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WhyLeadLabor?

ProjectsandPathwaysinCaliforniaUnions,1984 -2001

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Introduction

John Sweeney's selection to the presidency of the AFL-CIO in 1996 sparked a major effort by US unions to "reinvent" themselves. Concurrent with the "Sweeney revolution", a dramatic generational turnover has occurred in the leadership of major unions, labor councils, and state federations. Andrew Stern, for example, 52, a Penn graduate and student activist rose to lead America's largest union, SEIU. John Wilhelm, 56, the new president of HERE, a graduate of Yale, also came to labor as a student activist. And Doug McCarron, 51, neither a student activist nor college educated, has led the United Brotherhood of Carpenters through a major reorganization, including severing ties with the AFL-CIO. Similarly, at the state and local level, since 1998 the Los Angeles Federation of Labor has been led by Miguel Conteras, 50, the son of migrant farm workers and former organizer for Cesar Chavez's United Farm Workers. Josie Mooney, 48, a college educated former community organizer leads the Bay Area public workers union and serves as president of the San Francisco Labor Council - the first woman to occupy those posts. Members of this generation are also responsible for new efforts to bring young people into the labor movement - college educated apprentices recruited by the AFL-CIO Organizing Institute and Union Summer and, to a lesser degree, new immigrants who have been mobilized through campaigns like "justice for janitors."

Where did this new generation of California union leaders come from? Who are they? Why did they join the union movement? Why did some leave? And why did many more stay?

These questions are puzzling because this generation came to work for unions in the 1970s when organized labor was shrinking, not growing, and thus offered few opportunities for advancement. Nor were unions at the center of a social movement, as they once had been. In fact, in light of the response of some unions to the civil rights movement and Vietnam war, many political activists saw unions as "part of the problem, rather than part of the solution".

Existing scholarship on union leadership is of little help in answering these questions because it neither looks at this generation of union leaders nor grapples with questions of why people come to work for unions, why they stay in that work, and why they leave. One reason for this limitation is that earlier research focused only on top leaders, thus obscuring the question of why they remained committed while others chose to leave (Mills 1948). Moreover, previous scholars studied union leaders at only one moment in time, when they reached the top, making it impossible to observe the processes by which their commitment was sustained (Fink 1984, Quaglieri 1988). And since that research is more descriptive than explanatory, it provides little theoretical help for understanding how and why career paths develop over time. Recently a few researchers have begun to investigate the retention of union staff, but their focus is on brand new recruits rather than those with a long term commitment to union work.

Our study is the first to focus on leaders of the generation currently heading the American labor movement, and it moves beyond the empirical and theoretical limitations of earlier research. Rather than learning only about those who have become top leaders, we studied a broad range of union leaders at earlier stages in their careers. And instead of

focusing on a single moment in their careers, our study took a longitudinal approach that allowed us to investigate change over time.

Although the demographic background of today's union leaders differs from that of previous generations, demographic variables alone are of limited use in explaining why they came to work for unions, why some continued, and why others left. To answer these critical questions, we had to pay attention to how people articulated their motivations and goals - what we term their "projects" - and how these influenced the development of their careers over time.

We could undertake this research because we had access to a unique database that allowed us to conduct a longitudinal study of the careers of 68 California men and women first interviewed in 1984 when they were selected for study as rising young labor leaders. We interviewed them again in 2001 and 2002.

Studying California labor leaders is particularly useful for understanding attempts to revitalize unions. Not only do California unions represent 15% of all US union members today, they have also been especially active during the period of this study (BLS 2002). Significant attempts at union renewal in California, for example, include SEIU's "justice for janitors" campaigns, the Los Angeles Federation of Labor's grassroots political program, and unionization of some 100,000 home health care providers.

Pathways to Union Leadership

Because of the explanatory intent of our research, we delve into people's intentions, drawing on a body of theory that helps us make sense of the relationship between their intentions, where they are now, and why.

C. Wright Mills published the most comprehensive collective portrait of American union leaders in 1948, at a time when unions were growing and accumulating political power (Mills 1948). Mills did a masterful job of researching the demographic background of union leaders, and of locating these leaders in the larger social and political context of American society in the immediate post-World War II era. His point of departure was that these men were an newly empowered group of strategic actors in American society. Understanding their social origins, education, party ties, and the like were thus of interest in and of themselves. Most union leaders, he showed, were self-made men. He didn't inquire in any depth about their motivation for joining the labor movement, assuming instead that the incentive was self-evident: these men of humble social origins got involved in union work because unions were a source of power and upward mobility.

Mills set the agenda for most of the research on union leadership done to date (Fink 1984, Quaglieri 1988). Scholars have investigated how the background of top union leaders has changed over time, and they have sometimes interpreted these changes in ways that touched on why people would come to work for unions. For the most part, however, they have assumed their motivations, rather than asking about them. And they have not inquired into whether or not leaders' motivations for the work they do changes over time. Nor have they attempted to trace the way that careers might shift as intentions and goals change. Indeed, there has not been much attention at all paid to how the careers of union leaders develop over time.

This focus on demographics rather than motives makes sense at a time when unions were growing and gaining influence, and when they were dominated by workers who came up from the ranks. Mills sounded the theme which many other studies echoed: labor leaders were most often men who rose from the ranks, self-made men whose motivation for union work seemed self-evident and not worth further probing. Investigating motivation seemed unnecessary, and it was also out of step with the theoretical fashion of structuralism, which has dominated social science thinking for many years. And to the extent that students of leadership in management (Hollander 1978, Bass 1990), political science, or social movement theory (Oberschall 1973, Wickham-Crowley 1992) look at motivation at all, they do so mainly in terms of class background, education, or personality and its relation to function.

Today, however, it seems much less self-evident that people, even rank-and-file workers would be attracted to union work as a source of obvious social power, which makes the question of motivation more pressing. Moreover, sociologists have recently become much more interested in the role that agency plays in social life, in how intentionality and purpose shape social action.

Paying attention to purpose, however, is not to suggest that individuals end up where they do due to some random caprice. It is rather to argue that individuals make choices about the present based in part on what they recollect of their past and what they imagine for their future (Bruner 1990). Action is thus neither entirely spontaneous, nor entirely predictable, but adaptive, a result of what Bandura (1989) calls "emergent interactive agency" in contrast with "pure autonomous agency" or "mechanistic agency".²

Conceptualizing people's choices this way is rooted in a sociological tradition originating with Weber, Mead, and Schutz, and linked recently with narrative theory by Mische and others (Emirbayer and Mische 1998, Mische 2003). In this view, purposeful choices are shaped by a narrative process that situates motivation for present action within a context of past recollection and future projection. One's "project" is thus their account of where they hope to go (their goals), why they want to get there (their motivations), and how they think they can (their means).³

Since projects are the outcome of a narrative process, however, they are not fixed, but, as Schutz and Mead argue, constructed and reconstructed as circumstances change and actors "continually reassess future possibilities in the face of past experiences" (Mische 2003). Sometimes our goals work out and sometimes they do not, sometimes we persist in finding new ways to pursue them, but other times we change them. Career pathways can thus be viewed as devised, rather than followed. In our work, however, we focus less on the sources of people's projects – how they came to have the stories they do – than on the influence of those projects on their actions.

We recognize, of course, that both actor's projects and their career pathways unfold in interaction with organizational settings (Barley 1989, Gunz 1989). To the extent that organizations pursue collective projects, an individual's project may be more or less dissonant with that of the organization in which they find themselves. Furthermore, intentions are influenced by organizational settings, "shifting with changing structures of interest and attention" (Mische 2003). So we need to attend to the organizational settings in which people carry out their projects, paying attention not only to the projects they start out with, but how these change over time. Over time, however, we would expect for the projects of individuals within particular organizations to converge through processes of

selection and adaptation: people leaving, people changing or, occasionally, organizations changing.⁴

Projects can be studied systematically by analyzing what people say and how they say it and comparing the results across individuals, organizations and outcomes. Although relying on verbal accounts to access goals and motivations might be suspect from a psychological point of view, from the standpoint of trying to understand social action, attending to what people say about what they want and why may, because it is social, actually bring us a more useful understanding (Mills 1940).

How We Learned about Union Leadership

The initial data for this study comes from a set of interviews with 130 California union leaders conducted by Marshall Ganz and Scott Washburn in 1984 in an effort to assess the future direction of the California labor movement. With the support of California labor organizations and a number of small foundations, Ganz and Washburn targeted a set of younger full-time union leaders, most of whom had organizing experience, who had also earned positions of responsibility in their unions and reputations among their colleagues for a commitment to union revitalization. The interviewees were broadly representative of the full range of California unions, industries, and regions, but special emphasis was placed on those who were 30-45 years of age at the time, particularly women, people of color, organizers, and those with records of success. Eighty-six people in the original sample were in this age range. The unions they worked for included those active in the public sector, services, manufacturing, the building trades and transportation. The 2-3 hour interviews were extensive and focused on the respondent's family background, career to date, mentoring, views of organizing, beliefs about leadership, and expectations for the future. Based on notes taken in the interviews, Ganz and Washburn completed protocols which they then coded. However, other than presentations made to union leaders in 1985-6, and references in a few articles (Kuttner 1987), the findings were never published. Instead, until 2001, the notes rested in a trunk in a Salinas warehouse.

The present study builds on this data by re-interviewing the original respondents to compare their positions in 1984 with their positions now and learn how they got there. We learned of their successes and their failures, the opportunities they encountered, barriers they faced, and how they dealt with them. We paid particular attention to their "projects", how they have changed, and how this interacted with their career choices, organizational turning points, and leadership roles.

Our first task was to locate the original cohort, a search that got underway in the spring of 2001. Once we found most of them, we conducted a set of 2-3 hour semi-structured interviews, tape recorded them, transcribed the tapes, wrote up short "debriefs" after each interview, and met regularly as a research team of 5 to discuss and analyze them. We analyzed responses, developed categories, coded where appropriate, and evaluated quantitatively where possible.

For this paper, we look only at the people in the original sample who were between 30 and 45 years of age when they were first interviewed in 1984. As Table 1 shows, 84 or 98% of these people were still living. We were able to contact 75 of them, or 87%. Of these, 48 or 64% were still working for unions, 3 had retired from a union, and 24 or 32%

had left union work before retiring. Our study is based on those interviewed as of the writing of this paper -68 or 91% of the total available to us.

[Table One: Who was Targeted , Who was interviewed]

Where They Came From

[Table Two: Demographics]

Who were these 68 union leaders? Table 2 gives the broad picture. Perhaps accurately reflecting the makeup of middle level union leadership in 1984, only 14 (21%) were women. Ethnic ally the vast majority were non -Hispanic Caucasians. Eleven (16%) were Hispanics, a significant group who played an important role in the recent revival of California unionism and 15 (22%) were immigrants or had at least one immigrant parent. Despite considerable effort to find rising African -American union leaders to interview Ganz and Washburn found only two in the 45 -and-under age group and we were unable to interview either one again in 2001 -02.

In terms of religion, half had been raised Roman Catholic ic, a quarter, Protestant, a fifth came from Jewish backgrounds, and the remaining 5% claimed no religion. Only a minority had what might be called a devoutly religious upbringing, but a small and interesting proportion of these had attended a religious secondary or given serious thought to a religious career.

Traditionally union leaders had working class parents, had high school or some college education at most, and began their union careers as rank -and-file members of the union they later represented. This appears to be changing -- more so in some unions than others -- with the nature of the change already dramatically apparent in the demographics of the leaders were interviewed. A bare majority came from working class parents; indeed 47% were classified as having middle -class background. And only a third of the entire group had union parents in considerable contrast with earlier generations of union leaders (Mills 1948). Reflecting the dramatic expansion of higher education during the 1960s and 1970s to working class youth, however, the majority of our interviewees were college graduates and a considerable portion had done some graduate work. Far from incidentally, most of our college -graduate leaders were in college during the civil rights and anti -war movements of the 1960's and early 1970's. And many reported being radicalized in college and some even participated in anti -war activities in high school. A large majority (77%) had been political or social activists in community or political organizations prior to their union employment. Again, in contrast with previous leadership generations: a third (34%) were hired directly from "outside," without having first been a member of the union that hired them.

