

Développer le mouvement en misant sur les partenariats entre la communauté et le milieu syndical : vers l'auto-organisation des travailleuses et travailleurs au sein de la nouvelle économie

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Résumé

En 2006, la American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) a émis une résolution appelant à une plus grande collaboration entre syndicats et centres d'appui aux travailleurs. Dans cet article, nous nous appuyons sur l'expérience de la fédération pour illustrer la convergence de plus en plus importante des syndicats et des centres d'appui aux travailleurs et travailleuses vers des changements structurels économiques et politiques au cours des dernières décennies. Nous soutenons que les centres d'appui aux travailleurs et travailleuses, en tant que stratégie de mouvement social en faveur d'une nouvelle économie, et les syndicats, en tant qu'institutions conçues pour obtenir des gains en négociation, ont chacun des impératifs organisationnels potentiellement générateurs de conflits. Par une collaboration fructueuse, cependant, ces deux tendances du mouvement ouvrier ont le potentiel de redéfinir les stratégies d'organisation du 21^e siècle et d'accroître ainsi l'influence des travailleuses et travailleurs. À partir de la résolution de 2006, nous présentons cinq études de cas de partenariat syndicat-communauté et soulignons les progrès encourageants qui en sont le produit.

Worker Self-Organization in the New Economy: The AFL-CIO's Experience in Movement Building with Community-Labour Partnerships

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Abstract

In 2006, the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) issued a resolution calling for increased collaboration between organized labour and worker centres. Drawing from the federation's experience, this article traces the growing convergence of organized labour and worker centres to structural economic and political shifts in the past decades. It holds that worker centres, as a movement-based strategy for a new economy, and labour unions, as institutions built to secure bargaining victories, could potentially conflict in their organizational imperatives. However, through successful collaboration, these two trends in the labour movement could reshape organizing strategies in the 21st century to better leverage worker power. From the 2006 resolution, we present five case studies of labour-community partnerships to highlight encouraging developments.

On a cool, early morning in February, on a street corner in the Agoura Hills neighbourhood of Los Angeles, a group of about 75 day labourers huddled, consciously ignoring pick-up trucks and vans whose drivers were expecting to hire small groups of workers for a day of landscaping, light construction, home repair work, and similar duties. For about two hours, the day labourers, members of a local chapter of the National Day Labourers Organizing Network (NDLON), debated setting a minimum wage that they would collectively pledge to charge their employers from that point onward.

The group, virtually all male, Latino immigrants, finally reached a unanimous consensus, promising each other that they would not accept any more jobs for less than US\$12 an hour. Twelve dollars was \$5.25 more than the California minimum wage at the time and \$2.00 more than what they were typically paid for their work. The group then returned their attention to the pick-up truck and van owners who were looking to purchase their labour.

Some three weeks later, a serious conflict arose at this same street corner. A few of the day labourers had gone down the block and were undercutting their brothers up the street. One argued that he was getting free lunch from many of his employers, so he thought it fair to accept a lower wage rate. Another explained that he badly needed the work even at a lower rate, because he had sick children at home. The larger group up the street could not allow this breach, so they confronted those who had split off. They listened to the rationales advanced, and after a good deal of exchange, convinced them that while their arguments for making exceptions to the agreement might have merit, such decisions should be made by the collective, rather than on an individual basis. The smaller group acquiesced. The crisis was averted, and the minimum wage was restored.

Introduction

A small delegation of state, local, and national AFL-CIO officials, including the authors of this article, were given a tour of NDLO's street corners, witnessing these events firsthand. While the visits occurred in 2006, the day labourers' strategies and tactics reflected an earlier era of the labour movement. Despite not having collective bargaining rights or contractual employment relationships, workers banded together to set and enforce their own minimum labour standards.

At the time of these events, the national AFL-CIO had been receiving intermittent reports from state and local AFL-CIO offices about interactions with NDLO and other community-based worker centres. Some of the reports were favourable: unions and worker centres lobbying together for worker-friendly state laws or local ordinances, assisting each other with worker or immigrant rights training, or joining in efforts to expose abuses. Other reports were more mixed. Some unions complained that worker centres were dispatching workers to non-union competitors and undermining negotiated labour standards. Yet most union reports on the community-based worker centres involved simply a growing awareness that worker centres were dealing with many similar issues facing union members, such as wage and hour enforcement, health and safety protections, employees misclassified as "independent contractors," workplace discrimination and harassment, training, and worker rights education. Although worker centres lacked collective bargaining rights and other institutional features of "organized labour," they were nonetheless representing workers in a variety of

new, creative ways. The centres were emerging as a parallel labour movement, or perhaps more fairly described, they reflected a new development within a broader, more inclusive labour movement. This development came with its own challenges, including cultural differences and organizing strategies and tactics that differed from labour's traditional approach to growing collective bargaining power.

At its August 2006 meeting, the AFL-CIO Executive Council passed a landmark resolution calling for the creation of a national worker centre partnership, enabling community-based worker centres to affiliate with local labour bodies. Since then, through formal affiliations, network partnerships, and informal collaboration, the AFL-CIO has increased its efforts to expand the labour movement by, as then AFL-CIO President John Sweeney described, “enforc[ing] the workplace rights for all workers—union and non-union, immigrant and non-immigrant alike” (AFL-CIO, 2006). Through these dynamic partnerships, we envision one potential path to revitalize a besieged U.S. labour movement.

Much has been written about the decline of union membership in recent decades (see: Voss and Sherman, 2000: 310-311). Labour's diminished ability to provide a counterbalance to the growth and impact of corporate power in the U.S. is a growing concern (Hacker and Lowenthal, 2012; Mishel, 2012). From both inside and outside the labour movement, many have offered prescriptions to revitalize meaningful worker power (McDonald, 1993; Voss and Sherman, 2000; Heckscher and Carre, 2006; Martin, 2006; Tattersall, 2010), including a number of thoughtful proposals for building or rebuilding labour-community partnerships (Needleman, 1998: 71-86; Warren and C. Cohen, 2000: 629-631).

