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**“Beyond the Plant Gates”:**

**Postwar Labor and the Organizational Substructure of Liberalism**

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One of the most venerable chestnuts in American political development is the question of why no socialism in America, sometimes cast as the question of why American labor has appeared so politically conservative and workplace oriented compared to its European counterparts. The array of answers is well-known: the American working class inevitably developed middle class values because “America was born liberal;” American workers grew fat and complacent on “roast beef and apple pie;” ruthless business leaders used the power of the state to crush radical labor organizations; it is impossible to sustain labor solidarity with such a racially and ethnically diverse labor force.<sup>1</sup>

The debate is a rich one in part because none of these arguments has proven fully satisfactory. We know that each of these features of American political and economic life -- national values, broadly-shared economic prosperity, business power, and racial and ethnic division -- has varied in content and salience over time. Moreover, it is clear that movements for a more politically-oriented labor radicalism have periodically emerged but that such impulses have proven difficult to sustain over time. Historically-rooted analyses improve upon these general explanations by showing how American political institutions – especially political parties – stifled a broadly political labor consciousness. Ira Katznelson, for example, has argued that the territorial and ethnic orientation of political parties in the United States created a split between the politics of work and home.<sup>2</sup> Richard Oestreicher has argued that the two-party system organized around ethno-religious cleavages blocked efforts to build labor issues into politics. Despite repeated efforts to foster a broader socialist labor consciousness, these ideas could not take hold given the organizational structure of American politics.<sup>3</sup>

Most historically-oriented research shows how institutions restricted the ideological range of American labor by examining developments in the nineteenth and

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<sup>1</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *The First New Nation: The United States in Comparative and Historical Perspective* (W.W. Norton, 1979); Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (Holt, 1955); Werner Sombart, *Why No Socialism in America*; Kim Voss, *The Making of American Exceptionalism* (Cornell University Press, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches* (New York: Pantheon, 1981).

<sup>3</sup> Richard Oestreicher, "Urban Working-Class Political Behavior and Theories of American Electoral Politics, 1870-1940," *Journal of American History* 74 (March 1988), 1257-1286.

early twentieth centuries. As the era when labor's political engagement in the United States began to diverge from its European counterparts, developments during this period had repercussions far into the future. Yet, the period during and after the New Deal generated major shifts in the laws authorizing labor mobilization and in the organizational development of labor. Research examining this era explores labor's setbacks in the 1940s, including the failure to organize the South and the passage of the restrictive Taft-Hartley Act. We also have studies of labor's activities in national politics since the 1940s, especially its close relationship with the Democratic Party.<sup>4</sup> We know much less about the subnational organizational evolution of labor in the postwar era and how conflicts within labor helped determine the organizational forms through which labor defined and pursued its goals thus influencing the scope and substance of its political engagement, and the development of liberalism more broadly. Yet, strong subnational capabilities were essential for labor to extend its reach "beyond the plant gates:" labor political mobilization required ground-level organizing capacities and a broad social agenda required influence in state politics, where responsibility for many key social issues rested even after the New Deal.<sup>5</sup>

This paper examines the postwar political development of American labor by exploring the tensions between labor's vertically-organized, workplace-oriented union structure for organizing workers and its territorially-organized, politically-oriented federation structure for political mobilization and public policy influence. Drawing on material from AFL-CIO archives in the 1950s and 1960s, I show that even at the height of their power, liberal labor leaders proved unable to project their power throughout the

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<sup>4</sup> Taylor Dark, *The Unions and the Democrats: An Enduring Alliance* (Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Suzanne Mettler, *Dividing Citizens Gender and Federalism in New Deal Social Policy* (Cornell University Press, 1998).

complex organizational structure of “the labor movement.” Their failure to strengthen labor’s state and local organizational capacities, I show, contributed to the difficulty in mobilizing union members as a reliably progressive force in electoral politics and reinforced the narrow union orientation that characterized labor’s engagement with policy at the state and local levels. These mobilization failures and policy limitations were especially salient for understanding the relationship between organized labor and the urban poor.

The existing literature takes two diametrically opposed views about the key political question of labor’s representation of the poor during the postwar decades. Jill Quadagno, for example, argues that union racism played a key role in killing the War on Poverty.<sup>6</sup> By contrast, other analysts portray unions as the key mobilizers of the poor during this era or as a central advocate of the interests of the poor in national policymaking.<sup>7</sup> I argue that both perspectives are flawed because they failed to consider how the complex organizational structure of labor allowed it to be simultaneously in the vanguard of federal efforts to expand policies for the poor and a key obstacle to implementing effective policies. These underlying divisions within organized labor prevented it from building a new postwar organizational structure that would allow it to press for expansive social policies at all points in the federal system.

This meant that when specific unions backed policies to assist the poor, the organizational vehicles they supported – the community-based nonprofit organizations that flowered in cities across the United States during the War on Poverty – failed to alter

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<sup>6</sup> Jill Quadagno. (1994) *The Color of Welfare: How Racism Undermined the War on Poverty*. (Oxford University Press).

<sup>7</sup> J. David Greenstone, *Labor in American Politics* (Knopf, 1969); Vernon Coleman, “Labor Power and Social Equality: Union Politics in a Changing Economy,” *Political Science Quarterly* Vol. 103, No. 4 (Winter, 1988-1989), pp. 687-705.

labor's formal organization in ways that would support political mobilization or build universalist approaches to social policy into labor's legislative efforts. As a result, the War on Poverty did little to cement a lasting institutional relationship between labor and the community-based organizations, weakening the capacity of both.

The spread of the nonprofit model bequeathed an ambiguous legacy for later attempts to address poverty. While unions and their Democratic allies in Congress continued to support policies to improve conditions for the poor, their mixed agenda and diminishing power during the subsequent decades meant that much of the task for representing the poor fell onto the diverse collection of local nonprofit organizations that became the institutional mainstay in low-income neighborhoods. Despite the tremendous growth and diversity of the nonprofit sector, it provides a peculiarly limited form of representation for the poor, with restricted mobilization capabilities and weak vertical linkages needed to build ongoing political efficacy.

### **IDEAS, INTERESTS, AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE**

The empirical questions posed here provide crucial evidence for larger debates about institutional structure, agency, and ideas. A look at two different ways that historical institutionalists have grappled with these questions highlights the empirical challenges involved in unraveling the impact of ideas and institutions.<sup>8</sup> I propose a third approach, which anchors the analyses of ideas and structure in the context of organizational conflict and cooperation.

