

**MORE THAN THE SUM OF THEIR PARTS?  
LABOR-COMMUNITY COALITIONS IN THE RUST BELT**

by

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To my grandmothers, Janice E. Dobbie and J. Enid Garner.

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## **List of Acronyms**

ACORN	Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations
AFSCME	American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees
APA	Alliance for Progressive Action (Pittsburgh)
BP	Building Partnerships USA (national nonprofit)
CBA	Community Benefits Agreement
CFL	Chicago Federation of Labor (Chicago's central labor council)
CLC	Central Labor Council (regional body of the AFL-CIO)
CSM	Campaign for Sustainable Milwaukee
GC	Grassroots Collaborative (Chicago)
GJLN	Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods coalition (Milwaukee)
J4J	Justice for Janitors (SEIU campaigns across the country)
JwJ	Jobs with Justice (national labor-community nonprofit)
LAANE	Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy ("think-and-do tank")
MICAH	Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope (Gamaliel)
MVUC	Mon Valley Unemployed Committee (Pittsburgh community group)
PWF	Partnerships for Working Families (national nonprofit)
SEIU	Service Employees International Union
TMC	Thomas Merton Center (Pittsburgh)
UFCW	United Food and Commercial Workers union
UNITE HERE	Merged union of former textile workers' union and the hotel and restaurant employees

# Chapter 1

## Where Do We Go From Here?

*“As we talk about ‘Where do we go from here?’ we must honestly recognize where we are now...and face the fact that the movement must address itself to restructuring the whole of American society” (Martin Luther King, Jr., August 16, 1967 SCLC Convention).*

We stand at a moment of uncertainty, having seemingly reached a number of dead ends while facing many crises in the emerging world order. Even if our old policy tools were up to the task of establishing stable economic growth, limited resources and environmental catastrophes seem to foreshadow inevitable and fundamental crises ahead. The sense of neoliberal inevitability that led Margaret Thatcher to claim that “there is no alternative” in the 1980s has foundered amidst mounting signs of economic and social meltdown, but it remains uncertain how resistance to this crumbling “Washington consensus” will develop or what will replace it. While this research project tackles only a small corner of this broader topic, it is connected via two linked assumptions. First, that working class movements remain central to determining the shape of the world economy, and second, that urban regions will continue to be important sites of economic accumulation and class struggle.

This project compares emerging working class movements in three deindustrializing US cities—Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, and Chicago—with an eye toward these broader questions. Because organizers have met varying levels of success in each city over the past two decades, these cases help better understand why strong movements emerge in some places and not others. I was originally drawn to this set of questions by asking why recent economic justice struggles have been so weak and fragmented in Detroit (and Michigan as a

whole). As a native Michigander who has worked as both a community and labor organizer, this project is rooted in my search for strategies that might prove effective in my own patch of the Rust Belt. While efforts to build sustainable working-class movements in Pittsburgh, Chicago, and Milwaukee have not been completely effective, they offer many learning opportunities for organizers and researchers alike.

This topic emerged from my involvement in a 2004 ballot initiative campaign to raise Michigan's minimum wage. Many of the leaders of the campaign were interested in using it as an opportunity to build local progressive coalitions throughout the state and overcome the fragmentation dividing potential allies. The Republican legislature headed off the ballot initiative by passing an even larger increase (to avoid the presumed increase in Democratic voter turnout it would have produced). However, even before this deflated the campaign, I was struck by the immense challenge of bringing the many supportive groups together across cultural, organizational, and interpersonal barriers. Two years later, many of the same groups came together to oppose an anti-affirmative action ballot initiative, but often seemed to be starting from scratch. Scrambling to pull together a statewide electoral operation while fusing together a diverse coalition, the campaign never managed to gain momentum and lost by a sizable margin at the polls.

Organizers in Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, and Chicago got tired of losing such defensive battles and began working together to develop proactive strategies in the 1990s. These three cities represent neither the "easiest" nor "hardest" places to build working-class movements in the US. While they have been hit hard by deindustrialization, pro-business regimes, and long histories of racial conflict, labor retains a significant political foothold and the general climate is not as anti-worker as in some other regions of the country.

Coalitions in all three cities campaigned successfully for living wage ordinances<sup>1</sup> in the late-1990s, but have followed different paths since. Chicago's organizing efforts, which looked highly fragmented and less promising than the other two cities during the 1990s, built slowly and steadily and have since coalesced into the most vibrant and effective local movement in the region, largely because of the way organizers laid an early groundwork for success. After considerable early success, efforts in Pittsburgh and Milwaukee—mapping out ambitious structures to bring all potential allies into a single coalition—turned out to be unsustainable and failed catastrophically. While collaboration reemerged in Milwaukee relatively quickly, Pittsburgh activists continue to struggle.

### **Why Do Movements Emerge Where and When They Do?**

The literature offers far more explanations for cases where movements fail to emerge, as in Detroit, than for the varying levels of success found in these three cities. One school of thought explores how broader political-economic context and “external” factors present barriers to movements. Another perspective focuses on a range of “internal” factors like fragmentation, divisions, and strategic shortcomings to explain the relative weakness of US working class movements. In an effort to better understand why some movements do emerge in the face of all these challenges, this project traces the evolution of local organizing strategies as they confront internal and external barriers in their efforts to unify local working class movements across difference and match their organizational forms and political strategies to the context, a process Edwin Amenta (2006) suggests is the most important variable explaining different movement outcomes.

Because these perspectives are often applied somewhat erratically, observers of cities and working class organizing in the US seem subject to dramatic mood swings, resulting in parallel pessimistic and optimistic narratives within the urban and labor studies literatures. Cities are presented as either

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<sup>1</sup> Arguably the defining local economic justice policy idea of the last decade, the first living wage ordinance was passed in 1994—not in Berkeley or Los Angeles, but Baltimore. Well over 100 municipalities followed suit during the ensuing decade.

anachronistic remnants of an earlier age or our rediscovered future. Such dissonance is echoed in accounts of labor, which alternate between obituaries for a once-proud movement rendered toothless by increased capital mobility, racial divides, globalization, and self-destructive tendencies, and hopeful accounts of unions waking up from their lethargy, uniting with communities of color and churches, and embracing a broadly progressive agenda.

This divergence stems in part from authors looking for different things; however, it also reflects the fact that both narratives capture a piece of the truth. Neoliberal capitalism<sup>2</sup> is dominant in many ways—the legal and organizational basis of working class power has been eroded over time, urban policy is largely determined by business elites to protect real estate values rather than stimulate job growth or provide affordable housing, local governments are pitted against each other by corporations, and our communities remain dramatically segregated by race and class. Such fragmentation is a central problem for activists in cities and unions, as potential progressive allies are splintered by a multitude of parochial turf wars reinforced by pressures from above. However, one can also find hopeful signs that, backs pressed against the wall, unions and community groups are developing new organizing strategies to overcome the barriers separating them and promote a vision of more equitable urban regions that work for all their residents.

While scholars explain the existence of such beacons of hope through both external and internal causes, the broader patterns of the social science literature tend toward structural explanations. For example, hopeful and pessimistic accounts of the labor movement often reflect a geographic split, with innovation and positive change on the coasts and Sun Belt (most often in California), while the Midwest rusts quietly. Of course, it was not always this way—a generation ago, the region now known as the Rust Belt was the heart of working class organizing in the US, while most of the West Coast seemed to

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<sup>2</sup> Brenner and Theodore (2002:vi) describe neoliberalism as a “loosening or dismantling of the various institutional constraints upon marketization, commodification, the hyperexploitation of workers, and the discretionary power of private capital that had been established through popular struggles prior to and during the postwar period.”

embrace a sort of individualistic, uber-capitalist sprawl. How did these two regions come to switch places in our minds, and what does that transition imply for our investigations into urban working class organizing?

As archetypal representatives of these two regions and their divergent trajectories, consider Detroit and Los Angeles, and particularly two well-known strikes of the 1990s. A longtime hub of left-wing organizing, Detroit was the symbolic center of America's industrial union and Black Power movements, and elected a Black socialist mayor in 1973<sup>3</sup>. While deindustrialization and job losses hit the region hard, Detroit remains a strong union town, and when workers at the two daily newspapers struck to protest blatant contract violations in 1995, it seemed reasonable to expect their eventual victory. However, even after building community support and coordinating boycotts, direct actions, and political interventions over the course of the five-year strike, the unions were forced to accept crushing concessions (Mirola, 2003). The loss set the tone for further contract take-backs and the erosion of public benefits. As of 2008, the state faces the worst foreclosure crisis in the nation, a wave of union-busting, and an effort to make Michigan a "right to work" state, but relatively little organizing or vocal opposition has emerged in opposition to this right wing assault.

On the other hand, Los Angeles appears to have risen from the ashes in the 1990s, when a rejuvenated labor movement, in coalition with community organizations, is credited with transforming an "open shop" town into a bastion of working class power. The first widely noted sign of this trend came in the early 1990s, when a Service Employees International Union (SEIU) local made up of largely undocumented immigrant janitors pulled off a historic victory by utilizing community networks and creative tactics to put direct pressure on building owners. Over the next decade, this emerging movement demonstrated a new willingness to treat members of the working class as "whole people" with multiple, interlocking interests. Churches became more willing to take a stand on behalf of

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<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, 1973 is the same year many scholars use to mark the transition to a post-industrial economy and the rise of neoliberalism, suggesting what a difficult context Coleman Young and other African-American mayors of the era faced upon taking office (Sugrue, 1996).

their members' work conditions; unions used their political clout to address members' interests in clean air, affordable housing, and public transportation, etc. (Waldinger et al, 1996). This transformation emerged over time and through the conscious interventions of bridge-building leaders and a new intermediate layer of movement "halfway houses" like the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE), which integrates policy, research, and organizing in their efforts to build a "city of justice" (Milkman, 2006). This transformation of Los Angeles has been reflected electorally in a wave of union-backed candidates, highlighted by former union organizer Antonio Villaraigosa becoming mayor in 2005.

This reversal of roles between Los Angeles and Detroit is both hopeful and sobering. On one hand, such rapid transformations counter the fatalistic sense that change is impossible. On the other, it still remains unclear how much such transformation is caused by movement strategy and how much is due to external factors such as tight job markets and intense development pressures. The dominant narratives about the trajectories of such cities in both the social sciences and the popular press often reflect subtle shifts in analysis to claim movement success while explaining away failures. In a quintessentially American way, Detroit has been labeled a 20<sup>th</sup> century city, to be left behind as we head west and follow LA into the 21<sup>st</sup>. Perhaps due to some reluctance to place blame on activists to whom they are sympathetic, scholars who write about places like Detroit often present unions, community organizations, and even local governments as relatively powerless in the face of capitalists able to fly around the world playing workers off each other. Those who study places like Los Angeles, while no less critical of capitalism, often frame examples of resistance more optimistically, and celebrate actual victories like the Justice for Janitors campaigns perhaps beyond what their concrete impacts warrant.

As with most such generalizations, the tendency toward structural explanations is based on a core of facts. It is indeed easier for organizers to win concessions where tight labor markets and increasing levels of capital investment exist, making the coasts and southwest more favorable terrain for workers than the deindustrializing Rust Belt. Numerically (and even qualitatively)

speaking, there is probably more innovation going on in these areas. However, many cities in the Sun Belt have not followed L.A.'s successful path, while strong movements have emerged in some Rust Belt cities, suggesting that strategy does matter. On the other hand, it is also problematic to draw general "best practices" from such regions rather than understanding them as attempts to match a set of strategies to a particular context. Given that a favorable economic context has played some role in its revitalization, the lessons of the L.A. movement might not have as much to offer Detroit as the dogged and piecemeal coalition-building efforts in other Rust Belt cities that are the focus of this study.

In addition to these theoretical concerns, there are normative and practical reasons to pay attention to Rust Belt movements. Ethically, it is problematic to write off any region and its residents. Practically, while a working class movement can (and I would argue, should) be regionally-based, it cannot remain limited to certain regions and hope to achieve its larger goals. How the Rust Belt weathers deindustrialization will shape American politics for decades. The U.S. labor movement is still haunted by its post-WW II abandonment of the South after the failure of Operation Dixie led generations of leaders to write off the region as unorganizable. To build a more powerful movement, attention must be paid to these challenging contexts. As Steve Lopez (2004) argued in *Reorganizing the Rust Belt*, it is in cities like Pittsburgh, Chicago, and Milwaukee that we are able to observe the labor movement in transition, and thus better understand possible future directions for the movement as a whole.

This project thus explores a surprising phenomenon—successful working class movements in the Rust Belt—by comparing the trajectories of labor-community coalitions and working class movement-building in Chicago, Milwaukee, and Pittsburgh since the early 1990s. Before presenting an overview of each case and my findings, I will lay out the many reasons they *should not* exist through a brief review of the literatures on contemporary cities, neoliberalism, and urban working class movements. While these theorists largely explain movement failures, they can be read from another perspective to provide

clues for why strong working class movements emerge in some U.S. cities but not others.

*a. The Political Economy of Urban America*

Observers of urban politics generally agree that working class activists face a challenging political economic context. Regions have developed along fragmented geographies that separate people from each other, jobs, and decision-makers. Power relationships and decision-making are often obscured, either intentionally or through “common sense” assumptions that preclude certain ideas from public discourse. Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, and Chicago exemplify the sort of upper-Midwest industrial city that defined the 20th century. Over the first half of the past century, they were each sites of explosive growth, speculation, and class conflict, eventually producing a compromise between unions, businesses, and the state that created what we now think of as the American middle class.

Two major schools of thought posit answers to the question of “who rules” US cities. Pluralists (e.g. Dahl, 1961) argue that local political systems are relatively open, requiring compromise and coalition-building among a variety of interest groups on major decisions. Regime theorists (e.g. Stone, 1989) criticize the pluralists inattention to behind-the-scenes negotiations and consensus-building, suggesting that the power to set the policy agenda is held by a much smaller group of elites.

The preponderance of evidence supports regime theory. Economic policy in these three cities, like most in the U.S., has long been dominated by a “growth coalition” of local capitalists, real estate interests, and politicians (Logan & Molotch, 1987). Local union leaders were incorporated into such “governing regimes” as second tier players, but politicians and wealthy elites remained the ultimate shapers of local discussions. Such regimes are sometimes formally organized into bodies such as Pittsburgh’s Allegheny Conference on Community Development, which was formed in 1943 and continues to play a central role linking the region’s economic and political elites. In other cases, the networks are

more informal, relying on overlapping board memberships, social connections, and a few key think tanks to forge consensus (Carroll & Shaw, 2001). Due to the durability of the Chicago Democratic machine, politicians have played a more central role in the city's regime than most, and Milwaukee's regime was not consolidated until the 1960s (Ferman, 1996; Rast, 2006). Still, classic growth machines have been established for several decades in each city.

All three cities developed patterns of intense and durable racial segregation, particularly in housing but also employment, recreation, and politics (social scientists have called each the most segregated city in the US). Ira Katznelson (1981) has described the unique development of American urban politics as the furrowing of "city trenches," with early political developments leading to a working class fragmented along lines of race, neighborhood, and occupation. The development of institutions (particularly urban political machines) from this foundation deepened and solidified the "trenches" separating the worlds of the workplace and the community. As manufacturing moved into suburbs and rural areas in the post-war era, recently arrived Southern workers (particularly African-Americans) were trapped in central city neighborhoods with little access to jobs (Sugrue, 1996). Beyond the ever-present black/white divides, each city has been marked by deep parochialism and rigid boundaries of religion, ethnicity, neighborhood, organization. Many in each city maintain a proud sense of uniqueness and resistance to outside ideas and people. Each is described as a "city of neighborhoods," with city councils elected by districts.

This "horizontal fragmentation" of urban communities has profound impacts on the shape and content of urban politics (Sites, 2007). The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century can be divided into two distinct phases. Key components of our present urban system emerged in the post-war decades—unified business elites promoting downtown development partnered with compliant politicians, labor unions focused narrowly on workplace concerns, and geographic fragmentation particularly marked by the flow of jobs, wealth, and white people to outlying suburbs. While in retrospect, this post-war social contract appears inherently weak, it took a fundamental transition in the world economy beginning

in the early 1970s to strip away the illusion that it was permanent and inevitable. Whereas the captains of industry had been leaving cities for suburbs, they now began abandoning whole regions, sometimes driven by industry-wide crises, with predictable multiplicative negative effects on local economies. Corporations went on the offensive against their workers, and right-wing activists increased their efforts to apply “free market” principles to all corners of life.

The Right was far more prepared than the Left to take advantage of the uncertainty generated by the moment of crisis to promote a nascent neoliberal ideology. Looking back, it may be difficult to place in perspective, but they undertook the audacious task of shifting the core assumptions of ordinary people, as *Business Week* editorialized in 1974:

*“It will be a hard pill for many Americans to swallow—the idea of doing with less so that big business can have more. Nothing that this nation, or any other nation, has done in modern economic history compares with the selling job that must be done to make people accept this reality.” (Business Week, October 12, 1974, cited in Dreier, 2007).*

Political historians continue to document how the shaky foundations of the New Deal coalition crumbled under this assault, but it is safe to say a dramatic change had occurred in the US by Reagan’s election in 1980. Deindustrialization and the resulting social dislocations shook up local elites and governing regimes a bit more than their “big brothers” in New York, London, and Tokyo, but by the mid-1980s local regimes regrouped around a neoliberal agenda that jettisoned any remnants of a commitment to shared prosperity in favor of a business-focused “trickle down” development strategy. The fragmenting “city trenches” of race and neighborhood were dug even deeper as general scarcity at the metropolitan level increased feelings of competition between groups.

#### *b. Working Class Organizing and Urban Social Movements*

In recent years, many writers have looked back at this story to better understand the role of urban social movements within polities dominated by neoliberal capitalism (e.g. Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Harvey, 2000; Sites, 2003). Following Castells (1983), they tend to find quite limited opportunities for social movements to implement a more redistributive framework, but for different

reasons. Many early accounts of “globalization” highlight a scale imbalance—claiming that capital has become increasingly fluid and beyond the reach of workers and communities (or even states). A partial corrective to this view has suggested that governments continue to play a central role in creating the conditions for capital accumulation (Sites, 2003), which remains rooted in specific urban areas (particularly the “global cities” identified by Saskia Sassen (1991)). Still, even in this more locally focused view, governing regimes and political institutions are seen as flexible and able to co-opt or demobilize most movements, which start off on an uneven playing field and with vastly fewer resources. In addition, the fragmentation of working class communities make conflict as likely as collaboration across racial and neighborhood lines.

Challenges to urban growth coalitions have been periodically mounted by three main groups: African-Americans, labor, and middle class whites (usually either promoting “clean government” reforms or protecting their neighborhoods). At different points, these groups have been potent electoral forces in city politics, but their organizations and leaders have tended to recede or be pulled into the governing regime, as would be predicted by Katznelson’s argument about the demobilizing effects of “city trenches.” However, while such trenches divide people and can lead to such co-optation, the institutions built on them have produced successes and provide the basis for any potential movement.

Working-class Americans belong to three main types of organizations that have historically formed the building blocks of movements for economic and social justice: *unions*, *churches*, and *grassroots community organizations*. The literatures on labor and community organizing declare each movement to be in crisis, separated from each other as well as internally divided, and struggling to adjust to the context of neoliberal capitalism. These struggles are reflected in these three cities, but such groups remain the most viable source of working class power. Local movement-building has taken different forms in Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, and Chicago, with varying levels of success in sustaining cooperation over time and achieving their goals; however, each case has involved bringing organizations from these three sectors together.

In the late 1930s, Chicago was the birthplace of neighborhood-based community organizing as we know it, when Saul Alinsky applied union organizing strategies from his work with the CIO to the Back of the Yards neighborhood. The post-WWII Black Freedom movement shaped the Alinskyite tradition and helped spread the popularity of community organizing to a new generation of organizers inspired by a vision of “beloved communities” and democratic revolution from below. Particularly in Chicago, but also Pittsburgh and Milwaukee, a multitude of “grassroots people’s organizations” sprouted in the 1960s and 70s. This new populist community movement was filled with contradictions of ideology and practice, often became trapped in a paralyzing localism, and community organizing has declined across the country in the face of neoliberalism (Fisher, 1994). Perhaps most famously, several of Alinsky’s efforts in Chicago turned rightward, including the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council, which organized to keep blacks out of the neighborhood.

Less dramatically, but more common, community groups in all three cities retreated into parochialism under a variety of funding and political pressures. The increasing professionalization of “community development” as a field pulled organizations away from conflict approaches (Stoecker, 2003). Many became dependent on government and foundation dollars and adjusted their missions to keep money coming, including cooperating in right-wing efforts such as welfare reform and the privatization of public services. Even when not directly co-opted, many organizations retreated into narrow definitions of issues or communities they worked with. One organizer recalled Chicago in the 1980s as a “wasteland in terms of organizing, with everyone trying to be the next Alinsky instead of actually putting in the work.”

Two main wings of community organizing exist in the US today—a (mostly faith-based) institutional approach that pulls together existing groups in a geographic area, and a model based on direct individual membership. Several networks of faith-based organizing exist, including Alinsky’s Industrial Areas Foundation. The most prominent example in this study is the Gamaliel Foundation-affiliated Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope

(MICAH), which was founded in 1998 and brings together 36 member congregations around its mission “to do what is just.” Direct membership organizing is epitomized by the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), which look more like “community unions” made up of dues-paying resident members of neighborhood-based chapters. ACORN chapters have been active in all three cities, but Chicago’s is far and away the most prominent (although an organizational split in 2008 has created some uncertainty). Although very successful examples of each type exist, most reflective assessments conclude that the overall movement has fallen far short of the hopes of early leaders (Dreier, 2007).

Similarly, the US labor movement has fallen a long way from its peaks of energy in the 1930s and membership density in the 1950s. The early organizing efforts of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (founded in Pittsburgh in 1935) combined workplace and community-based organizing from a class perspective to begin knitting together urban working class communities, but this approach was almost completely lost following WWII. Labor scholars agree that the decline of the movement is due to a combination of virulent business opposition, a legal framework tilting ever more anti-union, and self-defeating practices. High on the latter list are union complicity in reproducing racial disparities and the evolution of “business unionism,” in which unions accepted a transactional and limited role.

In return for recognition and collective bargaining, unions agreed to limit their demands to strictly defined “workplace” issues. As part of this transition, most unions gave up trying to organize new workers and settled for whatever piece of the labor market they already represented. Following the failure of Operation Dixie, a post-war CIO effort to organize Southern industries, the labor movement implicitly withdrew from its role leading a broad working class movement with the goal of union representation for every worker to focus narrowly on winning better contracts for members, who began to see themselves as paying a fee for service rather than as members of a social movement.

American unions coasted through the 1950s and 1960s, riding their residual strength and the long post-war boom to increased wages and benefits.

However, each decade diminished the bonds between members and deepened the “city trenches” dividing suburbanizing union workers from the disproportionately Black urban poor. When corporations began their attack in the 1970s, most unions were unprepared to fight back (Tait, 2005). In hindsight, it becomes clear that working class movements have been steadily losing power in US cities for decades due to a combination of political-economic shifts, internal fragmentation, and self-defeating practices.

When union leaders bought into the myth that they were just another “interest group” and adopted a transactional business union model, they inadvertently eliminated their own ability to generate power. Offe & Wiesenath (1980) argue that working class organizations must not only *aggregate* the interests of members as the pluralist interest group model assumes, but also *transform* those interests through a dialogical process. By relying only on aggregation, business unionism (like narrowly parochial approaches to community organizing) makes it impossible to generate the solidaristic ties that make sustained collective action possible. I argue that this retreat from more transformative logics of collective action is closely related to the shrinking of intermediary spaces linking working class residents across organizational boundaries. Historical analyses of many movements have demonstrated the importance of such spaces in developing common frameworks, matching strategies to the context, and transforming groups into “more than the sum of their parts” (Andrews, 2001; Foerster, 2004; Morris, 1984; Warren, 2001).

### *c. The Upsurge in Labor-Community Coalition-Building*

Some promising efforts at the intermediary level have emerged from this generally dismal scene of parochialism and demobilization, although it remains to be seen whether they represent a new upsurge in working class organizing or anomalous blips within a general pattern of decline. The desperation fostered by 1980s plant closings sparked efforts to rebuild relationships with community groups. These defensive battles were mostly unsuccessful, but strengthened some revitalization efforts within the labor movement. Over the 1980s and 90s,

some unions dedicated themselves to organizing new members and strategically rebuilding power, sparking hopes of a general shift in strategy (cf. Bronfenbrenner, et al., 1998).

While these efforts produced many positive results, overall union density continued to slide, as increased membership in the service and public sectors lagged behind dramatic manufacturing job losses. The erosion of union membership steadily weakened the place of labor leaders within local growth machines over the past several decades, and the cooperative business union approach yielded fewer and fewer results as corporate interests tightened their grip on local political processes. While some labor leaders cling to the comfortable model of back-room handshake deals, many others -- pushed along by pro-business politicians like Chicago's Mayor Daley -- have become more open to alternative ways of building power.

New leadership was elected at the AFL-CIO in 1996, resulting in renewed attention to organizing, efforts to strengthen local labor councils, and increased engagement with other social justice movements. Promising community organizing efforts have sprouted around the country, particularly among immigrants and low-wage workers (Tait, 2005). Also attracting significant attention has been the increase in coalition activity involving unions, churches, and community groups in metro areas around the country. Observers have suggested that this wave of coalition-building might breathe new life into unions and community organizations; force the Democratic Party to adequately represent the interests of working class Americans; and develop more effective means of bringing people together across race, gender, and other cultural differences—in short, revitalize the US left.

The weakness of the left is often attributed in large part to its difficulties in bringing people together across differences, particularly race, gender, and class. As I found in our Michigan coalitions, such fragmentation is quite present in labor-community collaborations. Most unions and community groups are wary of working together because of perceptions of mismatched interests or organizational cultures. When they do work together, community organizations

often feel taken for granted while unions are frustrated by their lack of clear structure and authority (Krinsky & Reese, 2006). Studies of coalition-building efforts offer a window onto evolving strategies of negotiating difference and unity, especially efforts to cross racial boundaries and bring together unions with unorganized poor workers.

Local resistance to neoliberalism has evolved over the past two decades. The 1980s saw a wave of mobilizations against plant closings and Reagan-era policies, with significant focus on key defensive strikes and employee ownership bids (Brecher & Costello, 1990). In the 1990s, activists developed more proactive political program in efforts to pass legislation like living wage ordinances, develop comprehensive regional development platforms, and develop alternative electoral resources for progressive candidates (Reynolds, 2004). Taken together with studies of more recent efforts (e.g. Krinsky & Reese, 2006; Luce, 2004; Tattersall & Reynolds, 2007), these accounts document an evolution of strategies as working class organizers continue adapting to the context of neoliberal capitalism.

While such evolutionary learning processes are inevitably piecemeal and geographically differentiated, three main types of collaborative vehicle have emerged over the years. Ad hoc coalitions mobilizing defensively against plant closings and other crises were particularly prevalent in the 1980s. In the 1990s, activists in several cities tried to “get out in front” of issues by building overarching regional coalitions uniting the broadest possible set of groups on a permanent basis. In part because several of these ambitiously broad coalitions fell apart, more recent efforts have tried to find ways to continue proactive planning without bringing everyone under a single organizational roof. While still bringing together broad coalitions to work on specific issue campaigns, this model relies on more focused intermediary organizations playing a coordinating and consolidating role between campaigns (Tattersall & Reynolds, 2007).

This study focuses on how activists in Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, and Chicago experimented with more structured coordinating bodies in the 1990s and looser overlapping networks in recent years. The histories of these efforts help distill the

key factors influencing the emergence and sustainability of local working class movements.

## **Research Methods**

My work contributes to ongoing debates on movement strategy by systematically comparing three divergent cases of efforts to build local working class movements. While the unavoidable contingencies of the real world make it impossible to find perfectly matched cases, these three cities and their local movements shared many characteristics through the 1990s. The comparative case study method is most useful in efforts to reconstruct and extend theories, rather than systematically testing them (Burawoy, 1991). By exploring what is similar and different between efforts in Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, and Chicago we can suggest factors that play a role in causing their divergent outcomes.

My data collection and analysis were based on a reflexive model of analytic induction (Burawoy, 1998) and involve two main bodies of data:

- Semi-structured interviews with 53 experienced activists in the three cities covering the dilemmas and lessons of their work.
- Archival documents pertaining to coalition-building efforts in Chicago, Milwaukee, and Pittsburgh from 1990 to the present, drawn from organizational archives and news sources, which provide evidence of how different strategies work in varying political-economic contexts.

I spent several months in each city in 2006 gathering data. Where organizing was ongoing, I played an active participant-observer role as much as possible. For example, I helped out knocking on doors, attending meetings, and phone banking during the Big Box Living Wage campaign in Chicago over the summer of 2006. For the no longer active coalitions, I was forced to rely more on interviews and archival documents, which varied significantly in availability. For example, while the Alliance for Progressive Action papers fill many boxes at the University of Pittsburgh archives, most of the Campaign for Sustainable Milwaukee files (and those of several other activist groups collected over the years) were apparently tossed in a dumpster when they closed their last office.

While I entered the field with a set of theoretical interests and asked all interviewees a core set of standard questions, I also allowed themes to emerge from the cases and looked for evidence to challenge my preconceptions and early conclusions. Participants were generally quite willing to be interviewed and generous with their time, often sitting for repeat meetings and sharing their personal files with me. My experience working with both unions and community organizations gave me a measure of legitimacy with both groups. I was up front about my sympathetic orientation and background, and unsurprisingly found those I worked alongside in to be particularly candid, especially over time as I “proved myself.” Several paused in their interviews to mention that they “wouldn’t necessarily tell most academics this, but you’re an organizer, so you get it.”

Since I was interviewing key members of coalition campaigns in each city, I ended up over-sampling the kind of “bridge building” leaders who seem to be inevitably involved in successful collaborative efforts (Delgado, 1998). As their importance emerged more clearly, I made an effort to interview all such bridge builders in each city. Not only had most been at the center of many different struggles over the years, they had often already thought about the broader issues of building solidarity across difference I was asking about. Because of their eloquence, I have often quoted from our discussions at some length, letting the participants provide context for their insight rather than always parsing each passage myself. This involves a tradeoff in writing style, as it requires the reader to do more analytical work at times, but as one of my respondents said: “It’s in the stories—let the stories come out.” To preserve continuity and readability, I reserve this “oral history” approach to a few key leaders, whose voices appear repeatedly over the course of the text, hopefully allowing readers to link narratives together and develop a more nuanced understanding of the individual’s perspective.

Most interviewees requested to be identified by their real names, although other identities are disguised some or all of the time. I sent all of them the quotes I planned to use from our discussions to double-check for accuracy and permission, which proved to be a good decision for several reasons. Seeing their

words on the page with the chance to reflect on potential consequences, several respondents requested that I either remove small portions or not attribute certain quotes to them. However, most not only approved what I had written but offered further reflections that deepened my understanding of their comments and past events. Several of these local activists became more like collaborators than research subjects over the course of our discussions as we bounced ideas back and forth and debated points. Our dialogue has continued as they have graciously provided feedback on drafts of this project.

During my entire time in the field, I was very aware of how my identity as a white professional-class man based in an elite university was shaping my interactions with people. My mannerisms and union background often made white male labor (and community) leaders comfortable with me, to the point where I sometimes felt I was being let in on “family secrets.” On the other hand, I found women and people of color were often hesitant to talk about racial or gender equity issues, or “controversial issues” in general, until I signaled my interest and support. In introducing myself to everyone, but especially to people of color, I included a broad range of past experiences and chose examples carefully, mentioning “When we were trying to save affirmative action in Michigan...” or “As we’ve been fighting the gay marriage ban...” to mark myself as active in a broad range of social justice struggles. The code words I dropped and ways I introduced myself and my interests undoubtedly shaped how interviewees responded to me. Being a doctoral student at the time of this research cut both ways. On one hand, many respondents seemed enthusiastic about “helping me get my degree,” but I had the nagging sense some didn’t quite think of my research as “real.” This was confirmed when I sent out quotes to be confirmed and several interviewees reacted with surprise that their words might actually end up in print someday.

I told those involved that I was not interested in “airing dirty laundry” when I discussed the conflicts within each coalition, and I hope I have lived up to that promise. I was told many stories of racism, sexism, and homophobia from within each of the coalitions. For the most part, I do not explore specific incidents, but

discuss more general methods of dealing with conflict. As many others have documented, our movements are part of the larger culture and reflect all its negative traits. Interpersonal conflicts are endemic to movement organizations and can be considered relatively constant across groups. Specific stories are usually stripped of some details and context to emphasize the conflict, rather than the people involved. I hope I have been faithful in rendering and analyzing these stories, and am able to offer something useful to those who so generously shared them with me.

### Overview of Cases

Although Chicago is much larger than the other two, these three cities are broadly similar in many ways. Both Chicago and Milwaukee are the dominant cities in primarily rural and suburban states, nestled in the corner of their states along the shores of Lake Michigan (and while Pittsburgh is the second largest city in the state, it is so far from Philadelphia that it plays a similar role as the de facto capital of Western Pennsylvania). All three continue to rely heavily on manufacturing to drive their regional economies, though the number of jobs in the sector has declined sharply.

**Figure 1.1: Demographics of Cities and Surrounding Counties, 2006<sup>4</sup>**

City/County	Population	% White	% Black	% Hispanic	% Asian	% in Poverty	% Renters
Chicago	2,749,283	37	35	28	5	21	51
Cook County	5,288,655	51	26	23	6	15	38
Milwaukee	563,079	43	40	15	3	26	52
Mil. County	915,097	61	27	11	3	19	45
Pittsburgh	297,061	67	27	2	3	22	47
Allegheny Cty	1,223,411	83	13	1	2	13	32
US Overall	--	74	12	15	4	13	33

As is evident from the relative size of the cities and their surrounding counties in Figure 1.1, Pittsburgh was the least successful in annexing surrounding land, with static borders since its contentious takeover of several neighbors in 1907. Pittsburgh is also significantly less racially diverse than the

<sup>4</sup> Source: American Communities Survey, retrieved from <http://factfinder.census.gov> on 3/4/2008.

other two cities, where White residents make up only a bare plurality. And while Milwaukee and Chicago have gained many Latino immigrants in recent decades, Pittsburgh has remained basically biracial. However, all three are very racially segregated and have similar proportions of residents living below the poverty line and renting their homes, leading to roughly similar economic geographies. Decades of local development policy focused on downtown have resulted in many underdeveloped neighborhoods surrounding shiny pockets of new buildings in downtowns that empty out at night.

Similar opportunities for labor-community collaboration occurred in Pittsburgh, Chicago, and Milwaukee over the past couple decades. A number of large, publicly-supported construction projects were built; private sector workers faced aggressive employer campaigns and public sector workers tried to fend off privatization, outsourcing, and cutbacks; companies demanded concessions and public subsidies to create low-wage jobs or leave existing jobs in the area; and activists launched campaigns to pass living wage ordinances and other proactive economic justice initiatives.

These episodes offered opportunities to affect the regional political economy and push for a “high road” approach to economic development<sup>5</sup>. Many of the key activists involved in the campaigns examined in this study rose to leadership positions in their organizations by the early 1990s and tried to transition into building proactive, rather than defensive, labor-community coalitions. These coalition efforts were often explicitly undertaken as efforts to rebuild a left that had become fragmented by sector and geography over the preceding decades as many activists retreated into single-issue movements or neighborhood-focused organizing.

Coalition organizers sought out cross-cutting campaign issues that could pull in a variety of organizations and deepen relationships between them. Living wage ordinances requiring municipalities and their contractors to pay a higher

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<sup>5</sup> There are two basic paths to profitability for capitalist firms: a “low road” of cost-cutting and competition on price, with many social and environmental costs, or a “high road” involving niche development and high value-added processes, coupled with socializing, rather than externalizing costs (Luria & Rogers, 1999).

minimum wage emerged as a movement-building tool after Baltimore's well-publicized victory in 1994. Activists in Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, and Chicago were excited about the issue's appeal to traditional labor, poor people's organizations, and racial and gender justice advocates, and tried to use living wage campaigns to spark strong and sustainable working-class movements. Their effectiveness in doing so rested on the relative balance of power, what strategies they were able to bring to bear, and how they built relationships between constituencies.

Figure 1.2 presents an overview of the major collaborative efforts examined in this study. Almost all the campaigns included unions, churches, membership-based community groups, and advocacy and/or research organizations. However, the trajectory of labor-community collaboration has been different in each city. While it would be difficult to find a moment when there were *not* unions and community groups working together in recent history, more permanent, proactive, and multi-issue coalitions have come and gone.

In both Pittsburgh and Milwaukee, broad multi-issue coalitions were founded in the early 1990s, achieved success in several campaigns, but dissolved soon after 2000 amidst considerable infighting. Activists in Milwaukee re-formed a similar, though narrower, coalition two years later, while cross-sector collaboration reemerged in Pittsburgh within a much looser and informal structure at the Thomas Merton Center. No comparable long-term coalition existed in Chicago until a group of organizations, inspired by their cooperative experience in the living wage campaign, formed the Grassroots Collaborative in 1998. While this coalition hasn't been growing in organizational members, it has formed the core of consistently more ambitious campaigns and increased the organizing capacity of its members and the local movement as a whole. This study seeks to understand how Chicago's movement has been built steadily over the years, as well as why efforts in Milwaukee were more able to bounce back than those in Pittsburgh.

### *a. Milwaukee*

Milwaukee's recent history exemplifies the three phases of labor-community collaboration almost perfectly. Following a series of ad hoc defensive coalitions in the 1980s, two types of coalitions emerged to coordinate economic justice campaigns over the past two decades. The Campaign for a Sustainable Milwaukee (CSM) was formed in the early 1990s and became a nationally known model before a sudden demise in 2000. The CSM's role has since been partly filled by the more modest Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods coalition, which formed in 2003 and continues today.

A string of plant closings in the 1980s shook local unions out of their complacency and they mobilized with community groups to fight back, but with relatively little success. An informal group of activists formed bonds during those struggles and started thinking about how to go on the offensive over regular lunches at the China House restaurant. Around 1993, a core group including Bruce Colburn from the Milwaukee Central Labor Council and Joel Rogers, a professor at the University of Wisconsin, decided to create a structure within which to push for sustainable economic development in the region, first by expanding the monthly lunch meetings to include a broader group of invitees, and then forming the Campaign for Sustainable Milwaukee.

Over the next year, the CSM brought together a broad group of stakeholders for a series of conversations culminating in a report called *Rebuilding Milwaukee from the Ground Up*, presented at a Community Congress in 1994. The report looked at what was happening in Milwaukee and around the country to develop a progressive regional agenda and suggested forming four committees focusing on good jobs, credit and redlining, transportation and the environment, and schools. Hearing about Baltimore's living wage success later that year, CSM leaders thought such a campaign held great promise as a coalition-building tool and defining issue for their fledgling effort, although most area Democratic politicians were still reeling from the 1994 "Republican revolution" and thought they were crazy to launch such a campaign. Nevertheless, the CSM got strong support from the American Federation of State,

County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) public employees' union, hired an organizer to focus specifically on involving young black men (the group most affected by underemployment) and passed ordinances at the city level in 1995, school board in 1996, and county in 1997.

The CSM found even more success in 1997. The Casey Foundation recruited the group to coordinate an ambitious job training effort, while a big fight over the construction of a new convention center led to a groundbreaking community benefits agreement bringing together the historically antagonistic building trades unions and Black and Latino communities. After demolition work for the Convention Center started with a non-union company, the CSM managed to bring together the Building Trades Council with key community groups like Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAH) and Esperanza Unida to coordinate a huge demonstration and a shared platform. This resulted in a project labor agreement that required both union labor and affirmative action, as well as promises to bring more black and Latino workers into union apprenticeship programs.

The next year they opened the Central City Workers' Center to implement the Casey-funded Milwaukee Jobs Initiative, which was relatively successful and involved doubling in size again, to more than 20 employees by the end of 1998. The CSM appeared to be on a path of sustainable growth—having developed a funding model that tapped state and federal job training funds to support the infrastructure for organizing and advocacy and a membership of more than 200 organizations either paying dues or contributing in-kind labor—and they were seen by observers (e.g. Reynolds, 2002) as one of the most promising efforts in the country; however, the end was surprisingly near.

While the CSM was riding high, they lost a key founder when Bruce Colburn, head of the central labor council and the relational center of gravity of the coalition, left Milwaukee to take a position with the AFL-CIO. Management practices had not kept up with the explosive growth of the organization, and the CSM dissolved in 2000 amidst interpersonal conflicts, competition for funds, and a very shaky financial situation that has left some former board members still

upset with each other. Many Milwaukee activists seem to avoid the memory of the CSM. The accepted wisdom regarding the demise of the CSM is that its leaders were overly ambitious in expanding their reach—growing from 1 to 30 employees over a few years, but those more closely involved attribute more of the problems to internal conflict.

A similar body facilitating labor-community collaboration arose relatively quickly. In 2003, John Goldstein, then president of the central labor council and former CSM board chair, convened the Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods (GJLN) coalition to advocate for a community benefits agreement (CBA) for the Park East redevelopment project, a huge swath of prime downtown real estate opened up by the demolition of the Park East freeway. GJLN has a handful of core organizational members, but involves other more groups at varying levels. GJLN won a CBA at the county level in 2005 and is now working to transition beyond the Park East campaign and push for sustainable development policies throughout the city, currently focusing on redeveloping the former Tower Automotive site in the predominantly African-American north side neighborhood. GJLN has joined the Partnership for Working Families network of similar coalitions around the country (where Goldstein is now Field Director), incorporated as a 501(c)(3), hired staff, and laid out a plan to “change the conversation around development in Milwaukee.”



## *b. Pittsburgh*

Three different intermediary organizations have played a role as movement “hubs” in Pittsburgh over the last two decades. The Alliance for Progressive Action (APA) was formed in 1991 by several longtime Pittsburgh activists and coordinated a number of campaigns through the 1990s. Following the demise of the APA, the Thomas Merton Center served as the main center of labor-community collaboration for the past decade. Most recently, Pittsburgh-UNITED, an intermediary based on models like LAANE in Los Angeles and GJLN in Milwaukee, emerged in 2007 to coordinate community benefits struggles around large development projects.

