiesenhal 1980:75, also see 91-3). Compelled by these “conflicting needs” to construct solidarity from the ground up by following a more interactive “dialogical” mode of collective action, labor, as Offe and Wiesenhal conclude, lacks the organizational capacities of capital.

The same presumption that working-class diversity leads to disorganization also undergirds split labor market theory, arguably the leading sociological framework for understanding labor solidarity—and its absence historically—in the United States. In Bonacich’s (1972; 1976) classic formulation, the American working class failed to unify

because it was balkanized into racially distinct and hierarchically ordered local labor markets that pitted poorly paid White workers against even more exploited workers of color. Such internal divisions, as Brown (2000:657) argues, “heighten the salience of race and limit the possibilities for class-based collective action. To reduce job competition, majority workers use their unions to exclude or intimidate minorities. In turn, minority workers break strikes to access jobs or work ‘open shop’.” Subsequent elaborations of this theory have sought to understand the circumstances under which racially divided labor markets can be overcome by class-wide solidarity (Boswell, Brown, Brueggemann, and Peters 2006; Brown and Boswell 1995; Brueggemann and Boswell 1998; Gerteis 2007), but the underlying assumption—that diversity impedes class-based solidarity—remains firmly in place (Boswell 1986; Brown 2000).<sup>1</sup>

Whether focusing on the “dialogical” mode of action or split labor markets, there are indeed compelling theoretical reasons to conclude that social differentiation, *ceteris paribus*, leads to disorganization. This view that diversity within the working class is antithetical to class-based solidarity, moreover, spans the work of historians, sociologists, and political scientists who have studied the issue empirically with respect to race and ethnicity (Draper 1994; Fong and Markham 2002), gender (Rose 1992; Milkman 1993), nation (Wong 2004), and skill (Joseph 1993). Likewise, internal class divisions are

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<sup>1</sup> While the focus here is on theories of class and labor, the assumption that diversity is an impediment to solidarity can be found elsewhere. Feminist theorists, for example, have long grappled with the many differences among women—in terms of race, ethnicity, nation, sexuality, class, age, etc.—and questioned the validity of a unified category of “women” (Collins 1990; Lorde 1984; Mohanty 1988). At the same time, however, they have recognized the need for solidarity and mobilization around gender-based hierarchy and oppression, and sought to formulate the ways in which such a diverse group could come together as a collectivity. Young (1994), for example, has put forward the idea of “seriality,” while Alperin (1990) proposes an “interactive” model of feminist politics. Nevertheless, the assumption remains that the more groups have in common in terms of ascriptive traits, identity, and life experience, the easier it will be for them to cohere. In discussions of coalitions, feminist and otherwise, the idea of uniting through difference is more of a normative stance, while the ontological understanding is that difference divides in profound and almost unsurpassable ways. This literature thus serves to reinforce the puzzle presented by the two cases examined in this study rather than solving it.

regularly invoked to explain the “exceptional” lack of class consciousness and class unity, or the weakness of socialism, in the United States (Davis 1980; Form 1985; Lipset 1977). Whether rooted in a Marxian framework that emphasizes employers’ “divide and rule” strategy, or a more Weberian approach that envisions status identities in conflict with those of class, the prevailing notion that diversity hinders working-class formation appears obvious and over-determined.

The main exceptions to this pattern have occurred at the “point of production” where, subject to “deskilling” and other homogenizing pressures, class awareness and solidarity have been especially strong. To the extent that labor solidarity has emerged it has emanated primarily from the workplace, the locus of the inevitable clash of interests between employers and workers over the control of “labor power,” that most precious of commodities that fuels recurring struggles over how work is organized and rewarded (Braverman 1974; Burawoy 1979; Clawson 1980; Clawson and Fantasia 1983). Then, too, the workplace has served as the *locus classicus* of class conflict insofar as it offers a highly strategic location for drawing together an entire labor force to realize its collective capacity to disrupt production and press its common claims (Kimeldorf 1999).<sup>2</sup>

Of course, class has not generally displaced other identities, particularly those rooted in race and gender which have proven to be highly resilient in the American context (Milkman 1987; Roediger 1999). Nevertheless, according to received wisdom, solidarity becomes possible only to the degree that social differentiation is diminished. Thus, almost all of the leading explanations for the emergence of labor solidarity boil

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<sup>2</sup> More generally, the particular contours of different workplace environments have been used to explain a variety of class-based dynamics. Industry structure, for example, has been used to explain both workers’ voting behavior as well as their propensity to strike (Lipset 1959:232-6,262-3; Kerr and Siegel 1964:105-47).

down to eliminating a difference of some kind—whether it is divisive occupational differences that are eroded by deskilling (Braverman 1974), the multitude of competing worker interests that are welded into one by radical shop floor activists (Kimeldorf 1988), or varying capacities for disruption that are homogenized and more tightly integrated under conditions of mass production (Edwards 1979).<sup>3</sup> In each case, the triumph of solidarity is contingent upon reducing the degree or salience of diversity within the workforce.

While diversity has been seen as undermining solidarity on the job, it appears even more threatening to the cohesion of community-based movements insofar as they are typically more internally differentiated. Thus, sociologists writing in the 1960s saw the community as little more than a graveyard for class solidarity in tracing the “embourgeoisement” of manual workers to post-war suburbanization and the resulting decline in occupationally homogeneous blue-collar neighborhoods (Lockwood 1960; Zweig 1960). Others insisted that the class-deadening influence of communities has a much longer history. Katznelson, in his influential historical study of class formation in nineteenth-century New York, argued that a “radical separation” of work from community has been present from the beginning of the American class experience, such that many workers did not act “on the basis of the shared solidarities of class at work, but on that of ethnic and territorial affinities in their residential communities” (1981:19).

In a similar vein, Przeworski outlines how socialist party strategies “based on broad definitions of the working class decrease the salience of class and bring forth other

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<sup>3</sup> Kerr and Siegel offer a similar account in explaining differences in the propensity to strike across a variety of industries. They put forward the “isolated mass” hypothesis where higher strike rates among miners, loggers, seafarers, and longshoremen spring from the fact that “employees form a largely homogeneous, undifferentiated mass—they all do about the same work and have about the same experience” (1964:110).

cleavages as bases for collective identification and organization” (1985:91). In exploring the inclusion of such groups as the unemployed and the middle class he describes how:

. . . the dissociation of the nexus between workers and the socialist movement has the general effect of reinforcing a classless image of society. It decreases the salience of class as the basis for collective identification. It leads, therefore, to the resurgence of other bases of collective identification, whether these are based on the size of revenue, character of work, religion, language, region, sex, or race. In this sense, the process of organization of the masses disorganizes the workers. (1985:78)

For Przeworski, such mass mobilization hinders the development of working-class solidarity as the identification of workers with each other becomes less salient.

It is not only the great variety of community-based identities that leads scholars to emphasize the workplace as the locus of class formation. At the same time, there is a long-standing Marxian bias against the *specific kind of class actors* rooted in communities. Theorists of social class have juxtaposed the supposedly more stable, employed segment of the working class, laboring at the point of production, with those not engaged in paid labor. Marx derogatorily termed the latter group the “lumpenproletariat” while valorizing the employed segment of the working class as the ‘revolutionary subject’ most likely to develop class consciousness. As Przeworski (1985), for example, has argued in following this producerist tradition, this army of “surplus labor” undermines class formation rather than inspires it. On this view, those engaged in a traditional workplace strike would be more likely to develop class-based solidarities than a group that included the unemployed and other supposedly marginal sectors of the working class. Even recent work on “social movement unionism,” while recognizing the need to organize beyond the job, relegates the community to a supportive role in workplace struggles (Johnston 1994; Lopez 2004; Turner and Hurd 2001).

There are certainly good reasons for seeing the community, in comparison to the workplace, as a less supportive foundation on which to build working-class solidarity. Although communities have sustained highly localized ethnic- and neighborhood-based urban protests, they have seldom provided secure staging areas for launching wider movements organized along class lines. There are of course good reasons for this, and many of them rest on the familiar axiom with which we started: that communities are typically comprised of multiple group identities—racial, ethnic, linguistic, religious, etc.—and are thus less conducive to forging class solidarity compared to work sites. But, as a growing body of research suggests, diversity does not necessarily preclude solidarity, for, as Dixon concludes, “the impact of pertinent worker divisions is quite varied” (2004:369; see also Carsten 1988 and Hodson 1995).<sup>4</sup>

Consider for the moment the role of race—arguably the most divisive feature of the American class experience. Ideologies of white supremacy run deep and wide throughout the history of class formation in the United States, forming a backdrop against which class solidarity has seldom triumphed (Goldfield 1997; Omi and Winant 1994). Yet, interracial class coalitions have emerged and not just in isolated instances but recurrently (Brueggemann and Boswell 1998; Hodson 1995; Zeitlin and Weyer 2001). One of the more enduring such cases is Hawaii’s polyglot labor force which through many years of struggle overcame deeply entrenched ethnic and racial identities, eventually welding the island’s Filipino, Japanese, Portuguese and indigenous workers into a single and highly unified working-class movement under the banner of the

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<sup>4</sup> Likewise, in summing up a series of articles on 19th century class formation in the United States and emphasizing the contingent consequences of diversity, Tilly notes that the “effect of ethnicity apparently depends on the organization and skill distribution of different nationalities rather than on the sheer number or variety of foreign born” (1988:456).

longshoremen's union. Jung explains this as a result of "reworking," not abandoning, race in ways that rearticulated class and race identities and practices (2006:189).

Solidarity, in sum, is a project; it is the outcome of ongoing struggles through which participants come to rework and refashion their identities around a more expansive understanding of group membership. Notwithstanding a long and venerable scholarly tradition of attempting to read "class interests" from "class location" (e.g. Dahrendorf 1959; Poulantzas 1978; Weeden and Grusky 2005; Wright 1997), such structuralist accounts have provided limited insight into the sources, and variations, of class consciousness (Parkin 1979; Przeworski 1985). Alternatively, I advance here a more experiential account of class consciousness by showing how participation in transformative events can serve as a powerful medium through which solidaristic understandings emerge. As Fantasia has argued, "cultures of solidarity" are not just expressed by, but are also created by, collective action. Collective action should not be simply seen as an expression of attitudes, values, or consciousness but, in addition, it "may create a context for the transformation of ideation" (Fantasia 1988:10-11).

But the crucial point for the purposes of this study is not *that* such events can be transformative but, rather, to be attentive to *how* they are transformative, and to understand that different kinds of events will be transformative in different ways. How do such transformative experiences affect the rank-and-file of social movements differently depending on the context? Turning to the cases in this study, how does solidarity emerge differently through economic versus political action, in the strike versus the living wage campaign? And given the supposed difficulty of forging solidarity in the community, how was it that the highly diverse collectivity of actors in the living wage

campaign came to re-imagine themselves as part of a newly fashioned and cohesive community of workers?

The strike case examined here to some extent followed the predicted pattern. Workers labored under conditions of mass production on an assembly line, and they mobilized on the job against a common employer. They were subjected to the homogenizing pressures of deskilling, common working conditions, and a clearly identifiable opposition in the form of corporate management and the plant supervisors whose presence on the shop floor infused assembly line life with an acute sense of the difference between workers and their bosses. As such, workers' identity with each other did indeed cohere through participation in the strike action, which operated along the lines of this classic model of working-class insurgency.

But the emergent solidarity of the autoworkers was much less developed than we would expect given the primacy of the point-of-production in models of class formation. Their developing identities were less about class per se, instead attaching to their co-workers. While these co-workers were patently working-class in both demographic and structural terms, an identification with such a narrow and circumscribed group is not what most theorists imagine when they refer to "class formation" or "class identity."

But the puzzle emerges more sharply only when the auto strike is juxtaposed with the living wage campaign. The kind of solidarity that emerged in Chicago was much more expansive and inclusive, more appropriately categorized as a genuine "class" identity compared to the strikers who came to identify with co-workers who happened to be working-class people. What makes group identity so powerful is exactly its ability to connect distant others who may never have met and perhaps never will. This is what

makes an “identity” as opposed to a “network.” Perhaps most noteworthy, however, is the *way in which* a common class identity emerged in the living wage campaign—not through the denial of difference but through its reinterpretation. Participation in Chicago’s living wage campaign radically altered the cultural meaning of diversity, transforming a previously distant “them” into one of “us.”

In short, the experience of mass social struggle radically reworked and redefined the meaning of diversity. Participants in the living wage campaign came to understand diversity in an entirely new way. Where it initially stood as an obstacle to concerted action, those same differences became over time a rich source of experiential knowledge for recognizing the underlying interests common to all low-wage workers, regardless of their individual locations within a complex web of social hierarchies. The experience of struggle disrupted daily routines and taken-for-granted understandings, and in doing so provided a fresh vantage point from which to reassess what it means to be a “worker,” who counts and who does not, and how far one should go in the name of solidarity.

Although there was some limited racial diversity in the strike case, the walkout succeeded without any wider community mobilization. But it is exactly this more homogenous, circumscribed workplace focus that, according to reigning theory would lead to a more salient class-based identity. Nevertheless, the presumed models of proletarian solidarity—the auto strikers—developed a highly focused identity with their co-workers based on having fought alongside them in the walkout. Conversely, participants in the living wage campaign developed a much more expansive understanding of class solidarity that included all those who must ultimately subsist by wage labor, regardless of race, occupation, or even current employment status. In short,

the strikers came to identify more strongly with their co-workers whereas participants in the living wage campaign developed a more inclusive identity with the working class as a whole.

I argue that the experience of the walkout strengthened workers' identity as a cohesive group in opposition to their immediate employer, but this stronger identity came at the expense of empathizing with other workers beyond the factory gates. In contrast, through mobilizing alongside other low-wage workers with whom they previously had little if any concrete connection, living wage campaign participants came to envision themselves as belonging to an expansive and inclusive working-class. In short, homogeneous groups, as the prevailing theory suggests, may be easier to mobilize at the outset. But, in redirecting our attention from the causes to the consequences of collective action, it becomes clear that diverse groups, once having mobilized, can develop more expansive understandings of solidarity.

## II. THE CIRCUMSCRIBED SOLIDARITY OF A STRIKE

Having engaged in collective protest and experienced the intensity of the picket line together, workers at the auto shop came out of the strike with a stronger sense of solidarity. There were still disagreements and continuing personality conflicts. But there was no denying that the autoworkers emerged from their struggle as a more cohesive group. Striking on behalf of all the workers in the shop brought workers out of the isolation everyday experience. Speaking of his participation in the walkout, Shawn, an older African American worker in the shop, captured this mood:

I've been in on a lot of things but that was probably one of the most important. It was something you'll never forget. It ain't like a birthday

party or something where everybody wishes you a happy birthday. This was something that it wasn't for one person, it was for all.

Debbie, a middle aged White worker, similarly articulated the uniqueness of her experience on the picket line, and the “camaraderie” that sprang from it:

Just camaraderie—a collected feeling of we're here for each other, to support each other. That was amazing to me. It almost had a revival feel to it, because I never experienced that. People all might have had their different circumstances, but together feeling that we deserve to be treated better feeling.

It is one thing to feel such camaraderie through the intensity and energy of a picket line, but it is another for it to continue to infuse daily life well after the picket signs and bullhorns have been packed away. The consensus among leaders and rank-and-file alike, though, was that there were indeed lasting effects, and that they were more unified since the strike:

I think [the strike] affected us all in a good way because I mean now we're all as one. I mean, we're all...we're a union.

[Since the strike] we're unified as a group. We're a whole group. 'Cause they know what affects one of us affects all of us, 'cause we're like a big family, basically. . . . [The strike] made us all better. Plus I think we work closer together myself, as a team and this group as a union, because what affects one of you affects everybody.

Newly cognizant that their individual fates at work were inter-connected, strikers came to identify with their co-workers to an extent not seen before the strike: “We all feel as though we're in the same boat.”

Such solidarity cannot be taken for granted. In the U.S. context, where the working class is notoriously fragmented, this newfound sense of unity stood out. Dave, an experienced union staffer who was involved in the strike and who serviced the shop in its aftermath, was impressed by the solidarity exhibited by the autoworkers:

*I:* Has anything changed since the strike in the shop?

*R:* It's one of the strongest union shops we have in the region right now. We just toured it two months ago. The [regional] director and myself and the local union president. Everybody was practically wearing [union] T-shirts.

Having gone through a successful walkout together, the strikers were more solidaristic than their counterparts in the same union, region, and industry.

Workers had been divided into pro- and anti-union camps prior to the strike, and a small minority were strikebreakers. But the experience of struggling together through a successful walkout dissolved many of the pre-strike divisions. Dylan, a seasoned union leader, described this transformation as follows:

[Before the strike] we had a lot of groups, cliques. Certain people sat with certain people: people that were against the union would sit over here and talk, and these people would sit over here and talk. It's kind of everybody now — everybody's pulled together. . . . All these people that were against the union, I would say 90% of them people support the union now. . . . [As for this division] I really feel great that now that suckers gone. People just pull together and that's what you got to do.

The solidarity generated through the walkout was strong enough to win over the most anti-union workers. Dave described this transformation:

There's quite a few of the workers that were totally against forming a union that are some of our strongest members now. And I think [the strike] changed some of them who had never been involved with a union before, gave them a whole different perspective.

Support for the union increased sharply following the strike, even among people who were not union supporters beforehand. Such pro- and anti-union cleavages often persist long after the initial polarization, and relations between strikers and strikebreakers can remain tense, especially in defeat. But in this case, where strikebreakers were a small minority and victory was rapidly assured, the walkout was a powerful unifying experience.

Still, the solidarity displayed by the strikers was limited in a more fundamental way. When referring to the “group,” “all,” “we,” or “everybody,” the common reference point was their co-workers on the factory floor. It was a circumscribed solidarity that encompassed only other employees at the auto shop, as expressed by one first shift worker, Carl, when asked about the consequences of the strike:

As I look back now, we have *unity within the plant*. I can say that, pretty much 99%, except for 3 or 4 people, that’s about it that don’t. . . . We’re basically a big family there. We do have our little infighting within the union and all that but still, when it comes down to it, it’s a group and we stand as a group now. (emphasis mine)

This powerful new sense of belonging to “a big family” extended to all workers in the plant, even former strikebreakers, as articulated by John, another rank-and-file first shifter:

I actually felt like I was helping [the strikebreakers]. I’m out here risking losing money to help everybody—not just the people on the line but *everybody in the plant*, even those who crossed. (emphasis mine)

But “everybody” had a narrow meaning in this post-strike discourse. While strikers could imagine “helping,” even “risking” their income, to support people they knew and worked with, they failed to express a connection to workers in general. As traditional icons of working-class consciousness and action, strikers are assumed to embody a class-wide sensibility. This theoretical role, however, was not realized among the auto strikers. Instead, their on-the-ground experience of collective action shaped a more limited vision of their connection to other workers.

Reflecting this narrow and constrained form of collective action, the strikers failed to identify with workers beyond the plant gates. They did not frame their struggle as a fight for workers generally or for workers’ rights in any abstract sense. This was true

not only for rank-and-file workers but for leaders as well. Strike leaders, being self-selected volunteers who were more likely to have had prior activist experience, might be expected to hold broader views of solidarity or deeper commitments to the working class generally. It might be assumed that they came to the strike predisposed to embrace a broader solidarity. Nevertheless, due to the circumscribed nature of the strike, their understanding of solidarity was, like their rank-and-file counterparts, confined to their immediate co-workers. Echoing the rank-and-filers, Brian, a prominent strike leader saw the walkout as a struggle for all of the workers *in the plant*:

At one point in the strike I crossed the line to hand out literature ‘cause they were all on break. People were all on break, throwing a football around, acting nonchalant like it was no big deal because they still didn’t understand that we were doing this for them. It’s not an individual thing. We’re not out there, I’m not out there for glory. . . . We’re doing it for all of us as one. So at one point I crossed the line and I wanted to hand literature to my fellow coworkers and explain to them why we’re out here. I’m out here for you. You know, this is for all of us.

“All of us” was thus synonymous with “fellow workers” in the plant—a formulation that typified the narrowly circumscribed conception of solidarity that was embraced by leaders and rank-and-filers alike.

The strikers stubbornly clung to their limited understanding of solidarity despite their ongoing exposure to workers at other plants. Upon joining the union, they became part of a large amalgamated local that facilitated contact among autoworkers from different shops. They held regular union meetings in the amalgamated’s large hall and socialized afterward around the pool table, and they were involved with countless events, training sessions, and union-wide committees at the amalgamated local, and were thereby exposed to the larger labor movement. Nevertheless, their understanding of solidarity was not oriented toward the local union, much less the national union or organized labor

generally. Instead they identified narrowly with others in their own “unit” which, in the language of the amalgamated, referred to their particular worksite. “We have unity; we are a unit,” as one striker put it. “We have the power of that unit, instead of being divided. That’s the biggest thing.” A dense network of post-strike connections with the amalgamated local—one of the largest in the national union—was not by itself sufficient to stimulate broader solidarity. The strikers’ sense of solidarity was shaped by a momentous collective action event, not the more mundane everyday union experiences that followed. But their experience of collective action was limited to the “unit” as was the solidarity it engendered.

The strikers also faced the reality that lots of other autoworkers, including those employed at other plants within the same company, were still without basic union protection. These conditions were discussed at union meetings, but the discursive connections drawn to other workers failed to cultivate a more expansive solidarity. The newly unionized strikers expressed little identity with, or even acknowledgement of, their unorganized peers. Indeed, strikers seldom acknowledged their affinity with other autoworkers and when they did it was under very specific circumstances—for example, mentioning that they or one of their co-workers had helped organize another auto shop (as a handful of the strikers did), or when discussing how they fit into the national union’s organizing strategy. Otherwise, the plight of workers beyond the plant gates was not part of their discursive vocabulary. Not unlike the strikers’ membership in the large amalgamated local, their increasing exposure to other autoworkers did not lead them to embrace a more expansive understanding of solidarity. The post-strike exposure to other workers was simply no match for the more compelling experience of collective action. In

sum, the lived experience of a circumscribed form of collective action triumphed over less intense connections to workers laboring outside the auto shop's factory walls that were made through the more routine operations of union business.

And while the autoworkers did emerge from the strike with greater feelings of solidarity for their co-workers, there was at the same time an individualistic streak in their narratives. This was manifested, in particular, in an individual as opposed to collective sense of efficacy, which will be explored at greater length in Chapter 4. For the present purposes it simply must be noted that this individualism worked against any collective or communal impulses that the strike may have engendered.

Moreover, alongside expressions of worker solidarity there were some indications of division post-strike, and a countervailing narrative of fragmentation. After the walkout the shop was decidedly pro-union. But there were complaints, for example, about a lack of involvement in the union in terms of meeting attendance and participation on union committees. Debbie, for example, articulated what she saw as a lack of commitment to the group:

People don't really participate in the union meetings. I'm not going to say I've been to every single one of them, 'cause I haven't. . . . I do think that we need to get more involved so that we have a collective mind with how we all think. I just think that we need to stick together as a group more, so that we build strength.

The sense of camaraderie felt on the picket line had not infused post-strike commitments to the union as much as some had hoped. Shawn was upset with the discrepancy between his co-workers' complaints about problems on the job and what he saw as an unwillingness to become involved in solving them:

Right now it's as though that squeezing the plant and its—a lot of people are really getting a little ticked that they don't think the union is strong.

But I tell them every time, 'cause I'm usually at every meeting, and I tell them, I say: "You know, here we have meetings and there's only 3 or 4 or 5 of us, maybe 10 on first shift." And they tell them: "Well, why ain't we getting nothing done." If you can't go to the meeting and express your thoughts—what you think needs to be done or what should be done or what they shouldn't be doing—don't wait until the one or two of us come back from the meeting and ask us what we talked about. And then you saying: "Well, they didn't talk about—they didn't do this." Well, you're not there! How can you have a strong union if you're not there to be strong? And we're failing really bad now since we've organized—we don't get no participation at the meetings. The meetings are just ridiculous and we're trying to get more people to come. We understand if people have things to do, but right now Auto Parts Inc. is still more or less doing what they want to do.

From Debbie and Shawn's perspective there was a need for more discussion and communication between workers, for more unity and collective vision. There were a host of issues that workers wanted to see addressed. Although they now enjoyed the benefits of a union contract, there were ongoing problems in the shop, and there was an expectation that the union would step in and solve them. But there were limits to workers' own union commitment and a lack of desire to become intimately involved in this ongoing struggle.

Not everyone was concerned about a lack of participation in union activities. And there were discrepancies in workers' views on union strength—some bemoaned management's continued control of the shop floor while others emphasized workers' newfound voice on the job. Moreover, a desire for more participation in the union does not completely undermine the narrative of solidarity; imploring workers to become more involved in union affairs is something of a mantra in organized workplaces.

Nevertheless, the calls for more discussion, more participation, and more commitment indicate a certain degree of fragmentation and offer a qualification to the simultaneous

expression of unity. They betray the chinks in the armor of solidarity at the auto shop, and a lack of urgency with respect to workers' desire to be involved in continual struggle.

### III. THE EXPANSIVE SOLIDARITY OF A COMMUNITY-BASED MOBILIZATION

Where strikes are generally contained within the boundaries of the factory or a single company, community-based organizing around political targets is designed to appeal to a broad constituency often as large as the general public. Politicians may be responsive to small powerful groups, but not to small powerless groups that lack access to financial and other resources. If they hope to affect public policy, grassroots groups must thus be able to mobilize more than a narrow, insignificant constituency. They must press their concerns with public officials through the force of sheer numbers and be able to demonstrate that they represent a substantial voting bloc.

The Chicago living wage campaign was particularly broad and diverse, and this is exactly what made participants' developing solidarity all the more noteworthy. When the struggle began, there was little reason for optimism. Although residents had waged successful block- or neighborhood-level improvements—getting a street light fixed or improving trash pickup—there was little precedent for Chicago's racially diverse and economically stratified labor force coalescing behind a broad-based movement to address larger city-wide issues. The living wage campaign was further hampered by deep-seeded distrust between African Americans and Latinos, amplified by cultural and linguistic differences. Moreover, the targeted constituency—the city's low-wage workers—was distributed across every conceivable sector of the economy. And since low-wage workers are often concentrated in the most unstable employment situations, the campaign

drew many from the ranks of the unemployed, including the homeless, retirees, and homemakers.

Uniting young and old alike, men and women, veteran activists as well as political newcomers, the campaign's racial, economic, and geographic diversity fully captured the heterogeneity of interests that historically has made such community-based movements so vulnerable to fragmentation and eventual failure. In its rich diversity, cutting across both demographic and occupational categories and including those outside the standard employment relationship, the campaign exemplified the multitude of conflicting interests that face community-based movements. And since relationships between community organizations in Chicago had been characterized by a culture of competition rather than cooperation in many quarters, the new organizational linkages were a profound departure from grassroots 'business as usual' in the city.

The diversity of the Chicago living wage campaign was more than just an attribute of its broad coalitional structure. From the perspective of participants on the ground, the breadth of the constituency was one of its most salient aspects. As articulated by one prominent ACORN member:

We got started with [SEIU Local] 880, but we talked to other union leaders and other community groups and got all of them involved. And I thought that was a very rewarding experience that we—ACORN and 880 working together—could bring the unions and all these different community organizations together to work for a cause. And I thought that was wonderful. I said, "this is power!" [laughs]

This sense of power emerging from participation in a broad-based coalition was striking. Never before had participants seen such a wide range of groups and organizations mobilizing together in Chicago. Previously isolated community groups were now working together side by side. And, perhaps more importantly, activists succeeded for

the first time in uniting in common cause the city's trade unions and community organizations.

Such broad-based coalitions, particularly those rooted in the community, tend to unravel at the first sign of adversity. And many coalitions only come together at the very top by drawing together just the leaders of participating organizations. Chicago's living wage campaign was different. Instead of comprising a top-down coalition of bureaucrats, staffers, or "social movement professionals," its coalitional activity was mobilized from below. To be on the steering committee and involved in decision-making, an organization had to be capable of delivering, quite literally, a busload of people to major events. Being involved in the coalition meant mobilizing your constituency. This commitment to grassroots organizing provided a social laboratory in which participants discovered a new meaning for diversity.

While the living wage ordinance was, in the context of Chicago's political history, a stunning accomplishment, an even more profound transformation occurred among the participants themselves. Although the campaign mobilized a highly diverse body of supporters who were assembled from a multitude of organizations, demographic groups, and interests, the experience of collective action transformed the meaning of diversity such that participants now thought of themselves, and acted, as a cohesive group. Diversity no longer signified division, but instead was seen as marking the breadth of their common experiences as low-income workers. How was this possible? In particular, how did the experience of collective action transform this extraordinarily diverse group of actors into a more cohesive collectivity whose common class situation came increasingly to define who they were and how they acted?

This expansive identity was not rooted in any prior understandings, since Chicago’s working-class was previously plagued by fragmentation and division. Each group that joined the coalition, for example, had been accustomed to defining its priorities along narrow organizational lines. Illinois-ACORN, for example, suffered no lack of hubris, prominently displaying their organizational muscle through the trademark red t-shirts worn by its members to events and protests. Despite their organizational chauvinism, ACORN willingly moderated this stance when it came to the living wage campaign: “It wasn’t just an ACORN issue,” as one participant put it, “It was a people issue.”

Indeed the “people” came to see the struggle for a living wage in these terms, as participants from widely varying backgrounds—young and old, the employed, unemployed and retired—utilized the same trope in insisting that the campaign appealed to a generalized “everybody”:

Every time we said something about the living wage, everybody was willing to cooperate because everybody wanted a living wage.

I saw it as a struggle that involves everyone and that we fight for something worthwhile for everybody.

That’s what I remember about it, that it was people from all walks of life; it was different organizations; it was ethnic organizations. Everybody came together to fight for that.

Unlike the more circumscribed “everybody” found in the strike case, the “everybody” of the living wage campaign moved beyond participants’ more immediate circle of relationships, radiating outward. Margaret, a participant from ACORN, articulated this outward, expansive, more humanistic vision:

It meant a lot to me and not just to me but to my children, my grandchildren, my neighbors—everybody, you know. We're all connected and we all have that something in common.

Margaret felt connected not only through more immediate and close familial relationships, as to be expected, but also through a more extended, expansive network—with “everybody” being “all connected.”