At the outset of this article, therefore, a disclaimer of full originality is warranted. Indeed, attempting to describe the challenges the U.S. labour movement faces today or to design a blueprint for labour revitalization that does not expand upon or reaffirm existing work is difficult (see: Martin, 2006). As others have recognized, without fundamental change in organized labour's current situation in the U.S., the debate about how to ensure its survival, much less effective regrowth, will not enjoy a platform from which to continue much longer (Cobble, 2010: 20). A sobering set of statistics support this warning: in order to increase current U.S. union density by a mere one percent (from 11.8 percent of the workforce to 12.8 percent), it

would require a net gain of approximately one million new union members (Chaison, 2010: 74). Traditional workplace organizing alone cannot realistically reverse this decline, due to the many legal obstacles to organizing, and intense employer opposition. Were organized labour to rely solely on traditional practices to accomplish that gain, it would take, conservatively, many hundreds of millions of dollars (Milkman and Voss, 2004: 4).

Instead, there needs to be a significant rise in worker self-organization today as there has been at various other times in U.S. history (Cobble, 2010: 21). During the Great Depression, urban workers around the country transitioned from relying on over-extended ethnic charities, banks, and social clubs to pursuing cross-cultural alliances and broad-based labour organizing through the CIO, which had established a program of organizing unskilled workers (Cobble, 2001). These new institutions and movement-based alliances enabled workers to push for Roosevelt's New Deal social, banking, and industrial reforms, effectively building the welfare state (Cohen, 1990). We assert that a crucial precondition for widespread worker self-organization is that communities similarly feel connected with unions in a common movement. This connection can only emerge when a community believes the interests of the community's workers and families are effectively served by community-based organizations. Community interests are not limited to legislatively mandated minimum standards, but also include collectively winning and enforcing legal rights institutionally. Where unions and worker centres collaborate and work in partnership, communities are, indeed, mobilizing and connecting with unions, showing more interest in supporting organizing campaigns and collective bargaining (Theodore, 2010). To achieve a true, dynamic revitalization of the labour movement, these partnerships must be encouraged, supported, and nurtured.

Historically, the U.S. labour movement has always had dual co-existing identities. On the one hand, it is a social movement that reflects the collective aspirations of workers. On the other, it is an institution that serves to protect workers' gains (Hecksher, 2006). We argue that labour practitioners must reconceptualize the interdependent roles of institution and movement. As traditional workplace organizing strategies become increasingly tenuous, the growing synergy between community-based worker centres and institutionalized labour unions may provide an opportunity to

revitalize the labour movement (Cobble, 2010: 21). We will explore the structural context that gave rise to this growing synergy, as well as some of the difficulties inherent in developing relationships. To be sure, the separate strategies and organizational mandates of worker centres and unions are not always immediately compatible. Efforts must be made toward building trust through long term working partnerships. We then examine the 2006 AFL-CIO resolution and the AFL-CIO's subsequent efforts at building community partnerships. Finally, we review recent and current union-worker centre partnerships and posit that, although these campaigns have had varying degrees of success, they still serve as instructive case studies on movement building in today's new economy.

Structural Economic Shifts and Declining Worker Power

Before the onset of the current economic crisis, the labour market went through profound structural changes that eroded the power of workers in the economy. During the golden age of U.S. manufacturing from World War II until 1973, the growth of working and middle-class household incomes equaled or even outpaced that of the wealthy. From 1973 through 2007, a period of neoliberal crisis moved the economy toward deindustrialization, exploitative trade agreements without worker protections, off-shoring, and virulent corporate anti-union campaigns. Household income for the richest one-tenth of one percent skyrocketed by 495% in that period, while household income for the rest of the population grew by an anemic 14 percent (Mishel, 2012). From World War II until the early 1970s worker productivity and wage growth had marched in lock-step, as strong unions demanded a fair share of growing corporate profits. Since that time, economic changes and relentless attacks on unions weakened organized labour's ability to win these wage gains. As a result, worker productivity rates continue to climb, as the real value of wages has remained essentially stagnant since the early 1970s. From 1993 to 2010, the top one percent of incomes grew by 58 percent, capturing slightly more than half of the overall economic growth of real incomes per family over the period—a level higher than any other year since 1917, surpassing even 1928, the peak year of the stock market bubble before the Great Depression (Saez, 2012: 2-3).

The shift from an economy based on manufacturing to one driven by anti-union corporate interests, based on credit and

casino-style Wall Street speculation, has eroded organized labour to its weakest point in over a century. Furthermore, employers of low wage workers often exist in highly competitive markets, where workplace “fissuring,” the practice of separating market conditions in which wages and conditions are set from the actual employment of workers through methods like subcontracting, is common. This creates conditions for non-compliance with labour laws and makes workers ineligible for traditional union organizing (Weil, 2011: 33). Today only 6.9 percent of U.S. private sector workers are represented by a union, compared to a high of over 30 percent following World War II (Mishel, 2-3). Public sector unions are now on the decline as well, as corporate-supported state public officials attack the right of public-sector bargaining. A 2009 report found that a modest increase in unionization rates would help restore the broken link between productivity and wage gains. According to the report, “If unionization rates were the same as they were in 1983 and the current union wage premium remained constant, new union workers would earn an estimated \$49 billion more in wages and salaries per year” (Madland, 2009: 3). Yet, were every union in the U.S. to win every current organizing campaign, the net effect would be only a small fraction of such a turnaround.

This is not to say that many of the organizing campaigns that unions are currently waging are unimportant for the workers or the industry involved, or could not serve as models for other workers seeking union representation. All other factors aside, however, traditional organizing by itself is unlikely to lead to a sufficient level of growth, or an adequate resurgence of worker power in the economy. More and more, as an institution, organized labour is recognizing that it must also embrace new strategies that encourage broad-based movement building and worker self-organization.

Emergence of Community-Based Worker Centres and Early Interaction with Organized Labour

Community-based worker centres are emerging throughout the country, providing workers with a wide range of opportunities for collective and individual empowerment. Many of these centres play an essential role in helping immigrant workers understand and enforce workplace rights. In doing so, they also play a critical role for all workers, immigrant and U.S.-born alike, by fighting unscrupulous employers who try to use the immigrant workforce to

lower wages and other standards that protect all workers (Hecksler and Carre, 2006: 610-612).

