Between Bureaucracy and Social Movements: Careers in the Justice for Janitors

By

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Abstract

Industrial relations scholars and organizational sociologists have long argued that American trade unions adopted bureaucratic structures and practices in order to survive in the economic and political environment of the United States. Scholars drew a sharp dichotomy between bureaucratic unionism, which they viewed as the dominant institutional form of American unions, and social movement unionism. But more recently, scholars have argued that the environment has shifted, leading American unions to move away from traditional policies and practices toward social movement unionism. This research examines the organizational change process and current practices of the largest and most successful of such unions, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). The dissertation starts with a puzzle: while the union is ideologically progressive and strategically innovative, it is also extremely centralized and bureaucratic; furthermore, bureaucratization and centralization have both increased during the period in which the union adopted social movement elements in its practice. Earlier theories on institutional change in the labor movement have not adequately captured the dynamic co-existence of opposing elements. This study develops a theory of institutional change based on the political process. The thesis introduces the concept of movement careers and identifies these careers as a mechanism that mitigates the tension between bureaucracy and idealism in the union.

Part I of the thesis examines historical change in the union during the period 1950s – mid-1990s. It shows that the adoption of social movement elements by the union was the product of a contentious political process. Political battles and the urgency of reform felt by ideologically progressive staff further centralized control in the national union. These findings contrast with previous research that has depicted institutional change in the labor movement as rational organizational responses to environmental change.

Part II introduces and develops the concept of movement careers. It defines these careers as careers motivated by ongoing personal transformations triggered by an initial politicizing experience. It identifies the structural and ideological features that set movement careers apart from conventional organizational careers. Movement career builders think of their work in the union primarily in terms of changing the existing social order. Thus, they choose not to ascend the hierarchy of the organization.

Part III uses observational data from four local sites of the union and shows that sustaining idealism in a bureaucratic structure has posed a dilemma in three out of the four sites. This part of the thesis develops a theory of the organizational and environmental contexts that can foster movement careers in formal organizations.
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respect for the unique position that the SEIU holds in the American labor movement that I have subjected it to academic scrutiny.

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Introduction to the Dissertation

For approximately half a century since the post-war years, the dominant organizational form of American trade unions is understood to have been bureaucratic unionism. Bureaucratic unionism is characterized by a federated organizational structure represented by a division of labor between the national union and local unions (Barbash, 1967; Bok & Dunlop, 1970; Ulman, 1955); union operations governed by existing institutional arrangements, such as the institution of collective bargaining, rather than extra-institutional resources (Barbash, 1984; Fantasia & Stepan-Norris, 2004a); and chief attention to economic issues over social change or political reform (Barbash, 1984; Commons, 1921; Perlman, 1966). Bureaucratic unionism is deemed to have been unsuccessful in incorporating new groups of workers in the labor market, such as women, minorities and immigrant workers, in part because the existing institutional framework in which unions operated, such as workplace-based representation elections, became increasingly unsuccessful, and in part because this institutional framework necessitated a stability of the employment relationship which eluded the new groups of workers (Goldfield, 1987).

Bureaucratic unionism has been contrasted with social movement or political unionism, where unions mobilize moral and political resources to challenge power relationships in the existing social order. Scholars have pointed out that the latter type of unionism has not become institutionalized in the United States because of an absence of ideology among American workers and unionists, and because of the pragmatism in their approach to unionism. Selig Perlman, for example, noted that the absence of class consciousness among American workers created a particular “home grown” and “stable, job conscious” unionism here compared to the socialist labor movement which had developed in Europe around the same time (Perlman, 1966: 186-189).

In recent years, several unions appear to have digressed from the bureaucratic unionism model. These unions organize new groups of workers, particularly immigrant workers and women in low wage service sectors, based on the workers’ social identities. These unions no longer shun
involvement in policy change, and rather than put up with the existing collective bargaining framework, they effectively use extra-institutional resources, such as public corporate campaigns and acts of civil disobedience, as part of their mobilization strategy. Ideologically, these unions and their staff are progressive. The success that these unions have had in growing their organizations at a time of union decline has stimulated scholars to propose that a return to social movement unionism by some unions may usher in a revival of the labor movement (cite, cite). But precisely how these “social movement unions”, as they have been characterized, and unionists working in these unions are different from bureaucratic unions and unionists has not been addressed in previous literature.

This dissertation examines the organizational change process and current practices of the largest of such unions, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and its campaign to organize office-building cleaners. The dissertation starts with a puzzle: while the union is ideologically progressive and strategically innovative, it is also highly centralized and bureaucratic; furthermore, bureaucratization and centralization have both increased during the period in which the union adopted social movement elements in its practice. The body of the dissertation addresses the tension between bureaucracy and idealism in the union and identifies movement careers as an alternative form of participation in the organization that potentially mitigates this tension.

The SEIU is not only the largest of the new unions that are heralding institutional change in the labor movement. Among all the American unions, SEIU has been most successful in organizing new members; has authored the most radical innovations of the institution of collective bargaining in the United States; and it is arguably the most influential union in the U.S. if not the advanced industrialized world in terms of the wide diffusion of its ideas and practices (Clawson, 2003; Fantasia & Voss, 2004b; Lerner, 1996; Milkman, 2006). One indication of SEIU’s broad impact on the American labor movement is the number of high level executives and staff persons at the central labor federation, the AFL-CIO, that have previously worked at the SEIU. The current President of the AFL-CIO, John Sweeney, was SEIU member for more than forty years before he became president of the SEIU. Thomas Donahue, who was executive assistant to the SEIU president during the ’60s, was a progressive power in the Department of Labor as Assistant Secretary Labor, and later as executive assistant to the president of AFL-CIO. A
further indication is SEIU’s leading role in the secession of seven unions with six million members from the AFL-CIO in 2005 that resulted in the formation of a new federation, the Change to Win. Given SEIU’s leading role in creating institutional change in the American labor movement, studying how change was brought about within the SEIU will likely contribute to understanding how the change to social movement unionism happened.

Several initial questions arise from the ongoing institutional change in the labor movement, and they call on different streams of literatures. I review these questions and the respective literatures in this introduction, laying out the differences in my approach to these questions from those taken in previous literature. The first question is how has institutional change in the labor movement been explained in previous literature, and to what extent do they help us understand the current phase of institutional change? The second question has to do with the puzzle that while institutional change appears to have taken place, remnants of old institutional forms, such as bureaucratic structures, have remained and in fact been strengthened. Drawing on theories of bureaucracy and of functionaries in bureaucratic systems, I review the central problem that bureaucracy has posed in progressive organizations, namely the distancing of the organization and its goals from members’ and clients’ interests. Finally, given that bureaucratic organizations are likely to develop routines that make it difficult for them to adapt to ongoing changes in the organizational environment, I review the possibility of organizational change in bureaucratic systems triggered by the infusion of social movements into these organizations.

Institutional Change in the Labor Movement

Two characteristics stand out in previous scholarship on institutional change in the American labor movement. First, the literature has hitherto focused largely on changes in formal structure and resource allocation as a response to environmental stimuli. Second, institutional change has been understood in terms of large shifts that produce stable and unified institutional forms; thus institutional change is understood to have produced bureaucratic unionism at the turn of the previous century, and social movement unionism at the turn of the current one. These trends are common to earlier literature explaining the rise of the bureaucratic national trade union as well as more recent literature discussing the emergence of social movement unionism.
In Essay 1, I show how organizational actors create their own opportunities for change by mobilizing for legislative action and effectuating internal reforms. In contrast to other studies in this genre, I give particular attention to the organizational change process in the hopes of identifying both novel elements that indicate where institutional change may originate as well as elements that continue to build on a received institutional legacy.

The process by which unions in the United States developed formal organizations has been explained by most industrial relations scholars as an adaptation to changes in the environment. Theories on the development of the bureaucratic union have pointed to expansions in the product market (Commons, 1921; Commons, 1980 [1909]), growth of labor markets (Ulman, 1955), and the institutional context of collective bargaining (Barbash, 1984) as factors contributing to bureaucratization. In most of this literature, the dominance of the bureaucratic model over other forms of organization - such as the socialist organization or a social movement organization - is unquestioned; indeed, the bureaucratic union is often portrayed as the only imaginable form of unionism under the given environmental circumstances. These environmental circumstances, incidentally, are assumed to be economic in nature because of the particular absence of ideology that American workers and unionists are assumed to exhibit (Barbash, 1984; Commons, 1921; Perlman, 1966). The dominant psychology of the worker and the union functionary during this period is thought to be one of pragmatism, which would explain why unions would be thought of primarily as bargaining instruments as opposed to vehicles of ideology or social change. Thus, Barbash wrote that

Joining and organizing the union is, in most instances, a defensive response to a threat from the employer or rival work group. Most workers value the union not as a social movement but for what it can do concretely to advance their protective interests. (Barbash, 1984: 56)

The advent of a new form of unionism where both the unionists and the workers think of unions as vehicles for social movements, is similarly thought of as the product of union responses to environmental changes. The relevant environmental context now is that which is unfavorable to the bureaucratic industrial union and more favorable for a union that adheres to social issues that reflect the changes in the demographics of the low-wage workforce that has historically lent itself to unionization. Contexts such as the decline of manufacturing and the transition to a service economy, the outsourcing and offshoring of jobs, degenerating working
conditions for low wage workers, and the increase in immigration are thought to have forced unions to address issues previously thought to be outside the realm of unionism – issues such as the blocked social mobility of low wage workers in the world’s wealthiest economy. New immigration is particularly important in light of the fact that immigrants are understood to supply the ideology and the fervor for social change that the American worker was found lacking. In her book on union campaigns that have sought to organize immigrant workers, Milkman devotes a full chapter of her book LA Story: immigrant workers and the future of the U.S. Labor Movement to discussing the special role that immigrants play as a context for labor union revitalization in Los Angeles. Social movement unionism is described in the literature as a union response to these environmental changes.