Margaret conveyed the importance of appealing to “everybody” when asked if there was anything unique about the living wage campaign compared to others she had been involved with:

I believe we gained more participation from everybody in that campaign because it was the kind of fight that touched so many people, whereas some of the other issues didn't really. Like there were people that didn't have abandoned buildings in their neighborhoods. Or there were people that didn't even have children in school. That kind of thing. But living wage, everybody is on the same level on that no matter where you are, what area of the city you live in—if you're low-income and you're not making a living wage then you have a fight. You have a right to be there, because that concerns you. There's so many low-income people that's not being paid a minimum wage or a living wage. Because the wages that you make, you're not really living, you're just surviving. . . . [W]ith the living wage, any, almost any group was just willing to join in because, like I said, it affected so many people in so many areas.

In explaining why the campaign for a living wage developed such a large following, Margaret claimed that “everybody is on the same level on that.” She contrasted this to local community movements to clean-up abandoned buildings or improve public schools, which have, in her mind, a more limited appeal. But if the demand for a living wage appealed broadly to low-income workers, that same breadth threatened the campaign's cohesion precisely because its diverse constituency was also deeply divided, not only geographically, as she mentioned, but also by race, ethnicity, employment, and more. In seeing these potential divisions as the common ground occupied by “so many-low

income people,” Margaret came to understand the campaign’s diversity as its greatest source of solidarity.

For Margaret and many others, the issue was straight-forward: “if you’re low-income and you’re not making a living wage then you have a fight.” But this realization was less about some existing group of “low income” actors than about how participants in the campaign came to see differently their relationship to others. Seeing the need to fight for “everybody,” and having the will to do so for three long years, was not present from the beginning. Rather, it grew out of the experience of struggle through which Margaret came to identify with other low-income workers who were “not really living” but merely “just surviving” in the absence of a living wage ordinance.

Participation in mass protest radically challenged the disempowering individualism of everyday experience. This was articulated by Jill, a chronically under-employed service worker, who was drawn into the campaign as a rank-and-file member of the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless. Having later found employment as a home care worker, Jill explained how she felt “good to see all those people out there” at one of the campaign’s large rallies:

When you’re in situations, a lot of times you feel like you’re the only person that this is happening to. So when you get out there and you see this big crowd of people, and you go: “Wait a minute. It’s not me by myself.” That does kind of give you a little lift. ‘Cause a lot of people go through a depression when they going through this. By seeing that it’s hundreds of people going through the thing, you go: “Okay, well, I’m not alone.” It’s a good feeling to know you’re not alone. I mean, even though we all going through the same thing, at least I’m not by myself, you know, and that makes you feel better.

By taking part in mass protest, Jill overcame feelings of isolation and realized for the first time that “I’m not alone.” Standing shoulder to shoulder with other low-income workers

gave her “a little lift,” enabling her to see that she was one of “hundreds of people” facing many of the same challenges. This insight came only after experiencing for herself the transformative power of collective action.

Having experienced the isolation of homelessness, these newfound feelings of connectedness might be particularly salient for Jill and for those in similar circumstances. But participants from a variety of backgrounds experienced the campaign in this same way. Yvonne, for example, a retiree and rank-and-file ACORN member, articulated this same sense of connectedness when discussing the impact of the campaign on her life: “Sometimes you have a problem and you think, well, nobody have a problem but you. But I learned that other people have problems too.” Yvonne went from feeling alone in her problems to sensing the common plight she shared with others. She moved from a feeling of isolation toward a newfound sense of connection.

One of the most basic divisions of the living wage campaign was between those who belonged to unions versus community organizations, since there was historically substantial distrust between the two groups. Unions stereotypically have been viewed as catering to a whiter and more economically well-off working class while community groups have been seen as focusing on low-wage workers, the poor, and people of color. No matter the extent to which this is fiction or reality, this distinction has been construed not only as a matter of demographics but also of strategy and approach. The assumption is that unions are exclusively concerned with protecting the jobs (and job quality) that their members already enjoy. And community groups are seen as threatening to encroach

on that territory, since their unemployed members are potentially in a position to undercut wages and otherwise undermine union benefits and working conditions.<sup>5</sup>

The living wage campaign, however, broke down these apparent differences. Ron explained this process when discussing what, in his view, the campaign accomplished. He was a candy factory worker at the time of the campaign, but the shop where he worked was non-union and so he came to the campaign from a community perspective, through ACORN:

*R:* What I can say it accomplished for me: that unions can work the devil—unions can work the devil on issues with community organizations. I thought that was a little strange at first, but it was powerful. When community organizations can get together with unions—because who are in the unions? People who are in the community. So it made sense to work on other issues with the unions after that. . . .

*I:* And so what was it like bringing unions and community organizations together during the living wage campaign? It sounds like it was a new thing.

*R:* It was a new thing to me. It was a new thing to me. *Again, it made me realize that people in the unions live in the community. These are real live people that actually stay in the community!* It's not no secret organizations off in a place. It brought people to life to me. These are real people that face issues that we face in the community. It just put a human face to a union. That's the word I'm looking for—it put a human face to the union.

Through participation in the living wage campaign Ron came to see the union in the community and the community in the union.<sup>6</sup> He discovered an equivalency between the two groups—that they were essentially the same people. His narrative betrays how

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<sup>5</sup> Tensions often arise between the two groups on the topic of community benefit agreements, where cities negotiate with subsidized developers (or other businesses under which they have some control, such as casinos) about the terms under which they can operate. Although community groups generally support community benefit agreements, their members are often desperate for the creation of new jobs regardless of the wages and working conditions. They are often willing to settle for jobs that do not meet union standards in order to create employment opportunities for their members. Union members, on the other hand, enjoy long-standing union contracts and higher standards for wages, benefits, and working conditions. They see the creation of non-union, low-wage jobs as eroding their power and bargaining position, and are thus less amenable to compromising with developers.

<sup>6</sup> See Sciacchitano (1998) "Finding the Community in the Union and the Union in the Community: The First-Contract Campaign at Steeltech."

formidable the boundaries had been, such that even a common humanity had been obscured. But for Ron the campaign put a “human face” on previously distant union members. Rather than referencing a demarcated, narrow, or circumscribed group, the solidarity created during the living wage campaign encompassed a broader working-class, united by a common humanity, without reference to previously entrenched boundaries and divisions.

As unions and community groups came together, the campaign mobilized both employed and unemployed workers who acted in concert for the first time. The visible presence of homeless people in the campaign was especially transformative. Susan, who worked with ACORN’s housing services but had never had much contact with the city’s homeless population, came out of her first demonstration with the homeless deeply “moved” by the experience:

I remember we were at a park and it was a rally for the living wage campaign, and we had the Coalition for the Homeless there. And it was the first time that, personally, I had been involved with working with the Coalition for the Homeless on any campaign and I was amazed that—you know, you have preconceived notions about people that they don’t have anything, they don’t want anything—and you know, to see these people out there, trying to survive and trying to organize on the campaign around these issues—I was moved by that. And I had a different concept of people that are homeless.

Even though Susan was politically sensitive to housing issues and ideologically sympathetic to the homeless, she held “preconceived notions” that they had little in common. While still referring to them as “these people,” suggesting a certain degree of social distance, the demonstration gave her “a different concept of people that are homeless.” In struggling alongside the homeless, Susan came to realize that they were no different in “trying to survive and trying to organize on the campaign.” It was a lesson

that Susan learned, not from some abstract political ideology, but by participating in the highly charged atmosphere of collective action. For Susan, as for other participants, it was only in the context of collective action that the meaning of diversity was transformed. Instead of signifying observable differences, it came to represent a deeper commonality among the working poor and homeless.

The living wage campaign instilled in participants a greater empathy and understanding for the homeless, a group routinely ignored in conventional strategies for working-class empowerment. Homeless people are frequently unemployed or underemployed and thus thought to be more marginal and less stable, and to divide the working class rather than unite it. Those with such diverse life circumstances may indeed have gone their separate ways after each rally or protest—back to shelters or apartments or houses, back to jobs or back to looking for one, back to making ‘ends meet’ in a variety of ways. But in participants’ imagination they were, nevertheless, forever connected.

The campaign’s greatest success in drawing together previously disparate groups was its eventual bridging of the city’s racial divide. African Americans and Latinos in Chicago, two groups that figured prominently in the campaign, had been isolated by a long history of mutual tension, mistrust, and racism. Even for residents living just blocks away from each other, the two communities were experienced as worlds apart. Nevertheless, the living wage campaign broke new ground in building bridges between Chicago’s African American and Latino communities.

Before the living wage campaign, few connections had been forged between the two groups within ACORN, which had been primarily an African American organization.

ACORN had just begun to organize Latinos but there was little contact between the two groups even among members of the same organization. As described by two ACORN activists:

*R1:* At that particular time, Latinos had just started coming into ACORN and a lot of people still didn't know how Afro-Americans and Latinos gonna work together . . .

*I:* So before that there wasn't as much organizing between African American and Latino workers?

*R2:* No, we had just started organizing Latinos. They were mainly working on neighborhood issues. There was not a lot of contact between the two. The living wage campaign was the first time that the two came together.

*R1:* First time.

In appealing to both African Americans and Latinos for “the first time,” the living wage campaign broke new ground:

Just previous to living wage we had started organizing in Little Village [a Latino neighborhood]. We had worked on rats and garbage kinds of issues—local neighborhood issues—and this was one of the first issues where people came out of Little Village to a city-wide campaign. It was a huge issue for our Latino members; they came out in very large numbers. It made sense to them. It was *sueldos dignos*—salaries of dignity. And it really was the issue for the Latino community and for the African American community.

When the living wage campaign began there was a nascent strategic and geographical reorientation underway within ACORN with respect to organizing Little Village and the Latino community. But the long-term success of any joint mobilization between the two groups depended on the transformation of individual rank-and-file ACORN members. Ron, an African American, described how participating in a large multicultural living wage rally enabled him to realize that Latinos and African Americans “have the same issues”:

*R:* I remember having a conversation on the bus on the way back home [from a living wage rally] and say: “You know, we got the same issues.

*We have the same issues.” . . . That was the first time I had seen it come together. We knew the organizing had started in Little Village [the Latino neighborhood], but it really opened up. . . . And that was the first time that I’ve seen us coming together on the same issues . . .*

*I: What was this conversation you were having on the bus on the way home?*

*R: Well, basically the coming together of the communities, ‘cause really finding out that we do have the same issues . . . . Working together on that issue let us see that, okay, if we work together, we can really get some power and get some things done. *We can take over city hall! We started really thinking and started expanding our minds.**

The rally got Ron and others “really thinking and expanding our minds,” as they witnessed the power of working together in a multi-racial coalition to “get some power and get some things done.” The experience of collective action allowed Ron to imagine the kinds of battles they could wage, and possibly win, in the future with the two groups united. The power of this revelation was summed up by Ron for whom the living wage campaign “was the first time that I had seen the Latinos and Afro-Americans working on the same issue, which was powerful. That was just like awesome to me; so awesome.” The familiar narrative of ethnic diversity shifted from a story of competition and inevitable failure to one of unity and the possibility of victory.

Even deeply ingrained beliefs and prejudices could be overcome by the experience of collective struggle. An ACORN staffer recalled how Helen, a retired African American member, began to question the teachings of her church:

*It’s been phenomenal. . . . Helen’s church was teaching her that a sign that it was the end of the world was that so many Latinos were moving in and taking our jobs and they were going to take everything away from us. And Helen spoke up at a meeting and said, “You know what we need to do? We need to make sure that our Latino brothers and sisters get it that this is about them too.” It was a whole different issue, but she had moved so far in the course of this campaign that . . . she was going against what she was hearing in church.*

Former divisions rooted in ethnicity, language, culture, and neighborhood gave way to a more inclusive rhetoric that embraced “our Latino brothers and sisters.” And this solidaristic discourse was reciprocated, as expressed by Miguel, a young Latino participant:

It was a theme that affected both of our communities. It affected equally the Black person, the Hispanic person, and the immigrant. This made us understand that we have the same problems in our communities. But most of all, it taught us to be brothers and sisters with each other.

As campaign participants came to identify with one another, the meaning of difference itself was transformed from something that threatened to fragment and weaken the movement into a powerful demonstration of its inclusiveness and strength.

Although most of those who participated in the living wage campaign were initially unknown to one another, they emerged from the struggle with a powerful and enduring sense of community. In describing what the campaign accomplished, Karen, who belonged to the neighborhood-based group Organization of the NorthEast (ONE), said that “it brought [the] community together more as a community”:

Not just something you say, but a more tightly knit community that really was concerned about not only their own wellbeing but the wellbeing of the community and making it a viable community for all of the members, instead of everybody being so focused on their own household. You know what I’m saying? You get so involved in making it that you don’t really even know what’s going on in your community. So I think that brought people coming out to meetings. Yeah, you worked all day and you’re really really tired, but if you can go to work, you can come to this meeting too cause that’s the only way things are gonna change.

Participating in the struggle for a living wage challenged the routines of everyday life where people focus on their own household, job and family. The campaign drew participants out of their atomized routines and redirected their attention to the wellbeing of the community at large.

Unlike the strikers, who knew each other personally, living wage campaign participants struggled alongside other low-income workers who were initially unknown to them. In this way participants fashioned an “imagined community” of low-wage workers, feeling empathy and identity toward people with whom they had little or no prior connection. “It is *imagined*,” as Anderson writes in the context of national identity, “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1983:6). A similarly abstract understanding of community—where a communion is imagined between people who have never met—emerged among those who experienced the living wage campaign. This imagined community of low-wage workers was expressed by Jill, who invoked the popular notion that everyone in the world is connected by no more than “six degrees of separation.” As she put it, “we’re only six people away from knowing everybody else in the world, so somebody you know is going to be affected by not having a living wage.” Jill imagined a connection with others whom she had never met face-to-face but to whom, nevertheless, she felt connected. While this community was socially imagined, it was, as Karen argued, “not just something you say,” but was instead a real part of how participants in the living wage campaign came to think of themselves in relationship to low-wage workers in Chicago and elsewhere.

All of these expressions of solidarity came out of the lived experience of collective action. In one account after another, participants traced their own expanding awareness of group identity, and in particular their newfound connection to other low-income workers, to lessons learned while at rallies and marches, confronting politicians,

or attending other protest events. As they broke from daily routines and came together from their previously isolated corners of the city, formerly rigid social boundaries turned into their opposite, transforming diversity from a potentially crippling source of division to a cohesive force for unifying all low-income workers around a more inclusive understanding of solidarity.

#### IV. EXPANSIVE SOLIDARITIES AND PERPETUAL STRUGGLE

Participants emerged from the broad-based living wage campaign with feelings of solidarity for an imagined community of low-wage workers generally. Having developed an identity with fellow workers in this expansive group, they then faced the reality that most low-wage workers in the City of Chicago remained in need even after the ordinance was in place. The victory over an entrenched political machine, and a mayor who was perceived as having never lost in his life, was remarkable. And for those workers who were covered by the living wage ordinance it had a tangible, material effect on their everyday lives. Campaign organizers of course strove to increase wages for the greatest possible number of workers. But seeing a political opening after three long years, where there was a real chance of getting living wage legislation on the books for the first time, they were ready to negotiate with legislators over the final content of the ordinance. The inclusion of some specific jobs, like home care workers, was almost non-negotiable from the perspective of living wage supporters. But they were not able to get everything that they wanted, and after making some concessions only around 600 workers were covered by the final ordinance (Spielman 1998a).

The apparent limits of the victory, however, did not deter or frustrate future mobilization. Instead, participants were left wanting to continue the fight for the rights of low-wage workers even after the ordinance was passed. They were indeed proud of the campaign's success, but they were not satisfied. After mobilizing alongside such a wide variety of low-income groups, and witnessing how many fellow participants and Chicagoans remained in need even after the campaign's victory, they were compelled to see the struggle as ongoing.

In the aftermath of the living wage campaign participants displayed an acute sense that the victory was incomplete: "It is not a great victory, not a 100%. But it is a help." This sense of limited accomplishment was articulated by Karen when asked what had changed since the campaign:

I think people make more—I think some people, 'cause I don't think everybody got salary increases or hourly increases. I think more people got it than prior to that campaign. You know they say that every contractor that did business with the city would have to pay the livable wage. So it helped a lot of people. But a lot of people, nothing really changed. If you think about now—what is the minimum wage, \$5.50, \$5.75? What can you do with that? So in a way it was good, but we need to start it all over again. I mean, that's just disgraceful to say that people make \$5.75 an hour. So while, yeah, it was good, we got what we wanted, and for some people it made a difference. But when you look across the City of Chicago at all of the low-wage workers . . . . I'm happy that the living wage campaign passed finally and people did get a livable wage. I wish it had been across the board for everybody instead of just some.

Karen noted that some people did indeed make more because of the campaign's success, but emphasized that for a lot of people "nothing really changed." Invoking all of the low-wage workers in Chicago and speaking in terms of "everybody," her desire to continue the struggle—to "start it all over again"—was rooted in feelings of empathy and solidarity for all of those who still needed a raise. The sentiment was, in short: "Okay,

we won a living wage . . . . What about the other 3 million in this city? What are we going to do for them?”

But the solidarity that developed among living wage campaign participants went beyond an identification with those who stood next to them as they rallied and picketed and marched. And it went beyond the City of Chicago. Having developed an expansive solidarity that referenced a more abstract working-class group, participants were compelled to think about the need to improve workers’ lives on the other side of Chicago’s city limits as well, moving on to the county, state, and beyond:

I think it should be across country, not just state-wide, not just city-wide. I think it should be the whole entire country.

I figured it was the precedent of something—the beginning of something. I would like to see it affect the county, the federal government; I like to see it really affect in every area. Say: “hey, if they did this in the city, why don’t we”—and I think it’s happening. I think it trickled down, even though it started with the city—it should have started with the feds; that’s where it should have started. It started with the city and that’s like the bottom of the totem pole, so-to-speak. And then the state and then the federal.

The campaign inspired participants to reach beyond the “bottom of the totem pole” to think more ambitiously and grandly about the struggle for a living wage. Although the campaign itself was focused exclusively on the City of Chicago, the solidarities that it inspired subsequently underwrote a much broader vision of social change. An expansive solidarity led to an acute sense of how much needed to be done at other levels of government and in different locales—and to a commitment to working for social change in those disparate arenas. In this way an abstract, imagined community provided a more solid foundation for sustained mobilization than the concrete, face-to-face ties between the strikers.

Participants' emergent orientation toward perpetual struggle, however, was not merely predicated on a desire to tackle the living wage issue at different levels of government. It was also about taking on entirely new issues all together. The "feelings of brotherhood" that emerged between African Americans and Latinos during the living wage campaign, for example, became the basis for continued joint mobilization on issues that went beyond the living wage. As Jorge, a middle-aged Latino punch press operator, observed:

Hispanics and Afro-Americans picketed together and we considered ourselves as brothers and sisters because we shared the same way of thinking. A feeling of brotherhood was born there. . . . Since then, the brotherhood between Hispanics and Afro-Americans started. It started with the Living Wage Campaign, after that we continued [with other campaigns] . . .

Similarly, African Americans had come to empathize with the plight of Latino low-wage workers, and this led to subsequent joint mobilization as articulated by Ron:

I believe the Afro-Americans could feel what the Latinos, for the first time, was going through and we really realized how much the difference in the pay scale was for them versus us, doing the same kind of work. . . . So what we thought we was getting mistreated at, we found out even more so for them. So that was an issue that really made us, as members of ACORN, come together on more issues. . . . Hey, you mess with our brother and our sister, you mess with us. So we going to actions together.

Discovering what Latinos were "going through" and realizing that they were underpaid and "getting mistreated" worse than African Americans, Ron articulated an emerging sense of interracial solidarity that united all low-wage workers around the demand for a living wage and more. He continued by discussing how the two groups subsequently organized together around "predatorial lending," an issue that affected both communities. Ron's understanding of solidarity, like Jorge's, was not ephemeral, felt only in the heat of the moment of protest. Rather, it provided a lasting bond that allowed African Americans

and Latinos to coalesce around other issues after the original campaign was over. Instead of diversity leading to division and fragmentation, in the context of collective action it sustained a long-term commitment to joint struggle.

Discovering the mistreatment that others suffered through, African Americans and Latinos forged new bonds that led them to come together on issues beyond the living wage. Some of these issues, like “predatory lending,” affected both communities, but others did not. The commitment to continued struggle, then, sprung from participants’ emerging identification with workers whose problems and concerns were different from their own. Newfound solidarities opened their eyes to an array of problems affecting a variety of working-class groups that they had previously been blind to—and a desire to address them.

Since the campaign African Americans, for example, have rallied around Latino issues such as immigration rights, drivers’ licenses for immigrants, and in protest of social security “no match” letters (meant to deter employers from hiring immigrants). Jorge, for example, described a school campaign that would affect primarily the Latino community but that was won because of the support of their African American “brothers and sisters.” Building on “a bridge between the two races,” Miguel described how the solidarity that was forged during the living wage campaign later led to joint mobilization around issues that directly affected only Latinos:

Now you can see that the driver’s license campaign is taking place. Thousands of Afro-Americans came for this campaign. Two thousand Afro-Americans came in support of the amnesty program. This program did not have anything to do with them, but they came just the same to support us. “United we stand,” that’s the message we wanted to send.

Such selfless acts of interracial solidarity demonstrate just how deeply and permanently participants can be transformed by collective action. And in the post-9/11 era when many of these later mobilizations took place, when issues of race and immigration have been particularly charged, the durability of the solidaristic bonds forged in struggle is all the more noteworthy.

Since the living wage campaign, the two groups have worked together on a regular basis, both through ACORN, the campaign's lead organization, and in Chicago as a whole. Instead of ethnic diversity leading to division and fragmentation, it led to a long-term commitment to joint struggle. Through an identification with previously distant workers from other neighborhoods and backgrounds, living wage campaign participants discovered and embraced new routes of activism and struggle.

As we will see in Chapter 4, living wage campaign participants very much reveled in their victory, and focused on winning and the great achievements of the campaign. It is something of a puzzle, then, why at the same time they saw their victory as partial and incomplete and the struggle as ongoing. Only through an understanding of the expansive solidarity engendered by the campaign does this apparent contradiction make sense. This desire to continue the struggle did not emerge simply because of the fact that there were additional people who needed a raise. It came about, more profoundly, because living wage campaign participants came to identify with people who were previously unknown to them, became consequently concerned with social problems they had previously never encountered, and felt compelled to solve them.

Early scholars of collective behavior focused on the role of grievances in social protest (for example see Turner and Killian 1972 and Smelser 1963), but social

movement theory has largely moved beyond a focus on perceived grievances and relative deprivation, questioning the importance of their role in social protest (Ennis and Schreuer 1987). At the same time, some strands of social movement theory questioned the original formulation by suggesting that it is a *lack* of deprivation that underwrites mobilization. Resource mobilization and new social movement perspectives emphasized the middle-class base of many social movements and the substantial resources they require (Buechler 1995:454; McCarthy and Zald 1977). In a similar vein, labor mobilization tends to be supported when unemployment is low, rather than when there is higher unemployment, widespread insecurity, and substantially greater deprivation. Taken together, there appears to be something of a U-shaped curve with respect to the relationship between deprivation and protest.

Grievances have a role in this study, but not as traditionally conceptualized. The question of grievances has traditionally been addressed almost exclusively in terms of the extent of deprivation experienced by potential social movement recruits, or at least the extent of deprivation relative to others. This study, however, uncovers how deprivation and grievances can fit into protest in an entirely different way: not so much through the grievances of social movement recruits themselves, but with respect to how recruits experience and understand the deprivation of others.

In both of the cases in this study mobilization came with significant victories, while at the same time leaving much to be done. In the Chicago case, this is not only because the ordinance was restricted to the employees of city contractors in particular job categories, but also because the expense of living in the city meant that \$7.60 an hour—the wage stipulated in the 1998 ordinance—could certainly stand to be improved upon.

Ongoing increases in the cost of living, moreover, meant that the guaranteed living wage was in essence being reduced by the day.<sup>7</sup>

The resolution to the auto strike could likewise be seen as partial and incomplete. Although the strikers had secured some basic protections and material security through a union contract, the industry was very competitive and this affected everyday life on the factory floor. Management was continually “rebalancing” the assembly line: attempting to get more work done using fewer people by combining job stations in order to reduce the workforce. This created a certain level of job insecurity for workers with the least seniority, and it amounted to an ongoing speedup with concomitant health and safety problems. It was not at all unusual for workers to find themselves on “light duty” because of injury. The autoworkers thus encountered ongoing problems with respect to working conditions generally and safety specifically that demanded constant attention even with a contract in place. In short, both the autoworkers and living wage campaign participants made significant progress toward solving their problems through collective action, but nevertheless faced ongoing challenges with the state of their working-class jobs. From this vantage point, participants in each case might have been either inclined to rest on their laurels or poised to continue the struggle.

In terms of being amenable to ongoing mobilization, the crucial difference between the cases was thus not the extent of deprivation per se, or whether or not there were ongoing grievances that needed to be addressed. Instead, the different orientations

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<sup>7</sup> In November of 2002 the Chicago City Council passed an increase in the living wage to bring it up to \$9.05 an hour, but this time a cost of living index was attached to the bill in order to account for inflation. Some of the players from the first campaign were indeed involved in pushing this through, but the level of mobilization was minimal compared to the late 1990’s. Having broken down some barriers and demonstrated an ability to exert substantial grassroots muscle the first time around, much less effort was required to get legislation passed in 2002.

toward perpetual struggle related to where participants' solidarities lay and who was included in their understandings of deprivation—because this is what shaped their vision of and commitment to social change. Somewhat counter intuitively, it was not the more immediate and acutely felt grievances of the strikers that inspired a commitment to perpetual struggle. Instead, the living wage campaign demonstrates the importance of grievances that are more distant and abstract, felt through identification with others instead of through personal, daily experiences. An identification with the grievances of those outside of one's immediate social network—be it for those who need a living wage in a distant state, or those who have unique social problems in your own city—was more radicalizing, since it underwrote a broader political vision and a commitment to social change.

Although the strike engendered more cohesion among co-workers, such a circumscribed solidarity failed to inspire the kind of expansive vision that compelled living wage activists toward continual struggle. When Debbie, who had articulated how “you just want to go to work, get your job done, and go home,” was asked a question about continued protest post-strike she replied: “When you're at work for so long, for so many hours, you have little family time. It takes a lot of energy out of you. You have to really believe in it.” Debbie articulated how the mundane yet immediate demands of work and family, and the responsibilities of everyday life, pose obstacles to mobilization. And she recognized that ongoing struggle requires one to surpass such routines. It requires a more expansive vision, and a commitment to a cause that compels ordinary people to move beyond the immediate circumstances of daily life to act on something that they “really believe in.”

## V. REDRAWING BOUNDARIES FROM BELOW

Both of the cases examined here—a circumscribed strike and a broad-based community mobilization—illustrate the transformative power of collective action: the rank-and-file in both instances emerged from their experience with a stronger identification with others. But collective action did not have uniform ideational consequences. In examining the character of the solidarities that emerged from both cases of collective action, these findings demonstrate how different kinds of mobilization led to contrasting understandings of solidarity.

The auto strikers' workplace-based action led to a circumscribed understanding of class that referenced only their co-workers at the same plant. In contrast, participants in the living wage campaign—having attended protests, rallies, and other events during the city-wide mobilization—developed an empathy for low-wage workers generally. As disparate and far-flung groups from across the city came together in common cause, workers forged new bonds that crossed previously formidable demographic cleavages as well as differences in employment sector and status. Lacking the concrete connection of the strikers who worked side-by-side each day on the factory floor, living wage campaign participants instead identified with an imagined community encompassing all low-wage workers.

The familiar face-to-face ties between the strikers yielded a solidarity that was concrete yet circumscribed. In contrast, the living wage campaign participants, who mobilized alongside people with whom they had no prior connection, conceived of themselves as members of an imagined community that was abstract yet highly inclusive.

In this way, understandings of class solidarity that were built on an imaginary foundation proved to be far more expansive than those erected on the familiar brick and mortar of face-to-face interactions.

This imagined community was built, ironically, on the diversity of Chicago's low-income working class. Contrary to extant theorizing on labor solidarity, diversity was transformed by collective action into its opposite: a vehicle for expanding the boundaries of class awareness. This outcome depended on a grassroots mobilizing strategy that drew large numbers of supporters out of their everyday lives and into a mass social struggle. Diversity, as most accounts emphasize, can of course still be an impediment to collective action, particularly when movements first organize. But, if the Chicago case is any guide, the experience of struggle can also transform diversity into a potent source of solidarity that can actually help to support ongoing mobilization.

Coalitional organizing is often fleeting. Based more on strategy than solidarity, it is often assumed that coalitions, once united, will subsequently dissolve and that members will go their separate ways. 'Strange bedfellows' may come together in a moment of crisis, or may find a single issue over which they have common ground, but there is often little expectation of ongoing unity. As articulated in Brecher and Costello's classic work on the subject, labor-community coalitions "do not demand agreement on a single 'line' or even a common definition of reality. They depend on a political culture which recognizes that meanings will vary for different groups and which accepts the necessity at times to 'agree to disagree'" (Brecher and Costello 1990:333, also see 338). In "agreeing to disagree," the coalition model is one of groups tenuously held together for practical purposes. Such marriages of convenience are prone to falling apart when the

immediate issue or crisis is resolved. Coalitions, in short, are not the iconic incubators of solidarity and perpetual struggle.

This study, however, suggests that such dynamics may indeed pertain for coalitions that coalesce at the top, where leaders and staff convene to sign on to common agendas. But the picture may look quite different for those coalitions that see grassroots collective action. Only when coalitions are mobilized from below can we expect to see findings like those uncovered here, where coalitions engender a deeper sense of empathy and identity among previously disparate groups.

