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Contesting the Global City

Pittsburgh's Public Service Unions Confront a Neoliberal Agenda

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In early June of 1997 I began working as an intern for Local 9876 of the Service Employees International Union in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I had come to Pittsburgh to compare that city's response to globalization and de-industrialization with the experience of the German Ruhr. Both regions faced declining steel industries; both regions had been industrial heartlands of postwar economic expansion. But I found Pittsburgh so absorbing in its own right that I soon dropped the Ruhr. If in Germany the old labor regime was sufficiently durable to steer a gradual change, Pittsburgh was experiencing a veritable revolution. Its once mighty steel mills had become museum pieces along the Monongahela Valley and its unions seemed headed for the dustbin of history, as Pittsburgh's elites busily tried to reinvent the city as a center of finance, health services, and informational and biomedical technologies. I wanted to know how the labor movement was dealing with this dramatic transition from Steel City to Global City, from the ideology of class collaboration to a neoliberal offensive. Could this be soil for the restoration of labor? Could it take root in the burgeoning service economy?

I gravitated to the SEIU's Local 9876 because, amidst the historic collapse of industrial unionism in Pittsburgh, it had built a remarkable record of successfully organizing low-wage nursing home workers, often using confrontational tactics of grassroots public protest. Taking me on as an apprentice organizer, the union put me to work on an "internal" organizing project aimed at helping its unit of

1,500 Allegheny County workers (mostly clerical workers and clerks, with a few janitors and jail guards thrown in) win new contracts. Initially I was disappointed not to be working on new organizing campaigns, but I contented myself with the thought that successfully defending existing union members was just as important. My two fellow interns and I thus set about holding meetings with worksite stewards and leaders, planning a series of lunchtime worksite union meetings, and recruiting county workers' participation in a series of public protests.

Right from the beginning it was clear that Local 9876's Allegheny County chapter was struggling to adapt to a new labor relations climate. The local was being pushed by circumstances to innovate, to apply the lessons of private-sector organizing to its base in the formerly hospitable public sector, now under attack by a new Republican county administration. As the contract campaign unfolded it was very clear that the organizational legacies of a vanished labor-relations regime were making it difficult to mount a sustained grassroots campaign. Workers demanded action, but did not want to plan it or lead it. Workers also understood that the bureaucratic procedures through which paid union staff had traditionally resolved their grievances and negotiated new contracts were not working—but they lacked any vision of a more participatory, social-movement-oriented unionism based on collective struggle and solidarity. On the other side, the union staff was itself divided between those who saw the campaign as a jumping-off point for a thorough organizational reform and those who, unable to envision a different role for themselves, preferred to view mobilization as a short-term means to an end.

But if the importance of the union's organizational legacies was clear from the outset, what was not clear was the significance of the contract campaign itself. Perhaps because of my continuing involvement as an organizer, perhaps because I needed a longer time horizon, I kept vacillating about how to understand the campaign—especially since, despite its problems, it did lead to the successful negotiation of new contracts in the fall of 1997. Was the campaign a success because it won new contracts, or was it a failure because it did not immediately transform the organizational structure of the union's Allegheny County chapter? Indeed, it was not until early 1999, when the union decided to begin earnestly building a func-

tioning structure of worksite stewards in its Allegheny County unit, that I could fully appreciate the positive long-term effects of the campaign.

Nor could I immediately understand how it had even accomplished its victory. While it had organized a number of successful public actions, including one large rally involving more than five hundred workers from several dozen worksites, I was puzzled as to why these few rallies so easily induced the county administration to drop its demands for concessions. The Republican majority on the county Board of Commissioners had come to office, after all, promising to vanquish the county unions once and for all, to eliminate bloated budgets and payrolls, and to put the county's fiscal house in order. Why should a few demonstrations and informational pickets have caused them to change course so abruptly?

This second set of questions led me outside of my experience as a participant observer, back to the union's earlier campaign against privatization of the county's four public nursing homes, the Kane Regional Centers. In the winter of 1997–1998 I conducted interviews with Kane workers, union staff, and other participants; I studied news reports and watched several videotapes of television news coverage that union staff had compiled. Slowly I began to grasp the importance of an oppositional ideology that crystallized in the Kane struggle, an ideology that pitted the human rights of elderly and disabled nursing home residents against the market imperatives of efficiency and competitiveness. This humanitarian vision proved crucial to the union's ability to mobilize a broad coalition of actors to defeat privatization—and crucial for the success of the contract campaign as well, since defeat on the privatization issue created fiscal pressures undermining the county administration's ability to engage in a lengthy contract stalemate.

In the end, I concluded that for labor the very real pressures of globalization demanded not only a new set of tactics, not only new organizational forms overriding legacies of the past, but also new imaginations with which to challenge the assumptions of neoliberal ideology.

I had just returned to the union office from one of the informational picket sites I had helped organize for the day. As part of its three-month-old effort to win new contracts for 1,500 workers employed by Allegheny County, the union had organized a wave of pickets dubbed "rolling thunder week." Workers at various departments around the county picketed and leafleted at lunchtime; each day was a different department or set of departments. Interns delivered picket signs, union tee shirts, and union buttons to the worksites ahead of time, and gave a schedule of picket locations, days, and times to the television news departments. Several television stations sent out news crews each day of the week to do live coverage for the noon news. On this day, August 25, 1997, the picketing was taking place during workers' lunch breaks at Allegheny County's four publicly owned regional geriatric hospitals, the Kane Regional Centers.

I had taken some pictures of Allegheny County workers at one of the Kane Centers as a handful picketed and leafleted, and I gave a brief pep talk. Now, back at the office, I was about to receive bad news in the form of voice-mail messages from workers at two of the Kanes, where the scheduled picketing had not materialized. At one of the sites, the picketing simply did not materialize and no one could say why. At the other location, two union stewards had at the last minute scuttled the action by refusing to participate. Despite the presence of the media (a mobile news unit from one of the local television channels had been setting up in the parking lot since midmorning), the two women had driven off to lunch together in a car containing all the picket signs and materials for the action. Leaderless and without picket signs, the other workers had stayed inside. Worst of all, the news crew had done a bewildered live report from the parking lot, saying they had been told picketing was supposed to have occurred but that no one had shown up.

I was stunned by this information, not only because all of the stewards had assured me earlier in the day that they would lead the picketing at their sites, but also because I knew that months earlier, they and other Kane workers had eagerly participated in a whole series of informational picketing and protests during a union campaign to prevent the privatization of the four Kane centers. They had descended en masse on the county courthouse and had disrupted weekly meetings of the County Board of Commissioners. Why were these same workers, earlier so eager to protest against privatization, now so reluctant to protest on behalf of new contracts?

Part of the answer was organizational. The earlier protests had all been organized and led by the union; worksite stewards and other rank and file workers had been asked to turn up to union-orchestrated events. The "rolling thunder" actions, however, depended on stewards and worksite leaders to take responsibility for organizing, directing, and leading the actions themselves. Historically, the union had relied on paid staff representatives and bureaucratic procedures, rather than rank-and-file-led collective action, to deal with worksite problems. Stewards were volunteers, not

paid union staff, and their activities had traditionally been limited to serving as contacts for their worksites. They were not accustomed to organizing or supervising collective actions, particularly within the context of a tense contract situation, and they had not received any training as organizers. Thus, the union's historic orientation toward bureaucratic "servicing" rather than collective struggle constituted a set of organizational *legacies*, which now constrained its ability to mount worker-led collective actions without direct supervision from union staff.

A second piece of the puzzle had to do with *ideology*. My interviews with union staff and Kane workers indicated that even in union-led actions and protests, Kane workers had been much easier to mobilize in the earlier struggle against privatization than in the contract campaign because they perceived the two struggles very differently. Kane workers immediately perceived privatization as a threat, not only to themselves, but also to the aged and disabled residents they cared for. They viewed privatization as something they had a moral duty to struggle against, in order to safeguard the dignity and safety of their residents. Against the ideology of market efficiency which privatization would supposedly introduce, Kane workers counterposed a humanitarian vision of their residents' needs, which called them to action. On the contract issue, however, Kane workers had no such counter-ideology. They bitterly opposed the county's demands for greater scheduling flexibility, new management rights, and wage and benefit concessions, but lacked a mobilizing vision which would call them to action in their own self-defense.

Initially I did not see the significance of ideology and legacies in the story of the two Kane workers who, in driving off to lunch, had chosen bread over struggle. It was tempting to see their abdications as their own individual failures of responsibility, or, conversely, as the fault of the union for not adequately preparing them for the action they were asked to lead. But as I reflected further, it became clear that in trying to decide whom to blame, I had missed the point completely. The real significance of the story is that the two dilemmas it highlights are in fact central problems, not just of the two interconnected union campaigns examined here, but also of the American labor movement as a whole.