Why They Came to Work for Unions

In our interviews, we asked people about how they came to do union work, why they kept doing it, and, when relevant, why they left to do something else. We used a semi-structured approach in our interviews so that we could probe people's accounts of

why they had made their choices, as well as to learn what those choices were. We looked carefully at the specific answers people gave to our questions about why they made the decisions they did, but we also attended to the larger narratives in which their answers were embedded, the words and metaphors they used in describing their work, and the affect with which they responded.

Our respondents typically gave us detailed accounts of their initial involvements, and from these accounts, we coded the projects people had when they began working in the labor movement. We distinguished four broad projects: social reform, community leadership, personal advancement, and union building.

Social Reform: These people were drawn into union work as a way of pursuing a goal of social reform. Motivated by their commitment to social justice, they generally believed political work was the best way to make the world a better place. Union work, for them, was a means of achieving goals that were broader than the union itself.

Community Leadership: The goal of community leaders was to improve the lives of the members of their community, defined by ethnicity, kinship, or workplace, often in combination. They were motivated by identification with this community, believing they could best serve that community's interests by representing them and acting on their behalf. They often indicated a willingness to assert community interests over union interests.

Personal Advancement: These people got involved with union work with the objective of improving their individual life situation. For some, union work offered the prospect of upward mobility, for others, a more interesting job, and for others, a way to achieve influence and power. They looked for work based on the opportunity it offered, expressed themselves in non-ideological terms, and they typically considered union work as one option among others.

Union Builders: Union builders viewed union work as an end in itself. Often having had direct experience with the difference a union can make in one's life, they were motivated by the desire to improve the lives of others in the same way. As they articulated it, the best way of doing this was to negotiate good contracts, win grievances, organize, and service members.

Table 3 shows the number of labor leaders who came into the movement with each project. The largest single group, some 54%, had social reform projects when they first began working in the labor movement. The remaining 46% of those interviewed were divided among community leaders (16%), personal advancement seekers (16%), and union builders (13%).

Who were the people who came to work for a union to pursue each of these projects and how did they come to do union work?

Social Reform

Chart 1 displays the class background, education, source of recruitment, and activist experience of the 37 people who came to the labor movement with a social reform project. It shows that nearly half of the social reformers were college-educated people from middle-class backgrounds. Almost another third were college graduates from working-class homes. And about a fifth, some with middle-class upbringing and some with working-class upbringing, did not have college degrees, although many had attended college a year or two. In terms of recruitment, the social reform group is split evenly between those who were hired directly from the outside, and those who came from the workplace. The group includes both men and women.

Clearly, as column 4 indicates, the common thread connecting those interested in social reform is prior activism. Regardless of class background, education, gender or whether or not they were recruited from the workplace, every social reformer save one had been actively involved in social movements before coming to work for a union.

In our interviews, we probed people's early activism, trying to understand how it led to union work. We discovered three types of activism that brought people with a social reform project into the labor movement, each type associated with a different pathway into union work. One type, which we label "unaffiliated", involved participation in the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, without membership in a "vanguard" political group. A second type of activism, which we call "faith-motivated", was rooted in religious commitments. A third variety, which we call "vanguard" activism, entailed membership in a vanguard political group. No path to social reform was the exclusive route of anyone class; people from both the working class and middle class were found traveling in all three paths.

Unaffiliated Social Reformers

Those with an unaffiliated social reform project, the largest group, typically became activists in high school or college, spurred to action most frequently by the anti-war movement, but sometimes drawn in by the civil rights movement or community activism instead. Colin Gordon's story of anti-war activism, which began in high school, is characteristic:

There was a feeling in the air in those times. And the draft really, the single biggest motivating factor in my developing of my thinking was when I thought I was going to have to register for the draft pretty soon. And I was reading about the war in Vietnam. But I was also reading about everything else. I remember reading about, was it in the summer of '67, the riots in Newark and numerous other places. And in New Haven, CT actually. But in Newark, which was one of the most vicious ones. And I remember a Life magazine cover with the guy, I think his name was Billy Fur. He was like from Philadelphia and he was visiting Newark and he was killed by the National Guard for carrying a case of beer out of a liquor store that was being looted. And he had his bloody corpse on the cover of Life magazine. And the street was a typical suburban street. I mean it was a grassy, easy, dirty street and there he was. And I remember arguing with my fathers saying "You can't kill people for a case of beer." And my father took the other view, as lots of people did.

He soon began to mobilize his fellow students for anti-draft and anti-war activities, and continued this work when he went to college. He joined SDS, but when approached by more sectarian groups, he "didn't opt to engage."

I went to some of the meetings, some of the study groups and I read the books and it seemed odd. I remember thinking "This is such a great idea that these people have, if everybody would just work together and cooperate and share, this is like such a brilliant idea. But their approach is like they're never going to reach the people in the US that it's aimed at. They're not gonna come close." So I was going to one or two, and then I would just walk away.

Instead, his involvement with social movements in college centered on non-sectarian anti-war mobilizing, although he was also caught up in the larger activist milieu, which included "symbolic support for black activists who were being attacked by the government in '69 and '70 and '71." In his senior year in college he got involved in supporting a wildcat walkout of the cafeteria workers in the student center. However, that support ended when, "some guys in suits came up and told [the workers] to go back to work."

The "guys in suits" - union representatives - clearly did not leave a favorable impression. When he graduated from college, Gordon had a social reform project, but unions were not the obvious place to look to pursue that project. In this he was typical of many other unaffiliated social reformers we talked to. They, like most in the New Left, tended to view unions as undemocratic upholders of the status quo and the ware effort. Making union work even more unlikely was the fact that most unions were opposed to hiring "outsiders," people who didn't come up from the workplace. How then did social reformers like Gordon come to do union work?

Here, too, his path is similar to that of many other unaffiliated activists: he got to union work only through involvement in what we term a "bridge" organization, one that linked movement groups and labor unions. In his case, it was the United Farm Workers, which Gordon got involved with not because it was a labor organization but because it was part of a larger movement for social justice and civil rights.

Sol was intrigued by the fact... It would have been like June of '73, in Time magazine there had been a little article and it was on the [modern -day] "Grapes of Wrath". It was about the fights between the Teamsters and the farm workers in Coachella. And it said, "We're in the same place that Steinbeck used to write about. In the dusty fields, farm workers are being subjected to this violence." And I remember reading that without thinking much... I had never been involved too much in the boycotts '68 - '72 although there was a guy I remember from [college] and I was like "What's wrong with that guy? He's boycotting rapes???" We've got a war to stop or whatever we were trying to do with it." But I read that article and that was the first time that I really thought about the farm workers when I read that article that summer. And then after that I ended up in the SF area. And then when I met them [again] I said "God this is an amazing struggle." And I was talking to my friends from Fordham about it and they're saying, "Look they need people. They're trying to get people to work full time with them and support the movement. You were always Mr. Protest and making us go to demonstrations and everything. Why don't you go work with them?" I don't know if they were trying to get me out of the apartment or what! They were like "Why don't you go work with them?"

He began by volunteering to help with the boycott of Gallowine, went on to become a field rep and then an assistant field office director. He stayed for six years. When he left, "I... knew that I was going to continue in the labor movement," largely because he now thought he could carry out his social reform project by doing union work. He eventually ran into an "old farm worker contact" who had gone to work for the HERE local in San Francisco, he asked him if there were any jobs, and he got hired to run a picket line. He's done union work ever since because, "if everybody did a better job of organizing their co-

people, we could make the working people and the poor people have a lot better share of what there is.”

Another organization that bridged the world of activism with that of labor movement was the Citizens Action League (CAL), a membership advocacy group that battled the public utilities in California for reforms like lifeline rates for poor people. CAL’s founders, Mike Miller and Tim Sampson, were profoundly influenced by Saul Alinsky, and worked with unions like SEIU in doing their community organizing. Some of the social reformers, especially those whose activism involved community organizing, got to the labor movement after being involved with CAL. Clem Donlevy, for instance, became committed to a social reform project as a result of his experiences in the Peace Corps in Tanzania. He spent a few years after he left the Peace Corps getting his master’s degree in urban planning, then working as a well-paid urban planner for the city of Boston, which he hated. He came to the Bay Area and began working for CAL, doing community organizing for a subsistence wage of \$60 a week. During these years, he never thought about working for a union. However, by the time he was ready to leave community organizing (because he “had learned what he was going to learn from [community organizing]”), his thinking had changed. Now union work “was just sort of a natural progression,” since he had worked with people in labor while in CAL.

A few of the unaffiliated social reformers began working for unions without first being involved with a bridging organization like the UFW or CAL. Some in this group came from working-class backgrounds and got radicalized in college because of contact with radical professors. As Carol Lewin told us,

“I really got radicalized in college. There was this history professor, who taught Marxism and [explained] my whole life... My Dad was a salesman and he worked really hard. He would leave at 6:30 or 7 in the morning and what he did was go to poor neighborhoods and sold household items that he had in the back seat of his car. Like everything from toasters and ironing boards and pots and pans. And people would buy it on a payment plan. And so then he would go back every week and collect \$5 toward the toaster or whatever and that was his job. But there were some people in my family who had, now I sort of realize they were like doing well. Not rich, but they were doing well. And so there was, I just saw the difference and mainly I saw how my Dad felt about himself. Because about like his own sense of himself and dignity. And so then when I went to college and learned about Marxism and the alienation of labor and how people get their sense of themselves through work, it just felt totally, I just felt this amazing... It was like my family.

Another interviewee, Lloyd Callahan, from a similar working class background, talked about two of his professors, one a Marxist and one an “anti-communist Socialist” whose teachings “made sense” of his father’s life, offered him some pride of class, and a “philosopher’s stone” to understand the world.

Once they had been radicalized, Lewin’s and Callahan’s entry into union work was less problematic than it had been for Gordon Donlevy. All it took was exposure to an organizing campaign or a job lead. Lewin, for example, had an internship in Washington, DC for the summer break while she was still in college. While she was there, she roomed with someone who was working for the AFL-CIO on an organizing campaign.

I went there originally to work in the Health and Human Services because I thought I wanted to go into public health. But I went there and it was during the Reagan years and I can still remember this little cubicle I had at that office. And it was really boring. But I lived in this house with all these women who had all different jobs. And one of them had a job working for the AFL-CIO for the food

and allied service trades, FAST. And so I remember she came home one night and said "Tonight I have to go out at 2 in the morning to meet these waitresses at the Watergate Hotel. And then I have to be up at 6 in the morning to leaflet cleaners." And I went "Oh my god! That's what I want to do." So I just quit. I got the internship also with AFL-CIO. I mean they didn't pay us anything, so I had also gotten that. But I thought I wanted to go into public health so I took that public health one. And then I called Jeff _____ and said "Hi, can I come work for you instead?" And of course I could because they paid \$50/week.

When I was at Berkeley, I was in the New American Movement and I definitely knew that capitalism sucked. And so... but I didn't know what you could do about it. Like I didn't know that unions were an answer. Because one of us really talked about unions. But I studied all about gigantic corporations screwing over Third World countries. And then I knew that some people made all the money in the world but never spend it, and other people couldn't afford anything. And I felt like that about my family. So... I mean I felt like that but I didn't know what to do. I didn't think these were the answers. So then when I went to Washington and I saw that people were doing that, I went "God that's what I should do." And I remember thinking "I can't believe that I could actually do this and have it be a job! That this is a job!" And so then when I left there and went back to SF, I looked up Local 2. And that was the job I got.

Similarly, Callahan sent in a resume when he heard that AFGE was looking for organizers. In both cases, Lewin and Callahan seemed more predisposed than other unaffiliated social reformers to think of unions as vehicles for social change. Thus their coming to a union was a more direct process: all it took was contact with a union that hired from the outside and that was doing organizing. For other unaffiliated social reformers, these opportunities were also necessary, but so was participation in a bridging organization where they learned that unions could be vehicles for social change.

Another path by which some unaffiliated social reformers entered the labor movement was through social work, which in the early 1970s was a target of aggressive organizing campaigns by both SEIU and AFSCME. Social work was a rapidly expanding occupation in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It attracted large numbers of social reformers because it seemed to deal directly with the problem of poverty in American society. Before 1968, California public sector workers had no legal right to unionize. But the situation changed in 1968 with passage of the Meyers Millias Brown Act, a law that guaranteed public employees the right to unionize and bargain collectively. A few of our interviewees entered union work as a result of organizing drives in their units, sometimes because the union seemed to be a good way to protect themselves from managers who objected to their activist agenda.