But apart from the visible re-allocation of resources into organizing new workers as opposed to servicing existing members, how unions and unionists are different under this new brand of unionism from earlier unions and unionists is unclear. An exception to this is Fantasia and Voss’s (2004) characterization of unionists under bureaucratic unionism as the ideal typical ‘bureaucrat’ and the ‘strongman’ and those under the new form of unionism as the ‘militant’. In contrast to the ‘bureaucrat’ and the ‘strongman’, who are shaped by the rule-bound, bureaucratic nature of the union on the one hand and high local autonomy with big discretionary powers on the other, the ‘militant’ enters the labor movement from the outside with a progressive ideology, helping form "the capacity [of the union] to rise above its corporeal or institutional form through a kind of sacred narrative, or myth" (Fantasia and Voss, 2004: 116). Fantasia and Voss suggest that transformations in the functionaries of the bureaucratic unions is an important part of the institutional change process; yet hitherto, there have not been empirical studies documenting such transformations.

Part of the problem in trying to understand what exactly is new about social movement unionism has been the tendency in the literature to describe bureaucratic unionism and social movement unionism as discontinuous stable states rather than dynamic forms that can embody co-existing elements that are in conflict with one another. Another problem is that the process of organizational change has been black boxed in macro observations. I try to address both these problems in Essay 1 by extracting from the historical change process in the SEIU.
Bureaucracies, Bureaucrats, and Social Actors

Making formal organizations accountable to social actors has been a long standing problem in the realm of public agencies, voluntary associations, and labor organizations. Specifically, while formal organizations are needed to improve the well-being of the social actors, formal organizations are usually bureaucratized, and bureaucracies are known to be inflexible and lacking the ability to self-correct (Burns & Stalker, 1961). Bureaucracies are often undemocratic, which means that they miss the chances for ongoing adjustments made possible by participation and deliberation (Crozier, 1964; Lipsky, 1980). While this can be a problem in private companies, there, clients are in principle able to choose between multiple organizations, whereas options may be constrained in the public sector and in social movements, where there is often only one agency that the client can depend on for the provision of a service, or for the cultivation of voice or political power as the case may be.

Weber, the recognized forerunner in theories on bureaucracy, actually had a positive view about the social impact of bureaucracies. He noted that the impersonal appointment of staff to administrative careers in a bureaucracy on a meritocratic basis would have the effect of leveling the social classes. Thus, Weber theorized that the bureaucratization of organizations in modern society would necessarily go hand in hand with mass democracy (Weber, 1968). Later writers on bureaucracy were not so optimistic; they predicted that bureaucracies would develop either structures or behaviors or both that distanced them from their clients, the social actors. The two main outcomes of concern are structural rigidity (also known as the emergence of oligarchy) and goal displacement.

Scholars who expressed concern primarily with structural rigidity in formal organizations suggest several reasons why formal organizations may develop leadership structures dominated by a few elites that do not turn over. Michels (1911) expressed this in the phrase ‘iron law of oligarchy’; his explanation for it centered on the scarcity of political skill and the dominance of these skills within the organization by a few. Michels thought the masses dependent on the organization and its leaders for the development and organization of their collective will. Michels’ predictions led to a stream of productive research that sought to address the circumstances under which the development of oligarchy could be avoided – inter
alia, scholars have shown that inter-organizational competition (Minkoff, 1997) and the type of institutional environment that shapes the organization’s strategy and goals (Isaac & Christiansen, 2002; Zald & Ash, 1966) matters. But the emphasis on structural hierarchy may have been misplaced – Jenkins’ (1977) and Osterman’s (2006) work shows that despite the existence of oligarchy, members can remain engaged and goal displacement can be prevented through radical organizational culture and training. These studies suggest that beyond structural issues, the greater difficulty is how formal organizations can prevent falling into routine behavior that distances them from their clients.

Goal displacement refers to the problem of an organization and its leadership separating itself from its avowed purposes. Although Michels himself seems to have thought that structural oligarchy caused goal displacement (Jenkins, 1977; Michels, 1959 (1911); Osterman, 2006), other scholars have described it not as a structural problem but a human problem, having to do with the norms and practices developed by the functionaries of formal organizations. Merton, an early authority on this theory, associated goal displacement with the result of a kind of occupational hazard of the bureaucrat; he likened this hazard to Veblen’s concept of “trained incapacity”, “that state of affairs in which one’s abilities function as inadequacies or blind spots” (Merton, 1940: 562). Specifically, he pointed to three common ways in which bureaucrats generate goal displacement. The first has to do with the routinization of rationality, or the blind habitual following of rules:

Adherence to the rules, originally conceived as a means, becomes transformed into an end-in-itself; there occurs the familiar process of displacement of goals whereby an instrumental value becomes a terminal value. [...] Formalism, even ritualism, ensues with an unchallenged insistence upon punctilious adherence to formalized procedures. (Merton, 1940: 563)

The second way in which bureaucrats distance themselves from proclaimed purposes is through what Merton calls “pride of craft” (Merton, 1940: 565) - esprit de corps or professional norms whereby the bureaucratic functionaries come to trust their own judgments and interpretations of organizational goals more than the clients’. Merton’s ‘pride of craft’ thesis advanced a concern that Weber and Michels had also addressed before him, specifically the development of bureaucratic functionaries as a distinct “status group” (Weber 1968: 1001) and “political class” (Michels, 1959: 33). A third way that functionaries can cause goal displacement is by perceiving themselves as a representative of the entire structure of the bureaucracy: “The
bureaucrat, in part irrespective of his position within the hierarchy, acts as a representative of the power and prestige of the entire structure." (Merton, 1940: 566)

Sezlnick points to the inverse of Merton's sources of goal displacement; he maintains that goal displacement can lie in the larger social environment that bureaucracies operate in. In his classic study of the Tennessee Valley Authority, Selznick argues that bureaucratic agencies rely on partnerships and commitments to local organizations to carry out their goals, and, in this situation, are vulnerable to the transformation of their goals by local actors' interests. To implement its stated goals of grassroots democracy, the TVA relied on the same local organizations it had working relationships with. This served to reproduce the existing agricultural leadership in the Valley and constrained broader participations by the citizens through new institutions (Selznick, 1949). Although Selznick's study points to outsider threats to maintaining organizational goals, the mechanism he identified is working relationships and dependencies that grew between the TVA staff and staff in local organizations. Thus, functionaries' behaviors are also seen to be problematic in Selznick's work.

A third way in which bureaucrats can bring about goal displacement is by thinking of themselves as representatives of the authority and status of the entire structure: "The bureaucrat, in part irrespective of his position within the hierarchy, acts as a representative of the power and prestige of the entire structure." (Merton, 1940: 566)

Studies on bureaucracy since Merton and Selznick have had trouble identifying a way out of either type of goal displacement - that caused by functionaries' behavior or that originating in the co-optation of bureaucracy by local organizations. One stream of literature since then has examined the possibility that front line bureaucrats, or "street level" bureaucrats, may bridge the distance between clients and the bureaucracy. Street level bureaucrats are defined as those who deal directly with clients in providing the services of the bureaucracy, and who, by virtue of having to make decisions about selectively applying the body of rules embodied by the bureaucracy, have a certain amount of discretion in their work (Lipsky, 1980: 4). But whether street level bureaucrats are likely to use their autonomy to benefit clients and not their own work is undetermined. Recent work by Piore and Shrank (2008) on labor inspectors in Latin America suggests that by virtue of the knowledge gained through their practice, street level
bureaucrats are able to offer solutions and guidance to clients that, on the whole, benefit them. But there is reason to believe that group norms held by front line officers will disregard client needs in favor of building more power and autonomy for themselves. Lipsky theorized that street level bureaucrats’ primary reference group will be their peers. He pointed out:

Clients are not a primary reference group of street level bureaucrats. They do not count among the groups that primarily define street level bureaucrats’ roles. ... Work related peer groups, work related or professionally related standards, and public expectations generally are much more significant in determining role behavior. (Lipsky, 1980: 47)

The literature, then, points to a widespread pessimism about the ability of a bureaucratic system to uphold its relationships with social actors, and suggests that a critical barrier to doing so is the socialization process of its functionaries within the formal organization. But this literature has thus far not explored the transportation of values and experiences into the formal organization by functionaries whose socialization has happened outside the bureaucracy. Of particular interest is the possibility that functionaries, through their social experiences outside the organization, identify more strongly with the movement that gave rise to the formal organization rather than with the goals of the organization. At the individual level of the functionaries’ careers, such insight builds on theories of politicization (Gamson, Fireman, & Rytina, 1982) and on theories of alternative careers paths to the hierarchical career progression (Van Maanen & Schein, 1976). I elaborate on the movement careers concept in Essays 2 and 3. At the organizational level, the insight that movement careers may reduce the distance between bureaucracy and social actors builds on the stream of scholarship that has addressed how social movements can influence and sustain organizational change. I review this literature below.

Organizational change in bureaucratic systems and social movements

Theories on bureaucratic organization maintain that left alone in airtight systems, bureaucratic systems only change in discontinuous thrusts; the continual adjustments needed to remain close to clients’ interests elude bureaucratic systems. Such a view about change in bureaucratic systems is well explained in Crozier’s account of the bureaucratic phenomenon, where he points out that both the system of rules as well as internal power relationships in a bureaucracy will make the system tend to stability. Crozier particularly points to the fact that i) the system of
rules defining roles and job descriptions leave no room for innovation; ii) those who have the power to introduce change are at the helm and lack information from the floor level to effectuate change; iii) group interests resist threats to stability; and iv) the development of groups of equal power (what Crozier called "parallel power relationships"), on the whole, balance each other out, making change difficult (Crozier 1964: 170-92). Crozier predicted, based on his empirical cases, that change in bureaucratic systems would necessarily be implemented in a top-down manner, as only the managers as a group gain from introducing system-wide changes. He also maintained that change would be experienced as a crisis because it would disrupt the balance of power in the bureaucracy (Crozier 1964: 196). Thus, he suggested that change in bureaucratic systems would need a separate group of agents that are removed from the power relationships of the bureaucracy (Crozier 1964: 197). Crozier's emphasis on the difficulty of change in bureaucratic systems is generally echoed by other commentators on the subject, including Lipsky (1980), Kaufman (1960), and Michels (1911).

