

**From Economic to Political Mobilization:
Working-Class Organizing Targets the State¹**

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**** DRAFT—PLEASE DO NOT CITE WITHOUT AUTHOR’S PERMISSION ****

The American labor movement has traditionally focused on the economic sphere. With a strong syndicalist history, it has favored militant action on the job (Kimeldorf 1999). Lacking viable labor parties through which they could press their demands in the political realm, activists have instead sought to secure protections for workers through economic, workplace-based actions. The contemporary American labor movement was born of such workplace actions when the sit-down strike wave of the mid-1930s ushered in the unionization of workers in mass industry and the formation of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). Although labor unions have attempted to exert their influence on public officials through financial contributions and lobbying, working-class collective action continued to take place primarily on the shop floor. American workers have engaged

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throughout U.S. history in a variety of workplace job actions, but civil strikes protesting state policies such as those found in Europe, Latin America and elsewhere have been rare—especially in the post-World War II era.

Successful collective action on the job, however, has become increasingly difficult. Due primarily to changes in the structures of global capitalism—in particular, to neoliberal restructuring, and its consequences for labor markets and workplace power—economic struggle has become a less viable strategy for most workers. Under such circumstances, how have workers been seeking to press their demands? What organizing strategies have been put forward in lieu of the classic point-of-production model? How can we conceptualize the kinds of working-class mobilizations that have been taking place in response to neoliberal reforms, and what are their implications?

In this paper I seek to answer these questions by exploring the routes that workers have taken to press their demands in the contemporary political economy. In particular, I argue that the shift underway is best conceptualized as a turn to the political sphere, as workers shy away from targeting employers and instead set their sights on the state. Some scholars have emphasized how union and community-based organizing strategies have been brought together, which is a hallmark of “social movement unionism” (Clawson 2003; Fantasia and Voss 2004; Kelley 1997; Reynolds 1999). Such characterizations emphasize the *melding* of economic and political strategies and they do indeed capture an important dynamic. But they likewise obscure important developments in the opposite direction. I suggest that there is a different trend underfoot that has received far less attention—that is, the *bifurcation* of strategies, with only those workers in strategically powerful locations being in a position to take the economic route while others must resort to seeking change through mobilization in the political sphere.

In this paper I will examine the living wage movement as an icon of these new political strategies. I will focus on one particular case, the Chicago Jobs and Living Wage campaign, in order to get a more nuanced view of these recent mobilizations. I will use the interview testimony of activists who were engaged in Chicago's living wage fight in order to get some purchase on what these political struggles look like on the ground. This study relies on in-depth interviews with 24 respondents conducted in the spring and summer of 2004. While it incorporates interviews from the campaign's rank-and-file, this paper focuses on the testimony of key activists, leaders, and staff who are better positioned to interpret the strategic and organizational shifts afoot.² The interview data shed light on how participants view this strategic shift and its implications for the direction of American labor. I find that political mobilization is seen as constituting a better way to secure material gain for the working class in the current political economic climate. But more important than any material incentives, labor's recent political struggles have inspired new ideas about the state, shifted perceptions of the 'opposition,' and transformed working-class organizations themselves.

American Labor in Crisis

American labor activists have historically focused less attention on the political sphere compared to their counterparts in Western Europe, and American workers have expected less in the way of benefits from the state. Health care, in particular, stands out as something that, while assumed to be the jurisdiction of the state in other Western

² Respondents were mainly selected through snowball sampling using recommendations from participants, and then further screened to assure representativeness in terms of demographic characteristics and organizational affiliation. The interviews were supplemented by some limited participant observation, which included spending time at offices of the relevant unions and community organizations. Archival material was drawn from both the mainstream and alternative press including metropolitan-area, local, community, and union publications. In addition to newspaper and magazine articles, the data include organizational meeting minutes, leaflets, newsletters, educational materials, and internal memos.

industrialized countries, in the American context is acquired primarily on the job. With the exception a few long-standing programs such as Social Security, American labor has put all their eggs in the union contract basket.