All things being equal, perhaps the workplace is the more likely font of class identity. Walking through the routines of daily life, people meet on the job as fellow workers while encountering each other in the community through church, through civic groups, and in neighborhoods that are racially, ethnically, and linguistically distinct. Outside the workplace people may commune in networks both formal and informal as retired people, university students, war veterans, speakers of Spanish or Chinese or Portuguese, immigrants, asylum seekers, Christians or Jews or Muslims, mothers or fathers, bowling champions or little league coaches—but not as workers or class actors. During “moments of madness” (Zolberg 1972), however, collective action has the potential to turn such patterns upside down. In breaking from usual routines, the dynamics of workplace and community are inverted. Where the workplace would usually be considered the staging ground for working-class formation, collective action in such a context serves to enforce the boundaries surrounding those laboring under common conditions. And, conversely, the potent force of collective action has the ability to transform an otherwise fragmented community group into one of unity. In this study,

narrowly focused collective action curtailed the solidarity of the supposed models of proletarian consciousness while broad-based collective action trumped the supposed dynamics of fragmentation and division.

The importance of this unique relationship between diversity, solidarity, and collective action pertains not only to the question of class formation but also to citizenship. In the liberal tradition, universal equality before the law is granted to individual citizens. But this supposedly inclusive formulation masks its essential exclusivity since the specific needs of particular groups are subjugated to a supposed universal subject with generic rights. Since this ‘universal subject’ serves to strip the citizenry of their particular identities, backgrounds, and communities, theorists of citizenship and democracy have put forward alternative models. With Kymlicka’s (1995) ideal of multicultural citizenship and “polyethnicity,” Taylor’s notion of “deep diversity” (see Redhead 2002), and Young’s (1989) “group differentiated” citizenship, for example, citizenship is conceptualized in such a way that it recognizes and supports, rather than supersedes, the particulars of one’s identity, ethnic or otherwise.

Such ideals are exemplified by efforts to advocate indigenous constitutional rights and to legislate affirmative action, among others, but they have been incorporated into legal structures in only a limited, piecemeal fashion. And while the focus of these efforts has been on congressional chambers, judicial benches, and policy halls, here we can see how such ideals might operate more subjectively on the ground. The living wage case offers an example of how these alternative discourses of citizenship can emerge from below, through mobilization in the political sphere, rather than how they look when legislated from above. Campaign participants in Chicago were not reacting to a formal

legal mandate, but were experiencing the generative power of bottom-up processes of political mobilization.

Living wage campaign participants' newfound solidarity challenged traditional boundaries of citizenship through its inclusion of immigrants—documented and undocumented alike. And it was manifested in consequent commitments to mobilize around such issues as drivers' licenses for immigrants, employment concerns around “no match” letters, and immigrant amnesty. It encompassed a vision of “everybody” that referenced an inclusive humanity. The crucial point, however, is that this was not an “everybody” where difference was subordinated or disparaged. Rather than operating in opposition to one another, identity and difference served as two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, difference was used to underscore commonality and an inclusive humanity. Conversely, an identity with others led to empathy for the particulars of their plight. In this way solidarity proved to hold a double meaning—simultaneously recognizing differences and common ground. Solidarity and difference not only coexisted, but supported, and were integral to, one another.

In addition to advancing our understanding of how collective action shaped social movement actors in the strike and the living wage campaign, the results of this study also challenge on a number of fronts reigning theories of class formation and mobilization more generally. First, they run contrary to the conventional argument linking solidarity and class consciousness to worker homogeneity and disruptive capacities at the point of production. Instead, these findings suggest that this linkage is mediated by the lived experience of collective action. Workplace-based mobilization can—as in the strike case—truncate understandings of class and limit commitments to the working class

generally. Conversely, and contrary to the conventional view, a broad-based community mobilization that draws together highly disparate groups who pursue their struggle far removed from the factory floor can—as Chicago’s living wage campaign demonstrates—engender a deep and expansive conception of working-class solidarity.

Second, these results also challenge the large body of research that sees diversity—whether along the lines of race, gender, ethnicity, nation, skill, or employment status—as an almost insurmountable obstacle for group solidarity. Standard claims that the community, riven by multiple interests and competing identities, undermines working-class solidarity finds no support here. Contrary to this conventional view, the data demonstrate that the diversity of the living wage campaign was not an obstacle to be overcome but was—when experienced in the context of collective action—a source of the very kind of solidarity it is assumed to preclude. Those who participated in this heterogeneous mobilization emerged with a robust sense of solidarity, enabling them to imagine belonging to a highly inclusive working class that crossed entrenched boundaries of race, ethnicity, and employment status. Challenging the familiar axiom that diversity undermines group cohesion, these findings suggest that the experience of participating in a broad and diverse mobilization can sometimes lead to a more expansive awareness of solidarity and group identification. If homogeneous groups are often easier to mobilize, it appears that more diverse constituencies, once activated, have the greatest potential for forging wider solidarities.

Third, these findings offer a corrective to social movement theorists who prioritize concrete networks—“microstructures” (Snow et al. 1980), the “micromobilization context” (McAdam 1988b), or neighborhood social ties (Gould

1993)—as the building blocks of activism. Although the micromobilization context may be crucial to recruiting people to activism in the first place, as these studies demonstrate, it may not be sufficient to sustain a commitment to struggle over the long haul. The analysis here suggests that it takes not only pre-existing concrete social ties, but an imaginative leap of solidarity to cultivate a perpetual struggle orientation. This more expansive solidarity, where workers commit to the working class generally instead of to a more narrow or circumscribed group, leads workers to engage in continual struggle for those who remain in need. In this way, for the workers in this study, imaginary and ideological bonds were more profound than concrete and material ones.

More generally, these findings bear on the large and growing body of interdisciplinary scholarship on social boundaries (Lamont and Molnar 2002). Much of this research, particularly those studies that focus on social class (e.g. Parkin 1979; Bourdieu 1984; Lamont 2000), properly draws attention to the importance of ongoing boundary-work in reproducing, both culturally and materially, the identity and structure of collectivities. This study complements and adds to this research agenda by advancing an “eventful” perspective for understanding how symbolic boundaries are maintained, challenged and renegotiated. Focusing on a particular class of events, they demonstrate that participation in mass social struggles can provide a powerful mechanism for reinterpreting the meaning of difference, and for transforming understandings of identity as well as relationships more generally to other actors.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Becoming an Activist: Emotions and the Psychological Benefits of Mobilization

It is entirely possible to identify with others without committing to long-term struggle on their behalf. An expansive, inclusive class-based solidarity is just one pillar of living wage campaign participants' orientation toward perpetual struggle. In addition to their developing identification with other workers, campaign participants' long-term commitment to struggle was also based on more personal, internal transformations as they came to identify as activists, thus folding struggle into the fabric of their lives.

The development of an activist identity through participation in collective action has been observed before. Klandermans summarizes the literature on the topic:

Politically, participants remain more active than non-participants for the rest of their lives. McAdam (1989) coins the term of 'the self-perpetuating quality of individual activism' a concept very much similar to what I referred to as the spiral of commitment and participation. . . . If activism, in other words, has any biographical consequences it is in the construction of a new identity, contentious identity in Tilly's (1996) words or activist identity in those of Kelly and Breinlinger (1996). (1997:111)

Activism, in short, begets more activism. What might begin as an obligatory commitment to a friend to attend a single protest develops into a more personal attachment to the cause. After being pulled in by social networks or circumstance, the experience of collective action has the potential to inspire a much deeper commitment.

Collective action, however, does not have uniform consequences such that the “spiral of commitment” and the extent of personal transformation will vary. Why does collective action inspire increased commitment in some cases but not others? What is the specific mechanism, or the specific feature of collective action, that underwrites an activist identity? Why does it develop in living wage campaign participants but not in the auto strikers? An activist identity sprung, I will argue, not from the living wage campaign’s diverse constituency explored in the preceding chapter, but out of its emotional tenor.

## I. EMOTIONS IN SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

Social movement scholars, most prominently Goodwin and Jasper (2004), have critiqued the dominant paradigm of recent decades, as manifested in resource mobilization and political process theory, that emphasizes rational, purposive, and strategic action. They have called for, as in the title of one piece, “bringing emotions back into the study of social movements” (Gould 2004; also see Aminzade and Mcadam 2001; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001a; Groves 1995). Even the recent “cultural turn” in social movement theory, with a focus on framing and collective identity, has exhibited a cognitive bias (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2000; Jasper 1998).

Emotions were placed squarely at the center of social movement theory in the early collective behavior school. They were, however, conceptualized as deviant and irrational organic states, rather than culturally mediated and emergent in social interaction. In their recent call for the reinsertion of emotions into social movement research, scholars have questioned these negative connotations along with the

problematic juxtaposition of emotion versus rationality (Aminzade and Mcadam 2001; Calhoun 2001; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2000 and 2001b).

But scholars are still at the point of struggling for the mere inclusion of emotions in research on protest and explicating the largely unrecognized emotional underpinnings of existing concepts in social movement theory (Goodwin et al. 2001b; Jasper 1998). While there has been much discussion of how the theme applies to social movements generally, questions remain regarding how social movements vary in terms of their emotional tenor, or the extent to which they are emotional at all. The need for comparative studies on the role of emotions in social movements has been recently recognized by Polletta and Amenta (2001) and also by Aminzade and McAdam (2001).<sup>1</sup> Here I make inroads into such a research agenda by arguing that emotion and instrumentality do indeed map onto particular kinds of collective action in patterned ways, and by exploring the implications of this distinction. I likewise examine how specific kinds of emotions attach to particular collective action forms and what the consequences are for participants.

Moving beyond a call for the blanket inclusion of emotions in research, I seek to highlight how social movements vary in terms of the extent to which emotion or instrumentality is in the foreground. Emotion will be more or less relevant to different kinds of collective action, so that some forms of protest will exhibit more instrumental traits while others will be more expressive. This is not to reproduce an emotion-rationality dichotomy since the two can easily coexist and reinforce one another.

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<sup>1</sup> Aminzade and McAdam (2001) state: "Further research should shed light on whether movements with different emphases (for example, identity building or policy change) have different emotional climates and whether there is a relationship between appeals to particular emotions and particular movements, movement cultures, or collective action repertoires" (47).

Moreover, as will become apparent below, it is as important to recognize not just the extent of emotionality (its presence or absence) but the different kinds of emotion at play in different contexts.

Nevertheless, emotion will have a greater role in some forms of collective action than in others. Considering instrumental and emotional collective action as ideal-typical constructs, the question becomes: What are the consequences of more instrumental versus expressive protest? How are people differentially affected by participation in mobilizations that exhibits these traits? I argue that strikers, employing a more instrumental mode of action, saw the consequences of collective action primarily in terms of improvements in material compensation and working conditions. Once their material needs were taken care of, they were not compelled to continue the struggle. This is in contrast to the affective bonds of more broad-based mobilizations, where peoples' ties to each other are less instrumental and where victory does not secure direct material gain for all (or even a majority of) participants. I argue that the more expressive living wage campaign allowed participants to experience the benefits of collective action in psychological rather than material terms. Living wage campaign participants developed an activist identity which underwrote a long-term commitment to class struggle that was absent among strikers who shared bonds of common material interest.

## II. INSTRUMENTALITY AND EMOTION IN COLLECTIVE ACTION

The difference between the two cases cannot be explained by their stated goals since, unlike post-materialist 'new' social movements, both mobilizations were looking to gain material improvements for low-wage workers. But they employed different

logics of collective action in pursuit of this same objective, which lead participants' experience to diverge.

In the economic logic of collective action, where a circumscribed group of workers targets a particular worksite or company, mobilization is generally limited to laborers who are directly employed. It thus mobilizes those who stand to benefit most immediately from collective action instead of reaching beyond the walls of the workplace. This promotes a more instrumental mode of action where mobilization is based on common material interests.

Reflecting this economic logic of action, the wider community failed to mobilize around the walkout at Auto Parts Inc. While some supporters joined employees on the picket line, they were primarily drawn from the same local union as the strikers and from the closely-related customer shop where the parts used to be manufactured before being outsourced. And so the picket line was filled with those who had a direct interest in the strike's outcome. Since the unionization of subcontractors has a direct impact on workers' welfare—and paychecks—in the larger assembly shops, even the supporters had an economic interest in the strike. Lacking any broad-based community support, workers' motivations for participating in the strike had a powerful instrumental quality, since the strike was limited to those who were directly connected to this particular workplace.

Moreover, organizers advocated strike participation in terms of a very practical, rational argument. In order to convince workers to stay on the picket line instead of going to work, organizers mobilized around the idea that even a very short walkout would enable workers to secure a union contract and make significant gains in material

compensation and working conditions. Organizers encountered workers at the plant entrance on the first day of the strike, pleading with them to give it just one day and assuring them that only a minimal investment was required in order to achieve rapid victory. According to Kim, who had a bird's-eye view of the union and its strategies as a staff person coming out of the organization's international headquarters to assist with the strike:

We thought it would last one day . . . . So we were talking to workers about: "Just strike for one day. Just strike for one day. You can win in one day." And then, the second day it was like: "One more day. Just strike for one more day. You can win."

Similarly, the local leaders who worked at the shop recounted the use of this same frame.

Larry, a second shifter who had been involved in the organizing drive, described emphasizing the limited commitment required for the walkout's success:

On the day of the strike, people were coming in and crossing the picket line. And my sales pitch to them coming in was: "give it one day, give it one day, it could be over in one day, give it one day."

This framing reflects the instrumental quality of the economic logic of collective action that characterized the auto strike. Instead of making moral appeals about the justice or fairness of the cause, organizers' "sales pitch" honed in on a more practical point about autoworkers' ability to achieve victory in short order. Only in situations where participants have a direct interest in the outcome of mobilization does it make sense for such a cost-benefit calculation to figure so prominently in organizers' discourse.

All of the strikers benefited from union recognition and consequent contract gains. In more broad-based movements, however, it is rarely the case that all participants share equally in the benefits of victory when the movement's goals are achieved. Among such diverse constituencies, it is generally the case that some participants fight on behalf

of others. Some participants benefit more directly from movement success, while others receive no direct benefits whatsoever. Such mobilizations, following a political logic of collective action, are less clearly instrumental, exhibiting instead a more emotional basis for mobilization.

Although the Chicago living wage campaign succeeded in mobilizing a broad group of people who were in need of a living wage, the profound diversity of the campaign meant that the vast majority of participants would not in the end be directly affected by the new ordinance, which covered only the employees of city contractors. The campaign mobilized thousands for what was a great victory over entrenched political power. Nevertheless, in the end only some 600 workers would see a raise in their paychecks (Spielman 1998a). And most of the 600 were not directly involved in the campaign. In short, since only a small minority of campaign participants benefited materially from the new law, the mobilization occurred not on an instrumental but, rather, expressive basis.

The nature of SEIU's involvement in the campaign is instructive. Even among home care workers, one of the campaign's main constituencies, only a small percentage would potentially be covered by the new law since most worked for public entities or private companies that would remain unaffected. According to Tom, a long-time SEIU staffer: As the campaign commenced in 1995, "we probably had 10-12,000 members and only about 500 of them were covered under these contracts with the private companies who would have benefited from the living wage. The vast majority of our folks would not." The home care workers' union nevertheless put all of its weight behind the

ordinance, mobilizing members who worked for all kinds of employers, not just those who worked for city contractors.

Many participants were outside the active labor force all together—the unemployed, retired, homemakers—and so had no expectation whatsoever that they would personally enjoy the material benefits of a living wage ordinance. For those who were employed there was uncertainty about which specific jobs would be covered by the ordinance until the very end. Although some jobs were targeted by activists for inclusion in any new legislation, such as those filled by SEIU’s home care workers, there was no way of knowing ahead of time which specific job categories would be included after negotiations with the city council. Such circumstances made the connection between mobilization and material gain even less direct.

With more broad-based collective action, where participants are less directly affected by victory, it is untenable for organizers to motivate participation using the kind of simple cost-benefit calculation used in the auto strike. This limitation becomes apparent in Lopez’ (2004) study of a series of union campaigns spearheaded by the SEIU in Pennsylvania during the late 1990s. He contrasts, for example, two different struggles waged by public sector nursing home workers in Pittsburgh. The first was an anti-privatization campaign that succeeded in mobilizing workers and the community alike. This campaign was framed in moral, humanitarian, and social justice terms, since the well being of nursing home residents was presumed to be at stake. In Lopez’ view, it was this moralistic, social justice frame that led to the mobilization of “external” community constituencies beyond the nursing home workers themselves (104,125). He contrasts this action with a later contract campaign that was viewed more narrowly as a “union” issue

instead of being couched in social justice terms. This second campaign did not succeed in mobilizing community allies. Lopez likewise shows how SEIU's struggle with a giant for-profit nursing home chain (this time over the plight of 400 illegally replaced workers) relied on appeals to social justice to support more broad-based community involvement in a shop floor struggle (156,165). In short, as Lopez' cases demonstrate, broad-based organizing depends on moralistic appeals to social justice instead of material, instrumental, or self-interested tropes.

While organizers at the auto shop picket line were engaging in such practical calculations about the benefits gained through mobilization, organizers in Chicago instead used the personal stories of low-wage workers who spoke out about the desperation of living in the City of Chicago while making minimum wage.<sup>2</sup> A home care worker spoke about her experience as a low-wage worker during the campaign's "Tour of the Real Chicago":

. . . we could hardly survive. It was tough. I had to take in a boarder into my home to be able to pay the rent. I was working full-time but it wasn't enough to make it. I had to take another job too, working 3 nights a week babysitting. I'd get home at 1:00 in the morning and then struggle to get up a few hours later to go take care of my clients. That was the only way I made it. And still I could hardly make ends meet. I had to pay my rent and then the lights and gas, plus we had to eat. It was a struggle just to get from month to month and keep the phone from getting cut off. . . . it wasn't easy.

Such stories of people barely able to survive on low-wage work were regularly heard at living wage campaign events, from city council meetings to large rallies.<sup>3</sup> And the

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<sup>2</sup> Polletta's (2006) *It Was Like A Fever* includes an examination of those times when narrative and storytelling have failed to be beneficial for disadvantaged groups. But in her study this seems to occur most often when narratives are being interpreted by elites or the public at large. Here I explore how the stories of low-wage workers impact low-wage workers themselves.

<sup>3</sup> "The Living Wage Tour: A Tour of the Real Chicago" was organized for delegates of the Democratic National Convention (August 28, 1996). This kind of testimony was also heard, for example, at a city council Finance Committee hearing on July 16, 1996. (Such hearings weren't just bureaucratic exercises, but mobilizing

narratives made it into the pages of the city's major newspapers, which often featured the home care workers who were central to the campaign (see, for example, Stewart 1996 and White 1996).

In the context of such a broad-based campaign it was not possible to mobilize based on sheer self-interest. Instead, it was the emotional stories of others' suffering that galvanized participants. The stories of hardship had a powerful and lasting impact. They were meaningful and compelling. They were a prominent part of interview testimony, and were frequently invoked in descriptions of the campaign:

When people got up and told their stories about having to buy transportation to get back and forth for 2 weeks, but that meant they couldn't eat 2 or 3 days out of the week, they was hungry. I mean, come on now. That's something that was so concrete and so meaningful that it made the difference. So there is power in telling your story. Nobody can tell your story like you can. . . . When they got to go to city hall and each person got up and said how they were being impacted by minimum wages—you know, it was powerful.

Such stories were often relayed during interviews: people getting up and going to work every day who could not meet their basic necessities; people who could not pay their bills because they had to buy food; people having to choose between paying their bills and buying shoes for their kids; working people who became homeless because they could not pay the rent with minimum wage jobs; home care workers who were taking care of the sick and elderly day in and day out and who were struggling to keep a roof over their own head.

Responding to these moving accounts, campaign participants rallied around a sense of moral outrage. In Margaret's testimony, for example, her narrative about the

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tools, since they were often well attended by living wage protestors, as this one was.) And it was integral to the campaign's "citywide speakouts" for a living wage, held throughout the city in June and July of 1997.

hardships of low-wage work was immediately followed by statements about “justice” and “equality”:

Everybody knows that everyone deserves a living wage. And all we have to do is start making our statements and talking about what the politicians are making and how we always holding the sick and can barely feed our families. But the jobs that we have and the work that we do, the long hours that we put in—we are never compensated for that, not in its entirety. So, everybody see the cause. *They see it as a cause for justice; we’re fighting for equality.* (emphasis mine)

These stories of hardship served to rally people around the living wage cause. But the more important point for our purposes here is what this meant for the experience of participating in the campaign—that is, that it was imbued with particular kind of moral and emotional tone.

The moral overtones of the campaign were similarly expressed in the use of corporate “poster children” which put a “face” on the problem. One major rally, for example, was in support of Vienna Beef, which was elevated as a model corporate citizen, providing living wages and decent benefits to a unionized workforce. The company, however, was threatened by proposed changes in city zoning. On the other end of the spectrum, the campaign identified Farley Candy as a sweatshop paying minimum wages while receiving \$3 million in public subsidies, and targeted Whole Foods as another less-than-model corporate citizen seeking subsidies. As with the personal testimonials, stories of corporate malfeasance imbued the campaign with a sense of right and wrong, of justice and injustice, and concomitant anger. Ron, for example, discussed how Farley was paying “minimum wage with no benefits, and found out the city was giving Farley money to do this—become an *outrage* to us.”

Some kind of rational calculation will always figure into protest. Even the living wage campaign had, at minimum, instrumental, materialist goals. Conversely, collective action always entails an emotional aspect, and there were certainly strong emotions in play at the height of the strike confrontation, despite its instrumental underpinnings. Since instrumentality and emotion are simultaneously at play in any protest event, it is important to think of the two cases examined here in terms of which was in the foreground of participants' experience: an instrumental logic dominated the auto strike, while the living wage campaign was infused with affective bonds and moral outrage.

The crucial point is that these differences were not simply a matter of leadership discourse or tactics, but that they are inherent in the logics of collective action themselves. Leaders can successfully employ a narrow instrumentalist ideology only in a group where everyone benefits from collective action. Conversely, such instrumentalism would not have made sense in the context of the living wage campaign where most people had no hope of benefiting directly from mobilization. Organizing such a broad-based constituency instead requires emotional and moral appeals. Those not benefiting directly from mobilization must become outraged at injustice and moved to do what is "right" for others. The contrasting emotional tenor of the two cases thus reflects not random differences in leadership styles, but patterned differences between the economic and political logics of collective action. Leadership ideology and organizers' discourse is thus shaped and limited by these structural constraints. They reflect, and support, the kind of protest employed.

### III. REACTIVE VERSUS AFFECTIVE EMOTIONS

At the same time we can better understand the differences between these two cases by conceptualizing the specific kinds of emotions involved in each. Jasper (1997; 1998) has juxtaposed “reactive,” transitory emotions with more stable “affective” feeling states. The former are immediate responses to events and information while the latter are attached to enduring social bonds and moral commitments.<sup>4</sup> To elaborate on these ideas I conceptualize the two kinds of emotion as attaching to the economic and political logics of collective action in a patterned way. Long-term and broad-based political mobilization, on the one hand, requires enduring affective emotions. Because participants mobilize on behalf of others, a moral vision is required in lieu of self-interest. Conversely, since instrumental self-interest undergirds the economic logic of action, these kinds of affective emotions are not required.

Although emotions ran high on the picket line—excitement, anxiety, fear, joy—they were the reactive and transitory kind which typify the economic logic of collective action. When asked how the strike made them feel, participants responded with descriptions of these intense, reactive emotions:

I thought it was a thrill. . . . It was thrilling.

I was scared. I was nervous. . . . I felt very excited about it.

Some people were anxious . . . Some people were really anxious.

These are not emotions that endure over long periods, but instead are the kind that come and go in a matter of days, hours, or even minutes.

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<sup>4</sup> Also see Goodwin et al. (2001b) who conceptualize the duration of emotions in a way that maps onto Jasper’s distinction.

The strikers referred to “adrenaline” when describing what it was like being on the picket line:

So my adrenaline that morning was unreal. I mean, I rolled down my window and I was just shouting for joy.

I had a rush because of the adrenaline that was going through me . . . so it was like: “man, this is a rush”—um, scary.

Coming in a “rush,” the feelings associated with adrenaline cannot be maintained over the long haul. Larry described how he felt an adrenaline rush during the strike and for a couple days after, at which point he returned to normal:

The stress level was very high . . . And it was just pure adrenalin. I’ve never experienced that anytime in my life and I don’t know if I ever will. I’ve never gone skydiving before but I’m sure it’s somewhere out in that stress level line. . . . The stress level and the adrenalin level didn’t decrease the whole time. It was up there. It took even a couple days after the strike was over to get back, emotionally, get back to normal.

For Larry, the thrill and stress of being on a picket line was transitory. Like skydiving, it was something of a corporeal, physical experience. The emotions were intense, yet fleeting.

Many living wage campaign participants were similarly excited to take part in the campaign’s large rallies. Such events are of course very stimulating. They were a “rock-the-place kind of thing . . . lots of songs and chants, good times.” Ann, a long-time ACORN staff person, described a crowd that was “rowdy” and “tremendously excited” at one of the campaign’s large rallies: “It was just such a sense of spirit in the hall—the chanting and singing and cheering and stomping and carrying on.” But in contrast to the strike, the usual excitement of collective protest was coupled with emotions that proved to be more stable and enduring. When participants were asked how the campaign made them feel, they invoked more long-term affective emotions, attached to enduring social

bonds and rooted in moral commitments. In the words of Dan, a retired postal worker come ACORN leader: “It was something I believed in and I felt awfully good about fighting for something that I felt was really worthwhile.” Jill expressed similar sentiments: “You knew you were doing it for a good cause so that kind of gave you the courage.” Participants described feeling good about participation because it was a “good cause” that was “worthwhile.” Such emotions were not about adrenaline rushes, but about moral commitments.

The moral commitments of the living wage campaign were linked to a vision of economic citizenship rights: an ideal that workers should be able to afford, at the very least, the basic necessities of life. As articulated by Marisol, a homemaker involved through ACORN:

We need good salaries in order to survive, in order to pay the rent, in order to be able to eat well, and be able to buy some decent clothes. We all have the right to eat, buy clothes, and earn a living wage.

The personal stories of hardship circulating throughout the campaign expressed this vision of economic citizenship and moral outrage at the violation of these rights. Karen invoked these stories and articulated her sense of outrage when asked how she felt being at the campaign’s rallies:

How can a person live and support their family on \$4.50 an hour (which is probably what it was then, \$4.75)? And the rest of Chicago, you can’t—unless you being subsidized—you can’t even afford to pay rent. And people shouldn’t have to make the decision of: if I pay rent, then we won’t have enough food; or, if I don’t have enough food—you know what I’m saying—I might not be able to buy my transfers or my fare. It’s just always a manipulation of how do you really put your resources together to make ends meet. And if it’s not for the fact that you have to swallow your pride and go maybe to a pantry or to a church and get food—there’s no way, you just can’t make it off minimum wage.

The stories of hardship set the stage for the anger and outrage that were central to the campaign. As summed up in a ‘speakout’: “It’s not right that I should work and work and not have anything to show for it. . . . I deserve a living wage for every hour that I work!”

Margaret explicitly articulated how the emotions of the living wage campaign sprung from these moral commitments and this vision of economic citizenship:

We just see that as such an injustice for people that work 8 hours, 10 hours a day and you barely make enough to feed your family. . . . I know that I’m right; I know that I have a right to fight; I know that I deserve to feed my family; I deserve to be paid just like everybody else. If other people can make a living wage, why can’t I? . . . *you become very emotional because of what you’re fighting for.* And the living wage was something that was so dear to everybody, when we thought of the rise in the cost of living, the light bill, and food, and then your salary never moves. And when you see the politicians getting a raise, that what they’d make in a year you can live off a lifetime. *Those were the kind of things that just kinder our anger. You become angry.* (emphasis mine)

Emotions in the living wage campaign were rooted in ideas about what was right, fair, and just. Inequality inspired anger. Injustice engendered outrage.

It is worth noting that the raw material for moral outrage was indeed present at the auto shop. Workers were originally inspired to seek union representation in large part because of a pattern of unfair firings:

*I:* What were conditions like in the shop before the strike?

*R:* . . . So many people were being intimidated left and right—people all around me that I’d worked with for months. It was like a revolving door. People were just being spit out left and right. And I had never seen that at any of the places I’d ever worked before. It was just like the work force were a dime a dozen: “We got people waiting in line. We can replace you any time we want”—just for the slightest reason. . . . People were intimidated by management, just the fact that you’d seen people come and go so quick. I know myself, personally, I was scared to come to work. You know, you have to come in and watch your mouth, watch what you say. It was just very intimidating. The atmosphere in the place was very intimidating.

It was like almost a revolving door. There were people getting fired every week; two or three people every week. Without anything to say. It was just like, “you’re out the door,” that’s it.

There were, indeed, things to be angry about at the auto shop. Workers were upset about management’s overzealous and draconian use of discipline. They were nervous about coming to work every day, fearing that with one wrong move they could be fired.

Management’s use of what they called a “peer review” process amounted to an unsuccessful attempt to make punishing and firing workers more palatable. Ostensibly a jury of one’s peers, in practice it was widely viewed by workers as management-dominated and unfair. The ingredients of moral outrage were present, and workers were indeed angry enough to seek union representation. But the economic logic of collective action did not bring these sentiments to the foreground.

Instead the experience of being on a picket line, of withdrawing labor and stopping production, inspired more fleeting emotions. It brought to the fore more reactive emotions in response to this single, short-lived protest event. Workers’ descriptions of excitement and adrenaline reflect an intense response to stimuli—an almost physiological, corporeal experience—that subsided once the event was over. It was thus not the emotions of the strike that endured, but its instrumentality.

In contrast, the emotions of the living wage campaign flowed from involvement in what was perceived as a moral crusade. Living wage campaign participants were indignant. They were outraged. They felt the hardships experienced by low-wage workers were wrong and unjust. They felt good about doing what, from their perspective, was morally right. These emotions, based on enduring commitments and bonds, did not disappear with the cessation of collective action. And so the emotional

quality of the campaign had a resilience and long-term salience that overshadowed the campaign's more marginal instrumental aspects.

#### IV. MATERIAL VERSUS PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF MOBILIZATION

In the context of such divergent emotional experiences, the question for this study is: How did the different emotional tenors of these events affect participants?

Specifically, what are the consequences of instrumental versus emotional collective action for those engaging in protest?

Strikers and living wage campaign participants alike focused on the positive consequences of collective action. Both groups viewed mobilization as worthwhile, and believed that it made significant improvements in their lives. But the particular kinds of benefits participants felt they gained were fundamentally different in the two cases. This divergence can be traced to the distinct logics of collective action employed and, in particular, the contrast between instrumental and emotional protest.