One example is Rudy Del Castillo, who went to work as a welfare eligibility worker in southern California, after being involved in anti-war and Chicano groups at a UC campus. He discovered that Hispanic welfare applicants were disadvantaged because the Spanish translation of their applications was so inept that deserving people didn't get public support. He helped organize social workers, clients, community people, and Chicano activists from the local university to agitate for better translations. They won, but the managers soon retaliated against the social workers, who then organized a union that affiliated with SEIU. When Del Castillo himself was fired for his activities, he took a staff job with SEIU.

Faith-Motivated Social Reformers

A second way social reformers found their way into the labor movement was motivated by religious conviction. All of these activists were Roman Catholic and all but one trained to be a nun or a priest before becoming involved in the labor movement. Their belief in social reform was profoundly shaped by faith. Liam O'Reilly, for example, joined the UFW because he went along with a group of fellow seminarians. They would all picket a local liquor store, "talking to the drunks at midnight and 1:00 AM on Friday and Saturday nights." He soon took a year off from the seminary to work for the UFW. When one of his schoolmates asked, "Why are you doing that?" he answered, "Building the union is like building the church without the crutch of religion." After a year, O'Reilly left the UFW, but found his way to HERE when he ran into Gordon, the new left social reformer we discussed above. Gordon had just begun his job running picket lines for the HERE local and was looking for help. When we asked O'Reilly how he sees his union work today, he echoed his earlier interview that the union

gives people hope; gives people a way to be heard, gives a chance for there to be justice or something resembling justice. Something resembling fairness, and a way for people not to be powerless.... We create opportunities for people to be leaders among their coworkers. I mean the exciting thing is how the union changes people's lives.

The UFW was a common path to the labor movement for those who came to their social reform project through religion, just as it was for some of the non-affiliated social reformers, but in a distinct way. For the unaffiliated social reformers, the UFW bridged the divide between the social movements of the 1960s and unions because it was a way to fight for civil rights. For the faith-motivated social reformers, however, the UFW was a bridge between a religious vocation and the secular world. For example, one woman in this group, Linda Davis, remembered her father telling her that Cesar Chavez was "a modern day saint." Faith-motivated social reformers joined the UFW because of its profound religious content. After becoming active, they came to view unions as a way to carry out their commitment to social justice.

Vanguard Social Reformers

The third way social reformers entered the labor movement was through activism linked with membership in a vanguard political group, such as the International Socialist Organization. For these people, union work was a very different undertaking than it was for either the unaffiliated or the faith-based activists. They took jobs in factories and offices as "colonists," as a way to remake unions. For example, when we asked Ralph Reeve why he came to work for a union, he told us:

I had decided that I wanted to try to apply my politics in the labor movement. That was sort of a place you could go to to effect social change and that's what I wanted to do. So why the post office in particular? I just sort of fell into that. But I wanted to get into a blue collar, industrial setting of some sort and that was what I landed.

Asked if he was affiliated with any group that shaped his politics, he replied:

For a while I was a member of something called The New American Movement. And after that International Socialists.

HewenttoworkforthePostOfficeaftergraduatingfromSwarthmore.Hisgoalwasto
“reformtheunions.”

Theviewwast hattheunionswereterrible,theywerecorrupt,theywerebureaucratic.Wewere
goingtotransformtheunionsandremakethemsothattheywouldbeworkers'unions.

Onceonthejob,he

helpedformarankandfilecaucusintheAmericanPostalWorkers UnioninPhiladelphia.AndIdid
alotofworkforit.AndoneofmyearlierlessonsinhumilitywasIhelpedbuildthiscaucusandthen
IwasthrownoutofitbecauseIwastooleft.Andtheywentontochallengeforpoliticalofficeinthe
unionlocalandwon.Sotheyusedmetohelpbuildthecaucusandthentheythrewmeout.Sol
hadtolickmywoundsandrethinkwhatIwasdoingatthatpoint.

HesoonmovedtoCaliforniawherehegotajobasamailman.Onceonthejob,hebided
histimeuntilhis90-dayprobationperiodwasupandthen

IvolunteeredtobeshopstewardandIstartedfromthere.Iwalkedintotheunionofficeonedayand
toldthepresidentwhowassittingthere;Isaid,"WhatcanIdotohelp?"Ithoughthewasgoingto
falloffhischairanddie,thatanybodyhadeverdonethatbefore!Actuallycomeinandsay"What
canIdotohelp?"

Ayearlater,heranforrecordingsecretaryofthelocalandtookanactivepartina
movementtomergeseveralbranches.Afewyearslaterhesu ccessfullyranforthe
presidencyofthemergerlocal.

Othervanguardactiviststookasimilar“colonist”pathtounionwork.Thishelps
explainthelargenumberofsocialreformerswhoenteredunionworkfromtheworkplace.
Ofthe17socialreformerswhowererecruitedfromwithintheworkplaceinChart1,seven
hadgonetotheshopfloorwitharadicalpoliticalagenda.

Socialreformerswereadiversegroup,andtheirpathwaysintothelabormovement
ledindifferentdirectionsdependingonthespecificnatureoftheiractivistbackgrounds.
However,theyallsharedacommitmenttobroadsocialandpoliticalchange,andtheyall
sawtheirunionworkasawaytoadvancethislargerproject,ratherthanasanendinand
ofitself

CommunityLeadership

[Chart#2]

Whowerethepeoplewhoenteredunionworkascommunityleaders?AsChart#2
shows,ofthe10peopleweinterviewedwhoseinitialprojectwascommunityleadership,
allbut2werefromworkingclassbackgroundsandonlyonefinishedcollege. Sevenofthe
10or70%wereLatinoswhoseworkfortheunionwasanextensionofprior,ethnic
communityleadership.

Onecomunityleader,forexample,BobAlcala,aChicano,joinedtheLaborers'
unionwithhelpfromhisuncleswhohelpedhimfindwork inthetrade.Beforebecoming
activeintheunion,hehadtakenpartinChicanocommunityfightsoverpolice
brutalityandpublicparks.

He gained visibility in the union as a critic of the incumbents and through his position as a "union" foreman he began to acquire a following. After helping the bargaining committee with a particularly tough set of negotiations, the incumbent leaders invited him to serve as a business agent. Alcala made his decision about whether or not to accept the offer very carefully.

So... when the negotiations were finalized, the business manager... told me "I want you to come to work for me." Sol said, "Let me think about that." I mean I had people, I was building a political base and... I'm thinking, "What are they going to think? That I sold out?" Sol told them "This is what we want and this is the way I see it. I can go to work for them and try to do some good from the inside. Or stay out there and fight them from the outside. You guys make the decision."... So that's how I ended up working for them as a business agent.

Before going to work for the union, Alcala had built a political base among the membership whose views he had to take into consideration when deciding his next move. Later he led his own slate to victory. What he liked about union work was helping people like himself.

Just dealing with people that had the same common problems and the same things that I went through in my work. Being able to help them with these problems

A second community leader, although white, came from a world similar to that of Alcala, a building trades world in which family, work and union were closely linked. Karl Normangrew up in a union family, finished high school, and after a variety of union jobs, married into an Iron Worker family (his wife's brother, uncles, and cousins). He entered an Iron Workers' apprenticeship program at 18, "got his shot" at work on a new long-term job building the University of California at Santa Cruz, and was quickly drawn into a union leadership role.

...they were just starting (the job) at that time... I was trying to go to apprenticeship school and starting to raise kids. Then, they had a group of guys. 5 Iron workers were trying to unseat the established leadership of the local, so they drafted me to run with them, which made 6. I wanted to see something changed. We needed an agent for this area... a sublocal. Sol was running for the Executive Board... one election day I was the only one that made it out of the 6... this was rank and file Iron Workers that were running against the established Executive Board.... For some reason, I was the only one that made it.

Norman entered union leadership as an insurgent leader of his co-workers, ready to challenge the established leadership on their own behalf.

Although his new leadership role requires sacrifice, he was motivated by the challenge of holding the incumbent leadership accountable.

It was a lot. Going up there (to San Francisco) 2 times a month and trying to raise a family... it was a good hour and 20 minutes. I actually went up to resign. Me and a guy named RF, kind of got into it, so I told him I was going to stick around for 3 years just to haunt this ass... he was the Business Manager.

By the time he was elected business agent, JN had also become an active Christian for whom the union had become his "congregation":

I decided that the union would be my way of ministering. Health and welfare pension, workers rights, safety, and all the things that goes along with the union movement... It's more than going to church and praying. It's actually getting involved and helping people.

Of the 7 Latin community leaders, 2 were new immigrants from Mexico. One, Carlos Sanchez, found work in a unionized bakery, also after becoming active in the new immigrant community.

I think that the main thing is that you want to help the people... when I came here, I helped a lot of people in Mexico to get an ambulance. I went to the consul and asked for help... and they gave me 2 ambulances. I formed a social club for people from Acambaro, Guanajuato... I started meeting people from there... and say, "You know somebody else?" "Yes, yes, yes." So I get all together and we make a social club... to help the people, there... It was before (I got involved with the union work)... Probably a couple or hundred (people were involved). We had parties. Saturdays we had all to collect the money... to buy things, to send the money to the Red Cross.

He became active in the union after the union "defended him" so he began "defending" other workers as an extension of his "community":

... they told me that I was going to be demoted to part time. And I say, "Wait a minute." Why didn't you tell me? You didn't give me any notice, any warnings... They have a preference because somebody was a friend of somebody... So, I went to the shop steward and I told him. He said, "No, no, no. Call the union." I said, "OK." So, I called the union. They were there. They had a meeting. They said, "No, you cannot demote him." So they leave me there. From there I decide these guys are really something, and I start defending people. I called the union and tell them this is happening here, and this is not fair... I was translating to the people and helping the people. At that time, JB (the business agent) says, "What is this guy? He's good."... I was keeping helping the people, and the people talked to the shop steward there, to make me another shop steward, for them... So, they made me shop steward... Because, I help everybody. Anglos, blacks, whatever, Latinos, everybody.

He later came to work for the union full time as a business agent and organizer.

As the above excerpts demonstrate, community leaders, most of whom came from working class backgrounds, did not finish college, and are linked to their co-workers by ethnic, kinship, or other ties, saw their project as one of advancing the interests of this community.

Personal Advancement

[Chart#3]

Despite the weakened state of unions in the 1970s, 11 of the people we interviewed entered union work as a vehicle for their personal advancement. As shown in Chart#3, 5 were of middle class and 6 of working class background. Both groups were almost equally divided between college graduates and non-college graduates. Except for two of the college graduates, all were recruited from inside the workplace. And almost half of this group benefited from family connections that facilitated their election or hiring

into a union position, a fact that distinguishes them from the social reformers and union builders.

Dave Mills, for example, grew up in a middle class family, married while still in college, and joined a union local with help from his father-in-law, a union officer. After finishing college, he wasn't sure what to do, but had a family to support so he continued driving a truck. By now, however, his co-workers had begun to turn to him for help with their grievances. When they elected him steward, he began considering the union as a career option.

I had been going to some meetings soon... listening to the debate that went on... and talking to my father in law who had his own view of things and watching what went on the job. Talking amongst my co-workers in the job. And so I had an idea of what I felt a steward should do and how they should do it and what they should do in terms of... representing the worker, listening to their story and defending them against management... I mean I kind of viewed the job as being like an attorney... I got interested in running for office by attending membership meetings on a regular basis now because I was a steward.

Like many other union leaders, Mills described his decision to run for union office as the result of urging by others. But he described it as a new work option among many.

...people had suggested that I run... The election was coming up... guys I was working with, co-workers.. and my brother-in-law who was also working there... The idea appealed to me but I didn't know if I wanted to do that because the local... was chaotic. (But),,, I had to make a choice of what I wanted to do... I'd be going to school, ... back to UC... So I was kind of looking around and I started looking into the union and I started thinking "Maybe I could do this. Maybe I could make some kind of a difference." But the local was such a chaos and the BA's were all elected.... But I thought, well... you know, it's pretty heady thing when your co-workers say, "You ought to do this." And start pushing. Anyway, I ran.... and I came in I think third or fourth out of 12 people that ran for BA.... I put on VERY aggressive campaigns. Much more aggressive than anything the local had seen before... So anyway I got elected. I couldn't believe it. The election ended and geeze, I got elected...