On the surface at least, the American unions of interest for their innovative organizing seem to have undergone change processes that reflect Crozier's theory on bureaucratic change. Voss and Sherman (2000) found that reformed locals in California introduced change in a top-down manner, often through the deployment of new staff from the national union who quelled what was perceived to be a crisis of the existing system in the local. Milkman (2006) and others (Fantasia et al., 2004a; Fantasia et al., 2004b; Fine, 2005b) have also pointed to the endurance of top-down methods of the bureaucratic union in campaigns that were radically innovative in their strategy. But apart from Voss and Sherman's study, which focused on local unions, we do not have an accurate understanding of the process of change in unions, and particularly in the large national unions that radically transformed the relationship of trade unions with new groups of socially underprivileged actors. Furthermore, earlier studies on these reformed unions pose a puzzle. If the nature of the organization, with attendant formal structure and group interests, has not changed, what prevents these unions from falling back to what Crozier called the "vicious circle" – the joint action of the four elements that together, push bureaucracies to a stable equilibrium? That is, how can reforms be sustained and prevented from being institutionalized in favor of pre-existing power groups in the union?
I turn to a developing body of knowledge on social movements that has identified movements as a source of organizational change. First, on a cultural level, social movements can connect organizational members with collective identities outside of the organization (Scully & Creed, 2005). By connecting with a movement of people who seek to challenge existing social arrangements, organizational members can feel empowered with moral resources (Hirschman, 1995) and thus, be better able to mobilize for changes in their own organization (Campbell, 2005; Scully et al., 2005). Second, movements are known to unleash a watershed of cultural claims, artifacts and ideas that serve as a repertoire for new organizational forms and practices (Clemens, 1993; Rao, Morrill, & Zald, 2000; Tarrow, 1994). For example, Clemens (1993) shows that the women’s movement in the United States engaged in a search process for the organizational forms that would serve their purpose of effectively mobilizing members and establishing linkages to the political system. Even though on the whole women’s organizations themselves became business-like and bureaucratic, the search and deliberation process led the women’s movement to adopt several different organizational forms, which helped change the existing political system from a regime dominated by the courts and political parties to one based on a legislative process where interest group bargaining had a key role. The results of Clemens’ study challenge the theoretical framework advanced by Michels and Weber on the relationship between social movements and the political system, which is predicated on the assumption that social movements’ interaction with the political system would result in the movements’ adoption of bureaucratic forms of organization.

Rather than adopting a single bureaucratic form, these groups made use of multiple models of organizations - unions, clubs, parliaments, and corporations - each of which articulated in different ways with existing political institutions. This finding requires that the scope of the standard Michels-Weber account of social movement development be delimited by a more elaborated analysis of social organization. (Clemens, 1993: 758)

Third, social movement theory has advanced a notion of individual agency in institutional change that goes beyond the rational choice explanation of agency. The latter focused on the genius and creativity of the self-interested entrepreneur in bringing about institutional change. By contrast, a sociological explanation of leadership and entrepreneurship recognizes that actors effectuating change need to be socially skilled (Campbell, 2005; Fligstein, 1997, 2001a; Ganz, 2000). Fligstein (1997; 2001) draws on Emirbayer and Mische’s concept of socially embedded action to define social skills as “the ability to motivate cooperation of other actors by
providing them with common meanings and identities” (Fligstein 1997). Moral and cultural resources are considered to be crucial to the socially skilled change agent, which explains why actors lacking material resources in the existing social order can nevertheless be victorious by convening significant moral and interpretive resources. Both Fligstein (2001) and Ganz (2000) refer to the power of story-telling as a means by which collective actions can be induced by the socially skilled leader. In Fligstein’s words,

The basic problem for skilled social actors is to frame 'stories' that help induce cooperation from people in their group that appeal to their id and interests, while at the same time using those same stories to frame actions against various opponents. (Fligstein, 2001: 113)

Finally, new social movements can awake old and dormant movements, as Isaac and Christensen showed in their multi-site study of the effect of the civil rights movement on union members’ protest actions. Results from their study reveal that the civil rights movement helped revitalize militancy among union members, resulting in an increased level of protest actions against management, and sometimes against union leadership (Isaac et al., 2002).

Literature on social movements, then, points to the motivation, skills, and resources that social movements can imbue organizational actors who effectuate successful organizational change. But there still are remaining questions, for example, in our understanding of how actors link their experiences in social movements to their organizational roles, and what distinguishes those who are more successful in doing so than others. We also know relatively little about the kinds of organizational practices and spaces that would support such socially skilled actions to take place.

Plan of the Dissertation

I have argued that examining the organizational change process in the SEIU would aid our understanding of institutional change in the labor movement from bureaucratic to social movement unionism. Essay 1 provides a historical account of organizational change in the SEIU from approximately the 1950s to the present. I show that a tradition of decentralized self-governance by local unions was altered as national union leaders identified opportunities for organizational growth and then set out to build a structure to pursue that growth. The social
movement element introduced into the union in the ‘80s was the product of internal reforms that were carried out to enable the union to organize for growth. Centralization and bureaucratization increased at the same time as the union engaged in movement-based practices. I argue that the adoption of a new, laterally progressing organizers’ career was an important way in which idealism and bureaucracy could co-exist in the union.

In reviewing the recent literature on the impact of social movements and organizational change, I pointed out that we lack a clear understanding of how actors preserve the idealism of social movements in a bureaucratized organization. In Essays 2 and 3 I show that both members of the union and staff sustain the ideals of the movement in lateral careers that do not ascend vertically in the organization. Instead of occupational or self-interest, the individuals building movement careers are propelled by experiences that defined and politicized them. By contrast to organizational careers that move upwards in the bureaucratic structure of the organization, these careers acquire mobility in what I call the movement community, a community of people dedicated to bringing about a change in the existing social order.

I also observed that we know relatively little about the organizational and environmental factors that enable social actors to question and challenge practices in formal organizations and that sustain idealism in bureaucracies. In Essay 4, I draw on both existing theory and my own field work in four different sites of the SEIU’s campaign for janitors to delineate the factors that may support actors who mediate the tension between social movements and bureaucracy.

I conclude the dissertation by summarizing my contribution in answering the questions outlined here, laying out the implications for theory, and suggesting avenues for future research.

Similarities and differences between the four Justice for Janitors sites inform my analysis of the SEIU’s practice of social movement unionism throughout this dissertation. Thus, I provide brief profiles of the history of the campaign in each of the four sites below. Overall, the cases were selected to understand the Justice for Janitors campaign holistically. Los Angeles and Washington DC were selected as prototypical early campaigns that were waged in two very different contexts and rendered contrasting outcomes for member engagement and movement sustainability. As I will argue in Essay 4, the cases of Boston and Houston show that securing one of two factors - linkages with members’ communities or free organizational spaces for
deliberation - provides a minimum context for members to stay engaged in union activities and for idealism to be sustained. By contrast to previous studies on the JfJ, most of which have derived their understanding of the JfJ model from examining one locality, usually Los Angeles, I show that the JfJ has been implemented in a variety of different ways that are contingent on the local terrain. While previous studies on the JfJ and similar campaigns have expressed an optimism regarding the potential of these campaigns to revitalize the labor movement as a whole, I find that among the local unions I studied, organizational revitalization is complete only in Los Angeles. Table 1 summarizes the profiles of the four field sites.

Table 1 Profiles of Four Field Sites

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Initial mobilizations under JfJ</th>
<th>Market conditions*</th>
<th>Development of the JfJ over time</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>1986-1992</td>
<td>A few, national</td>
<td>Extensive linkages with Latino community</td>
<td>Self-organization at workplace level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>employers -</td>
<td>- Development of strong workplace culture</td>
<td>Members build informal political careers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>99% full time</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vibrant democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>1987-1997</td>
<td>Multitude of</td>
<td>Loss of linkages with black community, no new</td>
<td>Members have little knowledge of union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DC</td>
<td></td>
<td>regional, local</td>
<td>linkages with Latino community</td>
<td>Few opportunities for members' participation in formal democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>employers -</td>
<td>- Few linkages between workplace networks and union</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50% full time</td>
<td>apparatus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>2000-2002</td>
<td>Highly unionized</td>
<td>Difficulty establishing linkages with diverse</td>
<td>Though part time, members are engaged in union activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>city, national</td>
<td>communities members belong to.</td>
<td>Boston local one of few independent locals in east coast; member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>employers -</td>
<td>- Purposive construction of organizational spaces</td>
<td>representation is localized.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30% full time</td>
<td>for deliberation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>2003-2006</td>
<td>Non-union city,</td>
<td>Reach-out to non union workers through community</td>
<td>Represents an experimental model of the JfJ where members can participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>local and national</td>
<td>organizations.</td>
<td>in the union not only through union activities but also through their</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>employers -</td>
<td>- Incipient union organization, few</td>
<td>community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0% full time</td>
<td>organizational spaces</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Percentages of full time members are as of December, 2006. Information was provided by the local unions themselves.
As I explained above, Los Angeles is the most cited JfJ case. The JfJ in Los Angeles galvanized a city; it turned out thousands of janitors and sympathizers onto the streets, bringing together unionized janitors, non union janitors, and community activists. The Los Angeles JfJ was perhaps unlike any other in the JfJ world in terms of the extensive linkages the campaign had with Latino community organizations and with the Los Angeles central labor council (a federation of labor unions in Los Angeles), which itself had built a legacy of labor-Latino collaboration. The JfJ in Los Angeles also emerged out of a series of internal reforms and conflict within the SEIU local union, and as a result developed strong workplace culture that was the mainstay of local union democracy. Lastly, the abidance of full time work hours by employers in Los Angeles as well as the lack of members’ social mobility out of their janitorial jobs resulted in a stable membership whose options for associational life revolved mainly around participating in union activities.

In Washington DC, the JfJ was introduced by the national union without engaging existing members who cleaned buildings in the federal government sector; these members were disinterested in and even hostile towards organizing new members. Ensuing conflict between existing members and the JfJ leadership resulted in the severance of the union’s linkages with the African American community, where existing members of the union resided. Furthermore, the union has not been successful in establishing new relationships with the Latino community, to which newly organized members belong. Several factors impeded the development of a stable pattern of members’ participation in the union. First, there were few connections between members’ informal networks and the official union apparatus. Second, approximately half of the union’s membership worked part time, and the union provided few mechanisms for part time workers to participate in the union. Third, decades of financial instability in the Washington DC union, which owed to strong employers’ opposition to the union (particularly their efforts to undermine the transfer of union dues from workers’ paychecks), eventually led to a merger of the Washington DC union into the New York local. The merger drastically reduced opportunities for Washington DC members to hold official seats of representation at the regional executive board. Washington DC’s JfJ had neither adequate linkages with members’ communities or free organizational spaces for deliberation. As a consequence, sustaining idealism has been extremely difficult in Washington DC, with local union staff, who
themselves turn over frequently, constantly trying to create meaningful experiences for members who do not know the union.