NEW UNIONISM: TACTICS, LEGACIES, AND IDEOLOGY

Recent scholarship on new forms of union struggle emphasizes how participatory, disruptive, and confrontational tactics—like those Local 9876 attempted to use in its privatization and contract struggles—allow unions more effectively to exploit employer weaknesses and build workers' power. The literature emphasizes the importance of building lasting labor-community coalitions;[1] revitalizing local labor councils as organizational hubs of local labor-movement activity;[2] organizing collective action campaigns

emphasizing public protest and disruptive tactics;[3] and using "rank-and-file intensive" grassroots approaches to organizing, utilizing the talents of union member volunteers to connect one-on-one with potential new union members.[4]

A few writers have gone beyond the emphasis on tactics. Some have raised the issue of organizational legacies, pointing out that for local unions, using new tactics means embarking on a difficult process of organizational transformation. The structures of bureaucratic-servicing unionism have long discouraged worker participation and channeled workers' grievances into demobilizing bureaucratic procedures.[5] Moving from an approach that sought to manipulate bureaucratic procedures to service existing union members, toward one in which the collective *mobilization* of workers is paramount both to winning new members and defending existing ones, means shifting resources away from traditional representational activities.[6] The organizational legacies of business unionism are composed not only of the entrenched positions of many union staff, who remain wedded to traditional bureaucratic representation functions and identities, but also to deeply ingrained dispositions of rank and file members—who have been well taught not to see their union as a participatory social movement organization but rather as a sort of insurance company from which they purchase representational services with their dues.[7]

Other scholars have drawn attention to the problem of ideology, arguing that unions must create an appealing vision of society capable of mobilizing workers and their community allies: a "labor ideology" which "unabashedly champions class-unifying themes" such as universal rights to decent jobs, housing, publicly funded health care, education, day care, paid family leave, and vacations.[8] Such attempts are necessary to counter the ascendant neoliberal ideology of the contemporary period, which presents market forces as universal, natural, inevitable, and irresistible—suggesting that, at best, unions may make futile and backward attempts to protect their members from harsh economic "reality," while, at worst, they may actually hinder the functioning of competitive markets.[9] Moreover, some have noted, this challenge is all the greater in the contemporary period because economic globalization extends and deepens market ideology. The apparent unmanageability and universality of the global economy undercuts local or even national attempts to curb the destructive social effects of unregulated market competition. Globalization has become its own ideology, according to which the desperate competition of all regions and localities in an unregulated global economy is also natural, inevitable, and irresistible. Therefore a revitalized labor movement must ultimately construct and deploy persuasive new visions and ideologies, not only to counter the neoliberal view of market supremacy, but also against the naturalization of globalization itself.[10]

However, while labor movement scholars have noted the existence of

both ideology and organizational legacies as challenges unions must overcome, they have not studied *how* ideology and legacies are, or are not, dealt with in union campaigns. Case studies of union campaigns have, in the main, presented successful cases as strategic and tactical exemplars, as success stories illustrating the effectiveness of particular tactics. But as the anecdote with which this chapter began illustrates, union victories do not result merely from the mechanical application of new tactics; they reflect unions' abilities to somehow deal with the dilemmas of ideology and organizational legacies. When union campaigns succeed, in other words, it is not because they typify the use of new tactics, but because in using new tactics, they have been (perhaps uniquely) creative and clever enough to find ways of overcoming or bypassing these central dilemmas. Rather than simply noting their existence, we need to understand how, through what concrete processes, unions have struggled with ideology and legacies in actual campaigns.

This chapter examines the relation of ideology and legacies in the two campaigns introduced in the opening anecdote. First, I show how the increased salience of the global led to a neoliberal turn in Pittsburgh's local politics, underpinning both the privatization initiative and the county's demands for contract concessions from its employees. Second, I argue that the union's campaign against Kane privatization succeeded because it was able to deploy a humanitarian discourse emphasizing the dark side of market efficiency, transforming privatization into a synonym for cutbacks that would needlessly victimize the Kanes' innocent elderly and disabled residents. This union discourse mobilized diverse constituencies against privatization, allowing the union to *bypass* (rather than confront) its organizational legacies. The third part of this chapter argues that in its contract campaign, the union was forced to confront its organizational legacies more directly, because it could *not* generate an appealing ideological alternative and could not mobilize external allies. As a result, the union found contract mobilization a much more difficult task. Finally, I argue that moving beyond local successes like these will require the construction of a coherent ideological response to globalization—a task that will itself be complicated by the movement's organizational legacies.

GLOBALIZATION AND NEOLIBERAL IDEOLOGY

Pittsburgh presents an archetypal example of two distinct periods of globalization, each conforming to a quite different pattern. During the extended period of postwar United States hegemony, Pittsburgh was at the center of a global steel industry. Southwestern Pennsylvania headquartered a half-dozen large steel firms, and the Monongahela Valley was one of the world's most heavily industrialized regions. Pittsburgh's industrial products found global markets—but most Pittsburghers thought little about the

global economy, which remained hidden behind ideas about American industrial superiority. Pittsburgh's broad-based prosperity (indeed, its identity as the "Steel City") was perceived instead as part of the natural order of the world, even as it was underpinned by the steel industry's historic but temporary acceptance of unions and collective bargaining. Industry-wide pattern bargaining ensured, for a time, that global steel profits were spread to a prosperous local industrial working class.

In the 1980s, everything changed. Foreign steel producers, once scorned, were suddenly producing higher-quality products more efficiently. The tables were turned on union leaders who had thought themselves securely part of the institutional apparatus of American industry. Now they found capital's consent being relentlessly withdrawn. Pattern bargaining collapsed as steel and other industrial firms lined up to exact painful concessions with the threat of plant closures, then closed the plants anyway. During a remarkably brief span, southwestern Pennsylvania lost over 150,000 industrial jobs. In a few short years, Pittsburgh was transformed from the large United States city with the highest proportion of manufacturing jobs to that with the lowest.[11]

Ironically, it was only now that Pittsburgh was being displaced from the center of the global economy—and hence now *less* globalized—that ideas about globalization and the global economy began to dominate the local political landscape. The question of how to transform Pittsburgh in order to meet the requirements of the new global economy now consumed business and political leaders and informed local public debate. In the 1990s, with less than 10 percent of Pittsburgh's work force remaining in manufacturing, it is public service workers, not manufacturing workers, who are most affected by the new salience of the global.

This can be seen in the way that, even as the tax base has shrunk, numerous projects aimed at making Pittsburgh more attractive to investors, visitors, and tourists have siphoned funds away from public services in favor of corporate subsidies. The city of Pittsburgh has committed millions in subsidies toward construction of a new downtown convention center; new ballparks for the Pittsburgh Pirates and Steelers; new upscale retail space and apartments downtown; a new regional history center; trolleys for a "tourist transportation" business; and a pedestrian walkway over the Allegheny River linking Point State Park with the replacement to Three Rivers Stadium.[12] All of these projects have been justified with reference to the necessity of making Pittsburgh a more attractive location for global investment.

Efforts to shrink county government and cut taxes have also been underway throughout the 1990s. Democratic administrations reduced the number of employees on Allegheny County's payroll from over ten thousand in the late 1980s to seven thousand by the mid-1990s.[13] A Democratic administration cut county tax rates by 16 percent (from 37.5 mills to 31.5 mills)

in 1994 and enacted another cut of nearly 10 percent (to 28.5 mills) in late 1995.[14] Republicans upped the ante, however, during the 1995 county election campaign, promising a further across-the-board property tax cut of 20 percent, to be paid for with privatization initiatives and contract concessions from eleven unions representing county employees. The Democrats announced that they intended to match the Republicans' promise of a 20 percent property tax cut, but argued that it should be phased in gradually over four years instead of introduced all at once. Like the Republicans, the Democrats also promised to further streamline county departments and eliminate "unnecessary" jobs.[15]

Both parties also framed the issue of tax cuts in terms of the demands of interurban competition in a global economy. During the 1995 commissioners' race, for example, Democratic candidate Vuono argued that Allegheny County needed a 20 percent property tax reduction because it would make the county more competitive in attracting people and capital to the region, saying, "Part of the reason we're losing residents and losing business is because of the taxes."[16] The views of the Republican candidates were the same. In a letter to the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* published two days before the election, Larry Dunn and Bob Cranmer wrote, "We believe that an immediate 20 percent cut in property taxes is the only sure way to send the message to the world that Allegheny County is open for business. We want to compete with other cities and counties for new jobs." The letter added that "by totally changing the economic atmosphere (with a taxpayer-friendly property tax rate) businesses and jobs will come to Allegheny County."[17]