But the basket has been turned upside down, and workers are now scrambling to keep all the eggs from falling out. In the neoliberal context of heightened capital mobility and the global “race to the bottom,” the post-war “labor-management accord” has been almost entirely eroded. With labor markets more global, and more flexible, than ever before, even unionized workers have little bargaining power with respect to their much more powerful employers. Conventional workplace organizing has been increasingly met with hostility from corporations and government alike (Bronfenbrenner et al. 1998; Clawson 2003; Reynolds 2004). And corporate power has come to dominate the National Labor Relations Board (Greenhouse 2007), which monitors and certifies union elections, such that legal protections for unionization are arguably non-existent. Unionization rates have consequently followed a steady downward trend, so that in 2007 a mere 7.5 percent of private sector employees in the United States were unionized (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2008).

Some workers are still able to exert economic leverage to press their demands, but they are a select few who have found themselves in strategically advantageous positions. Bonacich and Wilson (2007), for example, have documented the increasing use of tight supply chains, a practice spearheaded by Wal-Mart whose business model dominates large sectors of the economy. While this “logistics revolution” has catapulted Wal-Mart and other large corporations into positions of economic dominance, at the same time it presents for such companies new vulnerabilities, since long supply lines and just-in-time production leaves employers increasingly vulnerable to disruptions at key bottlenecks in today’s highly

integrated production networks (Bonacich and Wilson 2007; also see Bonacich 2003 and Olney 2003). Some transportation and distribution workers thus find themselves in strategically advantageous positions, since even a small disruption can have immediate effects far down the supply chain. Such economic leverage has been exerted repeatedly by autoworkers now laboring under just-in-time production and other such systems. And it has been exhibited on a grand scale by the economic ripple effects springing from the job actions of longshoreman in recent years.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of workers do not enjoy this kind of economic leverage. With the increased casualization of labor—more part-time, contingent, and temporary work—workers’ connections to employers are increasingly tenuous, and they lack the kind of job security that has emboldened labor in the past. Long-term relationships with employers are like a quaint memory, such that workers can now expect to change jobs frequently throughout their lifetime. Employment insecurity, which is known to hinder rather than inspire militant action (Kaufman 1982: 479), has been taken to new heights in recent years. Even formerly stable union strongholds, like auto work, are being taken over by subcontracted, deunionized, less-stable operations. Most American workers, in short, do not have the kind of security and leverage on the job that bolsters militant organizing in the economic sphere.

Lacking disruptive power on the job, what kinds of alternative organizing strategies have such workers been using? Finding themselves in a weak labor market position, with tenuous connections to employers and occupations, most workers are unable to muster the kind of economic leverage that has been traditionally utilized in working-class mobilizations in the U.S. Instead, as Fine has argued, “low-wage workers in American society today have greater political than economic power” such that they have had more success achieving

changes in public policy than addressing grievances through direct labor market intervention (2005:156, also see Black 2005:31). Johnston has conceptualized this shift as “the resurgence of labor as a citizenship movement” (2001; also see Johnston 2000). He points to a number of recent trends, including the rise of low-wage and immigrant workers’ movements, and temporary workers’ unions:

Our argument is that despite the diversity, the different labor movements emerging in each of the circumstances we have discussed all seek to defend, exercise, and extend the boundaries of citizenship, and all these labor movements converge with other citizenship movements that seek to develop public institutions that defend and rebuild local communities in an increasingly globalized public order. (2001:35)

There are indications as well that this shift is occurring in multiple locations across the globe. Agarwala’s study of mobilization among informal sector workers in India likewise uncovers a shift away from traditional class-based mobilization where “the primary nexus of tension is between the organized formal proletariat and employers,” toward workers organizing as citizens to demand benefits from the welfare state (2006:426). Under this new model India’s growing ranks of informal workers organize “through slums, rather than work sites” and they “make demands on welfare benefits (such as health and education), rather than workers’ rights (such as minimum wage and job security)” (Agarwala 2006:432,428). To the extent that global capitalism and neoliberal economic policies pressure traditional formal sector workers in similar ways across the globe, we might expect to see this trend replicated elsewhere.³

In the United States, the living wage movement is an icon of these new political strategies. Indeed, the rank-and-file of the Chicago living wage campaign was full of workers

³ There is historical evidence, as well, that such dynamics have occurred in other times and places. Somers (1997:92) challenges the meta-narrative that working-class formation parallels capitalist development, uncovering instead how the formation of the English working class was founded on pursuit of the political and legal rights of citizenship.

who were unable to address their grievances through economic action—health care workers whose wages were constrained by public funding, candy factory workers whose wages and benefits were being cut while their hours increased, casual workers and day laborers who had no stable employer to which they could appeal. These workers were, however, able to make their voices heard in the political arena and make some headway on their demands by appealing to the state.