The Boston JfJ started as a way for the national union to intercept the local union in order to overturn a corrupt and nepotistic local union leadership. It stimulated into action janitors in Boston's commercial office buildings, most of who were part-time workers and had been disenfranchised under the former local union leadership. The JfJ in Boston did not have the support of those members (primarily in Boston's higher education facilities) who had been privileged under the former leadership. Neither was the new leadership of the local union able to build relationships with members' communities, a goal that proved difficult due to the fact that Boston's janitors belonged to many different ethnic communities. Despite these limitations, the Boston local was committed to establishing informal spaces where part-time members could develop personally and politically. These spaces were connected to and supported by formal institutions in the union, such as the executive board. The fact that the Boston local is, along with local unions in Florida, one of the few independent local unions in the East Coast where all building services local unions from Connecticut to Washington DC have been merged into the New York local, has helped preserve representational roles for members.

SEIU's janitorial campaign in Houston represents a large deviation from the conventionally depicted model of the JfJ derived from the JfJ experience in Los Angeles. SEIU did not have either a membership base in Houston or other unions in the vicinity to rely on for reaching nonunion workers. This prompted the union to try a different strategy, that of approaching nonunion janitors through community organizations that had contact with them in churches, affordable housing projects, and immigration reform movements. While the Houston union remains one of the newest SEIU entities and lacks in established spaces for members to come together inside the union, it presents an interesting possibility of a union organization crossing the boundaries into the community. In Houston, where workers are 100% part time and individual workers in unionized companies have the choice to opt out of union representation, the union has not only established connections with community organizations. Rather, it embodies the potential to be a community organization. Both the JfJ in Houston and Boston demonstrate that even where members are part time, idealism can be sustained in the union by
harnessing linkages with members’ communities and constructing organizational spaces where members can develop their associational skills.
Essay 1  Bureaucracy and Social Movement in the SEIU

Introduction

The recent emergence of reformed unions that seemingly are responding both to changing environments and to the needs of socially deprived groups such as immigrants belies the conventional wisdom that change is hard to come about in bureaucratic systems. Studies of how these unions organize have depicted them as having the impact of a social movement, a memory so distant that the two concepts - unions and social movements - have come to be perceived as almost antithetical. The changes in strategy, ideology, and practice that these American unions have shown prompt questions about the process by which these unions have arrived at these changes. That is, how do bureaucratic systems open themselves up to change through social movements and what happens when they do so? More broadly, what does this portend about institutional change in the labor movement? Is it a break with the past model of unionism, as has been suggested by recent labor literature on ‘social movement unionism’? These are questions this essay seeks to address.

In the main part of this essay, I review the historical change process in the SEIU that led to the introduction of social movement elements into a bureaucratized system. I find that historical change in the SEIU has not resulted in the types of change thought to constitute social movement unionism. The union did not become decentralized, rather it became more centralized with the reforms; similarly, the basic strategy of the union, which has been to build power for collective bargaining, has stayed constant. Despite the constancy in structure and practice, I find that the seeds for a new form of unionism are sown in changes in the way that careers are organized in the SEIU that began in the 1980s. This meso-level analysis of career forms allows me to identify why despite the presence of oligarchy, tensions between bureaucracy and social movement are mediated in the SEIU. I relate my findings to the
literature on institutional change in the labor movement. I argue against a thesis that characterizes recent changes in the reformed unions as a shift from business unionism to social movement unionism, and show that the unionism practiced by the SEIU today builds on past institutional legacies. Unlike earlier literature which black boxes the change process, I show that change is a dynamic political process in which actors and their careers play a big role.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. I first examine the historical change process in SEIU in three periods, with emphasis on the last period when organizational change led to wide-spread reforms. I then describe the introduction of social movement elements into the bureaucracy. Next, I analyze the Justice for Janitors model of organizing as an emblematic SEIU campaign that drew on the social movement element and point out the tensions embedded in this model. I then trace changes in the organization of careers brought about the reforms in the SEIU and address how they help resolve these tensions. I conclude with a discussion of the implications of SEIU's case for understanding institutional change in the labor movement.

Methods

Material for this paper was gathered from a variety of sources during Fall 2005 – Spring 2007. The main body of documentation of the change process in the SEIU was obtained through two visits to the Wayne State University’s Walter Reuther library which houses the SEIU archives. Documents at the Reuther library had a ten-year moving wall for public viewing, which meant that at the time of my first visit there I had access to union documents up to 1996. Two sources provided important supplements to the archives at the Reuther library. The first is documents availed to me by SEIU staff at the national union. These documents included market analyses for JfJ campaigns in various cities, including union density and the share of the market owned and cleaned by the largest owners and cleaners; campaign material (white papers, press releases, flyers); and strategy reports and policy briefs for the years 1985 to 2002. The second supplementary source is interviews with SEIU staff (77 interviews) and members (85 interviews), the bulk of which I draw on in later essays in this dissertation but which also added qualitative nuances to the information obtained in documents for this essay. In addition, I
downloaded from the Department of Labor website information filed by the SEIU under the Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act of 1959, specifically the earnings (from member dues and earnings on investment) and payments (including payments to the union's own staff, subsidies to local unions, and outside contributions) of SEIU for various years since 2000 under Form LM-2. Wherever relevant, these figures acted as comparisons to earlier figures I obtained from historical records.

The usual caveats of doing archival work apply to this paper. Archives represent an incomplete data set determined by their creators and keepers. The official archives of the SEIU which I accessed were entrusted to the Reuther library by the national union. Thus, the files comprise SEIU history as collected by the national union, and they only cover local unions through correspondence and periodic reports from local unions to national officers. Despite these drawbacks, the SEIU archives demonstrate a meticulous attention to data keeping by national union staff, particularly under the leadership of Anthony Weinlein, who was Director of SEIU's Research Department from 1943 to 1967 and subsequently Executive Assistant to President Sullivan. The advent of the electronic age has made such a centralized approach to data keeping in the SEIU more difficult, signaling difficulties ahead for the researcher inclined to do historical research on unions.

Organizational Change in the SEIU

A decentralized past (1920s-1950s)

The roots of the SEIU are found in flat janitors locals in Chicago and New York, and theatre janitors locals in San Francisco in the early 1900s. Early locals organized janitors against the predominant public opinion, which tended to regard the janitor as a servant whose right to organize was a "laughable" matter (Beadling, 1984). In fact, an SEIU publication points out that the earliest janitor locals were granted American Federation of Labor (AFL) charters at the urging of carpenters' and plumbers' unions who complained that much of their work was being done by unorganized janitors, rather than from any sense that the janitors deserved to be unionized. At the time, the AFL represented a group of unions that prided themselves on
organizing skilled craft workers, and looked down upon admitting unions representing unskilled or manual workers. That the fledgling group of janitors locals was granted a federal AFL charter was owed mostly to the tenacity and persistence of William Quesse, who became the first president of the national union in 1921. Three out of the seven founding unions of the Building Service Employees International Union (BSEIU) were based in Chicago, and power remained centered in Chicago up to the ‘40s with New York a growing secondary power base.

During the first few decades of the BSEIU’s existence, the federation of janitors unions was distinguished for its decentralized structure. Decentralization in the BSEIU has its roots in two key features of the union – the diversity of its members and their work, and the existence of power bases in several key localities that counter-balanced one another.

Janitors at the time of the BSEIU’s founding, like janitors today, were mostly immigrants – the main groups were German, Swedish, Irish, and Belgian in the early 1900s. The founding leaders of the BSEIU recognized that they could not build a union without cutting across racial and ethnic divisions among the union’s diverse membership. The Flat Janitors first yearbook in 1916 declared that “we are an organization doing business in a courteous way; and are composed of all creeds, colors and nationalities, and do not allow anyone to use any prejudice in the organization...” (Beadling, 1984: 9). Diversity also arose from the fact that the social conditions of janitorial work varied with the ‘industry’ that janitors worked in. For example, flat janitors, who constituted the largest group of members, usually lived in the basement of residential apartments and had tenuous relationships with tenants who, the Chicago sociologist Ray Gold said gave janitors their “status pain” (Gold, 1950). Most flat janitors were male and usually married; the flat janitor’s wife was also involved in the work of the janitor. In one of the earliest protests in Chicago, flat janitors demanded established working hours (flat janitors worked from dawn till dusk and could be called at any hour by tenants) and that their wives be freed from janitorial work. Elevator operators in New York, doormen, and theatre janitors in San Francisco all experienced different social conditions of work. By the mid-1960s, the SEIU also represented X-ray technicians, cemetery workers, race track workers, police units, newspaper distributors, court and probation officers, and even the occasional group of doctors (SEIU, 1968).
In addition to diversity of ethnicity and social conditions of work, the various janitorial occupations faced different structural conditions in the job market and had different levels of union penetration. In a master’s thesis of the BSEIU at Princeton University, David Delgado wrote in 1960 that

The union is organized only in a few key urban areas more or less insulated from one another, having differing degrees of union organization, different employment possibilities and in which the extent of automation and profitability of the industries concerned vary somewhat. (Delgado, 1960)

Delgado also wrote that local autonomy was crucial in the BSEIU because of the fact that the national union depended on several key locals for resources and talent: “The BSEIU is built around the philosophy of maximum feasible local autonomy; the International is dominated necessarily by regional power blocs.” (Delgado, 1960). Between the 1920s and 1960s, Chicago and New York City more or less alternated in dominating the national union; since the 1970s, tremendous growth in California made the West Coast the center of activity. In 1971, George Hardy, who rose to fame as a field organizer in California, became President of the national union, whereupon the national union adopted many of the innovative and militant organizing practices he had spearheaded in California. In 1971, four locals in Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York City and Chicago respectively made up a quarter of the national union’s membership of 435,000 (SEIU, 1971). By proportional representation, the national Executive Board was dominated by these locals and the national union’s policy was set in consultation with them. Thus, Delgado writes that the national union possessed few sources of authority over the locals:

Except for the President’s power to grant charters, and the Executive Board’s power to revoke them and to invoke trusteeships, the International has only recommendatory powers over the local unions. The locals set their own policies, negotiate their own contracts, and strike at their discretion. (Delgado, 1960: 2-3)

The national union’s main mode of communication with the local unions was through a loose body of regional “joint councils”, to which local unions could affiliate with if and only if they chose to do so. The purpose of joint councils was to share information and coordinate organizing activities as the local unions saw fit. Such a decentralized structure of governance persisted in the SEIU up to the mid-1980s. Piore, writing in 1994, remarks that the conference system of decision-making was still effective in the SEIU in the 1980s and was the hallmark of
decentralized governance at the local and regional levels (Piore, 1994). As I document below, the conference system would be eventually superseded in the ‘90s and replaced by a divisional structure.