Mills carefully considered the options before taking the risk of running for union office. Once he decided to take the risk, since his future was at stake, he was very committed to winning - which he did.

For others, union work offered the opportunity to find more meaningful work. Ken Brown, for example, came from a working class family, finished college, got married, and began teaching high school. But he was unhappy in this work. So when his father in law, a local union leader, recommended him to his union's organizing director who needed organizers to take advantage of the new state collective bargaining law, he saw an opportunity. He was already sympathetic to unions:

...when I was at San Diego State... I started really to understand the working class... I actually wrote a poem about how people are treated. It was called something like... "Back Door". And it said something like this... Joe worked his whole life and he gave them 40 and 6. And when he got old, as he began to stagger and fall, here reached out his hand, and they showed him the back door. I had (also) worked... in the retail clerks union... the laborers union... the carpenters union... I could clearly see the difference between wages and benefits that I was receiving and... my wife was receiving, who had no union and was working in retail.

But the promise of more satisfying work attracted him to the union.

And so they said they were interested in hiring like 20 organizers statewide to do some work in the school districts. So I thought "I'd like to try that for a while." ... I just thought it was exciting... it was challenging... (the organizing director was an) exciting guy... He just had a lot of energy. He was very tuned in to how to do things.

Although looking for opportunities for personal advancement is part of many people's decisions about what kind of work to do, for those whose project was personal advancement, it was their primary consideration. Although they had links to the union world, it had no claims on them until they saw that it offered them a way to pursue their own career goals.

Union Building

[Chart#4]

Twelve of the labor leaders we interviewed, their project was "building the union." As shown in Chart#4, 10 came from working class backgrounds, while 9 did not have college degrees. They entered union work from the inside, began as volunteer leaders (stewards, organizers, etc.), and most won election to their first full-time positions. Both union builders and social reformers had served as volunteer activists prior to union employment - union builders, inside the union, and social reformers, outside the union. But union builders described their "awakening" to the union in terms of a personal experience in which the union played an important role. Their stories often begin with a successful stand against an injustice, usually in the form of a grievance, than with an account of values commitments, community responsibility or job opportunity.

Wendy Martinez, for example, grew up in an immigrant, working class, union family. When she finished high school, she got work at the phone company, began to move up, but married and left to begin a family, returning to work some time later. Although she belonged to the CWA from the time she began to work for the phone company, an incident in which she was personally involved turned her into a union activist.

I had this supervisor (who) is the reason I got active in the union... she was a very controlling type. .. She wanted to know what everybody was thinking and what they were doing... I was a little worker bee... she observed me for a whole day and then... she says to me "You've got the highest production in the group. You've got the highest quality in the group. You're going places. I'm going to recommend you to get into... management." Oh, I'm just so pleased. She really just couldn't say enough about what good job I was doing.

A person who cared deeply about respect for her work, she hoped this would earn her the opportunity to become a manager.

But it was not to be. When she challenged her supervisor, her supervisor turned on her and the union became her line of defense. The union contract provided that workers could be required to work an extra 30 minutes in an emergency. If one worker in the unit had to work, all had to work until the job was completed. But the day that Martinez's supervisor took 2 of Martinez's co-workers to lunch, she applied the rule in an arbitrary way.

Well it's a 2-hour lunch or a 3-hour lunch and I didn't really care... I'm not going to do a good job just because this person is doing a good job. I'm not going to do a bad job just because of

somebody else. I'm doing what I'm supposed to do without thinking about what other people are doing. So I'm still working away.

But after they were gone for 2-3 hours, the supervisor... comes back... and says "You have to work your half hour..." We had to work a half-hour to make up for their 3-hour lunch. So I say "OK. I'm working my half hour, but I'm sure everybody has to work their half hour." But the minute the first (worker) got up to leave... I went to the supervisor's desk and I said "Excuse me..." Now this took a lot... because I was very... But it was not right... it motivated me out of my shyness. I went to her and said, "Excuse me... I have a question. It's my understanding that the union says that if one of us has to work a half hour, we ALL have to work a half hour." ... She was very good at turning people against each other. So she turns to the other (worker) who hadn't quite made it out the door and says "Oh... you're going to have to stay and work your half hour because of VM." Now mind you I'm the new kid and these two women are going to be mad.... And I thought "You know what? I don't care. Because if it's right, it's right." So I go back and do my job....

Because she felt taken advantage of, she protested. But the supervisor who had told her she was a candidate for management now reprimanded her in a way she experienced as disrespectful of her work.

Well then the next thing, the supervisor summons me to the conference room... and she's got all these binders in front of her which were all my job evaluations... And she's kind of leafing through the m and she looks me right in the eye and she says, "You know you've always been a very good employee. I HOPE that's not going to change." Very intimidating. She says, "I know you want to get into management." And I really had aspirations because it was more money... She says "But you know, one of the most important management attributes is flexibility." And I am seeing inside. I am like so horrified. Nobody has ever questioned my work... She says, "You've always been an outstanding employee." Well obviously. I always got promoted by the supervisors. And I was always the top. She goes "I HOPE that's not going to change." Like in other words she was the one that was going to write the next evaluation is what I'm thinking. And she blabs a little bit more and then she stops and she looks at me and says "Now what do you think of that?" ...

I looked at her and now I'm crying. But she didn't know I was crying from rage. I was so indignant that she had done this and I'm crying and I looked at her and I said, "You know... I thought that we were adults and I thought that if I had a question I could come and ask you. But it's so obvious that that isn't what's happening. You're trying to intimidate me because I'm a union member. And you know what? The next time that I have a question, my union steward will be in to talk to you." I didn't even know who that was! And she, soon as I used the magic words union steward... soon as I said that, she closed up all her books and she said "Oh! I certainly wouldn't want you to get THAT impression. That's not what I'm doing. And by the way, you don't have to work your half hour anymore." (laughing) She left the room. I had to compose myself because I was like a blubbering idiot.

Martinez now took her first steps along a pathway to union leadership.

And so as soon as she walked out the door, I left that office... there was a union steward down in the basement... And I'm asking people... "Where's the union steward?" "So I go down there and I find myself standing in front of this woman... the elected secretary of the local.... And I'm standing in front of her and I said "Hi. My name is Wendy Martinez and I want to be a union steward. Because if I'm going to stand up for my rights, I should at least know where they are!" I thought "God I'm going to get fired!".... and she says "OK. Well now you need to fill out this form and you're going to need to go to steward training." And then I told her what had happened and she says "Oh that's not acceptable."

So the next day when 3:30 came, and I stood up and I packed up my shit and I could have walked out the door and this other person says "Hey how come you don't have to work your half hour?" I said "Because I belong to the union and if you don't want to work your half hour, then you better join

the union too. "And I had gotten some membership applications. So I signed everybody up in the union and I went to steward training and they used to give you these big purple and yellow buttons. Those were our union colors, purple and yellow. And it said "CWA Union Steward" on it. This was a big button. The day that (my supervisor) came back from vacation... I'd already gone to the training and I was a bona fide union representative and I had signed up everybody in the unit. There was only one non-member.. But now (my supervisor) drives up and... I had my big union pin that you could not miss! It was yellow. I get out of the car and she gets out of the car. And I'm the first thing she sees and she lifts it and she says "Oh my. You're a union steward." I said "Yep. I figured if I was going to stand up for my rights, I might as well find out what they are."

The disrespect Martinez thus experienced on the job, her own gumption and access to the union as a way to turn her anger into action turned VM into a union builder who saw the union as a way to be the person she wanted to be.

Sam Hendricks also grew up in a working class, union family, joined the Retail Clerk on his first job, while still in high school, and married at 16. Unlike most union builders, he finished college, and moved to California to establish a residence to do graduate work at the University. The union helped him to find work, but while he was getting his feet on the ground, he got involved in a strike that turned him into a union activist.

Well I'd always been involved with the union. I went to meetings first day on the job back in KC. But my heavy involvement began with the strike. And one of the reasons for that was the business agent we had at that time who was selected... didn't show up between elections very often. Nice guy but he just... and he lost this next election. But there was just nobody in the store and when the company tried to get people to cross the picket line, a couple of us sort of stepped forward and started fighting the company over it. And the secretary/treasurer showed up the night before the strike and I read him the riot act and he got me involved. And we were able to keep most of the people out of the store.... And I was on several committees after that. And my assistant manager was in the union and he crossed the picket line and I charged him, we fined him \$500. That was a lot of money in those days. So I had to stay involved after that because they had their sights on me!

From general pro-union sympathies, Hendrick thus found himself catapulted into an activist role as a result of the leadership he demonstrated in a strike.

While pursuing plans to enter graduate school and study urban history, a union organizer had taken note of his role in the strike and tried to recruit him as an organizer.

And so in the midst of all this, the secretary/treasurer of the local asked me to fill out an application for the international. I had, sometime in early July they called me and asked me to go for an interview, but said they'd lost my application. I said, "Look, I'm not interested anymore. I'm going to be leaving about a month to go to New York.".. Then I got a call about a week later saying "We found your application, come on up." So I interviewed and they offered me the job and I told them I couldn't take it until I talked to M (his academic sponsor). But I was interested in it... And so since I had his blessing... I took the job and I wrote a letter... asking if I could delay entrance for a year.. They sent me a letter saying "No problem. Contact us in a year and you can come to school." And so I did this job for about 6 months and realized it was something I wanted to do... I thought it was going exactly where I wanted to go which was organizing workers.

Hendrick's project was thus one of "organizing workers" to build a strong union, valuable in its own terms.

For many union builders, an important moment is when they come to see what they had perceived as an individual problem, as a collective one. DG grew up in a working

class family, finished college, and became a social worker. She joined the union, became active during a strike, and was elected a steward. She came to see union work as an extension of what brought her to social work in the first place, but more effective:

I saw my job to be an advocate for the client. But that was more on a one-by-one basis... I saw the role of being involved in the union as being an advocate for my co-workers as a collective group. And at the same time, my clients as a collective group.... eventually I was in the job long enough to come to the conclusion that as an individual social worker I could certainly have an impact on the individual that I ran into. But I came to believe that I could have a much larger and more comprehensive impact on what it was like for me to be a social worker and what it was like for me to be in this system trying to achieve something. I could have a bigger impact if I came at it from a collective perspective. And I don't know. I believe that this is true in any labor situation.

Unlike social reformers, community leaders, and those seeking personal advancement, all of whom saw the union as a means to a greater end, union builders saw building a strong union as worthy in its own right. And, like Martinez, they could become the kind of people they wanted to be by helping to make it happen.

What Happened To Them?

Having observed the role people's projects played in their decision to go to work for a union, we return now to learn how people's projects unfolded over time -- and how this influenced who stayed and who left the labor movement. Chart 5 brings together people whose projects were social reform, community leadership, personal advancement, and union building in a single chart, grouped by their first union project. The second column shows whether or not their project changed in the course of their work with a union and, if it did, it indicates the new project. And the third column shows each person's final union project -- if they still work for the union, their current project, or, if they left the union, the project they were pursuing when they left. Finally, the fourth column indicates whether they continue to do union work, in which case a project is indicated, or if not, the space is blank.

[Chart #5]

Chart 5 shows two important dynamics in the way people's projects interact with their union leadership careers over time, one of which facilitates organizational continuity, while the other contributes to organizational change.

First, most of our interviewees became union builders and most union builders kept working for unions. Although only 11 people began as union builders, 38 developed a union building project at some point in their union career. The tendency to become a union builder was true no matter what one's initial project: Of 36 social reformers, 13 became union builders; of 11 POs, 10 became union builders; of 10 community leaders, 5 became union builders.

This suggests an isomorphic process through which people's projects become conformed to that of the organization within which they work. As Chart 5 shows, most people either adapted their projects to that of their organization or they left the organization. Five of those who began union work as social reformers and remained

committed to that project ended up leaving the labor movement. Likewise, four out of five of those who retained their initial projects as community leaders also left.

Second, those who did not become union builders but kept working for unions were almost all social reformers who either found ways to change their organizations or "free spaces" in which their value to their unions allowed them the room to retain their projects. In neither case, sustained ties to other social reformers was an important element in sustaining their commitment to their project.