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<sup>8</sup> Significant recent analyses include Robert Lieberman, "Ideas, Institutions and Political Order," *American Political Science Review* 96 (2002): 697-712; Sheri Berman, *The Primacy of Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Because the initial historical institutionalist literature sought to challenge the values perspective that portrayed the American working class as invariably conservative, much of this work took a strong structuralist perspective.<sup>9</sup> Analyses highlighted periods when working class actions revealed strongly political or socialist inclinations, showing how these efforts were stymied by inhospitable political structures. Although some of this work, notably Hattam's *Labor Visions and State Power*, sought to highlight the interaction between workers' ideologies and structural barriers, much of the work made political institutions the main focus of inquiry.<sup>10</sup> But with structures themselves invariant, this approach did not offer much analytic leverage for understanding the significant changes in labor activities and organization that have occurred over the course of American history.

The more recent literature on policy feedbacks and path dependency builds on the analytic contributions of the earlier institutionalist literature but opens an important door to studying the cognitive effects of policies.<sup>11</sup> Joining the insights of historical institutionalism with behavioral analysis, for example, Campbell and Mettler have shown how policies shape on political/policy attitudes.<sup>12</sup> Yet, as some commentators have noted, the path dependency approach, based on the model of increasing returns, provides few tools to account for "path breaking" developments or for explaining why some policies

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<sup>9</sup> The locus classicus setting the theoretical agenda for historical institutionalism is Sven Steinmo, Kathleen Thelen, and Frank Longstreth, *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Victoria C. Hattam *Labor Visions and State Power* (Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>11</sup> Paul Pierson, "When Effect Becomes Cause," *World Politics* (1993).

<sup>12</sup> Andrea Campbell, *How Policies Make Citizens: Senior Political Activism and the American Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The Making of the Greatest Generation* (Oxford University Press, 2005).



fail to produce changes or ignite changes whose impact simply peters out over time.<sup>13</sup>

Part of the problem with this group of studies is their tendency to isolate a single policy, looking for its impact, without examining how its effects may be conditioned by other policies or by the strategies of actors operating in other domains.

The literature on “multiple orders” in American political life offers more purchase on the problem of multifaceted change precisely because it recognizes the conflicting, colliding forces that are operating at any single point in time. Change, in this perspective, comes from “abrasion or friction” of these distinct orders as they come into contact.<sup>14</sup> Not surprisingly, this perspective highlights contingency since the precise ways that diverse forces will interact and how they will recombine cannot be predicted in advance. Yet, while this approach is more promising for explaining change than the path dependence, it lacks the clear empirical referents characteristic of path dependency approaches. What exactly is a “political order” and what are the boundaries of different orders?

I suggest that an analytic spotlight on organizations helps to resolve the tensions between path dependency analyses and the multiple orders perspective. This “political-organizational” perspective treats actors as potentially complex organizational entities, which are themselves embedded in multiple institutional networks.<sup>15</sup> This perspective

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<sup>13</sup> Eric Patashnik, “After the Public Interest Prevails: The Political Sustainability of Policy Reform,” *Governance* 16 (2) (2003): 203-34; Vivian Schmidt, “Discursive Institutionalism: The Explanatory Power of Ideas and Discourse,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 2008 11:303-26;

<sup>14</sup> Karen Orren and Steven Skowronek, “Beyond the Iconography of Order: Notes for a “New Institutionalism” in *The Dynamics of American Politics: Approaches and Interpretations* edited by Lawrence C. Dodd and Calvin Jillson (Westview Press, 1994), pp.311-392; Elisabeth Clemens and James M. Cook, “Politics and Institutionalism: Explaining Durability and Change,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 25 (1999): 441-466; Desmond S. King and Rogers Smith, “Racial Orders in American Political Development,” *American Political Science Review* 99 (2005):75-92; note the similarity of sociologists use of distinct “fields of action” Neil Fligstein, “Social Skill and the Theory of Fields,” *Sociological Theory* 19 (2) 2002: 105-125.

<sup>15</sup> See Margaret Weir, “When Does Politics Create Policy? The Organizational Politics of Change,” in *Rethinking Political Institutions: The Art of the State* ed. Ian Shapiro, Stephen Skowronek, and Daniel

puts politics and political conflict center stage in the study of policy by highlighting how competition and conflict take place through organizations. Focusing on competition within and across organizations can help explain what path dependence cannot: namely, variation in the durability of policy – why sometimes the effects of policies endure and other times not. It can at the same time bring empirical specificity to the notion of political orders.

The organizational complexity of key actors requires us to focus on exactly how processes of strategizing about interests and allies occur. Periods characterized by generational shift or organizational decline, for example, may be especially prone to struggles between factions within an organization over how to define interests and strategies.<sup>16</sup> Decision making during such periods is typically conflictual: when there are competing factions within an organization and the effects of policy are uncertain, some strategies may be championed because of the internal organizational advantages they confer rather than because of any rationally determined match with member interests.<sup>17</sup>

It is also important to portray organized actors as at least potentially embedded in multiple networks rather than as simple reflections of a single policy.<sup>18</sup> New policies may create new constituencies, but whether the “cognitive effects” binding constituencies

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Galvin (New York University Press, 2006). On actor-centered institutionalism, see Fritz Scharpf *Games Real Actors Play: Actor-Centered Institutionalism in Policy Research* (Westview Press, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Schmidt (2008) notes that generational change is one factor accounting for shifts in ideas.

<sup>17</sup> For example, Charles F. Sabel, “The Internal Politics of Trade Unions,” *Organizing Interests in Western Europe: Pluralism, Corporatism, and the Transformation of Politics* edited by Suzanne D. Berger (Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp.209-244.

<sup>18</sup> Peter A. Hall, “The Role of Interests, Institutions, and Ideas in the Comparative Political Economy of the Industrialized Nations,” in *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*, ed. Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zukerman (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), Peter A. Hall, “Preference Formation as a Political Process: The Case of Monetary Union in Europe,” *Preferences and Situations* Ira Katznelson and Barry R. Weingast (eds.) (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2005).

together endure depends on the competition they confront. The rise of alternative identifications, interpretations of interest, and choice of allies may pull organizations apart as segments of groups defect to support different policies or join alternative coalitions. Less dramatically, the salience of membership in a group may decline over time as its benefits are taken for granted or become less important. Acknowledging the existence of multiple networks implies not only that individuals and groups will splinter off from existing organizations to join competitors, it also suggests that coalitions of organizations will shift over time. As the benefits of some alliances wane or as some ties prove too constraining, organizations may seek to build alternative coalitions.