Worker centres have grown significantly over the past two decades. In 1992, five centres existed in the U.S.; 15 years later, there were over 137 in both rural areas and large urban centres (Fine, 2007: 335). Those served by the worker centres work primarily in building and construction, landscaping, hotels and restaurants, domestic work, and other service sector industries. Other centres assist workers in meatpacking, poultry processing, high tech industries and manufacturing. The centres play multiple roles, simultaneously engaging in activities ranging from legislative lobbying to providing legal assistance for employment-related issues. Individual U.S. labour standards are generally derived from the Fair Labour Standards Act (FLSA), the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OSHA), and other employment laws and regulations. Many centres offer classes in worker and immigrant rights, provide job-related trainings and workshops, and conduct research and issue reports on specific industries. Worker centres have increasingly pursued organizing campaigns, or have referred workers seeking representation to unions.

Some centres serve African American communities or a more racially and ethnically mixed population. In Los Angeles, the UCLA Black Worker Centre holds workplace rights classes and ethnic diversity trainings, and, as its keystone project, offers popular education trainings that prepare young black workers to enter pre-apprenticeship programs for green construction jobs. Worker centres in the south, like the New Orleans Workers' Centre for Racial Justice in Louisiana and the Black Workers for Justice Centre in Raleigh, North Carolina, are building worker solidarity by working to bridge the cultural differences between Latino and African American communities that cause tensions and divide workplaces.

Worker centres have filled an important advocacy gap in immigrant communities vacated by organized labour. Many of the same forces that encouraged the restructuring of the U.S. workplace, especially trade integration, also unleashed an influx of economic migration, in large part from Mexico and Central America. Before the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was passed in 1993, many predicted it would cause a crisis in the Mexican agricultural sector and displace as many as 1.4 million Mexican peasants, who could not compete with subsidized U.S. agriculture

(Garcia, 2002: 1). Predictably, many went north in search of work, joined by Central American migrants, displaced by civil war, Cold War intervention, poverty, or the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA). In the 1990s, the immigrant population in the U.S. grew by over 30 percent, with over 50 percent of all immigrants coming from Latin America (Suarez-Orozco, 2001: 345). In 2010, 15.8 percent of the labour force was foreign born, with half of this number being Latino (BLS, 2011).

Traditional labour unions were slow to respond to these demographic shifts. Most unions lacked organizing experience in immigrant-heavy informal and mobile workplaces. Cultural and language barriers between immigrants and organizers also played a role. Another factor in this inertia was the resistance among some unions to embrace immigrant communities, based on historic concern with protecting wages from being undermined by employers who relied on undocumented workers (Fine, Tichenor, 2009:85-86; Fine, Grabelsky, Narro, 2008: 33-35). In 1986 organized labour worked to secure the passage of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), which required employers to verify workers' work authorization. Commonly known as "employer sanctions", that section of the law essentially turned employers into immigration enforcement agents. The AFL-CIO reversed its policy in 2000 after seeing employers using "sanctions" to undermine organizing drives among undocumented immigrants, thus jeopardizing standards everywhere (Gordon, 2005). While organized labour began to appreciate the activism of low-wage immigrant workers, a legacy of distrust still exists among some immigrant groups and labour unions.

The AFL-CIO's 2000 immigration policy shift is part of a trend to expand organized labour's influence by reaching out to unrepresented constituencies. Some unions have been experimenting with non-standard worker representation structures (Nack and Tarlau, 2005). In 2003, the AFL-CIO established a non-profit organization, Working America, as a means to reach the growing numbers of nonunion working-class people. The organization has grown substantially. Going door-to-door in working class neighbourhoods, organizers have thousands of nightly conversations with nonunion workers about ways to take action on labour and political issues. By joining Working America, this unrepresented group becomes part of the labour movement's chief institution, as well as part of a movement to counteract big money politics with

long-term organizing around the idea of a “citizens lobby” (Levison, 2012, 2-4; Dean, 2012). Organized labour’s renewed interest in community engagement led to relationships with worker centres, as the centres themselves became more engaged in workplace issues, taking on many of organized labour’s traditional roles.

In 2004 in Washington D.C., a worker centre and the D.C. Labour Council successfully lobbied together for a needed overhaul of the District’s worker compensation system. In 2005 in Chicago, the Illinois AFL-CIO and worker centres jointly lobbied in support of a law that criminalized employer noncompliance with state wage and hour laws. Worker centres in Los Angeles and the California Federation of Labour were the chief sponsors of a law that regulated the use of contractors and sub-contractors in the construction, farm, garment, janitorial, and security guard industries. In the South, a worker centre trained union organizers on the rights of immigrant workers, and provided bilingual steward training jointly with a union. Over time many union and worker centre activists came to realize the effectiveness of the labour movement depended not only on organizing respective members, but also on engaging all workers—union and non-union, immigrant and non-immigrant.

These trends in the labour movement—one a network of institutions built over many decades of workers’ struggles, and the other an organic and fluid movement among vulnerable workers responding to shifting economic trends—quickly began to intersect. Naturally, they share many common interests, mainly establishing and maintaining good jobs with decent wages and benefits. They also share an interest in joining together to fight common enemies, anti-worker corporations and public officials. Centres and unions have increasingly worked collaboratively on a variety of issues, including lobbying state legislatures, city mayors, and councils to pass worker-friendly laws and ordinances; identifying and highlighting industry and employer-specific abuses; and enlisting support among government agencies to devise more effective enforcement strategies. Nonetheless, challenges to union-worker centre collaboration remain.

Challenges to Collaboration: Movement vs. Institution

Basic differences exist between worker centres and organized labour that must be bridged to form successful partnerships (Fine, Grabelsky, Narro, 2008: 4-5). With time, training and continued

exposure, cultural and language barriers between union and worker centre constituencies can be overcome, or at least mitigated (Rayod, 2007: 9-13). The essential challenge to practitioners working in the intersection of these two spheres is bridging the movement-based strategies of worker centres and the institutional structures and priorities of organized labour. When left unaddressed, these tensions can lead to conflict. In Florida, some unions viewed worker centres as supplying workers to non-union contractors, thereby lowering wage standards. Conversely, workers centres have accused unions of promoting legislation that served union interests at the expense of non-union workers, and in several instances, accused unions of not properly addressing the needs of immigrant (and especially undocumented) members (Fine, 2007; Gordon 1995).