Instrumental action is characterized by a cost-benefit analysis: "Instrumental movements do not value collective action as such very highly, and their motivation to act is mainly the result of externally produced benefits"; collective action is, in other words, "instrumental to an external goal" (Koopmans 1995:17-8,24). "Means and ends are likely to be separated, and the forms and activities of the movement are perceived as mere tools" (Rucht 1988:320). Such movements reflect Olson's (1965) classic model, where collective action itself is seen as coming with inherent "costs" which must somehow be overcome in the interest of achieving group goals. Experiencing such instrumental action, strikers focused on the consequent improvements in wages, benefits,

and working conditions. They emphasized how the strike succeeded in making practical, material changes to their workplace environment.

In contrast, mobilized on an emotional instead of an instrumental basis, living wage campaign participants were less attuned to the question of external rewards. The kind of cost-benefit calculation presumed in cases of instrumental action broke down. Participants instead benefited from the “pleasures of protest” itself (Jasper 1997). This phenomenon is examined by Hirschman (1982) in a discussion of what he calls “public-oriented action.” This kind of activity carries its “own reward” such that there is a “fusion of—or confusion between—striving and attaining” (Hirschman 1982:85). As Hirschman notes, referring to the supposed ‘cost’ of participation in collective action assumed in most social scientific models: “The implication of the confusion between striving and attaining is that the neat distinction between costs and benefits of action in the public interest vanishes, since *striving which should be entered on the cost side, turns out to be part of the benefit*” (1982:85-6, emphasis mine).

Indeed, it was striving for a living wage that turned out to be the benefit for campaign participants more than a living wage itself. Participants thus articulated the consequences of collective action not in terms of material gain but personal transformation; they focused on the psychological, rather than material, benefits of activism. Rather than emphasizing changes to the external environment, they instead emphasized how the campaign transformed their perspective—how it inspired cognitive and ideological change. More specifically, living wage campaign participants learned about mobilization and protest, and developed positive feelings toward it. They came to

identify as activists, and through this newfound role their perpetual struggle orientation came alive.

### *Material Gain in the Auto Strike*

After the strike victory, workers at Auto Parts Inc. quickly negotiated their first union contract. Despite management threats to the contrary, they did not lose any benefits as a consequence of unionization. Instead, they made significant gains with respect to both wages and working conditions. And the contract instituted a grievance procedure that went a long way toward remedying previous problems with unwarranted discipline and discharge. It was, by all accounts, a good first contract.

The autoworkers discussed the outcome of the strike and its consequences with reference to these concrete material gains. They saw the greatest accomplishments of the strike as increased compensation for their labors and fair treatment on the job. This was the case for workers coming from a variety of perspectives with respect to race, shift, and, perhaps most importantly, leadership status. The emphasis on concrete material gain was expressed by strike leaders and regular workers alike; it was articulated by those who volunteered for duty, as well as those caught up in the strike simply by virtue of their employment at the shop.

Both rank-and-file workers and their leaders emphasized the material benefits of mobilization when asked what the strike accomplished and what had changed since the strike:

We got our money. We got more days off. We got a lot of extras.

Wages, benefits, job security. Before they could just fire you if they didn't like you.

The discipline thing is in check, is under control.

Better working conditions.

We ended up making a lot more money, I can tell you that much—and that has a lot of pull with people. . . . The tardiness and lateness benefits are not only completely laid out, but evenly enforced. And I guess that was an issue before the strike that tardiness and lateness were not evenly enforced. And that riled up a lot of people. Now we know that if you're late, you're late, and if you're not, you're not.

As articulated by these autoworkers, the impact of the strike was seen in terms of concrete material gain: “wages, benefits, job security.”

One of the most frequently mentioned changes was the elimination of management's widely disparaged “peer review” process, which was replaced post-strike with a traditional union grievance procedure. Workers felt this gave them some degree of protection from mistreatment: “Instead of peer review, we have grievance procedure. So the discipline aspect of it has definitely improved.”

The strikers put particular emphasis on the achievement of some measure of job security and protections against unfair discipline and firing. Job security was invoked by strike leaders and rank-and-file workers alike when asked about what had changed as a consequence of the strike:

The revolving door at the front has been put out of business. As far as people being terminated, it just doesn't happen anymore. In the past there would be one, two, three people sometimes terminated on the same day and that just doesn't happen anymore.

The revolving door stopped. That firing somebody every week, firing somebody every two weeks, that came to a complete halt. There's no more of that.

I do know that there's a lot of my co-workers that if it wasn't for the strike, if it wasn't for the union, they wouldn't have a job right now. I know that for a fact.

These improvements constituted a drastic change in workers' daily lives post-strike. No longer did they have to be afraid of losing their job on the whim of a disgruntled manager. No longer were they plagued by uncertainty about whether or not they would find themselves suddenly unemployed.

Despite the profound impact these changes had on workers' lives, their narratives lacked a personal tone. There was little description of how the strike might have affected them subjectively or psychologically. Assessments of the strike's achievements were, instead, about observable, external, and concrete changes on the factory floor and in labor-management relations. In short, the emphasis in strikers' narratives was on changes to their external environment.

Brian was more grandiose than others when asked about what the strike accomplished:

Oh, hell, that accomplished a lot. I mean, we broke down the barriers. Auto Parts Inc. is one of the most anti-union companies in the United States as far as I was concerned. So, we were able to break down that wall.

Brian's vision was of a larger structural change. Nevertheless, like those who emphasized more mundane changes on the shop floor, he emphasized external instead of personal transformation.

One striker did touch on how the material gains of the strike—in terms of both increased wages and job security—affected workers' personal lives. His was not, however, an account of internal psychological effects. Although Michael was a leader with prior union experience, and thus ostensibly predisposed to being ideologically affected by the strike, his narrative was instead about purchasing power:

Improved wages, improved benefits, improved conditions, which improved my life and most of their lives. There's so much that we can do, so much security. Now we can go out and buy houses and buy cars and things like that because we know we're gonna be here. Instead of thinking: "Oh, is today my day?" I actually had that thought when I first started here, almost every day: "Is today my day to get fired? Is today my day? Is today my day? Am I living up to their standards and expectations?" So now everyone's comfortable.

The legacy of the strike as articulated here was about what workers could buy. They could now rely on being employed, and in a job that paid well at that. Life had changed in terms of strikers' ability to purchase material goods, which was indeed no small matter. But in contrast, as shown below, most living wage campaign participants were precluded from focusing on increased material wellbeing as an outcome of the campaign. Since only a minority of participants saw a raise in their paychecks with enactment of the Chicago ordinance, increased consumption and purchasing power were not the yardsticks of success.

The autoworkers, however, did indeed measure success in such terms, and they were not inclined to invoke personal transformation or the psychological benefits of mobilization. Even when prompted by the interviewer with questions about personal change, workers emphasized the material gains of the strike. When asked how the strike affected them personally they pointed yet again to job security and working conditions, as reflected in the following exchange with Nick, middle-aged, and one of the older and more experienced workers in the shop who had been involved with unions in the past:

*I:* How do you think the strike affected you personally?

*R:* I was happy. At least you can voice your opinion a little bit without worrying about your job. That's what I like. Plus work conditions got better. Safety. They would listen to you more about your ideas at least.

*I:* Did the strike change you in any way in terms of the way you think about things at all?

*R:* Oh no, not really.

Within this narrative, being “affected personally” was not experienced as an internal psychological transformation or learning experience, but was about changes in the external environment and the labor relations climate. The exchange continued:

*I:* Did you learn anything from the strike?

*R:* Just don’t step in front of cars. [laughs]

Referring to an incident when one of the strikebreakers drove through the picket line, he wrapped up this line of questioning by making light of it.

Even when the strikers acknowledged new feelings or sentiments—as in the striker above who felt “happy”—the narrative focus is almost exclusively on the external achievements or accomplishments that underlie these feelings. When asked if the strike changed him in any way, Carl dove immediately into a story about one of the strike’s concrete accomplishments:

Yeah. It just made me proud that—you know when this lady got her job back—they did bring her back—that was the happiest part of the day. You know what? That’s cool. That’s what we were there for. ‘Cause that was part of the negotiating for the contract—that they had to at least talk about this lady’s job—and they brought her back. And that was non-negotiable. And that was great—you know what? That makes me proud.

Though he mentions feeling “proud,” the narrative focus is on the concrete and material achievements of the strike even though the question posed was about personal change.

When asked about change—even their own personal change—the salient consequences of the strike for these autoworkers were not found within, but outside of, themselves.

The strikers rarely invoked the psychological benefits of mobilization, what they learned from the strike, or how it affected them on a subjective level. This was as much the case for strike leaders as it was for their rank-and-file counterparts. Because of the voluntaristic quality of their involvement, these self-selected strike leaders might be

presumed, like living wage campaign participants, to be more invested in activism. The assumption would be that they are thus more predisposed to being personally affected by participation in collective action. Nevertheless, the strike leaders emphasized psychological gains and personal transformation no more than their rank-and-file counterparts.

A focus on the material achievements of collective action precludes the development of a perpetual struggle orientation since material benefits can be solidified in union contracts or legislation. If material outcomes are the most important, as they were from the strikers' perspective, there is no need to continue the fight once these concerns are addressed in such codified, institutionalized forms. We can expect that if living wage campaign participants had likewise emphasized the importance of material gain, their desire to continue the struggle would have been similarly truncated by the enactment of living wage legislation. But because of the affective quality of mobilization in the living wage case, there were other processes afoot that would not be resolved with passage of a legal document.

### *Personal Transformation in the Living Wage Campaign*

The principle achievement of the living wage campaign would on the surface appear to be the betterment of the material conditions of low-wage workers, just as it was in the strike case. Just as the strikers secured wage increases in their first union contract, so too did the living wage campaign achieve such material gains with the passage of legislation. The new legislation mandated that city contractors and sub-contractors pay their workers substantially above the federally mandated minimum wage. On one level,

material gain for low-wage workers was what the living wage campaign was all about. It was what participants fought for, what they rallied around and chanted about. And so one might have expected participants to emphasize this in the campaign's aftermath.

Participants did acknowledge that some people received a salary increase because of the living wage campaign but this was couched as a limited, partial accomplishment and was not, in any case, a major theme. It was not achievement of the campaign's material goals that shaped its legacy but, rather, the transformation of the participants themselves. Through the more expressive logic of political action, those involved with the living wage campaign experienced the achievements of mobilization in terms of personal transformation. Their focus was on how the campaign led to ideological and psychological change.

Because the campaign was so broad-based, most participants failed to see an increase in their paychecks with the enactment of Chicago's first living wage law. Instead of material gain, the benefits that accrued to participants were more subjective. Frank, a staff person for the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, described how homeless people are transformed by experiences of mass mobilization, and how they were affected by the living wage campaign in particular:

For us, what happens with the homeless community is—it's different than other organizations by degree. People that are homeless really feel separate and feel isolated. So to become part of something bigger, deals with any depression they have, deals with any feeling of being nobody. And so by and large, what happens to people we work with that take part in this, is they're the first ones to get jobs, they're the first ones to get housing, because somehow they got something inside of them that it energized and it was like a belief in the sense that they're part of something bigger. That I've seen from the living wage, but I've seen it in general happen to people that get involved, that are homeless, in bigger activities.

Through participation in collective action the homeless came to feel energized, inspired, and connected. Mobilization changed the lives of homeless participants because it changed their mood and self-concept.

The specific implications of involvement in the living wage campaign differed depending on the group. The homeless, retirees, union members, home care workers, factory workers, day laborers, African Americans and Latinos each brought unique perspectives to the campaign. But the experience of personal transformation was a common thread throughout participants' narratives. It was a theme that united testimony from a variety of groups—all of whom experienced the same powerful experience of emotional, affective protest.

When asked about the achievements of the living wage campaign, unlike their counterparts in the auto shop, participants only marginally invoked changes to the external environment. A focus on material gain would not have made sense in the context of such a broad-based movement where so few participants would be affected by the wage increase. Instead, participants emphasized how much they learned from the campaign, articulated as “expanding our minds” and “thinking outside the box”:

*I:* How do you think the campaign affected you personally?

*R:* It was very, very exciting. It was a really good learning experience; I learned a lot. I grew. Not only as an individual, but educational as well. It was like going to school. It was worth money just to be right in the heart of things and seeing the dynamics of power and how power works and how it shifts. So that is how it impacted me. It was like an education that I got for free.

The campaign served as an educational experience, as taken-for-granted ideologies and old worldviews were challenged: “There was some learning moments—that moment

when you like, ah-ha!” The experience was not merely about learning new facts or gathering information; it was about inspiration—“ah-ha!”

In Jill’s testimony her learning experience was intertwined with issues of equality and justice, and the campaign’s sense of moral outrage:

*I:* How do you think the campaign affected you personally?

*R:* I think it made me more knowledgeable about stuff. ‘Cause I didn’t know anything about living wages before then. I didn’t know there was such a thing as a living wage. So it gave me more information than what I started out with—which was a good thing, trust me. ‘Cause I was sitting there going: “What the heck was a living wage?” And that’s when she explained it to me. And I was like: “Ooooh! Why we gotta protest? That should have been automatic, somebody should have thought of it!” But once again you have to remember that these are people who have millions of dollars in their pocket and they could care less about us that’s out here. I mean, to me ten dollars an hour is a good job. But to them ten dollars an hour, they’d probably turn up their nose.

Learning about the living wage was tied in this narrative to the injustices of class inequality. The campaign was not just about raising wages, but about making right a perceived wrong.

Jill went on to articulate how her newfound awareness led to an ongoing attention to the issue:

So yeah, it made me more aware of stuff and made me actually start paying attention. Now every time I hear the living wage, my ears perk up. I heard living wage—what are they saying?

Personal transformations ushered in by the education of living wage campaign participants had consequences that went far beyond the campaign itself. Participants became politicized such that they were no longer focused merely on achieving higher wages in this one instance, but on attending to issues of inequality over the long haul. These transformations turned workers and citizens into activists.

## V. BECOMING AN ACTIVIST

The living wage campaign inspired in participants a transformation of personal identity—of everyday people into activists. As articulated by one participant, the campaign changed his “way of thinking,” so that he “learned that it is a struggle that one must undertake.” As the campaign rolled on, it was no longer about merely showing up and carrying a sign when asked to do so. Participants were no longer just going along for the ride, as they did in the beginning. Instead, they became concerned with getting other people involved too, as articulated by Lucy, a formerly homeless person who became involved with the campaign through the Coalition for the Homeless:

It made me feel like I should get more people involved. It made me feel like the more people I can get involved and to do the things that we did at that campaign, will always bring about change. So, I feel very moved and motivated to continue to work for change.

Participants had committed to showing up at campaign events, and making the personal sacrifices required to do so. But by the end of the campaign their commitment had deepened. No longer mere participants, they came to identify as activists with responsibilities for getting other people involved as well. And they felt the need to do this beyond the living wage campaign, on an ongoing basis.

Ron, a factory worker at the time of the campaign, was motivated through his campaign involvement to become a professional organizer:

Right after [the living wage campaign] I started talking about organizing. I had a young family at that time, and I said then, during the living wage campaign, that whenever my son got to the point where he was getting ready to graduate from high school, I was going to start organizing. So it happened during the living wage campaign. That’s what made me feel like you can make change.

Ron's new interest in organizing led to a sharp turn in his life course as he pursued a major career change. For others it meant becoming more involved in a community group, or speaking up around political issues of importance to them. But the common thread was that activism became a part of living wage campaign participants' personal identity.

On a practical level, participants learned the 'tools of the trade.' Karen discussed how the campaign taught her about the tactics and strategies of activists:

I think I learned that you have to really know—you have to really be clear on what your message is. You know—what do you want out of it. And what would you accept as second best if you can't get this issue that you going—what would be the next thing. . . . And so being really clear with [politicians], having your message down pat—not rambling on and on—cause most of the time you only got a short time to get your point across and you got to be real quick. . . . Really learning how to work with politicians, how to work on quality of life issues and really be strategic in carrying out what it is you want to accomplish. As I said, I think it was a great education for me. It empowered me to fight for bigger and better things.

Becoming an activist committed to ongoing struggle involves acquiring a skill set—campaign strategy, dealing with elites, how to get your message across, etc. At the same time, it is about engaging with organizing, politics, and mobilization on a much deeper level. Activists develop a vision of struggling for social change and for “bigger and better things.” As Karen also noted: “Most of all you got to believe in what you're fighting for and you got to be passionate about what it is you want.”

Alejandro, an unemployed ACORN member who had worked in the past in a company's shipping and receiving department, likewise articulated not merely the acquisition of organizing skills but, more deeply, his transformation from a regular

community member into an activist. He was asked if anything surprised him during the campaign:

To tell you the truth, I was the one who was surprised. Because I was not prepared to be in charge of an agenda for the community, nor was I prepared to belong to an organization; then one doesn't understand how to reach a politician, one doesn't understand how to be a member, one doesn't understand how to talk to a politician, or to a leader. In other words, one doesn't understand anything. Then the surprised one was me, because I never believed that I could talk to the mayor, that I could talk to the governor, or that I could talk to some politicians.

On a practical level Alejandro learned some organizing skills. But there was a more fundamental change afoot. The campaign brought about a profound personal transformation so that this humble community member came to understand himself as a politically savvy community leader. He now thought of himself as an activist.

This activist stance sprung, specifically, from anger about injustice and inequality. It was a response to moral outrage. In this way, the emotions of the living wage campaign were the raw material from which activists were born. Participants discussed learning how, through organizing, one can successfully confront exploitation and curb abuses of power. As articulated by Jorge:

[I now think that] one can face the powerful now. One knows that the powerful can't be so arbitrary. . . . That one can overcome the abuses committed by those in power. . . . That we can face and stop those who abuse their power exploitatively because they have money. That they can't keep exploiting the people.

Activism offered a kind of resolution to the outrage that infused the campaign. Through becoming an activist, participants like Karen found an outlet for their anger:

*I: Did the campaign change you in any way?*

*R: Yeah. It made me know that—I guess it reinforced my—it raised my self-esteem. It made me feel like I did have some power and that I wasn't powerless. And it gave me a new way of dealing with my anger. Instead of letting the anger eat on me, I used it in a way that was more effective.*

So having a voice and using that voice and knowing when to use it and knowing what the issue is and knowing how to give and take—you know what I'm saying? The whole dance, I would call it, negotiations. And you might not get everything but what will it take for you to still feel like you've made a difference. (emphasis mine)

Here Karen described how the campaign led her to deal with her anger in a new way, as an activist does by using her “voice” to make change. Her higher self-concept came from learning how to solve problems as an activist: addressing the things that angered her strategically through organizing and speaking up.

Jorge similarly articulated how moral outrage at abuse and mistreatment led him to embrace an activist identity, but from a distinctly Latino perspective. He discussed what it felt like being at living wage campaign events:

When one goes there and meets people who share the same ideas about bringing justice to the people who have been abused, one feels rewarded. Therefore, *by helping my community I restore my self-esteem*. . . . I restored considerably my self-esteem. Being a Hispanic, one always loses self-esteem due to the mistreatment, though not direct, that our people have to go through. (emphasis mine)

He felt good about confronting a perceived injustice. But as articulated here, this newfound self-esteem was not merely based on a new ability to solve problems. Living wage campaign participants also came to feel good about themselves—as activists do—because they were helping others: “by helping my community I restore my self-esteem.” Seeing themselves as working on others’ behalf toward a greater good was a key element of participants’ new activist identity.

Instead of feeling demoralized by the limited scope of the new living wage law, these positive feelings about activism developed even in participants who were not directly affected by the wage increase—and the vast majority were in this position. More

precisely, as articulated by Yvonne, participants' attachment to activism developed *exactly because* they did not directly benefit materially from the new law:

So when you can get out and do things that help support other people, you feel good about yourself because you giving of yourself. A lot of time you don't have the finance, but you can give of yourself.

These feelings were tied up with the developing empathy discussed in the previous chapter: "It didn't affect me, but it makes you feel good because you helped somebody else." Jill expressed this same sentiment in the context of discussing her continued activism since the living wage campaign:

And most of the time, even with the living wage—even though I'm not getting the living wage—it still makes it worthwhile that there is some people out here that are getting it because of something that I was part of. So that makes me feel good even though I'm not getting it. I still feel good about the fact that they get the living wage and it's because of somebody . . . .

In acting altruistically, living wage campaign participants derived a psychological and emotional benefit from participation even in the absence of personal material gain. The self-esteem that came from working on others' behalf was an essential part of their new activist identity. Struggle became not an albatross around their necks, but a badge of honor.

Because not everyone involved in broad-based mobilization benefits equally from social movement success, it is inherent in the political logic of collective action that participants act out of moral and affective commitments instead of instrumental ones. As articulated by living wage campaign participants here, they thus gain the psychological and emotional benefits that come from helping others. Campaign participants were emotionally rewarded for mobilizing on behalf of a greater good, and came to identify with such actions. It was through acting in this less instrumental, more selfless fashion,

that participants developed an activist identity. Everyday people were inspired to commit themselves to sustained mobilization.

Union contracts and legislation crystallize the achievements of social movements for a period of time, and so they have the potential to undercut continued mobilization. As will be discussed at length in Chapter 4, some scholars argue that such institutionalization leads to the demise of insurgent activity (for example see Piven and Cloward 1977). But whether or not such institutionalization undermines insurgency depends on the circumstances. While both of the groups examined here secured victory through a codified, institutionalized mechanism—a union contract for the strikers and legislation for living wage protestors—this undermined a commitment to continued activism only in the more instrumental strike case where workers saw the benefits of activism in terms of material gain.

A very different dynamic ensued in the living wage case, where participants' focus on personal transformation and their developing activist identity underwrote an ongoing commitment to struggle that was not undercut by enactment of living wage legislation. As theorized by Butler (1988; 1990) in the case of gender, identities must be performed in order to be maintained. They must be constantly enacted, renewed and recreated, as people make their way through daily life. Living wage campaign participants' newfound activist identity was not something to be put on a shelf like a union contract or a piece of legislation. Instead, it led them to embrace struggle as an integral and ongoing part of their lives.

## VI. GOALS VERSUS FORMS OF MOBILIZATION

Mobilizations that follow the economic logic of collective action are limited in scope, taking place among a relatively narrow constituency, within the confines of a particular workplace or company. Typically, all participants are affected by the gains that come with victory. With such a narrow and circumscribed group, as in the auto strike case examined here, the mobilization takes on an instrumental quality since it is focused more directly on the interests of those involved. In short, activists are fighting on their own behalf and are thus focused on material gain. Unlike the living wage case, all of the strikers benefited from the unionization and subsequent contract that came out of the strike victory. Once the strike succeeded in meeting its goals, there was nothing compelling these autoworkers to engage in further struggle.

In contrast, with broad-based community organizing, participants often take on the causes of others instead of fighting to advance their own direct and immediate interests. Such mobilizations rely instead on their emotional character and on moral commitments. Participants are thus focused on the psychological benefits of mobilization rather than its material consequences; they experience the benefits of collective action in terms of personal transformation instead of external/structural change. Most importantly, they come to embrace activism as a way to resolve their anger, and so their commitment to mobilization is ongoing. The development of an activist identity serves as a basis for continued struggle even after the original mobilization has successfully met its goals.

These dynamics of collective action serve to explain an apparent paradox: that the strikers, whose achievements were immediate, material, and palpable, were not predisposed to continued collective action, whereas living wage campaign participants,

who were less directly affected by victory, ended up with a greater commitment to ongoing struggle. It might be expected that those with the most concrete, instrumental ties to a social movement would be the most personally affected, and would become the most deeply committed to the cause. Conversely, those whose attachments to a social movement are not so concrete or direct might be assumed, in the end, to be less predisposed to embracing activism more generally. The findings here, however, demonstrate the reverse. In the context of collective action, the dynamics of instrumentality were challenged and reconfigured.

The findings presented here are bolstered by Gould's (2002) work on emotions in the AIDS protest organization ACT UP. Gould argues that the emotions of the movement were key to its sustainability.<sup>5</sup> Anger and moral outrage—at the inaction of government and other powerful institutions—figured prominently in ACT UP as they did in Chicago's living wage campaign. These are the emotions that sustained ACT UP when it might otherwise have declined. As with the living wage campaign, we can see in Gould's account that a commitment to sustained struggle was born not of "reactive" and fleeting emotions, but of more enduring ones. This study elaborates on her argument by uncovering a specific mechanism—the development of an activist identity—that links these emotions to sustained protest.

The dynamics uncovered in this study are also reflected in the concerns of union organizers who are often wary of launching organizing drives where workers' grievances are primarily material or economic. Under such circumstances unionization efforts can be easily undermined since it is generally within management's power to readily address

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<sup>5</sup> Jasper (1997; Chapter 8) likewise argues that emotions are central to sustaining mobilization in his study of an anti-nuclear protest.

such concerns. They can raise wages. They can add benefits. Once such material concerns are addressed, the momentum of mobilization wanes. But it is not so easy for managers to transform workers' perception of whether or not they are being treated with dignity and respect. Moral outrage at mistreatment is more difficult to assuage than a desire for a few more cents per hour. Campaigns that revolve around these more emotional issues are thus seen by union organizers to be more stable and enduring.

This idea, though, rests on the assumption that the crucial instrumental/emotional distinction attaches primarily to a movement's goals, and that it maps onto mobilizations based on the different issues they mobilize around. This assumption is found not only among union organizers, but it has also enjoyed a long history among social movement theorists (for early renditions juxtaposing the "instrumental" versus "expressive" goals of groups see Gordon and Babchuk 1959 and Warriner 1965) and, more recently, has become a legacy of the 'old' versus 'new' social movement dichotomy. One of the main ways that scholars of 'new' social movements categorize forms of protest is with respect to whether or not the goals of mobilization are material. They juxtapose 'old' movements seeking material gain against post-materialist 'new' social movements seeking transformations of culture and identity (Buechler 1995; Melucci 1980). The labor movement is thought of as the classic case of instrumental mobilization. Other movements, such as the animal rights movement, are seen as inherently more emotional (Groves 1995; Kruse 1995).

It may indeed be the case that some social movements are more likely to have one or the other of these qualities, and some movements do appear to be more inherently emotional than others. It makes sense, for example, that AIDS activism, or any

mobilization dealing with death for that matter, would be highly emotional. This study has demonstrated, however, that when conceptualizing emotions in social movements the specific issues that people are mobilizing around may not be so important analytically. Both of the cases examined here had patently material goals. In both cases the motivation was to improve the material conditions of low-wage workers. They nevertheless diverged in terms of the role of instrumentality and emotion. But this difference was not about the goals of mobilization as usually conceptualized. It was, instead, about its forms. This study suggests that, with respect to the role of emotions, the legacies of social movements are not so dependent on a movement's goals but instead on the emotional quality of the kind of collective action employed.

In some ways, the goals of the strike case actually appear to be less material than those of the living wage campaign. The exclusive goal of the latter was legislation to increase wages alone, without addressing working conditions in any other way. The strikers, on the other hand, sought not only to increase their wages but also to redress mistreatment suffered at the hands of management, including unfair firings and discipline. With respect to movement goals, it is thus possible to view the strike as somewhat less material. But this simply serves to highlight the pitfalls of prioritizing a movement's goals when analyzing the emotionality of protest. The powerful instrumentality of the strike and the extreme emotionality of the living wage campaign can only be fully appreciated when these traits are viewed not in terms of the goals of protest but in terms of the logics of collective action used in each case.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that a given social movement can engage in either instrumental or emotional forms of collective action. The living wage case, for

example, demonstrates how labor mobilization is not always dominated by instrumentality as is often assumed. Looking at forms of collective action rather than its goals, we see how labor mobilization can have either more instrumental or more emotional qualities depending on the logic of collective action employed. Other social movements can likewise engage in more instrumental or more expressive protest. The environmental movement, for example, at times rallies around perceived threats to human health, mobilizing those directly affected by an environmental contaminant, perhaps targeting a particular corporation for chemical dumping or similar violations in a particular neighborhood or town. It alternatively takes an emotional ‘tree hugging’ form based more on sentiment than survival, addressing environmental problems that have minimal human impact.

The crucial point is that instrumental and emotional collective action can each be found in a variety of social movements. And regardless of the particular movement involved, the emotional tenor of protest can be expected to lead to consequences akin to those uncovered here. With respect to personal transformation and the development of activist identities (or lack thereof), the instrumentality and emotions of collective action can be expected to similarly affect participants in a variety of social movement contexts.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Collective Efficacy: The Irony of Power

The factors that facilitate or constrain mobilization are of central concern to social movement scholars and activists alike. Political-economic structures (McAdam 1982; Tilly 1978), counter-movements (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Zald and Useem 1987), resources (McCarthy and Zald 1977), and networks (Diani and McAdam 2003) have all been shown to have an impact on mobilization. More recently, social movement scholars have come to appreciate the role of more ‘subjective’ processes as well. They have turned their attention to the cultural processes of “framing” (Benford and Snow 2000), the formation of collective identity (Laraña et al. 1994; Polletta and Jasper 2001), and the role of emotions in social movements (Goodwin et al. 2001). Such scholarship has explored how consciousness and subjectivity relate to such things as perceived grievances, group cohesion, and mobilization.

But no combination of objective or subjective factors, however favorable, is likely to lead to successful mobilization unless the participants have a sense of their own power. The development of a sense of collective power—often conceptualized as ‘collective efficacy’—consists of a belief in the capacity to act as a group and the conviction that if the group does act they will succeed. Collective efficacy depends on two related processes: “first, that individuals come to accept a newly unfolding group logic and think

in terms of what the group *as a whole* can accomplish, and second, that potential members become convinced that movement strategies can actually succeed” (Schwartz and Paul 1992:214, referencing Fantasia 1988). It is, in other words, “actors’ awareness of their group capacity to alter the political and economic status quo through concerted action” (Freyberg 1995:212). This sense of collective efficacy is an important element in processes of group formation and mobilization precisely because it underwrites people’s willingness to act collectively to pursue shared goals and dreams.