**Bureaucratization without centralization (1950s- early 1980s)**

The national union begun to acquire the characteristics of a bureaucracy starting from the ‘50s. Bureaucratization in the SEIU occurred at a slower pace than in other AFL unions, and, up to the 1980s, was distinctive in that it was not accompanied by a centralization of control into the national union – that is, structural oligarchy did not take hold of the union prior to the ‘80s. I draw from Weber (Weber, 1964, 1968) and define bureaucratization of the SEIU in terms of i) formal rules outlining the authority of the national union; ii) structural bureaucracy – i.e. the establishment of administrative units in the national union based on specialization or what Weber called “spheres of competence”; and iii) the establishment of a system of income appropriation to maintain the bureaucratic structure.

The beginning of these trends can be traced back to the 1940s, when then President McFetridge, a nephew to the first president William Quesse, inherited the union after the fall of a former President who had been convicted on charges of embezzlement. McFetridge launched a modernization effort in the union that included putting in place financial and record-keeping procedures, hiring lawyers into a legal department, and establishing a research department. The latter department subsequently became the major means of communications between the national union and the local unions (SEIU, 1940-1960).

First, in terms of authoritative bureaucracy, formal rules giving the national union the right to trustee a local union first appear in the BSEIU’s Constitution and By-Laws of 1950. Thereupon the national union president is given the constitutional power to “negotiate and enter into national, regional, or area-wide collective bargaining agreements” in 1972.

Second, in terms of structural bureaucracy, the national union, which prior to the 1940s had been more of an ad hoc group that liaised between local unions and the AFL fortified its administrative function. As previously mentioned, functional departments such as research and
legal were inaugurated. The union also formalized national careers - a pension plan was set up for national organizers and business agents, and the first record of a staff union of national organizers appears in 1970 (SEIU, 1970). Also in this period, the national union moved towards asserting more jurisdictional control over the joint councils. For example, in the late 1970s, affiliation of local unions with joint councils was changed from a system of voluntary affiliations to mandatory affiliation with a relevant joint council.

Third, a system of appropriations from local unions to fund the functional departments of the national union and a corresponding increase in programmatic responsibility of the national union emerged during this period. A national strike fund was instituted in 1972 and controlled by the national President and the Executive Board. Organizing, which had remained the responsibility of local unions and was only supported by the national union in the form of subsidies, was taken on as a major responsibility of the national union, particularly after the ascendance of George Hardy into the presidency.

Records in the SEIU archives indicate that national union efforts to direct local unions, particularly in terms of organizing non union workers in their jurisdiction, were slow and difficult. For example, efforts of national union president George Hardy and several national organizers to establish a new joint council in the New England area in 1971 in the hopes of organizing more social workers and public works department workers in this area did not produce any results for several years even though the national President wined and dined local union officers and their wives over the issue. The reluctance of powerful local presidents, such as one of the Boston local presidents, to commit resources to working with less resourceful locals in Rhode Island and Connecticut was cited as a major barrier (SEIU, 1971). Organizers subsidized by the national union were under the command of local union presidents, and often national organizers were fired by local union presidents who were not satisfied with their performance. At SEIU Executive Board meetings in the 60s and 70s, national Presidents spent considerable time explaining changes in policy and eliciting support for them from local union representatives.

Meanwhile, the SEIU during this time experienced tremendous growth, particularly in sectors outside building services and in the low status professions in healthcare and public services.
Under David Sullivan, SEIU president from 1960-1971, the national union offices moved from Chicago to Washington DC and the union dropped the “Building” from its name. The BSEIU had always organized semi-professional workers in healthcare and public services, as evident in X-ray technicians’ and court and probation officers’ units chartered by the BSEIU. Precisely why the BSEIU had this orientation is not clear - Piore attributes this to the SEIU’s organizational identity as a moral entity committed to organizing low wage workers and semi-professionals in the service sector regardless of industry or craft, or creed or race (Piore, 1994: 529).

Whatever the initial reasons for organizing in healthcare and public services, the decline in membership in BSEIU’s founding sector due to technological change (which, for example, wiped out the elevator operators), outsourcing of cleaning services, and forays from other unions into BSEIU’s territory heightened the national union’s interest in organizing outside of building services (Palladino, 1987; SEIU, August 1985). In the ‘60s, David Sullivan and Thomas Donahue, Sullivan’s Executive Assistant who later became Assistant Secretary of Labor in the later years of the Johnson administration, directed national union resources into political lobbying for healthcare and public sector workers’ rights to organize. Subsequently, George Hardy, who became president of the SEIU in 1971, showed characteristic energy and charisma in pursuing organizing opportunities - in their reports, local union officers quote him as telling them to “organize everything”. Hardy is credited with two key affiliations that increased total SEIU membership by nearly 35% between 1982 and 1984: the affiliation of National Association of Government Employees in 1983 and that of the California State Employees Association in 1984. Affiliations refer to binding agreements between two unions, usually an “independent” union and a union that is a member of the AFL-CIO, under which the former agrees to be exclusively represented by the latter in collective bargaining while retaining its own autonomy in internal affairs. During the 1980s, affiliations of independent unions and employee associations in the public sector and healthcare industries became the main source of growth for the SEIU. SEIU had 600,000 members in 1980; at the end of 1989, its membership had grown to 925,000. Of the 325,000 growth in membership, 250,000 came as a result of affiliations, while 75,000 members were added as a result of new organizing (SEIU, 1986 - 1992). Piore attributes the immense success that SEIU has had in acquiring affiliations to the tradition of local union autonomy the SEIU was known for, which Piore points out must have been attractive to
independent unions joining the SEIU (Piore, 1994:527). Table 2 lists membership growth milestones in the SEIU since 1967.

Table 3 lists key legislative outcomes that defined opportunities for the SEIU’s expansion. In addition to national level legislative changes listed in Table 2, SEIU was actively involved in legislative activities at the state level that would confer collective bargaining rights on public employees.

Table 2 Membership milestones in the SEIU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March 1967</td>
<td>350,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1970</td>
<td>400,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1971</td>
<td>435,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1972</td>
<td>480,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1980</td>
<td>635,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1984</td>
<td>850,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>1,900,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SEIU Executive Board records, various years; [www.seiu.org](http://www.seiu.org) (2008)

Table 3 Key legislative milestones that consolidated SEIU boundaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workers in &quot;proprietary&quot; hospitals and nursing homes*</td>
<td>1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers in non profit hospitals and nursing homes</td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers in private non profit colleges and universities</td>
<td>1970</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Groups newly recognized as bargaining units under the National Labor Relations Act.

The national union during the Hardy presidency began to exert more control over organizing activities that had previously been left to the discretion of local unions to carry out. Still in this period, the main channel through which the national union increased its role in organizing was through increases in subsidies, enabled by the new growth. Thus, the near triple-fold increase in organizing budget from $345,000 at the end of the 1960s to $1 million in the early 1970s went mostly to increasing the local union staff working on nationally funded projects. This gave the national union more control over organizing done by local unions, but it did not increase the size of national staff significantly or bring in organizing jobs into the national union. The
expansion of the national union and the launching of national organizers’ careers is an important distinction between the 1970s and 1980s in the SEIU.

_Bureaucratization with rapid centralization (1984 – ongoing)_

The period starting from approximately 1984 to the present in the SEIU is marked by both heightened bureaucratization as well as rapid centralization of control in the national union under two very strong presidents – John Sweeney during 1980 – 1995, and Andrew Stern from 1996 to the present. In this period a cadre of staff at the directorship level emerge as a powerful group of decision makers in the national union. In the sense that decision-making authority is disproportionately held by this group of staff and they do not turn over easily, this group of people constitute a newly formed oligarchy in the SEIU. Centralization preceded, and was seen as necessary for, widespread mobilizations such as the Justice for Janitors.

Both increased bureaucratization and the centralization of control during this period can both be explained in terms of the aforementioned Weber’s three elements of bureaucratic control.

First, unprecedented control over local unions was given to the national union in this period. In sharp contrast to past constitutions that emphasized the local union – joint council relationship as the basic unit of decision-making, the 1992 Constitution and By-Laws stated that the “International Union has jurisdiction over all local unions and affiliated bodies.” (SEIU, 1992). The key event that strengthened national union control over local unions was a re-organization of the union from a geographic representational structure to an “industry” division structure. This required that local unions re-draw their boundaries and that those locals that previously represented workers in more than one industry exclusively represent workers in one of SEIU’s three main industries – building services, healthcare, and public services. Local unions thus had to ‘give up’ workers who were not in their new industrial jurisdiction. The re-organization was adopted by the national Executive Board in 1984, but took more than ten years to fully implement, especially at the local union level.

\footnote{Richard Cordtz was interim President of SEIU during 1995 – 1996.}
Unlike the slow and contentious transition at the local union level, the national union was promptly divided into three divisions, each overseeing the local unions representing workers in that industry. Information flowed from local unions directly to the divisions and the divisions deliberated and directed policy to the local unions. The joint council structure of conferences that Piore discussed as crucial to decentralized governance was eventually superseded by councils at the state level. State councils play a role in coordinating organizing and political activities across locals in their jurisdiction, but increasingly their role is being subsumed in turn by “mega” locals whose boundaries transcend states and who liaise directly with the national union. As in the railroad industry decades earlier, the divisional structure helped centralize information and resources in the SEIU (Perrow, 2002: 166-172).