At the base of these conflicts lie certain differences that separate unions and worker centres and highlight the urgency of integrating two distinct but not incompatible strategies for building worker power. Worker centres tend to be neighbourhood or community-oriented with informal membership and dues structures. They typically employ individual problem-based strategies, rather than advocate through longer-term, contract-based relationships, and seek change by mobilizing informal and overlapping constituencies (for a critical view on worker centre organizing, see: Jenkins, 2002). Even when immersed in workplace issues, many centres shun becoming institutionalized unions because they fear the added bureaucracy and that some of their tactics—secondary picketing, for example—would be outlawed under the National Labour Relations Act (NLRA) (Weissman, 2009:5). They generally focus on enforcing statutory protections like wage and hour laws and occupational safety laws (Fine, 2007).

One of the greatest deficiencies of statutory protection, however, is under-enforcement, particularly in low-wage industries. Many unscrupulous employers simply calculate the cost of potential penalties into a low-rate business model. The federal government's allocation to the Department of Labour (DOL) to enforce these laws is miniscule compared with the size of the overall economy. Between 1980 and 2007, the number of inspectors enforcing federal minimum wage and overtime laws declined by 31 percent, even as the labour force grew by 52 percent. Similarly, the budget of OSHA was cut by \$25 million between 2001 and 2007; at its current staffing and inspection levels, it would take the agency 133 years to

inspect each workplace just once (Bernhardt, Milkman, Theodore, et al, 2009: 52). The gains a centre may win, therefore, are precarious and depend on vigilant activism to sustain (see: Fine and Gordon, 2010). Moreover, due to their informal membership structures, the centres are often resource-deprived.

Labour unions, on the other hand, utilize institutional strategies, through contracts and collective bargaining, for cementing workplace gains. Collective bargaining is protected by the NLRA, a New Deal law that sought to create a system of workplace self-governance and democracy to address the defects in government oversight of mandated minimum standards. While the workplace has changed dramatically since the New Deal era, necessitating new organizing and negotiating strategies, traditional collective bargaining remains highly relevant.

Union wage premiums help overcome the racial and gender wage gaps that persist to this day. In 2011, while unionized workers in general earned 25 percent more than comparable non-union workers, the union wage differential for women was over 28 percent; for African American workers it was near 26 percent; and for Latinos it was an astonishing 43.7 percent (BLS, table 2). Furthermore, by pooling the resources through established dues structures, unions can hire staff, including lawyers, who offer experience and expertise to prosecute violations and resolve grievances. Perhaps most importantly, collective bargaining allows employees to determine, through a democratic process, what standards are most important. Unions can negotiate contracts that contain protections tailored for immigrant workers, such as preserving a worker's right to her or his position and seniority for a period while attempting to adjust immigration status.

Yet in today's global economy, as corporations and their political agents are aggressively stripping workers of their rights, unions are losing leverage to organize and bargain collectively. Workplace standards are threatened by this decline: statutes will not continue to be extended and adapted without the force of a strong labour movement and government mechanisms and private enforcement cannot fully substitute for collective bargaining.

At least partially from this decline in collective bargaining, community-based worker centres have emerged as agents of change, using non-institutional collective action to achieve employment-related goals. While centres would surely gain from the institutional

resources, expertise, and political reach of organized labour, unions, in turn, would benefit greatly from the dynamism and creativity displayed by movement-based centres. Since the nineteenth century, organized labour has been a primary agent in social movements that expanded protections to all workers. Few of the most important pieces of workplace legislation, including the eight-hour day, health and safety protections, and antidiscrimination employment provisions, would not exist without unions and collective action (Hecksher and Carre, 2006). For organized labour to survive, it must rediscover its movement roots. Likewise, for the emerging worker centre movement to cement its growing influence, it must embrace certain institutional forms.

The Emergence of an AFL-CIO Program: The 2006 Resolution and its Immediate Aftermath

As noted, in the majority of locations, union-worker centre relationships were largely non-existent in 2006. In a 2004 survey, it was that only 14 percent of worker centres had directly connected to unions (Fine, 2006). Nonetheless, the emerging experiences and interactions between unions and centres inspired national and local labour leaders to pursue a new paradigm—one that built on the institutional capacity of organized labour and the social movement capacity of the worker centre movement.

National-level leaders understood the importance of forging connections at the local level. Creating movement synergy would require building trust among local stakeholders by: building relationships based on long-term commitments, overcoming cultural and language barriers, and addressing longstanding issues of racial and ethnic divisions that have plagued the labour movement. They also understood that the relationships needed to have a formal structure while leaving room for experimentation. This approach mirrored the tradition of the early AFL that historian Dorothy Sue Cobble describes as “chartering thousands of new local unions, aggressively seeking the affiliation of independent organizations, and actively promoting the creation of new national and international bodies” (1996: 1).

In August 2006, the AFL-CIO’s Executive Council unanimously passed a resolution, “Creating a National Worker Centre Partnership,” that called on organized labour at all levels to build and strengthen ties with worker centres in their communities.

The resolution acknowledged centres as “a vibrant and important part of today’s labour movement.” It declared that a “stronger relationship with the AFL-CIO will benefit both organized workers and the worker centres, which need an institutional relationship with the organized labour movement in order to translate gains they accomplish on behalf of the workers they serve into the lasting improvement of working conditions.” The AFL-CIO would bring its extensive national reach and policy and legal experience to the table, while worker centres would bring new energy and creativity.

To further advance these goals, the resolution authorized the AFL-CIO to issue “Certificates of Affiliation” to individual worker centres, or networks of centres, at the request of a state federation or central labour council, where the entities decided on a voluntary basis to form a mutually beneficial partnership. When issued, the Certificates authorize the worker centre(s) to affiliate with the state federation or local central labour council, giving them a role to strategize, develop programs, and participate in other official labour matters, “to build ties between these organizations and enable them to work cooperatively on issues of mutual concern.”