Many of the APA’s founders worked together through the 1980s fighting mill closings, the Bork Supreme Court nomination, and supporting strikes and the Rainbow Coalition campaigns in 1984 and 1988. After working together so long, many were anxious to avoid “reinventing the wheel” for each campaign and hoped the APA would help them go on the offensive. SEIU and the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers (which moved its international headquarters to Pittsburgh in the late 1980s) provided crucial early funding, and by the mid-1990s, the coalition had around 50 dues-paying organizational members, an office, and staff. Early campaigns included organizing against police brutality, the sale of a local public TV station, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

The leaders of the APA had been looking for a galvanizing issue and, like their contemporaries in Milwaukee, were excited about the potential of a living wage campaign to bring together unions, churches, and community groups around shared economic justice concerns. The Western Pennsylvania Living Wage Campaign kicked off in 1997, got an ordinance through the City Council in 2001, lost a County Council vote a few months later, and then saw the City ordinance repealed within the year. This setback was a shocking defeat, given the Democratic majorities on both bodies and Pittsburgh’s reputation as a “labor town.” This disappointment exacerbated internal dissension, leading to the

departure of key players. The APA dissolved in 2002 and there have been no efforts to revive a living wage campaign in the region.

As in the other two cities, Pittsburgh politics often pivot around racial divisions, and efforts to bring together the African-American community with unions were never completely successful in the living wage campaign. Just before the living wage came up for a vote in 2000, the building trades unions engineered a ‘backroom’ defeat of a bill that would have required construction projects receiving tax breaks to employ 35% city residents, which was seen by some black leaders as a betrayal by the entire labor movement. The living wage campaign subsequently became coded as a “white union proposal” and the key vote against the ordinance was cast by an African-American County Councilor representing one of the poorest areas of the city who had originally co-sponsored the bill. Ironically, the subsequent repeal of the City ordinance is widely attributed to the unions pulling support for the ordinance. Thus, because of their difficulty working together, neither of the campaign’s presumed core constituencies (labor and the black community) ended up putting their full support behind the living wage.

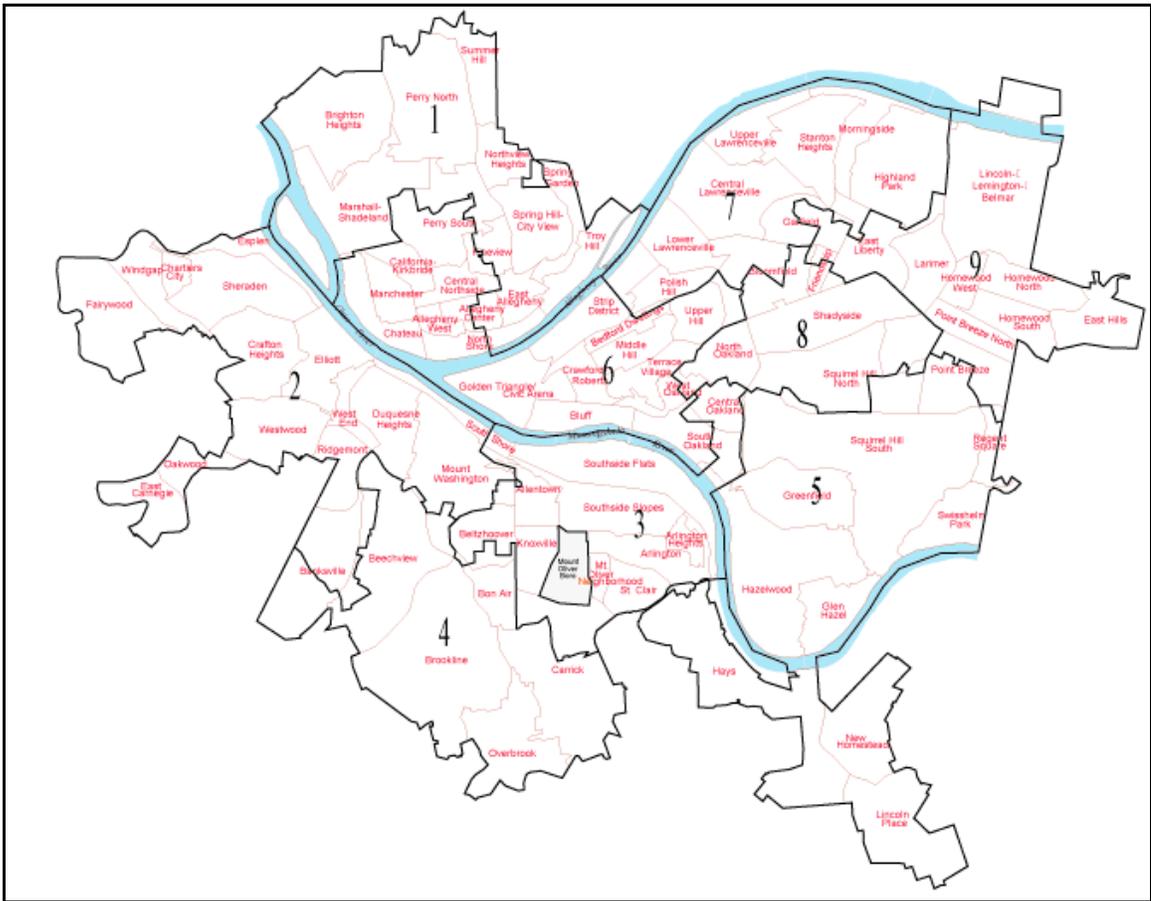
The APA became so subsumed in the Living Wage Campaign during the long fight that the campaign setback became a mortal blow to the coalition itself. Perhaps even more important in the long run, it had not succeeded in its goal to foster more grassroots community organizing—particularly in the black community—through the campaign. This task has been increasingly taken on by the Thomas Merton Center (TMC). The TMC has existed as a local peace and justice center since the 1970s, but assumed a more central role in local movement-building as the APA became exclusively focused on the living wage campaign and then dissolved. The TMC is quite decentralized and flexible, primarily providing space and support to local peace and justice groups who apply to be sponsored projects. While its board members represent a wide range of organizations, it is not a formal coalition. Many of the TMC’s projects involve relatively small groups of activists working mostly in coalitions with other groups.

The TMC also publishes a newspaper and website that circulate information to a broad community of local activists across sectors.

Recent examples of labor-community collaboration in Pittsburgh, such as a Justice for Janitors campaign, have largely been housed at the TMC and involved the Mon Valley Unemployed Committee (MVUC), another holdover from an earlier era and one of the founders of the APA. The efforts of SEIU Local 3 to improve the wages and benefits of Pittsburgh janitors have been threatened by an intransigent building owner who pulled out of the downtown collective bargaining agreement and fired their janitors at the end of 2003. A group of TMC and MVUC activists took on organizing community support for the janitors and pressuring tenants and other stakeholders (which would have been illegal for the union). Although they were quite successful in drawing press coverage and isolating the building owners, they were not able to force a resolution, and tensions developed between mostly young and radical community organizers and union staff over decision-making and the overall dynamics of the campaign.

In an effort to become more proactive, over the summer of 2007 a group of local activists worked with the Partnership for Working Families to form Pittsburgh UNITED. Their first two campaigns are trying to tie community benefits to plans to build a new downtown casino and hockey arena. People and organizations involved in the living wage campaign are active in the current campaigns, but the 2001 defeat also serves as a sort of generational dividing line, with many of the living wage leaders no longer much involved in local politics. Like in Milwaukee, the efforts of the APA are not widely discussed, or even known, among most of those now active in Pittsburgh.

**Figure 1.3: Map of Pittsburgh City Council Districts**



*c. Chicago*

Chicago differs from Milwaukee and Pittsburgh in that no broad, multi-issue labor-community coalition like the APA or CSM emerged in the early 1990s. The closest analogue would be the Industrial Area Foundation's (IAF) effort to build a Chicagoland-wide coalition called United Power, which still exists, but has been unable to build deep relationships between members or launch substantial campaigns (Moberg, 2006). Though all three cities have reputations for parochialism, the conflicts between groups in Chicago are legendary, and many local activists claim that broad, sustainable coalitions are impossible in the city.

However, collaborating in the Jobs and Living Wage Campaign in the late-1990s was a transformative positive experience for a group of members of the steering committee, who decided to form the Grassroots Collaborative after the City living wage ordinance was passed in 1998. John Donahue, of the Chicago

Coalition of the Homeless, was particularly central in these early stages as a person who had relationships with many other organizers across town. Members of the Collaborative thought they had developed some useful best practices through trial and error during the living wage campaign, including a two-tiered membership structure. Any organization was allowed to join the coalition and attend periodic meetings, but to be part of the decision-making steering committee, they needed to contribute money or staff time and be able to “fill a bus” with supporters (Meyer, 2008). This policy is credited for making campaigns run smoother and providing a clear and above-board way of determining who gets a voice in decisions.

The Collaborative, made up of about ten grassroots community organizations and one union, has gone on to build coalitions to tie the living wage to inflation, expand Illinois KidCare, raise the state minimum wage, increase affordable housing, and win driver’s licenses for undocumented immigrants. The union, SEIU Local 880, is unique in that it began life as part of Chicago ACORN, to which it remains closely linked even as it has grown into the largest union local in the state by organizing tens of thousands of home health and childcare workers.

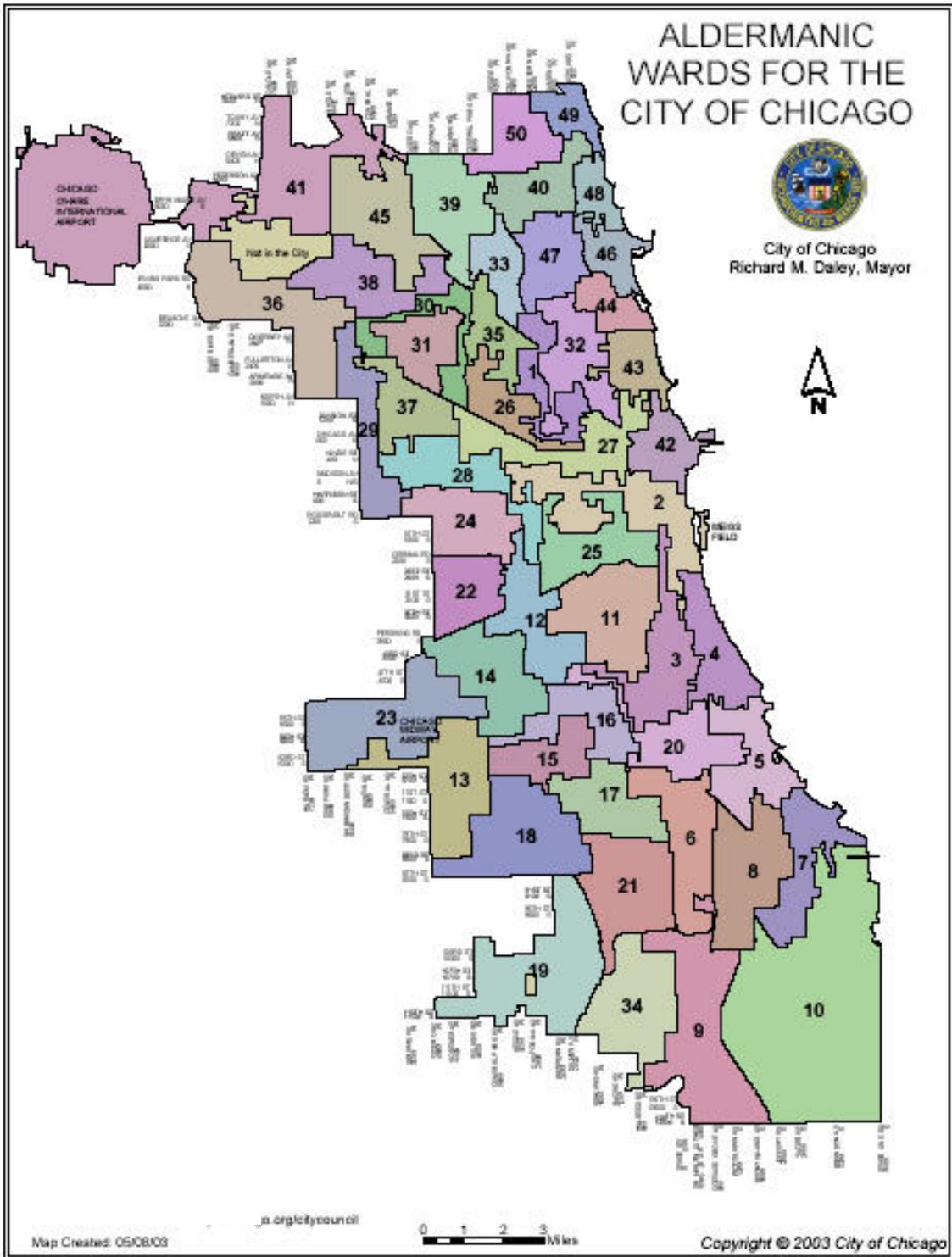
Another key center of cooperation was Chicago’s Jobs with Justice (JwJ) chapter, which is widely credited with opening up local unions to the benefits of working with community groups and laying the groundwork for tighter collaboration in the 1990s. The local labor movement’s political perspective was further shifted in the early 2000s, when Mayor Daley tried to extract big concessions from city workers in contract negotiations, spurring their unions to coordinate bargaining and threaten to strike for the first time in recent memory. This crystallized the growing estrangement between the mainstream labor movement and the Democratic Party machine after a decade of increasingly more business-friendly policies at City Hall. The Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL) and several large unions began speaking publicly against Daley and building up their political capacity after years of disuse. In addition, the Daley

machine came under attack in the courts, as judges issued a series of rulings gutting its patronage system.

This relationship-building and series of political shifts created the possibility for significant labor-community mobilization when Wal-Mart announced plans to build as many as 10 stores in Chicago in 2003. An anti-Wal-Mart coalition was convened at JwJ by the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), with the goal of persuading City Council to reject Wal-Mart's plan to build stores on the South and West sides unless the company agreed to a community benefits agreement requiring living wages and family health care for their workers. Following a split vote on the first two stores, the Collaborative formed a new coalition to pursue a new strategy of a citywide ordinance targeting all large retailers.

The resulting "Big Box Living Wage" ordinance sparked one of the most high profile campaigns in recent Chicago politics and ultimately passed City Council in July 2006 over the fervent lobbying of Mayor Daley and millions spent on advertising by Wal-Mart, Target, and the Chamber of Commerce. The mayor decided to draw a line in the sand, issuing the first veto of this career and pulling three aldermen to his side to avoid an override. His victory proved somewhat hollow however, as the Big Box ordinance provided a "litmus test" issue in the 2007 aldermanic elections. Members of the coalition targeted aldermen who voted against the ordinance, forcing eleven runoffs that resulted in nine new members of Council. While not all nine are strong economic justice supporters and Daley retains a working majority, many of the coalition partners are excited about shifting the balance of power in Chicago in a worker-friendly direction.

Figure 1.4: Map of Chicago City Council Districts



**Figure 1.5: Major Collaborative Efforts in Each City**

City	Name	Dates	Key Partners	Major campaigns
Pittsburgh	Alliance for Progressive Action (APA)	1991-2002	SEIU, Mon Valley Unemployed Committee, United Electrical Workers	Citizens Police Review Board, Living Wage
	Justice for Janitors (J4J)	2002-2005	Thomas Merton Center, SEIU, Mon Valley Unemployed Committee	University of Pittsburgh contract; Downtown coordinated campaign
Milwaukee	Campaign for a Sustainable Milwaukee (CSM)	1993-2000	Labor Council, UW-Center on Wisconsin Strategy, Esperanza Unida, Laborers Union, Transit Union	Living Wage; Convention Center; Jobs Initiative
	Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods (GJLN)	2003-present	MICAH, Painters Union, 9 to 5 (National Association of Working Women), UW-Center for Urban Economic Development	Park East Development Community Benefits Agreement
Chicago	Chicago Jobs and Living Wages Coalition/ Grassroots Collaborative	1997-present	SEIU, ACORN, Chicago Coalition of the Homeless, IL Hunger Coalition, UFCW, MetroSeniors, Chicago Federation of Labor	Living Wage; Immigrant drivers' licenses, State minimum wage, KidCare, Big Box Living Wage

**Conclusion: Strategic Evolution through Praxis**

While strategic debates within social movements often inspire strong feelings on each side, most remain debates because they have no clear right or wrong answer. By surfacing such recurring dilemmas, we can uncover useful research questions and internal processes of learning. I set off to study the experiences of coalition-builders in Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, and Chicago with a number of assumptions about what I would find. My beliefs that I would observe key dynamics at the intermediary level and that organizers on the ground would have many stories to share about the complexities of coalition-building were amply confirmed, but several of my own preconceptions about strategy ended up being exposed and challenged.

For example, I began this project asking, “What factors facilitate the emergence of sustainable labor-community coalitions?” but was pushed by the

case examples and opinions of respondents to think more carefully about equating success with enduring coalitions. As one activist told me, “Just keeping an organization alive isn’t necessarily success.” I realized that I was really interested in strategies for building working class power, and was studying labor-community collaboration because it seemed likely to be a key mechanism for doing so—enduring coalitions might or might not end up being important. Given that many activists are involved in, and frustrated by, such coalitions, it also seemed more practically useful to begin asking: “How can labor-community collaboration help build working class power?”

Although “working class power” is perhaps even more difficult than a “sustainable coalition” to operationalize as a dependent variable, taking this step back helped me regain a view of the “forest,” not just the “trees” of individual coalitions and campaigns. My analysis places labor-community collaboration within the broader contexts of urban political economies, social movements, and communities. *Social movements* are larger and more amorphous than any specific organization or coalition, with ebbs and flows over extended periods of time. The idea of *community* also inherently references the flow of time, in addition to an understanding of members as heterogeneous and linked together in overlapping relationships of conflict and cooperation<sup>6</sup>. Social movements and communities are inevitably unfinished projects, making movement-building and community-building their central activity.

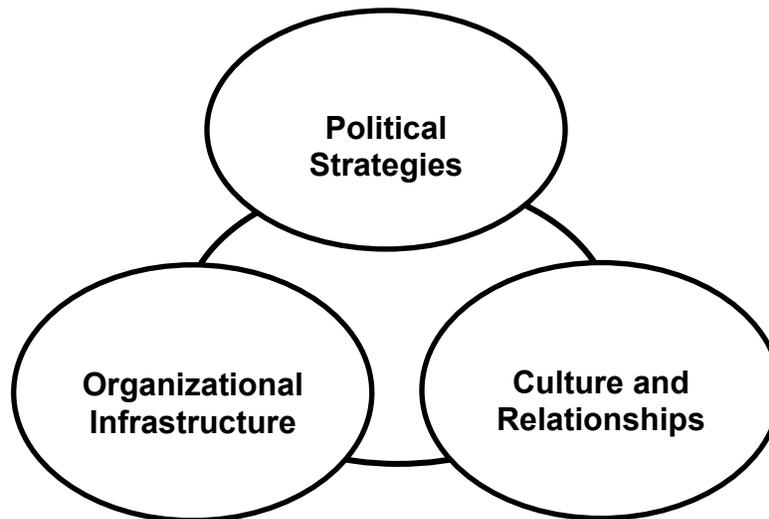
Strong working class communities are directly related to strong movements. This project focuses on specifying what such strong communities look like and what can be done to build them, including how social movement activity itself is a strong source of community-building. In analyzing each case, three linked spheres of practice emerged. Organizational structures and networks form an infrastructure for community and movement-building. Cultural norms and relationships link members together in certain ways. Finally,

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<sup>6</sup> This conceptualization is similar to how Crossley (2003) suggests using Bourdieu’s theory of fields in social movement studies, but I prefer the more intuitive “community.”

movements utilize a repertoire of political strategies to build and wield power. These three spheres are depicted in Figure 1.6.

**Figure 1.6: Spheres of Practice and Intervention**



The ultimate goal of these activists is to intervene in this complex system in ways that strengthen the local working class community’s ability to wield power in the broader society. Because these spheres are so interrelated, effective change efforts must target each of them simultaneously. Bate, Khan & Pye (2000) frame organizational change efforts as processes of *structuring*—deliberately breaking and refashioning the prevailing cycle. They suggest that the fatal flaw of most change efforts is an exclusive focus on either structure (resulting in new organizational charts that don’t end up reflecting reality) or culture (endless team-building and processing). More successful approaches foster the development of a learning community that integrates the co-evolution of structures and cultures. This process has the added benefit of developing consensus and fostering the emergence of a core leadership group through a cycle of action and dialogue—what Paulo Freire (1970) called *praxis*.

In the following chapters, I analyze the ways activists in each of these three cities have tried to learn through their experiences and balance the tensions within their efforts to build power and make change. Chapter 2 looks at

choices regarding the organizational structures used to coordinate movement activity. Flexible and overlapping networks of membership-based organizations linked together by intermediaries appear to provide a more sustainable basis for movement activity than a more parsimonious single structure. Chapter 3 looks inside these structures to examine the internal cultures and relationships within coalitions. Rather than downplaying differences between partners and focusing only on points of commonality, these efforts have been more successful when they pay overt attention to difference in their efforts to build bridges and construct new ways of relating to each other. Chapter 4 addresses the strategic political questions faced by coalitions as they try to shift the balance of power and create change, finding that they are more successful when they combine a broad range of strategies, prioritize long-term goals and avoid potential “catastrophic losses.” Finally, Chapter 5 returns to the over-arching dilemmas faced by movements, including how to coordinate change efforts in all three areas at once, and summarizes a set of recommendations and conclusions.

Overall, such collaborative work often seems to be swimming upstream against strong tendencies toward entropy. Patterns of fragmentation within local working class communities are particularly difficult to overcome because structural forces and elite actors reinforce the divisions of internal “trenches.” This point is sometimes missed by those who attribute the recent dominance of the US right to more effective organizing and infrastructure-building. While a useful corrective to past ignorance of the topic, such critiques sometimes fail to recognize the greater barriers faced by the Left. More effective coordination and allocation of resources is important and would likely lead to greater success, but working harder at the same game won’t lead to fundamental social change.

By overlooking the need for a transformative dialogical process, electorally-oriented populists sometimes fall into the individualist trap of thinking of working class organizations as merely “interest groups,” when they also face the challenge of pushing members to think outside the box of interests accepted by the dominant framework. Often focusing on persuading white working class men to “vote their economic interests,” this narrative assumes the existence of

already formed interests and collective identities in a historically untenable way that leaves organizers waiting for the long-promised working class majority rather than actively creating it through struggle.

Rather than just adding together all these potential members, processes of individual and collective transformation within movements are necessary to forge the sort of culture of solidarity that could lead to deeper political transformation. Running a slew of TV ads every four years (or any kind of electoral organizing) is simply not going to have much of an impact on creating a politically active working class. The process of strategic evolution documented in this study shows the necessity of multi-faceted interventions aimed at long-range development in order to build sustainable movements. It also demonstrates the importance of creating spaces to discuss past campaigns, which are too often pushed under the rug rather than learned from.

This is a particularly interesting time to consider such questions. Recent years have seen a surge of interest in expanding the capacity and infrastructure of the progressive movement with an eye toward blending short and long-term goals. Many of those involved see labor-community collaboration as a central component of any emerging Left movement, and several national nonprofits and networks are focusing specifically on supporting such coalitions. The models promoted by such networks will potentially set the framework for movement-building across the country, making it critically important that they not only build on the best practices of successful efforts, but also foster the learning capacity of local movements, helping local leaders assess the relative weight of internal and external factors, and innovate and adjust to new situations.

## Chapter 2

### Organizational Structures for Building Local Power

Building working class power is an inescapably complex process. As Chapter 1 began to lay out, organizers must pursue change efforts in at least three inter-connected spheres: organizational structures, creating local cultures of solidarity, and expanding the repertoire of political strategies. This chapter addresses the first of these spheres. Working class residents of these regions work for change through their neighborhood associations, churches, and unions—as well as through coalitions that pull these organizations together. What organizational structures best facilitate the emergence of powerful social movements to improve the lives of working class residents of a region?

Any such discussion raises longstanding questions surrounding the costs and benefits of formal organizations. Representing the positive view, Saul Alinsky (1972) claimed that “organized people” were the only potential counterbalance to the “organized money” of the rich. Efforts to build unions and community organizations have been founded on this belief and achieved significant successes, but a persistent strain of criticism follows Michels (1949) in warning against the dangers of oligarchy. Pessimistic libertarians like Piven and Cloward (1977) claim that efforts to formally organize the protests of challenging groups perversely serve to demobilize and channel their energy into “safe” avenues. While fears of oligarchy are sometimes more ideologically than empirically grounded, organizers do face a dilemma of how to build power while avoiding the stagnation of over-bureaucratization. More concretely, it is often unclear what type of organizational structure is best suited to carry out the tasks needed at any given time.

## **Introduction: Networks, Social Capital and Movement Infrastructure**

My exploration of this dilemma relies on several terms that are often used haphazardly or interchangeably. I use *organization* to refer to relatively independent and formally structured groups, including membership-based and advocacy groups. *Coalitions* are organizations of organizations working toward a common goal. Coalitions and organizations wage *campaigns* as political interventions into struggles to realize their goals. While organizations and coalitions are relatively formally defined, *movements* are larger and more ephemeral than any formal structure. Richard Rorty (1995) captured this distinction when he claimed that movements, in contrast to campaigns, are too big and amorphous to do anything as simple as succeed or fail.

This complexity poses challenges to those attempting to explain social movements, and organizationally-focused analyses seem particularly susceptible to draining away the emotions and alchemy that distinguish the movements they examine. This contributes to the unfortunate inaccessibility of much social movement theory and has limited the exploration of overlapping areas of interest with activists. In a similar vein, *community* is used by scholars to describe a complex system of relationships and meanings, including shared geographies, identities, subjective feelings, and patterns of communication (Bellah, et al, 1995). Based on the assumption that well-organized communities will be more able to form strong movements, one long-term goal of many activists involved in these coalitions is the development of politically active and aware working class communities.

While the literatures on community-building and social movements have mostly remained distinct from each other, the place and class-based local movements explored in this book highlight how much their subjects overlap. In fact, both literatures share a common “black box” that demands further specification. A conceptual gap exists between more concrete local structures like organizations and more amorphous phenomena like movements and communities. Considerable attention has been devoted to social movement organizations, but much less has been focused on *intermediaries*. Collective

action is clearly dependent on coalitions, training centers, and technical assistance providers—“movement halfway houses” that link together individual people and the larger collectivity (Morris, 1984). To bridge this gap and better understand how individuals are brought together in movements, recent analyses of the organizational underpinnings of movements have developed a meso-level focus on *networks* (della Porta & Mosca, 2007), *social capital* (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993), and *infrastructure* (Andrews, 2001).

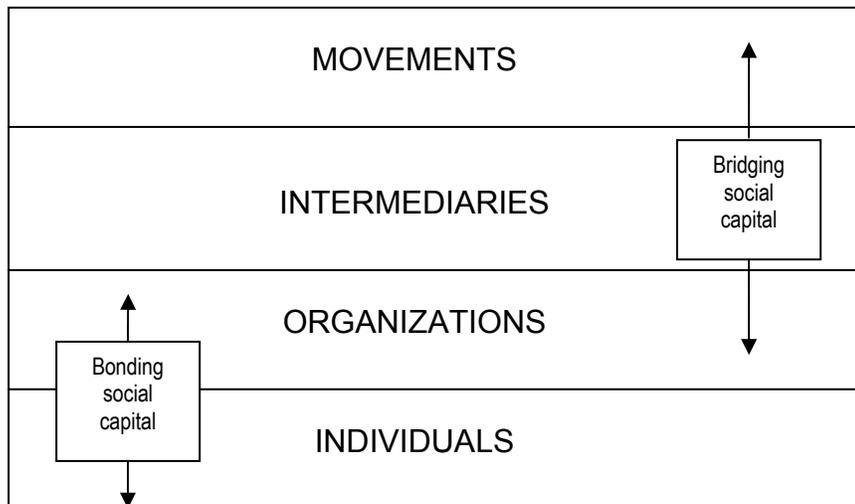
The above discussion implies at least four potential levels of organizational analysis: individual, organizational, intermediary, and movement/community. This chapter focuses on how membership organizations and intermediary structures link individuals to movement communities, in the process suggesting how certain patterns of organizational structure foster or constrain the emergence of local movements. Following Offe and Wiesenathal (1980), I distinguish between two logics of collective action taking place within this intermediary level: *additive* strategies that seek to aggregate the existing power of partner organizations, and *transformative* strategies that seek to change the organizations and their relationships to create new sources of power.

Efforts to apply network analysis to social movements have demonstrated that the optimal conditions for movement emergence involve nodes of strong ties (bonding social capital) extensively linked by weak ties (bridging social capital), a distinction that corresponds neatly with my distinction between membership and intermediary organizations (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993). Particularly in the down times between waves of movement energy, membership organizations like churches, unions, and community groups are an indispensable source of strong ties between people (Rupp & Taylor, 1987). Intermediary organizations, on the other hand, help bring people together across differences and foster the bridging social capital essential to the ability of movements to spread.

Figure 2.1 pulls together these two frameworks for thinking about the organizational preconditions for movement emergence. Bonding social capital is most commonly produced between individuals within organizations, while

intermediaries like coalitions are hothouses for bridging social capital, providing a potential empirical and theoretical ladder between organizations and movements.

**Figure 2.1: Levels of Organizational Analysis and Social Capital**



People and organizations have different interests, ways of doing things, cultures, and levels of power. A crucial goal of labor-community coalitions is bringing together constituencies (e.g. unions, churches, and neighborhood-based groups) that do not normally cooperate closely. Differences have to be negotiated while forging collective identities in any movement or community, but how are they most successfully bridged? By specifying the organizational strategies of activists in each region through the lens of social capital and networks, this chapter develops a set of provisional theories regarding predictors of movement sustainability and suggested applications for activists.

The experiences of these groups suggest that throwing everyone together in a room and hoping they coalesce seldom works, and that organizers should instead start off carefully, set up structures that encourage working together toward shared goals, and incorporate transformative strategies alongside the more common additive approaches. Specifically, strong movements appear more likely to emerge when activists build a strong organizational infrastructure, form tightly-knit core groups linked together within looser networks, and reserve the

broadest and most ambitious coalitions for specific issue campaigns and moments of expanding political opportunity.

### **Strategy 1: Developing Local Movement Infrastructures of Strong Organizations Linked by Flexible Intermediaries**

Activists sometimes debate whether energy and resources are best devoted to building “organizations” or “movements.” Although most would prefer not to make a choice at all, the amorphous nature of movements means that when the debate is framed this way, people focus on organizations almost by default. Particularly in the U.S. today, most do not feel a direct tie or sense of responsibility to a “movement.” Organizational affiliations, on the other hand, are real and present, and most activists feel a sense of responsibility to act in their organization’s best interest, prompting others to call for deemphasizing organizational interests in favor of broader movement issues. Ella Baker recognized this dilemma and emphasized that while her basic loyalties lay with the Black Freedom Movement, building strong organizations was necessary to grow and sustain it, as a Chicago union leader reflected:

*Mike: “What I’ve always liked about the Grassroots Collaborative—especially in the early days—is there’s a lot of people involved who want to build their organization, and they want to build a movement, but not at the expense of the organization.*

*Dobbie: Ella Baker always said her loyalty was to the movement, more than to any organization...*

*Mike: “I think I know what she meant by that, but at the same time you need to build strong organizations to be able to support strong movements. It’s an interesting question as to whether you can do both—and balance that—it’s tricky.”*

This debate is hamstrung by a limited vocabulary, particularly the absence of intermediary organizations from the discussion. A combination of direct membership organizations and intermediaries is necessary to bring together large numbers of people in social movements. Those arguing for a broader “movement” orientation and against parochialism might practically suggest devoting more resources to building networks and “halfway houses.” The limited resources of the left are very concentrated at the organizational level, especially

in non-profits, but also in other sectors (Incite, 2007). For example, the U.S. labor movement overwhelmingly concentrates money and power in local and international unions rather than intermediary bodies like central labor councils and the AFL-CIO. Even fewer resources are devoted to cross-sector intermediaries.

Organizers in each of these three cities have followed Baker's example and looked for ways to simultaneously build movements and their organizations. A more precise typology of movement organizational structures and strategic discussions about what roles they can best serve can help local activists choose "the right tool for the job" and build a strong local infrastructure. Differentiating between organizational forms is useful both analytically and practically. As longtime Pittsburgh activist Joni Rabinowitz warns, "Organizations are different from campaigns, and it's easy to just start one without asking, 'What are we trying to get done and how can we best do it?'" The evolution of organizational strategies in each city over time points to some broader themes about how activists can build sustainable local movement infrastructures.

#### *a. Broad vs. Focused Coalitions in Milwaukee*

Like other Rust Belt regions, Milwaukee, and especially its central city, has faced an exodus of manufacturing jobs in recent decades. Several efforts, including a local chapter of Jobs with Peace, brought together labor and community activists in the 1980s to fight plant closings and influence national and state policy. After a progressive slate headed by Bruce Colburn was elected to lead the Milwaukee Central Labor Council in the late 1980s, the Council began to take more active stances on local issues and reach out to a broader array of partners. This laid the groundwork for the creation of the Campaign for Sustainable Milwaukee (CSM), which emerged in 1994 alongside a bitter struggle to save more than 2,000 jobs at Briggs & Stratton's longtime central manufacturing facility.

CSM was broadly focused in every way, bringing together hundreds of organizations to develop a comprehensive platform for regional public policy,

coordinating political efforts with a third party called Progressive Milwaukee, and trying to secure a stable stream of funding by taking on a job training role that could tap federal and state funding. Ideally, this function was intended to mesh with organizing like a hiring hall—job seekers would come to the CSM Workers’ Center for training and placement and would also get trained on their rights and how to take collective action. Knowing the local labor market well would then help CSM go after the bad employers and help workers develop skills and work within the good ones. As Bruce Colburn, who was leading the Central Labor Council at the time, explains:

*“One of the questions that always comes up is how you take something to scale. We made a decision at some point to become the lead in the Milwaukee Jobs Initiative. The idea of it was that you could combine services and advocacy. The service side was connecting people with jobs, addressing the mismatch of skills, etc. So we ended up getting a grant from Casey that was collaboration between CSM and the business community and labor. That was about 7 or 8 million dollars, so it put a lot of pressure on the organization to focus on that level of service and then tie that into advocacy. It did focus on system changes—whether it was the lack of driver’s licenses and what that meant for people or setting a standard for wages in jobs that were subsidized, but it was so focused on this process of getting people jobs that we struggled to maintain focus on the original advocacy.”*

The Jobs Initiative was set up to funnel money to CSM community partners to train residents of their neighborhoods, but this new relationship put these organizations into competition with each other and frayed bonds with those leaders responsible for overseeing the program. Although several of the key players are not convinced that the model of combining service delivery and advocacy was inherently flawed, there is a general consensus that growing so fast stretched the CSM beyond what it could handle. Bill Dempsey, the main CSM staff member, came to Milwaukee from Gary, Indiana, where he had been organizing to save steel mills:

*“Looking back, running a lean organization might have been a better idea. The synergy between the job training and organizing elements was really productive, but we needed way more management expertise than we had...I found out later that Ernie Cortes [lead organizer of a well-established IAF affiliate in Texas] turned down the Casey money, which we probably should have too.”*

A more focused intermediary, the Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods coalition, rose from the figurative ashes of the CSM in 2002, although only a few

of the same individuals are actively involved. Despite including several common partners and being separated by only a few years, the CSM and GJLN coalitions took quite different organizational forms. The key transitional figure was John Goldstein, who followed Colburn as president of the local transit union, head of the labor council, and as the last board chair of the CSM. He then founded the GJLN coalition and now works for the Partnership for Working Families supporting similar efforts around the country.

In 2006, following a partial victory in their campaign to win a community benefits agreement for the Park East re-development, GJLN faced a number of decisions. Should it stay in existence? If so, what should it look like? What kinds of capacity should it provide, and what would be its focus? The coalition brought in an outside facilitator to help them discuss next steps. While several people were wary of moving beyond Park East and incorporating GJLN as a 501(c)(3), a consensus emerged that they wanted more organizational capacity. As Craig, who had served as GJLN chair, reflected:

*“Even though we did get some victories, we were kinda flying by the seat of our pants and we weren’t strategic enough because of not having a central staff. Like when we used the SEIU phone-banking system, we had to tally up with people to throw in 20 bucks or whatever, or somebody had to cover it themselves and then go around and collect.”*

Pam Fendt, a University of Wisconsin faculty member who has since become director of GJLN, remembered a discussion from the same retreat where it became clear that they didn’t feel ready to take on another campaign yet because the coalition wasn’t “scary enough to really have the kind of impact we’d want.” Stemming from this environmental scan and their desire to play an active role in regional development decisions, GJLN’s short-term goal became building up the coalition, particularly adding members from poor neighborhoods where they would like to encourage development projects. This approach to formalizing the organization differs from CSM, which existed on paper and then brought people into the structure. Like Chicago’s Grassroots Collaborative, GJLN emerged through a campaign, which fused together a core group of leaders and

shaped their ideas about what sort of intermediary organization would be most useful in Milwaukee.

Although the example of the Campaign for Sustainable Milwaukee is not much discussed within GJLN, some of the stories about its demise seem to affect how the participants think about setting up their coalition, particularly in terms of avoiding competition for funding between partners and limiting bureaucracy. The GJLN coalition was set up as a “coalition of the willing” and limited its targets to publicly supported development projects. A key issue limiting their effectiveness is the lack of strong organizations in Milwaukee to build on. While they haven’t yet attracted a lot of labor involvement, one local union president expressed concerns that GJLN has “siphoned off some of what little energy existed in the labor movement” by drawing some of the more active locals away from the labor council, thus limiting their attention to reforming local unions. Similar to the situation faced by Pittsburgh activists, GJLN leaders are asking: “If a strong activist labor movement is key to progressive change in Milwaukee, but the vast majority of locals are operating reactively, where does that change come from?”

Perhaps made a bit warier by the way CSM vanished without leaving much infrastructure or capacity behind, John Goldstein insists that, “We have to very consciously build the capacity of our partners. We don't have enough organizing capacity in Milwaukee, and if we think that hiring three organizers at GJLN is going to change that, then we're nuts.” As Craig lays out, they hope to seed more lasting change by funneling money to coalition partners to increase organizing capacity:

*“Part of [MICAH's] Jewish Fund for Justice grant came out of the Good Jobs coalition. Some of the initial funds of the coalition will be re-granted to the partner organizations. So that's the way that we can build up organizing among the organizations most likely to be doing it, and really get at the grassroots that's gonna be the key to really doing this.”*

While this does create a “funder-fundee” relationship like the CSM, partners are getting money to organize, not to provide services, which will hopefully head off any tendencies to drift into competition with each other. While some activists see such financial entanglements as positive linkages, others

think they are always a bad idea, so the power relationship between GJLN and its partner organizations will be interesting to watch evolve over time. In addition to competition for resources, a major concern of some members was that building up the GJLN infrastructure and hiring staff would lead to less engagement by partner organizations as they sat back and watched.

Addressing the larger concerns that strengthening a coalition as an independent organization might take something away from the member organizations, Annette, a longtime union organizer now working for 9 to 5, the National Association of Working Women, made a case for why organizations and larger efforts don't have to be seen in conflict with each other:

*“When you say some people are worried about coalitions taking on a life of its own—you kinda want it to. It doesn't diminish 9 to 5 to be part of Good Jobs, and I don't think it diminishes our efforts as a coalition to hire staff either. If you don't have that structure, you never get ahead of what's happening. And if you don't get ahead of it, your ability to impact decisions is very limited. I hate getting involved after the fact, and you're stomping your foot and demanding something, and that's all you're gonna get, is some little thing.”*

Another former union organizer now working for a statewide political organization made the argument that staff don't necessarily “take over, as long as the coalition partners don't abdicate their roles...I think it's kind of a cop-out to say staff takes over—only if you let ‘em.” Ultimately, GJLN reached a consensus that the dangers of bureaucratization were manageable and worth the risk. Through discussion, it became clear to all that several individual members had been carrying many of the day-to-day responsibilities in a way that wasn't sustainable, making the decision to hire staff easier. In addition, to this point, they have been able to attract all “new money” from foundations outside Milwaukee that hadn't funded any of the partners previously.

The most recent capacity-building step in Milwaukee has involved creating a Civic Leadership Institute bringing together emerging local leaders to develop a collective vision for “high road” regional development. The Institute, based on a successful model from San Jose, CA that Building Partnerships is promoting, will bring together cohorts of strategically chosen participants for a series of sessions presenting research and alternative perspectives for thinking about the local

economy, the role of government, and how coalitions like GJLN can make an impact.

*b. Strong vs. Loose Intermediaries in Pittsburgh*

While the Thomas Merton Center was founded in 1972, only in the past decade has it played a central role in bringing together labor-community coalitions. More prominent in the 1990s was the Pittsburgh Alliance for Progressive Action (APA), which made a large impact and marked out new intermediary roles during its brief career. While the APA arose at a similar period and from similar motivations as the CSM—following the catastrophic collapse of the Western Pennsylvania steel industry and broad mobilizations to support a number of local strikes—it evolved quite differently, never developing the same kind of institutional base and funding as its Milwaukee counterpart. Most strikingly, while the CSM was rooted in the Milwaukee Central Labor Council, the APA never forged a close connection with the Allegheny County Labor Council. In many ways, the APA never settled into an organizational identity, variously striving to create and incubate new organizing, consolidate existing efforts in focused campaigns, and catalyze change within local organizations. While all three of these were needed in Pittsburgh, the APA struggled to balance such a broad set of missions.