The organizational perspective also directs attention to the impact of the form of an organization on its members and to internal conflicts over the structure of the organization. Organizations that have multiple opportunities for participation and leadership development may bind members more strongly to the goals of the organization and limit the odds that competitors will be able to attract away members or split existing groups. Likewise, coalition building across organizations requires resources; how and where organizations acquire resources will have important implications for how they can be used. Conflicts over organizational structure and power within the organization thus have significant impact on patterns of coalition building.

The remaining sections of this paper uses the political-organizational perspective to explain the ways that labor did and did not serve an advocate for the poor and for the enactment of broad social policies during the 1960s. The first section examines the failed efforts to redesign labor's organizational structure to support such capacities. The second shows how the divergent elements within labor engaged with low-income communities

of color at the local level, highlighting the distinctive coalitional configurations of each. The final section considers the consequences of the shift to nonprofits as the main advocates for the poor and analyzes four variants of non-profit organizational relationships.

## **STRENGTHENING “THE VITAL LINKS:”**

### **LABOR’S POLITICAL ORGANIZATION**

Although labor is commonly referred to as “organized labor” or the “labor movement,” these words mask the complex set of organizations that together comprise labor in the United States.<sup>19</sup> Since the nineteenth century, American labor has featured strong local unions joined together in functionally-defined, vertically-integrated “international unions” that served as an umbrella for the locals. Complementing these vertical structures were geographic federations that sought to unite labor’s political voice at the city and state levels, through Central Labor Councils and State Federations of Labor.<sup>20</sup> After the surge of labor membership in the postwar years, the new generation of politically-oriented labor leaders, concerned with amplifying and expanding labor’s political presence, sought to strengthen these geographically-based organizations. Yet, underlying divisions about where labor’s political interests lay stymied their efforts.

*Failure to Build Vertical Political Organization* Students of twentieth-century American labor history have extensively examined the conflicts between the craft unions

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<sup>19</sup> See Nelson Lichtenstein, “Pluralism, Postwar Intellectuals, and the Union Idea,” in *The Great Society and the High Tide of Liberalism*, (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), pp.185-86; Joel Rogers, “Divide and Conquer: Further ‘Reflections on the Distinctive Character of American Labor Laws,’” *Wisconsin Law Review* 1 (1990):57-59.

<sup>20</sup> On Central Labor Councils in an earlier era, see Colin Gordon “The Lost City of Solidarity: Metropolitan Unionism in Historical Perspective,” *Politics and Society* 27 (4) (December 1999): 561-585.

that made up the pre-New Deal American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the industrial unions that formed the backbone of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO).<sup>21</sup> The AFL's workplace focus and neutral political stance ("reward your friends and punish your enemies") contrasted with the forthright political alliance that the CIO quickly forged with the Democratic Party. These differences within the labor movement did not end after the AFL and CIO merged in 1955. With a handful of exceptions, scholars have paid little attention to the efforts in the 1950s and 60s to strengthen labor's subnational geographic organization.<sup>22</sup> Yet, these organizations were essential for mobilizing union members politically and for engaging labor in broad coalitions that could extend labor's political agenda beyond the workplace by embracing measures aimed at ensuring social and economic welfare more broadly.<sup>23</sup>

The AFL-CIO unification process not only entailed the merger of the two national-level federations, it also required joining the separate state federations and local labor councils. In many states, the merger process was fraught with conflict. To help strengthen the state and local organizations, the Department of Organizing within the AFL-CIO leaders created a Department on State and Local Bodies, charged with reinforcing what it called "the vital links" in the labor movement.<sup>24</sup> The department's experience was largely one of frustration.

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<sup>21</sup> For example, Walter Galenson, *The CIO Challenge to the AFL: A History of the American Labor Movement, 1935-1941* (Harvard University Press, 1960).

<sup>22</sup> Greenstone, *Labor in American Politics*; Alan Draper, *A Rope of Sand: The AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education, 1955-1967* (Praeger, 1989).

<sup>23</sup> As early as 1954 British labor historian Henry Pelling pointed to the obstacles that labor would confront in promoting a "comprehensive programme of reform," including all the state legislatures and the Supreme Court, see "The American Labor Movement: A British View," *Political Studies*, Vol. XI, No. 3 (1954), p.238-39.

<sup>24</sup> The Vital Links AFL-CIO Pamphlet

The subnational bodies faced a fundamental problem: many local unions refused to affiliate with them. The first survey of state central bodies, conducted in 1960-61, found wide variation in the percent of locals that joined the state organization. Of 33,327 union locals surveyed (affiliated with 99 different international unions), only 48.5 percent had affiliated with the state central body.<sup>25</sup> Membership had grown only slightly four years later when the Advisory Committee on State and Local Central Bodies presented a plea to the AFL-CIO Executive Committee for more attention to the state and local organizations. By then an estimated 50% of local unions and 60% of membership belonged to the state and local federations.<sup>26</sup>

Some types of unions were more likely to affiliate with the state federations than others. The more left-leaning industrial unions were especially likely to join, with 70 percent affiliation rates in 1960-61; compared to 55 percent for the more conservative building trades. Affiliation rates varied widely across states as well, from a low of 33% in some states to a high of 87% in others.<sup>27</sup> Low affiliation rates translated into weak and uneven state labor capacities. Only two state federations had staffs of ten or more employees; five federations had between six and nine employees and 23 state federations had only between one and three employees.<sup>28</sup>

National leaders interpreted the weakness of the state and local bodies as a “big and tough problem” that had to be solved. As AFL-CIO President George Meany put it in

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<sup>25</sup> Statistical Information on State and Local Central Bodies AFL-CIO from Annual Reports, 1961, RG1-038 George Meany Memorial Archives.