Political Mobilization and the Living Wage Movement

The call for a “living wage” has become a key part of efforts to keep working families above the poverty level—something that existing minimum wage laws have failed to secure. The intent is to hold public entities accountable for their labor practices, and to legislate a living wage for the employees of firms and organizations receiving public contracts or subsidies. The first major living wage campaign succeeded in securing legislation in Baltimore in 1994 through extensive grassroots mobilization. The success in that city was soon replicated elsewhere, with campaigns springing up across the country and nearly 150 city or county ordinances in place (Living Wage Resource Center 2007). Although usually aimed at the municipal level, living wage campaigns have also targeted counties, universities, and other entities.

Not all living wage legislation is a product of extensive struggle. Living wage campaigns vary greatly in terms of their breadth, the degree of conflict, and the extent to which they rely on collective action and grassroots mobilization (Luce 2004). Some campaigns are won relatively easily due to sympathetic politicians or a favorable political climate, and so require limited mobilization by supporters. Nevertheless, one of the key features of the living wage phenomenon has been its ability to mobilize people—in

particular, those who have been left out of more traditional labor union strategies. The campaign that is the focus of this study consisted of an extensive grassroots effort that succeeded in mobilizing workers from all sectors of the economy and all walks of life. In the case examined here, low-wage workers from the more ‘marginal’ sectors of the working class clashed with—and won against—Chicago’s powerful political machine. Mayor Daly had historically dominated city council such that the aldermen rarely went on record in opposition to the mayor. And so when Daly came out against the ordinance, the stage was set for a long and difficult battle.

Launched in June of 1995, the Chicago Jobs and Living Wage Campaign involved a large and diverse coalition of organizations and workers coming at the issue from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives. More than 60 organizations were involved, from neighborhood groups to unions and community organizations. Spearheading the effort was the Chicago-based Illinois ACORN (the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now), a grassroots membership-based organization. ACORN was joined in the campaign by its long time ally, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 880, a union of home care workers⁴ and childcare providers, and by the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless (CCH), who brought shelter residents and day laborers into the campaign. Traditional labor unions were also brought into the fold. Thousands of people mobilized throughout the course of the campaign, with individual events drawing hundreds—and up to a thousand or more—demonstrators. The campaign employed a variety of grassroots tactics to put pressure on public officials, including many large rallies and demonstrations. Finally, after three long years of struggle, after countless meetings and marches and visits to

⁴ Home care workers are personal assistants for the elderly and people with disabilities. Clients, requiring assistance with personal care and other basic needs, are cared for in their own homes in lieu of being institutionalized.

aldermen, activists won passage of a living wage ordinance in July of 1998 covering for-profit city contractors and subcontractors.

While the mobilization was extensive and the victory impressive, in the end only some 600 workers would see a raise in their paychecks (Spielman 1998).⁵ While the additional compensation was crucial for these 600 workers, the significance of this victory went well beyond its arguably limited material gains. Perhaps most fundamentally, living wage activists saw political mobilization as offering hope for a dying labor movement:

The whole prospect—in a time when no matter how hard the unions work, they lose ground—the prospect of winning labor struggles from a different type of organization where you don’t have to be just all at the same workplace, you don’t have to just be working on your own immediate self-interest, but where people who are working-class people can come together on the basis of their wanting to change the balance of power around labor-management issues, but do it from a community-government perspective. I think the prospects of that are the positive thing that’s out there on the labor scene. We’re in big trouble with good unions, good progressive unions, getting killed. But what’s really hopeful to me is the campaigns that have come out of living wage and the statewide minimum wage and expansion of living wage and now this “big box” living wage [targeting Wal-Mart and similar retailers]. The prospects are so huge for us in Chicago, where hope has been dim, where it’s just very difficult.

From this activists’ perspective, gaining ground for workers through traditional trade unions has proven untenable in the current political economic climate: “no matter how hard unions work, they lose ground.” The “community-government perspective” is seen as the viable strategic alternative.