A core group of activists spent significant time and energy working through the idea and potential structure before bringing it to a broader audience, but it was still met with some skepticism. While supporters found it obvious that such a permanent coalition was better than “reinventing the wheel” each time a new campaign emerged, others pointed to the Thomas Merton Center and other existing structures to argue against starting a new coalition. Joni Rabinowitz, an anti-poverty activist, makes clear the need for more specific terminologies and discussion of distinctions when strategically thinking about structures:

*“I went to a couple meetings, but I frankly found them to be like nothing was happening there. If you're going to start an organization, you have to make there be a reason to be there. Sometimes people think we need an organization to do something, but I'm very hesitant, because often they'd be better off with a campaign. It's easy to just start an organization without thinking, 'What are we*

*trying to get done and how can we best do it?' It wasn't clear what it was doing in between campaigns...there's a lot of ways to do the relationship-building and information sharing without having meetings every month with a chair and people raising their hands and all that."*

The APA formed a board made up of representatives of the dues-paying coalition members, but without much of a budget, their capacity was limited basically to the core group of organizers who were willing to volunteer time. Their limited capacity meant that their goals of coordinating proactive campaigns and incubating new organizing projects ended up being somewhat in conflict with each other. When some funding was secured from unions and foundations in the mid-90s for the Living Wage Campaign, the APA was able to hire a full-time staff organizer. This allowed a much more ambitious campaign, but resulted in a shift away from the incubation and mutual support goals, later lamented by Judy Ruszkowski, long-time treasurer of the APA:

*"I don't think we ever really fulfilled the vision. I wanted to see the APA be more of an "advocacy incubator." And through all of this, we had a lot of trouble bringing the organizations and the individuals involved in these campaigns into the APA organizational structure. Tremendous amounts of resources would be mobilized to deal with these issues, but in the end, they didn't end up strengthening the APA and its infrastructure. If we had concentrated more on providing services to member organizations to support their ongoing work, rather than just trying to sell this concept that 'in numbers we have strength,' I think we might have succeeded more in keeping the APA around longer."*

As the APA grew more and more consumed by the Living Wage Campaign in the late-90s, the Thomas Merton Center (TMC) took on a role as the kind of incubator the APA had set out to be, carrying on a piece of Ruszkowski's vision as a result:

*"There were always some tensions between the Merton Center and the APA, because I think they saw themselves as fulfilling some of those roles that the APA had carved out for itself. They always had a much looser form of governance that allowed people to come in and out without having to check their politics at the door. That has really helped them, I think, develop into this project incubator."*

The TMC had historically been seen mostly as a center of Catholic peace activism. At least partly in response to the APA's example, they deliberately broadened their focus to become a more general peace and justice hub in Pittsburgh. Many projects are affiliated with the TMC and use the meeting space

and resources like computers and copier, but are not linked together in any formal way. As with the CSM, the incubator and campaign roles of the APA would ideally have been mutually reinforcing—organizations would have deepened their bases through joint campaigns, which in turn would have been more successful because of the broad constituencies involved. In a low-capacity environment however, their interaction meant the failure to develop strong grassroots organizations also limited the effectiveness of the living wage campaign, the failure of which is commonly attributed to a lack of grassroots support among those most affected, particularly in the African-American community.

The basic questions about the APA's role and relationship to other groups raised in early debates were never fully resolved. Was it to be a network of members, a campaign vehicle, marshal support for other campaigns or lead its own? The lack of a clearly defined identity and purpose created tensions between leaders of the APA and affiliated campaigns. For example, after the APA helped develop the Coalition for Police Accountability and secured a grant to hire an organizer, the Coalition began applying for separate funding from the same foundation, creating conflict between leaders of the two groups.

All coalitions struggle to decide how visible to make the coalition as an independent organization versus putting member organizations out front. Very different views of how to balance this tension created much of the stress between key APA activists. In one interpretation, the APA was not independent enough from its members to be effective, as its coalition roots slowed it down and made it less flexible as a campaign vehicle. From another view, the APA took so much ownership of the Living Wage Campaign that member organizations did not really buy in and, when the campaign failed, it brought down the APA because it had become so identified with that one campaign. Barney Oursler, a longtime Pittsburgh economic justice activist, staffed the campaign and reflected on how the coalition's energy slipped away over time, in part because the APA claimed ownership over the Living Wage Campaign in a way that felt oppositional to partner organizations:

*“A lot of groups that thought of the APA as theirs stopped thinking of it that way. ‘Oh well, that’s the APA—we may pay dues, we may do a few things that we’re asked to do, but it’s not really my organization anymore.’ And none of us really noticed this! Even the board that ran the living wage campaign—which was carefully defined to be reps of orgs that made substantial contributions to the campaign—it became clear towards the end of the campaign, that they weren’t even making the real decisions. That happened several times, and people quit participating, like ‘Why the fuck do I come to this?’ And the board of the APA just kept withering and withering.”*

After the living wage loss, the APA limped along for a year or so without recapturing a vision of what to do next. When asked whether the coalition could have returned to its early days as a no-staff, shared space, low resource existence, Matt Richards, a union organizer who served as the final board chair said:

*“Not a chance...people on the board had gotten used to the idea of having a staff and having an office. In the end, it became like, ‘We gotta hold onto the office, so we gotta hold onto the organization and our c3 status.’ Nobody wanted to make the hard choice of shutting down. Finally we just ran out of money.”*

On the surface, this tale seems to exemplify Piven & Cloward’s fear of organizations becoming ends in themselves and demobilizing movements. However, even those activists most critical of the APA asked, “What kind of organization could help us be most effective?” rather than “Why have any organization at all?” The APA set out to perform at least three roles: to seed and incubate new organizing in the area; to pull together the often-disconnected local progressive movement into a structure that enabled joint decision-making; and to coordinate proactive campaigns. With limited resources available to it, the APA was never able to fulfill all three roles simultaneously, but did each well in spurts. The larger strategic question is whether any one organization should try to fulfill all these roles simultaneously?

The Thomas Merton Center has undergone an interesting evolution over recent years under the prodding of staff organizers who actively reached out to people of color and younger activists, broadening the affiliated campaigns beyond their traditional faith-based pacifist base. The TMC does not try to fill all the roles envisioned by the APA, but has taken on an incubation role and provides spaces that bring together the local progressive movement. The TMC

publishes *The New People*, a wide-ranging monthly paper covering local activism, maintains an online calendar of upcoming events, and hosts many meetings and events. Because so many people come through the doors for various occasions and the staff is connected with activists from across the region, the TMC informally connects local activists together, though they are interested in encouraging more active cross-fertilization.

Most recently, a new intermediary named Pittsburgh-UNITED (modeled after GJLN) has helped pull together coalitions around development projects in the city's North Side and Hill District neighborhoods. In late 2007, the Pittsburgh-UNITED affiliated One Hill coalition launched a high profile campaign to force the Pittsburgh Penguins hockey team to agree to a community benefits agreement on their new arena.

*c. Overlapping networks combining strong and weak ties in Chicago*

No central coalition like the CSM or APA ever emerged in Chicago. The IAF-affiliated United Power has worked to pull together a Chicagoland-wide coalition, but has never built up the density or capacity necessary to tackle ambitious campaigns (Moberg, 2006). Many faith-based coalitions have united congregations around peace and justice issues, both within denominations like Protestants for the Common Good, or across, like the Chicago Interfaith Committee on Worker Issues. Beginning in the 1990s, Jobs with Justice has been at the center of many labor-community coalitions, helping forge connections and open up union leaders to the idea of working with other groups. Research and policy capacity to support these campaigns has come from groups like the Midwest Center for Labor Research and the University of Illinois-Chicago's Center for Urban Economic Development.

Currently, a key intermediary role in Chicago is filled by the Grassroots Collaborative (GC), which has evolved a unique organizational model that links together a handful of like-minded organizations committed to direct action, grassroots mobilization, and progressive political activity. Its independent capacity is limited to one staff member working from a cubicle in the American

Friends Service Committee office just south of downtown. The Collaborative seldom operates independently, but is almost always engaged in a campaign as part of a broader coalition. Their capacity to act remains rooted in the membership of each organization and their willingness to act. In the opinion of Ken Snyder, former GC organizer, the Collaborative takes enough of the coordination work off campaign coalition partners that they can focus on organizing:

*“We take some of the work off, but not so much that you actually dilute the strength of the organization, and move the power from them—there’s a balance. There’s 800 coalitions out there that have 65 members and can turn out 65 people to an event because they each send one person. That’s deadly, and it doesn’t win you campaigns like this. So there’s a real balancing act, and I don’t think a concrete set of rules is gonna solve it—you really have to be cognizant of how to keep the work in the organizations, but at the same time coordinate and communicate.”*

The Collaborative tries to stay in the background of campaigns, both to enhance member ownership and to diminish fears of losing organizational autonomy with coalition efforts, a particular issue in Chicago’s parochial environment. When discussing a possible campaign to pass a “balanced development” affordable housing ordinance, Kate, chair of the GC and director of an anti-hunger group, explains:

*“We don’t want people to feel like we’re doing a takeover...I don’t lose my identity being part of the Grassroots Collaborative, and I think people need to feel that and trust that. So the groups that have been at the forefront of Balanced Development, they don’t have to feel like they’re going to be in the backseat. They were the groups that really birthed this movement and this campaign, and we’re there to support it and not to take over. That doesn’t happen overnight—it’s about building relationships and building trust, and realizing that nobody’s self-interest is going to be stomped out, but whenever we can come together and have a collective interest, that’s when we all gain.”*

As well as being a coalition of organizations, the Collaborative functions as a network of individual organizers. It began through informal breakfast meetings of like-minded leaders from the Chicago Jobs and Living Wages Coalition getting together to talk politics, and they continue to support each other’s efforts to move their organizations toward a more organizing-focused model. Kate grew up in Chicago, but had been gone for years when she returned

to a job with an organization that had no real history of building a grassroots base, and was sustained in the early years through her contacts in the Collaborative. “It was a way to connect with organizers, rather than people who were just doing advocacy. So for me, coming into a place where my organizational home didn’t really do organizing, it was a wonderful thing.” One result is that her organization is now a very active community group with a large and growing grassroots membership, enhancing the broader movement possibilities in the region.

By intention and of necessity, the Collaborative is not the only active organizing network in town. One organizer who has worked closely with the GC on many campaigns but is not a member talked about “not getting stuck in the Collaborative.” There are organizations that will likely never join the Collaborative, which has chosen to be a relatively small, tight-knit group of organizations who believe in similar principles. Organizations need to make a significant commitment to join, and some will be hesitant to make that jump. In addition, there are some groups that refuse to join because of organizational conflicts with ACORN and SEIU, who are widely seen as the key drivers. There thus remains an important role for other Chicago networks like Jobs with Justice (JwJ) to reach out to other groups who might be active in labor-community solidarity work, as Carlos Fernandez from JwJ envisions:

*“I think that Jobs with Justice needs to be not only a neutral space, but an expansive space—continually bringing new folks in. Like NOW [National Organization of Women] hadn’t been involved before, but we did an action highlighting the experience of women workers at Wal-Mart, and it just took a call over to NOW and they were like, ‘Of course we’ll support it.’ So we want to be involved in what the Collaborative does, and any other campaigns in the city, but just always keep expanding those boundaries—bringing in new organizations, maybe on a marginal, very limited basis, but keep bringing them into the fold.”*

Members of the Grassroots Collaborative certainly agree with the importance of bringing new groups into labor-community solidarity work, but don’t think of it as a role the Collaborative necessarily needs to play. They think expansively about building power to move a broad agenda, but have a keen sense of the limits of their capacity, combined with an acceptance of a mid-level role in local change efforts. Campaigns that overlap with other networks provide the chance to work with other groups who might eventually join the Collaborative.

This limited ambition appears to be a large part of what has helped them create a sustainable and increasingly powerful network.

*d. Discussion*

A variety of approaches to organizationally structuring movements emerge from these cities. The increased capacity provided by coalitions has been essential to their successes, but organizational structures have provided difficult challenges as well. The APA and CSM tried to create broad formal coalitions that pulled together as much of the local left as possible, but failed to last out the decade. The Thomas Merton Center has existed much longer as an organization, resource center, and meeting space without the same kind of ambitions, though they would like to bring groups into closer contact. Similarly, the Grassroots Collaborative and Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods coalition have fewer members and more tightly defined missions.

Each of these efforts show the varying ways organizations relate to each other within coalitions according to formal and informal rules. How do you build strong, but not top-heavy, intermediary organizations? How can organizations relate to each other cooperatively when there many forces pushing them into conflict outside it? As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, questions of organizational culture are inseparable from structural issues. While on paper, the Alliance for Progressive Action looked very similar to the Grassroots Collaborative while fighting for a living wage ordinance, Barney Oursler describes the erosion of the culture of solidarity among its leaders over the course of Pittsburgh's Living Wage Campaign:

*"We didn't function as an organization of organizations anymore. We functioned as a staff-driven campaign organization, and it's kinda weird, cuz we had 72 groups join the living wage coalition, which meant some shit. When you signed the paper, you committed to educating your membership, to leadership getting trained, plus resources—money, people, turnout. And we did sustain activity for 4 years...*

*But we didn't spend any time, like we used to do, when a bunch of us would say, 'Hey, we're all gonna go to each other's meetings—we're gonna have some presence of this larger organization by at least seeing the face of some other leaders at your meetings.' All those little things that just build those connections beyond the leadership level. It takes organizational work to do that. With no one in*

*charge, some of us who were really excited would periodically get together and do something. When you've got staff, it's certainly easier for folks to step back. Its like, "Hey, you want it, you got it..."*

Chicago hasn't lost this culture of solidarity because of a unique blend of new structures and norms that have developed over a series of campaigns. Just as in thinking about the interconnected need for structural and cultural changes, there is often no need to force a choice on such questions—*both/and* is a better solution than *either/or*. People can be interested both in growing their organization as well as the long-term health of a movement. Campaign coalitions and networks can provide a bridge between organizations and movements, creating the space for the cross-fertilization, relationship-building and transformation of identities and interests that are central to the process of movement emergence.

## **Strategy 2: Building Intermediaries in Layers and Over Time**

How a coalition or other intermediary begins has important effects. Counter-intuitively to some organizers, paying attention to differences between potential partners and treating them differently within intermediary structures helps meet three linked goals of effectiveness, inclusiveness, and sustainability. As Joel Rogers, one of the founders of the Campaign for Sustainable Milwaukee, describes, there is no substitute for slow and careful trust-building:

*"We met informally for years in something called the China House group, named after a restaurant. One thing about building movements is you need some trust among the people who are leaders, and there's no way to build trust like just sitting around and talking with no particular agenda—just talking about how to improve the place that you're in."*

### **a. Targeted outreach rather than "open calls" to the coalition table**

Many activists try to start a coalition by issuing a general announcement with a meeting time, to which anyone who's interested is welcome to show up. The broadest possible participation is desired for both pragmatic and ideological reasons. Pragmatically, organizers are used to looking for power in numbers and count a high turnout as indication of a "hot" issue. In addition, many activists on the left are committed to ideals of inclusiveness and resist the idea of excluding

anyone who wants to participate. However, experienced organizers agree that it is important to start a coalition with a core group of solid people and then carefully build around it, rather than throwing open the doors and seeing who shows up. Members of Chicago's Grassroots Collaborative are most emphatic about this rule, as Madeline Talbott, longtime head organizer of Illinois ACORN, founding member of the Collaborative, and current lead organizer of a new grassroots organization called Action Now makes clear:

*"We learned through trial and error [to be careful how you start building a coalition], and then it's become something that a lot of us know now...so it's developed a bit of history and tradition in the culture of organizing here. Some people still do a general call, like "Everybody who wants to work on this, come." But that's always a disaster and if it's on an important issue, we have to dismantle that group and rebuild. And that's a troublesome task, because it upsets people, because there you really are kind of directly insulting them. But if you build it right, you build a table that has folks that can move people and will move people on the campaign, and then you have an outer table that is people who are supportive in various ways."*

This approach (and the Grassroots Collaborative itself) grew out of the first Chicago Jobs and Living Wages Campaign in the mid-90s. The campaign brought together many organizers who were interested in building power at a broader level, but wary of "poisonous" coalitions. A longtime local organizer named John Donahue, of the Chicago Coalition of the Homeless, started bringing together an informal network of leaders involved in the Living Wage Campaign for breakfast once a month at Manny's Deli, a long-time Chicago political venue, to talk about what was going on in the city and possibilities for working together.

Eventually this group became the Grassroots Collaborative and has evolved a distinct method of running coalitional campaigns. Even as coalitions expand, those organizations contributing more resources are accorded privileged access to information and decision-making as part of the core group, which has resulted in them playing more active roles and sending key organizational decision-makers to coalition meetings. This principle is clearly stated up front, so that organizations have the choice to join as either core members or as part of the supporting circle. In contrast, some organizers in Milwaukee and Pittsburgh

expressed frustration with not having control over who was at the table and no way of ensuring accountability among those who were not “bought-in.”

While an invitation-only process poses challenges to being inclusive, the ideal of building a diverse coalition can also be better served through slow and careful growth than an open call. Because of our segregated reality, it is difficult to reconcile the goals of beginning with a diverse membership with that of starting from a group of like-minded people with existing relationships. However, it is quite important to do so, as early interactions establish norms for how members approach the differences between them (Ely & Thomas, 2001).

Research shows that while many groups struggle to manage diversity, those based in settings such as workplaces that produce common experiences tend to produce more meaningful interaction (Estlund, 2005). Studies also show that people are better able to build relationships across differences when members dialogically develop congruent views of each other early on, something more possible in smaller and more stable groups (Polzer, Milton, & Swann, 2002). Among my interviewees, several women and people of color reported feeling less “tokenized” within smaller groups where the members developed personal relationships and an organizational history together.

In addition to greater effectiveness and inclusiveness, the intermediary organizations that have resisted pressures to add as many members as possible and focused on strengthening a network of like-minded organizations have sustained themselves over time most effectively. The Grassroots Collaborative has come under pressure from foundations to grow at a certain rate each year as a condition of funding, but members think that they are more effective because they insist on similarly high levels of commitment to organizing among all members. Ken Snyder, who was the Collaborative’s lead organizer and now works as the political director of UNITE-HERE Local 1, laid out:

*“I don't know that there's a large permanent membership for the Collaborative, and I wish the foundations would get off our backs about it, because I think they misunderstand the Collaborative. They think that the ideal form of the collaborative is like 40 members...but having 10 permanent members is not necessarily a bad structure if we're continuing to successfully run these broad coalitional campaigns. Our permanent members are around the table because they have some power*

*and because the people who lead them are very smart and are willing to look at the world through this context.”*

Bringing in organizations not quite on the same page might provide a short-term power boost, but make it harder for the Collaborative to sustain itself in the long term. In contrast, the Campaign for Sustainable Milwaukee was made up of more than 275 organizational members, but of course most commitments were quite shallow, contributing to the inability of the CSM to sustain itself through tough times.

*b. Internal structures that reflect contributions and differences between partners*

Contrary to how many progressive activists think movements should work, these coalitions have been more successful when they acknowledge the different levels of power between partner organizations and set up their structures accordingly. A key principle in setting up effective coalitions is making sure that the people making decisions represent a real power base (usually in terms of either people or money), which holds them accountable and encourages pragmatism and compromise. Coalitions often focus on bringing people together as equals, a goal many respondents think of as mythical at best and poisonous at worst—creating opportunities for individuals to exploit the goodwill of others. A parallel can be drawn with “color-blind” approaches, which limit efforts to set up “fair” structures by refusing to pay attention to difference (Taylor, 1994).

The past negative effects of overly “open” leadership structures often came up in conversations. Several respondents, including Mike, a Chicago union leader and member of the Grassroots Collaborative, distinguished between “stealing” and “building” power within coalitions:

*“The whole is greater than the sum of its parts. We get a lot of strength out of what you call coalition, and we call collaborative—cuz coalition is a loaded term with some people, especially field organizers, they're like 'Ugghhh...another coalition, that's all we need.' In the worst case, you get the professional activist who doesn't have a base but just goes from group to group and tries to form these paper tigers. So that's why we called it the Grassroots Collaborative, rather than a coalition...because it's such a loaded term for community organizations, and for unions. Because there's so many unions that have been burned in coalitions, or who, for good reason, have a bad reputation in coalitions. Because in the worst*

*case, they're just using community groups to turn people out and get them a contract and then just turn their back on them.*

*A lot of these letterhead coalitions—especially through the 70s, 80s, and into the 90s—where somebody'd get a few people together and then they're a group, and then 20 other individuals sign on. That's the worst case—you're borrowing other people's power rather than building your own power...The way we're able to keep the Collaborative collaborative is something that was true in the first Jobs and Living Wages Campaign. To be on the steering committee, you had to produce money, at least a busload of people, and staff—preferably all three. And if you couldn't produce that, you might be a very nice person, but sorry. But you could be on a separate endorsers' committee—we had regular meetings of them, and they could have input on things, so it wasn't just all rammed through, but it meant that that steering committee was really effective. And it was nice to be there with a group of like-minded people who not only wanted to build their organizations, but also wanted to build a movement and not just be organizations—really build both.”*

Formal structures can help create this more positive dynamic, but the distinction between borrowing and building power also reflects whether the coalition just pulls together organizations as static lumps of influence (an aggregative approach), or facilitates a creative process where the partners grow their bases and create stronger alliances (transformation). Although Pittsburgh's APA and Living Wage Campaign used a very similar set of rules that tied decision-making power to resource contributions and membership mobilization, it did not build a sustainable set of relationships between the partner organizations. Chapter 3 will explore how the Grassroots Collaborative has been able to transform the interests of participants to create a new culture of solidarity in Chicago.

Maintaining a strong core, being up front about power differentials between members, and growing thoughtfully helps coalitions stand up to the inevitable pressures from outside and build unity across traditional boundaries. The Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods (GJLN) coalition is far smaller than its predecessor, the Campaign for Sustainable Milwaukee (CSM), and members talk about how important it has been to build strong relationships over time. Craig, a pastor of a church and also works as an organizer for Milwaukee Inner-city Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAH), a coalition of churches affiliated with the Gamaliel Foundation, remembered that:

*“They tried to split us up all kinda ways...they'd say, ‘John and labor, they only care about themselves, they've never cared about black folks, why would you work with them?’ Some people felt like we were getting into bed with the unions and doing their work. Some of our pastors and leaders felt like we needed to be the ones at the helm of the coalition.”*

In part because it was the same people at the table week after week, personal relationships helped bridge the history of mistrust black church leaders felt toward union leaders. However, this experience also demonstrates an inherent tension in models of allocating formal coalitional power based on organizational resources. Less powerful groups have a long history of being ignored or double-crossed by more powerful groups, leaving a durable residue of mistrust between, for example, unions and African Americans. Guarantees of formal equality within coalitions are an understandable desire of these groups and can help persuade them to come to the table. However, many of those interviewed thought it was impossible to create an effective structure in which each group actually had equal voice, making formal and visible inequality preferable to formal equality and informal backroom deals.

### *c. Moving beyond “laundry lists” and “single issue” campaigns*

In a coalition context, choosing the right issues for campaigns shapes opportunities for existing partners to reach out to a new base, bring new organizations to the table, and opportunities for leaders to interact and educate each other. Because working class movements face the dual challenge of not only aggregating the interests of members, but also defining and *transforming* these interests through a dialogical process, they face a more difficult collective action dilemma than elites.

The most common approach of broad-based coalitions has been exclusively *additive*—pooling together many issues in a “laundry list” platform. This practice is often rooted in a desire for openness and the belief that organizations are likely to work together based only on their immediate self-interest. However, coming together while remaining in separate “issue silos” does not build new power—it only rearranges existing players. Such coalitions tend to launch a series of disconnected “single issue” campaigns, in which one or two

organizations lead “their” campaign and ask others for support. Taking the first step to develop consensus around a common “additive” vision is often a relatively easy process. The right-wing attack on working people and communities of color has been so vicious that most activists can identify how their issues are linked together. In the early stages of the CSM’s development, Joel Rogers remembered that:

*"It was very easy to get it together. We said, 'We're getting absolutely wiped out. The city's going down the tubes, we're riven by this race stuff, we're not getting help from the state, we've gotta have a plan, and here's our proposal.' Let's lay out a five year plan...and make a commitment that we'll try to do this thing over several years."*

Following these initial meetings, the CSM produced a comprehensive report documenting their vision for “Rebuilding Milwaukee from the Ground Up” and formed four task groups focusing on Jobs and Training, Environment and Transportation, Capital and Credit, and Education. In practice however, the CSM only really developed substantial campaigns focused on jobs and training, with some efforts around transit. To move beyond a “laundry list” situation where every group hopes to use the power of the others to achieve their own goals, it is necessary to develop a shared vision and choose cross-cutting issues to focus on together. These cases show that transforming various issues and concerns into a cohesive vision is an important step in helping coalitions become “more than the sum of their parts.”

Like many other coalitions, Pittsburgh’s Alliance for Progressive Action (APA) early on tried to support the campaigns of all member organizations (a laundry list approach), but found it overwhelming and developed a set of criteria for choosing which campaigns to support, and what level. Somewhat by default, the APA ended up narrowing even further and became focused exclusively on the Living Wage Campaign (single issue) by the mid-1990s, leaving no natural next step following its failure. The broad original platform was a distant memory and, without the living wage campaign to fight, there seemed no clear reason for the APA’s existence.

Instead of developing a comprehensive platform like the CSM and APA, the Chicago's Grassroots Collaborative pauses between campaigns to survey the landscape and assess what issues have the most potential to pull together a powerful bloc of forces. More informally, they continue the tradition of the Manny's Deli breakfast group through continuing conversations about what's going on in the city and how they might fit in. The APA and CSM used their platforms to convince a wide variety of groups that their interests were a coalition priority while trying to fuse them together into a more cohesive whole. This sort of common vision can be more easily forged within the Collaborative because it is much smaller and the participants have developed a good sense of the kinds of campaigns that will draw the interest of many members.

Long-time Milwaukee labor leader Bruce Colburn described how a "community benefits" frame has helped GJLN attract broad coalitions to work on development issues by bringing people together around their "mutual interest, because you can get a lot of different forces all together, whether it's environmental, housing, access to jobs." Exemplifying this wide appeal, the Park East community benefits agreement (CBA) in Milwaukee aimed to transform the site of a former freeway into an environmentally friendly neighborhood built by union labor that increased access to jobs for women and people of color, and provided affordable housing. As Colburn describes, the CBA form pushes coalitions toward a common vision. By synthesizing diverse interests into a single campaign, this represents a step beyond a laundry list approach where each group is promised that "their" campaign will come up eventually. In framing each CBA as only one intervention into the ongoing process of economic development, they avoid the single issue trap that limits the potential of long-term transformation.

#### *d. Discussion*

While activists in all three cities ran living wage campaigns with the hope of catalyzing transformation within local organizations and strengthening the central coalition, only Chicago seems to have realized this potential. This result is

somewhat surprising, given that the other two campaigns were coordinated by already existing coalitions with resources and infrastructure. Perhaps in some way, the maintenance of separate “silos” within CSM in the form of task groups meant partners were less likely to fully invest in the living wage campaign because “their” campaigns remained on the horizon.

The strategic balance between openness and a small tight-knit group is variable based on the situation. To a certain extent, efforts to increase breadth and depth are always in tension within these coalitions—growing very big very fast makes it difficult to also maintain strong relationships between members. However, these cases suggest that it is not a zero sum game—some of the coalitions have added members and built power while also maintaining strong ties between members by paying attention to how they grow and balancing attention to breadth and depth. The patient movement-building approach of Chicago activists over the last decade has enabled them to build progressively more power while also striving for inclusiveness. Like the Park East CBA, the most successful campaigns have garnered the full buy-in of a wide range of local groups, pulling them into a dialogical structure in which they begin to reconceptualize their interests and articulate a common vision.

### **Strategy 3: Using Campaigns to Catalyze Relationships and Strengthen Infrastructure**

Coalitions come together around various types of campaigns—supporting issues like a living wage ordinance, a union’s fight for a fair contract, ballot initiatives, or candidates in the electoral arena. Ideally, each campaign not only achieves its immediate goals, but also builds power that can be tapped in the future. How does this happen? Some approach this question by using campaigns as springboards into ongoing networks, while others let the coalitions dissolve, but hope each experience transforms member organizations. This relates closely to questions of formal organization and the combination of additive and transformative strategies, and this section overlaps with Chapter 3 in exploring how organizational structures and cultures are interrelated.

In Warren's (2001) conceptualization of relational organizing, power is built by increasing either the breadth or depth of ties between partners. Bringing together a broad range of organizations offers the potential to wield more influence over decision-makers and relies on bridging social capital, while deep relationships, or bonding social capital, between leaders and members within organizations make it easier to weather setbacks, find common ground, and deal with conflict. Maximizing both dimensions is a key organizational challenge faced by activists.

*a. Targeted recruiting to set the stage for deeper relationships*

One of the most often-repeated themes in interviews was the desire to push a progressive agenda forward instead of always responding defensively to attacks. As discussed above, the most effective campaign issues attract a powerful constellation of organizations, mobilize (and expand) the bases of these partners, and take advantage of political opportunities. A clear goal of issue campaigns is pulling in powerful players, often with the idea of working together to test the waters for more long-term partnerships. MICAH, a Gamaliel affiliated faith-based coalition in Milwaukee, and member of both the CSM and GJLN, explicitly uses such an approach to develop relationships with potential member churches. Craig says, "We like to work with churches that don't want to be members. We just ask for the opportunity to build some relationships with the leaders, and then after we win, they say, 'Hey, this is a pretty good organization, why don't we belong?'"

Building power to substantially reshape regional economies will clearly take more power than these local movements have yet managed to build. While bringing existing organizations together is a crucial step, new organizing is also essential. In some cases this means seeding new efforts, while other organizations can transform themselves into powerful and active membership-based organizations. GJLN has used potential development sites to reach out to community groups as part of a longer-term project to develop progressive organizing capacity—particularly within Milwaukee's Black and Latino

communities. Over the past year, GJLN leaders have cultivated relationships with people they see as the best organizers within these communities by exploring mutual self-interest and offering funding support, even funneling money for organizing to groups before they formally joined the coalition.

While this outreach process works smoothly with some organizations, it is often a struggle to convince groups that their self-interest will be served by joining the coalition. Various GJLN representatives tried to get SEIU Local 1 involved in the Park East campaign, with the idea that part of the community benefits agreement could include union representation of janitors in the development, but were unable to attract a significant commitment. Particularly within the property services division, SEIU is almost exclusively focused on an industrial, rather than geographic, organizing model. As John Goldstein explained, they're interested in getting leverage on large companies that will allow them to organize "25,000 in one shot, not the 1200 we could have helped with."

This example shows how limited resources (even among some of the wealthiest potential partners) create a need to prioritize. Since the presence of at least one active organizing union local seems important to the success of these labor-community coalitions, understanding the strategic priorities of union partners is critical to campaign planning. The APA and the Grassroots Collaborative were both built largely on SEIU locals that represented large numbers of working class people of color and provided a key link between other unions and community organizations. Just as with individuals, the "availability" of key organizations is a complex and important component of movement emergence. In the long term, the GJLN coalition will need the active involvement of more politically powerful union locals to have the impact it is looking for.

Of course, even when they lay out such a plan and find a cross-cutting issue, organizers have to respond to changing circumstances on the ground. From their beginnings, leaders of the APA and CSM saw healing the relationship between the construction trade unions and the black community as key to progressive movement-building in their regions; however, as is discussed in

Chapter 3, campaigns focused on minority representation on public construction projects turned out quite differently in each city. In Milwaukee, the CSM was able to take advantage of the opportunity offered by a huge Convention Center project and new leadership of the Building Trades Council to broker a deal guaranteeing union labor and also targets for people of color and women on the project.

On the other hand, efforts to broker similar deals between the trades and the black community in Pittsburgh failed badly. In the late-1990s, a city ordinance called “Pittsburgh Works!” was proposed to guarantee that all city-funded construction projects were built union and included a certain percentage of Pittsburgh residents, with the goals of ensuring good jobs and diversifying the local trades. Although it spoke to deeply felt grievances in the African-American community, the ordinance was not connected to a specific grassroots struggle or proposed project like the Convention Center, played out mostly in the formal political sphere, and was killed in a backroom deal.

*b. Cross-fertilization of shared interests*

A key factor in how campaigns potentially create transformation is the process of organic cross-fertilization of issues, tactics, and “movement” identities between partners (della Porta & Mosca, 2007). While the Grassroots Collaborative periodically looks for cross-cutting issues, other campaigns have emerged organically because members look at the world differently as a result of working together, as Kate, the director of an anti-hunger group describes:

*“I was working on getting a mandate passed that if schools had 40% or more of their kids low-income, that they have to provide school breakfast. I went to the then-president of the Chicago Teachers Union, and went to the other unions and got them to support the legislation. I wouldn't say that they were the ones who got it passed, because it was really our leaders, but for the first time, our leaders were sitting down and meeting with representatives from labor. And starting to realize from listening to them—though they'd heard me saying it all the time—that wages, working conditions, and benefits are at the root of hunger. Because our mission is to eliminate hunger by getting at the root causes, so that's how I've kinda been able to get away with this [push into organizing around broader issues].*

*So now we're always inviting our partners from labor to be part of the process. We're working on getting a breakfast for all 400,000 kids to have breakfast in the classroom, and key to that is my relationship with [the SEIU local representing service employees in the schools]. There's also a summer food program (and this*

*is where it gets real interesting, which is what I love). I found out that this summer food program is greatly underused and that in Chicago, the Park Districts are not using this program.*

*When I pushed the Park District to find out why, I found out that they will only feed kids that are enrolled in programs, and they charge per kid to get into these programs. So we're sort of uncovering this—and when I told [the local's director of community outreach] about this, she got real excited, because they've been fighting privatization and closing down programs, and charging families for services because it's precluding the people in the neighborhood who need it the most. I think our work together is going to build both of our bases of support as we fight this privatization of the park district.”*

Because of open lines of communication and knowledge of each other's approach and interests, these issues turned into coalition campaigns. The potential for cross-fertilization is multiplied when rank-and-file members, and not just leaders, come together within coalition campaigns. The Big Box Living Wage campaign and the 2007 aldermanic elections provided many opportunities for people from the various partner organizations to work together, as Kate describes:

*“Some of our leaders, that was the first time they had done the political stuff, the phone-banking and whatnot—and they really liked it, they were really jazzed, especially about doing it with the unions. Cuz a lot of these guys are day laborers or they pick up trash in alleys. They don't work at the Wal-Marts of the world—they're not even there yet—so it was a bit of a stretch or a leap for them, but they really liked it, and they felt like they learned a lot, and they liked developing relationships with some of the union guys that they met.”*

These sorts of mediated “weak ties” are the types of connections that seem particularly effective at spreading movement identities and building a sense of community (Diani, 2003). At marches, prayer vigils, and City Hall rallies, members of various organizations had the informal chance to socialize. While more formal programs to bring together rank and file supporters would make sense from a movement-building perspective, such efforts are outside the comfort zone of many leaders and make them nervous.

Two recent campaigns involving Pittsburgh unions and the Thomas Merton Center (TMC) speak to the benefits and challenges of bringing together rank-and-file memberships. Save Our Transit (SOT) was founded by bus riders to fight for adequate state funding for transit and maintenance of services. Tim

Vining, who came to Pittsburgh from Louisiana a few years ago to become director of the TMC, describes the emotional energy during a lunchtime downtown rally called by SOT to support the drivers' union during negotiations:

*“That rally really worked against what the Transit Authority had been trying to do—drive a wedge between the drivers and these poor riders. To have the only organized group of riders out there supporting the union really made a difference. We had so much authenticity, cuz we had people out there in their McDonald's uniforms—she almost lost her job for that—we had people in wheelchairs, and the media loves Save Our Transit. Even Channel 11 and the Trib couldn't pursue their anti-union agenda, and the unions saw that. Barney helped educate the unions, and union members started coming to the press conferences. Pat (the local's president) was almost teary-eyed at one of them. One of the cool things was the board was going to sponsor one of our events, and they took that to the members, and the members were like, ‘double it!’*

*It means so much when a driver acknowledges a rider that's got nothin' but is wearing an SOT button...so now the union and the community group are intertwined. So much so that at the last SOT meeting, the question of privatization came up, and it was a unanimous decision against it. Two years ago it woulda been a battle. It puts us at odds with the Port Authority leadership, who likes us too...but it didn't happen because the union gave us money or the leaders pushed it down their throat...it was very organic on both sides...I think the key was the relationships. These people don't get much affirmation. They talk about Save Our Transit being a place where their voices are finally heard. At the Labor Day parade, the ATU invited Save Our Transit to march with them. Save Our Transit was excited to hand out a few thousand fliers to people, we made it a diverse contingent, and we got to know each other marching together. And to be offered coffee and donuts, and Pat would grab some of the SOT members and bring ‘em around to introduce em to other union members.”*

This connection is not natural to most leaders, who are wary of providing access to “outsiders,” and only developed after months of relationship-building and consistent support of the union by SOT. In general, most U.S. public employee unions do not have close relationships with the constituents who access their services. For example, teachers' unions have often had wary or contentious relationships with parents and students. This cuts each group off from the potential allies who could be most central to creating positive change, and makes standing up to privatizations and other right-wing assaults on the public sector much more difficult.

The TMC Healthcare Campaign was formed to support the struggle of downtown janitors for a fair contract and to increase progressive action around healthcare more generally. After a quite different experience as one of the central

community organizers involved in the campaign, Alex Bradley ended up frustrated that:

*“Unions have this huge reluctance to open up their members...I think ultimately the big thing was the cultural barrier. We wanted to bring together the community with labor, not necessarily just with their handlers. We were never really able to do that, and that was mostly because of the union. They really kept a tight leash on us. They wanted us to help, but not too much. And they wanted us to be involved, but not in certain ways. I think it's a shame, cuz that was one of our...primary motivations. If you're going to build a longer-term movement, it's not just about the rhetoric, but people in the community are going to have to feel some real bonds of solidarity with individual workers, and not just with some representative telling them why it's important for workers.”*

Symbolic of this cultural barrier, union staff involved with the campaign found it incredible that the community-based activists would have tried to talk directly with their members, because it broke with normal protocols and seemed to open the union up to a dangerous breach of discipline. To them, the conflict seemed due to activists “not understanding how the real world works.”

The relationship between SOT and the transit union was brokered by several skilful activists with experience in both union and community struggles, who carefully built trust during the beginning stages. It also may have made a difference that the bus riders of SOT were mobilizing around their own self interests, rather than just as supporters. The active process of defining how the riders and drivers shared interests and framing the issue in ways that supported each other provided opportunities to deepen the relationship between the two groups. The Healthcare Campaign, on the other hand, began with the goal of supporting the janitors against a particularly nasty building owner, offering less chance to focus on how the destinies of these workers and their community supporters were entangled.

### *c. Building sustainable infrastructure*

The best example of an intermediary organization emerging out of a campaign in these cases is the Grassroots Collaborative, which grew out of the original Chicago Jobs and Living Wages Campaign. The Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods coalition presents a similar story—formed to fight for a community benefits agreement for one specific project, the members decided to

carry on following the campaign with the goal of intervening in all important development decisions in the region. More recently, GJLN developed a Civic Leadership Institute focused on their efforts to spur sustainable development on abandoned industrial sites. Participants were more likely to attend because of the preceding example of successful collective action, and hopefully the Institute will become an ongoing institution.

The energy of a “hot” campaign issue can pull people together, help them work across differences, and demonstrate the possibilities of cooperation, in the process expanding participants’ sense of possibility and justifying a commitment to the “costs” of future cooperation (Gould, 2003). Overall, campaigns are key strategic opportunities for movement-building. The right issues bring in new members, encourage a strategic focus on organizing capacity and base-building, and provide opportunities to build relationships and work through conflicts between potential allies. Coalition campaigns offer the potential for transformation as leaders actually get to talk to each other across differences, stretch their ideas of self-interest, and take their organizations in new directions.

### **Conclusion: Building a Flexible Infrastructure and Seizing Opportunities**

By comparing efforts to mobilize around economic justice issues in these three deindustrializing Rust Belt cities over the past two decades, we can explore what strategies are most effective in sustaining mobilization and increasing working class power. When do these coalition-building efforts actually become “more than the sum of their parts” and yield an energy that disrupts politics as usual and shifts the balance of power toward the have-nots? What approaches are most successful in overcoming fragmentation and riding out the ebbs and flows of changing political contexts? How people are brought together clearly matters, and these cases show that more focused strategies increase sustainability in a number of ways. When linked together by effective intermediary organizations, a local movement can realize the potential of broad strength implicit in the memberships of area working class organizations like churches, neighborhood groups, and unions.

a. *Building working class movements in a society that doesn't talk about class*

At the core of many organizing dilemmas lie questions of *who* to work with. While a class-based politics makes intuitive sense for efforts that define themselves around a common concern with economic justice, none of these coalitions explicitly defined themselves along class lines. Many commentators have noted how class discourse is policed and discouraged on the American political scene, making it less surprising that these groups mostly use terms like “progressive change” or “working families” when describing their goals (Zweig, 2004). While the symbolic borders are thus fuzzy, imputed class interests often come up in conversations about people on the edges of the movement who don't fit in, like one Milwaukee church leader described by Craig:

*“Your mission does shift once you take that money. We see it all the time, like with one of our leaders who works at a PR firm that works for Wal-Mart and spends a lot of his time trying to tell us that Wal-Mart isn't bad people. And we say, ‘Look it's not about bad people, it's about bad practices, bad policies.’ But he feels compelled to keep sayin' it cuz Wal-Mart is paying his salary. And Wal-Mart's been strategic about doing that...like they hired Andrew Young... You see that and it's just weird, y'know?”*

In fact, Young, one of Martin Luther King's former top lieutenants, was campaigning against Chicago's big box living wage campaign on behalf of Wal-Mart before being forced to resign in disgrace in the summer of 2006. The money chase is often dangerous for movements on the Left, with the scarcity of resources steering organizations down more conservative paths (Incite, 2007). Non-profits reliant on foundation and government funding provide the clearest examples of this phenomenon, but member-funded unions and churches are also often pulled toward a “safer” and less active role as the easiest route to maintaining member support. However, while most working class members of these groups may ask for an individually-focused “service model,” this preference is potentially transformable through the processes of collective action and dialogue. It is far less likely that charitable foundations built on the logic of capitalism will ever support basic challenges to the system (Rodriguez, 2007).