<sup>26</sup> Minutes AFL-CIO Advisory Committee on State and Local Central Bodies, January 14, 1965, George Meany Memorial Archives

<sup>27</sup> Statement Before the AFL-CIO Executive Council by the Advisory Committee on State and Local Central Bodies May 19, 1964) RG1-038, George Meany Memorial Archives

<sup>28</sup> Minutes AFL-CIO Advisory Committee on State and Local Central Bodies, November 28, 1960, George Meany Memorial Archives RG1-038 Miscellaneous : Coordinator Stanton Smith, Meany Memorial Archives

a 1963 letter to the leaders of international unions, these organizations were critical “because of the importance of strong State Federations and local Central Bodies to the legislative and political education work of the AFL-CIO.”<sup>29</sup> Meany renewed his plea for affiliation in 1966, noting that “far too many local unions stand apart from their brothers at the state and local levels and do not bear their share of labor’s efforts to make the American community a better place for all to live and work...”<sup>30</sup> Despite these efforts Stanton Smith, coordinator of the Department of State and Local Central Bodies, noted in a 1967 Report to AFL-CIO President Meany, that the “vital links” remained “in many cases the weak links” in the union structure.<sup>31</sup>

The failure to strengthen labor’s state federations and local councils significantly constrained the scope of labor’s political engagement and substance of its political agenda. The policy changes of the 1930s and the tremendous growth in labor membership positioned unions to emerge as an active political force pressing for a broad working class agenda. In many respects, this was true of labor’s engagement in national politics; in most state and local political arenas, however, labor’s voice – much more uneven -- remained weak and narrow. This divergence led not only to dissonance between labor’s political profile in national and subnational politics, it also undermined labor as a political force more generally.<sup>32</sup> The weakness of subnational organizations limited labor’s mobilization capabilities, damaged its ability to serve as a voice for the broad social and

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<sup>29</sup> Meany letter to Jerome J. Keating, President National Association of Letter Carriers., Jan 15, 1963, RG1-038 22/41. Meany sent identical letters to many of the international unions with the lowest affiliation rates.

<sup>30</sup> Meany To Presidents of National and International Unions January 10, 1966.

<sup>31</sup> Stanton Smith Memo to George Meany, Oct 9, 1967

<sup>32</sup> On the dissonance between subnational and national politics see Margaret Weir, “States, Race, and the Decline of New Deal Liberalism,” *Studies in American Political Development* 19, no.2 (October 2005): 157-72.

economic concerns of American working people, and limited its engagement in coalitions that aimed to advance the welfare of low-income nonunion members.

*Political Mobilization* One of the few studies to examine labor's local political engagement in the postwar era, David Greenstone's *Labor in American Politics*, likened labor's political role to that of a social democratic party, broadly mobilizing voters for the Democratic party whether or not they were union members.<sup>33</sup> He based his assessment on observations of union activity in three cities during the 1964 election. Yet, a view across labor's entire subnational organization reveals that the general weakness of the state and local federations handicapped labor's efforts to play such a role. On the contrary, it shows that the weak local and state bodies could not adequately support the efforts of the Committee on Political Education (COPE), which operated the AFL-CIO's program of political mobilization.

Politically-oriented leaders of the AFL-CIO, who had cut their teeth in the CIO, recognized the importance of state and local organizations for labor's political program. Gus Scholle, the president of the Michigan AFL-CIO and ally of United Automobile Workers' President Walter Reuther, argued that AFL-CIO leaders needed to understand that "90% of the goals of the labor movement depend on political action at the state and local levels."<sup>34</sup> The coordinator of the state and local programs likewise linked labor's political program to its local organization, remarking in a letter to George Meany that the

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<sup>33</sup> J. David Greenstone, *Labor in American Politics* 1969.

<sup>34</sup> Minutes, AFL-CIO Advisory Committee on State and Local Central Bodies, May 18, 1964, RG1-038 22/4; see also Dudley Buffa, *Union Power and American Democracy: The UAW and the Democratic Party, 1935-72* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1984).



success of labor's "political programs and legislative programs bears a direct relationship to the strength of the Central Bodies and the quality of their leadership."<sup>35</sup>

Yet the weakness of the state and local federations made it difficult for COPE to secure resources and mobilize workers. A tally of AFL-CIO COPE contributions from 1956 through 1961 revealed that most of the national and international unions fell far short of the quota that the central administration had set. Of 51 national and international unions, only six met or exceeded their COPE contribution quotas. Most contributed far less.<sup>36</sup>

The consequences for labor's political power became painfully evident as the first bout in the conservative countermovement took shape in the California elections of 1966. Faced with a strong challenge from the anti-labor gubernatorial candidate Ronald Reagan, labor leaders fretted over labor's state political capabilities. As one critic put it in a memo to State Federation leader Thomas Pitts, "over the years we have accepted mediocre performance on the part of COPE at the local community level but in the face of the current political crisis we cannot accept mediocrity if we expect to win in November."<sup>37</sup> Another labor critic highlighted the basic organizational flaws in California's COPE operations: "Our main problem has always been that State COPE has never been permanent. As each campaign began, we did not have the records, communications or histories of the district's past voting trend ..."<sup>38</sup> After Reagan's landslide election, the state labor movement fell into acrimonious internal divisions and conflicts with state Democratic leaders. In the words of California's Democratic

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<sup>35</sup> Stanton Smith Memo to George Meany, Oct 9, 1967

<sup>36</sup> COPE Administrative Committee, February 21, 1962, Bal Harbour, Fla.

<sup>37</sup> Memo To Thomas Pitts from Fred Smith July 12, 1966

<sup>38</sup> Remarks of George Hardy to the Executive Council, California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, February 12, 1969, p.14

Assembly Speaker Jesse Unruh, labor did not have the political power to “get a Mother’s Day resolution passed.”<sup>39</sup>

The Democrats’ reverses were not confined to state politics. The 1966 national congressional elections also delivered a sharp rebuff to labor’s political aspirations. Democrats lost 47 House seats, including 36 Democratic incumbents with strong labor voting records.<sup>40</sup> Astounded by the outcome, labor leaders in Washington sought to understand why union members had displayed such apathy during the election. A poll of union members conducted in 1967 revealed that the growing ranks of labor -- younger white suburban homeowners -- did not share the same political concerns as the Washington-based leadership. Instead these workers listed “fair tax assessment, crime, zoning laws and street and sewer repair” as the most important political issues they faced.<sup>41</sup> The survey further found that union identity was not particularly salient to younger union members; only 64% of all those polled even mentioned unions when asked about organizational memberships.<sup>42</sup>

A brief effort to enhance labor’s political presence in the suburbs faltered due to lack of support from the local unions who did not want to devote their resources to geographically-based political organizing.

*Failure to Expand the State Social and Economic Agenda* Building the capacity of the state and local federations was also essential for mustering labor support for an expansive social and economic agenda in state and local political arenas, which bore

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<sup>39</sup> Harry Bernstein, “Unions Lack Political Strength, Unruh Says,” *Los Angeles Times* September 24, 1968, p.3; Draper notes that California was “one of the few places where backlash was expressed in vote-switching and not nonvoting.” P.124.

<sup>40</sup> Draper, *A Rope of Sand*, p.123.

<sup>41</sup> Alan Draper, *A Rope of Sand*, (Praeger, 1992) pp.127.