Republican victory in the county elections of November 1995 thus meant only the acceleration of a neoliberal agenda that had already been defining county politics throughout the decade. On their first day in office, Dunn and Cranmer instituted the promised tax cut. Shortly afterward they sacked the county's in-house labor negotiator, replacing him with a high-profile law firm known for union-busting. The county's new labor counsel demanded a variety of givebacks and concessions from the unions, and insisted that all negotiations begin with a set of completely new documents erasing existing contract language on seniority rights, scheduling, and numerous other issues. Publicly, the county's new negotiators portrayed county employees as overpaid and underworked, and blamed the county's fiscal dilemma on a bloated county payroll. (Not mentioned was the fact that most unionized county workers earned only around $20,000 annually, or that upper-level managers had received large bonuses and raises since Dunn and Cranmer took office.) Finally, the county repeatedly told the unions that no substantive discussions were possible until the unions agreed to a new, two-page "management's-rights" clause. The county's proposal would have given it the right to privatize or contract out any county function without bargaining with the unions, and to unilaterally change workers' schedules and job assignments—or lay them off—without notice.[18] Not surprisingly, contract negotiations made no progress in 1996.

In September of the same year, the Republicans floated their detailed plan to lease the four regional John J. Kane Centers to a private entity, Alleco, specially created for that purpose. Alleco would lease the Kanes for $23 million annually and be responsible for all operating costs—although the long-term debt burden remaining from the centers' construction in the early 1980s would still be borne by the county. Alleco and the Republican commissioners publicly warned the unions that if they did not agree to concessionary contracts with the county before privatization took place, Alleco would not honor the expired contracts.[19] Alleco's business plan promised not to slash existing Kane workers' wages and benefits, but reserved the right to downsize. New hires would be brought in at lower wages and with fewer benefits.

The commissioners' arguments on behalf of Kane privatization illuminate the symbiotic relation between globalization and neoliberal ideology. While the global competition for jobs and investment can be directly invoked in support of tax cuts and business subsidies, proposals to dismantle public provision of needed services require specific rationales. Therefore, to justify their proposal to privatize the Kane Regional Centers, Republicans deployed neoliberal ideas about the superiority of private markets over public administration. Alleco, they claimed, could do the job more efficiently than county administrators, without harming Kane residents in any way.[20] The Kanes were overstaffed, they argued, relative to private-sector nursing homes—particularly in departments other than nursing (maintenance, housekeeping, dietary, and laundry). Kane management was burdened with arcane and inflexible work-rules that stood in the way of efficiency. And worst of all, they claimed, the Kanes were beginning to lose money—a problem that would only worsen in coming years because of recent changes in state reimbursement rules. In sum, privatization would allow the county to more efficiently meet its legal obligations to provide for the elderly and disabled—by getting rid of unnecessary staff, negotiating better deals with contractors, and using staff more flexibly.[21]

Here we see how, on the one hand, the necessity of competing for global investment and jobs seems to make public provision of services unsustainable, too expensive, and noncompetitive; while, on the other, the ideology of market efficiency provides ready-made "solutions" and plans for dismantling public provision. During debates over such "solutions," globalization recedes into the background, where it remains as an unspoken, unquestioned context for neoliberal arguments. The unstated presence of the global makes it more difficult to counter neoliberal claims because the threat of disinvestment and capital flight looms over everything. As we will see, however, this nested relationship between discourses about globaliza-

tion and neoliberal ideology is not invulnerable to counterattack, for where fundamental questions of justice and human rights can be raised, neoliberal ideology becomes vulnerable. In this case, Local 9876 was certainly not in a position to mount an attack on ideas about the global competition for jobs and investment (it could not and did not challenge the Republicans' tax cut). But the commissioners' specific claims about the virtues of privatization were ripe for contestation. The union's strategy, therefore, would be to mobilize a grassroots coalition around the idea that "efficiency" really meant cutbacks, and that cutbacks would unacceptably harm the Kanes' elderly and infirm residents. Even if the global could not be directly contested, the union hoped that public sympathy for these innocents would neutralize the Republicans' arguments about costs and efficiency.

"SAVE OUR KANES": FIGHTING PRIVATIZATION

In building a grassroots coalition against privatization, Local 9876 faced serious organizational obstacles related to the history of business unionism. Organized in more labor-friendly times in the early 1970s, the union's county chapter had evolved a fairly traditional bureaucratic-servicing model of unionism. Workers generally reported grievances directly to their union staff representative, bypassing worksite stewards. Staff representatives tended not to educate workers about the contract, preferring instead to play the role of "expert" over whether issues were grievable or not. Many of Local 9876's worksites and departments had not bothered to elect union stewards. In some worksites, only a few of the workers actually joined the union. Local 9876's clerical units at the Kanes were no exception: they did not have a functioning worksite-steward structure, with well-trained stewards capable of organizing and carrying out a strategy of grassroots protest.

Complicating matters was the fact that most Kane workers were represented by another union, the Laborers' Local X. Local X was even more firmly wedded to its tradition of business-union organization, and extremely wary of involvement in a public antiprivatization campaign.[22] While the leadership of Local X agreed to allow Local 9876 to try to mobilize Kane workers, Local X did not want to be publicly identified with the campaign or to participate directly in the mobilization effort. Therefore, Local 9876 would have to mobilize Kane workers without the benefit of any kind of effective worksite infrastructure.

Local 9876 could not directly overcome these business union legacies, particularly those involving Local X. But the union was able successfully to *bypass* these problems of internal union organization, because of the special appeal this particular issue held for three constituencies: Kane workers, an older generation of Kane activists, and Pittsburgh's progressive religious community. As we will see, each of these constituencies had its own reasons

for seeing Kane privatization in humanitarian—rather than economic—terms, and each group brought a different sort of credibility to the campaign to stop privatization.

Kane Workers: Defending Our Residents

Kane workers themselves were acutely aware of the privatization plan. They were particularly concerned about the possibility of staff cuts because staffing had already been affected by a countywide early-retirement plan enacted in the spring of 1996. Many Kane workers had taken the buyout, but these workers had not been replaced. As a result, Kane units were now working shorthanded more often.[23] Kane workers paid very close attention to the Republican commissioners' public claims that the Kanes were overstaffed, that its workers were overpaid, and that they enjoyed benefits and perks unheard of in the private sector. They understood very clearly that privatization would likely lead to further cutbacks in staffing, wages, and benefits. They were outraged by the commissioners' attack on the Kanes because, they felt, the Kanes' staffing patterns (one nurses' aide for every ten residents on the day shift) and relatively good wages and benefits (about $10 an hour for starting nurses' aides) were key ingredients of the facilities' low employee turnover and generally good care. As one Kane worker said:

> I get to take care of the same people every day, so I know them and their needs very well. And most of our workers have been at the Kanes for a long time. There's very little turnover. If you cut people down to six dollars an hour, a lot of people will leave. For six dollars an hour, it would be a lot easier to flip hamburgers, and not be dealing with the emotional stress of taking care of very sick people.

Kane workers were particularly worried about the effects of future cutbacks on residents. Dozens of workers I spoke with were visibly upset about the effects of the buyouts, the likely effects of future cutbacks, and the effect of talk of privatization on residents' morale. One worker's bitter comments captured a theme I heard often:

> The residents wonder why we can't spend as much time with them as we used to. They ask us, "What did I do to make you not love me anymore?" They think it's something they did wrong. It's heartbreaking. And all you can do is tell them it's not their fault and go on to the next patient. They deserve better.

Because of Kane workers' level of anger over privatization and the strength of their emotional ties to residents, Local 9876 was able to mobilize them in opposition to privatization even without an easily activated internal union structure. When the union began announcing rallies, workers turned up in fairly large numbers, with very little organizational effort on the part of the union. In late September 1996, about seventy-five Kane

workers from both locals turned out on short notice to an anti-privatization rally. Several weeks later, hundreds of workers responded to Local 9876's call to attend a Wednesday night meeting of the county Board of Commissioners. In January of 1997, Local 9876 successfully organized three days of rallies and marches; noisy crowds of workers descended on the Allegheny County courthouse each day. In between these large events, several dozen workers turned out for each biweekly county commissioners' meeting—to harass the county administration and to use the portion of the meetings designated for "public comment" as a platform to denounce Kane privatization.