The above example from Milwaukee speaks directly to the tangled knot of race and class in the US, and the struggles of activists to deal with their

interrelation coherently, a central activity within each of these cases. The “potential movement” in each of these regions is highly fragmented, with divisions between activists on the basis of demographics, areas of focus, and strategy. Symptomatic of how separated various justice issues have become from each other, Jeremy Shenk, the former communications director of the Merton Center, describes a well-publicized and funded group of mainly white, upper and middle-class liberals who “like to see themselves as a new progressive movement, but support privatization and busting unions by talking about ‘old Pittsburgh...artsy, young, definitely pro-choice and gay marriage...but when it comes to race and class, you get some interesting things.” As a result, the label “progressive” has become a flashpoint in Pittsburgh, with many in the labor movement reacting negatively to its mention. Ironically, less than a decade earlier, the term progressive as used by the APA was criticized by some for being too labor-focused.

To restate the dilemma as it often applies to these coalitions, to what extent should unions and working-class community organizations try to work with “middle-class” groups? While pragmatism and the desire to build power seems to dictate alliance-building, results in Chicago suggest that a majority political bloc may be achievable without the cultural complications of working with groups dominated by white professionals (e.g. many environmental, peace, or women’s groups), which, as the growing body of work on labor-environmental coalitions shows, can present considerable hurdles (Rose, 2000; Dreiling, 2001).

In his analysis of the mayoral campaigns of Harold Washington, Gary Rivlin (1992) suggests that the promise of attracting “lakefront liberals” to progressive coalitions that take race and class seriously is often overrated. Even though he was arguably the most reform-oriented “good government” mayor in the city’s history, Washington was never able to win more than a handful of votes from the north side wards. The Grassroots Collaborative’s campaigns have been almost exclusively based in organizations representing poor and working-class residents. Liberal suburban churches and similar groups have played an important supportive role, but the core has been inner-city community

organizations and unions, suggesting that, at least at some levels, it is possible to make change even in the face of a Daley administration that is far more interested in appealing to its wealthy constituents.

There are always challenges in bringing people together across differences within movements. To some extent, organizers can control who comes to the table and when, and thus impact the effectiveness and sustainability of coalitions. While it can be tempting to operate on utopian assumptions of equality and treat all partner organizations the same, these cases demonstrate that paying attention to differences between groups when developing organizational structures provides a basis for more long-term stability. Open calls to join campaigns, 50-member steering committees, trying to include every possible potential ally, and page-long laundry lists of shared issues often limit meaningful involvement as the greater breadth turns into greater frustration of nothing getting done.

While I argue that additive and transformative strategies can often be used side by side, in certain cases they do not fit together. For example, although the Big Box Living Wage campaign could have increased the breadth of its coalition by trying to pull in local retailers or small business associations, the strategic choice to limit who was at the table allowed them to frame the ordinance as a class issue and provided greater opportunities for the transformation of identities and interests among participants.

*b. Linking key organizations within focused intermediaries*

The key building blocks and constituencies of working class movements in each city are membership organizations based in the workplace, neighborhoods, or communities of faith. These cases suggest that these membership organizations are linked together within and across sectors by three main types of movement intermediaries: *“permanent” coalitions, campaign coalitions, and capacity-builders.*

**Figure 2.2: Three Types of Movement Intermediaries**

<b>Intermediary Type</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Example</b>
<b>Ad Hoc/Campaign Coalition</b>	Ad hoc network of organizations pulled together to work on a specific campaign.	Living Wage Campaigns, Park East CBA coalition, Pittsburgh Janitors Healthcare Coalition
<b>Permanent Coalition</b>	Network of organizations formed with the intent of facilitating cooperation over an extended period of time and multiple campaigns.	Campaign for Sustainable Milwaukee, Alliance for Progressive Action, Good Jobs & Livable Neighborhoods, Grassroots Collaborative
<b>Technical Assistance/ Capacity-Builders</b>	Broad category of organizations that provide spaces for groups and individuals to come together, specific “expert” capacities like policy analysis or electoral organizing, or otherwise serve as “hubs” of local movements. Often include representatives of a broad set of organizations on their boards, but are not technically coalitions.	Civic Leadership Institutes, Thomas Merton Center

These intermediaries can be distinguished based on the kinds of organizations they bring together and how many issues they focus on. Figure 2.3 represents a typology of organizations based on the breadth of their ambition on two dimensions. Some intermediaries work only with labor, faith-based, or community organizations, while others bring groups together across several sectors. Second, some focus on a single relatively narrowly defined topic, while others tackle a broad range of issues.

**Figure 2.3: Variations in Focus Among Movement Intermediaries**

	<b>Range of Issues Addressed</b>		
		<b>Narrow</b>	<b>Broad</b>
<b>Types of Organizations Involved</b>	<b>Narrow</b>	US Labor Against the War Chicago Rehab Network (neighborhood housing associations)	Interfaith Justice Coalitions Grassroots Collaborative Central Labor Councils Thomas Merton Center
	<b>Broad</b>	Justice for Janitors Good Jobs & Livable Neighborhoods Jobs with Justice	Alliance for Progressive Action Campaign for Sustainable Milwaukee United Power

None of the examples from the lower-right “most ambitious” category in this study have been successful over a sustained amount of time, suggesting that they represent a less realistic goal for activists outside moments of opening political opportunities. A more fluid strategy of pushing out in one direction from “narrow/narrow” collaborations to form “permanent” coalitions in the less ambitious boxes, pulling together broader *campaign coalitions*, then retreating back into more sustainable formations, may be a more effective way to build power for the long haul. For example, the Grassroots Collaborative formed the much larger Big Box Living Wage coalition to press the ordinance.

Beyond networking, movement intermediaries house a number of specific capacities to support local power-building. Coalition-building, research and policy analysis, leadership development and training, and political action all require specific skill sets and are often housed in specialized *independent capacity providers* like “think-and-do tanks” or “civic leadership institutes.” None of these three cities have uniformly strong capacity in these areas, but structurally, the more dispersed location of capacity seems to hold advantages over the “under one roof” strategy of the CSM, whose downfall took much of Milwaukee’s local capacity with it. In sum, these intermediaries play at least five potential roles in strengthening local working class communities:

- Consolidating the power of existing organizations in campaigns
- Creating new organizations to fill gaps
- Catalyzing change within existing organizations
- Coordinating proactive strategic planning
- Community-building and informal connections

The APA and the CSM both proved unsustainable, arguably in large part because they were too ambitious. Both tried to build the broadest coalition possible, provide services, and unify the local left into a formal decision-making structure to coordinate campaigns, but they were not able to do it all. Activists involved in both describe a loss of “coalition culture” during their decline. However, this decline was due to different forces. The APA’s cooperative culture atrophied during the years when attention was focused on the living wage

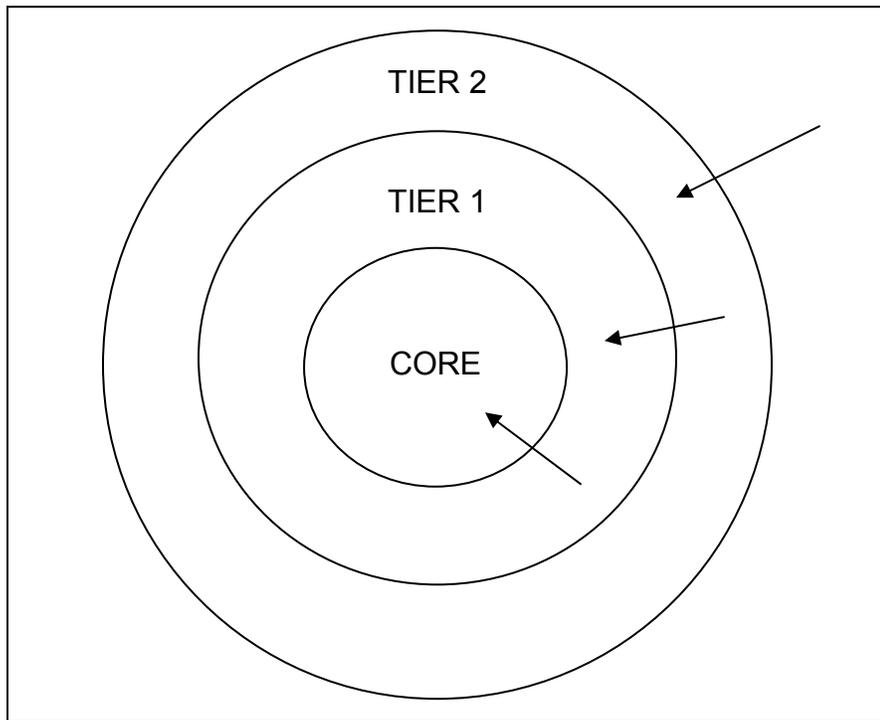
campaign, while the CSM was swallowed up by the service provision bureaucracy it built.

Of course, while less ambitious coalitions may be more sustainable, they make it harder to “get out in front of issues,” a continuing frustration of organizers. Defensive campaigns are naturally easier to build broad coalitions around because the issue, and people’s stake in it, has usually been made clear. Relationships are more easily built within strategic campaigns that draw in multiple partners through their self-interest, but there is no guarantee that these campaigns will emerge or that groups will come to the table in response.

A partial answer may be found in more focused types of intermediary organizations. For movements to emerge, local activists need a place to build relationships, develop a common vision, and set long-term strategy, but they don’t need to do these things all in the same place, and certainly not in a formal coalition setting. For example, the Grassroots Collaborative serves several important movement-building functions in Chicago, but is intentionally less ambitious than some other efforts. Ken Snyder calls the Collaborative “an interesting hybrid” of organizing-focused membership-based organizations that provides a supportive space for their staff and leadership as well as the core of broader coalition campaigns tackling “big issues that aren’t necessarily in their immediate self interest.”

Some Collaborative leaders “map” the field of local social justice organizations in multiple tiers, paralleling the way they structure campaign coalitions. The Collaborative is part of a central core group that is committed to a common vision and making significant sacrifices toward common goals. This core provides a center of gravity within larger coalitions. A second tier includes organizations that are regular partners in campaigns and are becoming more connected. A third tier is made up of groups that are peripherally active or logical partners who haven’t been connected with yet.

**Figure 2.4: Conceptual Map of Local Movements**



Although the Collaborative has not formally added many new members over the past decade, their campaigns have brought many organizations into the second and third tiers, multiplying “weak ties” and warming relations between community groups and unions in Chicago overall, increasing the potential for new campaigns with new partners.

*c. Evolving strategies and the craft of movement-building*

Overall, there’s no one answer to the question of what organizing strategies are most useful. At their most successful, these campaigns blend together mass grassroots memberships, strong organizations linked in networks and campaign coalitions, and a tightly linked leadership core. The presence of each of these elements makes it more likely that a strong movement will emerge from the continuing series of struggles in each city. Nothing as clear as right or wrong approaches emerge, but it is clear that there are better and worse ways to balance the tensions faced by organizers.

Local power-building strategies appear to be evolving, with at least three roughly distinct modes of local movement-building emerging from U.S. cities over the past several decades. The first, most prevalent in the 1980s, is exemplified by defensive mobilizations against plant closings; a second by proactive efforts to build over-arching regional coalitions uniting the broadest possible set of groups, and the third by a more flexible model of overlapping networks and institutions. As I have described above, this third generation still thinks big, but with more focused ambition—bringing together broad coalitions to work on specific issue campaigns while relying on more focused intermediary organizations to play a coordinating and consolidating role between campaigns.

**Figure 2.5: Types of Cross-Sector Working Class Organizing**

<b>Mode of Cooperation</b>	<b>Distinguishing Characteristics</b>	<b>Examples</b>
<b>“Strike back” defensive coalitions</b>	Clear distinctions between workplace and community issues; often union-directed; ad hoc coalitions; often aggregate impressive amounts of energy and power but dissolve quickly after campaign without leaving behind permanent intermediaries	Plant closings, Strike support
<b>All-inclusive proactive coalitions</b>	“Popular front” strategy of unifying a potential “governing bloc” in a formal structure, developing a common agenda, and pressing a broad platform of change; tend toward “laundry lists”; often bring all functions under one roof	APA and CSM
<b>Comprehensive movement- building</b>	Building movement infrastructure and creating a local culture of solidarity by strengthening networks and capacity through fitting defensive and proactive campaigns into a larger vision; Forward-looking but reflexive and organically evolving; Multi-level systems change; Uses all three intermediary types	Chicago in the 2000s

An open-minded pragmatism and willingness to alter approaches based on shifting political opportunities and local conditions seems to produce more success than a set model. Perhaps most challenging for organizers, building strong movements is not a linear process. Ideally, cooperation and involvement continue growing steadily among partners over the course of each campaign, but history has shown that movements grow and make gains in relatively unpredictable big leaps (Clawson, 2003). These coalitions are unlikely to grow steadily until one day becoming ready to take power. Since the political context is

constantly shifting, organizers should continually revisit strategic questions in an effort to better balance these dilemmas. Whatever organizational and political approaches are chosen should reflect a clear understanding of these tensions and be optimized to fit the local situation.

When a political opportunity opens up, organizers want to be able to quickly pull together a powerful bloc to capitalize on it and win as much as possible. To meet this goal, these cases suggest a measured and long-term strategy based on creating denser local movement networks. Under normal conditions, organizations would always be looking to move one or two links beyond their normal sphere of influence by reaching out across differences to organizations of different types or constituencies. Coalitions then constantly reach out to new partners who “fit” with the group, but bring something new in terms of constituencies or connections.

Each campaign provides a testing ground for groups to assess each other and see if they’re ready for a long-term relationship. For a group like the Grassroots Collaborative, each campaign might bring one or two new permanent members, as well as several new “second tier” relationships. The ambitious visions of the founders of the APA and CSM are not impossible, but require a more patient approach to expanding coalitions through the ebbs and flows of political struggle over the years. In general, activists will be more able to take advantage of political opportunities if a solid foundation of coalitions within each sector has been established, so building interfaith social justice networks and rejuvenating central labor councils is very important ongoing work. In addition, cultivating the growth of issue-based coalitions that bring various organizations together around a common cause strengthens cross-sector relationships and can help develop movement identities among activists.

If such broad and ambitious coalitions appear less likely to sustain themselves over time, it raises questions about where, and with whom, certain movement-building tasks should take place. Groups like the CSM and APA tried to provide a democratic setting for activists to come together and develop a broader vision of how the problems they faced (and their solutions) were linked

together. The Grassroots Collaborative and GJLN are made up of smart and creative people, but represent nothing like the diversity of these broader coalitions. Should some other structure exist to periodically pull people in these cities together to build bridges and a common vision, even if it does not continue as a formal body?

The CSM and APA also set out to build professional and personal relationships between activists to facilitate more spontaneous collaboration. What kind of local movement infrastructure is necessary to allow people to stay in contact, build relationships, and mobilize quickly? Who should be funding the media, networks, and “halfway houses” that help facilitate movement-building? The Thomas Merton Center plays a role unlike anything in Chicago or Milwaukee, and represents a model of what a loose, but physically rooted, movement-support space can look like. Many local activists across sectors read the TMC’s monthly newspaper and attend the annual social justice awards ceremony, which presents a chance for informal linkages. What parts of this model might be replicable in other regions?

Activists in all three cities are developing pieces of organizational infrastructure and establishing a basis for strong working class movements. Pittsburgh UNITED has joined Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods and the Grassroots Collaborative as a focused permanent coalition; Milwaukee has developed a Civic Leadership Institute, an idea now under consideration in the other two cities; and a core of leaders interested in tackling big issues has emerged in each city. Whether they are able to spark the emergence of strong local movements will depend not just on creating logical organizational structures, but on their efforts to use transformative strategies to forge new cultures of solidarity linking together local working class communities, the focus of Chapter 3.

## Chapter 3

# Creating Cultures of Solidarity Across Racial Boundaries

### Introduction: Organizational Culture and Prefigurative Politics

*“We’re a microcosm of the larger society, so we’ll always have homophobia, we’ll always have racism. But if you don’t struggle with those things, then that’s what we’ll always be, and that’s not right. We should aspire to something better.”*  
(Annette, Milwaukee community organizer)

U.S. social justice movements have made great strides in securing rights for women, people of color, and workers, but have often been hamstrung by their inability to unite potential constituencies across differences such as race, gender, and class. As the preceding quote suggests, these internal boundaries often replicate fault lines from the broader society. Unsurprisingly, the politics of race relations are never far beneath the surface of efforts to build local working class movements. As a researcher, when I introduced my interest in “labor-community coalitions,” I found that most people the prefix implicitly (or explicitly) attached “white” to the term “labor,” while “community” implied Black or Latino. Virtually everyone I interviewed assumed I was focused on efforts to bring together unions with communities of color. While I was initially uncomfortable with this and insisted that I didn’t intend such a distinction, I realized over time that it usefully pointed out the centrality of racial boundaries in their organizing frameworks. With this in mind, I reworked my interview introduction to center on questions of how coalitions work across race, gender, and other differences in pursuit of economic justice.

How these coalitions deal with cultural differences plays a significant role in the success and sustainability of their efforts. The starting point for coalition-

building in most regions is one of mistrust and fragmentation, with activists assuming that others are willing to “steal their power” and jump ship at any time. Based on past experiences, participants usually assume that differences of opinion, culture, politics, or strategy will lead to unpleasant conflicts and breakdowns of cooperation. Approaching multiracial coalitions as ticking time bombs produces a predictable vicious cycle in which wary activists assume the worst of each other and fulfill each other’s fears by acting in narrowly self-preserving ways. Although lip service is often paid to diversity, far fewer activists make an active commitment to inclusion. Sheila Cochran, who leads Milwaukee’s Central Labor Council, described how seldom differences of ideas and identity have been welcome during her years of experience as a black woman in the labor movement:

*We have leaders that feel like as long as you hire or elect someone who is African-American or Latino, you’ve satisfied what it means to be a diverse organization. Instead of saying, ‘I’m gonna bring this person to the table because they have ideas, not just because they happen to be brown or black,’ it’s been my experience that once you open up your mouth and actually begin to express those opinions, all of a sudden, diversity’s not such a good thing and now we’re just gonna tolerate you. And so I started hearing my favorite phrases: “She’s very candid...and outspoken.” The struggle is that you want these diverse communities to work together, but when they get together, you don’t really want to hear what they have to say.*

Not only do such groups miss out on the potential benefits of bringing together diverse constituencies, this sort of tokenism exacerbates existing divides. The status quo remains in place – women and people of color are excluded and often less willing to try playing such a role again.

The barriers standing in the way of a strong working class movement are easy to spot. Most people in the U.S. do not think of themselves as members of a working class in any political sense. If they think of themselves as part of a systematically disadvantaged group, it is much more likely to be on the basis of race or gender than class. Americans live very segregated lives, particularly along racial lines, reinforcing this sense of difference and producing a variety of dispositions and ways of life. As Ira Katznelson (1981) has shown, the US working class developed along a bifurcated path – workers on the job, but

members of racial and ethnic groups at home. Our political system enhances this fragmentation, as geographic racial segregation is translated into a pluralist interest group politics that creates a sense of conflict between subgroups. In addition, various segments of the working class (especially white men) have also used their racial and gender privilege to exclude and maintain relative advantages over African-Americans, immigrants, women, “unskilled workers,” and other groups (Roediger, 1991).

In the face of all these challenges, uniting the diverse body of social justice struggles within a transformative movement often appears little more than a pipe dream. With this crisis, however, comes opportunity. I found a general recognition that “politics as usual” has failed to produce results, and a resulting openness to new approaches. Many of the activists involved in these coalitions want to fundamentally shift the distribution of power and resources in the United States, are well aware that the history of US social movements is littered with the carcasses of groups unable to work together across differences, so are searching for new strategies to achieve their goals. This chapter focuses on the intersection of race and class because it was the most frequent topic within these coalitions, but much of the analysis could be applied to similar dynamics involving gender, sexuality, and other dimensions of difference.

Efforts to bridge these boundaries require more than just working harder on the same strategies, since they have included a hesitation to talk about issues of race and class directly, firm distinctions between workplace and community issues, and a narrow focus on organizational interests over broader movement goals. As Chapter 2 described, one piece of moving beyond the status quo involves creating new organizational structures to coordinate action. In addition, it is also necessary to create alternative cultures based on new norms and relationships between movement partners. The more successful coalitions in my sample are characterized by strong, trusting relationships between members (who even report having *fun* together!) and an acceptance of conflict and differences as constitutive elements of the group.

A wide-ranging literature on cultural change in social movements addresses the need to create spaces to develop the critical consciousness of members and demonstrate alternative ways of organizing social relationships in order to build solidarity across differences (cf. Guinier & Torres, 2002). This general process has been explored under a number of labels, including organizational culture, group formation, consciousness, collective identity, imagined communities, and public spheres.

While informed by all these literatures, this chapter is framed around the concept of *prefigurative politics*, an approach to movement strategy that attempts to align movement cultures, practices and consciousness with long-term goals – forging new relationships and developing ideology through struggle, guided by the dictum that “the way is the goal” (Crass, 2007). Prefigurative approaches emphasize the importance of “how” movements function as well as “what” their goals are. In their efforts to develop more effective organizing models, the coalitions examined in this study have utilized two interrelated strands of prefigurative politics (which I label using names developed within earlier movements). First, they incorporate a group focus on creating “beloved communities” as building blocks of a new world within the shell of existing structures. Second, they create new leadership norms through an individual focus on “being the change you wish to see.”

The most effective approaches to creating change within complex systems seek to coordinate reinforcing structural and cultural changes, rather than focusing on one or the other (Bate, Khan & Pye, 2000). These coalition-builders are trying to coordinate change within these two spheres while wrestling with an ongoing question: how best to bring diverse groups together without replicating systemic inequalities between them from the broader world? This chapter will briefly describe the status quo of racial division in these three regions before presenting two prefigurative strategies for building cultures of solidarity used within these coalitions. Finally, I provide several case examples of these strategies in action before concluding with a summary of cultural change strategies within multiracial organizing.

*a. Status Quo: Underlying Conflicts between Unions and African-Americans*

Activists in all three cities face longstanding tensions between local unions and black communities. Factors both internal and external to the movement maintain a cycle of mistrust and defensiveness. First, the two sides often seem trapped in patterns of relating to each other that increase emotion and distance between them rather than sparking change. Second, elites skillfully exacerbate these conflicts within broader cultural narratives, fanning the flames and making it harder to have constructive dialogues. Leaders' ability to bridge this divide explains much of their success in building powerful and sustainable coalitions and is central to long-term movement-building possibilities. This requires change in the labor movement—the less local unions are seen as only representing white workers, the more legitimacy they have as leaders of a multiracial working class movement. While there is still much to be done in each city, Chicago has been most successful moving in this direction, Milwaukee has seen some successes and some setbacks, while Pittsburgh has mostly struggled to bring together local unions and black communities.

The relationship between building trades unions and communities of color, particularly African-Americans, is a primary flashpoint in regions across the country. In all three cities, activists point to this historically-rooted conflict as the key barrier to building a stronger working-class movement. Black and Latino activists are upset about the slow pace of progress while leaders of the building trades feel their efforts to change deep-seated traditions in the face of resistance go unappreciated. The unresolved conflict spreads outward and infects the relationship between communities of color and labor in general. Biko Baker, a young African-American community organizer in Milwaukee who has also worked for unions, described how his father has sued the Electrical Workers for discrimination five times and now hasn't been sent to a job in years:

*Labor people often seem to say, 'Well, the trades are the trades...What can we do about them? It's not our fault.' But it may really be poisoning relationships with black activists, because those look like the only good jobs out there. It doesn't matter that SEIU's open—nobody wants one of those jobs anyway.*

As Baker's comments reflect, even when unionized, service sector jobs usually don't pay much, so the greater racial and ethnic diversity of unions like SEIU and UNITE-HERE fails to register as much impact on public perception. Such unions are thus forced to care about the conflict because many people generalize from the trades and portray all unions as racist, creating a huge barrier for those interested in bringing together a multiracial working-class movement. A Chicago labor leader told me:

*The problem is really the trades—that's where all the problems between African Americans and the labor movement are coming from. Reverend Meeks was on the radio in his church last week saying "All unions are racist." So we have to just get out there and show them that isn't us. It amazes me how much is ignored. Like at the last Collaborative meeting, [a woman] from MetroSeniors was saying, "Don't they know that there wouldn't have been a civil rights movement without a labor movement? Did they forget that King was in Memphis helping the sanitation workers?"*

Martin Luther King's work in Memphis was often cited as an example of how race and class struggles could be fused together. Particularly in Chicago, many white activists expressed strong convictions that change is necessary, but weren't sure exactly how it could be accomplished. A local labor leader told me he thought there were some union leaders who would like to see more done, and some "people in the trades who think they're doin' everything they can—and they are. They go out and recruit. And then there are people in the trades who could do a lot more. And we all get painted with that brush."

The conflict flows in part from the model of unionism used by the trades, in which you need to go through an apprenticeship and become a member of the union before being eligible to work for "union contractors." The union thus takes on the role of regulating the labor supply and allocating limited slots. Historically, these positions have often been filled based on ethnic and family connections, leading to the replication of homogenous workforces. Suggesting that such conflicts were almost intrinsic to the model, one African-American union leader told me, "I don't care where you are—I was in Zimbabwe and the trades was a problem!" On top of this however, US trade unions have at times explicitly tried to prevent people of color and women from joining (Swanstrom, 2007).

While federal and state intervention since the 1970s has made overt discrimination rarer, union members have still often made it very unpleasant and difficult for those trying to get through apprenticeship programs. Apprenticeship program sites are now often located in outlying suburbs and assume that workers have dependable cars and money to buy their own tools. In addition, while they have maintained relatively high wage standards, the building trades have lost market share along with the rest of the US labor movement, and more and more construction is being done non-union (often by Latinos and Black workers, including virtually the entire residential industry). With fewer union jobs available, those with less seniority (disproportionately women and people of color) spend more time “on the bench” and find it difficult to make a living.

All these factors combine to keep the construction workforce on big visible commercial and public works projects largely white and male. For example, only 4% of construction workers in Pittsburgh, and 7% in Chicago, are African-American (2% of each city’s construction workers are women) (Swanstrom, 2007). Steve Donahue, a Pittsburgh activist, describes walking by several big sites “and the parking lot’s full of SUV’s from Butler and all these outlying counties...Almost all white guys...” The high visibility of construction work and the perception that the trades provide one of the last ways to make a decent living without a college degree combine to make access to construction jobs a key issue to many African-Americans, whose communities have been particularly hard hit by deindustrialization. From the 1960s on, demands for affirmative action and local hiring have galvanized many struggles in Black communities. In most places, the building trades unions have grudgingly committed to ideals and goals of diversifying themselves, but half-hearted efforts and a lack of new slots have resulted in little visible change in most cities.

Jen Kottler, from Protestants for the Common Good, echoed others in Chicago by emphasizing the need for concrete restorative action directly confronting the relationship between the trades and the black community:

*“Until this issue’s addressed, it’s gonna continue to rear its ugly head, even in campaigns like this where the union involvement is from unions that primarily represent black and brown people—like UFCW and SEIU. I think it’s gonna take*

*somebody like the AFL to step in and say, "Y'know what? IBEW, Steelworkers, Plumbers and Pipefitters...you're gonna have to make amends. You're gonna have to actually do something in the black community that's gonna help us build bridges."*

*Whether it's putting together a high school—a charter school that focuses on apprenticeships in the trades, maybe taking over the Washburn building. Do something! It can't be about sayin, "Oh, we don't do that anymore." No. Y'know what? You're gonna have to buck up or shut up, and do something that overtly says to the community, "Yeah, we screwed up. We can't afford to be at odds with the black community."*

One reason that people are able to generalize from the trades to the broader labor movement is that the leadership of most unions—even those whose membership is largely women of color—remains white men. Until that changes, says Kottler, “It's going to perpetuate the myth that that's the only people that's in the unions and that the unions are just there to protect white folks.” It seems likely that the more unions like SEIU, UFCW, and AFSCME are publicly represented by people who look more like their members and are able to push the building trades to make concrete changes, the more they will be able to build strong relationships with communities of color.

Leaders of these unions are also well-positioned to serve as intermediaries between the two sides in potential efforts to broker deals. There are real limits to the number of unionized construction jobs available, but the symbolic impact of efforts to bring more people of color into the trades could potentially radiate outwards in the same way negative perceptions have. While leaders in the trades may feel the focus on them is unfair, the centrality of this issue in shaping perceptions of the labor movement in black communities suggests that directly addressing the relationship is crucial to the entire labor movement.

Although action is imperative, it would be naïve to assume that organizers only have to address the historical legacies of racism and continued segregation in order to be successful. Powerful actors try to keep unions and communities of color at odds, often in ways that directly impact coalition-building. Mayor Daley, who had previously claimed that Chicago was a “post-racial city” when confronted with racial justice claims, campaigned against the Big Box Living

Wage by equating union support for the ordinance with “redlining” black neighborhoods and preventing black workers from getting jobs. In addition to such overt intervention, the American political system encourages people to draw group boundaries along racial and geographic lines in ways that challenge the formation of working class movements.

While the racist history of US unions is undeniable, this narrative has been amplified as part of a broader anti-union assault and emerges in sometimes unlikely guises. Strains of Black nationalism emphasize racial solidarity as the key to advancement in each of these cities. Blue-collar white men (and the unions that still represent a few of them) are sometimes seen symbolically as the main enemies of working class communities of color. In such segregated settings, it is possible for such stereotypes to take on considerable resonance and be shaped by dominant discourses of capitalism. Tim Vining, former director of the Thomas Merton Center, describes:

*“Black leftists in Pittsburgh who know they should be wanting to work with labor, but they think it's easier to work with corporations! I try to encourage them to think about the unions, but they just have these bad experiences with the building trades and think that all of labor is worthless.”*

In the long struggle to bring a grocery store to the Hill District, the historic center of Pittsburgh’s black community, residents are most often framed as potential consumers with disposable income a store could capture, assuming that capitalism should render the race of residents meaningless. Entrepreneurship is often promoted as the key missing ingredient in the black community, and the years of segregated black-owned businesses are fondly remembered and promoted as a possible future. Of course, the idea that capitalism will eventually eliminate differences based on race or gender is as utopian as the hope that socialism would do so (Bourdieu, 1998). It is symptomatic of the contemporary strength of neoliberalism that so many racial justice claims are framed within its individualistic logic. Such framings, like the promotion of black entrepreneurs as natural community leaders, limit the potential for collective struggle and deeper analysis (Robbins, 2004).

While it is easy to understand protests of the racially exclusive practices of unions, these cities also contain conflicts between unions and ministers or political leaders that are more rooted in political machinations and divisions within the Black community. The “right to leadership” claimed by some (mostly professional class men like clergy) has long provoked conflict within the Black Freedom Movement (Kelley, 2002). White elites have often encouraged this centralization of leadership by rewarding compliant leaders and giving them some limited access to information and patronage (Rivlin, 1992).

Stereotypes of blue-collar bogeymen also provide cover for white liberals to be anti-union under the cover of advocating anti-racism and “progressivism.” Joni Rabinowitz, director of Just Harvest, a Pittsburgh anti-poverty organization, described how “a lot of progressive people in the welfare rights movement want the best for the clients and see the unions as an impediment to that. For example, when one former Just Harvest organizer went to work for a local union, a welfare rights advocate said to her, “Oh, you're going over to the other side...”

In these cities, the remnants of the labor movement are often portrayed as members of the “old boys club.” It is debatable to what extent unions were ever full members of local governing regimes, but their influence is certainly limited in the present era—maybe a seat at the table, but nothing like the agenda-setting influence of local business leaders. While they should certainly be pushed to become more inclusive, treating unions as parallel “interest groups” with business owners masks a fundamental power imbalance and thus effectively sides with capital (Offe, 1985). Alternatively, Steve Donahue, a Pittsburgh community organizer, suggests approaching potential allies with “a favorable bias...or at least withhold judgment.”

### **Breaking the Cycle: Building Working Class Solidarity Across Differences**

This tangle of issues exemplifies the extra hurdles faced by the Left in a context where neoliberalism is dominant. The historical experiences of union exclusion faced by Black communities dovetail with broader anti-union narratives and are amplified by local elites, who seize the opportunity to emphasize the supposedly different goals of unions and communities of color at every

opportunity. In this atmosphere of mistrust, it takes a significant amount of work, as well as some luck, to incubate stronger relationships between these potential allies in ambitious coalitions. While recent successes provide hope for change, this work is unending, as demonstrated in the Chicago big box living wage campaign, because elites are able to use the mass media to hammer wedges into emerging coalitions.

Building on the work of Gramsci, Offe and Wiesenthal (1980) specify the challenges faced by working class movements in such contexts, which must try to achieve a dialogical synthesis between channeling the interests of constituents into collective struggle while also transforming these interests. Practically, this suggests that counter-hegemonic movements face more complex tasks than defenders of the status quo since they not only have to effectively wield power within the existing system, they also need to create spaces in which members develop new norms and understandings that contradict those of the dominant system (Steinberg, 1999). If working class leaders want to mobilize a base for change, they have no choice but to engage dialogically with their constituents—both aggregating and transforming power.

Within the literature on working class formation, the school of thought that most closely parallels the processes observed in these coalitions is represented by Rick Fantasia's (1988) identification of the development of *cultures of solidarity* as the key process of working class formation. Fantasia argues that the concept of class consciousness is overly focused on abstract ideas and often obscures the actual processes by which groups become collective actors. Following Katznelson (1986), he suggests that class consciousness often develops through collective action and conflict, rather than being a necessary precondition for it.

This process of building such cultures of solidarity is inevitably contingent and historically bound, and activists try to marshal narratives of the past to help people imagine future possibilities. The local histories of each city are complicated and contradictory, holding both hope and warning for these coalition-builders. On one hand, each city has a progressive past that can be mobilized to

inspire present efforts. The mines and mills around Pittsburgh gave birth to both the AFL and CIO, and a strong abolitionist presence and early Black migration made Pittsburgh one of the early cultural centers of Black America. Milwaukee boasts of electing the last socialist mayor in the US, Frank Zeidler, who served until 1960. Chicago has long been an organizing hub, from the Haymarket affair to Alinsky, the Black Panthers, and the breakthrough election of Mayor Harold Washington, who combined bare-knuckled Chicago politics with the idealism of the Rainbow Coalition.

On the other hand however, each city's history contains many depressing stories as well, as working class groups have fought with and double-crossed each other, been co-opted or crushed by elites and politicians, and generally struggled to overcome the dominance of a corporate right wing in local politics. Activists in each city struggle are challenged to piece together a narrative that combines these positive and negative elements in a way that inspires hope and brings people together to take action while acknowledging shortcomings and learning from the mistakes of the past.

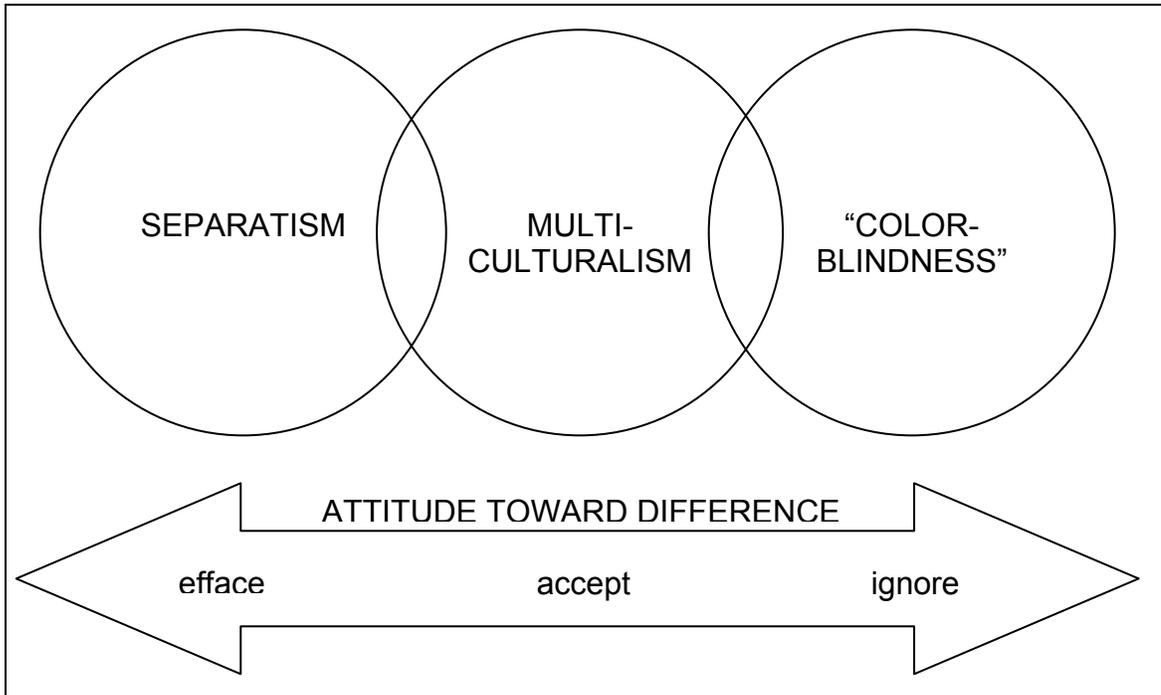
Further complicating this process, each city has been thrown into a broader crisis of self-definition by the political-economic shifts of the last few decades. Throughout their modern histories, waves of working class migrants (from within and outside the US) arrived and put down roots. While local elites have always been uneasy with this population, the demographic realities were undeniable and the public image of each city was as a blue-collar, industrial, immigrant town (sometimes even proudly embraced). Deindustrialization has created another opportunity for elites to intervene and "rebrand" their cities as enclaves of the white professional class. For example, Chicago activists are confronted by a powerful "growth coalition" led by Mayor Daley and real estate interests working to transform the city into a whiter, richer, amenity-rich, and service economy-driven "Global City" (Koval, 2006). While this push for gentrification does not benefit the majority of Chicagoans, who are working class people of color and largely unable to enjoy the new amenities, the Daley machine

is sometimes able to keep them split apart by playing groups against each other and exacerbating existing divisions (Garner, 2006).

Most critics remain largely pessimistic toward the possibilities of strong working class movements emerging in the U.S. Even the most optimistic work of recent years, Dan Clawson's *The Next Upsurge* (2003), calls for hope based on the historical pattern that American workers have made great leaps forward when conditions are worst and struggle seems least likely to social scientists. The most cited challenges faced by the U.S. labor movement include increased capital mobility, tendencies toward bureaucratic "business unionism," and detachment from communities of color and their struggles. These coalitions all set out to address the third challenge by bringing together unions and community groups and incubating nascent cultures of solidarity.

Part of the problem they face lies with our theoretical frameworks for thinking about difference and unity, particularly the pluralist tradition that dominates mainstream American thought. Solidarity has most often been treated as a latent quality, implicit in shared interests or cultural backgrounds, waiting to be uncovered by an organizer who shows people how their self-interests are connected and how those interests can be achieved through collective action. In this traditional organizing model, difference signals a lack of unity and solidarity and the most common approach has been to ignore in-group differences whenever possible. Most organizers systematically call attention to the differences between "us" and "them," constructing solidarity on the basis of commonalities within the group opposed to an "enemy."

**Figure 3.1: Pluralist Approaches to Cultural Difference**



The collective identities created through such processes are relatively impermeable, which provides strength but also makes it difficult to imagine overlaps where people belong to multiple groups. Differences within movements, whether of opinion, background, or identity, are minimized out of fear that they will distract the group from its common purpose and lead to fragmentation and divisiveness. A current of pragmatism among organizers eschews discussions that focus on dealing with differences in favor of “getting things done.” However, pragmatic organizers also care about building power, and most recognize that bringing people together across differences is essential to accomplishing their goals. If they had confidence that a discussion would yield the desired results rather than their fears of emotional blow-ups, most would be receptive.

Most organizing efforts still employ either “color blind” or “separatist” varieties of pluralism—either downplaying identity-based differences while emphasizing ideological common ground or invoking a shared identity to paper over ideological differences. These pluralist models assume a natural state of unity unfortunately marred by differences. Critical theorists have proposed concepts like intersectionality and multiculturalism to help move beyond this

quandary, but they have failed to gain much traction within movements, perhaps because collective mobilization seems to thrive on stark dichotomies.

There are not many practical examples of how organizers could build solidarity in ways that take differences between members as starting points for establishing common ground rather than ignoring, reifying, or minimizing them (Guinier & Torres, 2002). Even though it is virtually a given that coalition-builders pay lip service to the importance of diversity and not replicating racial and gender disparities within a coalition, such a “process” goal is often seen as conflicting with “effectiveness” and “getting things done.” While none of my respondents would ever downplay the historical significance of racism and sexism in the US, some grumbled off the record about people of color and women “beating a dead horse” and “not moving on.” More commonly however, they expressed sincere but frustrated desires to build new relationships between constituencies, particularly the black community and unions. If they had a model for effective organizing across differences, they would be likely to implement it.

These regional coalitions provide a particularly rich site to explore how an effective praxis of prefigurative politics can develop new strategies for multiracial organizing. The basic structure of a coalition primes those involved to be thinking about consciously negotiating differences. As they work to forge new collective identities, they inevitably grapple with the realities of past and present inequities as they try to create new relationships between people and groups. Chapter 2 showed that paying attention to differences in constructing organizational structures increased success and sustainability. The following sections examine prefigurative strategies pursued by these coalitions, focusing on how formal structures shape conflict and cooperation between members, how new cultures of solidarity can be created through collective action, and the role of leaders in bringing people together across differences.

The inevitable jumble of ideas, conflicts, and political pressures present activists with a tangle of dilemmas as they try to build cultures of solidarity, but some patterns emerge. Chicago has been most successful in creating new norms for groups and leaders (and relatedly, building a sustainable movement),

Pittsburgh least successful, with Milwaukee falling somewhere in between. Perhaps more important, common areas of success and failure across cities show how much more would be possible with more thoroughgoing change.