The issue of efficacy is of particular concern for movements on the defensive or in retreat, such as the contemporary American labor movement, where a sense of impotency is understandably well entrenched these days.<sup>1</sup> In the current context of globalization, industrial relocation, ‘downsizing,’ and the Wal-Martization of labor relations, the development of a sense of collective efficacy among workers in the United States would seem improbable. But workers’ belief that they can succeed in struggles against elites—the development of an “imagination of victory”—is crucial to labor organization (Penney 2002:96,106-13). While union failure in organizing drives is generally attributed to factors such as intense employer anti-union campaigns, workers’ fear of retaliation and job loss, and inadequate organizing strategies, workers’ belief in their ability to achieve goals if they act collectively is often a pivotal factor no matter what other obstacles stand in the way. An employer’s simple insistence that they will never sign a contract is one of the most potent anti-union weapons at their disposal, since it erodes workers’ belief that their actions can make a difference (Penney 2002:192-3,226-7).

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<sup>1</sup> It has been argued that an informal philosophy of cynicism is pervasive among American workers, such that they have “contempt for all movements, parties, and principles” (Hodges 1970:441).

Despite such obstacles facing American labor, workers still mobilize and press their demands. The question becomes: What leads some actors—in the face of overwhelming odds—to feel efficacious while others remain demoralized? More specifically, why do some workers believe that when they are united in struggle they can win against powerful adversaries? And why do other workers feel powerless? In comparing the auto strike and the Chicago living wage campaign we find that workers who were exposed to different experiences of collective action developed contrasting understandings of power and efficacy.

## I. THEORIES OF POWER AND EFFICACY

Social theorists have long sought to uncover the subjective aspects of power and inequality. Most prominently, Gramsci's (1971) treatment of hegemony and Althusser's (1971) account of ideological state apparatuses explore the place of ideology in diffusing class conflict. In a similar vein, Lukes (1974) critiques two prominent behavioralist approaches to power that emphasize overt conflict, and instead focuses on what he terms the "three-dimensional view" of power, which seeks to capture how "political systems prevent demands from becoming political issues or even from being made."<sup>2</sup> Rooted in the Marxist problematic of "false consciousness," such accounts of the subjective dimensions of power seek to explain non-elite quiescence (see, for example, Gaventa 1980). They pertain, in particular, to the classic question of why non-elites do not rebel, or why they do at some times and not others.

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<sup>2</sup> The one-dimensional view of power is the pluralists', while the two-dimensional view is outlined in Bachrach and Baratz's "Two Faces of Power" (1962). In that piece they outline how the second face of power relates to the establishment of the rules of the game and, consequently, what issues come to the table in the first place. But they stress actual observable conflict, so that acquiescence is not seen as central to inequality and domination. See Lukes (1974) for a discussion of their argument.

While both Gramsci's notion of hegemony and Lukes' third dimension of power cover a wide range of ideological ground—from perceptions of grievances to assumptions about elite legitimacy—the question of actors' belief in their ability to achieve goals through collective action looms large. Gaventa notes that the third dimension of power involves “the means through which power influences, shapes or determines conceptions of the necessities, possibilities, and strategies of challenge in situations of latent conflict” (1980:15). Non-elites' assessment of their own collective power and possibilities for change are one crucial aspect of hegemony.

Recognizing that a sense of collective efficacy is a precursor to mobilization and reflecting the general orientation of social movement literature toward explaining the origins of protest, most studies treat efficacy as a cause or precondition of collective action. It is one aspect of the “cognitive liberation” or transformation of consciousness that is a necessary condition of movement emergence (McAdam 1988b:132-3; Piven and Cloward 1977:3-4; also see Klandermans 1997:80-2). McAdam, whose use of a “political process” model highlights macro structural factors, at the same time recognizes the potency of more subjective processes:

[One] Marxist influence on the model outlined here concerns the importance attributed to subjective processes in the generation of insurgency. Marxists, to a much greater extent than elite theorists, recognize that *mass political impotence may as frequently stem from shared perceptions of powerlessness as from any objective inability to mobilize significant political leverage*. Thus, the subjective transformation of consciousness is appreciated by Marxists as a process crucial to the generation of insurgency. (1982:37-8, emphasis mine)

Although “a sense of collective efficacy” may at first glance seem like a weak or ephemeral phenomenon, the insight offered by McAdam is that it can have a force as potent—or more so—than any structural conditions or constraints.

Alongside treatments of collective consciousness, perspectives that use a rational choice framework also see an individual's decision to take part in protest, framed as a cost-benefit analysis, as dependent on expectations about others' participation and the probability of success (Klandermans 1984). For Wright, for example, "theories of consequences" are one of the main elements of class consciousness. He argues that various kinds of struggles—from establishing unions to fighting for socialism and communism—are very much dependent on workers' perceptions of their ability to succeed (1997:385-6). In a similar vein, the probability of success relates to the issue of "transition costs" associated with social transformation, where conditions worsen before they get better; success may not be immediate no matter the extent of collective efforts, and this can be a deterrent to mobilization (Przeworski 1980; Wright 1985:120).

The role of perceived efficacy in concerted action is also recognized in social psychological treatments of the topic. One of the leading theorists in this area, Bandura, writes: "People who have a sense of collective efficacy will mobilize their efforts and resources to cope with external obstacles to the changes they seek. But those convinced of their inefficacy will cease trying even though changes are attainable through concerted effort" (1982:144). Social psychology likewise confirms the somewhat counter-intuitive notion that it is those who have hope for the future—instead of, for example, those who are the most aggrieved—who are more likely to engage in protest (Bandura 1982:143). This general idea has surfaced in a variety of perspectives on social movements, from resource mobilization theory (which posits that it is those with the greatest resources and organizational capacity who will engage in protest) to the literature on new social movements (which focuses on mobilizations of the more privileged sectors of society)

(McCarthy and Zald 1977; Buechler 1995).<sup>3</sup> Although the theme has been approached from a wide variety of theoretical perspectives, each emphasizes how a sense of efficacy bears on a group's capacity to act collectively and, consequently, to affect social change.

But where does this “cognitive liberation” come from in the first place? In prior research the ability of collective action to generate a sense of efficacy—instead of just being dependent on it—is seldom considered. Yet it is common practice among union organizers and other activists to begin protest efforts with a focus on small, easily achievable goals in the interest of breeding a group's awareness of their collective power to make change before attacking bigger problems. The assumption is that people will not believe in the strength of their collective power until they actually exert it. With this framework in mind, I examine efficacy as a consequence, rather than a cause, of collective action.

A few scholars portray efficacy as emergent in collective action, as something that is simultaneously created by and an instigator for action. Fantasia (1988), for example, sees “cultures of solidarity” arising in the labor movement within a context of mobilization. In examining a student movement against South African apartheid, Hirsch (1990) explores the relationship between having a belief in success and recruitment to activism once a collective action event is in progress. Seeing others in action is part of what leads to a sense of efficacy and, consequently, greater participation. Freyberg (1995) explores the relationship between efficacy and action in his study of the formation of an auto workers' union in the 1930s. On the one hand, a “cognitive ‘breakthrough’

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<sup>3</sup> There is also a large political science literature on efficacy as a cause of political participation and voting behavior, but it is focused on individual-level efficacy and psychological orientations instead of collective power (Pollock 1983; Rudolph et al. 2000; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995).

was needed to support mass action.” But he describes how consciousness springs from collective action as well:

[One] variable influencing collective efficacy is a history of acts that demonstrate the potential of large-scale collective action. Even failed resistance attempts and partial successes can serve to demystify the power structure, indicate openings for action, and encourage witnesses to consider alternative courses of both action and outcome. . . . Analysis of mobilization . . . suggests that collective efficacy originally grows from both individual actions and limited collective acts that express the potential for a given group to alter existing social arrangements. (1995:245,7)

In these studies, witnessing or experiencing a group of protesters acting together—regardless of the movement’s eventual success or failure—engenders an awareness of the power of the collective. Although they offer a more complex view of collective efficacy and its relationship to social movements, they are primarily focused on mobilization processes rather than the consequences and aftermath of collective action. In contrast, this study focuses explicitly on those consequences, exploring how different collective action experiences lead to divergent understandings of power, and how those understandings can endure well past the original protest event.

Those few studies that explicitly examine collective efficacy as a consequence of protest experiences associate it with social movement success. In Klandermans’ words, “agency results from the *experience* that collective action is a potentially successful influence strategy” (1997:42; on success leading to mobilization also see Schwartz and Paul 1992).<sup>4</sup> When participants succeed in achieving their goals, a sense of efficacy is born that can become a powerful and enduring part of resistance cultures or discourses.

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<sup>4</sup> For discussions of the aftermath of struggles where workers’ movements were defeated see Lane and Roberts (1971:201-3) and Langford (1994).

In working-class history in particular, narratives of labor struggle describe how the success of previous mobilization leads to the development of class consciousness and workers' sense of power. Juravich and Bronfenbrenner, for example, explore this process in their study of a recent steel workers' struggle that was settled in favor of the union (Juravich and Bronfenbrenner 1999:199-206). And Penney examines this phenomenon with respect to organizing tactics and micromobilization processes in union certification election campaigns (2002:Chapter 3; also see Kimeldorf 1988:109).

While there is a clear relationship between movement success and participants' sense of efficacy, we know very little about how different experiences of collective action lead to different outcomes. The analysis below examines how contrasting logics of collective action yield distinct understandings of power and efficacy. In the cases of collective action examined in this study, participants emerged with different ideas about power even though both mobilizations were successful in meeting their professed goals. The striking autoworkers developed a *bureaucratic* and *individualistic* sense of power while living wage campaign participants emerged with a strong awareness of *collective* efficacy. What explains these different outcomes? How exactly do contrasting forms of collective action affect workers' sense of efficacy differently? We will see below how specific features of collective action—the kind of leverage exerted and the length of struggle—led to such different results.

## II. POWER IN THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL LOGICS OF COLLECTIVE ACTION

The economic versus political logics of collective action each utilize a distinct kind of leverage. Striking workers, on the one hand, exert a positional or structural power as they withdraw their labor at the point of production. As with the strikers at Auto Parts Inc., workers at strategic points in the production process are in a position to affect disruptions far beyond their own workplace. They may find themselves in a position to shut down not only their own factory but other workplaces as well, in particular the corporate customers who are consequently unable to keep their own operations running.

Manufacturing has come increasingly to rely on subcontractors such that the parts needed for a final product are made by workers at a variety of locations—sometimes dispersed around the globe. Facilities that lie at the end of the manufacturing process have thus become increasingly dependent on the smooth operation of factories far from their immediate orbit of control (see Bailey and Clark 2008 for a recent account of this phenomenon in airplane manufacturing). Although the work done at Auto Parts Inc. might at first glance seem economically insignificant based on the size of the workforce and scale of production, workers at the shop found themselves in a position to quickly affect production at a major auto company who relied on one seemingly insignificant car part to keep their assembly line rolling.

In the interest of cutting costs, companies have also come to minimize the use of warehousing. This, however, has meant that many other kinds of workers, far beyond the assembly line, now find themselves in strategically advantageous positions. In particular, workers in transportation, distribution, and ‘logistics,’ have increasingly found

themselves in a position to exert extreme economic disruption and prevent products from reaching retail outlets and the general public (Bonacich and Wilson 2007; Brenner 2008). But this form of economic action can be even more broadly construed to encompass all workers who are in a position to exert acute economic disruption even if they are not directly controlling the delivery of a product from a factory floor, the back of a truck, or a loading dock. Workers in New York, for example, who operate the city's public transportation system, demonstrated the havoc they could wreck on the local economy when they shut down bus and subway routes during the holiday season in December of 2005 (Steinhauer 2005).

A variety of workers thus enjoy this kind of economic leverage and positional power, and their numbers have been increasing due to recent changes in the production process. But no matter the particulars of the specific work involved, when the extent of economic disruption is severe there are incentives for elites to compromise and reach agreements with workers as quickly as possible. This does not mean that such workers always win their battles, but that rapid resolution of conflict is a likely outcome. Characterized by this intense disruptive capacity, the economic logic of collective action, in its ideal-typical form, thus takes place over a relatively limited period of time. Workers see the immediate effects of their actions.

On the other end of the continuum, the public pressure campaigns of the political logic of collective action occur across longer time horizons since they take more time to implement. Lacking the kind of structural or positional power of strikers, participants in such mobilizations must act together repeatedly, over an extended period of time, in order to exert enough leverage to be able to achieve their goals. The consequences for political

elites are less acute and not so immediate. It takes time for protestors to make it clear—to themselves and everyone else—that they will be able to exert some muscle in the electoral arena or the court of public opinion.

The ultimate threat is ousting politicians through the ballot box. But electoral politics is an extended process, with politicians enjoying terms that usually last at least a year and often times much more. In any case, the kind of pressure leveraged against a politician is no parallel to that exerted by strikers located at key points in the production process. The exertion of political pressure is, instead, extended, repeated, and prolonged. Getting the public to become aware of an issue, pressing politicians to take a stance or pass legislation, holding politicians accountable for that stance, and ultimately affecting the outcome of a subsequent election—all of this takes time.

Indeed, the ebb and flow of the Chicago living wage campaign reflected these electoral and political dynamics. In the middle of the three-year campaign, with the 1999 city council elections too far away to be of any consequence, campaign activities became more subdued. Activists did manage to maintain protest activity throughout the three-year period; the living wage issue never died. Participants rallied at union halls and city hall, at conventions and corporations. But there were times, when the campaign lacked the ability to exert electoral pressure in the foreseeable future, during which the intensity of the protests waned. As the '99 elections emerged on the horizon, however, the campaign picked up speed—a long awaited opportunity since the slogan “Payback Time in '99!” emerged from a city council vote that took place in mid-1997. In short, the extended nature of the living wage campaign reflected the protracted nature of the electoral process and political protest.

While political action generally follows this protracted logic, not all strikes are as short-lived as the auto strike examined here. Some workers are unable to exert such intense economic leverage due to the nature of their industry or their location in the production process. For workers who do not benefit from such acute economic leverage, any decision to strike may lead to an extended battle. The experience of strikers in such protracted struggles may more closely approximate that found in political struggles, at least with regard to this one particular aspect of collective action. The key point here is that the findings at Auto Parts Inc. are not meant to be generalized to all strikes, but that they will shed light on those strikes that share such acute economic leverage and short-lived protest. I would argue that other mobilizations that share these particular qualities are likely to yield similar consequences with respect to participants' sense of efficacy.

Importantly, the circumstances under which workers enjoy such structural economic power are not unique or marginal, but instead have become more common in recent years with the increasing integration of production and distribution processes in the global economy. While many other organizing strategies have become less tenable, especially more bureaucratic ones relying on union elections, strikes among such strategically positioned workers are poised to become an increasingly important labor movement strategy (Bonacich and Wilson 2007).

With its disruptive power the strike is often viewed, and sometimes valorized, as the most militant of working-class actions, as labor's ultimate weapon against capital (Brecher 1997). One might hypothesize that strikers, as icons of labor militancy, would feel a particularly strong sense of collective efficacy because of their immediate and palpable power to disrupt capital at the point of production. Workers exerting extreme

economic leverage are often able to quickly resolve conflicts in their favor because the pressure they bring to bear on capital is so acute. It might be supposed that this strategic position would inspire a sense of power, that strikers shutting down a major auto company would emerge feeling a strong sense of collective efficacy compared to working-class groups in less structurally advantageous positions. This hypothesis is supported by historical evidence that strategically positioned workers with the capacity to disrupt the production process have a greater propensity for resistance (Kimeldorf 1999:89-93). In contrast, when workers engage in political disruption their power to produce desired results is delayed as they attack multiple pressure points over an extended period of time. One might predict that such workers would exhibit a reduced sense of collective efficacy compared to strikers, and that instead of feeling efficacious such extended struggle would lead to gradual demoralization.

The cases examined here demonstrate the reverse. Participants in the three-year political battle for a living wage came away with a greater sense of collective efficacy than the strikers whose demands were met in a mere three days. While workers in both cases succeeded in achieving their goals, those who secured immediate success exhibited a weaker sense of collective power compared to those for whom success was delayed. What explains this surprising relationship between timing, collective action, and efficacy? Given the strikers' powerfully strategic position, why didn't they develop a greater sense of collective efficacy? Why would strikers who witness the strength of their collective power so directly feel in the end less powerful than workers whose ability to make change remained in doubt for years?

There is, in short, an irony to these logics of collective action: those with the most structural power end up feeling the least powerful, and vice versa. I argue that the very strength of the economic logic of collective action—its intense ability to leverage disruption—leads workers to see power as residing outside of themselves. The short duration of the strike, moreover, offers a limited experience with solidarity. In contrast, the political logic of collective action forces workers to rely on the power of their own solidarity precisely because their structural leverage is weaker. The very weakness of these political actions leads to an extended struggle during which participants must flex the muscle of solidarity over the long haul, and so their sense of collective power has time to cohere. The paradox of the findings, then, is inherent in the logics of collective action themselves.

### III. COLLECTIVE EFFICACY AND THE CHICAGO LIVING WAGE CAMPAIGN

Those who rallied behind a living wage in Chicago emerged from the campaign with a sense of *collective* power, learning that “if a bunch of people ban together they can move mountains” and that “the people united can’t be defeated if you really, really group up.” The living wage campaign was a catalyst for the transformation of participants’ thinking about their ability to create social change through collective action. According to Ron, the former candy factory worker come organizer:

[The living wage campaign] actually changed my thinking of what happens when people come together and how they can mobilize and make change. And that was during the living wage campaign.

The two elements of collective efficacy—a belief in the capacity to act as a group and the conviction that if the group does act they will succeed—are prevalent in participants’

descriptions of what they learned from the Chicago living wage campaign. Here I will explore various articulations and aspects of this sentiment, and demonstrate how participants' sense of collective efficacy developed regardless of differences in organizational affiliation or a variety of demographic characteristics. Later in this chapter I will trace this outcome to specific features of collective action, in particular with respect to the extent of structural leverage and time horizons.

In the words of Susan, an African American ACORN member, when discussing what she learned from the campaign, “everyday people” can make a difference if they come together:

I think that even when you face a politician that's against you, your issues, if you stand strong and you get people behind you, organized behind you, and you carry the effort forward, I think you can turn them around. And I learned that people can make a difference—and this is everyday people. These are not people that you think about—middle class people. These are everyday working low-wage workers. They can make a difference if you get a number of them organized. . . . [The campaign] gave people a sense of pride; a sense of accomplishment. They saw that they were able to accomplish something that, for the first time, that they were up against enormous forces and they were able to overcome these forces. . . . I think it's important to emphasize that it was a grassroots campaign and it's important to emphasize that everyday people brought this about, collectively working together. I think that's very important. That if you say no more than that, that's what's important.

Susan emphasized how, working collectively, it was “everyday people” who secured passage of the Chicago living wage ordinance. It was not some force external to the movement. It was not luck or God, or even the politicians who eventually voted for the legislation. And she learned that when those everyday people are organized and “standing strong” they can “make a difference.”

In a similar vein Jorge, an ACORN member, described how the campaign affected him and changed his thinking: “I know that when we organize, we will be able

to get justice and that is a positive thing.” He learned that “we,” collectively, could mobilize to successfully challenge elites and accomplish goals. In all of these narratives there is a strong sense of the collective, of the gains that can be achieved by exerting collective power. The overarching theme is a sense of collective efficacy—the idea that ‘when we unite we can succeed.’

Another Latino ACORN member, Marisol, the homemaker, described the changes that took place during the course of the campaign:

Some of our neighborhoods used to say that it was an impossible task because we all know that Richard Daley is a very important man. They used to say: “how can we, the common people, fight with such a powerful individual?” We may be unimportant and common but the community understands now that we have some power, that we can mobilize many people under the auspices of ACORN. Daley knows that we will fight and protest.

The power differential between political elites and “common people” is of course not unique to Chicago. But in Chicago, where community members were under the thumb of Daley’s strong political machine, feelings of powerlessness were arguably more acute. Even the 50-member strong city council—as democratically elected representatives, the supposed ‘voice’ of the people—was afraid to move against the mayor no matter the extent of popular support they enjoyed. Through the living wage campaign, however, working-class Chicagoans learned that they too could wield power, and work against the machine if they mobilized together. Jorge summed up his feelings of efficacy in this context: “Yes, something can be done. We can fight against these kinds of people even though they are powerful.”

It was not only ACORN members who articulated this new sense of power, but people from other organizations as well. Karen, who got involved through a

neighborhood organization, also emphasized how participants learned that they could have a hand in making change if they worked together. Indicative of the profound sense of impotency and cynicism normally experienced by America's working class, she articulated how gaining a sense of collective power through the living wage campaign amounted to "thinking outside the box":

I think they realized—and I don't think they realized it before that—that their voice made a difference. And I think a lot of people feel powerless and feel like they can't make a difference, and you can sort of get just apathetic. You just—yeah, you know all of this is going on and you don't like it and you're pissed off, but then you don't do anything about it. You don't write letters, you don't make calls, you don't—you know what I'm saying? So I think the community felt energized that they could make a difference . . . If you haven't been exposed to how to make a difference—you know, how do you approach your alderman, what you should be asking for—I don't think that's just something that people just know. So I think that whole movement really strengthened communities and the people that live in communities to get them to start thinking outside the box, like "wow, my voice is important, my vote is important; I can go to my church and start talking about this to people and get . . ."—you know, so it was just a big movement where everybody had something to do and everybody was important. . . . It made people feel really good. I think people felt good about working on the campaign. And definitely wanting to make a difference. Not just to be doing it, but definitely wanting to make a difference and wanting to be part of that movement to make a difference.

In this testimony, processes of personal transformation are couched in terms of the community as a whole, and the importance of each person's contribution to the larger movement. The campaign "strengthened communities," building a collective that learned that they could "make a difference."

Homeless people, too, gained a sense of collective efficacy through the campaign as they moved from feeling isolated and hopeless to feeling that they could create change through mobilization. According to Frank, the CCH staff member, homeless people generally lack a sense of efficacy "because people that are homeless for some length of

time tend to lose their belief that anything is going to change.” A consequence of the living wage campaign, however, was that even the homeless, whose dire situation leaves them prone to an intense feeling of powerlessness, now “just feel like there’s some hope.”

Jill, the rank-and-file member of the same homeless organization, articulated how this hope amounted to recognizing the power amassed when a group of people acts in concert. She discussed the consequences of the campaign in terms of participants understanding the power of the collective:

[P]oliticians know that just because a person is homeless don’t mean that they don’t count. It doesn’t mean that because they’re homeless or because they’re making very little money that all of a sudden their voices can’t be heard, because now those people now know that all they have to do is get a group together and you gonna hear what I’m saying.

This participant, who was homeless when she became involved in the campaign, emphasized the power of solidarity and how the homeless learned to act collectively instead of suffering alone. Another woman from the same organization described that her experience of the campaign “was basically to feast my eyes upon the difference that mobilizing cause.”

Participants expressed how their new sense of efficacy moved beyond feelings of personal or individual power. As described by Mary, a retiree who had been a home care worker and union member:

[The living wage campaign] taught me that we could win—not me, personally, but it takes numbers. One or two people can’t really do anything going down there talking to the politicians but when they see all those—like one time we had what? Three hundred and some people to go down there . . . .

Mary explicitly emphasized how a single individual “personally” could not do much in the face of political opposition, and juxtaposed this with her new sense that people

banding together collectively could indeed create social change. Alejandro, the ACORN participant who had been surprised by his own conversion from an everyday community member into an activist, echoed Mary's sentiments:

So, I was the one to be surprised because I understood that it can be done, anything can be done. The condition of the individual does not matter. What matters is that things can be done.

The experience of organizing in the community shifted Alejandro's focus away from looking at problems at an individual level, and led to a belief that "anything can be done." In short, the power of the collective to create social change, overshadowing the "condition of the individual," was a common thread throughout participants' narratives.

Participants' new sense of collective efficacy was exhibited in their focus on the campaign's success. Many emphasized the pride and excitement of achievement, or pointed to winning, to passage of the ordinance, as the most important moment of the campaign. As described by Jill, the most important moment of the campaign was:

When we got the money—when they told us "yes, we got it." It was like, everybody was just cheering. Because of all the stuff we been doing all this time, we done got on everybody's nerves, and they was like: "Look. Give it to them so they'll leave us alone." And we was like "yes, yes, we got it!" So yeah, that made me feel real good. . . . So it was like you get this burst of energy, this joy from knowing, wow.

Lucy, also from CCH, described the impact of the campaign as the "impact of accomplishment," and she also pointed to the importance of winning:

One of the moments that sticks out in my mind is when the ordinance was passed and we did the celebration. Yeah, we did the celebration and that was fantastic . . . it was really very powerful. . . . to me that was very powerful to know that we had worked for something and actually *got it*. And that was a turning point for me. . . . I really thought that was a great moment to be a part of the ordinance that we had worked so hard for, has now passed and it's going to make a difference in so many people's lives. So that was the turning point for me.

This emphasis on winning underscores how participants' developing sense of collective power was linked to the realization that with collective mobilization they could succeed in reaching their goals. Rose, a retiree with a long-standing interest in politics, observed that the most important legacy of the campaign was this sense of group achievement: "The joy of accomplishment. I think there was a lot of that. People said 'we did it!'"

Looking at how events unfolded on the ground, however, it becomes clear that the living wage ordinance was ultimately propelled forward by a precipitating event that was entirely external to the campaign itself. In the end, the city council decided to approve living wage legislation at the same time that they were implementing a pay raise of their own, for themselves, the mayor, and other city officials. To deny a living wage to low-wage workers while lining their own pockets would have been a public relations disaster. And aldermen were forced to address the issue just prior to an election, as mandated by law, which left them particularly vulnerable. This presented a crucial political opportunity for living wage supporters, and it can be seen as the precipitating event that led directly to the campaign's success.

The politicians' pay raise was a prominent part of public discussion and media coverage at the time. As reported in the *Chicago Tribune*:

In a bit of classic Chicago political theater, aldermen voted themselves a \$10,000-a-year pay raise Wednesday—and, in a thinly disguised attempt to make it go down smoothly with voters, council leaders and the Daley administration dusted off a long-dormant 'living-wage' ordinance designed to benefit the working poor. (Washburn 1998; also see Spielman 1988b)

Some rank-and-file activists saw this as a crucial moment for the campaign. Staff organizers in particular were acutely aware of the opportunity that the impending aldermen's raise presented, and they strategically planned the campaign around it.

Nevertheless, participants strongly emphasized their own mobilization and solidarity as reasons for success:

The final coup de grâce was when they wanted their raise. But there's some people who say it wouldn't have happened if the city council didn't want their raise. That's just stupid. I mean, the city council could have wanted a raise ten years ago, and there wouldn't have been a movement built to take advantage of that. So there's some . . . going "oh, city council wanted a raise and they had to cover their ass." That's bullshit. If there wasn't that movement built up with people willing to contact their folks and their city council people on this issue, it wouldn't have happened.

Instead of paying homage to political circumstance, living wage campaign participants emphasized how the ordinance would have never passed without their own collective efforts.

The facts on the ground left it open to interpretation whether success was brought about by working-class mobilization or political factors external to the movement. As will be discussed below, the dynamics of the auto strike were similarly ambiguous, and in that case workers focused on how external agents brought about the strike's success. But in the living wage case, in contrast, the overwhelming sentiment among participants was that they achieved their goals through the power of their own mobilization. Clearly, the ordinance was secured through a complex sequence of events. But the point here is to emphasize campaign participants' interpretation of this complexity and their particular understanding of what brought about the ordinance. In asserting the importance of their own mobilization, participants directly contradicted the proposition circulating in the media and among the general public that the ordinance was achieved because of external political factors—because of how the political winds were blowing, an opportune political moment, aldermen's own political agendas, etc.

Lacking the positional or structural power of strikers engaged in economic disruption, the particular experience of collective action in the living wage campaign led participants to focus on the power of their own solidarity. Without the acute economic leverage typical of strikes they were forced to rely on internal cohesion to put pressure on public officials and to do so over three long years. It was thus through the very weakness of the political logic of collective action that participants learned, ironically, the power of their collective strength.

#### IV. POWER IN THE AFTERMATH OF AN AUTO STRIKE

In contrast to living wage campaign participants, workers emerged from the three-day auto strike lacking such a strong sense of their collective power. They put comparatively less emphasis on success, and the win was not quite so sweet. Instead, strikers pointed to two events that occurred during the strike as the most important: when trucks refused to accept the company's shipments and when the corporate customer refused to accept parts from Auto Parts Inc. as long as its workers were on strike. What is noteworthy about both of these events is that they are the actions of external agents rather than the strikers themselves. Instead of emphasizing how they achieved victory through the power of their own solidarity, the strikers saw the actions of others—including a corporation—as key to securing the strike's success.

Workers from a variety of perspectives—leadership and rank-and-file, Black and White, first shift and second—all highlighted these same events. Shawn, a middle-aged African American second shifter who had been involved with the union organizing drive before the strike, described how truckers refused to cross the line:

The most important moment was when Final Assembly Inc. trucks tried to get in . . . When Final Assembly Inc. truck came and they tried to get in that back, tried to go in that driveway, and [the trucker] called back to Final Assembly Inc. and he said, “Look, they out here striking,” and dude said, “You know we’re part of a union and we can’t cross no picket line either.” And dude was saying, “Don’t cross it then.” [laughs] That was one of the most important aspects of the whole strike . . .

One might suggest that a focus on the truckers amounts to an emphasis on worker solidarity and, thus, in some sense on the strikers’ own power. But this interpretation only makes sense if workers’ discussions of the truckers are taken out their narrative context. In short, the strikers emphasized the truckers’ actions more than their own. And strikers’ testimony was not about how “we succeeded with the truckers’ support,” or even about how “we and the truckers succeeded together,” but about how “success depended on the actions of the truckers.” Not just a semantic exercise, this narrative difference betrays distinct understandings of power and efficacy.

Moreover, when the strikers invoked the crucial external factors that led to success, their focus was not merely on the truckers as other workers. They “thanked” the corporate customer as well. Brian, for example, a first shift White leader, emphasized the actions of Final Assembly Inc. in explaining the strike’s success:

Final Assembly Inc. refusing to accept strike parts. That was the pivotal point when they said they weren’t going to accept any more parts that Auto Parts Inc. was building because we were out on strike. That’s what did it for us.