At the same 2006 meeting, the AFL-CIO entered into a national partnership with NDLO, the largest national worker centre network. The AFL-CIO later entered into similar agreements with four other national networks of worker centres, including the National Domestic Workers’ Alliance (NDWA) and the National Guestworker Alliance (NGA). Many local centres affiliated with these national networks have entered into agreements with state federations and local labour councils. These partnerships and affiliations are building a broader labour movement, providing worker centres with support and laying the groundwork for joint campaign work. Worker centre affiliations with unions helped some labour leaders to persuade members to invest in new organizing with centres. Some of the affiliations have yet to bear fruit. Nonetheless, the commitment reflected in an official Certificate of Affiliation is an important step toward building working partnerships.

Additionally, and in some ways more importantly, the resolution signaled openness and flexibility in the labour movement. Worker centres and unions began collaborating on a variety of successful campaigns in a growing number of locations, even where formal relationships did not exist. Before forging a formal partnership, The AFL-CIO joined with the National Guestworker Alliance (then

the “Alliance of Guestworkers for Dignity”) to fight for a group of foreign guestworkers, brought into the U.S. for construction work under temporary seasonal visas. The workers, recruited from Peru, Bolivia, El Salvador, and Costa Rica, paid thousands of dollars in fees to a recruiting agency for the jobs, only to find that the jobs that they had been promised did not exist. Instead, the recruiter had leased the workers to other contractors across the South, who put them to work in dangerous and low-wage jobs with no protective equipment or training (Raju, Lopez, and Castellanos-Contreras, 2009). With the Alliance’s assistance, workers began to organize. When workers set up a picket line outside the office, the recruiter threatened them with termination and deportation and several workers were fired.

To obtain the visas, the recruiter had to advertise the jobs and attest that no U.S. workers were available. Hundreds had replied to the ads—mostly African-American men—but had not been hired. The Alliance’s lawyer obtained all the visa applications from the Tennessee Department of Labour, and Alliance members set out to find the U.S. workers who had been rejected. Seeking to help both the guestworkers and the U.S. workers, the Alliance contacted the Tennessee AFL-CIO. Utilizing both the institution (the state labour federation) and the movement, the Tennessee AFL-CIO and the Alliance organized a Workers’ Rights Board Hearing in Nashville where a panel of clergy, labour and civil rights leaders heard testimony from the exploited guestworkers and the turned-away U.S. workers. The leaders endorsed the strike and, at the urging of both the state labour federation and the worker centre, the Tennessee Department of Labour launched an investigation of the recruiter, which eventually led to litigation and a monetary settlement for the workers.

Similarly, in the absence of a formal affiliation, a working partnership evolved among several Chicago area worker centres, the Illinois AFL-CIO, and the Chicago Federation of Labour. For several years, the state AFL-CIO had attempted to pass a state law to penalize employers misclassifying employees as independent contractors in the construction industry. In large part due to mistrust among some unions and the Black and Hispanic legislative caucuses leadership, these efforts had been unsuccessful. Finally, in 2006, the worker centres joined with the state federation to lobby the legislature for the misclassification law, explaining how worker centres’ members (who were mainly Latino and African-American)

were often among those cheated by employers who misclassified them as independent contractors. The centres also informed the caucus leaders that they were now working with the building trades unions to get more African-American and Latino workers into apprenticeship programs. The misclassification law was enacted in the very next legislative session, and now the unions and centres work together to enforce it.

Evolution of the AFL-CIO Program: Case Studies

As demonstrated by the Tennessee and Chicago campaigns, the collaborative process initiated by the AFL-CIO's 2006 resolution began to reshape local organizing strategies, often without the formalities of official affiliations. The resolution provided an opportunity for the AFL-CIO's network of institutions to explore creative ways to win demands, building power with worker centres. The passage of that 2006 AFL-CIO resolution also signaled to centres that the AFL-CIO was committed to community engagement and could be depended upon to provide resources and infrastructure to movement-based centres, whether through formal affiliations or during joint campaigns. It also marked the beginning of many joint lobbying campaigns, driven by the AFL-CIO's political infrastructure, especially under AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka. Trumka himself has thrown his weight behind community-based campaigns centred on issues ranging from immigration reform, to fair domestic work.

Six years have passed since the 2006 AFL-CIO resolution, providing a basis to examine the efficacy of national worker centre partnerships in bridging the gap between movement and institution. Through five campaign case studies, we will evaluate the ways in which unions have triangulated their strengths to gain collective power. The cases reveal important lessons for labour practitioners who wish to build a more inclusive, movement-based unionism that is well placed to institutionalize its gains.

International Labour Standards for Domestic Workers

In 2009, the AFL-CIO and the NDWA began a collaboration to raise the level of recognition for domestic workers and establish labour standards in the industry. The campaign started when domestic workers around the country began to build relationships with local unions to gain support for organizing and policy initiatives. These

initiatives included local campaigns to enact various state and local (e.g. New York and California); to explore new models of collective bargaining for domestic workers; and to create administrative and regulatory changes at state and federal Departments of Labour.

The International Labour Organization's (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention (Convention 189) offered a unique opportunity to build relationships. As the idea of establishing labour standards for domestic workers was working its way through the ILO process, domestic workers were building a worldwide movement. The institution and movement came together in 2010, when the ILO's annual International Labour Conference (ILC) included an item entitled "[d]ecent work for domestic workers, for second discussion, with a view to the adoption of a comprehensive standard (a Convention supplemented by a Recommendation)" (ILO, 2011). The domestic worker movement did not easily fit within the institution of the ILO, a tripartite body where workers (represented solely by trade unions), employers, and governments create international labour law. No formal role exists for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at the ILO; NGOs are relegated to "observer" status and have no formal voice. Because of the formal partnership between the AFL-CIO (the representative for U.S. workers at ILO) and the NDWA, however, a domestic worker from a California-based NDWA chapter, Juana Flores, secured a spot as a member of the U.S. worker delegation with full voting rights in the standard-setting process.