Second, administrative control was strengthened during this period through the bolstering of functional departments and a huge increase in national union staff. Between 1980 and 1984, Sweeney increased the number of national staff from about twenty to more than two hundred (Piore, 1994: 527); in 1994, just before Sweeney left to take the presidency of the AFL-CIO, SEIU had 323 people on its national staff payroll (SEIU, 1994, December). The new generation of national staff had a distinct group identity; they were given a large amount of programmatic discretion over their task areas hitherto unknown to national staff. Administrative control was also enhanced through the creation of a Local Union Organizational Development unit directly under the national President; national staff in this unit helped local unions put in management systems for record keeping, finances and human resources.

Third, control over resources and programs was centralized under the national union during this period. The per capita tax paid by local unions to the national union increased from $1.8 (per month, per member) in 1980 to $4 in 1984 to $8 after 1984 (Piore, 1994: 527; SEIU, 1980). Under the Stern administration beginning in the year 2000, local unions were required to contribute a per member amount of $4-$5 in addition to the per capita tax under the name of the Unity Fund. The Unity Fund is a segregated fund used by the national union to finance “breakthrough” campaigns, coordinated bargaining and other activities designed to increase density in SEIU’s core industries. SEIU’s organizing budget increased correspondingly, from $4 million in 1988 to $13 million in 1994; currently, each division of the national union has an
organizing budget that exceeds $13 million. Table 4 lists increases in SEIU’s organizing budget over various years.

Table 4  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Increases in SEIU Organizing Budget</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Late 1960s</td>
<td>$345,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-1970s</td>
<td>$1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>$2 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>$4 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>$13 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Source: Report of the International President to the Executive Board, various years

Organizing became the main area in which the national union exerted programmatic control over local unions. The impetus for organizing also served to justify centralized control outside the programmatic area – namely, in the aforementioned authoritative and administrative areas. SEIU completed the transition from a “cooperative organizing” model, where the national union and various local unions pooled resources, to a model where the national union played a “vigorous role” in identifying areas and companies as strategic targets and in carrying out large scale organizing campaigns (SEIU, 1984).

Under the cooperative organizing model, the national union subsidized local union officers, usually the President or a business representative, to spend part of their time on organizing efforts. The only full time national organizers were regional Vice Presidents of the SEIU, of which there were four to six at any point in time. It was customary that in preparation for a recognition election, full time and part time national organizers would be joined by staff loaned by other local unions in the area as well as members of the local union concerned. An excerpt from President David Sullivan’s report to the Executive Board in 1968 where he describes an organizing campaign in the New England region gives a sense of how this model worked on the ground.

Two interesting features of the campaign should be mentioned. One is that this relatively small local asked three of its members to take leave of absence and work for the local at the beginning of the campaign. In the final election week there were about twenty-five people from the local who had taken a week’s vacation on their own in order to help in the campaign. We sent in 16 people to man the various polling places and show that we had a good staff. 7 of the 16 were loaned to us by Edward Sullivan's
Local 254 [in Boston], and the others were [lists names of national Vice Presidents and other national organizers]. We intend to repeat this cooperative effort when the final election is called. (SEIU, 1968)

By contrast, the new model where the national union undertakes strategic organizing is best characterized in a report from President Sweeney to the national convention in 1984 where he announces that the national union would take a “new and vigorous role in organizing efforts”:

In the past, the International’s responsibility in organizing has rested primarily in providing technical assistance and funding for local union efforts. Because our membership continues to diversify, however, we must focus more of our efforts on new occupations and new geographical areas - particularly the Sun Belt. And the increasing presence of multinational corporations with their seemingly limitless resources and professional union-busters as our opponents makes it clear that the International must take a new and vigorous role in organizing efforts. (SEIU, 1984)

Although systemic transformations that include changes at the local union level took longer to implement, the core elements that rapidly centralized control in the SEIU were put in place by the late 1980s; most of the key policy changes happened during 1984-1988. How does one explain such a rapid organizational change? Below I discuss the elements that made such change possible in the SEIU.

Key elements of organizational change process in the SEIU

Change in the SEIU was a top-down process, typically initiated by the national union President and implemented by his staff. Even under the decentralized governance system, or paradoxically because of the decentralized system, as Piore points out, the national union president had a large discretion in identifying new areas of activity (Piore, 1994: 526). After 1984, rapid organizational change was possible due to the empowerment of a cadre of national staff on whom the change project largely depended. Of key importance is the emergence of a cadre of professionals brought into the national union by Sweeney early on in his presidency who occupied key positions at the helm of the divisions and as heads of functional departments - organizing, legal, and research. Some of these key members were recruited from within the SEIU, such as Andrew Stern, who rose from being a social worker and a member of an SEIU local in Pennsylvania to President of his Pennsylvania local to organizing director under
Sweeney; others were recruited from outside the SEIU, mainly from other labor and community organizations.

These directors then hired under them staff who represented a new generation of managers. These professionals were ideologically progressive – Piore called them members of the New Left who had grown up and gone to college during the 1960s (Piore, 1994: 530) – and their views often clashed with the existing leadership in local unions. The radical innovation, distinct militancy and unrelenting drive of new campaigns such as the Justice for Janitors was propelled by the distinct group identity of this new generation of staff and the discretion they possessed in a new administrative system. This is consistent with the view in the literature on organizational change in bureaucratic systems that predicts change will be initiated by ‘outsiders’ or insiders with a separate identity who are legitimated by the top powers in the organization (Crozier, 1964). Although ideologically progressive, the managers in the national union are distinguished from the front line organizers I discuss later in the paper in that they occupied positions of power in the organizational hierarchy.

Second, change was accompanied with a sense of crisis in the union. National union officers shared a sense that new opportunities that had come in the way of the union needed to be harnessed and that reforms were needed to do it effectively. The union’s membership in its founding sector, building services, was fast eroding due to contracting-out, deunionization, and competition with other unions. At the same time, the union needed to respond to the demands of new members in healthcare and public sectors who quickly became vocal and powerful players on the national Executive Board. Divisionalization provided a means to foster separate organizational identities in the three sectors. It also had the effect of resolving the dilemma of too much diversity in the union and consolidating the union’s jurisdiction into three cohesive areas for future growth. In a report to the national union convention in 1988, Sweeney explained the necessity of an industry division in just these terms:

Just as our strength lies in our diversity, our challenge lies in creating an organizational identity which rings true for our wide range of members. From this challenge, the idea of industry-based divisions within SEIU was born. (SEIU, 1988)
In the building services division, staff shared the sense that a drastic solution was needed in order to resurrect the entire sector. Morale was so low in those local unions that primarily represented janitors that the creation of the building services division itself was deemed as a cause for hope. In a 1985 policy paper, building service division staff identified a distinct role (and opportunity) for the national union in assisting local unions to overcome the threat of non-existence:

Creation of the building services division has accomplished much in establishing the image that SEIU stands ready to take on those problems unique to Building Services.... the division, its board, and five ancillary councils are the ideal vehicles for providing assistance to prepared locals... image wise, SEIU through the building services division, is in prime position to far remove itself from the widely held image that many other unions are trapped with - that of representing a selfish, shrinking elite segment of the working class - by organizing minimum wage, benefitless workers at the bottom rungs of the occupational ladder. (SEIU, 1985)

Out of this crisis came forth an acute sense of urgency for a radical break with old ways, an innovation that, in John Sweeney’s view, would have SEIU “leading the resurgence of the labor movement” (SEIU, 1986 - 1992). Staff, however, faced extreme uncertainty on how to achieve such an ambitious goal. In a memo to senior staff in 1992, Andrew Stern, then Director of the Organizing Department, wrote:

There will be many, many ambiguities. Budgets are mostly inadequate for the task in front of us since this is the area that the labor movement needs the most effort and has the least expertise - creating its own resurgence. (SEIU, 1986 - 1992)

Staff were thus given large room for discretion in experimenting with novel and breakthrough ideas for growth and resuscitation.

Third, change was a dynamic process that involved political battles between the majority of the existing leadership of local unions and those advocating change in the union. National union staff negotiated, subverted, and put local unions into receivership in order to win these battles. On the change agent side were those who agreed with the national union’s program to put resources in organizing, rationalize the operation of local unions, and divisionalize. Members of the other side, though harder to characterize because of their relative diversity, generally favored local autonomy over directed national policies, and were protective of existing practices and relationships with members and at times employers. Among the opponents to change were presidents of large local unions, strongholds of power in the old SEIU, who themselves had
amassed personal status and wealth. In the building services division, local union officers had often watched as buildings deunionized or let wages and benefits slip in commercial office buildings while holding on to their power base of janitors in universities and government office buildings. The new staff who were involved in the change project generally thought of these locals as fiefdoms of labor barons. In addition to being programmatically opposed to the old ways, these staff were ideologically repulsed by the nepotism and cronyism that sustained some of the “old” locals. The change program propelled by the national union, then, was designed to have a profound impact on local unions, to “transform” them; in many cases, the change program wiped out the existing leadership of local unions. Such efforts were met with strong resistance, a resistance that was vanquished using resources, campaigns such as the JfJ, and ideology. Andy Stern told organizers attending a training in 1989 of the transformation needed of SEIU local unions:

SEIU is committed to transforming its locals into organizations that make organizing an integral and essential part of their local union. Locals who chose to turn the tide, not die of self-inflicted wounds; locals who believe the overall success of the labor movement is directly related to its power to both grow by uniting its existing members with unorganized workers employed by common employers or in similar industries or geography; ... Locals who understand that the only practical way to organize workers on a large scale is by mobilizing currently represented rank and file members, leaders, and staff.” (SEIU, 1986 -1992)

Overall in the SEIU but particularly in the building services division, the victory of the change agents was undisputable and complete. The Justice for Janitors campaign enabled this victory in a significant way. Initially, the campaign provided an entry-point to local unions that were at least interested in receiving national union resources and at most wanted to administer the reforms that the national union advocated. The implementation of the campaign, however, brought tensions between the old and new to the surface and made managing a local union in the old way untenable. For these reasons, the JfJ was described by the national Organizing Department as “most valuable in reforming locals” (SEIU, 1986 -1992).