The mobilization of Kane workers contributed a crucial piece to the overall response to the Republicans' assault on the Kanes. The sheer scale of workers' rallies and protests, combined with careful attention to media outreach, resulted in extensive coverage by all local television networks and both of Pittsburgh's daily newspapers. The *Post-Gazette,* which editorially favored Kane privatization, described the scene at one rally as a "buzz-saw of opposition," during which the crowd "chanted slogans like 'Hey hey, ho ho, Dunn and Cranmer got to go.'"[24] The workers' protests—and the resulting media coverage—also emphasized workers' concern for their residents in addition to their own opposition as workers. Local television coverage of one meeting, for example, featured a Kane worker saying, "I'm very opposed to [privatization] because we're very dedicated workers and I don't feel we should be put out in the streets. And our patients, our poor patients, some of them are asking questions about where we're gonna go, and where they're gonna go." Another gave an emotional statement to the cameras, with tears in her eyes as she referred to the Kane centers' historical mission: "The [Kane] hospitals used to have a motto that said, 'we'll take the poor and we'll take the indigent.' Now they want to run [the homes] as a business. . . . Well, businesses don't take in the poor." Television coverage of another rally gave a Kane worker the last word: "[Kane residents] have become family—when they hurt, you hurt."

But the two Republican commissioners' responses illustrate the limitations of mobilization by Kane workers alone and the importance of the union's decision to build a broader community coalition: they portrayed the workers and unions as motivated purely by self-interest in the face of difficult but necessary change. In response to one early protest, Commissioner Dunn said, "They're concerned about their jobs, and that's understandable." Cranmer added, "We want a positive relationship with the unions, but times are changing." As the campaign developed, the commissioners took a harder line, portraying the unions as obstructionist. "If the unions stand back and don't negotiate, then as far as I'm concerned, we turn this thing over to Alleco," Dunn threatened in January 1997. "The employees have had their chance. If their leaders don't do the right thing, then we're going to turn it over to Alleco and let Alleco negotiate with them."[25] Further, the Republican commissioners and the county's law firm began pointedly attacking "wasteful" labor agreements as the source of inefficiency at the Kanes, slamming Kane workers' free cafeteria lunches and differential rates ($0.25 an hour) for assignments off their normal units. "You'll find no counterpart to that in the private sector," complained John Lyncheski, the county's chief negotiator to local television news cameras. "It's just inefficient and wasteful, frankly." To the union's chagrin, despite its efforts to respond to these charges, the commissioners clearly scored major points with these attacks.[26]

Elderly Advocates: Independent Credibility

Fortunately, however, union leaders had anticipated that mobilizing Kane workers would not be enough. Right from the beginning of the campaign the union had enlisted a group called the Alliance for Progressive Action (APA) to help organize an effective labor-community coalition.[27] One way APA staff broadened the base of antiprivatization opposition was to begin meeting with a number of activists who had spearheaded a reform effort at the old Kane Hospital nearly two decades earlier. These activists were former workers at Kane Hospital who had gone public in the late 1970s with a damning report called "Kane: A Place to Die." Their central contention then was that low wages, understaffing, and high employee turnover at Kane Hospital led to low worker morale, patient neglect, and patient abuse. Their exposé had received national attention, had led to changes in federal government regulation of county nursing homes across the country, and had ultimately resulted in the demolition of Kane Hospital and the construction of the four regional Kane Centers in the early 1980s. These activists were justifiably proud of their reform efforts and of the new Kanes' continuing record of quality care; like Kane workers, they understood that the Kanes' vastly improved reputation was the result of their good staffing ratios, decent wages and benefits, and low staff turnover. The old Kane activists were thus very concerned about the commissioners' plans to privatize the Kanes, fearing that a private operator would undo precisely the improvements in staffing, wages and benefits, and turnover they had fought so hard for two decades ago. One of the original Kane activists who now led the group's efforts against privatization later related, "I ran into [another old Kane activist] at the supermarket, and we said, you know, we should really do something. So we called the union." APA and Local 9876 staff began meeting with these activists in September of 1996. Together, they formed a new group called the Committee to Save Kane, and began planning to organize residents' family members and to circulate petitions.

The members of the Committee to Save Kane played on their former positions as courageous whistleblowers at the old Kane Hospital and current

identities as elderly advocates, garnering an aura of impartiality that current Kane workers could not command. When the Committee to Save Kane held a press conference announcing its opposition to privatization and outlining its concern that any attempt to cut costs would necessarily rely on reduced staffing, wages, and benefits, press reports were respectful, treating its members as independent advocates for the elderly.[28] Coverage noted that Committee members included a regional director of the National Council for Senior Citizens and the president of the local chapter of the Steelworkers Organization of Active Retirees.[29]

In responding to the Committee to Save Kane, the Republicans continued to try to blame all opposition on the unions, saying that privatization foes had been "'sold a bill of goods' by union leaders with a stake in [Kane jobs]."[30] But claiming that advocates for the elderly and retired had somehow been duped by the Kane unions was not nearly as effective as being able to blast the unions directly. As a result, the commissioners were forced to respond more substantively to the committee's arguments. Sounding defensive, the Republicans denied that there would be any job cuts directly involving patient care, but their denial acknowledged that in fact job reductions were likely through attrition and possibly even layoffs.[31]

The Committee to Save Kane also contributed to the campaign in other ways. When committee members independently discovered that the Kanes were busing nurses' aides from one facility to another to beef up staffing during a state inspection—thus casting doubt on claims of overstaffing—they went public with the information. The Laborers' Local X, which represented these nurse aides, had known about the practice, but had chosen not to go public or even communicate this knowledge to Local 9876. Committee members spent hours discussing these discoveries and their analysis of privatization with several television reporters, and this paid off in the form of an in-depth television news report on staffing changes at the Kanes since the Republicans had taken office.

But perhaps the most important Committee to Save Kane activity was its effort to contact and organize the family members of Kane residents. Through its organizing efforts, the committee was able to turn out a contingent of residents' family members to protest at the commissioners' biweekly public meetings and at union rallies. The family members were extremely effective and enthusiastic advocates for the Kanes. At commissioners' meetings I attended, dozens of family members—mostly middle-aged and elderly women—formed a rowdy caucus. At every opportunity, they yelled at the commissioners, saying, for example, "Shame on you! How can you do this to my mother?" At one meeting, Commissioner Cranmer inadvertently stepped on their toes when he criticized Kane workers. The family members were outraged. "[Kane workers] are the nicest people anywhere!" one white-haired lady shouted angrily. "They take care of my sister

every day and she loves them dearly! Don't you say anything bad about them!" Cranmer was clearly flustered by all this, and neither Republican commissioner ever figured out how to respond effectively to the family members' vocal opposition: they simply could not dismiss family members' concerns as "selfish."

Religious Leaders: Moral Authority

In addition to its work with the Committee to Save Kane, the APA also helped coordinate opposition from progressive church leaders. The APA had already been in the process of organizing the Pittsburgh Area Religious Task Force on the Economy, recruiting church leaders who had historically supported labor causes and issues, and who were generally concerned about problems of economic inequality and injustice. When the commissioners announced their plans to privatize the Kanes, the APA and Local 9876 suggested Kane privatization as the Religious Task Force's first major project. "They needed something to get started on, they needed something concrete to work around," says the APA's Newman. The union put together a fact sheet on privatization emphasizing how Alleco's plan would likely affect the quality of care, and Newman and Janet Zimmerman, the president of Local 9876, presented the issue to the Task Force. They proposed that the Task Force convene public hearings on the issue, take testimony, and then issue an opinion.

The Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, and Jewish clergy who comprised the Religious Task Force responded enthusiastically to this proposal. The idea of holding public hearings was particularly attractive because, rather than being asked automatically to side with the unions with knee-jerk support, the clergy were being asked to form their own independent view and issue a thoughtful opinion. Clearly, though, the sympathies of this progressive group of clergy were with workers and residents from the outset. As the Reverend Phil Wilson, a Task Force member, later said, "You know, a lot of us visit parishioners at the Kanes on a regular basis. I have always been impressed with the staff there, and whenever I am visiting, they always seem to be working very hard. So to me, and to a number of other clergy, the things the commissioners were saying about the Kanes being overstaffed just didn't make sense." Also, Wilson added, "Some of us have been around long enough to remember the old Kane Hospital—and we didn't want to see a return to those kinds of conditions."