### **Strategy 1: Changing Group Norms to Create Beloved Communities**

*“While abhorring segregation, we shall love the segregationist. This is the only way to create the beloved community.” (Martin Luther King, Jr., 1957 Christmas sermon)*

Civil rights leaders of the 1950s and 60s tapped into the shared Christian faith of most African-Americans in the South to construct an ideal of the *beloved community* that shaped the organizational cultures and structures of the movement. In order to generate the necessary solidarity in the face of repression, they needed to transform local black communities—tightening bonds between people and developing a sense of possibility rooted in faith *and* experience. Powerful speeches were not enough to motivate people to take the risk of stepping forward; the new bonds tying them together with others across the country and a shared vision were rooted in emerging interactions, rituals, and structures (Payne, 1995). Such transformation took place within an organizational context that helped participants act out new roles as individuals and communities. In a similar vein, Marshall Ganz’s (2000) account of the rise of the United Farm Workers shows how organizers tapped into shared cultural meanings to transform the fragmented migrant worker community into a potent collective actor.

Efforts to bring people together across differences within labor-community coalitions don’t have the head start of broadly shared cultural experiences to build on. However, this makes constructing such “beloved communities” by consciously constructing common ground and establishing shared norms even more important (Grimes, 2002). Reflecting on the challenges differences present social justice activists, bell hooks (1994, p. x) asks, “Do you give up on making the beloved community...or do you realize you must make it a different way?”

*a. Using formal structures to manage conflict and encourage cooperation*

As discussed in Chapter 2, a clearly laid out coalition structure helps partners work together more smoothly. Developing structures that take differences between organizations into account while remaining open and welcoming is a constant challenge and occurs most effectively when organizers simultaneously work to change both organizational cultures and structures. For example, to establish a baseline of common perspective, Chicago's Grassroots Collaborative was formed through ongoing conversations to develop the principle that members need to be able to deliver a busload of people in order to sit at the central decision-making table, speak at rallies, or receive public credit. "Huge tensions remain," as Madeline Talbott explains, "But you can manage them because it's a group of peers."

The Collaborative helps alleviate the persistent difficulty of bringing together lots of relatively small community organizations with much larger unions by providing an umbrella group through which Ken Snyder could provide a central voice as lead organizer:

*It's not just that a union was dealing with the Chicago Coalition of the Homeless, they were working with CCH and Brighton Park, and 20 other organizations that were working on this. That helped to balance some of the power dynamics. There really weren't a lot of these tension points, but you could see a union saying 'Well, it's OK to piss off that community group because what they bring to the table isn't that significant,' but they wouldn't walk away from the whole community side.*

This has helped develop stable relationships between unions and community organizations over a series of campaigns in Chicago. In contrast, several of the Pittsburgh community activists who have worked with unions in loose partnerships facilitated by the Thomas Merton Center described feeling confused, alienated, and discriminated against, particularly on the basis of age and gender. Rachel Canning, a union staffer and current organizer at Pittsburgh-UNITED who observed several of the disputed occasions and heard these complaints through the grapevine, agrees that cultural change is certainly necessary in the labor movement, but attributes much of the conflict to different behavioral norms across organizations. While grassroots community groups hold the ideal of treating everyone involved the same way close to their hearts, "in the

labor movement you get burned if you don't talk to leaders in the right way.” Therefore, in meetings with community groups, unionists are likely to try to find the “leaders” in the room and speak directly to them. This may work fine while working with other centralized organizations, such as black churches, but create conflict when dealing with groups that place a premium on flat structures.

Coalitions create internal incentives for members to act in certain ways. Members of the Grassroots Collaborative make a case for healthy effects of competition within the coalition if it is focused on the proper goals. According to Madeline Talbott, since credit and publicity is divvied up according to turnout, all member organizations have an interest in organizing, which strengthens the campaign and movement as a whole:

*“It builds the coalition events bigger if we're all competing with each other. We're helping organizations to build the kind of organization where their members know they're members and associate with it, which I think is tremendously important to be able to do. If you can't put your shirt on somebody, then you oughta improve your organizing. I think other people can learn—if we come up with a flag, you can do a flag; if we do bright-colored t-shirts, others can buy bright t-shirts. We do that, and we get a big kick out of it. At first, it was just like, ‘Oh there goes ACORN taking over again,’ but once people got the hang of it, its fun.*”

*And if you say you're going to have 20 people and you don't, we try to make coalition events where your seats—whether 200 or 20—are kind of blocked off, so if you don't fill ‘em, it's kinda embarrassing. Those kinds of accountability things can be very trying—how do you enforce enough that it's worth coming for the groups that are disciplined? That it's not so loosey-goosey? You do it by setting up coalitions with only people who can move turnout and then rewarding them by making their turnout visible.”*

On the other hand, the Campaign for Sustainable Milwaukee foundered in part because of a loss of cooperation between partner organizations. In the opinion of Tony, head of the Building Trades Council, one cause of their demise was the coalition’s efforts to funnel job-training money to partner organizations, which turned them into competitors for contracts mediated by CSM:

*“You had Esperanza Unida, which is a job training and case management operation, competing against the Urban League for the same dollars. And these are businesses, even though they're nonprofit businesses, these guys are tryna make a buck, and when you have them competing; now you have a problem. Now you have two entities that are going to be proprietary in terms of sharing information, they're going to be predatory in terms of going after each other, and the coalition's over.”*

Similar tensions exist in Chicago, where claiming credit and numbers can be important for impressing foundations, but cooperative norms keep the competition within accepted bounds and focused on actions that benefit the whole. Tony ended up overseeing the job-training program at a stage when things came to a boil with the CSM under a cloud of financial impropriety, leaving him still bitter today:

*“It was a very tough initiation for me. This finally boiled down to more of a business relationship than any sort of collaboration, because I was responsible, and nobody gave a damn what happened to me, and I had to protect myself at all times. And I fired a couple of the original collaborators who didn’t deliver... So that was a really strange, strange experience of working with people in collaboration that finally just evolved into a business relationship, where I became a primary employer, and they became my subcontractors... That’s the problem I had with Sustainable Milwaukee—it literally destroyed the collaboration.”*

Especially striking in this quote is the assumption that collaboration is built on something other than “business relationships” and material self-interest. By setting up a subcontracting structure intended to help funnel money to partner organizations, CSM pulled these groups into a competitive search for dollars not necessarily balanced with cooperation. Joel Rogers, the University of Wisconsin-based founder of the CSM, alluded to this changing relationship between partners when reflecting on the demise of CSM. “What do you learn from this? It’s all kind of obvious. And it’s all hard. The defections get more and more attractive as the ideal conclusion gets more and more remote, and more improbable.” In earlier years, when different people were involved and there was a clearer structure, Rogers felt groups had been able to maintain cooperative relationships, but the accumulation of small setbacks and erosion of collective goodwill loosened the bonds between partners, reducing their ability to resist the ever-present centripetal forces pulling organizations back toward fragmentation.

*b. Establishing cooperative norms through collective action*

Cooperation between organizational partners can be very difficult to encourage and maintain. “Market logic” is very strong within the nonprofit sector and is reinforced by widespread focus on promoting competition among

foundations and governments (Incite, 2007). Two quotes from local leaders demonstrate the persistence and harmful effects of “zero sum” logic:

*Madeline Talbott (Chicago community organizer): “No matter what we say, we were trained in the early days that you want to borrow more than you lend in any coalition. The idea was: How can I use this coalition for my benefit? And if you couldn't, then you had to get out quick, because they were gonna use you—and that's still true for many coalitions.”*

*Sheila Cochran (Milwaukee labor leader): “The nature of a coalition is that everybody's gotta get something out of it. The only reason you're there is for your own self-interest. So if labor has its own self interest, and it isn't interested in the issues that the community's bringing to the table, then the community gets pissed off and walks away from the table and now you've got this big wall up and a bunch more hurdles to go through.”*

The sense that others are approaching each relationship trying to “win” is antithetical to the sort of long-term cooperation necessary to develop cultures of solidarity. The space for this sort of transformation is fostered by more of a mix between cooperation and competition. As Talbott suggests, it is quite reasonable to assume that others will try to “borrow more than they lend.” On the other hand, this knowledge can be balanced with the knowledge that people and organizations are shaped by, and change through, interactions.

A healthy sense of realism is thus useful in approaching coalition partners, most of who are neither completely selfless nor completely ruthless in their approach to collaboration. As the quote from Cochran indicates, it is widely accepted that organizations are part of coalitions that they get something out of. This troubles some activists, who wish people were guided by loftier principles and don't want to work with those they disagree with. Indeed, a collection of self-interests do not automatically become a collaborative agenda and a coalition of pure utility maximizers likely wouldn't last long. However, it is more useful to understand and work with complex organizations as they are than it is to start out disappointed about what they aren't doing. Mistrust at the start of a coalition is bound to be confirmed if everyone is expected to meet the same set of abstract standards and political litmus tests.

Even if none of us are completely selfless, we can become more cooperative in our interactions. Campaign coalitions and other intermediaries

provide a bridge between organizations and movements, creating space for cross-fertilization, relationship-building and transformation of identities and interests. Accepting each group's self-interest as they understand it, giving them the benefit of the doubt, working cooperatively as much as possible, and being patient about the rate of change helps increase the chances for productive interactions. Steve Donahue, a Pittsburgh transit organizer and former Catholic Worker, suggests a "long haul" approach, giving potential allies the benefit of the doubt and approaching them with a sense of optimistic realism:

*"I think the main thing—as someone who's not a member—is that I approach organized labor with a favorable bias. I make a presumption that organized labor is correct until proven otherwise. And this is what I think community groups should do. It's similar to what I think is a problem when white people are like, "Where are all the black folks at?" I accept labor as it is, an institution which has as its first goal improving the work conditions of its members, and a second goal of winning things all of us enjoy, like the weekend. So I know they make mistakes, and I don't always agree with them...but I have a strong bias in favor of labor, and I think when community groups approach them they should at the very least withhold judgment."*

High (and potentially unfair) expectations to support other organizations and campaigns are especially often placed on institutions that are perceived to be powerful and unitary, like "the labor movement" or "the black church," as two Pittsburgh activists reflected at the Thomas Merton Center:

*Tim Vining: In the peace movement, I get frustrated when they suddenly expect a union to be an anti-war group. They're not—they're a union!*

*Jeremy Shenk: And they say, "Why aren't you coming to our stuff?" But they don't come to union stuff...and people court black churches the same way...That's where we're trying to be consistent, where they'll know that the Merton Center is there supporting them, and that we're not a paper membership—we can turn folks out."*

High profile leaders, particularly those who feel they've been taken advantage of, their power borrowed without reciprocation, or who don't see an organizational interest in collaborating, are often wary of collaborating like this Pittsburgh labor leader:

*A guy stopped me yesterday at this thing—good union guy—and he says, "Y'know, we gotta get labor and some of these community groups closer together." I say, "Oh, we do, huh? Give me a call, we'll go to lunch." I'm thinkin' to myself...you know as well as I know, people try to get close to labor for two reasons...*

*Dobbie: Money's one of 'em...*

*And the other one is they know where the power is. I don't believe in that word power, I think it turns the public off...but we know we got some juice. And that's why they wanna be with us—and that's OK, who wouldja tie up with? Someone who's broke and got no respect? Hell, labor's never had a lot to gain from any group we've tied up with. Go back in history. What've we had to gain? The church, we gain some, no doubt...but in general, it's not much...We can always learn, but you gotta be careful who you go with, you gotta be careful of agendas.”*

When I told her the outlines of the above story, Madeline Talbott nodded and laughed before sharing how they've tried to break down that perception and build a new culture of coalition work in Chicago:

*“When we started this collaboration work with the unions in the early 90s, it really was like that. They really didn't know what to do—people would extort them, browbeat them...they just thought that you went to those tables if you had to go and then sit through it and get the hell out of there as soon as your members had what they needed. It was really horrible. We started trying to look at honest self-interest, and be above-board about that. And we understand that when we work together, when your members get what they want, you may no longer want to be there with us, even though we still haven't gotten what we need. It came with different unions over time. But we just kept plugging away, working together, never demanding that they be at the table beyond their own interests.*

Talbott went on to describe a coalition fighting school privatization where they put this principle into practice. The leaders of the coalition had worked together in the past and reached an understanding at the beginning of their campaign that if anyone got their “bottom line” met, they were allowed to cut the deal and get out, as long as they were up front with the other partners. The union involved did exactly that, winning a deal to protect their members before issues like community control were settled.

While this story could easily have been presented as an example of disloyalty on the part of the most powerful member of the coalition, Talbott emphasized how the union president later talked up the experience with other local leaders, leading to expanded opportunities for ACORN to collaborate with unions. Activists accustomed to calling for sacrifice in pursuit of higher goals might even be vaguely disappointed that the union did not turn down the deal out of principle. Whether this would have worked or not misses the larger point that extremely few labor-community coalitions ever get to such a decision point, in

part because the more powerful organizations fear they will be asked to be completely selfless. While all the partners benefited from their collaboration, the community groups were able to access a different form of power through the union and strengthen a long-term strategic relationship.

While strict cost-benefit calculations would be overkill in most cases, activists should recognize that many coalitions on the Left refuse to acknowledge the role self-interest plays. Intentionally bringing it into discussions legitimizes its existence and allows coalitions to balance the tensions more effectively and openly. Through the various collective struggles and relationships formed, our sense of our own interests can be broadened, as has been demonstrated in Chicago. The union in the above story has continued to deepen its relationship with community groups, developing several proactive joint campaigns, including some that are not “traditional labor issues.” As a transitional step, such strictly defined norms can be invaluable in avoiding misunderstandings and hurt feelings.

In pursuit of transforming the consciousness of those involved, broadening the agenda, and developing new cooperative norms, many people emphasized the importance of actually working side-by-side on campaigns as opposed relying solely on discussions, lectures, or formal trainings. Tom Hoffman, longtime SEIU staffer now leading Pittsburgh UNITED, said, “We've gotta find stuff to work on together rather than just airing our differences. The only time I've ever seen some of these barriers come down is when you're sitting around the table with people and you get to know each other.” Tim Vining and Jeremy Shenk illustrated this point in a story about an SEIU organizer who came up through the ranks as a janitor and surprised people by spontaneously bringing up gay rights and the Iraq war while accepting an award at the Merton Center’s annual banquet:

*Jeremy: “I think it's totally an excuse when people say you have to tone things down because the membership's not there. If anything, the opposite is often true—working class folks support stuff, and it's really the middle class professionals who might get alienated.”*

*Tim: “And this guy, if he had been a typical staffer, he never would have brought up gay marriage out of fear of offending the membership. The reason it came up was this guy and his wife had been having beers with someone who had been supporting their fight who shared with him the struggles of being gay in this society.*

*So then it was just him defending a friend, but a staff member would have been very cautious. Once it just happens and there's gay folks there or whatever, people are like OK...but if we had talked about it abstractly beforehand, never would have happened."*

Hope for progress and bridging these divides is often found in such stories, however rare, of individuals and groups undergoing dramatic transformations in the crucible of collective action. In explaining why she doesn't get easily discouraged, Milwaukee 9 to 5's Annette described an experience as a young union organizer working on an Ohio nursing home campaign that started on a worrying note when several white workers approached her to say they were hesitant about being in a union with their black colleagues. Because she had been trained in a context where open discussions of such issues were encouraged, she helped the organizing committee directly talk about racial issues over the course of the campaign, which paid off when the management kicked off an intense anti-union campaign, firing workers, making false criminal accusations, and trying to find wedge issues:

*They put up this whole montage of anti-union stuff, and there was this picture of Jesse Jackson from our 1199 magazine, and underneath it said, "Do you want your dues money going to this nigger?" The [organizing] committee and I met early the next morning and I said, "What do you wanna do?" And this one worker, who had expressed real concerns to me about being around black people, said, "Well, we have lots of copies of the magazine that has [local president] Henry Nicholson's picture in it, right? Let me have them." And she sat there and cut them all out and wrote "My President" on them, and pinned it on, and then she took them to work, and at the shift change she pinned them on everybody, and they went in wearing pictures of Henry.*

*It was an amazing thing, to see how far people had come, and how hard it was for people to get where they ultimately got. I'm sure at that moment it wasn't that hard for them to put that picture on, but it was very meaningful, I thought...and I think in other organizations, I wouldn't have known what to do, and I wouldn't have trusted them to come up with a good response. If I hadn't been part of an organization where we did talk about things and I was asked my opinion in situations where I was probably wrong, but someone said to me, "talk about what you're thinking—and then we'll try to figure out where to go with it.*

Of course, not all (or even most) conflicts are transformed into positive experiences, but stories like Annette's help maintain the faith in "regular" people's potential that is essential for organizers to be effective over the long haul. Most activists who have been involved in intense campaigns can recognize this

woman who went from expressing racist prejudices to taking anti-racist action. These stories of dramatic transformations provide powerful reminders why it is important to keep working with people and not write anyone off as a potential ally. The story also highlights the importance of open discussions about tough topics like race. Annette described intense discussions among union staff that had helped her develop her own understandings of herself, her opinions, and ability to intervene in such situations. Because she was confident and had been part of successful efforts to address such issues head on, she was able to help the committee constructively talk about the racial divide in the workplace and what it meant for their efforts.

As with many other important elements of movements, this sense of common purpose is not arrived at solely through discussion. Experiences of collective action play an important role in clarifying the bonds that connect people. The night before the Chicago City Council voted on the Big Box Living Wage ordinance, hundreds of supporters gathered at City Hall on a hot sticky evening for a prayer vigil. After congregating at a nearby church where many planned to spend the night and dropping off pillows and blankets, the group distributed signs and banners and gathered in a loose knot on the corner of Randolph and LaSalle, spilling into the street as the crowd swelled under the watchful eyes of a dozen police officers. As the sun went down, an assortment of religious leaders and members of their congregations came to the center of the circle and led the group in prayers and songs. Organizers circulated, passing out candles, creating a twinkling light much different than the neon reflecting from the surrounding skyscrapers. As darkness fell, a charismatic young South Side minister wearing a Chicago Bears football jersey led the group to spread out and “lay hands” on the building and then begin marching around the block, singing freedom songs over a mobile PA system hoisted onto the shoulder of a teenage boy grinning widely about being in front of the TV cameras.

The sound and candlelight reflected off the surrounding buildings as the crowd, now swelled to several hundred, encircled City Hall, drawing the attention of passing tourists and the top slot on every local news program that evening.

The prayer vigil was invoked by many of those involved as a galvanizing and clarifying moment of the campaign. Liz, a union staff member and recent transplant to Chicago, remembered that, "Just being down there singing and marching, and the candlelight vigil, it was truly one of those 'this is why we're doing this' moments. Everyone coming together and understanding what it was all about." After returning to the church where they spent the night, a couple hundred of the participants chatted in clumps eating pizza on the floor of a multi-purpose room while kids ran around chasing each other or slept in corners amidst rally supplies. Not only did many interesting conversations take place, a common identity was fused that night. Following this event, I saw several members of different organizations recognize each other at events with some variation of, "Hey, you spent the night at the church, right?" Such collective memories often provide touchstones for defining a group and its history of struggle together—expanding the "we" beyond lines of race or neighborhood that might have divided people previously (Foerster, 2004).

## **Strategy 2: Changing Individual Norms to Foster Bridge-Building**

*"We must be the change we wish to see in the world" (Mohandas K. Gandhi)*

Perhaps the most-cited activist quote of all time, Gandhi's dictum clearly delineates a model of prefigurative leadership. Alongside new group norms, new modes of leadership are necessary to facilitate the emergence of multiracial movements. These cases suggest that activists have some degree of agency in shaping outcomes, and that a form of dialogical "bridge-building" leadership is best suited to such settings. Although leadership is central to discussions among activists, it is often treated uncomfortably in the social movements literature, which tends to emphasize the importance of factors outside the control of activists in accounting for the success of movements (Barker, Johnson & Lavalette, 2001). This project reflects a more optimistic sense of the possibilities for movement leaders to shape outcomes, particularly within the realm of organizational culture, likely due in part to its basis in conversations with activists. The most effective and respected leaders do "more than their share" to help

change the organizational culture by leading by example, continually reaching out to strengthen relationships across boundaries, and subordinating their egos to the larger good.

“Bridge-building” leaders, who are able to move between groups and help people communicate across difference, have been identified by many writers as key to successful coalitions and movements (e.g. Grossman, 2001; Robnett, 1996). Building multiracial movements requires translation, trust-building, and a dialogical mode of leadership that blends listening and persuading, learning and teaching (Shandro, 2001). As described by Gabe Morgan of SEIU, Barney Oursler of the Mon Valley Unemployed Committee (MVUC) has been the quintessential bridge-builder in Pittsburgh for years:

*Barney's unique in being a really, really good organizer. There aren't many folks in the country who can do it, and it's really rare that there's somebody like Barney who's been doing it in the same place forever...he's like an effective Wobbly [nickname of the Industrial Workers of the World]. He can meet with the Black Radical Congress, and then sit down with the Building Trades, then talk to Teresa Heinz Kerry, and they'll all let him in. That's really key to coalition work, but it's a skill set that very few people have.*

This description highlights the need for both a certain orientation and skill set to serve as an effective bridge-builder. Captured in the phrase “effective Wobbly” is the implication that while lots of radical activists talk about bringing diverse groups together, few of them are able to do so. Empirical studies of local movement networks have shown that a relatively small set of activists who occupy such linking roles are critical to the success of local movements (Carroll & Ratner, 1996). Such leaders play a number of key roles in encouraging the emergence of strong movements in their regions, particularly through helping other participants develop skills for working across difference.

#### *a. Creating space for transformation*

Strong leaders can play a protective “greenhouse” role within movements, holding back potential conflicts to allow the seeds of cooperation to germinate and gain some strength. For example, the Chicago Big Box Living Wage campaign could easily have been derailed early on by opposition from the

building trades unions, who often look less than kindly on any efforts that might limit construction. However, they had faith that the leadership of the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL) was leading the local labor movement in a positive direction and understands their interests, so the trades let the CFL play a primary role in pushing the ordinance and refused to be baited into the conflict by Mayor Daley. That the CFL, as the embodiment of “big labor” in Chicago, so publicly and consistently championed a living wage for (mostly non-union) workers also convinced some racial justice advocates that working with unions might be possible and undermined the opposition’s claims that unions just cared about protecting their already privileged conditions.

As was further explored in Chapter 2, bringing together the right people in the right order also helps create more favorable conditions for changing relationships. Bridge-building leaders from different groups are more likely to be able to build good personal connections with each other, which can then set the tone for others as they join, so beginning coalition campaigns based around a smaller core group increases sustainability. Within coalitions, bridge leaders often “absorb” some of the negative energy, helping others relate more productively. Many leaders described listening to members complain about each other for hours on the phone, and helping defuse the anger before the next meeting. For example, although Sheila Cochran did not play an extensive formal role in the Campaign for a Sustainable Milwaukee, she was in the loop because, “The black folks that were involved would pick up the phone and rant to me about whoever was in charge or wasn't in charge. I would try to ask, ‘Is it racial? Or do you guys just not understand each other?’” Because Cochran also had a line of communication to the white leadership, she was sometimes able to broker deals that would have been difficult for the participants to resolve face-to-face.

Kate, the chair of the Grassroots Collaborative, described how she tries to take the lead in setting the tone and defending norms in the Collaborative if someone gets cut down in a meeting by intervening “either publicly, or definitely privately. I've been in meetings when someone came up with something not very supportive, and I've gone to them afterwards and said, ‘Just think about it—if that

was your first meeting, how you'd feel if that's the first time you spoke up?"

Madeline also challenges Collaborative members to be supportive of each other, privately and publicly, "And people find that strange, because the rule is that you just fight for your own interests. But you can actually change things, where there's a sense that we help each other out...but you have to work at it."

To gain the credibility necessary to intervene effectively in such situations, bridging leaders have to put themselves out front, representing "the change they wish to see" even while others are still operating within an old paradigm. Over and over, respondents described "swallowing hard even when you're right," and "putting your ego in the back seat" as key to getting through the challenging periods in efforts to build power. This kind of leading by example is counter-posed with the more common attitude of, "Well, if that's the way you're gonna be—two can play that game." Many leaders talked about how hard it was for them to break out of this mindset and act in ways they'd like everyone to, which sometimes gave them empathy for others who had not yet done so.

Operating on multiple levels like this requires extra energy, which is often in short supply during the tensest moments of a campaign, when emotions run highest and transformative moments are most likely. Reserving enough energy to rise above the immediate situation, be self-reflexive, and intervene effectively is a continual challenge of leadership in these contexts. It would be useful to better understand how some such leaders are able to continue doing "more than their share" over time, while others end up feeling taken advantage of or demoralized by the experience.

#### *b. Spreading norms through education and leadership development*

Where do such leaders come from? Certain people are especially well positioned to become bridge-builders on the basis of their life experiences crossing boundaries as "outsiders within" (Delgado, 1998). More broadly, it is clear that people with a history of relationships across racial lines are more likely to be able to build multiracial relationships (de Souza Briggs, 2007). In this vein, it was striking how few of those I interviewed could describe positive and

meaningful experiences in racially integrated settings. While talking about how many members of his church and other African-American pastors saw no point in working with people outside the Black community, Reverend Joseph Jackson, of MICAH and GJLN in Milwaukee, explained that he thought he turned out differently because of how he grew up:

*Personally, I believe in an integrated society. My experiences led me into that way of thinking, because I've always been part of multicultural groups. Growing up in Hillside, even though my family was Baptist by denomination, St. Francis Catholic Church had a summer program that attracted lots of the youth. And then as a teenager, my family moved around quite often, and we were up on the hill here, and I went to a Lutheran church. They had Boy Scouts, they had everything that I wanted to do, and I went through their catechism. It was right there, but it was majority white, and I went there for a period of time. And later when I went to Riverside [High School], it was naturally integrated—there was no busing when I was in school. It was Black, White, Hispanic and everything else. So from all that, integration certainly suits me personally. But so few folks have that experience.*

Other bridge-building leaders described experiences later in life, often through work, that pulled them outside their own communities. Those who had worked as organizers often talked about how much they changed as a result of systematically building relationships with so many different people and helping them relate to each other. Tim Drea, one of the key labor leaders involved in the Big Box Living Wage campaign, grew up in a small mining town in southern Illinois, got involved in politics through the mineworkers union, and ended up working for Emil Jones, a prominent African-American politician in the state. Later, as political director of UFCW Local 881, he had a relatively unique resume and day-to-day life, pulled him into all corners of the region by campaigns, where he not only drives through, but knocks on doors and actually talks to people. He contrasted this knowledge of different neighborhoods with members of his own family who moved out of the south side to the suburbs in the early 1970s:

*You musta not been able to rent a moving van in this city between 1968 and 1973, cuz it seems like every white family I talk to says, 'Oh, we moved out...' When I was working for Emil Jones and he was running for Congress against Jesse Jackson, they sent me up here to walk precincts in Roseland [their old neighborhood]. And there was a cousin who was like 'You got out alive?' And I was like, 'Yeah, there's a thriving black middle class there.' He was like, 'I don't know what part you were in.' He grew up there, and he just couldn't see it.*

Many of the most effective bridge-builders described proactively reaching out and building trust over time in an effort to broaden and diversify their networks. Jen Kottler, of Protestants for the Common Good in Chicago, is often the only white face on Operation PUSH's syndicated Sunday School television show. As she describes it, she "just keeps showing up, so now they figure 'maybe Jen's gonna be around awhile.'" Although a wide range of experiences clearly prepares people to be better bridge-builders, organizational silos often preclude such people from rising through leadership structures, as John Goldstein laments:

*For most union folks, their path is up through their own union. It's not through the labor council or the state fed or bringing community groups together. Where you move ahead, and where you get validation is within your international, and that's part of the problem—the internationals aren't engaged in local struggles, they don't have ties to local communities, and they aren't focused on developing strong local leaders.*

As those who have written on attempts to revitalize central labor councils point out, CLC's and "community outreach" work have often been seen as a "pre-retirement sinecure" by many in the labor movement (Ness & Eimer, 2001). Since such work is not usually respected or a direct route to power, the most ambitious and capable people don't move in that direction, and community perceptions about the labor movement are often confirmed by a preponderance of old conservative white men. Suspicion of people whose work history crosses boundaries is present in community organizing and many other movements as well, making it generally difficult for many bridge-builders to rise into leadership.

Bucking this tendency, intermediary organizations like the Grassroots Collaborative and Thomas Merton Center often make a deliberate effort to hire bridge-builders with credibility in several communities as staff. There is some anecdotal evidence that involvement in this sort of collaboration makes organizations more likely to hire such bridge-builders as well. For example, several organizers have moved between unions and community groups involved with the Grassroots Collaborative. Toni Foulkes, whose election to City Council was perhaps the biggest win of the recent campaign, was seen as a particularly strong candidate because she was a leader both within ACORN and the UFCW.

As examples of such collaboration grow, hiring processes and internal politics will hopefully become more open, resulting in the emergence of more natural bridge-builders. In the meantime, and to help develop a new generation of such leaders, national networks like Building Partnerships (BP) are promoting Civic Leadership Institutes to bring together cohorts of labor and community leaders in various cities. The concept is based on leadership development efforts sponsored by institutions like Chambers of Commerce that bring together rising elites to make connections and develop a common framework. Recognizing that the intermediary infrastructure of the left has atrophied, several of the founders of CSM are now working with GJLN and BP to create a Civic Leadership Institute in Milwaukee that would help activists develop a common language and experience working with people in other sectors.

Of course, this sort of process often happens in informal settings as well, as demonstrated by one of Kate's favorite strategies—sending people on trips together in cars and vans, where they naturally share their experiences and educate each other, as in one trip to the Illinois State Fair with two “little old black ladies from the South Side who ran a food pantry” and “two wealthy white ladies from DuPage County who volunteered at one”:

*When we were down in the tent, we were talking about food stamps, and there were these farmers who asked, "Could you step outside the tent? I have a question." These farmers were eligible for food stamps! So on the way back, everyone was real quiet, and I was like, "What's up?" And one of the little old black ladies said, "I had no idea that farmers could be hungry—how can a farmer be hungry?" And one of the women from DuPage County said, "Y'know, I heard that too—I kept thinking I misheard him." So they got in this whole conversation about the little world that they were in and what they saw at their pantry was so different, and how could it be that poverty existed in this way.*

The ensuing discussion of the economics of food production and their different experiences as anti-hunger activists in their communities broadened the understanding and collective identities of these women, several of whom went on to become leaders in the organization. By bringing together white suburbanites, black inner city residents, and rural white farmers, Kate created the potential for dialogue to transform each of their understandings of the issue of “hunger,” which brought them all together. While many such anti-hunger groups remain narrowly

focused on food banks and direct service, such educational processes have helped this group focus on root causes of poverty and enabled coalition-building.

Moments of leadership transition lay bare the intersection of organizational structures, emergent cultural norms, and personal relationships. If things were going well, how much was dependent on the leader's charisma, skills, or personal relationships, and how much was translated into structures and norms that maintain themselves beyond the intervention of any individual? If the situation was more stagnant, how large of an opening has been created?

The two Milwaukee intermediaries had quite different experiences as key leaders transitioned out. Most observers agree that the CSM never recovered after Bruce Colburn left to work for the AFL-CIO. As Joel Rogers put it, "everybody loves Bruce—he's pretty lovable. [After he left], the labor folks started doing things that weren't very friendly to the community people." Although the CSM accomplished many things following Colburn's departure, the process of fragmentation continued with nobody having the stature or ability to knit things back together.

On the other hand, the GJLN coalition weathered the departure of two key leaders—Kathleen Mulligan-Hansel and John Goldstein—early on, but has maintained a strong sense of connection and purpose. Of course, GJLN was far smaller and focused in its mission, compared with CSM, and also is part of national networks of coalitions doing similar work, which provide referent points and support. The material stakes are also much lower. While GJLN's budget is quite modest, CSM had millions of dollars flowing through it, increasing the incentives to "capture" the organization and heightening conflict between key players.

Connections between people and organizations take work to maintain. Sheila Cochran used the metaphor of a spider web to describe the proactive process of coalition-building, and emphasizes that you're always "runnin' around webbin' it back together." For this reason, the Grassroots Collaborative has tried to stay focused on constantly building relationships. Following the death of John (Juancho) Donahue, the original convener of the Collaborative, the group worried

about carrying on the cooperative culture. They were helped by the fact that the overall leadership involved has remained remarkably stable over the past decade, and they have been able to “keep the spirit of Juancho alive.” Kate, chair of the Collaborative, feels that a sense of conciliation was established by the founders in the early days and continues to shape members’ actions:

*In the beginning, where there were five or six of them who would meet to eat breakfast, they talked and shared...and they trusted each other. I think that's provided a strong foundation for us. I think everybody worried when Juancho died, that the spirit would go with him. We talked a lot about that...And there've been people at different times that I've had an argument with and I'll get a call from them saying, "y'know, in the spirit of Juancho, let's have coffee...or let's have a beer after work..."*

*So the group, I think there's always the foundation that people, even if they weren't here, they've heard the stories and they're aware of it. They know there's a story attached to how we got to where we are, and part of that story is that there was basic trust and honesty and commitment to each other, along with a basic set of principles. When all else fails, people rely on that.*

In addition, they’ve tried to make time for more formal relationship-building and reflection, especially focused on bringing new people into the fold. Following the prolonged campaign for the big box living wage, they planned a retreat for the summer of 2007, as Kate recounts:

*It's a group of people that has a pretty decent sense of humor—some more obvious than others. But some people who've come on have actually been kind of offended by what they think are flip comments or whatever. So we're going to Ed's place in Michigan City in June, where we'll spend the day. People'll bring their families, we'll barbeque, drink some beers, and spend time together. I think that's really important...But I think you hit on something, which is keeping the stories alive, which I think is important...and creating new stories, and new relationships, new great experiences that people can talk about.*

As Kate’s comments clearly demonstrate, there is nothing accidental or unplanned about these trips to the fair or beach, but they are less structured than more traditional trainings or meetings. The best bridge-building leaders do more than cross boundaries themselves, they take advantage of opportunities within campaigns to create dialogue between others in situations that are likely to lead to cross-fertilization and mutual learning and strategically intervene in formal and informal ways to shape an organizational culture of solidarity. When movements are growing and active, more opportunities for informal interventions present

themselves (e.g. people staying overnight in a church together during the Big Box Living Wage campaign), but more formal structures can be essential to maintaining connections when a movement is in the doldrums (Rupp & Taylor, 1987). For example, even though Pittsburgh has recently been in a bit of a movement trough, events like the Merton Center's annual awards gathering have kept pulling people together and providing an easy entry point for new activists and a network of loose relationships to be drawn on when campaigns emerge. Additionally, formal settings like a Civic Leadership Institute can be invaluable for bringing people together for the first time and explicitly encouraging dialogue within a clearly defined context.

### **Strategy 3: Breaking Cycles of Criticism and Defensiveness in Campaigns**

Campaigns offer the chance to break out of patterns of fragmentation and forge cultures of solidarity through collective action. As several respondents mentioned, people are more motivated to try new things and cross boundaries in the context of "real" efforts to make change. While groundwork must be laid before tackling ambitious goals, the reality is that many leaders are not brought to the table until a concrete campaign takes shape. Coupled with the knowledge that cultural transformations are most likely in the context of collective action, this fact makes issue campaigns a key venue where cultures of solidarity are developed and seeds of long-term change are sown.

In all three cities, organizers have used campaigns to try to break negative cycles of conflict between potential allies, particularly unions and communities of color. This section highlights three episodes: contrasting efforts to bring together the trades with black communities in Milwaukee and Pittsburgh, and the relatively successful multiracial coalition in the Chicago Big Box Living Wage campaign. When they have been most successful, organizers have used campaigns as openings to break out of the status quo and create new norms for leadership and group relationships.

*a. Efforts to bring together black communities and the Building Trades*

While those involved in the labor movement often describe the issue of diversity in the trades as “complicated” and “messy,” advocates of a more representative workforce tend to think progress could be made relatively quickly if the unions would alter a few key practices and confront their overtly racist members. The pattern of the basic dispute thus largely repeats itself. Racial justice advocates criticize the trade unions, whose leaders get defensive about their efforts, and neither side believes the other is operating in good faith. Breaking this cycle is a challenge, but is possible if the groups are able to accept where each other is at and work on a concrete project, as shown by the different trajectories of cooperation and conflict around bringing Black workers into the trades in Milwaukee and Pittsburgh. Though neither city represents an unqualified success story, Milwaukee has seen several breakthrough moments that point to opportunities for change, while Pittsburgh has been unable to address the semi-submerged conflict.

From their beginnings, leaders of the Campaign for a Sustainable Milwaukee (CSM) and Pittsburgh’s Alliance for Progressive Action (APA) saw healing the relationship between the construction trade unions and the Black community as key to progressive movement-building in their regions, but campaigns to create affirmative action requirements on publicly funded projects in the 1990s turned out quite differently in each city. The key turning point in Milwaukee was the 1996 construction of a new convention center. The CSM had already been in existence for several years, winning a number of living wage ordinances and building support for strikes. Key leaders had been laying groundwork to bridge the gap for years and took advantage of the opportunity offered by the huge project and the election of a new president of the Building Trades Council. Two separate struggles were being waged, one putting pressure on officials to ensure the convention center was built union, another focusing on hiring for minorities, creating a situation where it looked like neither side would win anything. Tony, the new president of the trades, was feeling caught in between, as his members demanded he secure a project labor agreement and

community groups and politicians demanded they bring more people of color into the trades:

*“There were a lot of community groups around town who were really bellerin' and wanted to see more diversity in the trades, and wanted to see jobs and apprenticeships opened up to people of color. And there weren't a lot of things going on...our Big Step [minority apprenticeship] operation had floundered and was useless, doing nothing. There wasn't a lot of minority recruitment going on. The community groups around town were frustrated that they couldn't get their candidates in. And I was the brand new president and was just getting hit from everywhere.*

*A very visionary guy who was a carpenter business agent at the time, he sat down with me one day and says, "Y'know, you need to do this the right way. And the right way is to band up with 'em. They have voting power, they have political power, and they're not going away. And there's no way this organization can continue like it is. Just think about it." And I think that initially that was the reason why on the part of all of these unions, because I think they finally came to the conclusion that no matter how redneck they may be, they're not gonna beat 'em.*

*The president of the convention center board at the time was anti-union and had this wild idea that he was gonna build it with all non-union minority contractors. Well that can't even happen—it's impossible. So they had hired Clark construction, out of Bethesda. Clark is the old High Menominee, and is pretty notorious for a lot of anti-union stuff. (They brought in this goon to try and negotiate with me, and the interesting thing was that this guy and I were in a labor-management gunfight in Kalispell, Montana years ago, but I didn't tell him that until it was over.)*

*So we had to do something. Kind of a paradigm shift around here, because up until a certain point in time, the building trades didn't embrace any of these community groups—they were in fact seen as trouble, problems for us. But they were showing that they had immense power. They were, for the first time that I'd seen in 38 years, showing some kind of collective, and result-oriented, power.”*

Several key union and community leaders on the CSM board helped organize a massive demonstration where union members and community residents from all over the city surrounded the entire construction site. The event attracted substantial press coverage and prompted immediate action by local politicians, as Tony remembers: “All of a sudden the phone was ringing: ‘How can we help you?’ We sat down with Clark/Hunzinger and bargained a contract that included 25% minority contractor participation and 25% minority labor. And we met those goals.”

This story demonstrates the importance of choosing the right issue and actively engaging partners in ways that allow them to get involved. There was

nothing automatic about the convention center project that brought together the historically antagonistic Milwaukee building trades unions and communities of color. The breakthrough flowed from the groundwork that had been laid by the CSM, where key bridging leaders within the trades and community groups had been working together for years, the growing weight of the African-American and Latino vote in city politics, and the internal political situation perceived by Tony.

A core of bridge-building leaders knew they wanted to bring together the trades and communities of color around a cross-cutting issue and were ready to seize the opportunity when the convention center presented itself. By doing prep work before the initial conversations, they increased the chances of successful interactions between the two sides. The physical experience of marching down the street in a multiracial crowd seemed to leave a powerful imprint on many of those who participated, leaving behind some optimism about further cooperation and validating those who had brokered the effort. It also provided a policy precedent, making it easier for Milwaukee activists to push for similar agreements from local government in cases like the Park East development.

On the other hand, efforts to pull together a similar deal between the trades and the black community in Pittsburgh in the late 1990s failed badly. A city ordinance called “Pittsburgh Works!” was proposed to mandate that all city-funded construction projects were built union and by at least 35% city residents, with the goals of ensuring good jobs and diversifying the local trades. Although it spoke to deeply felt grievances in the African-American community, the ordinance was not connected to a specific grassroots struggle or proposed project and played out mostly in the formal political sphere. The trades managed to hijack the measure after it was passed and prevented its implementation, further alienating many black leaders but not sparking much community reaction.

The APA was similarly positioned to engineer a deal as the CSM but was unable to do so, a failure that came back to haunt the living wage campaign, which was unable to meaningfully bring together the black community with local unions, according to many involved. Pittsburgh seems to have lacked the organizational infrastructure and the handful of proactive and well-placed leaders

able to reach out across the divide in Milwaukee. While nearly all those interviewed emphasized the importance of starting coalitions with a few strong partner organizations committed to mobilizing their membership around social justice issues, such organizations are sometimes not available. There were not many active membership organizations in Pittsburgh's black community, with activity more focused around individuals and politicians, and only a couple unions looking beyond "bread and butter" issues, with no key allies in the trades. The APA tried to play an intermediary role, but without clear potential partners to mediate between, they were left in uncertain waters.

Another difference between the two experiences is that Milwaukee's breakthrough was directly tied to the Convention Center campaign in which all the key stakeholders were forced to see some common interests in the face of the possibility of getting nothing at all. The legislative approach in Pittsburgh may have hampered efforts to bring labor and the black community closer together, compared to Milwaukee, where both sides could see an imminent loss on the horizon as demolition began on the convention center. This demonstrates the greater difficulty of developing new norms outside the context of collective action, and left a legacy that still hampers coalition-building in Pittsburgh today.

A more promising effort has recently emerged out of a sustainable development intermediary called Pittsburgh United (based on the model of Good Jobs & Livable Neighborhoods) around a new stadium project in the Hill District. The "One Hill" coalition is using their CBA campaign to proactively confront these barriers in building a new basis for trust between labor and the Black community (as well as uniting community groups themselves). As opposed to the Pittsburgh Works effort, this strategy offers both a formal structure to work within as well as opportunities for collective action and leadership development. However, Pittsburgh UNITED still faces an uphill battle. Early in 2008, the Building Trades Council came out against their CBA efforts as impediments to development, publicly splitting the united labor-community front the coalition had been trying to maintain.