Of the original social reformers, 18 remained committed to their original project and 13 are still doing union work today. And of the 13 who continue to do union work, 6 are involved in changing their organizations while 7 found "free spaces" within which to work. Of the community leaders, however, 5 retained their dedication to community leadership but only one found a way to stay in union work.

Finally, Chart 5 indicates that some people developed totally new projects in the course of their union work: those who placed family concerns first and those who became entrepreneurs. Of the 7 who followed this path, all but two left the labor movement.

BECOMING UNION BUILDERS

How and why did so many people become union builders? For some, union work turned out to be an effective way to translate their social reform impulses into practical outcomes. For others, the union provided an effective way to serve their constituencies. And for still others, especially those who began union work to advance their careers, it developed into a project to which they became committed as they learned that it was work at which they could excel, draw meaning from, and through which they could make a difference in the world.

From Social Reform to Union Building

For Charles Keaton, one of the 13 social reformers who became union builders, the transformation of his broad social reform project into one of union building occurred around his decision to seek full-time union work. A faith-based social reformer he had found his way to the Carpenters via the UFW. After getting married in 1973 - and taking time off to travel around the world - he thought about returning to the UFW .

...money wasn't a big issue as much as wanting to stay involved in the movement. And so I thought, "Well, I'll go back to the UFW. That was where a lot of things were happening." (But) it didn't work... the money became another issue to me because I really began at that time to realize that I needed a career. And I must have had some inkling that I could do that through the Carpenters. I mean I wasn't unaware of the fact that if I stayed active in the Carpenters I could find a career.

So he decided he could blend his social reform agenda with a career as a carpenter, a choice facilitated by the skill he had learned "working with tools" growing up and the fact he could do it with others.

And I think I realized at the time that a lot of activities could take place through rank and file carpenters.... People could still be involved in movement issues without necessarily working fulltime.. So I did a little shift in consciousness... I became a journeyman... And we also had a

group called the "Concerned Carpenters." Some people that were much more politically oriented. RCP people and stuff like that were involved, they sort of pulled away. They got bored with the thing, but I kept it going. Well, we had meetings and mailing lists and putting out a newsletter every so often. There were probably a core group of 6-7 of us (in different locals).

After becoming a journeyman he began to take part in union struggles as a participant more than a leader.

Well there was a strike I think in '73 or '74 and I was involved in picketing in that strike. I was involved in Local 1400 and we had... it wasn't a long strike but we were involved in that... I was just one of many people walking off the job and just talking on the job... not much more than that.

But he continued his internal organizing:

At that point we were agitating for responsible leadership in the locals... the right to vote on the contract. We kept hammering away on that issue. So by 1977 we had actually won that right... we attended all the meetings and we kept putting newsletters out on that issue.

When he moved to Orange County so his wife could attend medical school he decided to seek full time union work and plunged right into local union politics:

I had been active in the local and by that time I was very clear what I wanted to do. I knew... Probably by like 1980. I was very clear that I wanted to work full time for the union.

As Keaton decided to seek full time union work, he began redefining his project from one of broad social reform to that of union building. In 1982, he launched an "insurgent" campaign for local business agent and won. Although he found the "day today work of the union" took more time than he had expected, he led an effort to organize new residential construction. He continued to organize, won re-election in 1985 and 1988, and became active in municipal politics, especially initiatives to build affordable housing. Although he narrowly lost re-election in 1991, the council executive secretary appointed him a full time organizer. He continues in that role and draws his greatest satisfaction from "redirecting union resources into organizing."

When asked how his politics had changed since he began his career he articulated this vision of union building:

I mean I have found that what's good for labor is usually good for the country. Abraham Lincoln said "Any man that tells you that he loves America, yet hates labor, is a liar."

Henry Podack was another social reformer who found his way into a union as a social worker. He joined AFSCME when it began organizing the welfare department where he found work after graduating from UC Berkeley. But he became active in the union almost casually.

And so I forget what, there was an issue that came up that I ended up representing our side of the building there. And just continued on... I think I got lucky on my first grievance and decided I had talent... "

After getting elected steward and, later, chief steward, he began to get a "fever" for union work when he began organizing, successfully competing with other public sector unions.

"And that was a very exciting organizing campaign.... one of those where if you win your first one, you kind of get the fever.

After going to work for the union as a fulltime organizer in another city, he returned home to establish a base, built a regional council he was elected to lead and despite backing a losing candidate for international president, won election to the national executive board of his union.

When asked about where the satisfaction in his work came, Podack described his excitement with what a union can do for people:

....it's working directly with our members in some struggle. One was in Eureka in '96. We had a county strike there. And it's when you see the troops really get a sense that they have some power. I mean even the grievance wins, when they realize that if you fight about it and you persist, and you fight smart, you can win some of these things. It's watching them feel empowered I think is the greatest thing for me.... Well, I love to get involved in this. I'd rather do this than sit in the office and shuffle papers. I'm not a good administrator. My title is director and that to me is hilarious. I love to mix it up in the field.

For Podack, then, the union offered a pathway to a successful career, to work he loves doing, and to acting on his social reform impulse, now thoroughly linked to his union work. When asked to compare his politics today with his "Berkeley years", he described his move toward pragmatism, especially at the local level.

I will have to admit that I have fallen victim to the concept of pragmatism on many occasions where I just did not see a viable alternative, nor did I feel that maintaining a real radical position, out making myself feel good and allowing me to say I'm radical... I still think I'm closer to the radical than the conservative... And I've been to and worked for this union in Africa and to Asia and places. And so I come back thinking "You know, I don't worry about dysentery every day. And we don't worry about some of the things... I think my politics have been influenced by just my appreciation for how things work... Now on a more big picture level, I don't know that I've changed that much from Berkeley. This is both with Clinton and Bush as far as their foreign policy and the atrocities that we continue to create and perpetrate. I don't know that I'm any more comfortable with the US government today than I ever was. A lot of the shift for me has been to more local politics than national. side of

Our last example of a social reformer who became a union builder made the transition not as a result of election to local office, but in the course of his work as one of a growing number of "professionals" who work for several unions during their careers. For Neil Eaton, a faith motivated activist who entered union work through the UFW, his social reform project turned into a union building project as he decided to "get a regular union job".

The organizational content of his work is at the heart of his project.

But, as an organizer, my whole job, or my whole approach was to be able to set up an organization and get it going and then walk away, and have it still running.. Creating opportunities for people to do that is also part of what I see my role as... One of the phrases we use is try to help workers get the boss to do what we want him to do and not to do what we don't want him to do. While being

simple, I think there's a lot to that. You can dress it up in a variety of ways, but to the degree that we can give our members power to have some say and control over their own working lives, I think that's what our union does... most satisfying to me, and this is true of several jobs, is, if people feel stronger and better about their control over their work life, and their job, and that they understand the value of organization, and will then go out and say, "What do I need to do to make this happen?" That's a source of satisfaction to me.

Healsodrewsatisf actionfrombecomingincreasinglyeffectiveintheworkofunion building, although in different organizations.

Every job I've had, I've either been able to go into an area where I was able to expand an area of skill that I lacked previously. For example, the way I look at the UFW... I learned a lot of basic kinds of things in terms of organizing and dealing with workers and that sort of thing, community organizing... Moving to onto NABET... I began to do a little bit more organizing towards getting contracts and recruiting workers to identify the union as providing, when they worked together, and operated together, a collective benefit, i.e., health insurance, and that sort of thing. CFA offered me the opportunity to do more grievance work; did a lot of arbitration's with them. Lots of basic chapter building and organizational kinds of things in making structures more permanent. CNA was an opportunity to do some supervision and actually more hands on bargaining, myself, with much larger contracts. I negotiated for Kaiser... and I think we represented about... 6000 RN's. And then coordinating the bargaining in the East Bay was about another 3000, 3500, something like that. And I enjoyed that very much. It was a different activity. Obviously, going back to school was to go off in a completely different direction, but look at it as a sabbatical, or what have you. But, ultimately, came back to doing this kind of work, because I like it, and I've been able to do a little bit of everything with Local 250. They're very much oriented towards organizing and using the organizing model in approaching problems in the workplace.

From Community Leadership to Union Building

Linda Donatello exemplifies the five community leaders who became union builders and continued to do union work. After becoming active in the union as a leader of a small group of teachers who organized to protest changes introduced by a new principal, she became more involved in the union, developed her own capacities as a result, but still did not turn to a union building project.

I was finding myself kind of fascinated by doing some of the background work for this particular grievance. And so I did it. And I clearly became the lead person... Number one, it interested me. Two, I had the time to do it and I was willing to do it. I did not see myself as taking that on for any other reason but that. I did not see the beginning of a new career, anything along that line.

They won their grievance, she became more and more active in the union, and she became more and more skillful.

So anyway, I started becoming EXTREMELY active in the Grievance Committee, to the point that I began going to represent teachers at level one, which was the site level of the grievance hearing. Started out having the staff person with me. Graduated, so to speak, to doing it on my own... So I began then being involved in helping prepare the cases to go to binding arbitration. Making sure we covered all the contractual issues, to helping prepare the person who was going to be the chief witness. Even putting the exhibits together because it is very much like a court case... Exhibit one, two, three, whatever. And I became almost like an assistant to the staff person. Just clearly I was spending more and more and more of my time involved in doing that kind of thing. And doing some other things within the organization. Maybe helping to write newsletters or articles for the newsletter. Then people found out I could write and make stuff clear.

Gradually, as she devoted more of her energy to persuading others to join the union, the union came to occupy a more central role in her life as her project became one of union building.

Being involved in trying to get people to join the organization... I'd tell my story about why I became a member, how I became a member. Trying to get people to put their fair share into... So while the core was still around, a lot of the grievance issues and the confidence issues, I had feelers going out in other areas of the organization.... It was just that if you're there at the union office every day virtually, after school, and you walk in and there's not a grievance to be looking at today, "What else is there for me to do? Is there anything else that needs doing?" Or yeah, we've got a grievance that we're looking at, but really right now what we need to talk about is "Could you help out there?"

The "clincher" came when the state union representative, looking for new leadership to revitalize a local that had been in an ongoing jurisdictional fight with another union, asked her to run for local president:

So quite frankly I was approached by people within the state organization asking if I would be interested, willing to run as President of the organization... there had been organizing projects that had gone on, where we had gone out and tried to attract new members. And so there were always state people around, in and out and trying to see the health of the local. So I knew a lot of them and they knew me because I'd been involved and I'd been quite active. And so they basically approached me and said "Would you be interested in running as President?" And I'm like "Uhhhhh"... frankly they cut a deal that allowed me to run unopposed.

She was to serve as president of her local, which eventually included the entire city, for 10 years. As is the case with many union builders, her greatest work satisfaction is in bargaining and representation.

All through my time being involved in the organization, I had continued to be involved in grievance handling. And preparing for arbitration, working with lawyers when we took cases to arbitration. And that always was my life... But it was something I really liked and enjoyed and I did it... there's always the challenge... is a teacher/leader negotiating a good contract for teachers? Coming up with a document that you can be proud of, that does good things for teachers, that strengthens their rights. I used to say that we'd know when we'd gone as far as we could go in bargaining when that was left to negotiate was the quality of the toilet paper that was in the teachers' restrooms.... Obviously when you go to the bargaining table, you don't go as an individual, you go as a team... (but) there are sections of the contract that I can say "I did that. That was mine."... things in there that I know helped make teachers' lives better... So that I'm very proud of... The whole idea of teachers' self-esteem, self-respect... that's going to be a forever battle.

Donatella thus began her union work as leader of a workplace based community. But as she gained more experience, earned more responsibility, and became increasingly competent at her work, she came to redefine her project in more institutional terms of building a union to make a difference in the lives of its members.

From Personal Advancement to Union Building

Dave Mills, the seeker of personal advancement described above, was typical of the 10 others, all of whom became union builders save one. Mill's had decided to "move

up" by running for local union business agent. But once there he put the same kind of energy into keeping the job that he had invested in getting it. But he also found the job itself began to take on new meaning.

My wife got pregnant actual ly right after I got elected in '66, the summer of '66... our second daughter was born in March of '67... in '69 I ran and got re-elected... with the highest vote total anybody ever got in the history of the local.... During that 3 year period I worked like a dog. I was all over. Probably the fear of failure (was driving me)... I mean a very practical part of this thing. I'm married, I got 2 children, I'm a very young guy and I've got a long way to go. And I wanted to make sure I could survive. But the tool also really got into the shop and what I thought needed to be done and how it needed to be done.