The hearings held by the Religious Task Force on March 5, and their subsequent opinion statement, added a crucial final piece to the strategy of resistance. The hearings themselves offered another opportunity to mobilize "disinterested" expert opinion. Written testimony from Linda Rhodes, former Pennsylvania Secretary of Aging, was introduced, emphasizing the Kanes' record of providing high-quality care to a vulnerable population. She

wrote of having received many calls, as Secretary of Aging, "from Pittsburghers who asked if there was anything I could do to get their family members into one of the Kane Regional Centers because they knew that the care was so good but the waiting lists were so long." MIT-trained economist Stephen Herzenberg warned that nursing home markets and reimbursement schemes did not reward care quality in the private sector, contributing to understaffing and the spread of a low-wage, high-turnover model of labor relations. Finally, widely respected Democratic county controller Frank Lucchino testified that short-term budget considerations rather than concern for quality were driving the privatization plan. Lucchino noted that the Republican commissioners were eager to receive a $23 million lease payment from Alleco to help ease the county's self-imposed budget crisis. Moreover, Lucchino testified, in order to come up with the lease money, Alleco would necessarily have to cut jobs, wages, and services at the Kanes.

Again, the Republicans had difficulty responding effectively to these claims. *Post-Gazette* coverage of the Religious Task Force hearings gave extensive play to Lucchino's financial analysis of the privatization proposal, which James Roddey, Alleco's chairman, was not able to convincingly refute.[32] Roddey and Commissioner Cranmer repeated their denials that privatization would lead to cuts in the medical staff at the Kanes, but they now seemed to be outnumbered by a myriad of experts claiming the opposite.

On March 24, 1997, the Religious Task Force on the Economy issued its opinion on Kane privatization and its appeal to the Board of Commissioners to reconsider the plan. Its statement, quoted in the *Post-Gazette,* expressed concern about "increased social costs, the loss of public accountability, the stripping of public assets, the potential for corruption, the jobs of Kane workers and the undercutting of union organization."[33] The statement went on to say that "We are deeply concerned about reductions in the quality and availability of patient care. As religious people, we believe society has a duty toward the poor, the elderly, the infirm and the isolated."[34] Sister Mary Carol Bennett, of the Peace and Justice Office of the Sisters of Mercy, also commented that "[Privatization] is a dollar move to cut the bottom line figure. And the only way you're going to do that is to cut services and to cut jobs."[35] The press conference concluded with a call for parishioners and the general public to contact the commissioners to oppose privatization.

According to the APA's Wendy Newman, the Religious Task Force's contribution to the campaign was, organizationally speaking, "frankly, somewhat smoke and mirrors. But it ended up being a very important piece, because [the clergy] had a certain moral authority that had a very real impact." Indeed, the extensive publicity surrounding the appeal by the Religious Task Force on the Economy seemed the final straw for Commissioner Larry Dunn. Dunn had been quiet throughout the month of March, but decided several hours after the Task Force made its appeal—six

days before his original deadline for a final decision on Kane privatization—to quash privatization at least until the end of the year.

The timing of Dunn's reversal confirms the success of the union's three-pronged mobilization strategy—but more importantly it highlights the fact that the antiprivatization campaign's success was not rooted in the mere *fact* of grassroots mobilization tactics but rather in the union's careful attention to *whose* voices were raised and *what* they said. Together, Kane workers, old Kane activists (and the residents' family members they organized), and the religious community had articulated an emergent, still inchoate ideology, a vision of human dignity that ultimately made the commissioners' bottom-line arguments about efficiency and cost-savings seem not only heartless and insupportable, but beside the point. Ultimately, by helping the union *change the subject* from the costs of operating the Kanes to the importance of maintaining high-quality care for Allegheny County's most vulnerable citizens, the credibility of family members, old Kane activists, and religious leaders accomplished what worker mobilization alone could not.

We have thus seen how the union, unable to challenge either the reality or the ideology of globalization, astutely attacked the specific market-oriented arguments for privatization instead. The union's next campaign, aimed at winning new contracts for all its county workers (including Kane employees) was quite different in this respect. In its contract struggle, Local 9876 could not construct *any* issue of similarly broad-based appeal, capable of mobilizing credible allies and neutralizing neoliberal assumptions and discourse. The union's contract campaign also used grassroots, social-movement-style organizing and protest—but here, the absence of an attractive ideological alternative forced the union to more directly confront the historical legacies of its business-union structure in order to mobilize its workers. Moreover, as we will see, worker mobilization around the contract issue ultimately yielded fruit only because of the Republican commissioners' fiscal and political weakness in the wake of their defeat on Kane privatization.

WINNING FAIR CONTRACTS

Even though public opposition had put Kane privatization on hold by the spring of 1997, 3,500 workers represented by eleven county unions were still working under the terms of expired contracts, with no thaw in negotiations looming anywhere on the horizon. And despite the success of Local 9876's public organizing efforts in defeating Kane privatization, leaders of the other county unions favored returning to a strategy of quiet lobbying and behind-the-scenes pressure in order to settle the county contracts. Janet Zimmerman, president of Local 9876, saw clearly that such a strategy would not lead to a successful conclusion to county bargaining; she believed that the commissioners would need a stronger push.

The issue of contracts for county workers, however, did not inspire the same sort of community activism that Kane privatization had done. The activists and religious leaders who had helped generate a groundswell of opposition to privatization were not only less interested in county workers' contract situations, they were also in a weaker position for issuing morally charged public statements on the issue. Kane privatization had offered the specter of cruelty to innocent old people; the county's demands for contract concessions on seniority rights, scheduling, and contracting-out, on the other hand, simply did not appeal in the same way to a ready-made social justice constituency. County workers' stalled contract negotiations did not seem to portend human suffering of the same magnitude as nursing home privatization and cutbacks. Even though county workers stood to lose important seniority and educational benefits, not to mention their legal right to bargain over privatization and contracting-out, the union was not able to construct an appealing public discourse about the commissioners' attack or generate the same kind of emotional punch that the specter of Kane privatization had offered. As a result, the union could not rely primarily on external linkages with progressive organizations in its contract battle, and was forced to rely on leverage from within.

But without a ready-made counter-ideology to deploy, mobilizing county workers to fight for fair contracts required more intensive organizing than mobilizing angry Kane workers had done. Kane workers had been keenly aware of the privatization issue and its potential effects on themselves and Kane residents, and were eager to show their anger publicly. Kane and other county workers alike, in contrast, generally did not understand the bargaining situation at the outset of the union's internal organizing effort. Indeed, while many workers were angry about having to work under expired contracts, their anger usually took the form of blaming the union for "taking so long" to settle the contract. In contrast to the Kane struggle, therefore, contract mobilization would not happen so spontaneously. Here the union was forced to struggle with three central organizational legacies that the Kane campaign had been able to bypass: bureaucratic inertia, rank and file repertoires, and a worksite leadership vacuum. These legacies did not *prevent* the union from mobilizing workers around the contract issue, but they limited and constrained mobilization. The contract campaign did not solve any of these problems but rather temporarily overcame them or simply operated within the constraints they defined.

Bureaucratic Inertia

Right from the start, the union's bureaucratic-servicing history shaped the development of the contract campaign. Of the three staff representatives responsible for the 1,500 Allegheny county workers represented by Local 9876, the most senior, Fred Jones, was firmly entrenched in the bureaucratic proceduralism that had served him well over the years, and he had little talent or inclination for organizing. Part of the reason the union had hired three college-student interns to carry out the internal organizing campaign was that Jones could not be induced to fully support the campaign. Jones may have recognized that a pressure-campaign was necessary to move the contract negotiations forward, but he clearly wanted as little to do with it as possible, and he hoped to return to his standard representational activities as soon as the campaign ended.

Jones's response was not universal among the staff. Unlike Jones, staff representative Art Lazarra believed that the new context of Allegheny County labor relations demanded a radical response from the union. In Lazarra's view, the organizing campaign should not seek merely to temporarily mobilize workers in pursuit of contract agreements, only to return to the status quo; rather, he believed that the campaign should be a first step toward organizational reform and restructuring. Lazarra wanted to introduce a functioning worksite steward structure so that future mobilizations could be accomplished without having to start from scratch every time. But as consistently as Lazarra tried to introduce the issue of organizational reform into discussions about the campaign, Jones just as consistently tried to focus the campaign purely on short-term mobilization, member recruitment, and member donations to COPE, the local's political fund.

At one early planning meeting, for example, Lazzara criticized the agenda for the lunchtime worksite meetings, arguing that they focused only on short-term mobilization and ignored the underlying organizational problems of the county unit. Lazzara suggested mounting a program of stewards' training, which would be aimed at increasing the capacities of worksite stewards to organize their worksites more effectively. This proposal was tabled after vehement objections from a group of union staff led by Jones, who claimed that we would "not have time" to implement such a program, and that the worksite meetings themselves already represented "a pretty heavy schedule." Later in the summer, after privately lobbying the president of Local 9876, Lazarra and another staff person were given permission to hold a stewards' training session for county workers from Allegheny, Butler, Beaver, and Washington counties—but by that time, it was too late to make stewards' training a major focus of the Allegheny county contract campaign. The training session, held on a Saturday in early September, was indeed poorly attended by Allegheny County stewards, because only a few departments were contacted.