A crucial part of this shift for American labor is that it has turned to the state to secure benefits previously thought to be the responsibility of employers. The experience of SEIU Local 880 is instructive. Prior to the Chicago living wage campaign Local 880 sought gains for their members primarily through the more traditional route of union contract

⁵ The final ordinance, subject to last minute negotiations, required at least \$7.60 an hour and included the following job categories: home and health care workers, security guards, parking attendants, day laborers, cashiers, elevator operators, custodial workers and clerical workers.

negotiations. But, as articulated by a union staff person with respect to workers' frustrations when dealing with their corporate employers: you can only get "so much blood from the stone." Having hit a wall in the economic sphere, Local 880 decided to take the political route. This strategic shift did indeed succeed in securing better compensation for the union's members:

On so many levels: it transformed the wage scale in the private sector home care in the city; it led to a living wage movement in the state that moved our folks and those 500 people [who were covered by the Chicago living wage ordinance] up to \$7.60; then a year later, [a state-level campaign] moved our other 10 or 15,000 members up to an 8% increase and then a dollar the following year. I mean, those things didn't happen in a vacuum. Prior to that, we were lucky if we got 10 or 15 cents a year.

When targeting employers in contract negotiations, SEIU members saw small incremental gains that failed to keep up with the cost of living. In switching to a political strategy, their wage gains were much more substantial.

But the changes underway are not merely about securing greater material compensation for the working class. They are also about the shifting perceptions of activists themselves, and changes within working-class organizations. Appealing to the state to address class-based grievances, for example, entails a different understanding of power structures and class relations: Who is the opposition? Where does power reside? And who is responsible for ensuring workers' wellbeing? The answers to these questions began to change for those who had been through the living wage campaign:

It became much more real to people where the money really comes into the pipeline: that it's partially the boss, but it's also the state. And that it made the state a target much more than it has been probably prior to that. I think prior to that most people just naturally saw their boss as their enemy, or as the person that was keeping them from making a decent wage. And now: so it wasn't just the boss, it was the state. It can be the boss, but it wasn't just the boss; it was a missed situation, you know?

Campaign participants thus came to expect more from the politicians who represented them. Where Chicago's aldermen had traditionally been called upon to address relatively narrow concerns among their constituency, campaign participants came to see public officials as responsible for a much broader agenda:

[The living wage campaign] was also an attempt to have public officials accountable for more than just "do I get my garbage can?" . . . I think the thing that was new was that the aldermen were now being asked to take a stand on a quality of life, quality of wages issue that they had never been asked to take a stand on. They are always asked, you know—garbage cans, this, that, and the other thing. The strongest issues in your aldermanic campaign is streets and sanitation, garbage, and that's it. But this was a new one where they were forcing their aldermen to take a stand on an issue that had to do with the type of jobs in the city of Chicago and what the city should be putting their money into. Should they be paying a living wage? And that just catapulted the whole—after we did the campaign, everybody was talking about living wage jobs. And you can see now, all the politicians when they run for office—even Republicans—are saying "we need jobs with living wages." Living wages was not even part of the political discourse prior to 96-97.

The living wage campaign offered a fresh take on the responsibilities of politicians and their obligations toward the citizenry. ACORN, for example, had lobbied politicians in the past, but the demands had been more limited and, moreover, they had never before focused on the entire city council. In short, what it meant to be a citizen (in terms of what you could expect and demand of politicians) and what it meant to be a politician (in terms of what you were expected to provide for the citizenry) were transformed.

Of course, corporate control of the political process has the potential to impede labor's legislative gains. From the perspective of organizers in Chicago, however, the political sphere has proved to have some 'give' whereas the private sector has not. Although the American political system is less than an ideal democracy, with financial and corporate interests dominating political agendas, there is still some semblance of public accountability that is all but nonexistent in corporate boardrooms. There are institutional mechanisms in

place in the political sphere that democratic movements can utilize in pressing their claims. The mere fact that politicians are elected and that they are supposed to be public servants presents multiple opportunities and pressure points for activists.