<sup>42</sup> Draper, *A Rope of Sand* p.127.

responsibility for many key social policies even after the New Deal. Most state labor federations were prepared to weigh in on issues directly related to labor interests, such as workers compensation and right-to-work laws (which by outlawing the union shop reduce labor membership). They were far less well equipped to press for a broad social agenda designed to secure social benefits to be shared by nonunion members.

George Hardy, liberal vice-president and later president of the Service Employees International Union, wrote a sharp critique of California's Labor Federation in 1969, pointing to the problems that prevented it from pursuing an expanded social agenda.<sup>43</sup> Hardy noted that although the constitution of the merged State Federation called for committees on education, civil rights, community services, housing, union labor, safety and occupational health, the federation had paid only "token recognition" to these issues and failed to build "real operating departments." He proposed that the Federation create a fully-staffed legislative department in Sacramento and, attentive to the explosive issues of minorities and cities in the late 1960s, called for the creation of a department of urban affairs within the Federation. Hardy likewise criticized the organization's failure to take public positions on a broad range of social policies including, "consumer problems, taxes, pollution, education and out schools, housing, jobs, minorities." In sum, he noted "The Federation has defaulted on its responsibilities and has failed to become a significant factor in community affairs."<sup>44</sup>

At the national level, the AFL-CIO Department of State and Local Bodies attempted to expand labor's policy horizons in the states by holding national conferences

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<sup>43</sup> Remarks of George Hardy to the Executive Council, California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, February 12, 1969, p.3-4.

<sup>44</sup> Remarks of George Hardy to the Executive Council, California Labor Federation, AFL-CIO, February 12, 1969, p.5

that featured sessions on such topics as health services, civil rights, the war on poverty, and Medicare. In his 1967 annual report, Stanton Smith, coordinator of the department, called for creating a Clearing House on state legislation that would provide “regular service of assistance and advice on state legislative problems beyond the specialized fields of Workmen’s Compensation, Unemployment Compensation and Right-to-Work. For example, improved State Minimum Wage Laws, Occupational Health and Safety Laws, more equitable Tax Legislation ...”<sup>45</sup> The clearing house idea revived an older form of exercising policy in the states. During the Progressive era, a comparable coordinated state-by state strategy helped to support the passage of key social protection measures in the absence of national action.<sup>46</sup>

National AFL-CIO officials noted the resurgence of conservative elements in state politics as an important reason for strengthening labor’s state level policy capabilities. In a 1964 statement before the AFL-CIO Executive Committee arguing for more emphasis on state and local bodies, Stanton Smith noted that there had been “a decided shift of emphasis by such groups [the industrial and business community] to the state legislatures. This is obviously a diversionary action to: (1) accomplish all they can on that level; and (2) to divide the efforts of our organization in order to weaken our position nationally.”<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, labor’s failure to launch a strong and progressive state presence contrasted sharply with the direction that conservative activists took. The majority of state federations stuck with a legislative agenda that framed labor’s interests in their most narrow union-specific orientations. Conservative activists, by contrast, sought to build

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<sup>45</sup> Dept of State and Local Bodies, p.6

<sup>46</sup> William Graebner, “Federalism in the Progressive Era: A Structural Interpretation of Reform,” *Journal of American History* 54(2) (September 1977): 331-57.

<sup>47</sup> Statement Before the AFL-CIO Executive Council by the Advisory Committee on State and Local Central Bodies May 19, 1964.

power at the state level by launching a clearing house on state legislation in 1973. Since that time, ALEC (the American Legislative Exchange Council) has served as an important source of innovative ideas, model legislation, and linkage across the states for conservative activists.<sup>48</sup>

*Failure to Engage Labor in Broad Community-Based Coalitions* Within the AFL-CIO, the Community Services Program sought to promote labor engagement with a broad set of community issues. Program representatives described their goals in ways that reflected an expansive view of labor's identity and mission. The program took as its underlying principles:

“that the unions’ responsibilities to its membership extend beyond the plant gates and the collective bargaining table; that isolationism and separatism are bad for labor and worse for the community; that cooperation with other groups and citizen participation in community affairs are essential for the protection of a democratic society.”<sup>49</sup>

The publications of the newly-established community service program offered a glimpse of what such participation might entail. Soon after its establishment in 1956, the program held a weeklong conference discussing how “organized labor could be most effective in improving the community’s network of social agencies.” It claimed that the conference signaled more than a consolidation of old programs but marked “the emergence of a new effort to develop labor leadership in health and welfare activities.”<sup>50</sup> There was already a base on which to build the local labor-community connections. In 1956, 70% of cities had labor representation on Community Chest boards, and 100% on

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<sup>48</sup> ALEC <http://www.alec.org/am/template.cfm?section=home>.

<sup>49</sup> Summary of Proceedings Fourth National Conference of Central Body Officers, AFL-CIO, 1962

<sup>50</sup> Community Service, Labor Participation Department, United Community Funds and Councils of America vol. 1, no. 2 Summer 1957, RG1-038 95/14 Community Services 1956-57

United Fund Boards. In addition, some local labor organizations had already been politically engaged in efforts to expand social assistance, including a referendum to establish a county health department in Erie, Pa., and the move to establish a surplus food program in Michigan.<sup>51</sup>

In a 1956 speech to the Community Services program advisory council, Communication Workers of America president and CIO stalwart Joseph A. Beirne noted that

“The character of the labor movement itself has changed, and 20 years from now it may change again... No longer will unions be associated only with wage increases, strikes, turmoil, but with the life and workings of a community.”  
“Unionism cannot end at the plant gates. The union of tomorrow will have greater identity with the total community than it has even now.

Beirne went on to predict that the “biggest expansion of the AFL-CIO community service program is expected to follow the various mergers of local and state central labor bodies.”<sup>52</sup>

Yet, given the failure of national reformers to project their power through the vertical structure of the labor movement, the mergers did little to strengthen the connections between unions and community organizations. During “the heyday of American liberalism,” labor engagement in state and local politics took two divergent paths, each of which reflected the distinct identities and coalitional strategies pursued by different parts of the labor movement.

## **DIVERGENT INTERESTS; ALTERNATIVE COALITIONS**

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<sup>51</sup> AFL-CIO Community Services Committee, Director’s Report by Leo Perlis, June 4, 1956

<sup>52</sup> Joseph A. Beirne’s speech at the luncheon of the Advisory Council, October 4, 1956, RG1-038, 95/14

Throughout the postwar decades, the two divergent political poles within organized labor – the conservative building trades unions and the progressive industrial unions, particularly the UAW – coexisted uneasily under the AFL-CIO umbrella. These differences would eventually lead the UAW to withdraw from the AFL-CIO in 1968. The contrasting visions and alliances of these two branches of labor were especially sharp in local politics. There, the building trades unions allied with business and political interests that put them in direct conflict with low-income communities of color; the progressive forces within labor, by contrast, seized on the War on Poverty as means to support these communities.