The competing agendas of Lazarra and Jones ran right through the organizing activities I carried out along with the other interns, the staff representatives, and the volunteer member organizers. The central organizing strategy of the contract campaign was a series of lunchtime worksite meetings at several dozen county departments and locations, representing about

900 of the local's 1,500 Allegheny County workers, during late June and early July of 1997. These worksite meetings were used to bring workers up to date on the status of negotiations, to convey the need for collective action to put pressure on the commissioners, and to encourage workers to sign up for specific actions the union was planning. But the lunchtime worksite meetings ended up being infused with conflicting elements from both Lazarra's and Jones's agendas.

Anticipating bitterness on the part of workers who felt the union had not been doing enough to get them a new contract, Local 9876 staff director Joe Reilly encouraged us to tell workers that the union recognized its past failure to be sufficiently organized, and that the present internal organizing effort represented the union's commitment to change. "We need to change our image of what a union is," Reilly told us as we practiced giving the rap. "You can say that. Instead of seeing it as a sort of insurance company, where we buy a kind of policy with our dues, we need to involve all the workers in rebuilding the union." Along with the other interns, I incorporated this kind of talk into the rap. Buoyed by our own visions of a more participatory model of unionism, we naively promised workers that the union was firmly committed to a fundamental change in how their unit functioned.

This kind of talk made promises that Jones was clearly not very interested in fulfilling. Responsible for delivering a bargaining report to the worksites he represented, Jones would continually turn up late at meetings and then leave early. Workers were simultaneously presented with enthusiastic young interns telling them that with their help the union was committed to rebuilding itself, and with their staff representative who looked on in boredom and left early—not exactly a convincing combination. It was never clear whether Jones really thought of the meetings as a waste of time or whether, as a fellow intern argued, he was simply uncomfortable with this kind of interaction with the membership. Jones was obviously accustomed to playing the role of "expert" and took pride in being able to solve county workers' problems. In the current context—in which Jones's bureaucratic skills were useless—he may have felt embarrassed by the need to turn to the members for help. Either way, the absence of firm staff commitment to the new model of unionism we were promising was clear to rank and file members.

Rank and File Repertoires

Despite the mixed messages from the union, most workers were fairly enthusiastic about the union's decision to pursue a collective action strategy in order to win new contracts. They understood that embarrassing the commissioners, drawing media attention to the contract stalemate, and publicly demonstrating the union's resolve were worthwhile activities. Therefore, substantial percentages of the workers we approached signed up for participation in the rallies, button days, and other activities we were organizing. However, workers' willingness to participate in the union's contract campaign did *not* imply that they were eager for a more participatory, grassroots model of day-to-day unionism. Years of experience with a traditional model of bureaucratic unionism had taught workers to view the union not as the sum of their collective participation, not as something that they created through their mutual support of one another, but rather as something outside themselves, an external service to call on whenever there was a problem. These ingrained dispositions persisted even in the context of the contract campaign.

This could be plainly seen at meetings involving Art Lazarra's worksites. Lazarra took the opposite approach from Jones: rather than trying to undercut the idea of worksite participation, he tried very hard to convince workers that they could and should respond directly and collectively to worksite problems instead of just filing grievances and waiting for a procedural resolution. Lazzara always stressed the idea that direct worksite actions were particularly important now that grievances were piling up instead of being resolved in an orderly fashion. He used several examples to show how effective this sort of response can be.

In one of his favorite stories, Lazarra told of a hot, muggy day in late June when the air conditioning in one of the county offices broke down. The workers asked their supervisor if they could remove their ties because of the heat, but the supervisor said no. One of the stewards called Art, who, instead of filing a grievance (which would not have resulted in immediate relief in any case), suggested that all the workers should march down to the row officer's office, give him their ties, an explanation of the problem, and tell him that they were prepared to alert the media to the working conditions if they were forced to continue wearing their ties in ninety-degree heat. The strategy was successful—faced with collective protest, the row officer overruled the workers' supervisor and allowed the workers to remove their ties. In fact, for the rest of the week, until the air conditioning was fixed, the workers were allowed to report to work in shorts and tee-shirts.

This story never had the intended effect in any of the meetings Art attended. Workers invariably responded not with enthusiasm but with baffled incomprehension, as if he were missing the point. Every time Art would make his pitch and give an example, workers would counter with a grievance, and ask when the union was going to do something about it. They always seemed both puzzled and annoyed by Art's responses. As I watched this on numerous occasions, I could almost hear the workers thinking, "What's going on here? Why isn't he listening to us? We keep telling him about these problems and instead of promising to take care of it, he keeps trying to push them off on us." Often, workers actually said in frustration things like "Why am I paying dues if the union isn't going to help me with

these problems?" These exchanges always ended with Art and the workers exasperated and annoyed at one another. Lazarra interpreted their responses as an inability to understand their situation, what they were up against, and what they needed to do about it; workers in turn interpreted Lazarra's suggestion that they rely on their collective power to solve worksite problems as an abdication of responsibility by the union.

Why did workers approve of and participate in the union's collective-action strategy on the contract campaign, but respond so negatively to Art Lazarra's suggestion that they apply the same principles to worksite grievances? The answer is that these were two very different ideas. Unlike spontaneous worksite resistance, the protests we organized were relatively easy to participate in precisely because they took place *outside* the workplace—on the steps of the county courthouse, for example, or at commissioners' meetings. Acting up *in* the workplace, on the other hand, implies a potentially tense confrontation with the boss, which is an entirely different matter. Moreover, our public rallies and activities offered safety in numbers, almost an anonymity of participation. In contrast, asking a few isolated workers to stand up to the boss requires someone to go out on a limb in hopes that other workers will back him or her up. My point is certainly not that a more participatory model of worksite unionism is not possible. Rather, it should be understood that rank and file workers accustomed to a servicing approach will not embrace such threatening new ideas as Lazarra's without a great deal more support, leadership, and encouragement than was forthcoming in this campaign.

Worksite Leadership Vacuum

If the union's bureaucratic history made both ordinary workers and union staff ambivalent about the relationship between the contract campaign and a new model of worker participation, this was also true of the union's volunteer worksite leadership. As one staff person said, "You've got to understand that for years and years, the position of steward was basically meaningless. The steward was just a figurehead with no real function." As a result, many stewards had become accustomed to viewing the position as essentially symbolic. These stewards often resisted the idea or suggestion that they take responsibility for organizing. Understandably, they saw organizing and mobilizing as "the union's job" and often refused to do it. When we visited one steward as part of the planning for a worksite meeting for her department, she was taken aback by our request that she circulate "Contract Now!" petitions and flyers about the meeting, and post notices about the meeting at her worksite. She reluctantly agreed but added, "I can tell you right now that these workers here won't do anything. They just won't get involved." This turned out to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Like many other stewards, she was not prepared to take on organizing responsibilities,

primarily because the union had not provided the necessary training and support.

The traditional organizational irrelevance of the worksite steward, the lack of training, and the lack of real responsibility the position entailed also had the unfortunate effect of making the position attractive to the wrong people for the wrong reasons. In many worksites the only workers willing to volunteer for the position did so not because they wanted to represent their fellow workers, but because it was a way of being "in the know," of having something over co-workers, or even because they hoped it would give them a platform from which to harass union staff or other workers. In these departments, a kind of "crowding out" took place, a process in which workers with good leadership potential were kept from getting involved by the presence of self-serving volunteers who bullied, harassed, and intimidated them into staying uninvolved. Conversely, genuinely good leaders who held the position of steward with the best of intentions found the position extremely frustrating. Lacking any clearly defined role, lacking support from the union's staff representative for plans to organize worksites and departments, such stewards found themselves simply the unfortunate lightning rod for the frustrations of fellow workers. As one such steward commented, "I have no authority, no real purpose. I'm not able to do anything for the workers in my department. I'm just the guy who puts stuff up on the bulletin board. The people in this department either laugh at me, or they bitch at me for everything that's wrong with the union. And I can't change a damn thing."