As is suggested by Sheila Cochran's spiderweb metaphor, these relationships are always fragile. In several recent setbacks in Milwaukee, the relationships built in the late 1990s have not carried over to new contexts as smoothly as hoped. The trades have not been very involved in the GJLN coalition, although several members of the coalition have good personal relationships with the union leadership. Tony has kept his distance because of what he perceives as unreasonable hostility toward the trades:

*"We have a number of people around town who think that we never do enough and it's always too late, and just attack us and the industry on a regular basis. [A prominent critic] has no concept of how the industry works. She would just have us throw the doors open, and tomorrow there'd be 5000 people, and of course there's no market for it—they'd all just be standin' around with their fingers in their ass. She's a very intelligent woman, but she's just got this block. So we still have our detractors out there, and some of them became part of the GJLN coalition. I wanna work with people, but if they insist on bashing the living hell out of the building trades, there's lots of other community groups I can work with. It was very difficult for us to be a part of this thing when every once in a while someone would come to the mic out of the coalition and say 'The unions aren't doing the fucking job.'"*

The lack of active involvement on the part of most of the building trades limits the potential impact of GJLN as well as chances to further transform the relationship between the trades and local communities of color. Without cooperative projects to work on within a formal structure, such relationships have proven vulnerable, particularly as key leaders are replaced. For example, a recent public dispute about immigration at the 2006 Labor Day parade tied into national debates about immigration and the overall direction of the building trades unions, and led to several unions refusing to march in the parade. The episode set back trust-building and showed the lack of ties between the trades and the local Latino community.

Sheila Cochran, probably Milwaukee's best-placed bridge-builder, has spent years trying to improve the relationship between local unions and communities of color, by "mending fences, putting band-aids on stuff, getting people to talk to each other and saying 'Oh god, don't send out that press release, you'll set us back another five years.'" As part of this outreach, the Labor Council had been working with a local Workers' Center on the Latino south side and

asked them to participate in the annual Labor Day march, something nobody thought would be a big deal at the time. However, a few local trades unions took a stand against it, which attracted national press and further inflamed the situation, leading to what Cochran describes as an “estranged relationship”:

*I've just held my ground and said, “Well this is a population that needs organizing in this town.” I said, “Here I sit, having dealt with building trades issues in the black community for the last few years, trying to convince them that you guys are OK, and that you really are going to allow them to come into your unions, and you're just a great bunch of guys. And then this happens, and I get black people calling me saying, ‘See! They are just a bunch of bigots.’”*

*This is about workers that need to be organized, one of the largest masses of people in this town that we need to have some kind of relationship with. You guys can be pissed off or whatever, but somebody's gotta maintain a bridge between the Latino community and organized labor in this town, and if that's gotta be me, so be it. And when you guys get ready to use that bridge, just take the spikes off before you walk across my back!*

While it remains to be seen whether Cochran’s bridge-building efforts will pan out, her experiences highlight the difficulties of challenging such entrenched divisions from a traditional leadership position subject to the unpredictable ebb and flow of organizational politics. Milwaukee shows both the hope for change and its fragility. The convention center project was a key event that turned out well in large part because a formal cooperative structure existed in the CSM, a major issue provided opportunities for new norms to emerge through collective action, and a number of well-placed leaders were able to build bridges between the trades and communities of color. Internal political unrest (combined with the presence of trusted bridge-builders like Bruce Colburn) actually made it more possible for the trades to explore new partnerships with community groups.

After this mid-90s breakthrough, a generally accepted pattern of negotiating project labor agreements that include affirmative action on big public projects in the city has continued. The trades have by all accounts revitalized their Big Step program bringing minorities into apprenticeships, leading to steady, if slow, growth in numbers. However, this has certainly not demographically transformed the local building trades, or even led to solid relationships between the unions and community groups that can then be built on to tackle more

complex problems. Lots of mistrust remains, and an incident like the Labor Day parade conflict always has the potential to blow up years of careful progress. Pittsburgh UNITED is trying to build some initial bridges by focusing on winning community benefits agreements tied to specific development projects. This approach seems more likely to succeed than Pittsburgh Works, but will remain highly contingent on key leaders and relationships, as well as the chance to get some early wins to build on.

*b. Fending off elite interventions during Chicago's Big Box Living Wage Campaign*

Chicago's building trades have had at least as conflictual a relationship with the local African-American community as in Milwaukee or Pittsburgh, and there haven't been a lot of breakthroughs on the basic issue of hiring in the construction industry. However, other unions in the city, such as SEIU and UNITE-HERE, have proactively built coalitions and advanced a racial justice agenda. SEIU in particular is a large and powerful player in Chicago politics, so the impact of these efforts has been more than symbolic. Along with a number of community organizations who have reached out to partner with labor, these unions have achieved enough success that their campaigns have moved from uneasy truces to become something closer to a multiracial working class movement.

Because the split between the trades and Black communities has failed to maintain an effective and self-reproducing barrier to multiracial organizing, Chicago elites have attempted to drive a wedge between segments of the emerging working class movement, looking to head off any challenges to their control of local policymaking. During the big box living wage campaign, several members of the coalition received warnings about an impending "race war" from Daley aides, as one labor leader recalled:

*Daley's top aide on the council—I've known him a long time...He told me in passing one day, "You're starting a race war." I said, "What? It's only a race war if you make it one." It made me mad, but I didn't really know what he truly meant by that until the mayor started playing the race card. And he took the problems that some labor has with African-Americans and he blew it up. There never was a*

*trades issue with big box—they stayed out of it. They're gonna build 'em whenever they get built. Daley took that division between African-Americans and labor and multiplied it a thousand times, and tried to make us out to be racist.*

Daley, Wal-Mart, and their allies used two main strategies. First, they pounded a consistent drumbeat in ads, editorials, and press releases that the ordinance was about white unions trying to keep stores from opening in black neighborhoods. Second, they tried to persuade prominent black political and religious leaders to publicly oppose the ordinance, often by offering money and political favors. It is a testament to the strength of the living wage coalition that the combined efforts of Wal-Mart, Target, and the Chamber of Commerce spending millions combined with a strong mayor twisting arms wasn't successful in turning the tide against the ordinance. Ken Snyder, the Collaborative's lead organizer, now political director for UNITE-HERE Local 1, described the months-long battle for the support of key African-American leaders pitting the campaign's grassroots pressure against the money and clout of Wal-Mart and the mayor:

*Rev. James Meeks, who's a huge figure, was working very hard behind the scenes against us, and the fact that he couldn't persuade a large number of black aldermen to go away from us was a huge thing, and had a lot to do with the fact that some of our key African-American aldermen stepped up to deflect that. [Wal-Mart] could get to Meeks, they could get to anyone they wanted. They brought Andrew Young in, before he got in trouble. When Andrew Young comes to town and says 'I want to meet with you,' you find time in your schedule. When Tim Drea from UFCW calls, maybe not—he never got in to see Meeks.*

*ACORN and Protestants for the Common Good worked on a huge effort to connect with black pastors, and ACORN had a couple pastors who were basically out there full time working on it. [The opposition's] strategy was basically that if they got enough of the African-American aldermen to vote against, then the White and Latino aldermen wouldn't override the African-American community. We defeated it because of the strength of our grassroots campaign. We had a lot of the "good faith" actors on our side, and we had thousands of phone calls going in, both from door-to-door and phone-banking. Aldermen were saying, "I'm getting calls 10-to-1 in favor of the ordinance." [Aldermen] Lyle and Preckwinkle were really important behind the scenes in the African-American caucus, because it probably only would have taken a couple more leaving to tip the balance and just start a slide.*

A core network of bridging leaders was central to these efforts—particularly black pastors and politicians who were connected to the unions and city-wide community organizations. Some such leaders, like the aldermen and

ACORN pastors, were in place already, but others emerged through the campaign itself. For instance, Toni Foulkes was already an activist within ACORN and her UFCW local, but the big box living wage brought those two organizations closely together and perfectly positioned Foulkes to emerge as a key spokesperson of the campaign, expand her network of mentors, and make a successful run for a City Council seat, an amazing rise for a political newcomer in Chicago.

The final days before the City Council voted in the summer of 2006 saw the issue raised to a fever pitch. Both major daily newspapers published a steady stream of editorials against the ordinance, Wal-Mart and Target flooded the media with big advertising buys and threats to abandon the city, and Mayor Daley barnstormed the city's south and west sides claiming the ordinance would hurt Black communities. At a mass meeting of Black clergy, ministers were offered contributions to their churches or community development corporations in exchange for publicly opposing the living wage ordinance. That the issue became so blatantly racialized was shocking to many, and inspired some leaders to stand even firmer, as Rev. Jennifer Kottler of Protestants for the Common Good recounts:

*"It really was critically important that we had Jeremiah Wright, and Mike Pfleger, and Marshall Hatch, and B. Herbert Martin, and [other prominent Black pastors] coming out and saying, "You gotta understand, this is not the entire Black church—there's more of us. Leon Finney, Arthur Brazier, and James Dimas don't speak for the entire Black church in the city of Chicago."*

*I think for some well-meaning folks, the bottom line was "any job is better than no job." And then I think that there were others who were just bought. Bought and paid for by Wal-Mart. Wal-Mart was throwing money around. Pastors who were supportive of us got calls, asking, "Don't you need money for your youth program? For your CDC?" I think there are some of those [opposition] pastors who are very well-meaning and then I think there are some that are just goin' to hell in gasoline shorts."*

That Wal-Mart and Daley could run an anti-living wage campaign under the banner of racial justice demonstrates how detached racial and economic justice issues are in mainstream US political discourse (Guinier & Torres, 2002). To many of those closely involved, it seems incredible that others don't recognize how interlocked issues of poverty and race are, but as Ward Connerly and other

conservatives have demonstrated, Americans (of all races) have been trained to remember the civil rights movement as a battle against individual discrimination, and the memory of Martin Luther King can be manipulated to oppose affirmative action or living wages. During the campaign, living wage supporters learned that they needed to more and more clearly demonstrate, both rationally and emotionally, how the ordinance would help low-wage Black workers. Though it was precarious at times, they at least fought this battle to a draw, with polls showing huge majorities of African-Americans in support of the ordinance and enough of the Black establishment standing with them to prevent the mayor and the media from being able to frame it as solely a “white union” initiative.

On the morning of the vote, council chambers were packed with hundreds of noisy protesters. On one side, a sea of purple, red, yellow, orange, and blue t-shirts representing all the unions and community groups supporting the living wage—relatively evenly split between African-Americans, Latinos, and Whites, with a wide range of ages represented—many of whom had come straight from an all-night vigil in a church across the street. Around 8 a.m., buses arrived carrying a couple hundred Black teenagers in white t-shirts bearing the name of The Woodlawn Organization, a south side community organization started by Saul Alinsky that has become a large real estate, social service, and development interest tied to Mayor Daley.

After a period of each side trying to drown out the other’s chants from behind security cordons on opposite sides of the echoing lobby, members of ACORN and other community groups fanned out and began informally talking to the young people, quickly learning that most of them had no idea what was being voted on that day and were only there because they had been promised money by the director of their youth program. Once the youth found out what the ordinance was actually about, most drifted away to sit on the stairs, took the bus home, or joined the supporters’ side. By late morning, the “opposition” had largely dissolved, and the crowd that greeted the council members after they finally voted late in the afternoon was almost all living wage supporters.

Several of those involved think more than direct financial motivations might have led some Black leaders to oppose the living wage. A labor leader active in the living wage campaign suggests that:

*There are ministers on the south side of Chicago who believe that if unions become strong in the African-American community, the key social institution will become the unions instead of being centered around their church. Although we are in no way competing with the churches, I am in competition with this thing that they fear losing the most—their political power and their ability to influence politicians in these south and west side wards. That comes under threat as we get more involved...Who will the politicians be more afraid of—the unions or the ministers?*

Recent events in Chicago clearly demonstrate the fragmenting and demobilizing effects of “city trenches.” Electoral politics as practiced in these cities fragments communities along racial and geographic boundaries. Ward politicians have a well-honed system of maintaining control by mediating between a multitude of interest groups. Mounting a substantial challenge to the machine, the living wage coalition managed to hold onto almost all their committed “yes” votes and pass the ordinance by a substantial majority; however, they were unable to override the Mayor’s veto, a task that will require a renewed effort and even broader support.

Even though they did not secure a veto-proof majority, Genie Kastrup, SEIU’s political director, echoed others in talking about how the coalition was able to shift the political center of gravity and create a sense of possibility of larger change in the future: “In the past, the aldermen have been able to often run to either labor or the community groups and play them off each other, and a united front meant they felt like, ‘I’ve never been pressured like that.’ It was a new day at City Hall.” The emergent possibility of a more permanent “new day” likely explains the full-scale mobilization of the political establishment and its corporate backers against an ordinance that would have had relatively modest financial impact on the affected businesses.

### **Conclusion: Cultural Change Strategies for Multiracial Organizing**

The potential impact of a multiracial working class movement will continue to excite the imaginations of organizers searching for ways to bring people together without ignoring the differences between them. Mechanisms for realizing

such an outcome through deepening and transforming alliances around race and class into political power will be explored more fully in Chapter 4. Any political context presents a number of potential bases of community and solidarity, some of which are often in conflict with each other. Race and class consciousness have often been pursued as if contradictory, and in many US cities, cross-class racial solidarities often seem to be a much more salient political identity for residents of all races than class-based communities.

Basic cultural changes are necessary to move such coalition-building efforts forward. The attempts to build multiracial coalitions in these three cities demonstrate the importance of bridge-building leaders, developing cooperative norms during moments of collective struggle, and creating structural frameworks for groups to work together across differences. Figure 3.1 summarizes the prefigurative strategies used in the two areas to encourage the transformation of the individuals and groups involved. While most would rarely be completely in the prefigurative column, moving in that direction by incorporating new norms increases the opportunities for transformation.

**Figure 3.2: Traditional and Prefigurative Organizational Norms**

	<b>Traditional/Additive</b>	<b>Prefigurative/Transformative</b>
<b>Organizations</b>	Either bureaucratic or structureless; transactional	Actively constructing inclusive beloved communities
<b>Leadership</b>	Top-down, charismatic, competitive	Bridge-building leaders becoming the change they wish to see

The relationship between African-Americans and unions is of course not the only conflict demanding the attention of organizers. Several recent writers have documented the divide between labor and environmental groups (Rose, 2001; Obach, 2004), many have written on gender and sexual identity issues in the labor movement (Baron, 1991; Colgan & Ledwith, 2002; Tinsman, 2002), and in many places, getting the white men running unions to talk to each other would be a step forward. However, the issue of race remains particularly prominent in US working class organizing, and it is difficult to imagine much progress without

a movement that unites economic and racial justice concerns. As shown by these cases, coalition campaigns provide an opportunity to do this work. These local coalitions operate at a scale in which prefigurative politics and changing organizational cultures are more realistic, as leaders can build bridges and trust between groups and help new norms emerge through struggle.

There do not appear to be any automatic prescriptions for creating an organizational culture hospitable to multiracial organizing. Trying to keep as many elements in place at once creates the possibility of the emergence of new relationships and norms. The big box living wage campaign took this emergent set of norms to a new level in Chicago, as Madeline Talbott relates:

*It's still countercultural within organizing ideology, but what I teach in organizing workshops is that coalitions work best if there's real trust between at least some of the members, and if possible trust among all of them. You just have to own that there's a history to this, and each coalition's not new. I think developing trust and the ability to work together is a lot just doing it rather than laying out your positions and trying to reach agreement. A lot of it is just by hook or by crook...having to work together and seeing what you get out of it. It helps to be up front, and it also helps to be willing to swallow hard and eat a certain amount of shit. Getting it is not an intellectual achievement. It seeps in through the skin pores in the course of struggle, just like it does with our members. And of course it's useful to reflect on that, and generalize from that, and be able to articulate what you've learned, but there's a certain amount of just experience that changes people in coalitions.*

*And there's still miles to go before we sleep, but it's so much better now. I've worked with Dennis Gannon [president of the CFL] for 11 years on living wage issues. He never returned a single phone call of mine all that time, and he never called me. And now we call each other's cell phones, and the number of unions where that's true is so much different now. It was in the heat of battle when we all needed each other, and we all cared so much, so we reached out, and what we kept finding was people willing to back down off of their positions in order to make something go. And we all got better at this. I was far more coalitional than I usually am. I'm usually a bulldog when it comes to defending my organization's interests, but I backed off claiming credit again and again...nearly killed me to do it, but I did...*

*The big box campaign was critical to the solidifying of relationships because there was so much heat of battle that it forged this coalition of trust, and we found ourselves sharing things that just a few weeks before we would have hidden from each other. We just found ourselves opening up and talking about things. There's still huge divisions, mostly between the unions, that have still not been worked out...but in the course of that, people have had more and more ability at the table—even if not outside of it—to lay out their concerns and have them dealt with. And others were just phenomenal in their willingness to swallow and keep moving on things that they felt they were right on. It was hugely important that we won big—even if it's only temporary—because every time people try to go back to their*

*old way, they recognize that in the old way, there's no way any of us could have won.*

Talbott's account makes clear the emergent nature of this culture of solidarity—new ways of relating to each other were forged through collective action and deepening dialogue between partners. It also captures the conditional nature of these gains. The spider webs of local working class movements require the constant vigilance of many bridge-building webslingers, diagnosing weak spots and moving proactively to strengthen relationships. These webs are always fragile, both because they are often under attack and because they are of necessity built within the hegemonic system of neoliberal capitalism, simultaneously resting on its structure and conflicting with it.

The concept of prefigurative politics provides a theoretical and practical toolkit for understanding the tasks taken on by these leaders in their attempts to create new organizational cultures that allow people to break old habits and develop new norms. Leaders of such efforts utilize a mixture of formal and informal opportunities to bring people together in ways that encourage transformation and then try to solidify new norms in structures and collective narratives. The biggest challenge facing such bridge-building leaders is also their greatest opportunity—in order to be successful in reaching their larger goals, they must engage dialogically with their constituencies and unite people across deep divides. This entails far more complex processes than relying solely on additive strategies, but also contains the potential of creating an ever-expanding pool of leaders and relational power. Thus, while searching out a balance between additive and transformative strategies might slow progress toward short-term goals, it forces such movements down a path offering the best chance of long-run success.

## Chapter 4

### Combining Strategies to Reshape Local Politics

Building on the previous chapters, which focused primarily on changes internal to movements, this chapter looks outward to examine the development of new political strategies in the three cities. How organizers build and use power impacts the results of struggles as well as the internal cohesion of a movement. I examine these cases within the class-conflict perspective of regime theory, with complementary contributions from the literature on urban social movements and power relationships.

There are many opinions about how to most effectively structure campaigns and movements, and activists must make strategic choices about how best to pursue their goals. These often implicit theories form the basis for very different organizing strategies, tactics and goals. Debates have long raged on the Left about whether, and how, to engage with electoral politics; the efficacy of non-violence; and incremental versus revolutionary change. Many such debates are longstanding precisely because they offer no clear answers, but rather dilemmas to be grappled with. While these opinions have often hardened into dogma and split movements apart, research on social movements shows that broader repertoires and strategic flexibility leads to greater success (Amenta, 2006). Practically, it thus seems more useful to identify the limits of different strategic options and ask how they might be combined in specific situations.

This chapter explores how these working class coalitions have contested local neoliberal “growth machines” in their attempts to redefine the role of government in the economy. While state and federal policies as well as international factors provide an important context for these struggles, unique aspects of each local situation are explored in the following section. All the cases

examined in this project operate at the municipal and regional scale, making local governments and corporate elites the main focus of their campaigns. These emerging movements have been most successful when they have combined a variety of strategies and found ways to work simultaneously toward short and long-term goals. The chapter presents three strategies of political intervention utilized by these coalitions and concludes with reflections on how local activists can take the next step to move into a governing role in their regions.

### **Introduction: Local Political Contexts of Post-Industrial Rust Belt Cities**

Organizing efforts are shaped by, and respond to, their institutional political setting, which is relatively similar in each of these regions. All three cities are the dominant municipality of the surrounding county and operate on a mayor/council system (although Chicago clearly has the strongest Mayor, both by law and personality). In a state and national context, the electorates of these cities and counties are strongly Democratic, so much so that municipal government is in effect a one-party system. Milwaukee formally holds non-partisan local elections, but in Chicago and Pittsburgh, the Democratic primary is the de facto general election, producing a similar dynamic of candidate-driven politics largely disconnected from the national parties. All three are strong “neighborhood cities” with city councils elected by districts and developed strong ward-level Democratic machines in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The machines are shadows of their former selves, surviving only in fragments and memory, as patronage has shrunk with City workforces under pressure of shrinking tax bases and federal investigations.

Economic policy in these three cities, like most in the U.S., has long been dominated by a “growth coalition” of local capitalists, real estate interests, and politicians (Logan & Molotch, 1987). While the old political machines incorporated labor and ward-level leaders, they were dominated by pro-downtown growth coalitions. Such constituencies are sometimes formally organized in bodies such as Pittsburgh’s Allegheny Conference on Community Development, which was formed in 1943 and continues to play a central role in linking the region’s economic and political elites. In other cases, the networks are more informal,

relying on overlapping board memberships, social connections, and a few key think tanks to forge consensus (Carroll & Shaw, 2001). In Chicago, Barbara Ferman (1996) has shown that political actors, led by the original Mayor Daley, have maintained a more autonomous role than in most cities, although the results have arguably not been much different. Milwaukee's regime formed relatively late, not solidifying its hold on power until the 1960s, but all three cities have been effectively run by growth coalitions for decades (Rast, 2006).

Deindustrialization and the resulting social dislocations shook up these governing regimes to some extent, but by the 1980s they had regrouped around a neoliberal agenda and proceeded to chip away at whatever concessions had been made to working class interests during previous decades. For example, unions in Chicago that had long relied on "handshake contracts" rather than more formal legally-binding agreements, found themselves forced to accept less and less from the younger Daley in the 1990s (Rast, 2005). Through this transition, the basic thrust of the growth machine agenda has remained constant—touting the benefits of publicly subsidizing large downtown projects to the exclusion of a development policy more broadly spread across neighborhoods.

*a. City trenches and the fragmentation of urban politics*

Challenges to this growth machine have been periodically mounted by three main groups: African-Americans, labor, and middle class whites (usually either promoting reform or neighborhood protection). At different points, these groups have been potent electoral forces in city politics, but their organizations and leaders have tended to recede or be pulled into the growth machine. By turning a comparative-historical lens on the purportedly exceptional American working class, Ira Katznelson (1981) showed how early political developments in the U.S. produced a working class fragmented along lines of race, neighborhood, and unions. The development of political institutions from this beginning has consistently deepened and solidified the "city trenches" separating the worlds of the workplace and the community. This fragmentation of struggles limits the

power of a the working class and allows elites to maintain control despite their vastly fewer numbers.

Each of these contending groups has had their electoral moments. The peak years of the U.S. labor movement surrounding WWII were a time of union strength in City Halls, reflected in officials like Frank Zeidler (Mayor of Milwaukee from 1948-60), who was the last Socialist to lead a major U.S. city. The Black Freedom Movement developed a base in each of these cities in the 1960s and 70s, but never managed to transform city government. Harold Washington, who served as Mayor from 1983 until his death in 1987, is still the only African-American elected to lead any of these cities (Marvin Pratt was recently appointed to serve out a term in Milwaukee, but then defeated in the election). Washington's campaign inspired unprecedented turnout in the Black and Latino communities and took advantage of a machine split between two white candidates in 1983, but was crippled by a hostile City Council and unable to create many of the changes his supporters had hoped for (Rivlin, 1992).

As in most cities around the country, middle class neighborhood-based movements have not been able to maintain the interest of residents much beyond defensive campaigns to keep poor and Black residents out of their neighborhoods, protect their property values, and lower their taxes (Davis, 1990). As one of the first of a wave of politicians to capitalize on growing insecurity and dissatisfaction in the country, Peter Flaherty served as Mayor of Pittsburgh from 1970-77 as an anti-machine candidate focused on preserving neighborhoods and cutting taxes.

Despite these variations, local growth machines have largely maintained control over the shape of local policy. Even an ambitiously progressive administration like Washington's found itself constrained by the threat of capital flight, a credit squeeze by bankers, and the downgrading of municipal bond ratings. This problem of scale is faced even more acutely by local community groups and unions, who find themselves trying in vain to force multinational corporations to pay attention to local problems. The fragmentation of the American working class thus limits the ability of local movements to come

together across differences and to contest capital (Sites, 2007). The political potential of multiracial working class coalition-building lies in the possibility that a governing majority could be forged to finally overthrow the growth machines.

As is explored in Chapter 3, race is an extremely significant cleavage in each city, where Whites, Blacks and Latinos relate to electoral political structures quite differently. Figure 4.1 presents basic demographic breakdowns of the three cities and their surrounding counties.

**Figure 4.1: Demographics of Cities and Surrounding Counties, 2006<sup>7</sup>**

<b>City/County</b>	<b>% White</b>	<b>% Black</b>	<b>% Hispanic</b>	<b>% Asian</b>	<b>% in Poverty</b>	<b>% Renters</b>
Chicago	37	35	28	5	21	51
Cook County	51	26	23	6	15	38
Milwaukee	43	40	15	3	26	52
Milwaukee Cty	61	27	11	3	19	45
Pittsburgh	67	27	2	3	22	47
Allegheny Cty	83	13	1	2	13	32

Chicago has been described as a quintessential example of pluralist political incorporation. The South Side black community was organized into the Democratic machine under the leadership of Black politicians and ministers like William Dawson beginning in the Depression era. While their wards still received less resources than white neighborhoods, some patronage did flow through the machine, and an uneasy truce has been largely maintained through the present day. Chicago’s Latino population followed a similar pattern, and the Hispanic Democratic Organization is referred to as the only remaining “real machine” in Chicago. Despite this status, the Big Box Living Wage campaign exposed the different ways African-Americans and Latinos have been incorporated into Chicago politics. Although Latinos have grown dramatically in numbers to almost equal the area’s Black population (28% to 35% in 2006, with whites making up 37%), race, class, and politics intersect different in the Latino community, leading to a different relationship with other groups, as Ken Snyder describes:

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<sup>7</sup> Source: American Communities Survey, retrieved from <http://factfinder.census.gov> on 3/4/2008.

*The racial politics of this were such that if we didn't have a majority of African-American votes, the ordinance would not have gotten called. [The lead aldermen] wouldn't have let it come up for a vote if it looked like it was getting inflicted on the black community, but that wouldn't have held true for the Latino community. If [the other side] had won most of the Latino aldermen, they would not have held up the ordinance, because the racial politics are different with Latinos.*

Observers describe Chicago's elected Latino leaders as more ideologically diverse than their black counterparts, ranging from some of labor's strongest allies to staunch Daley supporters. While this is arguably true of the Council's black caucus as well, the perception (or myth) of a unified black political perspective and voice persists in a way that is not assumed of Latinos.

Milwaukee's black and Latino populations arrived later than in Chicago, past the point when ward-level and ethnic organization played a central role in Milwaukee politics. Their relatively late arrival also meant they did not have much chance to develop an economic foothold before the factories started shutting down, resulting in a relatively small black middle class compared to other Rust Belt cities. Like Chicago, whites make up a small plurality of the population at 43%, compared to 40% African-Americans and 15% Hispanic. Although, like Chicago, it is quite flat and spread out, Milwaukee's three converging rivers separate neighborhoods as starkly segregated as any city in the region. If you imagine the city as half a pie cut into four pieces beginning from the northeast, middle and upper-class Whites are concentrated in a narrow strip between the Milwaukee River and lakefront; Blacks on the "north side" spread out to the west; separated from Latinos by the wide industrial ditch of the Menominee Valley; and ending up back along the lake in historically White "ethnic" working class neighborhoods (now becoming more Latino).

The more famous home of three rivers, Pittsburgh was also one of the earliest northern cities to develop a significant African-American community and has been an important center of black culture. However, for the most part, they have been kept on the sidelines of local politics. Whites continue to maintain a comfortable numerical majority in the city (67% to 27%), and the black community has long been fragmented by class and geography. Pittsburgh's topography, which often separates neighborhoods by rivers, ravines, or cliffs, has

prevented the development of sprawling ghettos like Milwaukee's north side or Chicago's south and west sides. As soon as they developed the means, many families moved out of the Hill District, the historic center of Pittsburgh's Black community. For all these reasons, the black community has never cohered as a unified political force and the possibility of a Black mayor of Pittsburgh seems as distant as ever.

*b. Three dimensions of power in urban politics*

In the face of such fragmentation, there is no shortage of pessimistic theories that seek to explain urban politics. Those placing modern cities within neoliberal capitalism have mostly followed Castells (1983) in suggesting that increasing capital mobility makes it extremely difficult for local movements or governments to force meaningful changes. From a more political perspective, institutionalists like Katznelson show how much the past determines our current and future trajectories. Regime theory has largely focused on producing more nuanced narratives of how elites maintain control of the growth machine by adjusting strategies and co-opting resistance, a theme echoed by a wave of recent studies on governmentality (Rast, 2006).

Although depressing, this body of urban theory possesses the virtue of accurately describing reality for the most part. In recent decades, the governments of these three cities have been dominated by local growth machines and become less and less labor-friendly. Economic development plans seem to involve little more than luring young professionals and empty-nesters to downtown lofts, with little concern for the people who will do the work to support their lifestyles and/or already live in the city, seeming to confirm all the pessimistic predictions of the literature. However, by taking the past so literally as prologue and focusing on regime continuity, this tradition sometimes overstates the permanence of power relations and fails to offer much leverage on questions of social change.

Addressing such questions requires the critical analysis of present regimes with attention to the actual mechanisms through which they exercise

power. By focusing on specific forms of power used by elites to maintain the status quo, John Gaventa's work provides a useful framework for understanding how such growth coalitions maintain their hold on decision-making and how challengers can "both confront power and overcome the accumulated effects of powerlessness" (Gaventa, 1980, p. 258). Following Lukes (1974), Gaventa proposes a three-dimensional understanding of power relations. The first dimension involves observable competition over resources and decisions, the second incorporates a more institutional focus on establishing the agenda and "rules of the game," and the third examines how people's conceptions and desires are themselves shaped by power. Like Offe and Wiesensthal (1980), Gaventa finds that the challenges facing working class movements are much greater than simply forming stronger interest groups to contest the first dimension of power. Observable (first dimension) conflicts, like City Council votes on specific ordinances, are thus a culmination of contention and shaped by the second and third dimensions of power.

Neoliberal growth machines build and use power materially through institutions and setting the rules of competition; and culturally by shaping the general population's common sense of the role of government and local business and the efficacy of markets (Sites, 2003). As a demonstration of how this manifests itself, the GJLN discovered how deeply rooted real estate developers were within the local political structure during their efforts to win a community benefits agreement:

*The developers we were up against spent years building up power, and an issue for them was like a single development project. They don't care about that particular project, they care about having the power to be able to go where the money is and do projects when and where they want to. And they've built that up over years through making campaign contributions across the board—we pulled records and saw that the big developers gave money to all of them.*

It was seen by some elected officials as perfectly normal that developers had a "special relationship" with city planning staff, meeting privately to plan projects. In a Rust Belt city like Milwaukee, which has suffered through decades of eroding population, good jobs, and self-image, many have come to believe the mantra that any activity is good, even if the benefits of new downtown lofts to the

average Milwaukeean are seldom clearly explicated. Through institutions like the Chamber of Commerce and conservative foundations, local business interests promote a vision of themselves as an indispensable resource shackled by the “special interests” of labor, environment, and community groups.

Even in its “liberal” guises, this pro-development perspective admits the interests of these groups only in a secondary role, perhaps advising a developer or business owner but never setting the agenda themselves. The common threat facing the hint of any such impertinence involves capital flight—business owners will supposedly refuse to operate in any locale that does not permit them complete freedom. Because local elites wield power within all three dimensions, collaborative efforts to reshape local economies to be more equitable and sustainable must also address all three as they engage the political process.

### **Challenging the Neoliberal Growth Machine**

Analyses of political processes tend to produce more optimistic or pessimistic results depending on the focus of the author. Mainstream pluralist political scientists (looking only at observable, first dimension power struggles) often find that well-organized challengers are successful in achieving at least some of their goals and are often partially incorporated into the institutional structure of governance. More pessimistic assessments of similar cases come from critical theorists, who usually conclude that modern systems of domination are almost infinitely able to absorb challenges (Rast, 2006). Both extremes tend to overemphasize one side—either the agency of individual and collective actors or the structural constraints limiting them.

Amenta (2006) suggests a blended “institutional politics” approach that explores the historical contingencies and interplays between institutional factors and political actors to explain why systems of power relations are usually (but not always) maintained. A three-dimensional view of power helps flesh out the implications of Amenta’s suggestion by pointing us toward conflicts that might be less obvious and more enduring than those exposed during the flash points of campaigns. Of course, overt conflicts remain important to examine for the ways they bring such relations of power above the surface and mark key events within

longer struggles. Figure 4.2 summarizes the major campaigns examined in this chapter. Although most have not resulted in clear victories or losses, by looking at them as part of a sequence we begin to see how interrelated they are.

**Figure 4.2: Key Coalition Campaigns Impacting Local Policy**

<b>City</b>	<b>Campaign</b>	<b>Key Dates</b>	<b>Result</b>
<b>Chicago</b>	City/County Living Wage	1995- Formed coalition 1996- Lost City Council vote 1997- Won vote 2002- Won inflationary index	Living wage ordinance covering municipal workers and contractors that increases to keep up with inflation
	Big Box Living Wage	2004- Wal-Mart announces stores 2005- split votes on 2 stores; developed living wage strategy 2006- won City Council vote 2006- Daley veto 2007- Aldermanic elections	Failed to override Daley veto, but electoral organizing resulted in a friendlier Council
<b>Milwaukee</b>	City/County Living Wage	1995- Launched campaign 1995- Won City Council vote 1996- Won School Board vote 1996- Won Convention Center CBA 1997- Won County Council vote	Living wage ordinances covering municipal workers and contractors
	Park East Community Benefits Agreement	2003- Demolition of Park East freeway announced; coalition formed 2004- Lost CBA vote at City Council 2005- Won vote at County Council	CBA covering County-owned parcel of land (unclear how enforceable the ordinance will be)
<b>Pittsburgh</b>	City/County Living Wage	1997- Formed coalition 2001- Won City Council vote 2001- Lost County Council vote 2002- City repealed ordinance	No living wage ordinance
	Justice for Janitors	2002- Contract campaign; Support coalition formed 2003- Downtown contract signed 2004- Centre City pulled out and fired janitors 2004- City Council passes Displaced Worker ordinance	Won a contract covering all but one downtown building. Passed a (since-repealed) proactive protective ordinance.

Activists in each city sought to achieve goals beyond any individual campaign, making an assessment of success based solely on the adoption of a certain policy inadequate. In the analysis below, I pull apart the concept of success into layers corresponding loosely with the three dimensions of power to explore their ability to combine multiple political strategies, place each campaign

within a larger context of struggle, build capacity to intervene on various levels, and set the terms of the debate in local politics.

### **Strategy 1: Coordinating Strategies, Goals, and Timeframes**

Consistent with the social movements literature, success within first dimension observable power struggles is positively correlated with broad strategic repertoires. Two critical dimensions of breadth demonstrated in these cases are the ability to combine various forms of power and balance short and long-term goals.

The line between “outsider” and “insider” strategies often marks a significant separation on the local political scene. Though the dichotomy can be criticized as overly simplistic, it reflects basic assumptions of the differences between “insider” groups who exert power through personal connections with policy-makers and “outsiders” who rely on disruptive, contentious displays of power (Maloney, Jordan, & McLaughlin, 1994). In the settings studied in this project, unions would be expected to rely more on insider strategies like lobbying elected officials on the basis of campaign contributions and clout within the Democratic party. Community groups more often use their outsider ability to create disruption to force officials to pay attention to their issues.

Many factors reinforce the distinction between insider and outsider approaches to pressuring political decision-makers. Particularly since the 1960s, a libertarian strain in U.S. movements has condemned insider strategies as almost inherently corrupting and anti-democratic, while considering outsider strategies to more authentically represent the voice of the people. Some community organizations in this tradition fetishize their lack of involvement in electoral politics as a mark of purity. At the same time, however, it is widely believed that these outside strategies are usually not very effective in accomplishing their goals. These two strands of thought come together in Piven and Cloward’s (1977) pessimistic thesis that poor people’s movements are only able to create change through disruptive action during moments when governing regimes are realigning, but even then have very little ability to shape the policy reforms granted by elites.

Within this tradition, power is seen as almost inherently corrupting. Outsider strategies maintain distance from all but the first dimension of power and its public conflict. This may reduce the chances of overt co-optation, but is a self-limiting strategy that gives up whole fields of struggle to elites maintaining the status quo. Moving into “second dimension” agenda-setting requires expanding the timeframe and scope of struggle. As one Milwaukee organizer described the ultimate goal of their work, these coalitions are trying to shift the balance of power, even in the absence of a clear next “hot issue,” so that “things are different ten years from now, and we can take on the things we care about—schools, jobs, our communities.”

Organizers and other pragmatic political actors have often grappled with such dilemmas of scope. Often, even those who agree on long-term goals and visions disagree about the proper steps to take in the present. While some activists have always argued that the pursuit of compromise partial victories would dull the edge of hunger for change and diminish the likelihood of broader transformation, others claim that movements are built on victories, and that winning smaller campaigns builds confidence, develops skills, and whets the appetite for larger changes. A version of this debate has taken place within U.S. community organizing, which has tended to get sidetracked into an endless cycle of “stop sign” organizing—winning small local victories on immediate concerns of members but not attacking the structural inequalities that reinforce the problems facing their communities (Fisher, 1994). Unions, for their part, often tend to narrow their goals and ambitions to issues that can be bargained in a contract.

Because these differences in strategic orientation often correspond with race, class, and organizational boundaries, they become even more difficult for movements to negotiate across. It is relatively rare to find unions engaging in direct action or community groups building effective political machines, but when attempted, blending strategies often produces successful results. The most effective efforts in each city used a full range of tactics, combining theatrical confrontations with (metaphorical) arm-twisting in smoke-filled rooms. Participants across my cases generally viewed this “political sophistication” in a

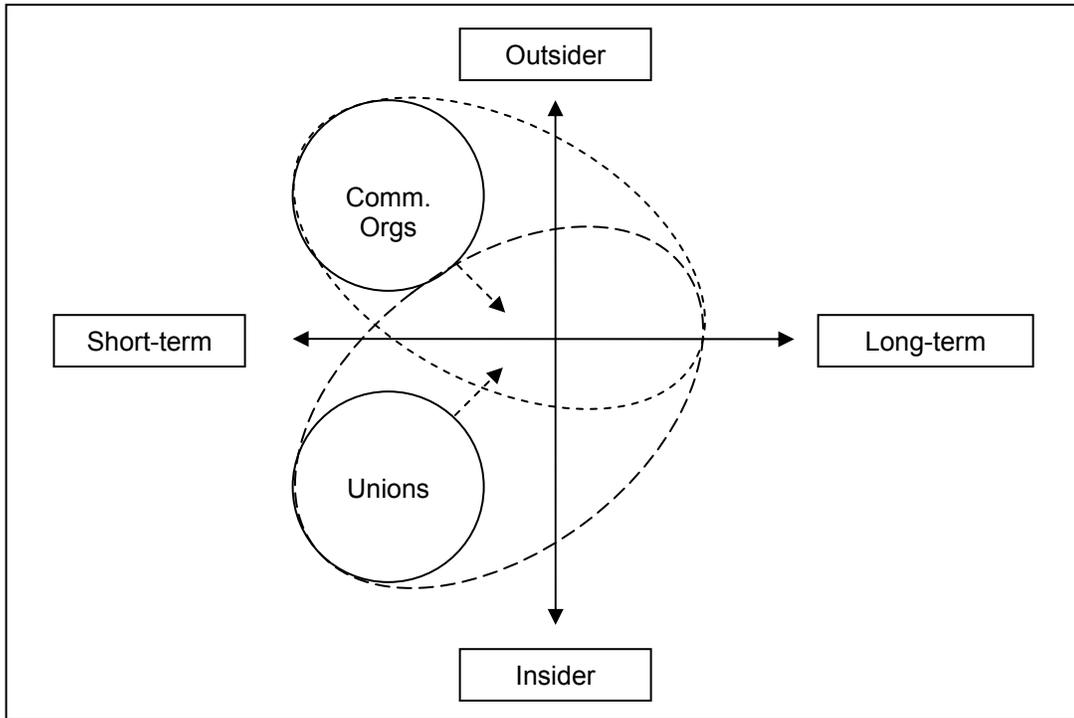
positive light, although difficult to achieve. The potential power of a united working class collaborating across racial and strategic boundaries is captured colorfully by a Milwaukee labor leader:

*Oh, if you could just sit down together with the African-American community and the Latino community and make a joint statement on one or two issues. It doesn't have to be anything elaborate. Just saying we're gonna work together on this—whether it be broad-based or very narrow. You'd have these guys downtown crappin' in their dresses!*

Looking back at movement-building activities in Chicago and Pittsburgh up through the mid-1990s, the results of each city's living wage campaigns would be surprising. The Alliance for Progressive Action in Pittsburgh brought together labor, faith-based, and community organizations around a broad shared agenda and launched a living wage campaign with the explicit goal of furthering collaborative activity and strengthening the APA. Chicago's Jobs and Living Wage Coalition was focused on establishing a living wage ordinance, with no explicit goals of building a larger movement. In their first real tests, taking the ordinances to their respective City Councils, Pittsburgh's campaign was victorious, while Chicago's lost.

We might have expected organizing efforts in Chicago to fizzle while Pittsburgh went on to further success. However, within a year, Pittsburgh's ordinance was rolled back and the APA was in disarray, while Chicago's coalition not only bounced back to win the ordinance, but has gone on to increase its living wage, come within a vote of passing one of the most ambitious living wage policies in the country, and unseat an unprecedented number of aldermanic incumbents. An explanation for these divergent trajectories is depicted in Figure 4.3, which schematically represents the strategic orientations of most unions and community organizations and how they might expand their strategic repertoires.