Local union presidents initially would invite in national organizers (and accompanying subsidies) to launch a JfJ campaign in their locality; over time, the JfJ unit would grow, necessitating local union involvement in administering the campaign and recruiting local organizers. The local union’s administration of the campaign made salient any existing
problems in the management of the local; often, conflicts ensued over resource allocation decisions. These incidents provided the window for the national union to intervene, and, in all of the thirty localities that the JFJ was waged, led to trusteeship of the local union by the national union. The trusteeships also often served the accompanying purpose of dividing an amalgamated local union into separate industrial jurisdictions. Subsequently, staff turnover as well as staffing changes effected by the new leadership would eventually rid the local union of core members of the old guard.

The process of organizational change in the SEIU then, is generally consistent with what the literature predicts of organizational change in bureaucratized systems. Change was initiated at the top of the organization and was enabled by a cadre of staff who perceived the situation as a crisis and were given the discretion to experiment with new ways of doing things. Such a top-down organizational change, however, was a precursor to introducing new forms of careers into the union, opening the way for the institutionalization of an interaction between social movements and bureaucracies. Figure 1 outlines the chronological development of organizational change in the SEIU.

Figure 1  Timeline of Organizational Change in the SEIU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>SEIU founded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950s-70s</td>
<td>Expansion into healthcare &amp; public service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>Re-organization into Industry Divisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>Centralization of control into national union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>First JFJ launched: Denver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>JFJ launched in LA, Washington DC, Atlanta, San Francisco, San Diego, Seattle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>SEIU breaks away from AFL CIO, founds Change to Win coalition; 30th JFJ launched in Houston, TX</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The introduction of social movement elements into the bureaucracy: circa 1985

Ownership of new programs by national staff in the top ranks was considered crucial to the success of reforms planned around 1984, so much so that the first recommendation by the Building Services Advisory Board to the Executive Board in 1984 prior to the official formation of the building service division was that a 'building services director' be appointed by President Sweeney. Once appointed, staff generated ideas for growing their own division and actively lobbied for resources and President Sweeney's attention and actions to support their programs. Thus, the appointment of key staff to head each of the three industry divisions gave direction and incentive for generating novel ideas for growth in each of these sectors.

The common thread in the innovations begot by national staff in the 80s revolved around shoring up density in key markets through large-scale organizing that did not rely on the protracted workplace elections sponsored by the National Labor Relations Board. Staff viewed it vital that SEIU obtain critical mass in key markets in a relatively short period of time so that power obtained in one locality could be used in other markets where some of the same employers owned businesses. Conditions in building services were particularly amenable to such a strategy. Although the office cleaning industry was diversified, a handful of large contractors dominated the industry; moreover, building owners rarely turned over and presented themselves as potentially stable negotiators vis-à-vis the union. Early on in the brainstorming process for ways to revitalize building services, key staff in the newly revamped Organizing Department identified public campaigns as an effective way of pressuring employers to negotiate with the union over the representation of their workers. It quickly emerged from the experiences in the first building services organizing campaign in Denver in 1985 that a public campaign galvanized the janitors who participated in these actions, and that a social movement of janitors would be a powerful means by which to pressure not only the cleaning contractors but also the building owners.

The exact origins of what I term the 'social movement element' are unclear; SEIU records suggest that it emerged out of practice rather than by design. Staff in the building services division were given free reign in their first campaign to regain density in Denver. National
organizers assigned to this job, including a key staff member who later was credited with ‘designing’ the JfJ, experimented with various scenarios for a public campaign in Denver. The ensuing campaign was met with a visceral response from the mostly Latino janitors working in Denver office buildings, for many of whom the union campaign provided the first opportunity to express anger and frustration about the conditions of their work and life. The phrase “Justice for Janitors” is said to have been offered in an organizing meeting by one of the organizers on the Denver campaign. By 1986, the second year of the Denver campaign, organizers had fine tuned a storyline for a larger scale campaign focused on the low quality life of immigrant janitors, juxtaposing it with the huge profit that building owners reaped from building operations. “Justice for Janitors” was quickly adopted as the campaign’s motto and later the formal title of the nation-wide campaign to revive union membership in the building services.

The Justice for Janitors electrified janitors in cities that it went to and transformed many workers’ and staff’s lives. The social movement element in the JfJ is most vivid in its real life examples. Hundreds of janitors and members of the community blocked bridges in Washington DC. Latino immigrants came out in droves in a protest in Silicon Valley that forced Apple Inc to commit to using unionized contractors. Record numbers of workers, students and community activists participated in a march in Century City, Los Angeles, during a JfJ strike in which police indiscriminately beat down on dozens of participants, causing one death, a miscarriage, and many injuries. Those who died and were injured in Century City became instant martyrs commemorated to this day among janitors. The Los Angeles janitors’ stories were captured in an independent film directed by Ken Loach, Bread and Roses, parts of which were shot in the Los Angeles SEIU local and in which many Los Angeles janitors participated as amateur actors.

In Boston, janitors ousted a local union president whose family had ruled the local for decades without giving them voice or better conditions; these janitors won a new and substantially better contract with Harvard University in a much publicized fight that involved Harvard students confronting the administration on behalf of the janitors. The lived-in experiences of the JfJ as a social movement are reproduced in individual narratives and collective memories that explain why the JfJ has inspired such passionate actions during its mobilization phase (Ganz, 2001; Polletta, 1998).
These examples do not always translate to the campaigns themselves creating or resulting in a social movement. Drawing on Oberschall (1972) and Melucci (1989)'s general definition of a social movement, I identify the conditions for a social movement occurring in a JFJ campaign as involving i) the mobilization of the majority of the workers for broader social change and not just economic issues, such as higher wages and benefits; and ii) politicization the majority of workers, staff, and others who participated in the campaign. Under this criterion, I determine that few JFJ campaigns resulted in a social movement because in most cities, mobilization for union recognition happened rapidly, and used top-down methods to reach large numbers of workers. Despite the failure of some campaigns to engender social movements, the element of social movement is captured in the experiences of those workers and staff who are transformed by the mobilization effort, and this is crucial to understanding why some of them build movement careers.

SEIU has tried to introduce the social movement element to campaigns in the healthcare sector, but it has most successfully taken root in building services. One can understand this in terms of the identity of the janitors themselves, and by extension, the identity of the staff who work for the janitors. Staff who were charged with designing the revitalization program for building services understood that the building service local unions suffered from low self esteem. In a 1986 document laying out an agenda for revitalization, the Building Services Advisory Board pointed to an “inferiority complex” shared by both the workers and the contractors in the industry. The document goes on to say that this has detrimentally affected how SEIU local union staff view themselves and notes that promotional material should be designed to help change this self image:

Worth noting here also is that this ‘complex’ transcends the limits of management and workers and has a decided effect on SEIU locals and how they view themselves. It is not unusual to hear non-bldg service locals refer to another SEIU local as a ‘janitors union’ in a disparaging or patronizing tone. Promotional and organizing materials should be very sensitive to this. (SEIU, 1985)

The social movement element was an apt complement to the progressivism of new staff called to join the national union’s reform programs. It excited staff, and it became central to how the people working for the union saw themselves.
A second reason the social movement element took root more fully in building services had to do with the power structure in a subcontracted industry, and the constraints that the current labor law places on organizing workers under such a structure. Legal employers in this industry, the cleaning contractors, can lose their contracts at any time and have little power over their profit margins. At the same time, the union is prohibited from bargaining with building owners, who are “third parties” according to labor law, and from conducting labor actions against the building owner, which would violate the ban against secondary boycotts under the Taft-Hartley amendment to the National Labor Relations Act. The prohibition on secondary boycotts, or union actions directed at firms that do business with a firm which is being targeted for a primary dispute, is considered to be crippling for unions in a subcontracted industry. Secondary boycotts were a crucial part of the Teamsters’ union’s growth strategy in the ‘40s until it was banned in 1947 (James & James, 1965); they were also key to the unions in the garment industries, which were exempted from the prohibition of secondary boycotts. Secondary boycotts were used legally by the United Farm Workers against agricultural producers as farm workers are not covered by the Taft-Hartley Act; they were an essential element in the farm workers’ subsequent victories (Ganz, 2008).

SEIU staff developed two alternatives to the secondary boycott – community pressure, and the corporate campaign – both of which depended on framing the JfJ as a campaign about social issues (poverty, inequality, and immigration) than as a labor dispute. Community pressure was built in part through allying with other labor organizations, but mostly it comprised of protest actions in concertation with community organizations, religious groups, and politicians (Erickson, Fisk, Milkman, Mitchell, & Wong, 2002; Rudy, 2004). Building an identity for the JfJ as a social movement provided a common ground for the union to ally with the latter organizations. The corporate campaign is a series of actions directed towards stakeholders on the employers’ and owners’ sides - business partners, boards of directors, and investors - to expose their unjust practices and to identify union representation as a desirable alternative. Actions under the corporate campaign and protests are protected under the First Amendment.

From the union’s viewpoint, then, the social movement element was instrumental to advancing the organizational goal of rapidly raising density in whole markets. Strategy plans for JfJ
campaigns are explicit about the necessity of the social movement as a means for building the union's bargaining power. A 1986 strategy document about the Denver campaign states:

Our aim is to build a movement (emphasis original) of Latino janitors that will give us the momentum and power to not only represent a majority of downtown buildings, but to win significant improvements in bargaining. (SEIU, 1986b)

Where the union's bargaining power could not win union representation rights in a particular market, direct action by the janitors made the ultimate difference between victory and loss. For example, the public outcry in response to police beatings at the Century City strike and the ensuing sympathy protests brought the largest contractor in Los Angeles, ISS, to the bargaining table within days of the strike. As a result of the negotiations that followed, the union expanded its jurisdiction over most of Greater Los Angeles and won a single 'master agreement' that standardized wages and benefits in core areas (SEIU, 1986-1992; Waldinger et al., 1998).