He earned a reputation for competence, as "the business agent who could win any grievance."

And I became known as the drunk's best friend and the crook's best friend... Man I became like an attorney. And if I could nail the employer on anything, a technicality or whatever I would, I would nail them on it.... But the one thing about going to college gave me an idea of how to prepare some things, prepare cases and stuff like that. Oftentimes I was dealing with terminal managers, never got to college, or supervisors who never had the experience. And just came off a truck and became a supervisor. And the BA's didn't have much formal education. So I think that helped a lot. I had some very good decisions in cases I had. I organized workers. I mean I did a lot of things. And so I got a pretty good vote. And my father-in-law became a little more controversial during that term of office and I got more votes than him.

After winning re-election to a second term, a regional union leader who had taken a liking to him asked him to become a full time lobbyist for the union in Sacramento, the state capitol. He had an interest in politics and took the job, even though he had to resign his elected position in the local. Although he learned a lot from the union's chief lobbyist, however, he became restive having to follow someone else's orders:

I realized that I didn't want to do that for the rest of my life.... Mainly because I was following a policy that someone else had set and a lot of times I didn't like it... And there was no way that I was going to change his mind and there was no way I was going to replace him because he was an institution.

So he began to consider options that could both give him more authority in the union, at the same time, rebuilding his base:

In fact, frequently told my wife, "Hey I just don't like this. I can't see myself doing this for the rest of my life. I want to have more direct contact with the members. I want to have more direct influence on policy." So I said I probably should go back to (the local) and run for secretary/treasurer.

At the end of that year he quit his lobbying job, went back to driving a truck, and began his campaign for secretary/treasurer of his local.

I went back to driving, working as a truck driver during that 5 month period of time. From the first of the year on nominations in April. And I worked a number of different places, different jobs in the local and then got nominated for secretary/treasurer. And in the meantime while I was down here was building up my political machine... And got nominated in April and ran against the incumbent

local

recording secretary at the time... And anyway, Iran and I put together. Sol became the secretary/treasurer.

won. In fact I got more votes than they all

Having recommitted himself to union work, taken a risk and been rewarded for it, and won a key position of local leadership, he developed his union building project more fully:

Yeah, one of the things I wanted to do was to get the collective bargaining straightened out... I don't care who you were in the local union, we didn't like the outcome of the 1970 negotiations and we wanted to change it in '73. So that was one thing. Healthcare, getting the best healthcare program we could for members and a retiree healthcare program, wanted to do that. I emphasized and argued for more money and better pension program... I wanted to get collective bargaining agreements for members... And reviving stewards meetings, getting members involved in the process... Establishing some kind of solid and secure financial position. We were broke... And that was another challenge, just bringing back the finances because it's pretty hard to look at anything else if you can't pay your bills and you can't meet your payroll. So over the years we dealt with them and it was a struggle.

Mill went to work for a union because it offered him an opportunity for personal advancement. Like other personal advancement seekers, however, his project became one of union building as he grew more successful, experienced the reward that went with success at the work, and relished the opportunity to make a difference.

Many union leaders whose projects had been social reform, community leadership, or personal advancement thus became union builders. While they gave different emphasis to acting on their values, serving their constituency, or developing as effective leaders, these concerns came together in the "larger" project of building the union.

But not everyone became a union builder, however. Some found they could pursue another project within their unions, but others found doings so required that they move on.

STAYING THE COURSE AND STAYING IN (SOCIAL REFORMERS)

The people we interviewed who found ways to pursue their initial projects within unions without becoming union builders were almost all social reformers. Six of them took part in efforts to change their unions and seven others found ways to "negotiate" free spaces within their unions in which they could pursue their projects. In both cases, maintaining ties with other social reformers seemed very important to sustaining their commitment to their project.

The most striking example of union transformation of which we learned is signaled by the fact that four of the 13 social reformers who stayed the course went to work for HERE and are still there today. Moreover, no one in our sample who went to work for HERE ever changed their project, suggesting that rather than HERE changing the social reformers, the social reformers helped to change HERE. And indeed, each of our interviewees who went to work for HERE took part in efforts to transform that union from an old-time business union into a social movement union.

Interestingly, the stories HERE leaders tell about their career in the union have certain common elements. They took part in a formative political struggle soon after

going to work for HERE. And in that struggle they formed relationships with allies that continue to sustain their union work today.

For instance, Liam O'Reilly, the faith motivated social reformer discussed above, got involved in a bitter election campaign a few years after he went to work for a HERE local. That election, he told us, was fundamentally a fight "about the future of the union," and he supported "the only person who understood organizing" or who was committed to making wholesale changes in the way the local was run. His candidate won the election but the power struggle continued because some of the staff had been on the losing side of the election and they fought tooth and nail against effort to reorganize the union. O'Reilly was part of the small group of staff and rank-and-file union members who began to meet in the evenings, after work, (he called it the "night shift") to "talk about where we needed to take the union." This small group organized others and eventually won broad support for transforming the local union. Today, O'Reilly is still in touch with people from this "leadership group" who helped to convert the local into the kind of organization that fights for "justice" and "fairness."

While O'Reilly's story provides insight into how social reformers contributed to the transformation of a single local, Colin Gordon's experiences illuminate ways they contributed to changing the national union. O'Reilly was hired by Gordon, the unaffiliated social reformer whose journey to HERE via the UFW is recounted above. Gordon's first job was strike coordinator for the local, a job that brought him into contact with Vincent Sirabella, HERE's legendary organizing director, and John Wilhelm, now HERE's president.⁵ After directing a large and successful hotel strike, Gordon became organizing director of the local and formed an organizing team, that included O'Reilly. Two years after coming to work for the local he was recruited to join the international staff, eventually becoming part of Sirabella's national organizing team. As a member of the CG team helped to reorganize several local that had been trusted by the international union. Today he is president of a New York local, a position to which he was elected after helping to revitalize the local while in trusteeship. When we asked him what he had done to turn around the local, he stressed team development, membership involvement, and organizing -- his tools for bringing about organizational change:

... The plan was to build a team of people so that we could first of all involve the members in the union and put the union into their hands. And then figure out how to approach organizing."

Gordon remains a social reformer, having helped to transform HERE into the kind of union where one can pursue as a social reform project.

Other social reformers who "stayed the course" told us about their efforts to change the organizations of which they were a part. Although they tended to suffer more political reverse than HERE leaders, they continued to do union work because they found "free spaces" within their organizations that allowed them to sustain their projects. Also, they were often tied to a social reform network through which they could sustain their commitment.

One example is Tom Weinberg, a vanguard social reformer, who led a successful insurgency in the local union he had joined. About a year and a half after joining, he ran successfully for steward and then, the executive board. Frustrated with how little he was able to accomplish in those positions and looking for another way to have more influence, he started an underground newspaper. Targeting "workers, families, and customers", it

afforded him a way to conduct "propaganda campaigns" to solve problems she could not solve under the contract. Two years later, he ran against the incumbent president of the local, using the newspaper to articulate his broad view of unionism. The campaign that ensued proved to be a formative political battle. On the slate with him were two women, one of whom was a black Latina, a "young Latinoguy" who would become his closest ally in the union, and a Japanese man. He won the presidency, but the old guard, with support from the international, red baited him and got the election thrown out. So Weinberg ran a second campaign, and won again.

Consolidating power took a while, however, since many of the people on the executive board still opposed him. He built support by doing a good job at union work, focusing on race and gender issues, and reaching out to women and minorities in the union and in the community. Although these priorities fit with the politics of his vanguard group, he turned them into practical successes. He won a break-through private industry pay equity agreement, ran a campaign to keep local pay offices open ("Save Our Services"), and mobilized community support to win Martin Luther King's birthday as a paid holiday. Success encouraged the international president to make peace with him, so after 8 years as local president, he accepted an offer to work for the International as a regional director. His early ally, the "young Latinoguy", became the new local president. Three years later, the international president tasked him to become the national research director, with the understanding he was being groomed to be his successor.

But the international president didn't survive the next election, so the fact his political prospects depended on this relationship ended Weinberg's rise in the union. Although he still holds the national research director's job, he has little power to continue his efforts to transform the union. However, he remains a social reformer, and looking back on his career, describes himself as "an agitator," who continually "adapts to the situation in which he finds himself." His current project is fighting to get the labor movement to live up to its "responsibility to workers and working families," a responsibility he sees as extending far beyond "those people who are unionized." While serving on the International staff he has organized a coalition to fight deregulation, a fight he thinks is crucially important because "it is part and parcel of the privatization, World Bank stuff that's going on internationally."

Weinberg, then, is a social reformer who stayed the course, even in the face of setbacks and disappointments. His early successes as a local president clearly constitute a time when he could align his social reform project and his union work. He has been supported in the years since by remaining in close contact with members of the vanguard group he originally traveled to southern California with. And although his efforts to transform his union appear to be stymied, he has found a "freespace" from which he continues to pursue his project.

Another example is Nancy Masterson, who was able to negotiate her "freespace", quite explicitly, as a result of her success as a top organizer of a desirable new constituency. An unaffiliated social reformer influenced by the UFW she found her way into a clerical job in a legal services agency. After becoming a community worker she helped organize the community workers, paralegals, and clerical staff into an independent union, backed by the Women's Labor Project of the National Lawyers Guild. Despite the fact that legal services is a non-profit agency, it was problems around race and gender -- as well as economics -- that had spurred the organizing.

And there was a very difficult split... as you might imagine, between the white attorneys who primarily comprised the legal force and largely Latino and Mexican former farm worker community workers, paralegals and secretaries. So there were a few of us who were Anglo support staff, but primarily there was a pretty sharp racial division at the time. And it created tensions and working conditions and racial tensions at the workplace. Racism, sexism, all the things you might imagine

When their union not only won recognition from the agency, but along strike, they became a "hot item", attractive to various international unions trying to offset declining membership by moving into new jurisdictions through affiliation.

. And we were on strike I think for 14 weeks for our second contract as an independent. And we won the strike, we were successful, and got a lot of publicity in the media throughout the state. At that point, every union wanted us because they felt we had done something as an independent that, you know, small workforce, separated geographically. And plus, the number of people were clerical workers and a lot of unions were beginning to be interested in...

One such union was the "Distributive, Processing and Office Workers of America, District 65", a product of the highly politicized New York labor movement, formerly part of the RWDSU. ⁶ Known for representing white collar workers, including those employed by New York Legal Aid, women, and people of color, the union had a very "progressive" reputation, but few members on the West Coast. In return for affiliation, District 65 agreed to fund a fulltime organizer, the position to which Masterson was selected. In 1980, however, just after Masterson's group had affiliated, District 65 affiliated with the United Auto Workers (UAW), who were hoping to establish a base among white-collar workers. It continued as a "national local" within the UAW. And as a fulltime field rep, Masterson was elected every 3 years and served on the board of the national union. She became a very successful organizer, winning white-collar units ranging from the Sierra Club to Revlon. She earned a reputation of having won every NLR election she ran in except for one and by the mid-1980s had become her union's Western Regional Director. District 65, however, had begun to have serious financial problems and board meetings required constant travelling between the East and West Coasts. As a result, in 1988, she renegotiated her status within the UAW.

So in addition to what I was doing on the west coast, I was flying to New York every Sunday night on the redeye and coming home on the Monday night redeye just so I could be at the board meeting. And then starting my weekend on Tuesday. And that was primarily why I decided to accept the job on the UAW International staff. I was how old then? I was 40 and so by my late 30's the two redeyes back to back was starting to wear thin. Although I remained there for District 65 for some years after I went on the UAW International staff, I left my elected position to take an appointed position through the UAW. With the negotiated understanding with the UAW Regional Director that I would be able to retain much of what I was doing.

Masterson's position was unique in the UAW, a union deeply committed to hiring only from the "shop floor", in which representatives either did "servicing" or "organizing". To carry out her project, Masterson wanted to do both.

... what was most important to me was retaining the ability to organize. And so I kept the UC assignment because by '88 we had started drives at San Diego and we had the lead at Santa Cruz,

in addition to Berkeley. Sol wanted to continue the UC drive and I wanted to continue to have some oversight over the other work. e

Soshe "cut a deal" with the Regional Director of the UAW.