**Figure 4.3: Traditional Union and Community Strategic Orientations**



Most working class organizing (workplace or community-based) is short-term and would benefit from broadening its timeframe. Unions and community organizations differ more on their tendencies to rely on either “insider” or “outsider” strategies and again, could each benefit from expansion. This does not imply giving up their existing strengths, but learning to “walk and chew gum at the same time.” Not coincidentally, a region like Chicago where more organizations have expanded into overlapping strategic territory is more hospitable to coalition-building. As building block organizations expand into the dotted lines in Figure 4.3, intermediaries are more able to bring them together. Coalitions like the APA and CSM may have been so broad to make up for the narrow focus of local unions and community groups. Their collapse, and the resulting demobilization, demonstrates why such intermediaries do not provide a substitute for strong membership organizations. It seems likely that Chicago could survive the dissolution of the Grassroots Collaborative because many local organizations have expanded their timeframes, goals, and strategic repertoires and will thus have an easier time constructing new intermediaries.

*a. Combining “insider” and “outsider” power*

Chicago activists increased their ability to combine strategies over the past decade of contentious living wage campaigns. The early campaigns are remembered as tough challenges, especially for the unions, who weren't accustomed to directly challenging the mayor, but the coalition held together and learned from the experience. This contrasts with Pittsburgh's living wage campaign, which struggled to maintain unity across this strategic split.

The 2002 indexing campaign marked a major step forward in terms of political sophistication and trust among the key players in Chicago. SEIU was interested in raising the living wage because of its potential impact on their contract campaign. Although they were talking privately, ACORN and SEIU did not present themselves publicly as aligned on the issue, creating the illusion that Mayor Daley could head off a potential alliance if he agreed to a deal quickly. Playing to type as an outsider, ACORN held public demonstrations to raise the profile of the issue while SEIU quietly proposed negotiations, at which Daley quickly agreed to automatic indexing of the City's living wage. Madeline Talbott, of ACORN and currently Action Now, called this “a more sophisticated play... To sort of play off each other while being united at the same table was really fun and showed great progress.”

The 2006 Big Box Living Wage campaign continued to build on this sophistication, producing an initial series of wins at Council (although failing to override Mayor Daley's veto). In this most recent campaign, the coalition was able to relatively seamlessly combine highly visible pressure tactics, personal lobbying of power-brokers, targeted constituent mobilization, and presenting a credible threat to running candidates against incumbents in their efforts to secure votes. Blending tactics was helpful at several key turning points in the campaign, including forcing the ordinance out of committee to the full Council, maintaining support in the face of a full-scale assault by Wal-Mart and Mayor Daley, and negotiating the final language of the ordinance.

One example of this synergy was the variety of tactics the campaign used in their interactions with Ed Burke, powerful chair of the Council's Committee on

Finance. In the course of having dinner with Burke, labor leaders learned that he was hedging on his pledge to move the ordinance out of committee in May of 2006. Upon hearing this news, the coalition sent an army of community organizers out into key districts, including Burke's, where, as Talbott recounts:

*"We immediately discovered that we could romp—he hadn't been minding the store. We could force him to call it, because he wanted to be out of the kitchen. And then we went into all the swing aldermen's wards and put up signs, got signatures, got calls into the offices, and just created this thing going on in their own backyards in an election year. We only visited voters, so if you were sharp and saw our walk sheets, you knew what we were doing."*

The outsider grassroots organizing of the community partners was more effective because it could be strategically targeted based on "insider" information. For example, while Talbott had initially thought it would be useless to try to organize in the district of a powerful incumbent like Burke, a union political analyst who had been analyzing demographic shifts across the city convinced her it was worth the effort. On the other hand, the unions and advocacy groups found a far more receptive audience from aldermen who were receiving hundreds of constituent calls supporting the living wage. By focusing on registered voters, the coalition's potential power was immediately recognizable to politicians in an election year.

Several community groups like ACORN were already doing some political organizing, while unions like SEIU and UNITE-HERE have been willing to mobilize their memberships and utilize a broad range of pressure tactics. Various partners could thus bring influence to bear on key votes, a combination of pressure points that helped keep aldermen on board, since they weren't able to play the unions and community groups off one another. Although remaining tensions were sometimes inflamed by the media's focus on the unions and dismissal of community partners, members of the campaign reinforced the value of their different sources of power at the coalition table.

When they went to City Council meetings, Tim Drea, then political director of UFCW Local 881 and now secretary-treasurer of the state AFL-CIO, put on a suit like a "regular labor lobbyist guy" while the community groups wore "their uniform—jeans and t-shirts." Drea highlighted Talbott's role in helping the group

talk through the need for multiple forms of power and “recognize that the guys in suits aren’t always your enemies, and the guys in the streets aren’t enemies either. I guess we knew that, but it was nice to talk it out.” Such discussions were important to maintaining cohesion. Although the media focused on the “unions vs. Daley” storyline, assuming that they must represent the “real” power, members of the coalition agreed with Kate, of Illinois Hunger Coalition, who emphasized that:

*“It wasn’t just the unions. The unions had these white aldermen that we didn’t have any connection with, but there were a bunch of the Black and Latino aldermen that they didn’t have. A few of those Latinos that voted with us, I’ve been in rooms when they start yelling, ‘Tear up your union cards—they don’t represent you!’”*

Aldermen could risk angering the unions or neighborhood groups in their ward, but were quite worried about simultaneously alienating both of these sources of electoral power. The living wage coalition held onto most of their votes under intense pressure because of its grassroots capacity to mobilize constituents and willingness to hold incumbents’ feet to the fire and support challenging candidates. Because they had done real face-to-face organizing in the neighborhoods, constituent support for the ordinance held up even under the constant media barrage. One alderman reported “never feeling pressure like that,” and others complained of feeling caught with nowhere to go. The final days before the vote were full of traditional community organizing tactics like marches and vigils, grassroots political pressure through constituent phone calls, and insider lobbying.

While the Western Pennsylvania Living Wage Coalition did a tremendous amount of outreach and education of the broader public, it was not able to effectively focus a combination of grassroots and insider power on key politicians. After getting an ordinance through at the City, the campaign lost a surprise vote at the County level, prompting the City Council to repeal its ordinance. The consensus of those involved is that both votes would have been won with more active support from organized labor. As Rosemary Trump of SEIU, the key union leader involved, recalled:

*“The unions all supported the campaign but didn’t actively make it a priority. It was probably about a six on a scale of ten in terms of importance, and there were folks who thought people making less should just join a union and bargain a contract.”*

*Labor council support was key to the fact that there was any effort at all, but if it had been a higher priority for them, it probably would have passed. [Several council members] probably would have voted yes if there had been more union pressure on them from people like the Federation of Teachers.”*

In contrast to Chicago, Pittsburgh’s campaign lacked organizational members who could combine insider and outsider strategies. The community organizations involved were largely uninvolved in electoral politics, and the unions didn’t have the capacity to mobilize a broad swath of their membership around the issue. Tom Hoffman, who was working for SEIU at the time and now coordinates Pittsburgh UNITED, told me:

*“There’s a big difference between SEIU here and in Chicago in terms of being able to apply political pressure. Rose Trump did a lot of great work, and she was a great supporter of a lot of great causes, but there weren’t a bunch of SEIU members that night. And at the labor council, they always said, “Well, this doesn’t really affect any of our people. It’s nice, but it’s not really a priority.”*

By the time of the Council vote, the campaign had effectively split between “outsiders” and “insiders” and the coalition meetings were not able to provide an effective space to discuss the possibility of a negotiated compromise on the ordinance. The “outsider” camp had no faith that the “insiders” could be trusted to negotiate an acceptable compromise, and so in effect gambled on an “all or nothing” approach, which ended up leaving them with no ordinance. More importantly, the process drove a wedge between members of the core leadership group that led to the demise of the Alliance for Progressive Action and set back movement-building in Pittsburgh for years. The failure to bring together both tactical wings thus resulted in failure both at the immediate policy level and in terms of future capacity.

#### *b. Balancing Short and Long-term Goals in Campaigns*

Most of the organizations that represent sizable working class memberships in the U.S. lean toward short-term strategies, leaving relatively few, and small, groups advocating for more fundamental changes. On the other hand, growth machines make plans within a more extended timeframe, leaving working class movements at a disadvantage if they do not move in this direction. As with many of the other dilemmas inherent in such work, I suggest that organizers are

more successful when they recognize the real tensions between each position, and make choices contingent on the specifics of each situation rather than adopting a firm position.

If one accepts the desirability of working pragmatically toward short and long-term changes as well as the possibility that strategic compromises can derail longer-term efforts, several strategic questions emerge. How does one ensure that issue campaigns are part of a broader ongoing struggle? Decide when to cut a deal, and when to take a principled loss? When to play politics-as-usual within accepted frameworks, and when to insist on changing the process and terms of the debate? It is often difficult to balance short and long-term goals, but several campaigns in these cities demonstrate the importance of keeping the long-term capacity of the movement paramount and how campaigns can contribute to this end while also producing short-term successes.

As described in the previous section, the different paths taken in Pittsburgh and Chicago following their initial living wage campaign are somewhat surprising. Most centrally, this divergent trajectory reflects the ability of Chicago organizers to place each living wage campaign within a broader struggle, helping create a context in which neither wins nor losses demobilize their efforts. In fact, several short-term losses have sparked deeper coalition-building and more successful campaigns.

Rachel Meyer's (2008) analysis of the original Chicago living wage campaign demonstrates that rank-and-file supporters came to see their efforts as one episode in a "perpetual struggle," an orientation that helped them redouble their efforts after the initial loss in 1997, continue expanding from the successful effort to index the wage level to inflation in 2002, and respond to Daley's 2006 veto with an unprecedented electoral mobilization. The results of this electoral work were somewhat surprising even to the political insiders involved, who had not realized how weak the local machines had become, even in the districts of long-time incumbents. One union political staffer reflected that:

*"Even after all the negative press, we were still really strong, especially on the south and west sides [primarily African-American neighborhoods]. A lot of those wards were up around 90%. And that was against the \$2 million that we estimate*

*they spent. We put together a real field program, so it wasn't just the big powerful groups pushing on them. In the last month, we did thousands of patch-through [phone calls] from their constituents, and they hate that! We were averaging a hundred a day and they were freaking out."*

This learning process not only affected strategy within the living wage campaign, it gave the unions and community groups involved a sense of the broader possibilities of political change through challenging incumbents head-on in elections. This string of campaigns has corresponded with broader shifts in local politics, as Daley has consistently moved away from labor and community groups since his 1995 re-election (Rast, 2005).

Through the 1990s, most unions remained at least nominally loyal to the machine but began to entertain increasing doubts as their "insider" power seemed to mean less and less. In particular, Chicago's city workers, long the faithful foot soldiers of the machine, felt that Mayor Daley declared war on them in recent contract negotiations, demanding cutbacks in health care and other areas. Because they had little independent political capacity, having traditionally fed their members and money into the machine, the unions found themselves vulnerable. The last decade has thus seen a process of emotional and institutional disengagement from the local Democratic Party, along with proactive steps, as individual unions and the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL) have built up an independent electoral infrastructure, which paid off in recent council elections.

Anticipating some such effort, SEIU held a well-publicized "Aldermanic campaign training" early in 2006 to find potential candidates and signal their willingness to challenge incumbents. Nobody thought the groups involved would end up launching such a broad and coordinated effort until the living wage campaign exposed the opportunity. The coalition had laid the groundwork and was agile enough to take advantage of the opening. At a meeting immediately following Daley's veto of the Big Box Living Wage, members of the coalition went around the room offering reflections on the campaign and what to do next, most agreeing with Mike, SEIU 880's lead organizer, that the veto offered them a chance to create more change than if they had won the ordinance outright. "We

had a sophisticated use of the various types of power in the room,” reflected Mike. “We held together through a rocky campaign, building trust and laying the groundwork for a lot more we could get done in February.” What could have been a crushing defeat was immediately reframed as an opportunity, a process that worked smoothly because it was consistent with the “perpetual struggle” orientation of coalition partners.

The way decisions are made within campaigns is a critical determinant of whether they will contribute to movement capacity and facilitate deeper collaboration between partner organizations. Examining several campaigns makes clear that a primary goal of organizers should be avoiding “catastrophic losses” in campaigns, where a short-term defeat metastasizes into a broader crisis of the emerging movement.

Reflecting on turning points of the big box campaign, Ken Snyder of the Grassroots Collaborative diagnosed the complications that arise when bringing together groups that rely on different logics of political action, and how important it was that leaders paid attention to the process, as well as outcomes, of negotiations. Organizations evolve unique models of decision-making and action, often reflective of their internal structure and traditions. Insider groups like unions usually vest considerable latitude to individual leaders while outsider community groups tend to delegate less authority. Snyder’s account highlights prefigurative strategies at both the individual and organizational levels:

*The reason that community's afraid to get sold out is that they do things differently than labor. People get elected to the head of a labor union and the model of accountability is elections. So if Dennis Gannon doesn't do right by his members, then he doesn't get elected again—that's how there's accountability. Where a community group does accountability by sending in a leadership team and then they come out and talk to the whole group, so you could come up with the same product but the community feels sold out...and that's the moment where all the trust has the potential to break down.*

*I give Tim Drea [UFCW] a lot of credit, because there were moments in the campaign where the Brennan Center was saying, “We need to do this to the ordinance,” and [Alderman] Burke was saying, “I want to do this to it,” and the labor union model is asking, “Is this good or bad? OK, let's do it.” And the community model is, “Let's come back and talk about it.” Labor deserves a lot of credit for seeing why that was important to do here and the community groups*

*deserve some credit for listening to the UFCW and the Brennan Center...but y'know, you don't know your partnership is that strong until you're there.*

Under pressure during moments of crisis, people and organizations tend to fall back on accepted schemas and spaces for discussion of differing assumptions becomes limited (Kelly & Karau, 1999). These conditions can lead to breakdowns within coalitions as the desire of each partner to follow their most comfortable strategy becomes stronger and stronger. Snyder felt the Grassroots Collaborative provided a good basis for such cooperation under pressure because it includes both unions and community groups, particularly since SEIU 880 operates “more like a community group than any union” he’s ever seen and several community-based partners fall on the formal side of the continuum. In addition to the presence of such bridging organizations, the campaign made sure to have ongoing conversations about the different internal logics of each partner.

Without strong reservoirs of trust and established decision-making processes, many coalitions crumble under the pressure of balancing multiple goals. In contrast to Chicago, Pittsburgh’s core group of leaders fractured along overlapping fault lines of power, gender, ideology, and goals during the crucial end stages of the living wage campaign. While the main division corresponded with an insider/outsider split, it also reflected a deeper disconnect over long-term goals. Rather than disagreeing about the relative importance of short and long-term goals, both groups justified their strategic choices in terms of their long-term effects. However, since the APA had not succeeded in forging a consensus on shared long-term goals, the campaign further fractured the potential allies.

On the “insider” end, Jack Shea, head of the Labor Council, was primarily interested in passing a reasonably strong ordinance and maintaining labor’s relationships with key political allies. He was used to hammering out compromises before public votes and thought the coalition should have been willing to narrow the ordinance by eliminating human service workers after losing at the County Council in an effort to keep the City version in some form:

*“Sometimes, you gotta be a closer. You gotta know when to make the deal. I was taught when I came up in this business that sometimes a union rep gets offered a half a loaf or no loaf at all, and a lotta times they take no loaf...Always up and*

*down the sidewalks, rah rah rah—but that ain't makin' a deal...that ain't helpin' families better themselves. You feel good for the hour you're walking up and down, but it ain't about that.”*

Other key leaders of the campaign however, came of age in the anti-war and civil rights movements, were more comfortable forcing public conflict, and cared about building power and changing the way politics works in Pittsburgh as much as passing the ordinance. From this perspective, a big part of the problem was the fact that one needed to be somewhat connected to the power structure (and usually a white man) to exert influence. Several key activists saw the living wage campaign as a chance to “change the face of Pittsburgh activism,” by bringing together a more diverse constituency. While accepting that insider strategies like having the head of the labor council meet privately with council members were likely to be effective, they resisted relying on them because they worked against the long-term goal of diversifying and spreading power.

These differing perspectives built up tension over the campaign. During the final stages, the key players were not even talking all together. We can only hypothesize about whether they could have worked out an acceptable compromise ordinance among themselves if they tried, because a real conversation about that possibility never took place. Chicago coalitions have been able to negotiate out a series of compromises (and collectively decide on areas they would not compromise), in large part because the more powerful union and political actors have insisted that all the key partners be involved in such discussions. By establishing standards up front for who would be at the table for key discussions, they are able to be more inclusive without getting bogged down trying to involve all possible groups. Their long-term view helps shape decisions in crisis points and avoid compromises that might limit future possibilities.

Milwaukee’s Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods coalition also faced the a potential split during negotiations for the Park East community benefits agreement. Representatives of the community groups were offered a “side deal” that would have included minority hiring and affordable housing, but no guarantees of union labor. The developers were very anxious to avoid paying

union wages on the project and thought they might be able to drive a wedge between communities of color and the unions, particularly because the coalition did not have extensive union involvement. However, a broader perspective of trying to build power with unions beyond the particular campaign led the community groups to reject the deal. Even though GJLN only achieved a partial win on this first campaign, they avoided the sort of catastrophic defeat that hit Pittsburgh's living wage campaign and are continuing to build capacity and strengthen their ties to unions.

### **Strategy 2: Proactively Shaping Policy Conversations**

In their efforts to promote the interests of the working class and poor majority, these local movements have also begun to contest the third dimension of power by developing alternative collective visions of their cities based on a new set of principles. This ideological work requires a shift in perspective and an alternative institutional infrastructure to develop ideas and put them into practice. As Craig, the lead organizer of MICAH, explained, "it was the potential to shift power and the overall discussion in a real way that attracted us to GJLN." In moving toward this goal, he diagnoses a common challenge among organizers as being overly issue-driven, always searching for the "next hot issue in order to get us going instead of being attracted to the idea of building power."

In contrast, members of the local growth machine pursue a broader agenda through construction of a "common sense" consensus on issues that concern them. Craig's goal is for members of GJLN to adopt a perspective more like these developers, who are committed to shaping the context even more than promoting specific projects. He and other GJLN participants talked in more detail about their efforts to shift the conversation around economic development than their counterparts in other cities, perhaps because of the group's focus on development issues as well as the legacy provided by the Campaign for Sustainable Milwaukee and Progressive Milwaukee.

Wisconsin has a varied political history shaped by swings between a strong socialist tradition and serving as a right-wing laboratory. Milwaukee served as a testing ground for welfare reform and school vouchers over the past several

decades (interestingly, the Bradley Foundation in Milwaukee and the Scaife Foundation in Pittsburgh have been two of the most prominent funders of right-wing causes in recent times). When the Campaign for Sustainable Milwaukee started having some success putting job creation at the top of the local political agenda in the 1990s, the Bradley Foundation began a series of attacks on their efforts. Echoing the tactics of their Wisconsin forbear, Joe McCarthy, Bradley operatives tried to plant stories in the press and spread rumors of radical domination of the CSM. In the opinion of Bill Dempsey, CSM's lead organizer, this smear campaign stemmed from Bradley leaders who "felt the region's focus shifting from school vouchers to family-supporting jobs as the defining issue of the moment."

GJLN has carried on CSM's theme that local government should play an active role in creating an equitable economy by focusing on the ways that government shapes real estate development. Many members were attracted to the Park East campaign based on an intuitive sense that local government should be doing more to create good jobs and stable communities in Milwaukee. As the campaign progressed, they developed an intellectual rationale and public message, as expressed by Craig:

*"It's wrong for the city to be beholden to developers and to use our tax money to subsidize all kinds of development projects and have us not get any benefits off it. So we built our mantra on this idea of "public dollars, public benefit." The city has this practice of giving developers what they want, in part because they have deep pockets and they can put it right back into the campaigns.*

*Our angle was that if public investment was goin' in, we needed to demand higher standards. And if we did that, we could start to undermine a practice that has been deeply ingrained, in terms of developers getting what they want from the city. We were coming up against these developers and they were saying, "Well this is my land that I own, why should I have to do what you say?" So we said, "There's public land, there's public investment. Anywhere there's either/or, we'll demand public benefits."*

This position brought them up against the central tenet of neoliberalism—that free markets provide the optimal solution to any social issue. Such a challenge brought out the growth machine's big guns—defeating the GJLN Park East proposal was reportedly the Milwaukee Chamber of Commerce's top priority in 2004. The opposition predictably relied on long-standing arguments that any

regulations on development would lead to capital flight and actually hurt the local economy. As Kori Schneider of the Fair Housing Council reflected:

*“There's just a really strong feeling that the market should be able to take care of itself, and if we need affordable housing, then the market will create it. The city continues to say that, yet there's really no evidence of it working. In fact, they're subsidizing stuff all the time—there's very little that gets built that they don't subsidize. I still find it hard not to believe the whole bluff thing...it's compelling...it's scary. There were many times where I was like, ‘Well, what if they're right?’”*

“Public dollars, public benefits” not only provided an intellectually consistent context for their demands, but also what Craig tellingly calls a “mantra.” In order to break the stranglehold of the laissez faire perspective on local debate, such a simple and clear message was crucial. It directly confronted “don’t mess with the market” mantra of local developers and provided a stable touchstone for supporters who, as Schneider describes, are always subject to conflicting pressures and doubts themselves. As they got further involved in the campaign, members of the coalition began to hold this alternative vision more firmly and examine the often-flimsy claims of elites more critically. Rev. Joseph Jackson, a MICAH pastor who became co-chair of GJLN, described himself transitioning from being relatively politically disengaged to poring over the paper’s business section for clues over the course of the Park East campaign:

*“I was pulled in on my self interest. Here was an area of Milwaukee that I grew up in, and we had a chance to make something good happen in that corridor, so I started tellin’ my testimony, and I looked up and folks started saying, ‘Joe, can you come to this? Joe, you oughta do this.’ I saw it as a chance to right some of the wrongs of the past.*

*I was reading history on [former Mayor Frank] Zeidler, and he was very responsible for the Hillside projects being there, and that was the affordable housing of the day. But now... to hear politicians and developers use the argument that there was enough affordable housing already near downtown, and that was it! Man, I don't know, I don't have a degree from the university—or the technical college for that matter—but that was like, “Who do you think I am?” That was insulting...it is insulting!”*

Professional credentials and expert discourses often present a bar on participation in such debates for those toward the bottom of our economic pyramid. Coalition campaigns can present alternative educational venues for participants to develop both concrete understandings of the issues and

confidence in their authority to question such “experts.” As he further developed this theme, Rev. Jackson linked together the institutional and cultural basis the GJLN coalition is trying to build. The organizational basis of the coalition, and its ability to intervene in local policy discussions, is intricately connected to their efforts to create a climate of hope:

*“It became clear as we fought at the city level that this was potentially a great model for the whole city. And if it was going to spread, then we were gonna need to exist. And that was before we even lost—but we had agreed that we were gonna be at this for the long haul, because we wanted to see the whole city go in this direction. So there’ll always be another opportunity, and somewhere, years down the line, these Milwaukee developers that have this attitude of “If we don’t do it, nobody will,” that’ll be thrown out the window. Cuz now we’re talking about a whole city, not just a city along the river and lake. And if you can develop the whole city, and rule the whole city, then you must be God! Let’s change the culture of development in Milwaukee. Get Milwaukeeans to believe that they can be builders of their own city, and have jobs in their own city.”*

By articulating an alternative vision of Milwaukee based on good jobs and neighborhood development rather than shiny new buildings downtown, GJLN is challenging the basic definitions of success assumed by government officials and the local growth machine. While they care about winning individual projects like the Park East development, they know their larger goals are only feasible if they are able to shape a new set of “common sense” assumptions about the regional economy and role of government.

The right’s rise to power over the past several decades was based in sustained attention to infrastructure-building, a fact that is attracting more attention in progressive circles of late. Rather than reflecting some mysterious shift in American values, the rise of the right was based in grassroots organizing, a network of think tanks and media outlets, and the development of a formidable electoral apparatus (Dochuk, 2006). Their efforts paid off more handsomely than they could reasonably have expected, creating a dominant paradigm most people might have been expected to find counterintuitive, as *Business Week* editorialized in 1974:

*“It will be a hard pill for many Americans to swallow—the idea of doing with less so that big business can have more. Nothing that this nation, or any other nation, has done in modern economic history compares with the selling job that must be done*

*to make people accept this reality.” (Business Week, October 12, 1974, cited in Dreier, 2007).*

To counter such influence, progressive activists are constructing their own movement infrastructure, including spaces for the development and dissemination of critical perspectives, policy analysis and development, and political capacity to develop and elect candidates to office.

To begin developing and spreading an alternative vision of Milwaukee, GJLN has helped create a Civic Leadership Institute to bring together local activists to develop a common understanding of the regional economy and potential development strategies. This institute is modeled on similar efforts around the country promoted by Building Partnerships and seeks to provide an alternative to the Chamber of Commerce-sponsored leadership development programs in many cities.

In a similar vein of knowledge production, Partnerships for Working Families is helping create a network of independent policy action centers that develop and analyze regional policy from a working class perspective (Dean & Reynolds, forthcoming). Past campaigns in these cities have relied mostly on university-based researchers to provide such capacity. For example, Milwaukee’s efforts were closely linked to the UW-Madison-based Center on Wisconsin Strategy in the 1990s and UW-Milwaukee’s Center on Urban Economic Development during the Park East campaign. Similarly, academics in Pittsburgh and Chicago have played supportive roles in campaigns (although they have also worked closely with out of town think tanks or technical assistance providers like the Economic Policy Institute).

Universities occupy an interesting position in relation to these efforts. While small groups within them often produce research and training very useful to these local movements, the larger institutions are often central players in local growth machines, both as ambitious builders and producers of justificatory studies that paint a rosy picture of the potential of development projects (Nicholls, 2003). Would labor-community coalitions be able to rely on such centers in campaigns targeting the university? As many universities reduce community-focused work like extension programs and place ever-more emphasis on

traditional research and faculty as grant-getters, how many faculty are realistically able to play such roles? These contradictions lead some to wonder how effectively even the best-intentioned university-based centers can support local movement-building and suggest the need for independent movement research capacity<sup>8</sup>.

A sub-component of developing alternatives involves working within sectors to generate perspectives rooted in particular group experiences. For example, Protestants for the Common Good was formed to ensure there was a “Religious Left” voicing an alternative vision and providing a vehicle for people of faith in Illinois to get involved in social justice issues. In Milwaukee, MICAH similarly articulates economic justice in faith-based language, contesting the right’s hold over religious discourse.

### **Strategy 3: Independent Political Action**

Like the need to build infrastructure to do ideological work and blend strategic approaches, these movements also need to create new sources of political power to impact the electoral arena. Through the development of an independent political apparatus, working class movements reduce their reliance on the Democratic party and increase their ability to develop candidates and hold politicians accountable.

The GJLN and Pittsburgh Justice for Janitors coalitions were unable to synthesize insider and outsider strategies smoothly enough to win full victories in their respective campaigns. Compared with Chicago, local community organizations in the other two cities have not engaged much in politics and most of the unions are not comfortable with the use of more disruptive power, making the gap between them more difficult to cross. This discomfort with blending strategies appears to be symptomatic of a lack of independent political capacity, which can translate into dependency on the existing power structure and reduce strategic options.

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<sup>8</sup> The ideas in this paragraph were shaped by conversations with Ralph Bangs, Walter Nicholls, and Virginia Parks.

During a telling early moment of the Park East campaign, a classic community organizing “outsider” accountability session held at a church in front of more than 500 community members made several key union partners uncomfortable, as described by John Goldstein, who now works for Partnerships for Working Families:

*“The MICAH ministers really got tough. They pulled microphones away from elected officials, and they did a traditional community organizing thing, where they said, “Will you support the CBA, yes or no?” And when politicians started giving speeches, an older minister took the mic away. County supervisors were screaming, and we had coalition partners who were freaked. One said, “Look, all the work we’ve done has gone out the window—the county board’s mad at us.” It ended up being the county board that was strongest in the end, but that was a very tense moment. That summation meeting at the end of the public meeting was very tough—people were in tears. They’re not used to dealing with elected officials like that.”*

Several of these union leaders never returned to the coalition following the incident. Since it was early in the campaign and coalition partners did not have a long history of working together, more extensive preparation might have been necessary to get everyone on the same page before the event. At least in part because of the lack of energetic labor support, the GJLN coalition lost its vote on the Park East CBA at the City Council. While they did secure a CBA covering the County-owned parcel of land, it has proven tough to implement. In Tony’s opinion, this stems from GJLN’s tendency to rely on “outsider” approaches:

*“I carried a lot of water for them, but some of this stuff, you still have to do behind closed doors. You gotta sit down and cut whatever kinda deal you can cut before you go out and hit ‘em over the head with a picket sign. And that isn’t the way the Good Jobs folks do their thing. And that doesn’t bother me, it’s just...you’re not going to get anything past the Redevelopment Authority until you can get at the people who appoint people to the Authority. And it can be done—they’re right on track as far as their vision of things and what they’d like to see, but they’re just not going to get it with how they’re doing things.”*

The community organizations involved in GJLN are not nearly as active in conventional politics as those in Chicago, largely because of concerns about endangering their 501(c)(3) status and a simple lack of examples of involvement. Milwaukee has been a testing ground for many experiments in privatization and several observers pointed to the depoliticizing effects of welfare reform and charter schools on the local scene. Many community organizations in Black and

Latino neighborhoods have received grants or government funding that explicitly or implicitly keeps them away from any “political” issues. In addition, just as several of their labor allies were viscerally uncomfortable with the publicly-conflictual community organizing tactics of MICAH, many community (and labor) organizers have a gut-level aversion to insider strategies, as Annette from Milwaukee 9to5 (and formerly SEIU) reflected about herself:

*“It’s probably because I’m not a politically savvy person, but the only kind of power I like is the kind that comes from members. I don’t like the maneuvering. A lot of people do, they find it exciting—like chess—but I don’t like it. It feels like we’re excluding people...it starts being about you...and at that moment, you’re not really representing people, you’re the one maneuvering. I’ve caught myself falling into that in bargaining, when it’s like, “I hate that boss, I’m smarter than him, and I’m gonna show him up.”*

Their general lack of involvement in electoral politics meant the GJLN coalition was less able to secure firm commitments from City Council members, who had less of a history, and less to fear, from these organizations than the Chicago coalition (although to be fair, this was the first such campaign GJLN had engaged in). The Milwaukee growth machine hadn’t engaged as directly with the County Council, where allies emerged somewhat surprisingly from suburban districts, as Pam Fendt, now director of GJLN, reflects:

*“It became clear that [County Council members] weren’t nearly as connected to the developers—and the developers weren’t nearly as comfortable playing over there as in the City—because they usually don’t have to. The City controls all the zoning, and it was just in this case they knocked down the freeway and the County owned a piece of the land...But the difference came out to me at a hearing where one of the supervisors mispronounced a big developer’s name when he called on him—he didn’t know who this guy was, but it was completely different down at the city.”*

This contrast highlights the inadequacies of looking only at the first dimension of power. From such a perspective, the City and County Council would be seen as equivalent arenas and the differing results somewhat puzzling. Only by understanding that the opposition was playing on a field it had helped set up at the city level does it begin to make sense why representatives of whiter, richer areas supported this effort to help central city people of color.

In fact, campaigns in all three cities had trouble winning the (supposedly “safe”) votes of politicians representing poor, largely African-American districts

whose constituents would presumably have had the most to gain from the ordinances. These “betrayals” were often especially deeply felt by members of community organizations based in the same neighborhoods, who found it incredible that their representatives would vote against their cause. For this group of representatives, *their* insider power was supposed to have been decisive. Rev. Joseph Jackson of MICAHA told me people often avoid discussion of the City Council vote:

*“It’s embarrassing—we let this happen to us! We trusted the politicians this one time and look what happened to us. So now I think we’re more clear that there’s no permanent enemies, no permanent partners. Like my good old brother Michael McGee, who said he was with us 100% on the CBA, then at the 12th hour he abdicated. Seems like somebody talked to him at that last hour and made him an offer he couldn’t refuse.”*

This sort of disillusionment can lead either to withdrawal from politics or to a determination to shape the process “upstream,” through developing candidates and turnout capacity within community organizations (more common in Chicago than the other two cities). The focus on these particular Black politicians may be based more on assumptions about the overlapping effects of race and class than especially pronounced flip-flopping. In Pittsburgh, most of the blame for the living wage loss has been laid on James Simms, who represented the blackest and poorest district in the County and cast a surprise deciding vote against the living wage ordinance after originally sponsoring it, yet several white “labor-friendly” reps who voted no or abstained have escaped such harsh criticism (or labor-backed challengers).

Still, the fact that these coalitions had such a tough time securing votes from politicians whose constituents supported the ordinances in overwhelming numbers does highlight the lack of grassroots organizing power plaguing many low-income communities of color. Organized voters or money are far more effective in convincing politicians than any appeal to social justice or shared identities. Tom Hoffman described the night of the living wage vote in Pittsburgh in similar terms as Rev. Jackson talked about Milwaukee:

*“Jim Simms looked out and saw the Lutherans, the crazy kids from the University, a couple people from SEIU, and a few of the other usual lefties, and he said,*

*"None of these people vote for me, why should I do what they want?" We didn't do any organizing in his neighborhood. Someone gave him a better deal, and we didn't have anyone talking to him that he'd listen to."*

More than any personal story about a politician like Simms, the living wage loss in Pittsburgh reflected the lack of political infrastructure able to hold officeholders accountable to a pro-worker agenda.

A partially successful effort in Pittsburgh more recently emerged through a campaign to secure a contract for the downtown janitors represented by SEIU. Overall, the campaign was similar to many other Justice for Janitors (J4J) comprehensive corporate campaigns, a model that has been refined within SEIU's property services division since the mid-80s. In fact, a 1985 "fight back" strike by Pittsburgh janitors after decades of shrinking membership and stagnant wages is seen by some as the first example of this innovative approach, which gained national fame through successful mobilizations of mostly immigrant communities in Los Angeles in the early 1990s (Waldinger, et al, 1996). J4J campaigns use labor-community coalitions to place simultaneous pressure on all the major property owners involved to sign a master contract through whatever forms of pressure are available, including public demonstrations of union and community members, financial pressure, calling in political favors, and threatening embarrassment to people and organizations who may be able to facilitate a settlement.

In 2003, negotiations for downtown janitors were stuck on healthcare issues, prompting SEIU to launch a campaign outside and inside strategies. By linking up with community groups through the Merton Center, the union was able to publicly shame some big property owners, like the healthcare corporation Highmark, as the local's Pittsburgh director, Gabe Morgan, describes:

*"At the time, a janitor cleaning their building had to pay \$500 a month to get family healthcare. So a bunch of clergy came marching down the street with the janitors' kids and a big banner...I think Highmark didn't even really understand what was happening. It's a number on your sheet next to your electric bill."*

When Highmark agreed in principle to the union's demands, it created a ripple effect, with other owners agreeing to come to the table rather than face a public campaign. Behind the scenes, an inside strategy was facilitating this

process, as labor leaders directly contacted local building owners to convince them to sign a contract. While this inside-outside combination produced a successful agreement with the major locally-based building owners, the janitors' celebration was sidetracked by the decision of one absentee owner to pull out of the pattern agreement, provoking a struggle still going on today, as recounted by Morgan:

*“Centre City announced they were throwing out the contract on New Year’s Eve, and then the workers were out in January 2004. What I knew from experience other places was that we had to come back really hard, right away. The ‘85 lockout went a similar way: Three buildings said, “We’re drawing the line,” everyone else jumped on board, and all of a sudden there’s an 18-month lockout. Within a few weeks, I had six other buildings saying they were going to do the same thing—this one building with nine janitors was threatening the whole contract.*

*So we started a really ugly fight to drive them back in, no matter what it cost. ‘Cuz if we can at least make this not cost-effective for the owner, it makes it less attractive for others to try. So we did a month and a half of escalating events- we dumped a thousand bags of garbage in front of the building...We went on hunger strike...Had sixty-some people go in on Friday and lie on the floor...City Council passed a resolution...[the county executive] intervened. All the other building owners were showing each other the video of the stuff we were doing. And all the people who had been thinking of bailing were saying, “We don’t want any part of this.”*

Although this pressure campaign contained the damage and kept the other building owners in line, several of the community organizers involved ended up frustrated that the campaign didn’t continue to escalate pressure on Centre City building tenants to cancel their leases or bring pressure to bear on the property owners. Some felt this reluctance stemmed from SEIU’s involvement with the power structure making them hesitant to be too confrontational. While this “insider” approach paid off with local owners, it presents a dilemma by limiting leverage on out-of-town owners. In addition, the union was coordinating organizing campaigns in several other cities and didn’t want to commit too many resources to a battle with unsure chances of success. Coordinating struggles across geographic scales is a challenge for any working class movement and is currently a major focus of unions like SEIU and UNITE-HERE, who are experimenting with organizing and bargaining strategies for service workers that even cross national lines at times.

Even though they have thus far failed to break Centre City, the campaign did provide new political openings, resulting in a Displaced Workers Ordinance protecting union janitors by mandating that when contractors change, the new contractor has to hire the displaced workers for at least 6 months to let them find another job (since overturned in the courts). In Morgan's opinion, "It would have been politically impossible before, but now it was a no-brainer." This type of win highlights the ability of organizers to turn setbacks into opportunities.

Recent efforts in Milwaukee echo those of a decade earlier, when a similar set of activists came together to create the Campaign for a Sustainable Milwaukee and a third party, Progressive Milwaukee. It was hoped that the institutional relationship between the coalition and party would provide a framework for coordinating inside and outside power and provide a partial solution to the perennially vexed relationship between working class movements and the Democratic Party in the U.S. As Joel Rogers, the key architect of the CSM/PM framework, explained:

*"The traditional function of a party is to bring people together on a basis that's more permanent and allows you to access public support in ways that social movements are very rarely able to do, except under the most extraordinary conditions. If you've just got episodic coalition politics, that doesn't really develop much for you."*

The Milwaukee efforts were part of the larger New Party goal of developing a "non-spoiler" third party strategy based on "fusion" elections, where candidates run on multiple party lines, which received a fatal setback at the U.S. Supreme Court. This ruling effectively killed the national New Party and along with incipient local divisions, led to the dissolution of Progressive Milwaukee:

*"In New York [where fusion is allowed], with the Working Families Party, you see that the model is perfectly good. They have very little money, but have been able to do stuff that the Left hasn't been able to do for 20 years. So there's really no exaggerating the importance of having some degree of more cosmopolitan political coordination, but that takes attracting people who have an interest in real power."*

*In theory, we could have done it without fusion. But you tend to attract the people you don't want—who either don't give a shit about higher-level politics or who don't give a shit about practical politics. Progressive Milwaukee sort of went off on its own, and people started doing more electoral work than the Campaign was about. You didn't have any real accountability for the Progressive Milwaukee candidates,*

*and they ended up endorsing people pretty promiscuously—people who immediately went south and reneged on commitments.”*

Without Progressive Milwaukee or a similar vehicle, it has been difficult to maintain any connection of issue campaigns and electoral organizing into coordinated power-building in Milwaukee. As in most other regions, the tremendous resources poured into national elections tend to be used to create temporary structures by the Democratic Party or AFL-CIO—what Sheila Cochran at the Labor Council describes as “spaceships landing with all the money”—rather than strengthening existing networks that might be able to play an ongoing role, to the frustration of John Goldstein:

*“We were running 500 volunteers and 100 staff a day close to the [2004 presidential] election. Multiple contacts with union members identified as swing voters and drop-off voters in the city. It shows that when you put resources in, you can really have an effect. If unions put 10% of what they put into national politics and built permanent local structures, you could really do something. Another classic example of a wasted opportunity—after Election Day, it's all gone—no ID's are preserved, nothing...I just hate it!”*

While electoral politics in Milwaukee and Pittsburgh are largely episodic and shaped by outside actors, Chicago organizers have made some initial steps toward building the political capacity of their groups through their issue campaigns and continued into electoral politics. Grassroots Collaborative members have been able to tap into national money to do voter registration, education, and turnout in their neighborhoods. Door-knocking during the Big Box Living Wage campaign produced lists of supporters that were then used to target voters in the aldermanic elections. Many of the coalition partner organizations segued fluidly into local aldermanic elections, playing a significant role in ousting several incumbents who voted against the ordinance. For example, in the Back of the Yards neighborhood, Latinos Organizing for Justice took their local alderman a survey showing that 93% of residents supported the living wage but only 35% supported her, as Kate describes:

*“And her response was, “You don't support me, so I don't need to listen to you.” So their feeling was, “We're gonna get her out of office,” and they did, and now they really feel like they only want people there who are going to represent us. People have realized their power more than ever before. It's like the clouds opening up in the sky. People are saying, maybe we can reverse this trend where the only*

*housing development is for higher income people; that we'll have real parks and not Millennium Parks. Our vision incorporates recreation for all kids, safe streets, school funding, stopping closing down schools and pumping all the money into charter schools—it's about all that.*

*The way I grew up in Chicago, there was a park at the end of my block. Both my parents worked, but I learned how to play chess, and checkers, water ballet, tennis—and everything was free! It was like a full-time job for me, and my parents could go off to work and not worry about me getting into trouble. But if I lived in the same neighborhood now, I wouldn't have any of that—I'd probably be in the house getting babysat by the television. And that's what's happening for too many kids...It's all part of what a real beautiful city should look like.”*

The groundwork for this electoral and programmatic effort had been laid through earlier campaigns and efforts to get prepared for such an opportunity. The next steps in Chicago focus on building grassroots power in wards across the city by bringing together community organizations around common causes and mobilizing union members in their neighborhoods. Leading into the election year, SEIU ran a program of aldermanic trainings designed to find potential candidates and send a message that the union was open to supporting outsiders, which raised some eyebrows among their allies, but showed people they were serious. They also systematically organized their members in the city, largely to demonstrate to aldermen in predominantly African-American districts that they had strength in their wards, as SEIU political director Genie Kastrup described:

*“Approaching black aldermen on the living wage, they’ve never worked with labor on anything. They just relate to the trades and think labor is all white. I met with [a black alderman] to try and reopen the door because I knew nobody had gone and talked with her. When I came in, she was really hostile because she thought I was going to try to threaten her. We actually haven’t done a lot at the city level, so I hadn’t met her, and she was just talking about ‘White Unions’ and ‘her constituents,’ and I said “Don’t try to pretend that I’m the White union here. We have 3000 members in your ward, and they’re not white.”*

*I showed her this one little street on the map, said, “You know this street? We have 50 members on that street, and you add in their households, you’re talking at least 150.” And her face kind of went blank and she sat back in her chair. She had been trying to split apart the union from her constituents, which is their strategy, and was really just shocked that there could be so many union members in her ward. We have 2500-3000 members in most of the Black wards, which they know is often the margin of victory, or even the number of votes they got last time.”*

Electoral efforts in Chicago have clearly been more successful than in Milwaukee and Pittsburgh, but it is difficult to assess the extent to which they

have succeeded in challenging the growth machine discourse and changing the conversation on economic development in the region. The Big Box Living Wage campaign was able to hold onto strong public support for regulating corporations in the face of a huge media campaign, but its chief opponent, Mayor Daley, was also reelected in a landslide. More work will be necessary to shift the debate toward justice issues. Members of the coalition have been working to pull together and educate a “Progressive Caucus” on Council to develop a real counterweight to the Mayor’s power and be able to push an independent agenda. Increased policy and education capacity also seem likely to be necessary components for the emergent working class movement to take a leadership role in conversations about what kind of city Chicago should be.