It was through these events, precipitated by external agents and cited by the autoworkers as the most important of the strike, that the rank-and-file and leadership alike became convinced that they could win. Both the truckers and the corporate customer were reacting to the actions of the strikers, and they refused to deliver or accept parts only because of strikers’ solidarity on the picket line. Nevertheless, in these narratives, the

strikers did not interpret their success as being predicated on their own collective power and solidarity, but on the actions of these external agents.

Although the actions of both the truckers and the corporate customer were taken in honor of the picket line, their execution depended on people other than the strikers themselves. Despite the fact that the strikers were engaging in a massive display of labor's power at the point of production, strike leadership and the rank-and-file both focused less on their own power and more on the support they received from others. Recognition of the truckers' role could under other circumstances indicate a developing sense of solidarity with other workers. But the strikers downplayed their own role in the event and at the same time linked the actions of the corporate customer to resolution of the conflict, indicating how a sense of workers' collective power remained in the background.

Most strikers' narratives were about how "*they* refused to accept parts" instead of how "*we* shut them down"—a rhetorical difference suggesting workers' sense of where power was located. As in the living wage case, the facts on the ground left it open to either interpretation. Final Assembly Inc. had a long history of unionization and was seeking good relations with its own workers prior to contract negotiations. A dominant union account was that Final Assembly Inc. did indeed choose to decline a shipment of parts, encouraged by their own union workers, when it was delivered by a non-union driver who had been willing to cross the picket line. In this sense, the customer chose to shut down before they were forced to for lack of parts, as the strikers emphasize. However, the company downplayed this story in media accounts. The dominant public

narrative, in both national and local media reports, was that the assembly plant shut down because they ran out of parts.

In any case, if the workers were not united in a strike, Final Assembly Inc. would have never shut down. And the strikers had succeeded in limiting production to the extent that the customer would have run out of parts in short order. Indeed, the rapidity with which Final Assembly Inc. shut down, just hours into the strike, regardless of the specific circumstances, is a testament to the strikers' power. Nevertheless, instead of emphasizing, as living wage campaign participants did, how they persevered against powerful elites through the strength of their own solidarity, the strikers instead gave credit to outside entities. This is in marked contrast to the living wage campaign where, as explicitly articulated by one participant: "It wasn't a feeling that someone else had done it. It was a feeling that *we* had done it."

Exemplified by the Fordist factory assembly line system and, more recently, just-in-time production, the economic logic of collective action consists of a kind of structural leverage that is external to the workers themselves. But workers leverage this external support at the expense of internal self-reliance and cohesion. Because the extensive economic impact of the auto strike was due in large part to strikers' structural point in the production process, from the workers' perspective this overshadowed the role of their internal solidarity.

The strikers did however feel that they had more power after the strike than beforehand. Before the strike workers rarely confronted management because of fears about job security: "They was pretty much scared to say anything. They just didn't voice their opinion. I mean, nobody got in an argument with the boss, they was afraid to lose

their job. So there was nothing like that.” In the strike’s aftermath, there was indeed an increased sense of power and workers were much less afraid to speak up. But instead of a sense of *collective* power based in solidarity, the strikers’ newfound sense of power was articulated in terms of either *bureaucratic* power or *individual* power.

As Carl, a first shift rank-and-filer, explained it there were two ways to solve problems post-strike. On the one hand, he was much more likely to speak to management individually, but he could also go through union channels: “I’m a very hard worker, but if I don’t feel it’s right they’re going to hear from me, somebody is. . . . Either that or I go through the union, tell [the chairperson], say, ‘you know what, this what the issue is’.” Carl could either talk to management himself or go through a union official. With both options available to them, the situation for workers at Auto Parts Inc. was much improved over their pre-strike insecurities when workers kept their mouths shut and heads down for fear of reprisal. But as strikers articulated power in bureaucratic and individual terms, they exhibited a reduced sense of collective power compared to their counterparts in the living wage campaign.

Students of industrial relations might argue that such a bureaucratic stance typifies the “labor peace” or “labor-management accord” consolidated in the post-war period. In this view, workers laboring under a union contract would be averse to using collective action to solve shop floor problems, instead taking advantage of their access to a grievance procedure, contractual protections, etc. Aronowitz (1992), for example, outlines his view of how union contracts serve to undermine labor militancy:

The union assumes obligations as well as wins rights in the collective bargaining agreement. Under contemporary monopolistic capitalism, these obligations include: (1) the promise not to strike, except under specific conditions, or at the termination of the contract, (2) a bureaucratic

and hierarchical grievance procedure consisting of many steps during which the control over the grievance is systematically removed from the shop floor and from workers' control . . . . The role of collective bargaining today is to provide a rigid institutional framework for the conduct of the class struggle. . . . The growth of bureaucracy and the decline of rank-and-file initiative is built into the theory and practice of collective bargaining. (1992:217-18, 252)

The argument is that the institution of collective bargaining defuses shop floor militancy by channeling it into individual grievances that are handled administratively. The result of this in the long run is seen to be a certain level of stability in labor-management relations since workers have avenues through which they can pursue their grievances without resorting to strikes or other forms of collective protest.

But although the concept of "labor peace" might apply to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when more than a third of workers were union members, it is a somewhat arcane notion at a time when workers' rights are under attack and union membership has reached historic lows. As outlined in a recent Human Rights Watch (2000) report, workers' basic rights to organize, bargain collectively, and strike under international norms are routinely violated in the United States. Workers covered by union contracts do not enjoy the level of security they once did, with struggles over concessions and corporate "take backs" reigning the day during contract negotiations.

Moreover, a union contract does not assure "labor peace." Although "labor-management accord" is one possible arrangement, a union contract does not prevent workers from thinking about solving problems collectively, from seeing union power as solidaristic instead of bureaucratic. On the contrary, unionized workers, who are generally working under a contract, are more prone to thinking in terms of workers' collective power than are their unorganized counterparts. As would be expected from a

resource mobilization perspective, workers in highly unionized industries are thus more likely to engage in strikes (Cornfield 1991:35). Hodson, for example, in a study of interracial solidarity in the workplace, outlines the positive effects of unionization on collective protest:

Unionization, which has the only consistently significant effect on organized resistance among the controls, also has a positive effect on informal resistance and appears to be key in this regard. . . . The direct effects of unionization on solidarity and organized resistance are quite strong. . . . The role of unions in facilitating organized resistance against management is both intuitively obvious and strongly evidenced in the ethnographic data. (1995:153-4)

Unionized workers are more prone to undertaking a variety of organized resistance strategies, from more covert, informal actions to overtly confrontational strikes. Instead of shying away from militancy, unionized workers laboring under a union contract are in fact more likely than other workers to engage in collective protest.

Despite the insertion of a no-strike clause in most labor agreements, which is the linchpin of contract unionism, American workers have a long history of engaging in struggle while working within the institutionalized context of collective bargaining (Kimeldorf 1999:164-5). Many of the most militant workers in American history were operating under union contracts; indeed, they regularly relied on collective action to enforce them.<sup>5</sup> The militancy of workers operating under collective bargaining agreements can be seen, in particular, in the case of longshoreman who engaged in job actions and secondary boycotts while working under contracts (Mills and Wellman 1987; Kimeldorf 1988), and among auto workers who have a history of wildcatting and other strikes against the union bureaucracy (in the context, for example, of rejecting national

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<sup>5</sup> For many workers bureaucratic, legalistic grievance procedures have been found to be effective at meeting workers' needs only when backed by worker solidarity and collective action.

agreements) (Weir 1970:467-71). The late 1960s and early 1970s, for example, saw what one observer called a “labor revolt” which consisted of an explosion of unauthorized job actions and internal rebellions against the union bureaucracy, from “daily guerrilla skirmishes” on the job to full blown wildcat strikes (Weir 1970).

The wildcat strike, which challenges contractual limits on job actions and the union officialdom that helps to enforce them, is perhaps the most obvious example of workers’ collective action in the context of a contract.<sup>6</sup> The tactic came to the fore at a number of times in U.S. history, most notably during World War II when a rash of wildcats took place in violation of unions’ “no-strike pledge” (Glberman 1980), and also beginning in the mid-60s and culminating in the wildcat wave of the early 1970s (Brecher 1997:249-71; Weir 1970).<sup>7</sup> Although wildcat strikes are less prevalent now than they have been in other periods, there are other historical forms of resistance carried out among unionized workers that have persisted more prominently until the present day. Such unauthorized job actions include the use of more covert actions (such as slowing down production by working-to-rule) which, rather than being isolated incidents, generally have a collective quality to them (Braverman 1974; Burawoy 1979; Clawson and Fantasia 1983). In a similar vein, the prevalence of internal union democracy movements (such as Teamsters for a Democratic Union and the New Directions Movement in the United Auto Workers) can be seen as another form of mobilization against entrenched bureaucratic power.

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<sup>6</sup> For accounts of how wildcat strikes challenge union bureaucracy and formal leadership, and unions’ lack of support for or even repression of them, see Berry 1974:20-4, Fantasia 1988:88-92, and Gouldner 1954.

<sup>7</sup> Wildcat strikes were also widespread in industries such as rubber and auto shortly after the 1936-7 sit-down strike wave established collective bargaining in those industries.

Although these forms of resistance to contract unionism—wildcats, covert actions, and union democracy movements—have not been pervasive in all eras, they have had a clear and persistent presence in American labor history. There are, moreover, a variety of actions that workers can engage in collectively that do not violate contract provisions at all or necessarily challenge union officials. Workers can approach shop floor problems collectively while remaining within the constraints of a labor agreement—circulating petitions, mobilizing collectively through sanctioned union committees, organizing informational pickets and other demonstrations that do not involve work stoppages, etc. The crucial point is that a bureaucratic stance is not pre-ordained for workers laboring under a union contract. Though institutionalization of labor-management relations may sometimes limit democracy, militancy, or collective action, it certainly does not preclude them.

Although some workers laboring under a contract may adopt a bureaucratic stance, others do not. The question is: if the presence or absence of a union contract fails to explain which workers are more or less likely to embrace a bureaucratic versus militant stance, then what does? Here I will argue that we should turn to the legacy of collective action, to the particular experience of protest that workers experienced well before filing their first grievance paperwork. The workers at the auto shop examined here clearly articulate a bureaucratic stance. But I will argue below that its origins can be traced not to the effects of a union contract, which are ambiguous at best, but to the particular kind of collective action experienced when the union was in formation.

Most workers seeking to form a union do so through government monitored elections overseen by the National Labor Relations Board. Instead of taking this more

bureaucratic and institutional route, the workers at Auto Parts Inc. wielded a more potent weapon in their quest for union recognition: the strike. One might think that workers with strike experience would be particularly likely to emphasize their collective strength. But despite this unique and intense experience, workers at Auto Parts Inc. articulated feeling a sense of bureaucratic power in the aftermath of the strike instead of the collective power felt by living wage campaign participants. They emphasized the grievance procedure and the fact that there were official channels through which problems could be solved post-strike.

This stance was apparent in the testimony of workers coming from a variety of perspectives, regardless of race or ethnicity, leadership status, or shift. According to John, a first shift White worker:

We're glad as a group . . . that there is somebody backing you up, there is a process. If you do get fired, you're going to go through every step there is to take to see if we can get your job back . . . I think people are generally satisfied with the structure we have now. People have an avenue they can pursue if they feel something is wrong. And they know that if it's brought up to a union person that it will be brought up to management. People see the union committee as on their side. . . . And if there's a dispute, well, it's going to be worked out in a step-by-step process with the union and with management.

In this narrative, workers' power is equated with bureaucratic procedures and protocols. It is orderly and official and structured. The agreed upon grievance procedure is followed step-by-step. Similarly, in discussing what has changed since the strike, Shawn equated people "speaking out" and having more of a voice with going through the grievance procedure alongside a union steward:

People are speaking out more about what they feel. [Management] can't just walk up and tell somebody this, that, and the other. 'Cause if [a worker feels] that they don't like what you're saying to them, they can go get their steward or committee man, and then you can go into a office and

discuss it. And a lot of times, they just say “well, we’ll just write a grievance saying we wish that this particular incident be pulled from that person’s file.”

Workers’ newfound power is wielded in an office, across desks, through paperwork and files. Carl even invoked bureaucratic power in direct response to a question about collective action. When asked if workers had been involved in any group protest or collective action since the strike, he responded: “Most of them are settled through the grievance procedures. . . . Most of the time, they’ll bring it up to the head union guy or any of the union guys, and they’ll bring it in to—they go right into the office and talk with them.”

Coming from the perspective of a leader and union committee member, Dylan explained that workers do feel that they have more power, but described it as channeled through union representatives and structures:

They see that now they got rights; they can say something. . . . Now, if they don’t think it’s right they’ll say, “well, wait a minute—that’s bull crap.” And if they don’t work it out with the boss, they’ll tell them: “I want to see [union representative #1 name] in here; I want to see [union representative #2 name] in here; I want to see [union representative #3 name] in here.” And because the company knows that’s going to happen, they’re more likely to work things out before we get involved. Because they know there’s a chain of command there.

Here power is seen as embodied in a bureaucratic hierarchy—the “chain of command.”

Nick’s rank-and-file view was no different, similarly emphasizing the chain of command while describing how it goes all the way up to the international union. In response to a question about if workers now have a voice at work, he invoked the upper echelons of the union bureaucracy:

Like on [one work station] recently, [the union committee chair] went in there told [management]: “You know, everybody’s getting hurt. You got so many people getting hurt over here you better do something now or

gonna get the international in here.” And that scared them. Soon as they—“Oh, ok.” So they got a person out there right that second. They didn’t want the international in there.

Uniting these narratives is a sense that workers’ ability to confront management and to advocate for themselves is equated with bureaucratic power. As grievances go up the chain of command they get farther away from the shop floor, arguably the epicenter of workers’ power when engaged in economic struggle.

In the narratives of workers at Auto Parts Inc. their newfound sense of bureaucratic power was detached from conceptions of workers’ solidarity and collective strength. Instead, their bureaucratic stance was underwritten by the assumption that someone else, generally a union representative, would attempt to solve problems on their behalf instead of workers solving problems for themselves. Both White and Black workers used the language of someone fighting “for” them:

Now you know that hey, this guy is sticking up for us and [management] can’t say anything about it.

From the peoples’ standpoint, we’re heard, wages is decent, we got somebody to go in and fight for what we need and not accept what they’re giving us.

This African American worker, Martin, continued on the theme of how the union fights *for* workers when discussing the role of elected union leaders: “I talk to them and I hear what they go through as far as what they try to do for people, and try to help them, and people don’t understand how hard of a job it is to go in and to fight for hundreds of people that has different issues.” Later in the interview he emphasized how workers’ problems were solved by the union chairperson:

It’s still certain issues that don’t get solved the best way that people feel that they should be, but I know those guys [the union representatives] are batting and going in and doing the best job they can. You know . . . our

chairman . . . I think within the first year the guy got this one guy back from being fired three times. That's the first time I've ever seen that and the guy was busting his butt doing it. He had a good turnover ratio as far as getting people their job back . . . .

Instead of emphasizing their ability to *fight for themselves* the strikers thought about solving problems in terms of *what others could do for them*. They did feel that they had more power to solve problems post-strike. But they consistently articulated this power as being dependent on union representatives and structures, on a bureaucratic process as opposed to their internal solidarity and collective strength.

It might be argued that the bureaucratic power articulated here *is* collective power, the idea being that unions are inherently a collective enterprise. Or, similarly, one might posit that the bureaucratic power articulated by the workers at Auto Parts Inc. in some way depends on an underlying power that comes from workers uniting together in a union. This is to some extent true, but only in a very formal sense. It might very well be that *in the last instance*, all unions depend on workers' collective power—that unions would ultimately crumble if workers were not united behind them. Nevertheless, having a union and having a sense of collective power are two entirely different things.<sup>8</sup> We can say, however, that to the extent that unions are based on collective power in a formal sense, it makes the auto strikers' bureaucratic stance all the more noteworthy for how it

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<sup>8</sup> Some workers at Auto Parts Inc. recognized this difference. As articulated by Shawn:

*R:* The only thing now, from my point of view, looking toward the future, is what can we do to make the union stronger at our plant 'cause it's not strong at all.

*I:* It's not strong at all?

*R:* No, we don't have nothing. I mean, they crying and crying and crying and they want to take a union steward or something in there every time they have an issue. But none of these people want to go and, you know, go to the meeting and start committees—you know, to try to hold it together you need more committees. You need more people to sit down and discuss some of the issues that's going over there, to see if you can not just do it but make it better, fight to make it better.

He articulated the distinction between going to your union steward to solve a problem and joining together as union members—that is, between having a union in a formal sense and acting as a collectivity in practice.

diverges from this ostensibly expected pattern. Moreover, this bureaucratic stance was bolstered by another anti-collectivist theme.

Despite their reliance on the union bureaucracy, many workers did come to feel more comfortable fighting for themselves than they did before the strike. Regular workers, not just union leaders, were emboldened when confronting management about unfair treatment and other grievances. The strikers relayed many stories about how, when suffering an injustice at the hands of management or when hurt on the job, they were now speaking up. But these stories betrayed a sense of individual power rather than collective power. They were typically reported in terms of individuals handling their own grievances or dealing with management one-on-one. This individualistic orientation is all the more noteworthy given that workers' ability to exert this newfound power was, again, based at least formally on the strength and protections springing from the union as a collective.

Although strikers felt that they could confront management more aggressively than before, this sentiment was articulated as an increased sense that '*I can do it*' rather than the idea that '*together we can do it*' described by living wage campaign participants. Debbie, for example, described how she was better able to solve problems on an individual level. In explaining what has changed since the strike, she said that she would now go to her steward to try to resolve things if, for example, she was assigned the wrong job on the assembly line. She concluded: "But that's up to the individual to keep track of that."

While Debbie revealed this individualistic orientation herself, at the same time she had the ability to critically observe the phenomenon and articulate it as problematic.

She was frustrated that there was not as much participation in the union as she would like, particularly with respect to attendance at meetings. And she explicitly couched this as being about people thinking “individually” instead of collectively:

There are some problems, but that’s up to us whether or not we want to work them through. We have to gain strength by believing that this union is us. I don’t think that has quite sunk in with everybody. I really don’t. People tend to stay on their own individually. And I tell people, if you go to the union meetings, you’ll learn that if we all stick together with how we think and how we speak out, we might get further quicker. But, again, I don’t think it’s quite sunk in.

Workers at Auto Parts Inc. had not embraced the strength of the collective post-strike. They had not yet learned to “stick together” through union meetings or anything else. But having “stuck together” for the strike—an action that most groups would never take given the high risks and uncertainties—this individualistic orientation is all the more noteworthy.

Union leaders also expressed this individualistic orientation. Larry, for example, older and more practical than some, described his role as a union representative. He repeatedly used “I” when describing his dealings with management instead of a collective “we”:

When dealing with management, I don’t get everything I want. But most of the time, they’re willing to sit down and listen. And sometimes they butter me up, and think I’m going to get what I’m asking for, and in the end I don’t.

But younger, more passionate leaders like Brian likewise described how post-strike problems were solved through the one-on-one rapport they had with management: “I work with management more on a one-on-one basis.” Leaders and rank-and-file workers alike felt better able to advocate for themselves post-strike, but for both groups this was

experienced through individual acts rather than collective ones, as personal instead of collective efficacy.

In Chicago and at Auto Parts Inc. the changes underfoot contributed to workers' psychological and material quality of life. Whether bureaucratic/individual or collective, participants' new sense of power brought confidence and pride while also helping to solve the concrete problems faced by low-wage workers on the shop floor and in everyday life. At the same time, the distinction between these contrasting understandings of power has important implications for working-class formation:

Widespread feelings of individual efficacy do not necessarily increase the prospects for collective action, and may in fact decrease them. For instance, American culture's individualist emphasis may inhibit collective action by encouraging people to make individual adjustments in response to structural inequities such as poverty or unemployment. (Freyberg 1995:245)

In assessing the implications of different understandings of efficacy we can turn to the two classic axes of class formation: cohesion (that is, solidarity or identity with other workers) and opposition (against capital or elites). The strikers' emphasis on individual power can be seen to undermine group cohesion. At the same time, exerting power through bureaucracy may be viewed as a form of cooperation with management. Acting within management's purview and through channels over which the employer has some control, workers advocate for themselves in less oppositional ways. And so with respect to both cohesion and opposition, living wage campaign participants exhibit a higher degree of group formation and class consciousness.

Although a few strikers touched on the sense of collective efficacy felt so strongly in the living wage campaign, such sentiments were atypical and were not a prominent discursive theme. The strike was clearly a unique and memorable event, but few

discussed learning lessons about the power of working-class unity. And even those who mentioned solidarity were not as explicit about linking the strike's success to workers' collective actions, which is the crucial connection underlying a sense of collective efficacy. Instead, as shown above, the key to success was seen as residing in external agents, in the truckers and the corporate customer. On the other hand, the idea that 'if we unite we can win' was the take-home lesson from the living wage campaign, almost a mantra for its participants.

If workers in both cases succeeded in achieving their goals through collective action, why did living wage campaign participants come to believe that they could succeed through solidarity while strikers expressed feeling power in bureaucratic and individual terms? Why were strikers left with feelings of bureaucratic and individual efficacy despite having collectively engaged in the quintessential form of working-class power and militancy? The explanation lies with two distinct yet interrelated aspects of collective action: the kind of leverage employed and the length of struggle. The strikers exerted a structural or positional power, quickly leveraging external support which then overshadowed internal group solidarity. They simply did not have time to build enough collective muscle to last into the post-strike period. Living wage campaign participants, in contrast, with no such positional leverage, instead resorted to flexing the muscle of collective power over three long years.

## V. STRUCTURAL LEVERAGE AND TIME HORIZONS

The political logic of collective action is characterized by the extended mobilization that public pressure campaigns require. Indeed, many pointed to the length

of the Chicago living wage campaign when asked if they thought there was anything unique about it:

There was something distinct about it. . . . What was really different about the living wage campaign was that it was a much longer campaign than, I think, any that we had waged previously. It took us three years from the time that ACORN started it to the time that it won. And I don't remember maintaining that level of energy over a three-year period. [laughs] I think all the books say you're supposed to have six week campaigns. Three years—that was different.

Generally, you work on an issue, you might work on it six months, nine months and then it's resolved, or it's not resolved and you decide that we need to move on. But that was something that—I think that's the only campaign that I've worked on for a couple of years or longer.

Participants were struck by the unique experience of maintaining a high level of energy and mobilization over such an extended period of time. As one participant put it, this was required despite the fact that they were pursuing the ostensibly simple goal of securing a raise: “We had not had a raise in 3 years. . . . We fought it for a long time—3 years to get a raise is a long, long time.” But instead of participants becoming disheartened, the length of the struggle was a source of strength: “*It was something that the longer it went on, the stronger it got.*” Instead of a liability, the extended nature of the campaign turned out to be one of its greatest assets.

For living wage campaign participants, the feelings of success and achievement underlying their sense of efficacy were tied up with the fact that they struggled for such a long period of time. Narratives of accomplishment were frequently intertwined with comments on the length of the campaign:

The most important thing of that time was winning. You know, that was a long struggle to fight three years and still didn't get nothing out of it, and then in '98 we succeeded. So that was a long struggle; a very long struggle. And we won, we got victory. And we was very happy about it.

It was so hard for us to get it—we struggled, we struggled, we struggled; well, finally we got it. And I don't know what day it was but they said, you know, we about to get the living wage bill signed—and everybody was just so happy about it, that we gonna get a living wage. . . . So eventually we got it passed. And everybody was so proud. But we had a struggle; it wasn't easy. But we didn't give up. We continued to stay on the case. And I think when they signed it, we had went and struggled so hard and so long until everybody was just so happy to get it signed. I was glad to see that people had been fighting so long for it to get it. I was very proud of that, because I knew what they had went through to try to get it passed. And I was very proud of that, that they got the bill passed because they had been working so long and so hard to try to get it. . . . [the living wage campaign] gave me to know that whatever you start, if you fight long enough you'll accomplish it. It gave me that—determination.

Instead of leading to demoralization, the need to mobilize over such an extended period of time had the opposite effect; it led to “determination.” To succeed after such a long campaign was energizing. And it made victory even sweeter. It was not a victory that was handed over, but one that was hard fought and well earned.

Reveling in the campaign's success and accomplishments, Margaret explicitly tied a sense of collective efficacy to the length of struggle:

[W]e found out that *if you persevere*, if you stick with what you know is rightfully something you should have, where there's numbers, there's power. . . . *And the majority will rule if you stick with it long enough and don't give up.* . . . It's a good feeling to know that people can stand together and really accomplish something.

The living wage campaign taught her that people could achieve goals through solidarity and collective action. But in Margaret's mind this was intimately related to perseverance, and an ability to “stick with” something to the end. Without such a protracted fight, success is less remarkable; but when the obstacles to success are great, and the struggle is long, the *way* in which goals are achieved becomes all the more salient. When goals are difficult to attain and take longer to secure, it serves to highlight for protestors their need to rely on collective power and internal solidarity.

Alternatively, the economic logic of collective action exemplified by the auto strike favors a faster resolution. Of course, not all strikers enjoy such acute structural leverage. But in more pure cases of economic disruption workers exert intense and immediate economic pressure that brings rapid resolution to conflict. The workers at Auto Parts Inc. were assured of success not because they were committed to sticking together for the long haul, but because it would be over very quickly if they could manage to walk out together at all, even for a very short period of time. This became a central part of the strike campaign, as union activists rallied people around the idea that the strike would be short-lived:

My friend was very involved in the movement and he told me that “we’re not out on a limb here . . . it’s not going to last very long if we shut Final Assembly Inc. down because [they need] this vehicle.” . . . And I had his assurance; I trusted him. And I, myself, didn’t think it was going to last longer than a week.

Union staff and rank-and-file leaders told workers that the strike could be over in a matter of days or hours as they urged them to honor the picket line:

Many occasions they said: “If we’re on strike, it’s going to be short lived; it’s not going to be long.” They were saying it won’t be longer than a week, that Final Assembly Inc. won’t allow us to be on that long ‘cause we’ll hurt them.

As workers prepared for a strike, the short-term time horizons of the action they were contemplating, and the need to commit for only a limited period of time, loomed large.

Some might point to the fact that union leaders emphasized the short-term nature of the commitment as evidence that the crucial factor leading to the different efficacy outcomes observed is not the kind of collective action experienced but leadership ideology. Do leaders frame movement success as being dependent on the leverage exerted through participants’ positional power, or on the collective power of working-

class solidarity? As argued in previous chapters, it is important to recognize that leadership ideology reflects, or is at least constrained by, the structural situation of the workers involved and the logic of collective action employed. Without denying the importance of leadership, we can nevertheless recognize that it would have been impossible for the living wage campaign to be framed in the same terms as the strike. There was simply no potential for short-term resolution to the conflict as there is when workers have significant positional power, and so living wage leaders could not have credibly claimed that the struggle would be short-lived.

At the same time, strikers' positional power, and the likelihood that the strike would be short-lived, was salient to the workers at Auto Parts Inc. because of their experiences on the job, their point in the production process, and their understanding of what this meant for collective action. The just-in-time production process, which workers confronted on the assembly line through monitors and queues, would leave the customer without parts in a matter of hours, and thus quickly force the employer's hand. This acute power of economic disruption, and its implications for the length of the struggle, was bound to factor into workers' experiences of the strike since it was an integral part of their daily lives at work. Michael, the middle-aged seasoned strike leader, summed up the situation:

*R:* I didn't think [the strike] was going to last three days.

*I:* How long did you think it was going to last?

*R:* I thought it was going to last maybe a half hour [laughs]. . . .

*I:* Now why did you think it was going to take such a short time?

*R:* Money. Money. They have to pay a certain amount of money to Final Assembly Inc. if they either shut Final Assembly Inc. down or don't get the [parts] there on time. That comes with their contract with Final Assembly Inc.

Workers on the assembly line had a sense of the ‘big picture.’ They were aware of their role in the production process, of the relationship between their shop and Final Assembly Inc. and, ultimately, of what this meant in terms of the power they could wield to leverage management.

This ‘big picture’ was not some privileged knowledge held only by older and more experienced workers, but instead sprung from workers’ daily life on the job. It did not represent a ‘sophisticated’ view of more seasoned laborers or an imported consciousness rooted in earlier union experiences. It was what workers faced everyday as they assembled auto parts on the line and fought the clock to get the product out the door on time. The young and inexperienced thus offered similar assessments of the extreme economic leverage they enjoyed due to their place in the production process.

John, a young worker in his mid-twenties who was new to trade unions, offered a detailed description of how an awareness of this leverage was integral to workers’ daily experience of the just-in-time assembly line:

We knew how integral we were to Final Assembly Inc. It was always drilled into us from the first day of training that we have [only so many] minutes to build [the product] to Final Assembly Inc. specifications and deliver it to their plant [within a few hours]. As soon as they order it, we build it, we ship it, we got to get it there on time and on quality. We knew—and there had been a few times before when maybe an electric motor broke at our plant or we had an issue with computers, where we had shut down Final Assembly Inc. And we hadn’t sent out a truck of [the product] on time, and Final Assembly Inc. is down and they’re charging our company for the down time. And so every time we came close to shutting down Final Assembly Inc., we heard about it. Because even if it wasn’t our fault—this computer crashed, we shut down Final Assembly Inc. for 8 minutes, they’re charging us thousands of dollars—everybody on that line, whether they were for the union or not, knew that Auto Parts Inc. had to run for Final Assembly Inc. to run. So, everybody was fully aware of the just-in-time process. . . . I think it factored a lot into [workers’ willingness to strike] because a lot of us felt that it would not

last very long. Because of the power we had. . . . Everybody I had talked to on the [picket] line that day felt that it was going to be over within days.

Because of their intimate knowledge of the production process, workers were convinced that the strike would be short-lived, and so they were not prepared for an extended struggle. Leadership framed the struggle in a way that reflected the everyday experience of workers on the assembly line; but they could not have successfully emphasized the likelihood of the strike's rapid resolution—instead of the importance of long-term worker solidarity—if that framing did not resonate with workers' knowledge and experience. The crucial point is that it was strikers' everyday experience of their point in the production process and what this meant for collective action—not leadership's framing or ideological proclivities—that underwrote the salience of the strike as a short-term action requiring minimal collective sacrifice.