The AFL-CIO met some initial union resistance to including a NGO representative in the process, but that dissipated as the domestic worker movement grew around the world. In May 2011, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the global trade union federation, at the AFL-CIO's request, sent a circular to all its affiliates encouraging them to include domestic workers as voting delegates to the ILO, as AFL-CIO planned. Eleven trade union representatives ceded their seats to a domestic worker during the first year of the ILO process; eighteen did so the second year.

Domestic workers' direct participation at the ILO led to the successful enactment of the Convention. That participation gave the process moral authority. Moreover, the participation of the domestic workers built in the expertise of those most affected by the lack of standards to shape the Convention. On June 16, 2011, the ILO adopted Convention 189, to the cheers of trade unionists, domestic workers, governments, and even some employers. The domestic

workers' movement made that moment a reality and organized labour—through its institutional power—helped to solidify the movement's demands.

The Secure Communities Program (S-Comm)

One of the most dangerous immigration enforcement programs for workers in the U.S. today is the so-called “Secure Communities” program (S-Comm). This entangles Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE, a division of the Department of Homeland Security) and state and local law enforcement agencies. It authorizes local police to automatically share fingerprints with ICE of anyone booked in federal, state, or local jails. As the program operates pre-conviction, crime victims, witnesses, and others who come into police contact are often caught in this dragnet.

In the past two years, ICE has expanded this program at an alarming rate. In 2013, the Obama administration plans to expand S-Comm nationwide, despite its tendency to encourage racial profiling and divide families. Immigrant communities report that police arrest individuals under questionable circumstances only to run their fingerprints through S-Comm, and even share the fingerprints of crime victims with ICE. Not surprisingly, the program has chilled crime and workplace violation reports. Distrust of police has grown in immigrant communities, and many law enforcement officers express frustration at the inability to work with immigrants. Employers benefit from S-Comm in that immigration enforcement is used as a club to deter immigrant worker complaints (Smith, Avendaño, Martínez-Ortega, 2009). For example, in Southern California, a day labourer was deported after his contractor called the police, wrongfully accusing the worker of theft when the worker complained about unpaid wages.

NDLON began a campaign against S-Comm in 2010 with results that surprised many: The District of Columbia opted out of the program, followed by Illinois, New York, and Massachusetts. Day labourers, along with other worker centre leaders, aggressively confronted public officials at town halls, staged sit-ins at ICE offices, and convinced members of Congress to denounce the program. The efforts received wide publicity. ICE, facing such criticism, had to respond to the public outcry. It established a “Taskforce on Secure Communities” to address “concerns about the program and solicit recommendations” (see: Homeland Security Advisory Council,

September 2011). NDLON was not invited to participate on the taskforce, nor were any other grassroots organizations. Many feared the task force would merely serve as a public-relations rubber stamp for the program.

The AFL-CIO and two of its affiliated unions were appointed to the taskforce, along with other mainstream civil society organizations and local law enforcement agents. The AFL-CIO made clear from the outset it would represent the interests of both affiliates and community partners. Accordingly, the AFL-CIO representative convened frequent telephone calls with NDLON so the two organizations could share information, strategize, and attempt to find ways for community partners to participate meaningfully. After three months of deliberation, the task force's focus for a report became S-Comm as a public relations, not a policy, problem. The AFL-CIO and union representatives resigned in opposition to the report, thereby denying the government the endorsement it sought from institutional stakeholders.

NDLON's grassroots activism created a movement powerful enough to cause important elected officials to denounce the program, which forced ICE to establish the task force—a victory that organized labour could not have produced alone. The AFL-CIO's institutional power established a community voice in the taskforce that helped shift the public policy debate. While S-Comm remains a threat to communities, the crisis S-Comm creates among immigrant communities and law enforcement is now widely understood in policymaking circles. This shifting narrative, the result of both institutional and movement strategies, has precipitated further collaboration. In California, after the lobbying efforts of more than 50 organizations, including NDLON and the California AFL-CIO, the state senate recently passed a bill that would allow communities to opt out of S-Comm and would set minimum standards for information sharing.

New York Taxi Workers' Alliance

As worker centres become more sophisticated, they are increasingly seeking ways to institutionalize their victories. For example, the New York City's Taxi Workers Alliance (NYTWA) is building a new kind of union to adapt to contract employment arrangements that are not covered by the NLRA. New York taxi drivers lost union representation in the 1980s after a structural shift

in the organization of employer-employee relations in the industry left the drivers as nominal independent contractors. Nevertheless, taxi drivers in the NYTWA engaged in strikes and other job actions to achieve increased pay and other improvements in working conditions. Like a labour union, the NYTWA is funded largely through member dues.

In 2006, this worker centre was the first to affiliate formally with AFL-CIO Central Labour Council. The Taxi Workers promptly changed their letterhead to reflect that affiliation, and began to leverage the power of the affiliation to improve conditions for taxi workers. In 2012, the Taxi Workers won health coverage when they negotiated with the NYC Taxi and Limousine Commission a fare increase, a portion of which is designated to a health and welfare fund for the drivers.

In September 2011 NYTWA joined with the Unified Drivers of Pennsylvania to form the National Taxi Worker Alliance (NTWA) and, at that time, they were granted an Organizing Charter by the AFL-CIO. The charter gives the National Taxi Workers Alliance status as an affiliate of the AFL-CIO. The Alliance is now working with the AFL-CIO Organizing Department to build 30 locals of taxi drivers across the U.S. in the next seven years – all unified under the national charter.

Voces de la Frontera

Another worker centre, *Voces de la Frontera (Voces)* in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is exploring a transition from a community-based organization to a more formal structure that can institutionalize an organizing victory. Initiated in 2001 as a grassroots organization of immigrant and low-wage workers, *Voces* is a member-led organization with a strong base in Southeastern Wisconsin, where 80 percent of the state's Latinos reside. Building on their relationships in the Latino community, *Voces* members working at a local pizza factory began to organize in response to abusive working conditions. When the employer learned of the effort, it sent out a notice requiring many workers to re-verify their immigration status, a well-known union-busting strategy. Workers refused. Over 150 walked off the job. They have been on strike since June 2012. They demanded recognition as the Palermo Workers' Union, but the employer responded by firing workers, including many of the striking workers who did not re-verify and permanently replacing other strikers.