*Labor and Business: The Local Pro-Growth Alliance* Even after the New Deal, in most states and localities where unions were strong, the traditional AFL craft unions in the building trades tended to dominate politics. These unions drew their economic strength from a booming construction industry and enjoyed close ties with employers in the construction industry. State and local political arenas were especially important to these groups because states bore responsibility for the myriad regulations governing the construction industry. Yet, the building trades were the least likely to join the state COPE political efforts or support a broad social agenda in state politics. Their significance in state and local politics became a key factor in limiting labor's political reach in the postwar decades.

Although unions in the building trades often tussled with employers over specific regulations governing the construction trades, both agreed on the importance of growth. Together unions and developers formed the heart of postwar pro-growth coalitions that supported the highway building, suburban development, and urban renewal that remade

metropolitan areas in the 1950s and 60s. This same stance that put unions in close connection with the construction and real estate industries placed them in direct conflict with minority groups. Because minority urban neighborhoods were the target of much urban renewal, the urban politics of the 1960s produced bitter conflicts between minorities and the pro-growth coalitions of which unions were a central component.<sup>53</sup>

The building trades unions were not only aligned against African Americans due to opposing interests on urban renewal policy, deeper issues of identity drove a wedge between these groups. As Sugrue notes in his study of Philadelphia's building trades unions, the racially exclusionary practices of the building trades were deeply embedded in the culture of these organizations:

The shape and form that exclusion took grew out of a deeply rooted culture of race, gender, ethnicity, and family. Building trades unions practiced preferential hiring. Many skilled trades unions perpetuated a father-son tradition, recruiting new workers through family connections. In 1964, for example, all thirty-two apprentices in International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 32 were sons or nephews of union members. Forty percent of Philadelphia's plumbers had sons in the trade. The Operative Plasterers and Cement Masons Local 8 gave first preference to sons of contractors, and second to sons of its members. .... Exclusive hiring practices reinforced the ties of ethnicity and community. Unionists strengthened their sense of exclusiveness and solidarity through elaborate hazing rituals on the job site. Friendship and kin networks in the building trades were a nearly insurmountable barrier for black workers, since blacks and whites almost never intermarried and, in the heavily segregated city, seldom lived in the same neighborhoods or belonged to the same churches and clubs.<sup>54</sup>

Building trades unions resisted the efforts of the newly merged national federation to invigorate state and local bodies with new purpose and capacities. In states where these unions dominated the labor federation, little was done to ramp up labor's political

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<sup>53</sup> John Mollenkopf, *The Contested City* (Princeton University Press 1983).

<sup>54</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, "Affirmative Action from Below: Civil Rights, the Building Trades, and the Politics of Racial Equality in the Urban North, 1945–1969" *Journal of American History* Vol. 91, Issue 1., (2004)



capacities or expand its social reach. In many localities, the dominance of the building trades meant that labor sided with city leaders and builders against low-income communities of color. In others, clashes between the building trades and other unions prevented labor from engaging in broader community efforts to revitalize cities.<sup>55</sup> These dynamics meant that in state and local political arenas, organized labor was much less likely to embrace a racially inclusive identity, much more likely to ally with major business interests in the construction industry, and much less likely to engage with policy issues related to economic and social concerns outside the immediate work-related interests of its members.

*Labor and The War on Poverty* Despite Quadagno's claim that labor racism undermined the War on Poverty, segments of labor leadership – the United Automobile Workers (UAW), in particular – were among the most active forces in designing and supporting the War on Poverty.<sup>56</sup> Yet in so doing, they accepted the assumptions of the program, targeting policy to the poor and setting up separate institutions for the poor. This approach contrasted sharply with the strategy of uniting lower and middle income earners against the rich, which had been central to the social democratic vision of these labor leaders.<sup>57</sup>

In national politics, mainline AFL-CIO officials as well as the more radical elements in the UAW actively supported the War on Poverty. Jack Conway, a UAW leader on leave from his position as Executive Director of the AFL-CIO Industrial Union

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<sup>55</sup> Guian A. McKee, *The Problem of Jobs: Liberalism, Race, and Deindustrialization in Philadelphia* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), p.78-79.

<sup>56</sup> John C. Donovan, *The Politics of Poverty* (New York: Pegasus, 1967); Kevin Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism* (Cornell University Press 1995), p.189.

<sup>57</sup> Boyle *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism*.

Department, played a key role in creating the Community Action Program, which aimed to empower low-income neighborhoods of color. Labor leaders staunchly defended the War on Poverty in Congress. During the initial congressional hearings on the War on Poverty, AFL-CIO president Meany pledged labor support for the War on Poverty, noting that “the elimination of poverty is and always has been a primary goal of organized labor ...”<sup>58</sup> Three years later, AFL-CIO legislative director Andrew Biemiller, reiterated labor support, defending the Office of Economic Opportunity against proposals to dismantle it. Biemiller also endorsed the increasingly controversial Community Action Program, praising it as “a new force of life in the American community bringing added urgency and vitality to bear on the problems of the poor.”<sup>59</sup>

The UAW played an especially central role in the War on Poverty. The union’s president Walter Reuther, along with other key UAW activists, were instrumental in designing what became the Model Cities program, a major initiative aimed at revitalizing urban cores.<sup>60</sup> The union also launched and generously funded the Citizen Crusade against Poverty (CCAP), a coalition of unions and liberal groups that joined in support of the civil rights struggles. Reuther envisioned the CCAP as one element in a “tripartite partnership” that would also include the federal government and the poor.<sup>61</sup> The CCAP’s role was to train the poor to take charge of poverty programs; it would also pressure the federal government to enact programs that would eradicate poverty.

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<sup>58</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor “Economic Opportunity Act Amendments of 1967, Part 4;” Cong. 90 sess. 1 (July 20,21,24, 26-28, 31, Aug. 1, 1967), p.2842.

<sup>59</sup> U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor “Economic Opportunity Act Amendments of 1967, Part 4;” Cong. 90 sess. 1 (July 20,21,24, 26-28, 31, Aug. 1, 1967), p.2844.

<sup>60</sup> Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism*, pp.204-05

<sup>61</sup> Boyle *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism*, p. 190; Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit*, (University of Illinois Press, 1997).