Indeed, the threat of ousting aldermen from their posts on city council proved crucial to the ultimate success of the Chicago living wage campaign. At one point living wage supporters pushed for a vote on the issue even though they expected to lose. With Mayor Daly having come out in opposition to the ordinance, only 17 aldermen voted in support of a living wage, with 31 against, in July 1997.⁶ Although the campaign clearly faced an uphill battle, the council's stance had become a matter of official public record. Individual aldermen could now be held accountable for their position. With the 1999 elections approaching, the living wage slogan became "Payback Time in '99!" This was more than an idle threat. Because of a vacated council seat and a special election, living wage supporters had the opportunity to demonstrate that they could force a candidate to take a positive stance on the issue. It was becoming clear that they had the political muscle to effect the outcome of city council elections and that there would indeed be consequences for those who did not support a living wage. Democracy was far from perfect, as demonstrated by the strength of Daly's political machine, but it gave low-wage workers in Chicago some room to maneuver.

Moreover, because of the success of living wage campaigns and other such initiatives, the very nature of working-class organizations themselves is being remade. Traditional trade unions have been struggling just to maintain already low membership numbers and to beat back a tide of concessions on health care, job protection, and other issues. Community organizations have begun to take up the slack and are being viewed

⁶ The council technically voted to table a motion to have a vote on a living wage ordinance, but it was widely viewed as a surrogate up or down vote on the measure.

differently by their members because of their success in achieving concrete material gains for the working class.

Trade unions, for example, have traditionally been thought to be responsible for securing wages and benefits. Community groups, on the other hand, worked on local neighborhood issues such as trash pickup and abandoned buildings. Illinois-ACORN had been just such an organization, and they were also involved in such issues as housing, education, and redlining. But once ACORN became involved in the living wage campaign, the expectations of its members were transformed. As articulated by one ACORN leader: “Members see ACORN as a labor organization. They don’t have a union so they are looking to us to deliver wages and health care.”

ACORN members in Chicago had begun to wonder if the organization would be distributing identity cards giving access to health insurance and other benefits. ACORN, in fact, was doing no such thing, which serves to highlight the extent to which members themselves were imagining a new role for the group:

We became the living wage organization, it became very legitimate in our members’ eyes who previously might have seen us more as a neighborhood improvement group, a school improvement group—real civic-y. They started to see us as a labor organization. You know, that thing that Teresa talked about where people were saying: “why hasn’t ACORN won us health insurance?” or “why doesn’t the living wage cover us?” That whole version of us as a labor organization didn’t exist before and it’s now becoming part and parcel of who we are and that was begun in the living wage campaign. People expect us to provide them with a voice on wages and benefits and that’s really an interesting development.

Through the living wage campaign, ACORN members began to view the organization as being responsible for ensuring basic material security. Struggles around such issues no longer fell under the exclusive purview of employer-employee relations and union contracts, but came to be seen as community-wide concerns with political solutions. Changes in the mission and role of community organizations themselves were bound to follow suit.

Conclusion: 'Marginal' Workers at the Forefront of Labor Movement Resurgence

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

This paper has identified a number of implications of this shift with respect to its ability to secure concrete gains for the working class, how labor views employers and the state, and how working-class organizations have been transformed. Although the focus of this paper has been on strategic and organizational implications, other parts of this research project have uncovered how these new forms of political mobilization have inspired profound subjective transformations of participants as well. Although a thorough assessment of the subjective consequences of political mobilization are beyond the scope of this paper, suffice it to say that they hinge on the less self-interested nature of collective action in the political sphere. Since political mobilization requires more broad-based public action compared to the more narrow and confined constituencies mobilized through the

workplace, participants are consequently prone to thinking more expansively about their fellow workers and about ongoing struggle. Although there is not sufficient space to explore it here, suffice it to say that the subjective changes found among participants who experience this political form of collective action are at least as important as the material and strategic ones.

The living wage movement has lost some momentum in recent years, but this has been due to its success more than anything else, since those municipalities that would be candidates for such campaigns now have living wage legislation on the books. In any case, labor's general shift toward political mobilization has taken off in many directions. In Chicago, for example, the living wage fight led to a "big box" campaign that sought to require such Wal-Mart-like stores to maintain certain levels of wages and benefits.⁷ There have been, in addition, an increasing number of state-level initiatives to increase the minimum wage above that which is federally mandated.