The verification demand was discovered to be an employer intimidation tactic, but it was initially unclear (due to the opaque information received) if ICE had issued the order. A few months before the strike, the AFL-CIO and the United Steel Workers (USW) joined *Voces* and the Palermo workers in the campaign. The AFL-CIO provided legal support on the verification issue and was able to persuade ICE to stay any enforcement action resulting from its audit of the employer's records, the first time it had ever made such a move. The ICE decision sets an important precedent for future organizing efforts, since immigration enforcement frequently undermines worker demands during labour disputes.

The campaign's ultimate goals are to win the strike and form a union at Palermo's Pizza, while creating an organizational structure that allows members to simultaneously bargain collectively with their employer and belong to *Voces'* Worker Centre. If successful, this may serve as an opportunity to explore how a worker centre transitions to a legally recognized bargaining representative.

CLEAN Carwash Initiative

In Los Angeles, years of union-worker centre collaboration and community engagement are leading to an appealing model for organizing against coercive, low-wage employers, and activating local partnerships to contribute to overall community development. The CLEAN (Community Labour Environmental Action Network) Initiative is an innovative community-labour partnership that seeks to create a new type of institution: a union-worker centre hybrid. The initiative emphasizes the power that comes with synergistic workplace and community organizing, stressing the need to institutionalize worker-community partnerships.

The carwash is central in Southern California's culture. There are over 500 carwashes and over 10,000 carwash workers in the Los Angeles metropolitan area. The industry operates nearly universally outside the law. The vast majority of workers are Latino and monolingual in Spanish, and a high percentage are undocumented. Workers are regularly exposed to dangerous chemicals without adequate protective gear, are routinely denied breaks, and often work 50-60 hours a week in poorly ventilated and damp areas, commonly below minimum wage (if not tips only) and without overtime compensation. The average carwash worker earns \$12,500 annually with no benefits.

Many carwash workers cannot turn to publicly funded legal services organizations for assistance because these organizations are barred from representing undocumented workers. Given strained public budgets, state enforcement of workplace laws is barely visible. The CLEAN Carwash Initiative arose following several years of attempts by community groups in L.A. to expose the industry's rampant wage theft practices. Pro bono attorneys and their carwash worker clients came to realize that, although they were winning nearly every case, they were not achieving any form of systemic change. The carwash owners simply saw the financial consequences of violations as a cost of doing business—one that intermittently required them to pay what they owed initially.

Over time community groups, attorneys, and workers came to recognize that enforcement of the carwash workers' claims would not achieve lasting change. Rather, workers needed to establish monitoring and enforcement mechanisms in the workplace through collective bargaining. In 2006, the community groups approached the AFL-CIO and the USW suggesting a labour-community partnership that resulted in the formation of CLEAN Carwash Initiative. Thus far, the initiative has led to three unionized carwashes. The goal of the carwash workers is to collectively bargain contracts as members of a self-sustaining local affiliate of the USW, with the protections of an industry-wide agreement and grievance-arbitration dispute resolution. The union local will not only be shaped by members, but also the community, functioning as a "community union." The union will bargain to improve labour standards and enforce contractual rights, while also functioning as a worker centre, providing cultural, social, and educational services.

The CLEAN model exists in the intersection between traditional union organizing and a dynamic alternative community-based social movement approach. Given that virtually the entire L.A. carwash industry operates below minimum standards, the Initiative pushes employers to comply with mandated standards through targeted litigation, administrative complaints, social mobilization, and public education. Unionization is critical to ensuring that standards are maintained and expanded through collective bargaining. The CLEAN strategy also seeks to build an identity among carwash workers as both economic actors and participants in political life. In this vein, the Carwash Organizing Committee (CWOC), made up of workers from dozens of carwashes, union and nonunion, convenes

regularly to share workplace strategies, participate in trainings and leadership development, lobby politicians, and build solidarity in the community and among workers.

The CLEAN strategy depends on fostering strong relationships among community-based organizations. Strategic decisions are made by a Steering Committee and a Community Advisory Board (CAB) composed of representatives of organized labour, worker centres and other community-based organizations. This level of strategic engagement between labour and community makes them integral partners in a broad struggle for justice across the carwash industry. The labour-community partnership is not merely a campaign tactic; it is a defining institutional feature.

CLEAN has recently partnered with St. John's Well Child and Family Centre, a local community health centre, to secure improved access to tailored, low-cost or free health care for carwash workers and their families. As part of this program, carwash workers have become engaged in St. John's Right to Health Committee, which deals with aspects of healthcare access in under-served communities. Through subcommittees, the workers are involved in civic engagement and community outreach about healthcare inequality and encourage community feedback on how St. John's runs the clinic.

The CLEAN Initiative focuses much of its efforts in South LA, an area plagued by poverty and a lack of opportunity, and a history of racial unrest. Since carwash workers both live and work in South L.A., it is an ideal location for labour-community partnerships to explore methods to bring long-lasting improvements to the local economy. While the CLEAN Initiative currently focuses on the carwash industry, it seeks to develop a model transferable to other industries that employ immigrant workers and operate outside of labour laws. A recent study of the low-wage labour market in the three largest U.S. cities—Chicago, Los Angeles and New York—reveals that workers in many other low-wage industries face exploitative conditions similar to those in the car wash industry. In these three cities alone, workers lost over \$56 million per week due to wage theft. (Bernhardt, Milkman, Theodore et al., 2009). The immediacy of the problem and the need for a solution is apparent. The CLEAN Initiative's new hybrid organizing model based in community-labour partnerships could potentially be replicated to benefit workers across the country.