At the local level, labor engagement was much less extensive. In a handful of urban areas, unions directly sponsored War on Poverty programs. Biemiller's 1967 testimony highlighted two of the most important examples: the Watts Labor Community Action Committee (WLCAC); and a Neighborhood Youth Corps project sponsored by the Central Labor Council of Alameda County in California.<sup>62</sup> The UAW was instrumental in the founding and initial development of the WLCAC, a nonprofit organization that formed as an alternative to the official Los Angeles War on Poverty agency. Unlike the top-down city agency, which was controlled by public officials, WLCAC was a black-controlled organization designed to promote community participation.<sup>63</sup> WLCAC's activities went well beyond the traditional War on Poverty programs to build a range of community institutions to support its ideal of community control. It also mobilized in local politics, winning a notable victory when the county agreed to build a much needed hospital in South Central Los Angeles. The UAW's Jack Conway launched a similar project on the west side of Chicago; and in Detroit, the bastion of UAW power, the union initiated a major program to rebuild the city under the auspices of the Model Cities program.

The great organizational innovation of the War on Poverty was to bypass state and local governments to offer assistance directly to low-income neighborhood groups. This strategy prevented federal funds from being captured by state and local governments, which had long ignored the desperate conditions in many minority

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<sup>62</sup>U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Education and Labor "Economic Opportunity Act Amendments of 1967, Part 4;" cong. 90 sess. 1 (July 20,21,24, 26-28, 31, Aug. 1, 1967), p.2844. P.2848

<sup>63</sup> Robert Bauman, "The Black Power and Chicano Movements in the Poverty Wars in Los Angeles," *Journal of Urban History* vol. 33 no. 2 (January 2007):277-295; Boyle *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism*, pp.214-15.

communities and had upheld the racial segregation that fostered such conditions. By organizing the poor and supplying resources to them, it gave residents of low-income neighborhoods the power to challenge unresponsive urban bureaucracies and city governments. The connection to labor supplied an additional advantage by providing these groups with a powerful ally at the federal level. The combination of federal funds and labor support established a potent vertical linkage between the neighborhood-based nonprofit organizations and the highest levels of government.

But these were particularly fragile organizational relationships on several dimensions. First, the engagement between labor and the poor did little to alter the main organizational components of labor, since the poor did not become members of unions. As such, it did not reinvigorate or inject new purpose into the mainline subnational political organizations of labor: Central Labor Councils and State Federations of Labor did not change as a result of labor's engagement with the War on Poverty. This meant that labor's participation in the War on Poverty did little to strengthen or secure its role as the mobilizing arm of Democratic Party, described by Greenstone. Second, the direct linkage between the federal government and the neighborhood associations proved impossible to sustain for very long, as the vast literature on the War on Poverty as shown. The pushback by local officials began immediately and, by 1967, the Green amendments assigned formal control over Community Action Agencies to local officials.

The main organizational legacy of the War on Poverty was a broad array of nonprofit community organizations established in cities across urban America.<sup>64</sup> Once the Nixon administration reinstated more traditional federal relationships, curtailing the

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<sup>64</sup> R.F. Clark, *Maximum Feasible Success: A History of the Community Action Program* (Washington DC: Association of Community Action Agencies, 2000).

direct federal funding of neighborhood organizations, these groups had to craft a new set of organizational relationships if they were to survive. The character and terms of those relationships would determine much about the possibilities for addressing poverty in the future.

### **The Non-Profittization of Poverty Politics**

The failure to create a strong organizational substructure for liberalism – one that encompassed mobilization capacities and vertical linkages operating through organized labor – posed a new set of questions about the capacity of the organizations created during the War on Poverty and their future trajectory. These questions are relevant not only in the United States, they are now being asked across the globe as the corporatist links forged by organized labor in the postwar era are replaced by a much looser set of nongovernmental organizations. Key among the concerns about local nonprofit organizations is whether they can “coordinate action with similar groups... aggregate up and ... effectively articulate demands.” In what sense do they “function collectively as a *system* that can represent the interest of the poor...?”<sup>65</sup>

The United States faced these questions earlier than many other nations due to labor’s failure to become an effective interest intermediary pressing for universal and generous social policies. As the politically-oriented stance of community organizations during the War on Poverty took on a more purely service-orientation in the 1970s, the initial assessments were negative. Analysts criticized the narrow substantive focus and

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<sup>65</sup> Peter P. Houtzager, Ruth Berins Collier, John Harriss, Adrian G. Lavalley “Rights, Representation and the Poor: Comparisons Across Latin America and India,” Development Studies Institute; London School of Economics and Political Science, Working Paper Series, No.02-31

limited political reach of these organizations.<sup>66</sup> By the 1990s, however, growing interest in the efficacy of social capital drew new attention to community-based organizations as evidence of America's distinctive capacity to solve problems through local action.<sup>67</sup> Doubt about the efficacy of these organizations persisted, however, especially in light of the entrenched nature of urban poverty over the past forty years.

Judgments about these organizations must ultimately rest on the ties they have built and the way those ties have influenced their capabilities. Since the 1960s, at least four types of linkages have become common: ties to public bureaucracies, politicians, foundations, and national organizing networks. Each brings with it distinctive benefits and drawbacks.<sup>68</sup>

The link to public bureaucracies is perhaps the most longstanding and extensive, as public agencies have grown to rely on non-profits for service delivery, particularly in the human services.<sup>69</sup> The turn to devolution in the 1970s and 80s greatly increased this role for nonprofits. The connection to public agencies secures resources for community nonprofits but also functions as a social control mechanism that allows public agencies to limit the set of activities in which local groups can engage. Moreover, the turn to service provision transforms community residents from members of a local organization into clients.

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<sup>66</sup> Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches* (Pantheon, 1981); Michael Brown and Steven P. Erie, "Blacks and the Legacy of the Great Society: The Economic and Political Impact of Federal Social Policy," *Public Policy* 29 (Summer 1981): 299-330.

<sup>67</sup> Jeffrey Berry, Kent Portney, and Ken Thompson *The Rebirth of Urban Democracy* (Brookings Institution Press, 1993).

<sup>68</sup> These will be more fully elaborated in the book chapter that I am drafting from this material.

<sup>69</sup> Steven Rathgeb Smith and Michael Lipsky, *Nonprofits for Hire: The Welfare State in the Age of Contracting* (Harvard University Press, 1993); Kirsten A. Grønbjerg, "The U.S. Nonprofit Human Service Sector: A Creeping Revolution," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* vol. 30, no. 2 (June 2001): 276-297.