In Maryland the struggle for health care took a political direction when activists succeeded in securing enactment of the Fair Share Health Care Act in 2006. This was the nation's first state law to require large companies to make minimum contributions to employee health care. Although this particular law was eventually overturned in the courts, the significance lies not in the outcome of this one initiative but in the fact that activists are making some headway on health care when they turn their efforts toward the state.

Organizing around similar legislation has been taking place in other states and municipalities across the country, targeting Wal-Mart and other such corporations who employ large

⁷ One of labor's main challenges is the dominance of Wal-Mart and other similar corporations. The inability of Wal-Mart workers to form unions and secure union contracts could in fact be seen as one of the driving forces behind labor's turn to political strategies. From the perspective of workers on the 'big box' shop floor, Wal-Mart has proven virtually unshakeable. Only through various kinds of community campaigns (to ensure living wages at such stores, or to prevent their presence in communities all together) has the company's dominance been curtailed in any notable way.

numbers while offering little support for their employees' health care. It is no coincidence that while these "fair share health care" campaigns have taken root, union and non-union workers alike have seen their health care erode in terms of both access and affordability. The United Auto Workers, for example, have been suffering historic attacks on health care for employees and retirees alike in their agreements with the automakers. But UAW members and others like them have been facing these severe cuts in their health care benefits while those working for the country's largest employers are beginning to see how the state can be called upon to support workers on the issue.

Some labor unions have been putting more resources toward voter turnout and also toward making financial contributions to political candidates. The electoral process, as Fine has pointed out, opens up possibilities for otherwise powerless groups to wield power: "Organizations that demonstrate that they have the ability to influence or mobilize a large number of votes for or against elected officials, whether those voters are rich or poor, black or white, have political power" (2005:184). But the shift as conceptualized here is not primarily about electoral politics, about workers voting for Democrats or Republicans or independents. It is a shift, instead, toward grassroots political mobilization. The political successes of the labor movement in recent years come primarily from street heat rather than from voting booths where limited choices constrain political possibilities. Although the electoral process indeed offers pressure points and opportunities for activists, the new labor strategies may be best thought of as "politics without elections" (Reynolds 1999). They more often entail grassroots mobilization targeting legislation around specific issues rather than getting out the vote in support of a particular political party or candidate. And while labor unions have had some hand in these mobilizations, these grassroots political efforts

have been spearheaded more often by community organizations than traditional trade unions.

Perhaps more importantly, neither have such efforts been spearheaded by traditional workers. The Chicago living wage campaign's targeted constituency—the city's low-wage workers—worked in all manner of non-standard employment situations. Some were part-time. Some could be thought of as 'seasonal day laborers' who worked the summertime festivals. The campaign's home care workers labored under uniquely difficult conditions, dispersed as they were in people's private homes, isolated from co-workers and with no common workplace to speak of. Many campaign participants lacked a stable employment situation. Extending its reach beyond the workplace, the campaign also mobilized large numbers of retirees, the homeless, the unemployed, homemakers, and others not even engaged in paid labor. The campaign was likewise racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse, with a strong base in both the African Americans and Latino communities. In its rich diversity, cutting across both demographic and occupational categories and including those outside the standard employment relationship, the campaign mobilized what Kelley has called "the new urban working class" (1997) who have traditionally been excluded from the house of labor.

Similarly, worker centers—an especially prominent example of the shift away from workplace-based mobilization—have sprung up among more 'marginal' sectors of the working class, particularly in immigrant communities. Fine, in her recent study of these centers, articulates this connection between constituency and strategy. She notes that worker centers have succeeded most at changing public policy since their low-wage (and often immigrant) worker constituencies have such limited economic power (2006:258).

In short, as indicated in Clawson's (2003) recent work, the cutting edge of working-class organizing is now taking place among those who have a history of marginalization with respect to the mainstream labor movement. Putting the "movement back in the labor movement" has become an exercise in stepping outside of traditional unions all together. The successes of living wage campaigns and worker centers, for example, point to a future for American labor that lies not in the more 'stable' segments of the working class—as a neo-Marxist perspective might predict—but in its more 'marginal' ones. As such, this 'stable' versus 'marginal' distinction is itself becoming inverted. Labor's traditional constituency is becoming more marginal as they weaken in the face of concessions and cutbacks, while supposedly 'marginal' members of the working class have become the lifeblood of the labor movement.

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