Expanding Relationships: Labour Innovation for the Twenty-First Century Fund (LIFT)

The labour movement's expansion into non-traditional relationships is also reflected in the AFL-CIO's new partnerships with the philanthropic community. Philanthropists have in large part funded worker centres and their networks that typically do not have established funding streams. In 2011, the AFL-CIO joined with the Ford Foundation, the New World Foundation and the Solidago Foundation to establish the Labour Innovation for the Twenty-First Century Fund (LIFT). The LIFT Fund aims to support and highlight innovative community-labour partnerships that are broadening the reach of the labour movement and building collective worker power in innovative ways. The grantees span the country, are demographically diverse, and include AFL-CIO affiliates, like the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), The American Federation of Teachers (AFT), the Labourers Union (LIUNA), USW, NTLA, and the Northern New Mexico Labour Council.

In its first round of grant making in the fall of 2012, LIFT selected 11 organizations to be featured and awarded support in amounts ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000. The recipient projects include:

- a pilot campaign of four New Jersey day labourer centres to target residential construction contractors to establish collective bargaining agreements with LIUNA locals and obtain jobs for day labourer and worker centre members;
- a project in New Orleans to win good employment for local workers in the city's redevelopment; to win key policies that guarantee inclusion and opportunity for African-American workers in the city's redevelopment; and to create career ladders and shift the construction industry from temporary day labour work to permanent construction work.
- a project to build local organizational capacity, membership, and a dues base for the National Taxi Workers' Alliance;
- a joint organizing campaign of a worker centre, AFSCME and AFT and a teachers' union based on a social movement model with the goal of organizing 10,000 new early childcare providers and homecare workers in Vermont;
- the *Voces* campaign to form a union in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and create an organizational structure that enables members to

bargain collectively with their employer and simultaneously belong to the work centre;

- a collaboration between a worker centre and labour council in New Mexico focused on building worker committees in the tourism industry;
- an effort by a coalition of unions and day labour centres in Texas to engage in policy advocacy and support non-standard organizing strategies around employer codes of conduct;
- a binational U.S.-Mexico effort led by a worker centre and AFT to bring direct worker participation to the issue of international labour recruitment, to promote worker involvement in the creation of tools to support guestworker organizing, and to include workers' perspectives in the development of core principles for reform;
- support for NDLO and DWA in relation to their national partnerships with the AFL-CIO; and
- the CLEAN Carwash Initiative's effort to explore the intersection of community health organizing and workplace organizing in South L.A.

Conclusion

Worker centres and unions are experimenting with different organizing tactics and strategies, accessing different working populations, sharing experiences and developing best practices. The aforementioned case studies and other experiences with community-labour partnerships that have occurred since these partnerships became an institutional priority of the AFL-CIO bring to light many important points for labour practitioners. The following lessons emerge from the AFL-CIO's experience.

Build on mutual interest. Overcoming conflicting self-interest can be challenging, especially in times of high unemployment. Worker centre-union partnerships advance when parties see that the collaboration benefits workers served by both organizations by building worker power, raising labour standards, or building infrastructure. The collaboration, described above, between the Alliance of Guestworkers and Tennessee labour unions led to a shared analysis and actions that held employers accountable to the benefit of workers served by both movements.

Address misperceptions directly. Because worker centres and their networks and trade unions developed independently, some

organizational ignorance exists about what the other does. Education and dialogue have been central to building strong partnerships. In Seattle, Washington, a worker centre that serves as a dispatch centre for day labourers had met with some resistance from local construction unions when the centre attempted to sit alongside the unions on a local government task force. That resistance was based on a belief held by the unions that the centre was dispatching workers to non-union competitor contractors. Conversations among centre and union leaders revealed the opposite to be true: the worker centre purposely did not dispatch workers to non-union commercial contractors. Rather, it had been looking for a better way to track contractors, and asked the unions for help in developing that system. The worker centre now works with the local unions to address a number of shared concerns, including the problem of eroding labour standards for migrant workers, and job creation initiatives.

Understand the changing demographics of the workforce. The changing demographics of the workforce can be an important factor in making the case for effective collaboration. A worker centre in Austin, Texas, *Proyecto Defensa Laboral* (PDL), conducted a research study of Austin's construction industry, finding that approximately 80 percent of workers in the local construction industry were foreign-born. Moreover, few of these workers were union members. In sharing this data with the unions, the centre highlighted why the unions had a strategic self-interest in developing a partnership with PDL to expand their mutual reach and power in the industry.

Confront racial and ethnic divisions. Like society as a whole, the labour movement has been plagued by long-standing racial and ethnic divisions, which in many cases have made it difficult for unions to gain acceptance in communities of colour and with immigrant workers. In recent years the AFL-CIO has undertaken new efforts to confront those divisions and adopted policies that foster diversity and inclusiveness (see: AFL-CIO, 2005). The labour movement's new approach to immigration referenced above is one of those policies.

Support relationship building. Before the 2006 AFL-CIO Resolution, relationships between labour practitioners, labour leaders, and worker centres had been, for the most part, transactional, focused on solving a specific problem, or on a particular campaign. Building relationships requires intentional spaces for building trust,

strategic thinking, and critical evaluation. The AFL-CIO has now created a Worker Centre Partnership Advisory Board consisting of local and national labour leaders, worker centre leaders, and academics. The Board will meet in person at least once a year to strategize, share practices, and address the difficult issues that occasionally arise.

Develop new metrics. The success of building a new type of labour movement cannot be measured by standard metrics. In many cases, it may take years, if ever, for many union-worker centre partnerships to develop into collective bargaining agreements in low-wage workplaces. As the economy and employment relations shift, traditional organizing, too, is less effective. More qualitative analyses of collective worker power in given industries and communities may be required in many cases.

By working together, unions and worker centres have envisioned a broad and inclusive labour movement made up of both union and non-union workers. The partnerships with worker centres and, in turn, their networks have made new organizing models possible and have enabled unions and centres to build on their respective and complementary strengths. Although long-standing cultural concerns and organizational differences have posed challenges, and will no doubt continue to do so, the challenges overcome thus far offer hope for continued partnerships. Within the last decade, the AFL-CIO has shifted notably in its support for community-based organizing strategies. In turn, both union and worker centre activists are becoming increasingly aware of a diverse set of strategies to build worker power through movement building. In today's economy, marked by austerity, precarious work, and runaway corporate power, it is in these developments that the labour movement may be able to reclaim its place as a countervailing force in the capitalist system.

Endnotes

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