This was articulated by Dave, the union staff person, who described how workers were easily convinced of their point-of-production power because of their daily experience on the assembly line:

[W]e were able to convince them because of their position as just-in-time delivery suppliers that they had a lot of strength. . . . it's not a hard case to make. You know that you make [a product] and three hours later it's in a [Final Assembly Inc. vehicle]. And your supervisors and your bosses are always telling you—you know, there's a TV monitor, and how many are in the queue, and they know, they realize that they've got a lot of strength.

While union staff may have highlighted workers' positional power, this framing was not an ephemeral political or ideological position but was rooted in workers' everyday experience on the shop floor.

As such, the strikers were not prepared for a long struggle. But because of the immense power leveraged through their point in the production process and the extent of

economic disruption they did not need to be. However, in employing such brute economic force and enjoying such rapid resolution to conflict, the workers at Auto Parts Inc. were not in a position to fully develop their collective muscle over the long haul. And so instead of developing a sense of collective efficacy as seen in the more extended living wage campaign, workers emerging from the strike attributed success to external agents and exhibited an individualistic/bureaucratic orientation.

## VI. THE IRONY OF POWER

Not all cases of successful mobilization lead participants toward a greater sense of collective efficacy or the same understanding of power. Instead, in the cases examined in this study, participants' sense of power developed differently depending on their specific protest experience. They brought to the strike and the living wage campaign a variety of experiences in terms of race, ethnicity, and organizational affiliation, with some volunteering for duty as self-selected leaders and others becoming involved as rank-and-file members. But despite these differences, participants' understandings of power in each case coalesced. Each group developed a distinctive perspective on efficacy that diverged from their counterparts in the other case. The crucial point is that the observed differences cannot be accounted for by different patterns of participant recruitment or by demographic and organizational characteristics but, instead, are rooted in the contrasting logics of collective action.

Using the economic logic of collective action, the sacrifices involved in a strike, where workers put their jobs on the line, might be expected to create more intense feelings of 'the collective' than a campaign where participation is less threatening to

participants' livelihoods. Engaging in behavior that a self-interested cost-benefit analysis would discourage, strikers take on considerable individual risks for the sake of the whole. Moreover, workers engaging in the economic logic of collective action exert a more intense and acute form of power compared to workers who rely on extended political pressure campaigns to achieve goals. These considerations would, it seems, lead strikers, using labor's ultimate weapon against capital, toward a particularly strong sense of collective efficacy; workers who shut down a major auto company might be expected to emerge from the conflict feeling exceptionally powerful.

But herein lies the irony of power: the strikers' inherent strength—that is, their ability to exert a profound structural or positional power due to their location in the production process—ironically led them to attribute success to forces outside of themselves. Moreover, they failed to gain a sense of their own collective power precisely because the event was so short-lived compared to the living wage case where workers had to fight long and hard to achieve their goals. Strikers displayed a sense of bureaucratic and individual power, reflecting the security and protections of post-strike union organization, but they had no chance to build a feeling of collective strength during the strike since the action was over almost as soon as it started. Victory was, in essence, too easy. Rapid achievement of goals might be the ostensible mission of any protest movement. But when conflict is truncated, even if successful, it undermines the development of an outcome that is more subjective yet equally important to our understanding of social movement trajectories: a sense of collective efficacy.

Living wage campaign participants, in contrast, experienced a protracted battle typical of political protest where the power exerted is less direct and so success demands

persistence. Those who took part in the living wage campaign were required to flex the muscle of collective power over the long haul. And so through the campaign they learned the value of sticking together, and to embrace their collective strength. Ironically, it was the very weakness of this form of action that led to feelings of collective efficacy among participants; lacking the positional power of the strikers, they were forced to focus on the strength of their own solidarity.

## VII. COLLECTIVE EFFICACY AND PERPETUAL STRUGGLE

It is entirely possible to identify and sympathize with fellow workers and to feel that you have gained the skills of an activist while lacking the conviction that collective protest can make a difference. Activists routinely make assessments (realistic or not) about the possibility—or impossibility—of social change at a given historical juncture; to be moved to action there must be a belief that the collective can bring about social change. It is only through such convictions that ongoing protest becomes worthwhile. A sense of collective efficacy, in short, takes the raw material of an activist identity and shapes it into ongoing protest. Jasper articulates the connection:

What is an activist identity? One reason that activity in one cause leads to activity in another is a sense of personal and collective efficacy, a feeling that one's participation may actually make a difference—what movement activists call “empowerment.”<sup>9</sup> (1997:197)

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<sup>9</sup> I have not used the term “empowerment” in my analysis for three reasons: first, it is not as specific as “collective efficacy”; second, it does not capture the distinction between individual and collective power as well as the term “collective efficacy”; and, finally, “empowerment” has become a somewhat empty and meaningless term, less a conceptual analytical tool and more of an ideological one wielded by grassroots activists, corporations, and political elites alike.

A sense of collective efficacy bolsters the emerging activist identity treated in the previous chapter, and brings to life solidaristic commitments to other workers explored earlier. It is the third and final pillar of perpetual struggle.

It would be difficult to embrace a perpetual struggle orientation if one lacked the belief that collective efforts make a difference. In the narratives of Chicago protestors, discussions of collective efficacy were associated with a desire to continue the struggle. Lucy summed up the connection: “That’s something that you can always talk about. We did this and we won, and we did this and we won, and we’re looking to win again.”

Alejandro echoed her sentiment:

The only important thing that happened was that we achieved something. We achieved that what we were fighting for. Then, for me that is something additional that we obtained. We have to fight, fight and fight and continue to go ahead because it can be done. We can fight. That is the only thing I can tell you: to continue in the struggle.

As told by Alejandro, his sense of collective achievement, and knowledge that “it can be done,” is intimately bound up with his commitment to ongoing struggle. Once participants had a taste of collective power, they were compelled to continue exerting it.

Ron expressed how perpetual struggle was more than an abstract concept or theoretical proposition. It was based on learning how “we can do anything” through the living wage campaign:

Say: “Hey, we got the living wage, let’s work on the minimum wage.” That let us know that we can go up to another level. So we got the state living wage, let’s work on the federal living wage. Growth; growth would be the word. Once you start attacking little things, you figure you can conquer the world. . . . let us know that we can do anything. So we took on—after that, we took on predatory lending. After that we took on minimum wage. And now we’ve taken on Wells Fargo. We keep this up, we can take on Washington DC!

Living wage campaign participants emerged from the campaign ready to take on other social issues of importance to them. Once they tasted collective power, it opened up a world of possibilities. How far could they go? How much more could they achieve if they worked together? Perhaps the sky was the limit?

The world of possibilities that opened up, however, should not be conceptualized as, essentially, a matter of framing or ideology. The importance of the living wage campaign, instead, rested on the *experiential* nature of collective action. As an experienced activist, Ann was able to step back and assess how the experience of collective action was crucial to the desire to continue the fight:

How could you stop when you know what you can do? Alright, we can win a living wage, so why would we stop when we know we could raise the minimum wage statewide. And if we could do that, why would we stop when we know we could stop Wal-Mart? And if we could stop Household, then we could stop Wells Fargo. And it's these—being a part of . . . it's sort of like *because I was there, I experienced that wonderful moment of power that led toward success. So I know that we can be successful in other ways because I've experienced it. . . .* We've got a history of failure in this constituency, really everybody feels like they have no power—and *if you actually experience that wonderful moment of wielding power, Lord God, then you'll just take on anybody.* 'Cause it's not so much just that there's more to do and what we did wasn't enough; it's not just that we can do it; it's also that it is pretty much fun getting there. [laughs] I mean there's something about wielding power that feels good and solidarity where you got back up. That's a great, great feeling.

Through three long years of struggle, relying on little but the power of their own internal solidarity, it was the tangible, palpable, embodied nature of collective action that led participants to develop a genuine taste of their own collective power and to commit to ongoing struggle. Rather than springing from some political ideology or charismatic leader or a book or a pamphlet or what they heard from someone in their social network, it came about because they were there.

## VIII. INSTITUTIONALIZATION REVISITED

For all the differences between the auto strike and the living wage campaign, there is one thing that the mobilizations shared: institutionalization in the aftermath of collective action. This occurred in a number of different ways. First, and perhaps most importantly, the movements' successes were codified—through a union contract in one case and legislation in the other—so that achievement of movement goals was crystallized in an institutionalized form. Both cases, moreover, saw new formal organizational structures. The strikers saw the development of their own local union, holding elections for union posts and creating a structure of union committees. In Chicago, the Grassroots Collaborative was born in the interest of formalizing the new organizational relationships that were built in the heat of the living wage battle. Institutionalization also occurred in both cases with respect to access to elites and the 'powers that be.' The strikers felt that they had more of a "seat at the table" with management and that official channels were open in an unprecedented way. Living wage campaign participants similarly felt that they had more respect from city council, and more of a direct line of communication with Chicago officialdom. Whereas it used to be difficult just to make it through the front door of your alderman's office, it was now much easier to get a real hearing.

Some labor scholars view union contracts as antithetical to insurgent activity, as discussed above. But the underlying premise expressed in the union context can be found in a wider range of scholarship on protest and social movements. Most prominently, Piven and Cloward (1977) have classically argued, in their study of poor people's

movements, that institutionalization undermines protest activity more generally. A parallel perspective can be found in Michels' (1962 [1915]) iron law of oligarchy where organizations are seen as tending toward hierarchy and oligarchy, such that even more democratic ones will progress toward a top-down structure.

Scholars have demonstrated that such iron laws are often broken. Voss and Sherman (2000), for example, find that even in labor unions with long-entrenched bureaucracies there are possibilities for revitalization under some circumstances. More generally, resource mobilization theory focuses on the role of organizations in movement sustainability, and how more permanent organizational structures sustain activism in between bursts of collective action (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Summing up the literature on the topic, Lopez concludes that: "As a general explanatory factor . . . bureaucratic organization is ultimately ambiguous in its significance" (2004:107). Theories that emphasize the role of institutionalization may offer a partial explanation in some circumstances. But they are at best uneven, leaving much unanswered in attempting to explain the demise of insurgency. And they certainly cannot account for the different outcomes found in this study where both groups saw institutionalization in the wake of victory, but where a sense of collective efficacy and a perpetual struggle orientation reigned in one instance and not the other. The divergence of the living wage case from the predicted pattern leaves something unaccounted for; there is need for an alternative explanation.

In Markowitz's (2000) comparative study of two workplace organizing drives she concludes that the kind of campaign waged had consequences for workers' activism and ideas about the union down the line. In particular, she focuses on the effects of

participatory democracy, which was present in one of the union drives she studied but not the other. In both of her cases workers secured basic bureaucratic and institutional structures as they formed local unions and secured contracts with employers. But the nature of workers' orientations toward the union consequently differed—in one case characterized by a “business union” model and in the other a “union as workers” model—based on the extent of democracy in the original organizing drives.

Luce (2004) has uncovered a similar dynamic with respect to living wage campaigns. Some embody what is here termed “perpetual struggle” while others, unable to enforce legislative gains, wither on the vine. In comparing a variety of successful campaigns in which legislation was achieved, Luce demonstrates that what determines the ability of activists to mobilize around policy enforcement in the aftermath of a campaign is not the extent to which conflict is resolved through institutionalization. Instead, it is the kind of conflict that takes place beforehand. More contentious campaigns, rather than leading to more difficulties in the enforcement of legislative gains, actually enable activists to organize more effectively around enforcement in the aftermath of the original struggle. Taken together, the work of Markowitz and Luce suggests that the kind of mobilization that workers experience in the heat of battle is at least as important in determining social movement outcomes—if not more so—than the extent to which any resolution to conflict takes an institutionalized form.

In short, prior collective action experiences shape social movement outcomes as much as, or more than, subsequent institutional arrangements and organizational forms. The intensity of collective action experiences—the “moments of madness” (Zolberg 1972) in the heat of battle—shape participants in ways that may be more forceful and

enduring than any consequent institutional or organizational arrangements. Even when facing forces that have the potential to squelch continued protest, the perspectives and understandings springing from past collective action experiences have the potential to override stasis and complacency. In comparing the cases in this study we can see that an individualistic/bureaucratic stance reigned the day only in the strike where mobilization failed to breed a sense of collective efficacy. Just like their counterparts in the auto strike, living wage campaign participants enjoyed new legal protections, new organizational structures, and new access to the chambers of political power. But rather than becoming 'co-opted,' their experience of political collective action, of a long-term campaign that highlighted the internal strength of the collective, trumped these forces of institutionalization.

This is not to deny the demobilizing potential of institutionalization, but to recognize that prior experiences of collective action can at times be a more potent force. A commitment to ongoing struggle is not so much dependent on the existence or non-existence of institutional mechanisms, but on prior experiences of mobilization. Institutionalization may indeed have a demobilizing effect, all things being equal. But, at least in some circumstances, it can be trumped by the legacy of the lived experience of collective action.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

Here the organization does not supply the troops for the struggle, but the struggle, in an ever growing degree, supplies recruits for the organization.

—Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike*, 1971 [1906]:66

Political identities and commitments originate in collective political experiences, not the other way around. The problem is not the political apathy of individuals but the poverty of collective opportunities to act democratically to achieve collective goals.

—James Max Fendrich, *Ideal Citizens*, 1993:144

#### I. CLASS STRUGGLE CONSCIOUSNESS

The question of class consciousness has long been integral to scholarship on the history and changing dynamics of capitalism, and it is also central to contemporary discussions of the American political economy. In examining the tension between hegemony and critical or oppositional working-class consciousness, observers have asked: Under what circumstances is hegemony relatively complete and when does it break down? When are workers' identities 'colonized' by dominant ideologies and, alternatively, what contributes to the development of class-based consciousness? These questions have been as relevant for theoretical treatments of capitalism as for the public discussions of American workers' voting behavior that make front page news after every Republican election victory.

All of this, however, begs the question of what, specifically, is meant by “class consciousness.” Scholars have emphasized how the content and contours of class formation in different historical contexts vary widely (Marshall 1983; Katznelson 1986; Somers 1997). Nevertheless, class consciousness is generally conceptualized as encompassing some form of political ideology. Traditional Marxian renditions have included “the conception of an *alternative* society”—specifically, a “socialist ideology” (Mann 1973:13,48, also see 50-1). They posit that workers will come to resist their position in the capitalist order and embrace an alternative vision of economic arrangements as an inevitable outcome of capitalist development. While more contemporary approaches move away from such radical ideals, they similarly associate class consciousness with political ideology.

Working-class consciousness is typically seen as encompassing a ‘progressive’ political agenda of one form or another. This is apparent in discussions of workers’ “cultural conservatism” around religious, reproductive, sexual, or other issues. Workers’ conservative stance on such issues has been used as an indicator of their lack of class consciousness, particularly in efforts to explain working-class voting behavior in the U.S. context. Workers’ “cultural conservatism” was widely discussed, for example, in the aftermath of the 2004 presidential election. The Chicago living wage campaign did nothing to challenge these “culturally conservative” ideas. More generally, campaign participants failed to develop allegiance to any particular political ideology or workers’ party platform. But does this mean that they lacked class consciousness?

Chicago living wage campaign participants did indeed come to embrace a greater understanding of their status as a class. Through the use of in-depth interviews, this

study has demonstrated how class consciousness is generated on the ground, offering a better understanding of the particular ways in which class becomes salient to workers themselves. Analyzing the nuances of respondents' own words and narratives, this study has opened up new territory in terms of what 'thinking as a class' looks like from workers' perspective rather than how it is expected to be according to some political or theoretical ideal.

Class consciousness for living wage campaign participants amounted to a commitment to ongoing struggle against the conditions under which they labor and live. It was rooted in a commitment to each other and to continued struggle to address the needs of working-class Chicagoans and beyond. It was not about signing onto a particular political platform or ideology, but it was nevertheless oppositional and counter-hegemonic. It betrayed an incisive understanding of power relations: that they, as the working class, would always be struggling to meet their needs and had no reason to expect otherwise under the current socioeconomic order. Participants expected to be engaged in struggle with elites on behalf of an inclusive working-class group, and expected that they could be efficacious in those collective efforts. This brand of working-class consciousness was more about struggling in the present, in direct response to workers' needs in the here and now, than about an elaborate and well thought out vision of the future. I suggest that we think of this brand of working-class consciousness as a *class struggle consciousness*.

Although this class struggle consciousness did not offer visions of widespread societal transformation or revolution, it was nonetheless active and engaged, encompassing a commitment to pursuing social change. Fantasia articulates a similar

version of class consciousness as “praxis” rather than “ideology in the abstract” (1988:10), as does Kimeldorf who couches American labor’s syndicalist streak as “a *practice* of resistance rather than a theory of revolution” (1999:15). Likewise, the working-class consciousness that emerged through the living wage campaign was action-oriented more than ideologically driven, expressing the simple idea that through collective struggle the working-class could continue to improve their lives, and to change the world for the better.

The idea that collective struggle in and of itself holds counter-hegemonic potential, regardless of the kinds of goals that are being pursued, is consistent with arguments made by Scott in *Weapons of the Weak*. There he claims that “bread-and-butter” concerns can hold revolutionary potential such that “there is no necessary relationship between the small and limited demands typical of a ‘reformist’ consciousness and the kinds of actions taken to achieve these demands;” “petty reformist demands are quite compatible with revolutionary action” (1985:341,344). Similar themes pervade Thompson’s (1991) account of how defense of traditional paternalism led to mass action in 18th century English food riots. Without glorifying the potential of reformist political programs or the defense of traditional social arrangements, the theoretical point is that the means and ends of social movements are conceptually distinct.

Likewise in the Chicago living wage case, counter-hegemony could be found in a commitment to ongoing collective struggle rather than in the campaigns’ demands or goals. Campaign participants were pursuing nothing more radical than a wage increase. But the goals that they were seeking to achieve were less important in shaping

consequent understandings than their particular experience of collective action. The class struggle consciousness that emerged, and the ongoing activism it inspired, moreover, can be seen to overshadow the simple raise achieved in 600 paychecks. It was a kind of class consciousness that served to move the working class from below, challenge the status quo, and infuse a sense of collective empowerment into the individualism of everyday life. It saw collective efforts as a way to go about pursuing social change, while speaking to the real, daily needs of an expansive notion of the working class. Although class struggle consciousness is no revolutionary orientation, it is undoubtedly more commonplace and more likely to have an impact on the contours of working-class formation.

Of course, this class struggle consciousness failed to emerge in the strike case. The aim of this study has been to turn from a focus on the causes of collective action to examine its subjective consequences, but to do so with an eye toward how different kinds of collective action have distinct effects on participants. The findings show that some protest experiences lead to a continued commitment to activism, whereas in other cases participants' commitment to struggle ends when the protest event is over. Protest can beget more protest, but only under certain circumstances.

The analysis in the preceding chapters explored how different understandings of ongoing struggle rested on particular experiences of collective action. In particular it demonstrated how the perpetual struggle orientation found in the living wage case rested on three ideological pillars—an expansive solidarity, an activist identity, and a sense of collective efficacy—and traced each one to a particular feature of collective action.

Chapter 2 demonstrated that participating in collective action strengthened solidarity in both cases but that, contrary to reigning theory, the greater diversity of the living wage campaign engendered a more expansive understanding of solidarity compared to the more homogeneous and strategically powerful strikers. The campaign redefined the meaning of diversity such that it came to underscore common bonds across boundaries rather than division and fragmentation. The experience of collective action in the context of a broad-based community campaign led to the development of participants' identity with and empathy for other low-wage workers and a commitment to continued struggle on their behalf.

In Chapter 3 I argued that the instrumental tendencies of the strike led to a focus on material gains, and that once such goals were achieved workers were no longer compelled to engage in mobilization. In contrast, in the more expressive living wage campaign, participants experienced the benefits of collective action in psychological terms. In particular, they experienced personal transformation toward an activist identity that underwrote a commitment to continued mobilization.

Contrary to prevailing theories that see workers' disruptive capacities as promoting class consciousness, Chapter 4 explored how such strategically positioned strikers developed a *bureaucratic* and *individualistic* sense of power whereas participants in the community-based mobilization emerged with a strong awareness of *collective efficacy*. The acute power of economic disruption on the job, where workers exert structural leverage external to themselves and where the struggle is short-lived, attenuated any sense of collective strength. In contrast, those engaged in political action in the community were forced to rely on their own solidarity as they pressured public

officials over an extended period of time. It was through the very weakness of the political logic of collective action that participants learned, ironically, the power of their collective strength.

The overall argument is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Characteristics and Consequences of the Economic and Political Logics of Collective Action

	CHARACTERISTICS	SUBJECTIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR PARTICIPANTS
ECONOMIC LOGIC OF COLLECTIVE ACTION	<p>workplace-based, disruption of capital accumulation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• narrow/homogeneous constituency</li> <li>• instrumental</li> <li>• structural or positional power/leverage; short duration</li> </ul>	<p><b>LACK OF PERPETUAL STRUGGLE ORIENTATION</b>—participants reject ongoing struggle, find continued mobilization emotionally draining:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identity and solidarity with others is localized; once gains are made for such a circumscribed group there is no need for continued struggle</li> <li>• focus on material benefits of mobilization; after gains are codified, struggle ceases</li> <li>• sense of individual and bureaucratic efficacy</li> </ul>
POLITICAL LOGIC OF COLLECTIVE ACTION	<p>community-based, disruption of political legitimacy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• broad/diverse constituency</li> <li>• expressive/emotional</li> </ul>	<p><b>DEVELOPMENT OF PERPETUAL STRUGGLE ORIENTATION</b>—participants embrace ongoing struggle, find continued mobilization emotionally uplifting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1) <b>EXPANSIVE SOLIDARITY</b>—identity and solidarity with others is generalized; solidarity with an expansive group underlies commitment to continued struggle for those still in need</li> <li>• 2) <b>ACTIVIST IDENTITY</b>—focus on psychological benefits of mobilization; development of an activist identity serves as basis for continued struggle even after gains are codified</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of structural power/leverage; long duration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3) sense of <b>COLLECTIVE EFFICACY</b></li> </ul>
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The analysis here demonstrated how the economic versus political logics of collective action diverged in terms of their subjective effects. But the specific way in which this happened was not according to the expected pattern. There was, instead, an irony to the findings throughout: the group with the most diversity emerged with the most expansive solidarity; those with the least instrumental ties to the movement became the most committed activists; and those engaged in a long struggle from a weakened position came to enjoy a sense of collective efficacy while those with the most structural power felt the least empowered. These findings challenge our usual assumptions about the divisive dynamics of diversity, about the solidity of instrumental connections, and about the role of the workplace in working-class life.

These unexpected outcomes only make sense in the heat of collective action, when the dynamics of daily life no longer pertain. Although the workplace is generally theorized as the font of working-class identity, in the context of collective action the more narrow strike mobilization limited the development of empathy for and solidarity with other workers. At the same time, the instrumentality of the action led strikers to see the consequences of collective action primarily in terms of improvements in material compensation and working conditions, and there was little need for ongoing struggle once these goals were met. Employing severe economic disruption in pursuit of their goals, the structural leverage enjoyed by the autoworkers, moreover, truncated their sense

of collective power when channeled through their short-lived strike experience. Taken together, these aspects of economic action curtailed any sense of perpetual class struggle.

In contrast, experiencing the mass mobilization of a broad-based constituency, living wage campaign participants developed an empathy for workers from whom they had previously been divided. Although the diversity of community-based campaigns is generally seen as an Achilles' heel, once the successful living wage campaign was launched the meaning of difference itself was transformed. With difference now underwriting a sense of unity, this more expansive class-based solidarity compelled participants to engage in ongoing mobilization on behalf of those who remained in need even after the living wage ordinance was in place. Moreover, the affective nature of the campaign, and the fact that not everyone would be covered by the ordinance, meant that in lieu of material gain participants focused on the psychological benefits of mobilization. Rallying around moral tropes and more enduring emotional frames, they came to embrace activism as an integral part of their identity. Finally, the lack of structural leverage and the extended duration of struggle actually emboldened participants rather than demoralized them, since they had nothing more to rely on than the strength of their own solidarity. Taken together, their expansive solidarity, activist identity, and sense of collective efficacy underwrote an orientation toward perpetual struggle.

While the experience of collective action does not uniquely determine consciousness, there is, as shown through the analysis here, an underlying logic governing how distinct patterns of mobilization differentially transform the mental worlds of their participants. We have seen how the economic and political logics of collective action affect working-class worldviews in unique ways, and how particular

aspects of these logics had specific consequences. But how can we think more abstractly about the processes involved? Is it possible to take a step back and to formulate a more general approach to the connection between collective action and subjective transformation?

## II. BREAKING ROUTINES AND BREAKING NEW GROUND

Though most sociological accounts of class formation are set against some momentous social struggle, the event itself serves as little more than a convenient backdrop for investigating the causal factors that presumably matter most, whether it is leadership, the state, cultural repertoires, the economy, or something else. What gets lost is how the act of participating in different types of collective action can itself transform group identities and practices, giving rise to distinct understandings about who counts and who does not, and how far one should go in the name of solidarity. Collective action here is treated not just as an outcome of other supposedly more important variables, but as an independent force for social change.

Collective action itself largely remains a black box in social movement theory. This is due in part to the leading perspectives that have dominated the field in recent decades: resource mobilization theory focuses on social movement organizations that sustain activity in between bursts of collective action; political process theory focuses on macro political-economic factors rather than the internal dynamics of social movements; and the “framing” perspective privileges leadership ideologies and discourse over grassroots mobilization. While each of these perspectives has made significant contributions to our understanding of social movements, they have largely neglected the

experiential component of collective action as an object worthy of study in its own right. Moreover, none of the conceptual mainstays of social movement scholarship—resources, opportunities, or framing—are theoretically positioned to elucidate the transformative power of collective action itself. Focusing on the subjective consequences of collective action highlights not only its potential for radically transforming ordinary participants, but also the movements they enable.

Answering Sewell's call (2005:100) for an "eventful" sociology, the strike and the living wage campaign are here treated as "happenings that significantly transform structures"—in this case, structures of understanding among movement participants. Of course, the transformative potential of collective action is also influenced by processes that are external to the event itself, such as the prior understandings of participants as well as efforts by leaders to "frame" the struggle in a particular way. The focus on collective action is not meant to deny the force of either pre-existing subjectivity or movement leadership, but rather to highlight that the experiences of the rank-and-file, particularly in a moment of intense mobilization, can become a powerful and enduring force in their own right. It is this largely unexamined connection between the dynamics of collective action and popular understandings of social struggle that has been elucidated here through a comparison of economic versus political protest.

This study has demonstrated the power of collective action, but the findings here show how this manifests in some unexpected ways. One might hypothesize that the narrow group of strikers, uniting around common experience and material interest, would develop a greater sense of class identity and commitment to joint activism, finding it easier to continue to mobilize together in the strikes' aftermath. Conversely, participants

in the diverse living wage campaign, many of whom were unemployed, homeless, or retired, did not reflect the traditional image of the proletariat and had less instrumental ties to the movement. It might be assumed that such a group would have a hard time overcoming differences to maintain solidarity over the long haul. But the cases examined here demonstrate the reverse. Participants in the broad-based living wage campaign came away with a greater dedication to ongoing struggle than the strikers. Why did the strikers, after employing labor's ultimate weapon against capital, fail to embrace their militancy for the long-term? Why would living wage campaign participants, who were mobilized through a coalition of disparate groups, feel engaged in a perpetual struggle whereas the more narrow and presumably cohesive group of strikers did not?

The results here are only surprising insofar as they are viewed through the lens of 'normal' everyday life. Collective action, however, had the effect of disrupting entrenched patterns and structures. In breaking from daily routines, it was the very incongruity of collective action that made it so transformative. It challenged the structure of the quotidian, and that is exactly what made it so powerful. In the context of collective action, habitual ways of knowing and thinking were up for challenge. Ordinary men and women were able to step outside the normal rhythms and understandings of everyday life to imagine an alternative conception of who they were in relationship to others and to the world around them. As such, I suggest that collective action should be viewed as an experiential mechanism through which new relationships, new connections, and new identities are born.

Social classes are indeed made and remade through more mundane everyday activities—from working to cooking, from schooling to sports teams—and they may

gradually shift over time. But here the usual bounds of class and community, of neighborhood and ethnicity, were radically and quite suddenly transformed. Social scientists often think of very stable and enduring factors as largely shaping attitudes and identities—socioeconomic status, race, gender, nationality. What has been shown here is how a more fleeting, anomalous life experience can have equally profound effects. It is exactly the uniqueness of collective action experiences, compared to more durable or permanent phenomena, that makes them so powerful.

It was thus the non-routine character of collective action that made it such a powerful force for subjective transformation, much as Durkheim (1965 [1915]:249-50) described the creative powers of “effervescent social environments” in which the individual feels “dominated and carried away by some sort of an external power” that enables one to “think and act differently than in normal times.” Having been “transported into a special world” that is “entirely different,” actors come to “feel themselves transformed in the same way and express this sentiment by their . . . general attitude.”<sup>1</sup> As one SEIU staff person involved with the living wage campaign observed, the experience of struggle “transformed a lot of people who prior to this just thought there was nothing you could do. You went to work, worked your shift, got your check, go home, get back up. This actually gave people a sense of their power and their ability to change things.”

Despite previous divisions of neighborhood and organization, of race, ethnicity and language, the experience of collective action broke old boundaries and routines and created a common experience, common narratives and, as I have emphasized here,

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<sup>1</sup> For a compelling account of how such experiences unfold on the ground, see Gould’s description of mobilization in the AIDS activist organization ACT UP (2002:192-5).

common perspectives on perpetual struggle. This became apparent in each case, perhaps most profoundly, when it came to the issue of different recruitment mechanisms and routes to participation. There was more of a voluntary quality to participation in the living wage campaign, and this presented the question of selection bias since those who volunteer are thought to be more likely to have prior activist experience, or be otherwise predisposed in some way to a critical consciousness. In fact each group included both experienced activists and younger, greener recruits. And one might have expected the experienced and the inexperienced to emerge from collective action with very different orientations, even if they had joined together for a particular protest event. But, instead, in the auto strike as in the living wage campaign, the perspectives of participants coalesced regardless of their past activist experience or the nature of their recruitment.