... most reps in the UAW would either have only servicing or have only organizing. And I asked to have either all organizing or both. And while that was unusual, that request was accommodated because the Regional Director of the UAW board didn't want to lose someone from organizing who wanted to organize. Most people at the time when I came on staff, were trying to get out of organizing. So the best job in the UAW was considered to be the servicing job because it was stable geographically and while your assignment might change, your life was somewhat more stable. You had a servicing assignment as opposed to an organizing assignment. But while I liked servicing, I didn't like it as well as organizing.

The strength of her position also enabled her to negotiate an unusual degree of stability in her family life.

I had had an offer for a number of years from the UAW to be an International Rep and I had turned it down for probably 7 or 8 years in the '80's because I wanted some geographic stability in terms of northern California. My family is here. My husband is here. His job is here. I like it here. ... I was able to negotiate the job I wanted. Not completely. I mean I couldn't just say "I won't take that assignment or I won't do this." But I had pretty good arrangement geographically that while I would travel, I would be still in northern California. That I would continue to have organizing as a priority, but I would still have servicing assignments as well.

She was also able to negotiate the autonomy to do her work as she saw it, one of the main reasons she thinks she has avoided "burnout"

... a lot of the reason I haven't felt burnt out is that I took a job at a point where I was able to negotiate options. So I think that really makes a big difference. To have control over your working life. I mean nobody has complete control. I mean it's not like I say "Oh no, I won't do that." And I have done assignments that I would not have selected myself. But I've always also been able to do something that I felt was really interesting and vital and something I wanted to do. And I haven't had a difficulty in any significant way negotiating resources and getting additional help.

The fact she has been able to keep organizing, follow through on her plans for leadership development, and insure continuity in her work has helped her to sustain her commitment to her social reform project.

I really like the process. I like working with people in an organizing capacity. I like to see that process develop. I love seeing people gain skills, not just in their workplace about organizing, but also kind of adopting the attitude that you can actually change things in your life and other people's lives. So it's a real dynamic, exciting lifestyle. I really do regard it as something that goes through your whole life. It's not just about union organizing. But it's about being active in your community, just feeling like you have the power to do something. And so I like that myself. But I also really love working with people who learn that through the process of organizing.

I think the thing I'm proudest of is leadership and staff development. I think we've done a good job that will benefit the labor movement for a long time to come... A lot of people who have come out of our campaigns are out of the locals where we've organized, have either become International Reps or they've gone to other unions or they've gone into -- in the case of UC -- this isn't just UC, but

have gone into the academy and have maintained their interest and link to labor or some other type of community organizing. So that the organizing message I think has successfully been picked up and carried broadly in a way that I think has major significance.

Masterson remains a social reformer, one who negotiates "free space" because she had built a base within a constituency the UAW hoped to organize, earned a reputation of excellence at her work, and could not be easily replaced. Her organizing successes have also put her in a good position for the future, since she organized the

second biggest UAW local in the country. So that has power. It's the biggest local on the west coast, biggest local west of the Mississippi. So people look to the... leadership in that local and say "OK, what are they going to do?"

Although these social reformers found ways to pursue their projects while at the same time staying in union work, others left. It is to them we now turn.

LEAVING THE UNION

Some of the labor leaders we interviewed left union work. Why did they leave while most stayed? Although it is interesting to know who left and who stayed, it may be more valuable to know why they left and where they went. Research on careers of union leaders of an earlier generation showed that many built management careers on their union experience. In this generation, however, most of those who left unions continued doing work broadly related to labor's mission. Why didn't they pursue this work within their unions?

We looked at several factors to see whether or not they were associated with staying and leaving, including gender, ethnicity, religion, class, education, family background, marital status, recruitment, first union job, and mentors and sponsors. But the strongest connection we could find between going and staying was people's projects. As we have already seen, people who became union builders stayed with the labor movement, and with the exception of a portion of the social reformers, those who did not, often left. Moreover, most of those who adopted new projects, like prioritizing family first, or the pursuit of entrepreneurial career, left as well.

For those who left, Chart 6 displays their projects just before they left union work, how they came to leave, and the kind of place to which they went. It indicates that of the 21 people who left union work, 4 were social reformers who found they could not pursue their projects by working for unions and 9 were community leaders or union builders (and one social reformer) who left after losing political fights.

KEEPING YOUR PROJECT AND LEAVING THE UNION

All but one of the social reformers who left union work did so not after losing an election, but because they decided carrying on their project required exiting the labor movement. They came to this conclusion after many years of doing union work. But, like almost all social reformers, they had activist experience before coming to the labor movement. And all those who left had been recruited from the outside. This may be one reason they found they could leave on their own volition.

For example, Laura Feirman, a middle class, college educated, unaffiliated social reformer who entered union work after being a community and antiwar activist, left after eighteen years of trying to find a place where she could “create the kinds of changes that really need to happen.” During those eighteen years, she worked for some of the more progressive unions in the labor movement, SEIU, SAG, and the National Writers Union. In 1991, she finally decided to find other work:

A bunch of things happened... National health care goes down the tubes in part because the labor movement can't get itself behind some real reform. NAFTA gets passed in part because the labor movement has killed off all the left wing people in Central America who could have helped them defeat it. A number of things happened that really changed my feelings about the labor movement relative to the rest of the progressive world. And that needed to be bridged. That whatever happened next was not going to happen either exclusively in the labor movement or exclusively in the community sector and that we had to reconstruct the way the movement looked if we were ever going to win any of the things we needed to win again.

And the other thing that happened to me, is I went back to something that had been a lot more important to me earlier and realized that I never again wanted to work in an organization that was basically white. That race was my preeminent passion and that I was really tired of working with people who were there by privilege. And I just was not interested anymore in that and I no longer wanted to work in a situation where white people were in charge by fiat.

So those two things [came together]... I didn't like the culture of the labor movement. And I thought I had sort of run out of spaces where I could fix it from inside... each job had was slightly closer to the edge of the labor movement than the job that preceded it. And I finally fell over the edge.

A year and a half after leaving her union job, she created an NGO with the mission of “advancing progressive organizing and supporting the people who do it.” She is currently the full-time director, overseeing programs that support organizers from a range of progressive groups, including some unions.

The other three social reformers who left the labor movement told similar stories of years invested pursuing their project in the labor movement and eventually concluding that to do what they wanted to do, they had to leave. One of these, like Feirman, started an NGO that supports organization of low wage workers, often in collaboration with unions. Another became a journalist, political consultant, and public official who works closely with unions. And the third became a journalist who played a leading role in national debates on public policy.

Losing a Political Fight and Leaving the Union

Ten of the labor leaders we interviewed left the union movement after losing political battles. Five of them were community leaders, 4 were union builders and only 1 was a social reformer. However, regardless of project, all those who left after losing political fights had been recruited from inside the workplace, perhaps making them more reluctant to leave on their own volition. After leaving, the paths of union builders and community leaders diverged, with most of the union builders making their way into state politics and most of the community leaders repositioning themselves in a local business or other local enterprise.

The number of community leaders who left is notable because it is such a large proportion of all those who stuck with this project: 5 out of 6 people. Four of the 5 are Latinos who had articulated their project in ethnic rather than workplace terms. None had completed college when they entered union work and all but one came from a working class background. This suggests that community leaders who did not make a transition into union building found themselves ill-equipped - in terms of organizational relationships beyond their local communities, shared projects or alliances - to survive political reverses. This might also help explain why they found their way into local enterprises rather than state or local politics.

In contrast, three of the four union builders who left after losing political fights had middle-class backgrounds and two had finished college before they started their union careers. They also represent a much smaller proportion of union builders than is the case with community leaders, suggesting that union builders were usually able to regroup when they suffered political losses rather than leaving as the community leaders did. It is likely that union builders were able to develop a broad set of relationships, shared projects, and alliances than those who remained community leaders could. This could also help explain why they made their way into state politics, rather than into local businesses.

Rom Gianinni, for example, was a union builder who began union work as a social reformer. He was recruited by a growing SEIU local that represented the municipal workers of a city where he had found work painting street lines. With good sponsorship in a growing union he rose quickly, becoming a dedicated union builder. When he came to the attention of the national union leadership, looking for people with whom to beef up its local unions, he was appointed trustee of major locals in Southern and Northern California and eventually earned election to the national executive board. But when he ran for president of the local that he had served as trustee, he lost. Deeply shaken by the loss, he began to reconsider his project while the national union offered him a variety of positions, carrying him until he decided what to do. They supported him in his decision to go to work for the speaker of the Assembly and, later, as a political consultant.

Dick Lara, on the other hand, was a community leader who was a Chicano activist long before he entered union work. As a Chicano activist he became active in AFSCME by organizing his workplace, winning election as steward and, eventually, vice-president of his local. He then accepted a full-time union representative position, a post in which he served for 7 years. During this period, however, he devoted much of his energy to organizing and leading a city-wide "Alinsky style" community organization, linked more to his experience as a Chicano activist than as a union official. When his AFSCME unit got decertified, he moved to SEIU as a business agent for a local branch of one of its statewide locals. He supported formation of a separate local, part of the national union agenda, but had conflicts with the national staff who fired him for insubordination. Although he pursued his project by remaining active in local community organizing, he was out of a job and got a license to sell insurance as a way to make a living.

For Gianinni, like other union builders, recovering from a political loss was personally difficult, but smothered by his ties to the union he had been building. For Lara, on the other hand, when he fell out of favor with the union leadership, he found himself out of a job, without a union base to fall back on. Like other community leaders, however, he found he could draw on his ties in the local community to find work in which those ties could be of real value.

Changing Your Project and Leaving the Union

Eleven of the people we interviewed left after they changed projects and did not find ways to pursue them within the labor movement.

Five left while in pursuit of projects with which we are already familiar. One social reformer (Henry Carl) who became a community leader left under the same circumstances as other community leaders, losing a political fight. Three social reformers (Altman, Gianinni, Hoffman) who had become union builders also left after losing political fights. And the one social reformer (Ralph Reeve) who prioritized his personal advancement left to pursue that.

Six others left to pursue new projects developed in the course of their union work. Three social reformers (Nussbaum, Davis, Kaufman) left to prioritize their family lives. And although four of the people we interviewed developed projects as entrepreneurs (Darden, Norman, Martin, Thomas TD), two of them left (Martin and Thomas). All four "entrepreneurs" passed through a "union builder" transition from initial projects of social reform (2), community leadership (1), and personal advancement (1).

Family First Projects

Three of the people we interviewed left because their project became giving priority to the quality of their family life.

Family First: These people decided to sacrifice work with the union to family interests. They articulated this change in their project as an explicit decision. And it was associated with having small children, having to make choices about parenting, etc.

Our interviews show that union leadership work often creates serious work-family tensions. Although often resolved at serious family cost, in three cases, these tensions were resolved with a change in project, followed shortly thereafter by leaving the union. Contrary to what some might expect, although all three of those whom we made this transition were former social reformers, only one was a woman, while two were men. The two women came from middle-class families and had finished college. The woman came from a working-class union family, but had not yet finished college when she began her union work.

Tom Nussbaum is a middle-class, college graduate, social reformer who went to work for SEIU through a community organization with ties to the labor movement. He became the chief political operative of a major public sector local, a position of influence inside and outside of the labor movement. His wife was pursuing a doctorate, they had two small children, and he became increasingly aware of his role as a parent.

And it was, I'd say late 80's, it was, "How does my family fit into this picture? How does being a father fit into this picture?"... I think I became aware that my marriage and being the kind of parent I wanted to be, which was not at all the kind of parent I had. My father was a classic 50's dad. Not around, not in the picture. And I think I knew that I like kids too much. It's so fun. And that I wasn't going to miss that. It wasn't really a conscious decision...

He had begun to consider other options, including politics.

It thinksomeoftheotherthingsthathappenedwhereIstarteddoingmorecampaigns.IthinkIgot interestedinthingsoutside ofthelabormovement,likepublicpolicyquestionsandappreciateda broaderviewthansimplytheviewinorganizedlabor...So,like'90 -'91,Iworkedfor(themayor)as hisliaisonwiththeBoardofSupervisors,basicallyhislobbyistwiththeboard...S oldidthatfora year.Helost.Ithenwascontemplatingdoingconsulting...butendedupsortofintheconsulting feelingwasnohome.Nofamily.Itwaslikebeinganoutsider,andIdidn'tlikethatfeelinghaving comefrom10yearsinSEIUwhereyou feellikeyoubelong.Youknowtheplayers.You'vegot institutionalmemory.You'renotahiredgun.