The union's inability or unwillingness to clearly define a meaningful role for volunteer worksite stewards, to provide training and support, and to establish standards of performance for which stewards would be accountable meant that the union depended entirely on top-down organization in order to mobilize workers during the contract campaign. This ultimately limited the union to actions that paid union staff could directly organize and supervise—such as a series of rallies held at evening commissioners' meetings and a large day-long rally and protest at the courthouse dubbed "Solidarity Day." These events were successful and generated generally positive media coverage of the workers' fight for fair contracts (between fifty and one hundred workers protested at each of the committee meetings, and more than five hundred turned out for Solidarity Day)—but unlike the earlier Kane rallies, these actions required an enormous amount of logistical and organizing effort to create. The union could not simply call a contract rally and expect county workers to show up; indeed, it did not even have reliable means of communication with many county worksites. The contract rallies therefore had to be carefully planned ahead of time. Interns and member organizers had to set up and carry out dozens of worksite meetings in order to educate the membership about the bargaining situa-

tion and the need for rank and file involvement in the contract campaign, and to recruit workers' participation in the planned rallies. Workers who signed up for these events were then systematically phone-banked in the days leading up to them. The one initiative in which the union tried to rely on worksite stewards to directly organize a series of actions, the "rolling thunder week" described in the opening anecdote, led to decidedly mixed results.

The reliance on top-down organization also constrained the union's ability to mount a *sustained* campaign. By the end of August 1997, two of the three interns had returned to graduate school, and the union had exhausted its small supply of "member organizers" willing to take two weeks off work, paid by the union, to work on the campaign. Though the commissioners could not have known it, the union could not have sustained the campaign at the same level beyond August without a regrouping period. Had the commissioners been able to hold firm into the fall of 1997, the outcome of the campaign might have been different. Fortunately for the union, however, time was not on the commissioners' side in the wake of their defeat over Kane privatization. The commissioners had failed to realize $23 million in immediate savings by privatizing the Kanes, and county government was still operating under the constraints of the 20 percent property-tax cut. As a result, the county's fiscal situation was spiraling out of control. Vast budget deficits loomed, as bond rating agencies, citing the mismatch between the sharp revenue reductions and the failure to find new savings, lowered Allegheny County's rating twice during the summer of 1997. The two Republican commissioners were even called to New York to receive a "scolding" from Standard and Poors in early August.[36] By that point, $76 million in county cash reserves had evaporated and the Republicans' only plan to deal with a budget deficit of $26.5 million involved the one-time sale of property tax liens. The commissioners were thus under tremendous pressure from bond rating agencies to restore some semblance of order to county finances by the end of the year.

Initially, the Republicans had hoped to realize the necessary savings—and indeed ultimately to resurrect Kane privatization—by defeating the county unions on the contract issue. If they could force the unions to accept their proposed contract language on contracting-out, they would have a free hand once again as far as the Kanes were concerned. But such a strategy depended on defeating the unions quickly. Local 9876's contract campaign, culminating with its large "Solidarity Day" rally, demonstrated that a quick union collapse was not forthcoming. As a result, there seemed to be no possibility of resurrecting Kane privatization any time soon. Therefore, Republican Commissioner Bob Cranmer backed down. In late August, he joined forces with Democratic Commissioner Mike Dawida to oust the Republican chair of the Board of Commissioners, Larry Dunn, who

was not yet prepared to settle. Cranmer would be the new chairman, and Cranmer and Dawida agreed to work together to reach quick settlements with the county unions.[37] Ultimately, all the county unions but one signed nonconcessionary contracts. Local 9876's contract included raises, compensation for back raises, improved bumping and bidding rights, and no concessions on contracting-out or "management rights."

THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL-MOVEMENT UNIONISM

Each of the two interconnected union campaigns discussed here managed to find a *partial* solution to just *one* of the two central dilemmas facing the labor movement. The Kane campaign, unable to construct a counter-ideology capable of taking on globalization or the Republicans' tax cut, successfully attacked instead the specific neoliberal arguments in favor of privatization. As a result, it was able to mobilize both workers and allies against privatization—despite its inability to deal with organizational legacies. The contract campaign, unable to really solve the organizational problems of the union's county chapter, nevertheless devised short-term, ad hoc ways of dealing with them. As a result, it was able to mobilize workers (but not allies) in the struggle for new contracts—despite its inability to construct an appealing counter-ideology. The asymmetry between the two campaigns thus lies in the facts that partially overcoming the dilemma of ideology led to the mobilization of workers *and* their allies in one campaign, while partially overcoming the dilemma of organizational legacies led only to the mobilization of workers in the other. Hence the Kane campaign developed more leverage than the contract campaign—so much so that contract success ultimately depended on the aftereffects of the Kane campaign.

What conclusions are we to draw from this asymmetry of effects? Does it mean that the dilemma of ideology is more central to the labor movement's success than the dilemma of legacies? That legacies can safely be ignored while ideology must at all costs be dealt with? Quite the opposite, for several related reasons. First, in many cases the humanitarian issues are not so ready-made or appealing as in the Kane fight. The political weakness of the contract campaign, its inability to mobilize allies despite its successes in mobilizing workers themselves, is its real significance: somehow the labor movement must move beyond reliance on easy public sympathy for appealing protagonists like nursing home residents, or it will be limited to the rarest of victories. Most workers, after all, are not connected closely with such appealing clients.

But moving beyond reliance on easy public sympathy for appealing protagonists will necessitate the development of imaginative alternatives to globalization itself, to the context underwriting all manner of neoliberal attacks. As others have noted, in order to move beyond piecemeal local vic-

tories such as these, the labor movement will need to vigorously champion an analysis that exposes how the global competition for jobs and investment is not "natural" but an artifact; not the inevitable result of computer and communications technology but the political result of trade and banking policy decisions primarily advocated by the United States. It will need to replace the ideology of globalization with one of its own, emphasizing perhaps the "re-nationalization" of capital and the internationalization of labor and environmental standards. Such an ideology does not yet exist, and as the following discussion demonstrates, the very effort to create it will mean confronting the organizational legacies of the movement.

Working Families 2000, a labor initiative begun in Allegheny County in the wake of the campaigns analyzed in this chapter, may represent the kind of necessary starting point required for constructing a coherent response to globalization—but it also serves as a reminder that such efforts will be complicated by the organizational legacies of the movement itself. Working Families is a new coalition involving Local 9876, the SEIU international union, the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO, Allegheny County's Central Labor Council, and a number of other local unions. It has been constructed with the goal of developing a progressive, worker-friendly political agenda for county politics. Coalition members have donated staff and an office at the international headquarters of the United Steelworkers in downtown Pittsburgh. The campaign has been attempting to coordinate the political endorsements of local labor unions in the 1999 county elections, to support labor-friendly county politicians, and to articulate a progressive agenda for county politics around four planks: (1) support for the "living wage" campaign of the Alliance for Progressive Action, which would require recipients of local tax subsidies or government contracts to pay their workers a living wage of $8.82 an hour with benefits;[38] (2) enforcing the right to organize, so that tax subsidies or government contracts are not used to fight unionization; (3) fair taxation; and (4) no privatization or contracting-out.

Ideas such as these could represent the modest beginning of a coherent response to globalization—not so much for what they stand for in themselves but because the very attempt to construct a platform has forced Allegheny County's coalition of labor leaders to confront the context of globalization and think about ways of responding to it. But here we see how organizational legacies are themselves implicated in the search for new ideologies: Working Families 2000's efforts to create a meaningful political agenda remain complicated by the organizational history of the local labor movement. While coalition members agreed in principle to support the living wage campaign, many union locals remain uncomfortable with the idea of actually attaching living wage conditions to county contracts and subsidies. Building trades unions in particular have strongly supported the city's and county's subsidies on behalf of new stadiums, a new convention center, and downtown retail outlets, even though no living wage or job-provision conditions were attached to these projects, because they promised short-term jobs for unionized construction workers. As a result, Working Families 2000 has struggled with the issue but has not identified a single subsidy they are prepared to oppose, despite the lack of living wage or job guarantees.

The issue of taxation is similarly problematic: coalition members agreed to fair taxation as a slogan but do not have the political will to publicly oppose cuts in property tax rates or the recent creation of a highly regressive county sales tax—let alone to make concrete proposals that would address the regressiveness of local taxes. And other issues remain unaddressed by Working Families 2000 altogether: the coalition is silent on the shift of local public resources from needed social services to social control agencies because the jail guards' union resists any suggestion that there should be fewer jails, more schools, and more social services.

Building labor coalitions of this character is, we can see, very precarious—but only through such organization-building efforts, at both local and national levels, can the labor movement as a whole hope to build a coherent ideological response to globalization. Solutions to both dilemmas, ideology and organizational legacies, are thus equally important and inextricably intertwined.