The views of strike leaders (who had more organizing experience, and who volunteered for their positions) were compared side by side with those of rank-and-file strikers throughout, demonstrating how their perspectives converged. At the same time, strike leaders were also compared to living wage campaign participants since both groups could be thought of as self-selected volunteers—and it was found that in fact their experiences, instead, diverged. It turns out, in short, that selection bias was not a mitigating factor. Prior activist experience or voluntary recruitment here did not determine subjective outcomes. Rather, they served to demonstrate how previous life trajectories can be altered in the context of collective action. In each case collective action experiences set the group involved on a new, common course, trumping other dynamics that are undoubtedly important in the context of routine everyday life.

But if both the strike and the living wage campaign disrupted daily routines—for a picket line or for a protest—how are we to understand their divergent outcomes? It must be remembered that these breaks from routine occurred in the context of two very different forms of collective action. The specific features of the economic and political logics of collective action—in terms of constituency, emotion, leverage, and duration—made for particular kinds of breaks with daily life. And in a variety of ways, the political logic of collective action constituted a more profound break from such routines.

At first glance one might say that the strikers' lives were more profoundly disrupted, since they were unable to go to work and were at risk of suffering financial loss as a result of the action. But given the extreme economic disruption, the strike was resolved in short order and workers quickly returned to their jobs and families. There was no need to adjust to a 'new normal,' since daily rituals and routines were promptly resumed. With such a time limited action, workers could bracket the walkout and move on; it was "in the past," as articulated by one striker. In the living wage case, by contrast, the duration of the campaign meant that such non-routine experiences were seemingly incessant, not to be contained within a day or a week, and they thus pervaded participants' developing worldview more completely.

The strikers, moreover, were not required to reach beyond themselves and their immediate connections with their coworkers. This, also, made for less of a stark break with business as usual at the shop. The group may not have been on strike before, but workers were used to standing side by side with these same people every day. The assembly line morphed into the picket line, and then back again. This was not the case

with living wage campaign participants for whom the usual daily boundaries of workplace, neighborhood, organization and ethnic group were radically challenged.

The strike, in some ways, actually had something of a ritualized quality to it. Workers took their place on the picket line. A few of them crossed. The police came by to monitor the situation. From the union perspective, there is generally little desire for the strike to get 'out of control' in any way. Arrests, for example, are often counterproductive, serving to remove key leaders from their posts and deplete the picket line of their ranks, making it easier for strikebreakers to move through. In the auto strike, union staff actually sought to limit the number of supporters who showed up in the interest of maintaining order and controlling the crowd. So, while some fellow union members from the customer shop did come to show support, the numbers were restricted in order to make sure that nothing got out of hand. Although the strike clearly broke with daily experience, its controlled, ritualized elements were a mitigating factor.

Conversely, the living wage campaign lacked this kind of ritualized quality. The political logic of collective action requires a variety of tactics targeting different pressure points, such that movement strategies often appear more generative, creative or improvisational. Each event was different from the next, so that if one day they were protesting in the streets, the next day they found themselves at city hall or at a private residence. And rather than resting success on control of the crowd, some of the most crucial moments of the living wage campaign occurred when the crowd got out of control.

This happened, in particular, in July 1997, during a rally that took place outside of city council chambers as the aldermen prepared to vote on the living wage issue. Living

wage supporters were prevented from entering the half-empty chambers despite the fact that there were plenty of seats available and that others were being allowed to enter. Frustrated by this turn of events, some protestors began to move past the security barrier, and around the metal detector. More followed suit and in the end six prominent activists were arrested. This was not, however, a planned act of civil disobedience. There had in fact been an explicit decision made beforehand that they would not engage in such a tactic. Instead, with city council essentially closing their chambers during a public hearing, it was a spontaneous reaction to what protestors saw as an egregious violation of their rights as citizens.

This event was a defining moment for the campaign. It was shocking and surprising, challenging the ‘business as usual’ of participants’ previous experience. What is noteworthy about this event for the purposes of this study is not so much that it happened, or what it meant for the campaign strategically, but its prominence in participants’ memories. The event got some press, and it did put some added pressure on city council. But it was, more importantly, a turning point in terms of participants’ internal transformation and radicalization. In interviews participants highlighted this event in particular, which was discussed with excitement and energy. It was not uncommon for respondents to sit down and, unprompted, begin their entire narrative with a description of the arrests. The crucial point is that the spontaneous, surprise nature of this clash with elites very much shaped the lens through which campaign participants saw the world thereafter. Such unexpected events are particularly jarring, and thus more transformative, for those engaged in protest. In sum, the strike was an intense experience, and it did present a disruption in workers’ daily routine. But the break from

routine in the walkout was very brief, and it was contained and controlled in a way that the living wage campaign was not.

### III. SUSTAINING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

The perpetual struggle orientation that emerged in the living wage campaign bears also on the question of social movements' ability to endure. Compared to the focus on the origins of social movements, far less attention has been devoted to the factors that contribute to their sustainability. Under what conditions will protest flourish or instead be left to wither on the vine? Sociologists who have addressed this question (often under the rubric of movement demise) have done so by focusing on processes of institutionalization and the role of organizations (or lack thereof), or by examining the nature of opposition or countermovements. These approaches, however, are characterized by conflicting accounts and contradictory predictions. Focusing on the role of organizations in movement sustainability, resource mobilization theory (McCarthy and Zald 1977) can be used to account for how more permanent organizational structures sustain activism in between bursts of collective action, while from another perspective, in line with Michels' (1962 [1915]) iron law of oligarchy, such formal organizations contribute to the demise of insurgent activity (Piven and Cloward 1977). Similarly, within the literature on countermovements, movement opponents often suppress, but can also sustain, mobilization (Meyer and Staggenborg 1996; Zald and Useem 1987).

Despite the indeterminacy of these approaches, most scholars continue to focus on either institutionalization or opposition to explain the potential of social movements to endure, neglecting to take into account how the particular kind of collective action

involved at the outset might bear on the question of social movement sustainability down the road. How might the legacies of different collective action forms either support or curtail continued mobilization?

This study has examined this question with respect to the perspectives and orientations of social movement participants themselves. It thus points to the question: to what extent does the sustainability of social movements rely on the sentiments and understandings of their membership? While participants' expectations about ongoing struggle surely have some effect on movement sustainability, the specific nature and strength of the connection remains an open question. There are, nevertheless, indications that there is indeed a connection and that a perpetual struggle orientation operates not merely in the realm of consciousness but that it also has to do with how people act and organize their lives. Although it is beyond the scope of this study, we can see how the different orientations of the two groups affected their behavior in the events' aftermath, so that the strikers were relatively hesitant to become involved in their newly organized union while the Chicago group continued to engage in protest even beyond the living wage issue. This is not to say that institutionalization and countermovements are unimportant, or that there are not other additional factors that will affect social movement sustainability. The point is simply to recognize one crucial piece of the puzzle: those more bottom-up processes that affect the orientations of participants, who either will or will not be involved as the rank-and-file of consequent struggles.

The issue of sustainability is particularly salient in the context of the American labor movement, which has enjoyed a lengthy tenure on the national political landscape while at the same time suffering from a decades-long decline that raises the possibility of

its ultimate demise. Beginning with the 1995 reforms in the leadership of the AFL-CIO,<sup>2</sup> there has been a renewed interest in democracy, organizing, and the involvement of rank-and-file union members (see, for example Bronfenbrenner et al. 1998; Mantsios 1998; and Turner, Katz and Hurd 2001). There has likewise been intense interest in the idea of “social movement unionism” along with a call to “put the movement back in the labor movement.” Many trade unionists have moved away from a servicing model, focused on maintaining the contracts of current union members, to an organizing model based on grassroots mobilization.

At the same time, however, labor’s reactions to the increasing pressures of corporate dominance in a globalized economy have often been top-down. Some very prominent unions have relied heavily, for example, on “corporate campaigns” or “comprehensive campaigns” which are characterized by a reliance on researchers who seek a detailed understanding of the pressure points that present themselves through suppliers, stockholders, and union pension plans while downplaying (in practice, if not rhetorically) the kind of grassroots pressure that many labor strategists deem crucial. This strategic tension pervades debates currently raging about the new Change to Win coalition, formed in 2005 out of seven unions formerly affiliated with the AFL-CIO. Some Change to Win unions have been accused of being undemocratic, choosing to secure agreements with employers through the use of pressure points found at the top of the corporate hierarchy—or even negotiating “sweetheart” deals with employers that circumvent employees’ input and concerns (see, for example, Krehbiel 2008).

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<sup>2</sup> The American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations.

Although such “corporate campaigns” have sometimes proved successful in increasing union membership numbers, they are unlikely to transform the commitments of labor’s rank-and-file so often touted as the keystone of labor movement revitalization. The activists created through the living wage campaign, and the long-term commitments generated, emerged through experiences of collective action in the streets—not by wielding pressure through stock options or union pension plans. It is worth considering whether a commitment to ongoing struggle among the rank-and-file is more important to the labor movement than any “corporate campaign” tactic that might secure limited gains from a particular employer.

#### IV. WORKING-CLASS ORGANIZING TARGETS THE STATE

Whatever the role of rank-and-file subjectivity in mobilization processes, one thing is clear: that there are distinct trends afoot within the American labor movement with respect to the use and viability of economic versus political mobilization. The American labor movement has traditionally focused on the economic sphere. With a strong syndicalist history, it has favored militant action on the job (Kimeldorf 1999). Lacking viable labor parties through which they could press their demands in the political realm, activists have instead sought to secure protections for workers through economic, workplace-based actions.

The contemporary American labor movement was born of such workplace actions when the sit-down strike wave of the mid-1930s ushered in the unionization of workers in mass industry and the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Although labor unions have attempted to exert their influence on public officials through

financial contributions and lobbying, working-class collective action continued to take place primarily on the shop floor. American workers have engaged throughout U.S. history in a variety of workplace job actions, but civil strikes protesting state policies such as those found in Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere have been rare—especially in the post-World War II era.

American labor activists have historically focused less attention on the political sphere compared to their counterparts in Western Europe, and American workers have expected less in the way of benefits from the state. Health care, in particular, stands out as something that, while assumed to be the jurisdiction of the state in other Western industrialized countries, in the American context is acquired primarily on the job. With the exception a few long-standing programs such as Social Security, American labor has put all their eggs in the union contract basket.

But the basket has been turned upside down, and workers are now scrambling to keep all the eggs from falling out. In the neoliberal context of heightened capital mobility and the global “race to the bottom,” the post-war “labor-management accord” has been almost entirely eroded. With labor markets more global, and more flexible, than ever before, even unionized workers have little bargaining power with respect to their much more powerful employers. Corporate power has, for example, come to dominate the National Labor Relations Board (Greenhouse 2007), which monitors and certifies union elections, such that legal protections for unionization are arguably non-existent. Unionization rates have consequently followed a steady downward trend, so that in 2007 a mere 7.5 percent of private sector employees in the United States were unionized (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2008).

Successful collective action on the job has thus become increasingly difficult. Some workers are still able to exert economic leverage to press their demands, but they are a select few, such as some transportation and distribution workers, who have found themselves in strategically advantageous positions (Bonacich and Wilson 2007).<sup>3</sup> But the vast majority of workers do not enjoy this kind of economic leverage. Moreover, with the increased casualization of labor—more part-time, contingent, and temporary work—workers’ connections to employers are increasingly tenuous, and they lack the kind of job security that has emboldened labor in the past. Long-term relationships with employers are like a quaint memory, such that workers can now expect to change jobs frequently throughout their lifetime. Employment insecurity, which is known to generally hinder rather than inspire militant action (Kaufman 1982:479), has been taken to new heights in recent years. Even formerly stable union strongholds, like auto work, are being taken over by subcontracted, deunionized, less-stable operations. Most American workers, in short, do not have the kind of security and leverage on the job that bolsters militant organizing in the economic sphere.

Finding themselves in a weak labor market position, with tenuous connections to employers and occupations, most workers are unable to muster the kind of economic leverage that has been traditionally utilized in working-class mobilizations in the U.S. It is in this context that American workers have turned to the political sphere to address their grievances. They have shied away from targeting employers and instead set their sights on the state. Johnston has conceptualized this shift as “the resurgence of labor as a citizenship movement” (2001; also see Johnston 2000). He points to a number of recent

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<sup>3</sup> Since their jobs are less easily moved overseas, some service sector workers are in similarly advantageous positions, and so a substantial portion of newly organized union members are now drawn from this economic sector.

trends, including the rise of low-wage and immigrant workers' movements, and temporary workers' unions:

Our argument is that despite the diversity, the different labor movements emerging in each of the circumstances we have discussed all seek to defend, exercise, and extend the boundaries of citizenship, and all these labor movements converge with other citizenship movements that seek to develop public institutions that defend and rebuild local communities in an increasingly globalized public order. (2001:35)

There are indications as well that this shift is occurring in multiple locations across the globe. Agarwala's study of mobilization among informal sector workers in India likewise uncovers a shift away from traditional class-based mobilization where "the primary nexus of tension is between the organized formal proletariat and employers," toward workers organizing as citizens to demand benefits from the welfare state (2006:426). Under this new model India's growing ranks of informal workers organize "through slums, rather than work sites" and they "make demands on welfare benefits (such as health and education), rather than workers' rights (such as minimum wage and job security)" (Agarwala 2006:432,428). To the extent that global capitalism and neoliberal economic policies pressure traditional formal sector workers in similar ways across the globe, we might expect to see this trend replicated elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

In the United States, the living wage movement is an icon of these new political strategies. As articulated by living wage advocates in Chicago, political mobilization offers hope for a dying labor movement:

The whole prospect—in a time when no matter how hard the unions work, they lose ground—the prospect of winning labor struggles from a different type of organization where you don't have to be just all at the same

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<sup>4</sup> There is historical evidence, as well, that such dynamics have occurred in other times and places. Somers (1997:92) challenges the meta-narrative that working-class formation parallels capitalist development, uncovering instead how the formation of the English working class was founded on pursuit of the political and legal rights of citizenship.

workplace, you don't have to just be working on your own immediate self-interest, but where people who are working-class people can come together on the basis of their wanting to change the balance of power around labor-management issues, but do it from a community-government perspective. I think the prospects of that are the positive thing that's out there on the labor scene. We're in big trouble with good unions, good progressive unions, getting killed. But what's really hopeful to me is the campaigns that have come out of living wage and the statewide minimum wage and expansion of living wage and now this "big box" living wage [targeting Wal-Mart and similar retailers]. The prospects are so huge for us in Chicago, where hope has been dim, where it's just very difficult.

Here the "community-government perspective" is seen as the viable strategic alternative too traditional trade unions.

A crucial part of this shift for American labor is that it has turned to the state to secure benefits previously thought to be the responsibility of employers. The experience of SEIU Local 880 is instructive. Prior to the Chicago living wage campaign Local 880 sought gains for their members primarily through the more traditional route of union contract negotiations. But, as articulated by a union staff person with respect to workers' frustrations when dealing with their corporate employers: you can only get "so much blood from the stone." Having hit a wall in the economic sphere, Local 880 decided to take the political route. This strategic shift did indeed succeed in securing better compensation for the union's members:

On so many levels: it transformed the wage scale in the private sector home care in the city; it led to a living wage movement in the state that moved our folks and those 500 people [who were covered by the Chicago living wage ordinance] up to \$7.60; then a year later, [a state-level campaign] moved our other 10 or 15,000 members up to an 8% increase and then a dollar the following year. I mean, those things didn't happen in a vacuum. Prior to that, we were lucky if we got 10 or 15 cents a year.

When targeting employers in contract negotiations, SEIU members saw small incremental gains that failed to keep up with the cost of living. In switching to a political strategy, their wage gains were much more substantial.

Of course, corporate control of the political process has the potential to impede labor's legislative gains. From the perspective of organizers in Chicago, however, the political sphere has proved to have some 'give' whereas the private sector has not. Although the American political system is less than an ideal democracy, with financial and corporate interests dominating political agendas, there is still some semblance of public accountability that is all but nonexistent in corporate boardrooms. There are institutional mechanisms in place in the political sphere that democratic movements can utilize in pressing their claims. The mere fact that politicians are elected and that they are supposed to be public servants presents multiple opportunities and pressure points for activists. Indeed, the threat of ousting aldermen from their posts on city council proved crucial to the ultimate success of the Chicago living wage campaign. Democracy was far from perfect, as demonstrated by the strength of Daly's political machine, but it gave low-wage workers in Chicago some room to maneuver.

This study has revealed a more subtle and unexpected yet crucial dimension of the shift to political collective action: that such mobilizations not only carry the potential to deliver material gains, but also to produce new, robust forms of class consciousness. While the concrete material gains of such initiatives are impressive, this study has uncovered the subjective dimension of this shift, in terms of how the increasing use of political mobilization is likely to affect the class consciousness of labor's rank-and-file. It has shown how the political logic of collective action can inspire profound subjective

transformations among participants that hinge on the ways in which political mobilization is more broad-based, more expressive, and long running. Given the perpetual struggle orientation that emerged among living wage campaign participants, the importance of this political shift might turn out to have more to do with securing long-term commitments to activism than securing more cents per hour.

With this study of working-class subjectivity we have only begun to understand the contours of political mobilization and its implications. There are many directions for future research on the topic, and here I will point to just two that emerged during the course of my own investigations. First, there are indications that labor's recent political struggles have inspired new ideas about the state and shifted perceptions of the 'opposition.' Appealing to the state to address class-based grievances entails a different understanding of power structures and class relations: Who is the opposition? Where does power reside? And who is responsible for ensuring workers' wellbeing? The answers to these questions began to change for those who had been through the living wage campaign:

It became much more real to people where the money really comes into the pipeline: that it's partially the boss, but it's also the state. And that it made the state a target much more than it has been probably prior to that. I think prior to that most people just naturally saw their boss as their enemy, or as the person that was keeping them from making a decent wage. And now: so it wasn't just the boss, it was the state. It can be the boss, but it wasn't just the boss; it was a missed situation, you know?

Campaign participants thus came to expect more from the politicians who represented them. Where Chicago's aldermen had traditionally been called upon to address relatively narrow concerns among their constituency, campaign participants came to see public officials as responsible for a much broader agenda:

[The living wage campaign] was also an attempt to have public officials accountable for more than just “do I get my garbage can?” . . . I think the thing that was new was that the aldermen were now being asked to take a stand on a quality of life, quality of wages issue that they had never been asked to take a stand on. They are always asked, you know—garbage cans, this, that, and the other thing. The strongest issues in your aldermanic campaign is streets and sanitation, garbage, and that’s it. But this was a new one where they were forcing their aldermen to take a stand on an issue that had to do with the type of jobs in the city of Chicago and what the city should be putting their money into. Should they be paying a living wage? And that just catapulted the whole—after we did the campaign, everybody was talking about living wage jobs. And you can see now, all the politicians when they run for office—even Republicans—are saying “we need jobs with living wages.” Living wages was not even part of the political discourse prior to 96-97.

The living wage campaign offered a fresh take on the responsibilities of politicians and their obligations toward the citizenry. ACORN, for example, had lobbied politicians in the past, but the demands had been more limited and, moreover, they had never before focused on the entire city council. In short, what it meant to be a citizen (in terms of what you could expect and demand of politicians) and what it meant to be a politician (in terms of what you were expected to provide for the citizenry) were transformed.

A second development that calls for more attention is how the very nature of working-class organizations themselves are being remade. Traditional trade unions have been struggling just to maintain already low membership numbers and to beat back a tide of concessions on health care, job protection, and other issues. Community organizations have begun to take up the slack and are being viewed differently by their members because of their success in achieving concrete material gains for the working class.

Trade unions, for example, have traditionally been thought to be responsible for securing wages and benefits. Community groups, on the other hand, worked on local neighborhood issues such as trash pickup and abandoned buildings. Illinois-ACORN had

been just such an organization, and they were also involved in such issues as housing, education, and redlining. But once ACORN became involved in the living wage campaign, the expectations of its members were transformed. As articulated by one ACORN leader: “Members see ACORN as a labor organization. They don’t have a union so they are looking to us to deliver wages and health care.”

ACORN members in Chicago had begun to wonder if the organization would be distributing identity cards giving access to health insurance and other benefits. ACORN, in fact, was doing no such thing, which serves to highlight the extent to which members themselves were imagining a new role for the group:

We became the living wage organization, it became very legitimate in our members’ eyes who previously might have seen us more as a neighborhood improvement group, a school improvement group—real civic-y. They started to see us as a labor organization. You know, that thing that Teresa talked about where people were saying: “why hasn’t ACORN won us health insurance?” or “why doesn’t the living wage cover us?” That whole version of us as a labor organization didn’t exist before and it’s now becoming part and parcel of who we are and that was begun in the living wage campaign. People expect us to provide them with a voice on wages and benefits and that’s really an interesting development.

Through the living wage campaign, ACORN members began to view the organization as being responsible for ensuring basic material security. Struggles around such issues no longer fell under the exclusive purview of employer-employee relations and union contracts, but came to be seen as community-wide concerns with political solutions. Changes in the mission and role of community organizations themselves were bound to follow suit.

The living wage movement has lost some momentum in recent years, but this has been due to its success more than anything else, since those municipalities that would be candidates for such campaigns now have living wage legislation on the books. In any

case, labor's general shift toward political mobilization has taken off in many directions. In Chicago, for example, the living wage fight led to a "big box" campaign that sought to require such Wal-Mart-like stores to maintain certain levels of wages and benefits.<sup>5</sup> There have been, in addition, an increasing number of state-level initiatives to increase the minimum wage above that which is federally mandated.

In Maryland the struggle for health care took a political direction when activists succeeded in securing enactment of the Fair Share Health Care Act in 2006. This was the nation's first state law to require large companies to make minimum contributions to employee health care. Although this particular law was eventually overturned in the courts, the significance lies not in the outcome of this one initiative but in the fact that activists are making some headway on health care when they turn their efforts toward the state. Organizing around similar legislation has been taking place in other states and municipalities across the country, targeting Wal-Mart and other such corporations who employ large numbers while offering little support for their employees' health care. It is no coincidence that while these "fair share health care" campaigns have taken root, union and non-union workers alike have seen their health care erode in terms of both access and affordability. The United Auto Workers, for example, have been suffering historic attacks on health care for employees and retirees alike in their agreements with the automakers. But UAW members and others like them have been facing these severe cuts

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<sup>5</sup> One of labor's main challenges is the dominance of Wal-Mart and other similar corporations. The inability of Wal-Mart workers to form unions and secure union contracts could in fact be seen as one of the driving forces behind labor's turn to political strategies. From the perspective of workers on the 'big box' shop floor, Wal-Mart has proven virtually unshakeable. Only through various kinds of community campaigns (to ensure living wages at such stores, or to prevent their presence in communities all together) has the company's dominance been curtailed in any notable way.

in their health care benefits while those working for the country's largest employers are beginning to see how the state can be called upon to support workers on the issue.

Some labor unions have been putting more resources toward voter turnout and also toward making financial contributions to political candidates. The electoral process, as Fine has pointed out, opens up possibilities for otherwise powerless groups to wield power: "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" (2005:184). But the shift as conceptualized here is not primarily about electoral politics, about workers voting for Democrats or Republicans or independents. It is a shift, instead, toward grassroots political mobilization. The political successes of the labor movement in recent years come primarily from street heat rather than from voting booths where limited choices constrain political possibilities. Although the electoral process indeed offers pressure points and opportunities for activists, the new labor strategies may be best thought of as "politics without elections" (Reynolds 1999a). They more often entail grassroots mobilization targeting legislation around specific issues rather than getting out the vote in support of a particular political party or candidate. And while labor unions have had some hand in these mobilizations, these grassroots political efforts have been spearheaded more often by community organizations than traditional trade unions.

Perhaps more importantly, neither have such efforts been spearheaded by traditional workers. The Chicago living wage campaign's targeted constituency—the city's low-wage workers—worked in all manner of non-standard employment situations. Some were part-time. Some could be thought of as 'seasonal day laborers' who worked

the summertime festivals. The campaign's home care workers labored under uniquely difficult conditions, dispersed as they were in people's private homes, isolated from co-workers and with no common workplace to speak of. Many campaign participants lacked a stable employment situation. And many were unemployed—from younger workers who desperately needed a job to retirees who had no intention of returning to the workforce. The campaign largely mobilized people of color, and involved undocumented workers and immigrants. In its rich diversity, the campaign mobilized what Kelley has called “the new urban working class” (1997) who have traditionally been excluded from the house of labor.

Not all living wage legislation is a product of extensive struggle. Living wage campaigns vary greatly in terms of their breadth, the degree of conflict, and the extent to which they rely on collective action and grassroots mobilization (Luce 2004). Some campaigns are won relatively easily due to sympathetic politicians or a favorable political climate, and so require limited mobilization by supporters. Nevertheless, one of the key features of the living wage phenomenon has been its ability to mobilize people—in particular, those who have been left out of more traditional labor union strategies. In the case examined here, low-wage workers from the more ‘marginal’ sectors of the working class clashed with—and won against—Chicago's powerful political machine.

Similarly, worker centers—an especially prominent example of the shift away from workplace-based mobilization—have sprung up among more ‘marginal’ sectors of the working class, particularly in immigrant communities. Fine, in her recent study of these centers, articulates this connection between constituency and strategy. She notes that worker centers have succeeded most at changing public policy since their low-wage

(and often immigrant) worker constituencies have such limited economic power (2006:258).

In short, as Clawson (2003) has pointed out, the cutting edge of working-class organizing is now taking place among those who have a history of marginalization with respect to the mainstream labor movement. Putting the “movement back in the labor movement” has become an exercise in stepping outside of traditional unions all together. The successes of living wage campaigns and worker centers, for example, point to a future for American labor that lies not in the more ‘stable’ segments of the working class but in its more ‘marginal’ ones. As such, this ‘stable’ versus ‘marginal’ distinction is itself becoming inverted. Labor’s traditional constituency is becoming more marginal as they weaken in the face of concessions and cutbacks, while supposedly ‘marginal’ members of the working class have become the lifeblood of the labor movement.

## V. COLLECTIVE ACTION ACROSS CONTEXTS

While the economic and political logics of collective action are clearly important to understanding contemporary trends in the American labor movement, do the findings of this study apply to other groups and social movements? The intention here has been to go beyond comparisons of different movements to a greater level of abstraction, since these forms of collective action can theoretically be used in any social movement. The distinction between the economic and political logics of action does indeed apply more broadly and can shed light on the varieties of collective action used not only among labor activists but in other contexts as well. In social movements as varied as, say, the civil rights and peace movements, there is an important distinction to be made between

targeting the operations of a particular business establishment or corporate entity (restaurant, nuclear power plant, etc.) versus targeting legislation or public policy. With the former, regardless of the social movement context, only a small number of people may be required to shut down a facility or interfere with its operations—and the action is likely to be short-lived before activists are ejected or arrested. The best hope for the latter, alternatively, is to mobilize larger numbers for a long-term campaign, be it for parity or peace. The economic/political divide can also be seen, for example, in the logics of action employed by different factions of the environmental movement: industrial sabotage versus grassroots mobilization around legislation. Since the conceptual model is relevant to other arenas and social movements, this study provides important insights into the general dynamics of economic versus political action, workplace versus community struggle.

Of course, the acute power present at the point of production is particular to workers laboring in very specific structural positions, and so economic leverage might look different for other groups. And some kinds of economic leverage (where there is less acute disruption of production) will look more political; most boycotts, for example, will require extended campaigns. At the same time, not all actors will have equal access to the political and economic realms, and some social movements may be more or less likely to utilize a particular kind of collective action. Some constituencies, for example, have little economic leverage (such as some segments of the poor or unemployed), while others operate with less leverage in the political realm (such as non-citizens). Historical and social structural factors will also come into play, so that, for example, in different historical contexts actors will be more or less able to press their demands politically

depending on the openness or vulnerability of the political system. In short, the kinds of leverage available to specific actors at particular points in time will vary. Nevertheless, most social movements have a variety of strategies available to them, so that the two logics of action operate in many different contexts.

This study, however, is not about the origins of particular strategies but their outcomes, and the key point to be made here is that the economic and political logics of collective action can be expected to exhibit similar consequences across movements. Although the logics are treated here through an analysis of labor movement dynamics and class formation, we can step back with an eye toward how they might apply to social movements more generally. We would expect, for example, a perpetual struggle orientation to emerge from other successful community-based political mobilizations that share basic traits with the living wage campaign. Conversely, mobilizations that resemble the auto strike might be expected to produce an enhanced (though not expansive) solidarity among participants while at the same time truncating any expectation of ongoing struggle.

Moreover, while the different aspects of the logics of collective action—constituency, emotion, leverage, and duration—can work together in an interrelated way, at the same time we have traced particular subjective consequences to each of these features. While the various qualities of collective action examined here generally cluster together at opposite ends of the economic-political spectrum, in isolating each of these traits analytically and demonstrating their independent consequences, we can apply them on an individual basis. A successful long-term action, for example, would be expected to bolster a sense of collective efficacy regardless of whether it exhibits a narrow- or broad-

based constituency. Each specific feature of collective action can be expected to affect participants in consistent ways across contexts. Groups organizing around issues as varied as peace, gender oppression, or immigrant rights are likely to be affected by, for example, the duration of struggle in similar ways. No matter the particular social movement in question, when activists must resort to sustained mobilization and the strength of their own solidarity to achieve goals we can expect them to emerge with feelings of collective efficacy similar to those exhibited by living wage campaign participants. In applying such insights more broadly, we can uncover how specific features of collective action operate across contexts, promising us a better understanding of how collective action leads to social transformation.

More generally, this study has sought to prioritize the on-the-ground experiences of participants in social movements over the typical emphasis, among scholars and activists alike, on leadership and ideology. Without denying these downward pressures, this study demonstrates the value of a “bottom up” perspective for understanding class and group formation as, in Thompson’s (1963) celebrated phrase, “something that happens.” Examining how participants experience and make sense of collective action, here I have emphasized those “happenings” that break with daily routines, those exceptional “moments of madness” (Zolberg 1972) that, in the course of collective struggle, can transform popular understandings and alter the course of social protest. It is a reminder that we should attend not only to the stable and enduring features of social life—as our discipline does so well—but also to those seemingly ephemeral experiences that comprise the lived history and collective memories of the groups we study.

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