Findinghimselfbetweentheworldoftheunionandofpolitics,hisfamilyconcerns loomedparticularlylarge:

Bythen,Iwasfullyinvolvedinparentin g,probablyreallyjustintermsofthejoyofraisingkids. Everyonewhohaskidshastheircertainperiodsthattheygettoffon,andIguessIthinkIreallygot offonwhentheywereverylittle,sortofthe1to6 -7yearoldset.Itseemstobemypart icular passion...Ithinkitwasjustcleartome,I'mnotsomebodywho'sgoingtowork...Ididabunchof psychotherapy,whichIfoundverypowerful.IthinkIcamesomeunderstandingofwhatmy relationshipwastounionwork,sortofonapersonallevel, notjustonasocialchangelevel,butwhy asanindividualwouldIwanttodothiswork?What'sitabout?Whatdoesitdoforme?Whatdoes beinginfightsmean?Ithinkmyconclusion,afterallissaidanddone,wasthatmyfamilywasfirst andforemost. Whichisn'tanunusualconclusion,butthatonapersonallevel,Iwasn'tgoingtowork 60hoursaweekagain.ThatIneededtofindadifferentpath.

Hefoundawaytospendmostofayearathomedoingparttimeworkandfocusing onparenting.Hethen returnedtoworkparttimeascommunityliaisonforamajor university.

Twootherformersocialreformers,GeorgeKaumanandLindaDavis,alsoleft unionworktoputtheirfamiliesfirst.Onecontinuedtoworkwithunions,butasan educatorattachedtoa university,ratherthanasanactiveunionleader.Davisfoundher life"transformed"bymotherhood,returnedtoschool,andbecameeachildtherapist.Thus, althoughthesethreesocialreformersfoundtheycouldnotreconciletheprioritythey wantedtog ivetofamilylifewithacareerinthelabormovement,theydidfindwaysto pursuepublicservicecareers.

EntrepreneurialProjects

Fourofthepeoplewhomweintervieweddevelopedentrepreneurialprojects,twoof whomleftunionwork.

Entrepreneurship: Thesepeopleturnedtheirenergytoinitiatinganddeveloping theirrownenterprises,including,butnotlimitedtobusinesses.Forthem,unionwork createdtheopportunityfornewpursuits,outsidetheunion.

Whencomparedwithstudiesofearlierg enerationsofunionleaderswholeft unions,itisremarkablesofewofthisgenerationturnedtothisproject.Althoughtwohad begunassocialreformers,oneasacommunityleaderandoneseekingpersonal advancement,allofthosewhodevelopedentrepre n eurialprojectspassedthroughaunion buildingperiod.Andalthoughtheyhadbeensuccessfulintheirunionbuilding,itseemsto haveleftthemdissatisfied.

They also seem to have been well "equipped" to pursue new projects of their own. Three had come from middle class families and two had finished college. But they all had acquired new skills, relationships, or resources in the course of their union work that served them well in their new ventures.

Len Thomas' project trajectory went from personal advancement to union building to entrepreneurialism. Growing up in a troubled middle class family, he dropped out of high school and earned his GED in the army, where he learned rocketry. Upon discharge he found work in an aerospace plant represented by the UAW. Recruited by the steward, the union offered him a way up by "getting people together to make things work better." As a "union builder", when he changed jobs, he organized a new local there, was elected president, and joined the UAW regional staff as an international representative. His "union building" project was shaken, however, when he was laid off due to industry cutbacks and tried his hand at politics. His candidate lost but asked him to join him in a business venture in Taiwan. The venture didn't succeed so he returned the UAW when recalled. When he was assigned to Nummi, the joint GM/Toyota enterprise in Fremont, he developed a deep interest in the Toyota system, "interdependent industrial enterprise." This became his new "entrepreneurial" project and after briefly heading a joint labor management training program, he pursued it as a VP with McDonald Douglas, responsible for training in the new system. While there he earned his MBA, despite never having attended college. And when he parted ways with management, he continued his project by joining a consulting firm as a passionate advocate of the Toyota system,

For Thomas, then, the union offered him an avenue for personal advancement, a union building career during which he could acquire new skills, relationships, and commitments. These enabled him to become a dedicated advocate of a new industrial design system, his "entrepreneurial" project, which opened new opportunities outside the union.

Conclusions

We began this paper by asking where the current generation of California union leaders came from? Who are they? Why did they come to work for unions at a time when they seemed neither a way up nor at the heart of a social movement? Why did most of them stay? And why did some leave?

Although the people we interviewed are not a "random" sample, they are representative of the "rising leaders" of this generation in the California labor movement. So we have a great deal to learn from their experience not only about what happened to their generation, but to the leaders among them.

We discovered that many of the demographic variables often used to explain social action—and the career choices of earlier generations of union leadership—did not, in and of themselves, explain much about this generation of labor leaders. Class education, gender, ethnicity, and source of recruitment made little difference in who came to work for unions, who stayed, and who left. Instead, what mattered was people's projects, that is, how they conceived what they were trying to do. Projects help us understand the diversity of reasons why people came to work for unions, how those reasons evolved and why, in some cases, they became reasons for leaving.

7

Why did they come?

Some came on a mission of social reform, motivated by commitment to their faith, to vanguard politics, or to the broad social change goals shared by many influenced by the movements of 1960s and 1970s. Few social reformers found their way directly into the labor movement, however, except those from working class families who were radicalized in college. Most passed through "bridging organizations" such as the United Farm Workers or the Citizen's Action League. Because of their goals, organizational alliances, and networks they had forged these organizations specifically bridged the world of "the movement" to that of organized labor. It is unlikely most of the social reformers would have found their way to unions in their absence.

Others came for more traditional reasons. Some were leaders of communities, usually working class, and in most cases, Latino, whom they tried to serve through the union. Others came seeking personal advancement, a "way up". And still others came because the union had made a big difference in their lives so they came to believe "building" the union was a goal worthy of their commitment.

Why did they stay?

One of the most interesting findings in our study is how people's projects changed, as they converged on union building as the individual project most consonant with that of their organizations. We observed a process of adaptation as 90% of those who began seeking personal advancement became union builders, 50% of those who started as community leaders did, as well as 36% of those who started as social reformers. But we also observe a process of selection as many of those who did not adopt a union building project left: the one personal advancement seeker who did not "convert", 50% of those who started as community leaders, and 38% of those who started as social reformers.

The exception to this pattern of convergence, however, were the 13 social reformers, 36% of all those who began with this project, who remained committed, but found ways to stay in the labor movement. Some became part of a concerted -and successful -effort to change their union. Others found organizational "free spaces" where they could trade pursuit of their project for work the organization required.

And it is also interesting to note that although the social reformers -those who became union builders and those who did not -made valuable contributions to the unions, the unions did not make any social reformers.

Why did they leave?

What is perhaps most surprising for those in the labor movement with whom we have shared our results is that relatively few people actually left -22 out of 68 or 32%. And those who did leave rarely did so due to "burn -out". About half of those who left lost political fights and either could not or did not regroup. The other half left because they could not pursue their project while working for a union. For some it was their original projects, as with the social reformers and community leaders who left. For others it was a new project, as with those who decided to prioritize their family life or pursue entrepreneurial endeavors. But regardless of the reason, most of those who left did not

turn on the labor movement, but went on to do work broadly consistent with its goals especially in politics. In reflecting on this finding, however, it is important to note that the people interviewed in this study were not neophytes in their unions, but had enough tenure of service behind them that they were emerging as leaders within their organizations.

Forscholarsofthelabormovement,socialmovements,organizationsand leadership,ourfindings suggest the value of studying agency systematically. Although data drawn from interviews, especially when retrospective, has its limitations, it nonetheless offers valuable insights into how people's intentions influence their actions, how these intentions change over time, and how intentions interact with the organizations within which people work. It can never be enough to assume undefined "interests" as a theory of motivation, especially when considering organizations, like unions, that are rooted in noneconomic values. And it is particularly important to note that this approach makes visible the relationship -and the tensions -between individual change and organizational. Finally, given the work of leaders in the lives of organizations, learning how agency works is essential for understanding how leaders develop.

For union leaders, we hope our study is a value as well. It will no doubt be interesting for members of the generation we write about to engage with our findings --to challenge them, learn from them, or respond to them --because they are about them. More importantly, however, we hope they may contribute some valuable insights about why people come to work for unions, why some stay and why others leave. In fact, our study suggests it may be more fruitful to focus on why people stay in the labor movement than on why they leave it.

Perhaps reflecting on their own experience, many of today's top union leaders have reduced their reliance on "bridge organizations" by committing to direct outreach to today's generation of social reformers through the Organizing Institute, Union Summer, Living Wage campaigns, and the like.

But it takes more than social reformers to build a union. It takes union builders too. Our study underscores the fact that these union leaders often came from the workplace. They are people whose direct experience persuaded them of the difference a union can make in one's life. Those who came to work for "personal advancement" reasons also became union builders as their skills, relationships, and commitment to their organizations developed. In fact, for almost everyone, the union building project was related not only to their initial union experience, but the extent to which the union offered the opportunity for ongoing professional development.

Of most concern was the high proportion of community leaders who could not find a place within the labor movement, particularly because of their roles in the Latino community. This may have changed, it may have been due to the particular time period that our study covered, but it surely must be a cause for serious concern.

If people leave a union they have worked for because they had other goals to pursue, they are likely to continue their support of the labor movement's union leaders would be wise to wish them well. If they leave because they lost a political struggle, it is a loss. But it is also may be the unavoidable cost of contested elections which, however

imperfect, remain a critical accountability mechanism in America's large egalitarian -representative organizations. st -and most

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¹union leaders do not begin at the top, but work their way up organizational ladders. A focus on top national leaders, reveals little about the careers of the thousands of other elected and appointed local, state, and national leaders who do the work of the union - and why some rise to the top and others do not. Although scholars have focused on unpaid rank and file leaders (Strauss and Sayles 1952, 1953; Peck 1963; Chaison and Andiappan 1987), few studies of the full-time people responsible for day-to-day union leadership have been conducted since the 1950s (Strauss 1956, 1957). Yet in California alone, in 1984, some 2,000,000 union members supported 500 full-time business agents, elected leaders and organizers who coordinated the work of an estimated 26,500 volunteers.

²²This cognitive distinction is quite similar to the relational distinction Granovetter makes between "undersocialized" and "oversocialized" agency, actors as entirely autonomous individuals or as mere extensions of social groups, classes or other collectivities. In sociology a number of scholars make distinctions quite similar to that of Bandura: Powell and DiMaggio (1989), Banaszak (1996), Zerubavel (1997), and DiMaggio (1997).

³Mische describes projects as "evolving, imaginatively constructed configurations of desired social possibility, accompanied by an implicit or explicit theorization of personal and/or collective capacity to act to achieve that possibility" (Emirbeyer and Mische 1998, p. 46 -47). (Mische 2002, p. 14)"

⁴Mische writes that collective projects can be defined as public narratives of proposed interventions by groups or collectivities (Mische and Pattison 2000; Mische 1996). Such narratives clearly have a projective dimension, in that they "embed identities in time and place" (Somers 1992); they give a sense of where a society and an organization have come from, while also delimiting where actors think, hope, or fear they may be going. Sometimes those collective projects encompass the youths' own "projects -in-formation"; sometimes they expand or challenge them; and sometimes they conflict with or cause internal dissension in an activist's perceived sense of direction and possibility.

⁵Although we interviewed neither of them, Sirabella's "project" may have been one of union building, recognizing that "social reformers" can make a valuable contribution to organizing. Other labor leaders have from time to time recognized this as in the legendary account of John L. Lewis's response to criticism for hiring Communists for the CIO organizing drive in the 1930s. "We'll see who winds up with the bird? The hunter or the dog?"

⁶The other well known activist independent union to have originated as part of the New York RWDSU is Local 1199, now part of SEIU.

⁷Of the 46 people whom we interviewed who were still working for unions, 11 were no longer working in California - 5 in Washington DC, 4 in New York City, and 2 elsewhere. On the other hand, some important current California union leaders were not working there at the time of the original study.