NOTES

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1. Andy Banks, "The Power and Promise of Community Unionism"; James Craft, "The Community as a Source of Power"; Ruth Needleman, "Building Relationships for the Long Haul: Unions and Community Organizing Groups Working Together to Organize Low-Wage Workers"; Ronald Peters and Theresa Merrill, "Clergy and Religious Persons' Roles in Organizing at O'Hare Airport and St. Joseph Medical Center"; and Katherine Sciacchitano, "Finding the Community in the Union and the Union in the Community: The First-Contract Campaign at Steeltech."

2. Fernando Gapasin and Howard Wial, "The Role of Central Labor Councils in Union Organizing in the 1990s"; Philip McLewin, "The Concerted Voice of Labor and the Suburbanization of Capital: Fragmentation of the Community Labor Council"; Stewart Acuff, "Expanded Roles for the Central Labor Council: The View from Atlanta."

3. Roger Waldinger et al., "Helots No More: A Case Study of the Justice for Jan-

itors Campaign in Los Angeles"; Acuff, "Expanded Roles for the Central Labor Council"; Larry Cohen and Steve Early, "Defending Workers' Rights in the Global Economy: The CWA Experience."

4. Kate Bronfenbrenner and Tom Juravich, "The Promise of Union Organizing in the Public and Private Sectors"; Steve Early, "Membership-Based Organizing"; Janice Fine, "Moving Innovation from the Margins to the Center"; Sam Gindin, "Notes on Labor at the End of the Century: Starting Over?"; Josephine LeBeau and Kevin Lynch, "Successful Organizing at the Local Level: The Experience of AFCSME District Council 1707"; Stephen Lerner, "Taking the Offensive, Turning the Tide"; and Linda Markowitz, "Union Presentation of Self and Worker Participation in Organizing Campaigns."

5. Kate Bronfenbrenner and Tom Juravich, "It Takes More than House Calls: Organizing to Win with a Comprehensive Union-Building Strategy"; Linda Markowitz, "Union Presentation of Self and Worker Participation in Organizing Campaigns"; Kim Moody, *An Injury to All;* Moody, *Workers in a Lean World: Unions in the International Economy;* Moody, "American Labor: A Movement Again?"; Peter Rachleff, *Hard Times in the Heartland;* Rachleff, "Organizing Wall to Wall: The Independent Union of All Workers, 1933–37."

6. Bill Fletcher, Jr., and Richard Hurd, "Beyond the Organizing Model: The Transformation Process in Local Unions"; Fletcher and Hurd, "Political Will, Local Union Transformation, and the Organizing Imperative"; Kim Voss and Rachel Sherman, "Breaking the Iron Law of Oligarchy: Tactical Innovation and the Revitalization of the American Labor Movement."

7. Michael Eisenscher, "Critical Juncture: Unionism at the Crossroads"; James Craft, "Unions, Bureaucracy, and Change: Old Dogs Learn New Tricks Very Slowly."

8. Fernando Gapasin and Michael Yates, "Organizing the Unorganized: Will Promises Become Practices?"; see also Gregory Mantsios, "What Does Labor Stand For?"

9. Elaine Barnard, "Creating Democratic Communities in the Workplace."

10. Barbara Shailor and George Kourpias, "Developing and Enforcing International Labor Standards"; Héctor Figueroa, "International Labor Solidarity in an Era of Global Competition"; Ellen M. Wood, "Labor, Class, and State in Global Capitalism."

11. United States Department of Labor, *County Business Patterns.*

12. City of Pittsburgh, "Mayor's Annual Report."

13. John Bull, "County May Offer Buyout Packages: Republican Takeover Could Frighten Many to Take Money, Leave."

14. David Michelmore, "Democrats Match GOP Vow of 20% Cut in County Millage."

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Larry Dunn and Bob Cranmer, "Our Campaign is Different."

18. The management's-rights clause was important to the county because Pennsylvania labor law requires public employers to negotiate with unions over any proposed privatization or contracting out, even if these subjects are not mentioned in collective bargaining agreements. Therefore, to gain a free hand in this area, the county hoped to force each union to accept the management's-rights clause.

19. Mark Belko, "Dunn Gives Ultimatum to Kane Unions."

20. Mark Belko, "Control of Kanes May Be Shifted."

21. These claims were developed in two reports commissioned by the Republicans: James McDonough, "John J. Kane Regional Centers: Privatization Options," and Jake Hauk, "The Case for Privatizing the Kane Regional Centers."

22. Unlike Local 9876, Local X had no previous experience with public protest campaigns. Local 9876 had been involved in a series of difficult (but ultimately successful) grassroots, social-movement style struggles against private sector nursing home operators, and it was largely this experience of struggle that led the local to conclude that a similar approach was now necessary to fight Kane privatization. The leadership of Local X had no tradition of public struggle, having relied mainly on close relations with Democratic politicians over the years. Despite the open hostility of the Republican privatizers towards the county unions, Local X feared that a public protest strategy would irreparably damage relationships with the commissioners and make it difficult to ultimately negotiate contracts.

23. According to workers, the Kanes had historically kept a day- and evening-shift ratio of one nurses' aide for every ten residents, but since the buyouts, it was more difficult to find replacements for workers who called in sick. By the fall of 1996, they say, it was common for day-shift nurses' aides to be given twelve residents to care for, and on the evening shift the ratio sometimes approached one to twenty. Workers I spoke with generally reported that while they were still able to meet the basic physical needs of their residents, as a result of the buyouts they were no longer able to take time to talk with their residents, to comfort them, read to them, or comb their hair.

24. Mark Belko, "Privatization Hits Strong Opposition: Commissioners Booed, Questioned by Crowd."

25. Mark Belko, "Dunn Gives Ultimatum to Kane Unions." This approach backfired when the unions revealed that they had been trying to set up negotiation meetings with the county's law firm for months, only to be told that the county negotiator's schedule was "virtually full."

26. According to Local 9876 staff, the free lunches had been proposed by the county in the 1970s, in lieu of a pay increase, and accepted by the unions in order to help the county save money; the modest off-unit differential was designed to reinforce the Kanes' philosophy of developing long-term relationships between residents and their primary caregivers, and to discourage managers from assigning workers to take care of residents whose needs they did not know well.

27. The Alliance for Progressive Action, founded in 1991, was an umbrella group for more than a dozen progressive and civil rights organizations in Allegheny County. Local 9876 was a founding member of APA and had contributed funding since its inception. Other APA members included the Rainbow Coalition, Act/Up, the United Electrical Workers (UE), and a number of civil rights organizations. Longtime Local 9876 organizer Wendy Newman had been involved with APA since 1991 and, at the time of the battle over the Kanes, was in the process of leaving the local to take a full-time job at APA.

28. Mark Belko, "Keep Kane Homes Public, Group Asks."

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Mark Belko, "Lucchino: Privatization of Kanes Just a Quick Fix."

33. Mark Belko, "Dunn Halts Proposed Transfer of Kanes."
34. Ibid.
35. Joseph Crumb, "Religious Leaders Put Out Call for No Privatization."
36. *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette,* "County's Former Third Wheel Comes Full Circle."
37. Ibid.
38. The figure of $8.82 an hour was arrived at on the basis of several studies by Ralph Bangs, who analyzed more than two dozen family types and calculated the income requirements sufficient for "minimal" realistic family budgets in Pittsburgh. $8.82 is the wage required by families with two working parents and two children.

TEN

From Private Stigma to Global Assembly

Transforming the Terrain of Breast Cancer

Maren Klawiter

It was in the fall of 1994 that I began my study of breast cancer activism in the San Francisco Bay Area, inspired by a fellow student in a participant observation seminar—a woman who had just finished chemotherapy treatments for breast cancer. With her encouragement, I began observing a breast cancer support group and, at the same time, entered a volunteer training program at the Women's Cancer Resource Center (WCRC) in Berkeley, the first feminist cancer community of its kind in the country. Through WCRC, a local hub of information and cancer activities, I learned about and became involved in a series of projects, including those that figure prominently in this chapter—Race for the Cure, the Women & Cancer Walk, the Toxic Tour of the Cancer Industry, and the World Conference on Breast Cancer.

For the next three-plus years I conducted multi-sited participant observation in a range of settings: cancer support groups, cancer organizations, cultural events, coalitions; fund-raisers, educational forums, environmental protests, public hearings; early detection campaigns, street theater, and various conferences and symposia. I supplemented this ethnographic data with interviews of cancer activists, experts, survivors, and women living with breast cancer. I discovered that the breast cancer movement was multiple rather than monolithic, and my focus shifted from studying "the" breast cancer movement to analyzing multiple mobilizations around breast cancer. In the summer of 1997, I joined a large contingent of activists from the Bay Area who made the historic trek to