### **Conclusion: Moving into a Governing Stance**

*“I can imagine some people would say, ‘Oh, your Chicago squabbles are petty.’ But this corporate-led Democratic governments vs. people-led progressive movements—that’s the real heart of the struggle, and that’s what we’re working on here. So it might seem petty to someone in Arkansas, but we’re trying to define what social justice means, as opposed to just fighting off the worst” (Carlos Fernandez, Chicago Jobs with Justice).*

One benefit of examining economic justice organizing over time in each city is how clear it becomes that any single measure of success is inadequate in assessing the results of each campaign. Not only are conflicts taking place simultaneously across dimensions of power, events can have different short and long-term effects. The second and third dimensions of power are usually most relevant within a longer window, so we can group them together and use short and long timeframes as a rough proxy for the three dimensions of power. This also reflects the two basic ways many organizers think about success:

- Was the policy/instrumental goal achieved (short-term success)?
- Was the movement strengthened (long-term success)?

Local movements appear to be quite capable of absorbing (and even benefiting from) short-term losses, but have a difficult time bouncing back from serious setbacks in terms of organizational infrastructure and the long-term health of the movement. For example, as shown in Figure 4.4, the Chicago Big

Box and Pittsburgh living wage campaigns are the only efforts that resulted in flat-out policy losses, but these setbacks had very different long-term effects on local movement-building. Pittsburgh’s living wage loss splintered local activists, while Chicago’s sparked an ambitious coordinated electoral effort.

**Figure 4.4: Short and Long-term Campaign Successes**

Goal	Chicago Living Wage	Chicago Big Box LWC	Pittsburgh Living Wage	Pittsburgh Justice for Janitors	Milwaukee Living Wage	Milwaukee Park East CBA
Short-term (instrumental) success	Yes	No	No	Partial	Yes	Partial
Long-term (capacity) success	Yes	Yes	<b>No</b>	Partial	Partial	Partial

In moving toward long-term success, Amy Dean and David Reynolds (forthcoming) have suggested that a key step for labor-community coalitions is moving beyond an oppositional posture to take a “governing” role in local politics—putting forward a positive program and building consensus around a comprehensive platform as part of eventually constructing a new “regime.” As demonstrated in this chapter, working class movements face challenges as they attempt this transformation. The common fears of many “outsider” activists are rooted in reality—getting involved in local policy processes can in fact demobilize and fracture coalitions. However, leaving that work to only loosely affiliated politicians is a recipe for disappointment and inconsistent results. Demonstrating that getting co-opted is not the only danger facing such movements, the most dramatic example of demobilization in these three cities resulted from the Pittsburgh living wage campaign, which was perhaps the least enmeshed in local politics. Based on this limited sample, there does not appear to be any necessary relationship between “insider” involvement and weakening movements.

The fundamental lesson of the literatures on urban regimes, neoliberalism, and class struggle is that these coalitions operate on unfavorable terrain structured in ways that make it difficult for them to succeed. In such situations, working class organizers need to be keenly aware of how elites use power and willing to contest them in each of these arenas. By moving into more complex

relationships with political officials and blending the use of insider and outsider power, the emerging Chicago movement has been able to continue to increase their influence over a series of living wage campaigns. However, this “sophisticated” combination of strategies has relied on the strength of relationships built up over the last decade—it would probably not make sense for a brand new coalition to attempt something similar from scratch. On the other hand, other cities could profitably replicate the way each Chicago campaign has expanded the core group of leaders, deepened bonds between them, and catalyzed broader change in the region.

To move in this direction, organizers in all three cities have formed capacity-building intermediary institutions of three types (though none of the cities in this study have had all three functioning at once):

- Coordinating organizations that concentrate local expertise in policy work and coalition-building.
- Leadership development and training to facilitate the emergence of a cadre of bridge-building leaders from grassroots organizations and unions.
- Independent grassroots political apparatuses.

These nascent movements remain basically oppositional, and haven’t yet faced the challenge of governing and putting forward a proactive agenda. It seems likely, however, that the balancing act being developed between insider and outsider strategies, and between immediate and long-term goals, will serve them well in making this transition. Initial steps toward a more accountable relationship between politicians and movements can be seen in Progressive Milwaukee and the Grassroots Collaborative’s efforts to find and run candidates from within their own membership. In their efforts to define what an equitable and caring city would look like and begin building the infrastructure to bring it into reality, these movements are creating the ability to contest local growth machines across all three dimensions of power.

## Chapter 5

### Moving Forward and Drawing Conclusions

The coalitions described in this project are part of a much broader set of efforts to build working-class movements. More specifically, they represent an evolution of strategies on the part of local organizers in the neoliberal era. This sort of coalition-building is particularly interesting because it opens a window on questions of how movements emerge from the doldrums that have long fascinated academics and activists alike. Coalition campaigns are examples of what Aldon Morris (1984) called “movement halfway houses,” locations where new organizational structures, networks, norms, and relationships are developed.

While looking back over the evolution of local movement strategies in each of these cities, examining the meso-level of organizational infrastructure helps clarify the processes of movement emergence. A strong infrastructure of membership organizations, networks, and technical assistance providers of expertise make the emergence of strong local movements more likely. However, infrastructure is clearly not enough. Organizers need to develop new internal cultures in order to bring people together across entrenched differences, and movements must also navigate a political system stacked against them when they attempt to deliver concrete and immediate changes.

These cases thus suggest that working class organizers are faced with the daunting task of building a strong local organizational infrastructure, developing a transformative culture of solidarity, and melding together several different tactical forms of political power to build strong movements and create change. Furthermore, while it seems clear that strong local movements are built over time through cycles of issue campaigns and base-building, overly formulaic approaches have weaknesses. The most seemingly parsimonious and efficient

efforts—mapping out formally elegant structures like the Alliance for Progressive Action and Campaign for Sustainable Milwaukee—turned out to be unsustainable and failed catastrophically. Chicago’s organizing efforts, which looked fragmented and less promising than the other two cities during the 1990s, have since coalesced into the most vibrant and effective local movement in the region.

### **Guiding Strategic Evolution and Innovation Forward**

I argue that this divergence reflects Chicago’s relatively quicker adoption of what I call a comprehensive movement-building approach. In contrast with earlier efforts that tended to go from episodic ad hoc coalition-building to broad central bodies, this approach involves bringing together broad coalitions to work on specific issue campaigns, but relies on more focused intermediary organizations to play a coordinating and consolidating role between campaigns. These strategies evolved through campaigns to balance the inherent tensions between efficiency and sustainability facing organizers.

There are long-standing debates surrounding nearly every element of working class movement-building, with “optimistic” and “pessimistic” positions well established on each. Despite libraries full of scholarship, few of these dilemmas have been resolved conclusively, as counter-examples to nearly every pattern can be found. Even researchers examining the same cases often draw very different conclusions, as shown by ongoing debates within U.S. labor history or the implications of the movements of the 1960s.

#### *a. Grounded Generalization: Transferring Strategies to New Locations*

If there is a common thread to the literature on working class movements, it seems to be that their development is historically contingent and bound up in specific contexts. Hard and fast rules of human behavior, organizational patterns, and the outcomes of strategic choices do not exist, but patterns emerge across similar situations. While most social theorists work from such an assumption, it is more difficult to translate into practice-oriented work. In appealing to a non-academic audience, most studies that strive for social relevance conclude with a section of “best practices” that boil down complex analyses into a set of rules to

be adopted by practitioners. The recent literature on coalition-building and revitalizing the labor movement has been especially prone to this sort of abstraction and simplification (Tattersall and Reynolds, 2007). In trying to give activists what we think they want, writers often provide over-simplified strategic recommendations that may not be translatable to their situation.

An alternative path involves attempting to specify the conditions under which a finding may be generalizable (Paige, 1999). This approach is particularly attractive in social movement studies because it mirrors ongoing dialogues within movements over strategic approaches and their dissemination and recognizes the inevitable differences between contexts. Some of the more interesting implications of this project flow from the fact that there is a current wave of interest in trying to build proactive labor-community coalitions to address economic justice issues. In particular, two national networks—Partnerships for Working Families (PWF) and Building Partnerships (BP)—have emerged from recent successes in California and are spreading their model around the country (Dean & Reynolds, forthcoming).

The analytical task before these groups involves a sort of grounded generalization—understanding the development of local movements in their specific context, figuring out which elements were essential to their success, and suggesting how they might be translated into another local context. This parallels the increasing consensus within organizational studies that, rather than looking for causes, it is more useful to identify the conditions that increase the likelihood of a group evolving toward greater competency (Hackman, 2005).

Los Angeles, which has transformed from a bastion of the “open shop” into a stronghold of working class people of color, suggests the potential of a fully-realized version of this approach. However, the Campaign for a Sustainable Milwaukee tried to implement a very similar model as LA organizers in the 1990s. They built a broad coalition, developed policy analysis capacity and an independent political apparatus, and focused on cross-cutting regional issues that could unify people and point them towards a different way of thinking about economic development. The CSM was successful both on paper and in practice;

however, it declined rapidly in the late-1990s, leaving few traces behind, which offers a cautionary lesson to PWF and BP as they try to spread the “California model.”

The blueprint for the CSM existed before the first meeting was called, and local organizations and leaders were basically plugged into the framework. This well-designed framework allowed the CSM to grow quickly and wield power effectively, but because it housed most local capacity and expertise under one roof, efforts in Milwaukee were significantly set back by the Campaign’s demise. The ambition and complexity of the CSM made leading it tremendously complex as well. During its peak years, Bruce Colburn, Bill Dempsey, and Joel Rogers brought together three unique sets of skills, experiences, and dispositions. The CSM was formed around them, making it difficult to imagine molding together a similar leadership team.

Chicago is an interesting case because it has built a strong leadership core and undertaken many of the same tasks as organizers in the model regions of California, but without building nearly the institutional capacity to coordinate it. The near future will give some clues as to whether this represents an alternative path, or if they will run up against the limits of their lack of capacity and need to do more institution-building. Imagining such alternatives can help check the tendency to impose order through hindsight. Los Angeles evolved their model over time and based on the local situation. While the current model can be described as possessing a high degree of internal logic, and has produced successful results, it does not necessarily follow that if the same infrastructure existed in other cities, they would also have strong working class movements.

This has implications for places like Pittsburgh and Milwaukee, where activists have affiliated with PWF and BP are building institutions along the lines of the California model. What specifically needs to be done to build working class power in these regions? What might be different in the Rust Belt generally and each region specifically? Milwaukee’s labor leadership has largely come from the central labor council (CLC), not an activist local. Pittsburgh’s community organizing has been weak, the CLC has not been particularly supportive of

coalition-building, and the main activist union locals have taken a top-down approach, supporting progressive causes through money and statements rather than involving members. How might efforts evolve differently in these situations?

My conclusions attempt to generalize to the principles that emerged from multiple cases and hold true across contexts while also embedding them in a contextual trajectory. This study of course only begins to surmount this difficulty through its limited comparisons across time and region. It does however, provide a glimpse of the kind of “knowledge work” necessary for movements to grow and evolve, as participants learn through their experiences. It also provides a reminder to avoid focusing narrowly on the “rational” elements of organizing and dialogue. As accounts of the Black Freedom Movement in particular have shown, emotions and cultural norms are central to creating space for strategic learning (Barker & Cox, 2002). Marshall Ganz (2005) has argued that the strategic capacity of a leadership team—their ability to recontextualize and synthesize data in fashioning new approaches—is the key variable in understanding why challenging groups sometimes win. I agree that the ability to learn and adjust over time is central to the success of organizing in these three cities. In addition, I find that planning for this sort of “knowledge work” is quite inconsistent, suggesting that it could be the focus of movement capacity-building interventions.

*b. Organizing as “Movement Farming?”*

Urban farming provides a potentially useful metaphor for the craft of local movement-building. Community gardening has spread widely across U.S. urban areas in recent decades (over a roughly similar timeframe as the recent wave of labor-community coalition-building). These gardens represent collaborative efforts to reclaim some slivers of our deindustrialized cities for the production of immediately useful goods. They are built on the history of what came before, often requiring the cleanup of contaminated soil, much like coalitions must overcome legacies of racism and mistrust. Some community gardens reflect an agglomeration of individual interests in the form of separate plots marked out and only sharing some basic resources like irrigation systems, reflecting what I have

called additive logics of coalition-building. However, other community gardens (and coalitions) develop more transformative logics, moving beyond their initial boundaries and exploring ways the group can produce more through extended cooperation.

Farming also involves the combination of art and science that is basic to organizing. A good gardener tests the soil, understands the growing season, and plans out an optimal spatial relationship between different crops before planting, but also accepts that each plot of ground is unique and only experience can show what the exact best strategy for that garden will be. That sort of iterative learning process enables gardeners to change some of the “context” of their land. Rotating crops, fertilizing, and mulching enable a good gardener to grow things that would have been impossible when they began, much as coalition work builds on itself and expands possibilities by creating cultures of solidarity and expanding political opportunities.

Finally, farmers have developed a healthy sort of fatalism over the centuries that might prove useful to organizers. Locusts, hailstorms, and other unpredictable events that can always ruin a season don't provide much alternative except to shrug and get back to work. Conditions that produce a bumper crop are likewise unpredictable, so farmers do pretty much the same thing each season, while systematically making small improvements to their systems and infrastructure, avoiding catastrophic losses at all costs, while trying to continually do a little better. Organizers also face unpredictable winds, and can lay the infrastructural groundwork during fallow periods to increase the chances of strong movements emerging during moments of political opportunity.

### **Summing Up: Spheres of Strategic Intervention**

Three overall areas of focus emerge from this study as key cross-cutting areas of movement strategy: building organizational infrastructure, developing new cultures of solidarity within working class movements, and using issue campaigns strategically to further these goals. Most effective organizers operate with two timeframes in mind: short-term efforts to capitalize on political openings, and a longer-term focus on strengthening the base of the movement to be able to

take on larger challenges. As demonstrated in the more successful examples, such as the Chicago living wage campaigns, well-run campaigns can succeed on both levels through careful strategic choices.

### **Sphere 1: Building Organizational Infrastructure**

Organizational structures are the building blocks of movements, and as the element most clearly under the control of activists, attract a lot of attention. Through the analysis of these cases and similar work by others, an organizational taxonomy of local working class movements including three main types of infrastructural bodies emerged: the building blocks of membership-based organizations; networks that link these organizations together; and intermediary “expert” organizations that serve as repositories of expertise in specific areas like coalition-building or leadership development.

#### *a. Key organizational building blocks: Unions, grassroots community organizations, and congregations*

The backbone of these efforts is almost always formed by existing organizations who take the lead in broader coalition efforts. Working class residents of these cities fall within three main organizational sectors: unions, churches, and community groups. All three can provide effective bases for political action, but in practice span a wide spectrum in terms of their effectiveness, involvement of rank-and-file members, and orientation toward coalition-building. These coalitions have been most successful when at least one organization within each sector actively engages its members in broad economic justice campaigns. Even better, sometimes these key partners are already politically well-situated and able to influence political decision-makers and other leaders in their sector.

Often, such perfect partners do not exist in a region, making internal reform efforts and/or new organizing crucial to creating building blocks. This connects to broader efforts within each sector (e.g. revitalizing the labor movement by moving from a “business model” that treats members as consumers to an “organizing model” that relies on democratic participation to

generate power). It can be difficult for leaders from other sectors to understand the dynamics of other organizations when looking for good partners, making bridge-builders with cross-cutting experiences important.

The 1996 leadership changes at the AFL-CIO provided more space, resources, and encouragement for labor-community collaboration. However, the current upheaval in the labor movement, with several large unions leaving the AFL-CIO, has made such work more challenging. Several of the unions most likely to be active in such coalitions because they represent many low-wage workers of color, like SEIU, have adopted an industry-based model of organizing that makes local coalition-building less interesting to them. In some regions, the lessened involvement in the labor council of those unions who left the AFL-CIO has also diminished the ability of local labor movements to collaborate with community organizations.

Particularly puzzling is the absence of certain organizations from these cases. Public employee unions would appear to be prime candidates for coalition-building, with much to gain from joining with community groups to defend high quality public services. However, for the most part unions of teachers, city employees, social workers, etc. have been absent in these three cities. At times, they even tend toward conflictual relationships with community stakeholders, diminishing this potential bridge (Scanlon & Harding, 2005).

*b. Networks: Labor, grassroots organizations, the “religious left,” and a diverse cross-sector leadership core*

Although there are seldom many “key activist organizations” available, many regions are even weaker at the intermediary level linking these groups together. Every region in the U.S. has at least a nominal labor council organized through the AFL-CIO; however, the effectiveness of these bodies varies dramatically. In the best cases, the labor council actually fuses together various locals into something resembling a movement, with common goals and shared resources. More often, they are loose agglomerations of independent locals far more connected to their parent unions than each other. Similarly, while interfaith

justice coalitions exist across the country, their success in generating participation in more than a handful of congregations is usually shallow.

Still, the faith community seems often to be more networked than community organizations, whose turf battles and parochialism make partnering difficult. As a group of community organizations dedicated to building power and moving larger issues, the Grassroots Collaborative is the only good example of such a network arising from these cases. MICAH is the most successful faith-based network in terms of pulling area churches toward a focus on social justice organizing, and Milwaukee has also had probably the most “activist-minded” labor council. However, while the labor council has consistently been involved in a broad range of issues, not many new “activist locals” directly organizing members have emerged through their efforts.

It is even more rare to find strong cross-sector networks in these cities. Community activists, union leaders, and progressive people of faith seldom share the same spaces or get to develop relationships. Coalition campaigns are thus very valuable in providing space for such interactions and bringing people together across differences.

*c. Knowledge development and capacity-builders: Policy, politics, leadership development, and coalition-building*

Cross-sector intermediaries also provide vital movement support functions, like analyzing and generating policy, developing leaders, and coordinating independent political action. One or more of these functions are often performed under the same roof or in closely affiliated organizations although, as mentioned above, consolidation has mixed effects on success. These cases, along with recent successes in California, also make clear the role of organizations that provide coalition-building expertise (Nicholls, 2003). Members of the Grassroots Collaborative have developed a basic coalition framework that now provides the starting point for bringing together broader coalitions in efforts like the Big Box Living Wage campaign.

Questions often emerge about whether to build on existing structures that are situated to perform these functions. Local universities often have centers that provide some policy capacity and labor councils usually have some form of political apparatus. The resource advantages of building from existing structures are clear, but organizers must always ask whether the organization can fully transform into a new iteration that is truly cross-sector.

The national networks (BP and PWF) are particularly focused on building this intermediary level of infrastructure. PWF is focusing on developing “think-and-do tanks” to function as movement hubs in terms of policy and organizing expertise modeled on the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE). BP prioritizes the formation of Civic Leadership Institutes based on the leadership development model in San Jose.

#### *d. Putting the pieces together*

Table 5.1 summarizes the key elements of organizational infrastructure that facilitate local movement-building in the form of a chart that might be useful for self-assessment by activists and provide the basis for a set of measures could enable research across a broad set of cities. I developed these measures by triangulating the results from this study with other accounts of labor-community collaboration and the social movements literature more broadly. I have adjusted them based on feedback from a few activists and scholars, but the scales remain very much works in progress.

**Figure 5.1: Key Elements of Local Movement Organizational Capacity**

	<b>Scale (Shorthand way of assessing local capacity in each area)</b>
<b>BUILDING BLOCKS</b>	<b>Dimension</b>
	<b>LOCAL UNION PARTNERS</b>
	<b>GRASSROOTS ORGANIZATION PARTNERS</b>
	<b>RELIGIOUS PARTNERS</b>
<b>NETWORKS</b>	<b>LABOR NETWORK</b>
	<b>GRASSROOTS ORG NETWORK</b>
	<b>RELIGIOUS LEFT NETWORK</b>
	<b>DIVERSE LEADERSHIP CORE</b>
	0: No activist union locals 1: Activist local exists, but is politically weak, internally top-down, or narrowly focused on workplace issues 2: At least one strong activist local that involves its members in broader social justice campaign coalitions 3: Multiple such locals
	0: No grassroots membership organizations with sizable memberships 1: Some organizations, but weak or narrowly focused 2: At least one strong organization that involves its members in broader social justice campaign coalitions 3: Multiple such organizations
	0: No local congregations active in social justice issues 1: Some active congregations, but politically marginal or lacking full internal buy-in 2: At least one strong congregation that involves its members in broader social justice campaign coalitions 3: Multiple such congregations
	0: Stagnant and/or reactionary central labor council (CLC) 1: CLC leaders basically support the status quo, but provides some space for new work 2: Supportive CLC or other multi-union coalition, but lacking full buy-in of several strong locals 3: Strong CLC that unifies most of local labor around movement-building activity
0: No formal connections between community organizations 1: Informal cooperation and networks 2: At least one proactive network that focuses on tackling larger issues 3: Several broad networks that get along and link all key organizations together	
0: No organized faith perspective on economic justice 1: Informal or labor-dominated coalitions 2: At least one network of working-class churches active in politics 3: Overlapping faith networks that include most key congregations and see themselves as part of a movement	
0: Not much connection of leaders across sectors (labor, grassroots, faith-based) 1: A few bridge-building leaders have begun to work together and discuss potential common goals 2: Leaders from all three key sectors have gone through multiple campaigns together and are developing trust 3: Experienced group of leaders representative of all local constituencies, sharing a common analysis and bonds of trust	

<b>TECHNICAL CAPACITY</b>		<b>Scale (Shorthand way of assessing local capacity in each area)</b>
<b>Dimension</b>		
POLICY ANALYSIS & GENERATION		<p>0: Mostly throw together secondary data analysis in reaction to crises</p> <p>1: Loose network of sympathetic academics and outside bodies who are tapped when needed</p> <p>2: Some independent ability to proactively analyze policy impacts and frame campaigns within regional economic trends</p> <p>3: "Think and Do Tank" that does this, and develops a long-term vision for the region in dialogue with local activists</p>
INDEPENDENT POLITICAL APPARATUS		<p>0: Energy and money funneled into Democratic Party for general elections</p> <p>1: Some engagement (usually only labor) in primaries; some targeted voter ID and turnout</p> <p>2: Strategic endorsement process and labor-community cooperation within an independent grassroots vehicle</p> <p>3: All this and long-term common vision and strategy for developing a platform, holding candidates accountable, and lobbying</p>
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING		<p>0: Token labor and community participants in elite-focused networking ("Chamber of Commerce" leadership groups)</p> <p>1: Limited practical training reaching a few local leaders (e.g. university-based Labor Ed)</p> <p>2: "Civic Leadership Institute" that brings people together across sectors to develop a shared analysis</p> <p>3: Such an institute plus strengthened training within sectors and orgs and evaluation of campaigns to develop strategies</p>
COALITION-BUILDING EXPERTISE		<p>0: Nobody in town has thought much about labor-community coalition-building</p> <p>1: A few key bridge-builders often play an informal role in forming and maintaining coalitions</p> <p>2: Semi-formal development of "local best practices" through reflection by local leaders and organizers</p> <p>3: Local organization that serves as repository of "lessons learned" and specializes in technical assistance to coalitions</p>

I think that something like this chart could be a useful tool for both researchers and organizers. As a next step, I imagine testing it at gatherings of local leaders interested in coalition-building. After asking everyone to fill it out individually, I would bring them together in small groups, and then the full body, to assess their region on each dimension. This iterative process would allow the group and I to see where people interpreted things differently or disagreed with each other, which would be valuable for revising the instrument and building a common understanding.

From an organizing perspective, such a group assessment could inform strategic planning and future action, as well as broadening people's perspectives. In terms of research, a more refined survey instrument could then be administered to groups across a broader set of regions and then analyzed statistically with attention to patterns, particularly whether certain dimensions appear consistently more difficult to attain or if groups of people tend to demonstrate systematic differences in responses. Along with more qualitative and theoretical work, this could help inform emergent questions such as whether to weight certain dimensions more heavily than others.

Figures 5.2-5.5 present an extremely preliminary and rough estimate of local movement capacity in each city over the past two decades. I provide what are in effect "my answers" to the survey to demonstrate what this might look like in practice and because it demonstrates some interesting trends that suggest these measures do correspond with movement success. While I assessed each dimension as fully as possible given the data I have, my understanding is nowhere near fine-grained enough to be completely confident about the completeness or accuracy of my assessment.

**Figure 5.2: Chicago Movement Capacity over Time**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Early-1990s</b>	<b>Late-1990s</b>	<b>Early-2000s</b>	<b>Late-2000s</b>
KEY LOCAL UNION PARTNER	2	3	3	3
KEY GRASSROOTS ORG PARTNER	1	2	3	3
KEY RELIGIOUS PARTNER	2	2	3	3
LABOR NETWORK	1	2	2	2
GRASSROOTS ORG NETWORK	1	2	2	3
RELIGIOUS LEFT NETWORK	2	2	2	2
DIVERSE LEADERSHIP CORE	1	1	2	2
POLICY ANALYSIS & GENERATION	1	1	1	1
INDEPENDENT POLITICAL APPARATUS	0	1	1	1
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING	1	1	1	1
COALITION-BUILDING EXPERTISE	1	2	3	3
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>

As shown by Figure 5.2, Chicago has steadily increased capacity in most areas, but remains somewhat sparse in local technical capacity. This may be changing, as groups are currently exploring the possibility of starting a Civil Leadership Institute and political experimentation continues.

**Figure 5.3: Milwaukee Movement Capacity over Time**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Early-1990s</b>	<b>Late-1990s</b>	<b>Early-2000s</b>	<b>Late-2000s</b>
KEY LOCAL UNION PARTNER	2	1	2	2
KEY GRASSROOTS ORG PARTNER	2	1	1	1
KEY RELIGIOUS PARTNER	2	2	2	3
LABOR NETWORK	3	2	2	2
GRASSROOTS ORG NETWORK	2	2	1	2
RELIGIOUS LEFT NETWORK	2	2	2	2
DIVERSE LEADERSHIP CORE	2	3	1	2
POLICY ANALYSIS & GENERATION	2	3	1	2
INDEPENDENT POLITICAL APPARATUS	2	3	1	1
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING	1	2	1	2
COALITION-BUILDING EXPERTISE	1	3	1	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>21</b>

Figure 5.3 shows that Milwaukee’s movement infrastructure has ebbed and flowed in strength. It is currently relatively solid across the board, perhaps creating an opportunity for a big step forward through the right campaign.

**Figure 5.4: Pittsburgh Movement Capacity over Time**

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Early-1990s</b>	<b>Late-1990s</b>	<b>Early-2000s</b>	<b>Late-2000s</b>
KEY LOCAL UNION PARTNER	1	2	2	2
KEY GRASSROOTS ORG PARTNER	1	1	1	1
KEY RELIGIOUS PARTNER	1	2	2	2
LABOR NETWORK	1	1	1	1
GRASSROOTS ORG NETWORK	2	3	1	2
RELIGIOUS LEFT NETWORK	1	2	1	1
DIVERSE LEADERSHIP CORE	1	2	1	1
POLICY ANALYSIS & GENERATION	1	1	1	1
INDEPENDENT POLITICAL APPARATUS	0	1	1	1
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT & TRAINING	1	1	0	0
COALITION-BUILDING EXPERTISE	2	3	1	1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>

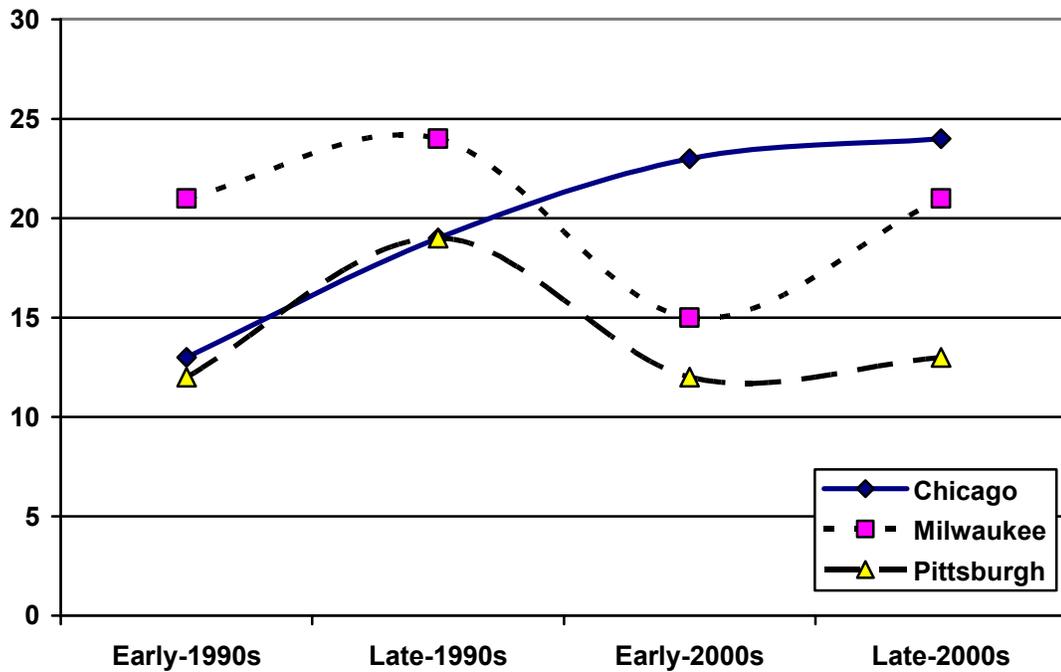
After a promising increase in capacity in the 1990s, Pittsburgh is the weakest of the three cities, particularly at the intermediary level, which leaves them less able to coordinate action.

*e. Building infrastructure over time and in layers*

A strong infrastructure makes it more likely that vibrant movements will emerge from conflicts. The elements that make up such an infrastructure are

mutually constitutive. The presence of each helps make the others more likely, and certainly facilitates the kind of coalition work that then likely spurs investment in further infrastructure-building. These infrastructural elements are all in some ways results, as well as causes, of strong local movements, so timing becomes important in understanding how each influenced the other. The chart in Figure 5.5. brings these numbers together visually, clearly showing the declines around the turn of the century in Pittsburgh and Milwaukee, Chicago’s steady growth, and Milwaukee’s recent bounce back.

**Figure 5.5: Movement Capacity in Each City Over Time**



While these elements of movement infrastructure fit together, it does not seem necessary that they develop in any particular form or order. In a case like Chicago, a variety of change efforts within organizations, developing networks, and building capacity have proceeded in sometimes loose relation to each other. Contrasting the three cities, it becomes clear that it is not necessary, or even desirable, to house these elements together. Though it may look more efficient on paper to create large, parsimonious systems like the CSM, such a strategy places “all the eggs in one basket,” making serious breakdowns more possible,

as well as increasing the chances that not all of the tasks will be performed well. Rather than striving for a parsimonious model, more overlapping networks evolving over time to fit the local conditions are stronger and more resilient. The temptation appears tough to resist—foundations have responded to the success of the Grassroots Collaborative by pushing them to become broader and to grow quickly, even though their tighter focus has arguably been central to their success.

I also started this project assuming that a broad permanent coalition like the CSM or APA was the gold standard that everyone should aspire to—it took repeated demonstrations otherwise to make me question it. When prioritizing resilience, a set of multiple overlapping networks makes a lot of sense. Not housing all the local capacity under one roof makes a movement less vulnerable to a breakdown in that organization, while redundancy of expertise and capacity likewise provides insurance and forms denser networks. The spider web analogy suggested by Sheila Cochran, head of the Milwaukee Central Labor Council, rings true in relation to the success of strong and flexible networks and the role of bridge-building leaders in proactively diagnosing weak spots and stringing together relationships within inherently fragile structures. One element not captured by Figure 5.5 is the multiplicative effect of trust and relationship-building within stable situations. While Milwaukee has managed to rebuild much of its infrastructure since the collapse of the CSM, they have nothing like the reservoirs of trust and goodwill built up over time in Chicago, which emphasizes the importance of avoiding “catastrophic defeats.”

## **Sphere 2: Developing Cultures of Solidarity**

These organizational elements are intimately connected to the cultural work of movements discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Coalitions and intermediary organizations provide the spaces where local activists come together from different spheres, develop trust and better understandings of each other, and begin to form common goals. Multiracial cultures of solidarity are clearly essential to the development of working class movements in the U.S., which have often stumbled while trying to bring people together across differences. Strained

relationships between unions and communities of color have held back movement-building in each of these three cities, prompting organizers to proactively confront these divisions with a combination of prefigurative strategies.

Bridge-building leaders have tried to make themselves and their organizations reflect the norms and structural relationships they would like to see, even while recognizing that most others are operating according to different logics. Individually, these leaders try to “become the change they want to see” by modeling practices of forthrightness and trusting others, “swallowing hard” during conflicts, and creating space for new relationships to develop by absorbing negative energy. They also work to create “beloved communities” within organizational structures that develop cooperative norms and realistic expectations between partners, and then extend these new norms beyond the initial core group of leaders.

The most successful efforts have created formal structures that pay attention to the differences between participants in ways that are counter-intuitive to some organizers. The Grassroots Collaborative model of requiring organizations to commit resources and turnout members at events in order to be involved in strategic decisions has clarified the system and brought things out in the open for discussion. Efforts to maintain strict equality between partners, such as the Pittsburgh Living Wage Campaign, proved very difficult to maintain in the heat of a campaign, and often seem to slide into informal systems whereby a few key organizations make key decisions. This sort of “false equality” poses more risks of internal conflict than the structural differentiation of the Chicago model. The Grassroots Collaborative also agglomerates the power of its member organizations in a way that allows them to relate on a more equal basis with unions when necessary.

These cases also demonstrate that developing new cultures is a fragile process of building new relationships over a series of interactions, requiring participants to break old habits reinforced by the dominant hegemony and elite intervention. While people can be transformed by collective action—as in Chicago, where activists reported a dramatic increase in levels of trust and

openness during the final weeks of the Big Box Living Wage campaign—bad interactions can also quickly set back an effort, as people find their pessimistic expectations confirmed. Thus, a main task of organizers is convincing participants to follow Pittsburgh activist Steve Donahue’s advice to approach other organizations with a favorable (or at least neutral) bias.

Such expansions of collective identity strengthen a local movement’s resistance to elite efforts to drive wedges between groups. As demonstrated by the Chicago case, the relative absence of class-based discourses and history of white working class racism in this country make working class movements vulnerable to efforts to promote racial splits. The living wage campaign was able to weather such attacks largely because it was centered on a diverse core group of leaders representative of the key constituencies of the city who had developed a basis of trust working together over a series of campaigns. In such circumstances, the attempts of the Daley administration and Wal-Mart to “play the race card” actually catalyzed the development of a multiracial working class culture of solidarity by spurring internal discussion and the development of a collective identity frame linking together class and race in terms of economic justice.

This transformation of interests and identities marks the kind of moment in which local coalitions move beyond additive logics of collective action to become “more than the sum of their parts.” Relationship-building methods from the community organizing world could be particularly helpful in coalition settings where many participants do not have a good understanding of each other’s organizations and interests. Groups like MICAH very intentionally set up a series of “one-on-ones” where leaders sit down and ask each other questions, each doing more listening than talking during their turn. As many respondents said, unions and community organizations have much different internal politics. Strategic disagreements can be more about different ways of doing things than substance, and a basic understanding of where someone is coming from can help people find common ground. The process Milwaukee labor leader Sheila Cochran described as “webslinging” – proactively searching out and repairing

weak spots through relationship-building – is a related technique crucial to maintaining unity during campaigns.

### **Sphere 3: Using Campaigns to Build Power Strategically**

Issue campaigns are the galvanizing events of these movement-building efforts, providing opportunities to win concrete changes and plough the ground from which movements emerge by building organizational infrastructure and promoting cultural change. These cases show how major leaps forward occur during the heat of campaigns as new possibilities present themselves, new relationships and norms are developed, and new strategies are experimented with. The relatively open and transitory nature of coalition campaigns may make them more likely sites of experimentation than more permanent organizations. While challenges emerge from the perception among activists that many coalitions are temporary, with unclear lines of ownership, this openness may also encourage leaders to try new things.

These local movements pursue both short and long-term goals in their efforts to wrest control over local policy-making away from the neoliberal growth machines that dominate each region. Their campaigns are designed to affect individual policy decisions in the short term, while also building the long-term capacity of the movement. These coalitions have been most effective impacting policy decisions when they are able to combine “insider” (e.g. lobbying) and “outsider” (e.g. disruptive collective action) forms of power, particularly in conjunction with an independent electoral apparatus. Thus, when unions and community groups develop the ability to mobilize their constituents to vote, take direct action, and lobby, local politicians find it difficult to resist their demands, even in the face of large financial interests.

The experiences of these coalitions show that local movements appear to be quite capable of absorbing (and even benefiting from) short-term losses, but that organizers should be very wary of suffering a catastrophic loss in terms of the long-term health of the movement. In practice, this suggests making strategic choices within campaigns with long-term goals in mind, and refusing to make compromises that will fracture key relationships even if they might produce more

success in the short term. In this vein, the community organizations involved in the Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods coalition refused to entertain proposed community benefits agreements that would have more fully addressed their demands for affordable housing and local hiring because it likely would have limited their long term ability to work more closely with the building trades unions.

The longer-term success of a campaign is measured by whether it strengthened the local movement's capacity to take on further struggles. Perhaps most importantly, campaigns allow local movements the opportunity to expand their capacity to bring people together across differences. In each campaign, organizers hope to:

- Build the core group of bridge-building leaders by incorporating new activists, deepening bonds of trust, and developing shared norms and vision;
- Develop cultures of solidarity within the broader membership of the organizations involved that expands their collective identities and connects to a broader vision of social justice;
- Strengthen intermediary institutions that will continue bringing people together across differences and support future campaigns.

To accomplish their larger goals, these local movements also need to build power to change the terms of the debate, which entails building intermediary institutions to develop and promulgate alternative visions, policy prescriptions, and leaders from within the movement.

### **Developing Strategies and Bridging the Activist-Academic Divide**

The United States has a particularly sharp divide between the academy and social movements compared to many other countries. When it comes to labor and community movements, recent decades have seen a decrease in the labor studies centers and extension programs that tend to be a prime location for activists and academics to meet, further separating the two. This has arguably led to a less pragmatically politically involved US academy and relatively weak

“knowledge capacity” in social movements, something that might change if both sides move closer together and find more areas of overlap.

Ideally, work within each of the above spheres of practice reinforces each other in a virtuous cycle. Well-selected issue campaigns provide the opportunity to recruit new partners, experiment with new intermediaries and strategies, and deepen cultures of solidarity. “Down times” between campaigns allow the chance to institutionalize the most successful of these experiments and proactively set the stage for emerging issues. This approach to local movement-building represents some clear advances, but is certainly not the end-all and be-all of movement strategy. As opponents adapt and the political-economic context evolves, it is more than a truism that movements must either keep growing or die.

To facilitate this process of innovation, a cadre of local activist-intellectuals—people doing the real work of organizing but also thinking about the bigger picture—could emerge and be linked together in each region, particularly within the intermediary layer of bridging organizations (Barker and Cox, 2002). By virtue of their central positions within local networks, this group would be well-placed to function as “webslingers” surveying local movement infrastructure, diagnosing weak points, and proactively creating new intermediary organizations or connections. By analyzing past campaigns and efforts in other regions, this brain trust could play a lead role in consolidating local knowledge and strategic innovations, catalyzing change within existing organizations, and facilitating communication across divides.

The national movement-building networks like PWF and BP could play an important role in linking these activist-intellectuals together across regions and developing their capacity to make grounded generalizations across contexts. Expanding slightly beyond their role of promulgating and adapting a model to other regions, these networks could explicitly set out to develop a core group of activist intellectuals in regions around the country, each seeking to develop local strategies to facilitate the emergence of strong working class movements. Through the comparative process of trying to translate their experiences into recommendations, those involved would hopefully develop a deeper

understanding of their local efforts as well as begin to isolate the common threads that emerge across cases. Instead of playing an “expert” role and mainly disseminating knowledge, the more “traditional” academic intellectuals involved would then focus on helping participants in the network develop their research skills and process.

As many observers from a wide range of fields have said, the only likely prospect for the transformative and complex systems change desired by groups like these working class organizers lies in the development of “learning organizations” that are able to evolve and continue to increase their strategic capacity over time. Working class organizers face an unfriendly environment and the challenge of balancing multiple logics of action—both bringing people together and helping them change simultaneously. This demands new organizational structures and cultures, leadership styles, and strategic repertoires.

Over time, perhaps these activist intellectuals would come to see their organizing work like farming—an ongoing process embedded in a complex system, with no hard-and-fast rules, but many relatively consistent patterns, a rich trove of folk wisdom, and the ever-present certainty that one’s work is never done. With such a perspective, they might very well navigate a variety of locally-specific paths toward strong working-class movements, build alternative structures while also forcing existing bodies to change, and even begin to explore the routes connecting their local movements across regional and national boundaries.

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