A second kind of linkage connects nonprofits to public agencies but adds a political patronage dimension. Many nonprofits have established relationships with local politicians who secure resources for them and protect them from cutbacks. In return, the community organization is expected to turn out its clients to support their political benefactor come election time.<sup>70</sup> Such political connections can greatly increase service capabilities of organizations but allow only a narrow and tightly-controlled scope for political engagement. The patronage relationship may also reduce the potential for local organizations to aggregate their power horizontally, given the competitive incentives for organizations to guard their resource flows.

A third linkage, which has grown in importance in the forty years since the War on Poverty is the tie to private philanthropy. Foundations have long played a role in social welfare activities: the Ford Foundation's Gray Areas program served as the model for the War on Poverty.<sup>71</sup> Since the 1960s, with the growth of community foundations, foundations have played an ever larger role in funding community nonprofits.<sup>72</sup> Foundation funding is less likely to create obstacles to horizontal aggregation among nonprofits – and increasingly, funders encourage such collaboratives – and making them more effective at service delivery. These organizations now play an important role in filling holes, as the federal government has withdrawn support for key policies, such as housing but they have done less to expand the policies needed to connect low-income people to economic opportunity. Their nonprofit status and the congressional

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<sup>70</sup> This relationship is well-analyzed in Nicole P. Marwell, *Bargaining for Brooklyn: Community Organizations in the Entrepreneurial City* (University of Chicago Press, 2007).

<sup>71</sup> Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy and the Poor in Twentieth Century U.S* (Princeton University Press, 2001);

<sup>72</sup> David C. Hammack, "Community Foundations: Changing Notions of Community, Changing Purposes, in *An Agile Servant* Richard Magat (ed) (The Foundation Center: New York 1989).

investigations into foundation-supported political action have made foundations politically cautious. Moreover, foundations often impose a shifting menu of priorities on nonprofits, making funding unstable. Finally, foundations are especially likely to fund specific projects rather than support ongoing operating expenses, adding to the precarious funding situation that many nonprofits experience.

A final set of linkages has been established through organizing networks, such as the ACORN, Industrial Areas Foundation, and PICO.<sup>73</sup> An outgrowth of labor-style community-based organizing that Saul Alinsky launched in Chicago during the 1940s, these networks specialize in mobilization. They link local groups into national networks that supply a model for mobilization and offer expertise advice about how to implement that model. Although they have exercised considerable political influence in some local settings, these organizations have difficulty building collaborative horizontal relations and their intensely local bases give them little power to help them aggregate up to the state or federal arenas.

As this quick tour indicates, there has been tremendous organizational innovation in the forty years since the War on Poverty. Yet, the organizational relationships in which local community based organizations are embedded restrict their ability to mobilize politically and limit the vertical relationships they need to influence policy decisions. Although exceptions exist, it is very difficult for such groups to build power on the scale needed to enact policies to combat poverty.<sup>74</sup> While these groups may win victories at the

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<sup>73</sup> See Marion Orr (ed.) *Transforming the City: Community Organizing and the Challenge of Political Change* (University Press of Kansas, 2007); Heidi Swarts, *Organizing Urban America: Secular and Faith-Based Progressive Movements* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008); Mark Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy* (Princeton University Press, 2001)

<sup>74</sup> And as Jeffrey Berry has noted, the legal limits on tax-exempt nonprofits' political activity robs these organizations of much political voice. "Nonprofits and Civic Engagement," *Public Administration Review* vol 65, no. 5 (September/October 2005): 568-578; for a somewhat different view, see Debra C. Minkoff,



local level, they have rarely been able to exercise influence in state and national politics. Only by building a broad set of politically potent linkages – with mobilization capabilities and power at all levels of the federal system – will they be able to exercise the kind of influence needed to alter policy.

## CONCLUSION

Many accounts of organized labor’s postwar political and ideological orientations identify the 1940s as the endgame for a political progressive labor movement. Yet, even after the AFL and CIO joined forces in 1955, labor continued to be a complex organization with internal factions striving to advance their perspective and thereby to engage labor in coalitions with other groups.<sup>75</sup> The progressives within labor understood that to promote a politically-engaged, broadly progressive vision within labor they needed an organizational form that could build these qualities over time. Accordingly, these activists sought to strengthen labor’s geographic organizational structure to facilitate engagement with social concerns beyond the workplace and to promote labor’s capacity to mobilize its base and beyond. Without that organizational footing, labor had few resources to prevent its members from straying to the other political networks that commanded their allegiance, whether southern White Councils or the anti-labor Republican Party.

America’s liberal heyday left behind an ambiguous organizational legacy: a thriving but politically weak set of nonprofit organizations dedicated to serving low-income communities. Alone, these groups are poorly suited to press for changes on the

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“The Emergence of Hybrid Organizational Forms: Combining Identity-Based Service Provision and Political Action,” *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 2002; 31; 377-401.

<sup>75</sup> Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism, 1945-1968* makes a similar point, p.261.

scale needed to address the problems they confront and the linkages they have forged over the past forty years are not geared to bring about needed political change.

However, new possibilities are emerging. During the past decade, organized labor has once again experienced a generational shift with a new cohort of activists seeking to revive labor as a broad-based social movement.<sup>76</sup> They have launched numerous new innovative efforts to revamp labor's organizational structure and its political alliances. These include campaigns to revitalize Central Labor Councils, experiments with new organizational forms, such as workers' centers for nonunion workers, and new community-labor coalitions.<sup>77</sup> Not surprisingly, these efforts have set off internal organizational struggles, experimentation with alternative organizational forms, and initiatives to build coalitions with new groups.<sup>78</sup> These organizational strategies, however, did not emerge from any institutionally-derived recipe for pursuing labor's best interests, however. Rather they reflect the process of persuasion and dynamics of power that have taken shape within labor organizations.

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<sup>76</sup> Kim Voss and Rachel Sherman, "Breaking the Iron Law of Oligarchy," *American Journal of Sociology* 2000.

<sup>77</sup> Immanuel Ness and Stuart Eimer, (eds.) *Central Labor Councils and the Revival of American Unionism* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001); Janice Fine, *Worker Centers: Organizing Communities at the Edge of the Dream* (ILR Press, 2006); Dorthie Benz "It Takes A Village to Win: A Case Study of Organizing among Florida's Nursing Home Workers," *Politics and Society* (2005).

<sup>78</sup> See for example, Lowell Turner and Daniel B. Cornfield, *Labor in the New Urban Battlegrounds* (ILR Press/Cornell University Press, 2007).