The introduction of the social movement element as a best alternative to negotiated outcomes rather than as an end in itself is an important factor in understanding why the Justice for Janitors way of organizing operates more frequently as a template of practices – a "recipe" in union staff's parlance – rather than something organic to the needs of the communities that it mobilized. First, the union typically did not feel it had the time to build the campaign from the ground up because it needed to coordinate the pressure on targeted employers and building owners nationally. Thus, when a city was deemed 'ready' for a campaign was determined mostly by the marginal benefit of the campaign in tipping the union's bargaining power vis-à-vis employers over to a victory in that market. Second, knowledge and skills needed for pressuring employers and owners were considered to be more constant and thus scalable than the talent needed for understanding local needs. The former were also thought to be more valuable to achieving victory than the latter. Thus training and staff development tended to focus on the former rather than the latter, and staff who possessed knowledge on employers and the market acquired more mobility in the union structure than those who possessed knowledge on workers and the community.

In the next section I elaborate on the Justice for Janitors model of unionism, paying attention to two analytical traits. First, I identify where the JfJ has developed as a "template" and where the
standard template leaves room for experimentation. Second, I focus on the JfJ as a hybrid model, and address where the bureaucracy plays a relatively larger role vis-à-vis the social movement, and, by contrast, where the social movement is likely to influence outcomes.

Where social movement meets bureaucracy: the JfJ model of organizing

As of July 2007, the JfJ had been waged in approximately thirty localities across the United States. Although the conditions in each of the localities differed at the time the JfJ unfolded, JfJ campaigns exhibit surprising similarity across these areas. One significant divider is the timing of the campaigns, which also correlates with the accumulation of SEIU’s density in key markets. This means that the union had more power in campaigns that were waged later than in earlier campaigns – according to interviews, 1995 is the year that the union held approximately 65% density or higher in areas where it had representation. Campaigns waged prior to 1995 were in general more difficult for the union, more protracted, and involved larger-scale and more militant actions. These campaigns typically sought to win back whole markets where the union had represented the majority of workers in the 1970s but where density or contractual wages or both had fallen precipitously in the late 70s and early 80s – examples are Denver, Los Angeles, Washington DC, Atlanta, and Seattle. By comparison, later campaigns were waged in three types of markets:

i) suburbs of large metropolitan markets of importance to SEIU (e.g. Chicago, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia suburbs);

ii) delayed campaigns in areas where previously powerful local union presidents had blocked access (Hartford, CT; Stamford, CT; New Jersey; Westchester, NY)

iii) Mid-west region (Columbus, OH; Cincinnati, OH; Indianapolis, IN) and “right-to-work” states (Houston, Miami)

In general, where SEIU has been able to leverage its influence over employers and owners it had dealt with previously in other markets, and where the JfJ had name recognition among non-unionized workers, post-1995 campaigns achieved faster settlement and involved less militant direct action. The exceptions in this trend are new markets being organized in the Mid-West
region and the “right-to-work” markets of Houston and Miami. I analyze the main traits of the JfJ model below based on pre-1995 JfJ campaigns as these earlier campaigns have provided the templates on which later campaigns were built. Wherever relevant, I point to innovations and deviations that developed in later campaigns. A full list of JfJ campaigns and specific characteristics of each campaign is attached as Appendix A. Figure 2 demonstrates a flow chart of the sequence of activities of a JfJ campaign. Figure 3 represents the coordination of activities and resource deployments between the national union, the local union sponsoring the JfJ, and other SEIU local unions under the JfJ.

Figure 2 Organizing the Justice for Janitors Way

Research → Bargain to Organize → Union recognition by

Area-wide contract → Member Representation → Re-organize for contract renewal

Figure 3 Coordination and Resource Deployment in JfJ Organizing
Strategic selection of markets

An important idea behind the JfJ is that of strategic organizing, the idea that the decision over where to organize is not based on workers' demands for a union but that it is based on selecting the most 'winnable' markets. The main goal of strategic organizing is outlined in documents produced by the SEIU Organizing Department in terms of scalability, which includes, \textit{inter alia}:

- To organize at a fast enough pace that we increase the percentage of the work force that we represent.
- To rationalize bargaining (one contract in nursing homes) and to represent a majority of the industry in specific geographic and industry markets. (SEIU, 1986 - 1992)

In principle, the national union recommends JfJ campaign locations based on the scalability criterion, which in turn is based on an assessment of employer and owner composition in the market; worker turnover; political structure (municipal and state); and, in right-to-work states, the presence of other SEIU locals or other SEIU programs (SEIU, 1994). The union assesses viability in terms of employer and owner composition by looking for the presence of large corporations that have market share in other SEIU markets, thereby assuring the union's bargaining leverage over these employers/owners and leaving open the possibility that these employers/owners might convince others to enter a neutrality agreement with the union (see next section). In terms of worker turnover, whether janitorial work in a particular market is full time or part time became a criterion. For example, having experienced difficulty in organizing part time workers in Washington DC in the '80s, a city whose owners also engaged in vigorous organized action to resist unionization, the national union did not approach part time markets again until the late '90s.

In reality, the decision to conduct the JfJ in a particular city prior to 1995 depended a great deal on the amenability of the local union leadership to committing resources to a janitors' campaign, or at least not oppose the national union coming into their jurisdiction to launch one. In most amalgamated locals (locals that represented workers from more than one industry), the leadership eschewed putting resources into janitorial workers' issues. Instead, they favored what they viewed as more remunerating (and higher status) work for healthcare and public services workers. In addition, some presidents of powerful localities such as Gus Bevona in
New York City and Ed Sullivan in Boston believed new organizing in peripheral areas would downgrade wages in core metropolitan areas whose members were their power base. In both cities, the JfJ was only waged in peripheral areas – New Jersey and Westchester, New York for New York City, and commercial janitors (as opposed to university janitors and maintenance workers) for Boston - after the ousting of Bevona and Sullivan in 1999.

**Bargaining to Organize: Neutrality and “Trigger” Agreements**

Since the ’70s, the legal department of the SEIU expended great effort in researching alternatives to the NLRB workplace elections. The earliest records on neutrality agreements appear in 1986, where a memo issued by the legal department details a series of instructions for staff to negotiate employers’ ‘neutrality’ prior to organizing the workers (SEIU, 1986 - 1992). These agreements centered on obtaining the following:

i) explicit communication from the employer to workers that the employers do not oppose unionization;

ii) union recognition based on majority of workers signing union cards; and, usually but not always;

iii) employers’ provision to the union of employee details and access to workers.

This memo states that organizers should concurrently prepare for a long term corporate campaign should negotiations on neutrality break down. The neutrality agreement, which becomes a binding private agreement once signed, has been a centerpiece in all JfJ campaigns. Wherever possible, the union seeks to have all employers representing the majority of a defined market sign a neutrality agreement. In the earlier years (approximately up to the mid-90s), this was made difficult due to a collective action problem among employers: employers worried that other employers would defect from signing, resulting in individual losses for those who signed. The union’s main strategy around this problem up to approximately 1998 was to target one or two of the largest employers to sign the neutrality agreement first before negotiating...
with smaller employers. Because the large employers usually resisted, the earlier JfJ’s typically accompanied protracted periods of corporate campaigns and worker action.

Interviews reveal that in the late ‘90s, the SEIU legal department innovated the neutrality agreement to overcome the collective action problem. Called a “trigger” agreement, the new concept involved bargaining simultaneously with all employers who together hold a majority of a defined market (typically 55-60%). Only once the union has the commitment of all such employers the neutrality agreements signed with each of the employers are “triggered” and go into effect. This concept has significantly aided the union in speeding up its campaigns. Heralding the trigger agreement as a major breakthrough idea in the labor movement, other unions in the service sector have invited SEIU lawyers to give talks on it. But presumably, the diffusion of this concept will not only depend on the power of the idea but on a variety of factors including the structure of the industry and the level of power that the respective unions have amassed with employers.

Shoring it Up through Social Action: Targeted Campaigns

While the union is bargaining to organize, it employs a variety of social actions to target selected employers or owners that resist the union. A series of templates exist for coordinating these actions so that they result in an escalation of pressure on the selected actors. These include:

- Public exposure of questionable corporate conduct through direct actions and publications (‘white papers’, flyers, press releases);

- Partnering with others who share similar agendas (community groups, religious groups, advocacy organizations, and politicians);

- Mobilizing existing members to engage in diverse forms of public protest.

In practice, there is wide variation in how these templates play out, especially for the latter two elements. The union may not have the relationships with local progressive organizations, in which case it may need to build them, or relationships may have eroded or broken, in which case they need to be mended and trust re-established. In some campaigns, where bargaining
and partnerships have established union goals, worker mobilization may only play a supplementary role. Especially in post-1995 campaigns, direct worker mobilization became customary – in the words of a national staff member, sometimes actions were carried out even if no major barriers to bargaining were foreseen, “so that people can remember what the fight was”. Campaigns where worker mobilization was more ceremonial contrasted with those campaigns where the fate of the campaign was uncertain and worker mobilization was central to escalating the campaign. So although the success criterion of IfJ campaigns is uniform across the different cities – settlement of the campaign with the signing of an area-wide labor contract by all major employers – the process of arriving at settlement varies in terms of whether it is driven primarily by negotiations with employers or by direct action among workers.

_Bargaining to Win: Contracts as Precedents for Future Campaigns_

Once the majority of employers agree to neutrality, staff say that collecting union cards from workers is a relatively straightforward process. The exception in this otherwise relatively smooth process is markets where workers are part time and high turn-over can invalidate a subset of union cards. Should employers dispute the validity of such cards, it can trigger repeated card check drives and a difficulty in obtaining recognition. The eagerness of janitorial workers to sign union cards in the absence of employer pressure discredits the prevailing notion in some sectors of labor that immigrant workers shun unions and that thus these workers are responsible for driving standards down in the industries that employ them. Milkman (2006) has strongly disputed such claims in her analysis of the timing of deunionization in Los Angeles – she shows that deunionization preceded the taking of these jobs by immigrants. In fact, my fieldwork suggests that janitorial workers tend to have higher expectations of a union contract once they become union members, a point that has created tensions in many IfJ cities post-organizing.

For the SEIU, a labor contract in one city is seen as a precedent for other contracts in different regions, or for future contracts in the same city. The union sets its goals in the contract by comparing it with similar markets elsewhere in the country and using its knowledge of its own powers vis-à-vis owners’ and employers’. Its focus thus is on raising wages and obtaining
benefits relative to other cities that the union has fought in. Where the work is part time, the union’s goal is to full time the work by incrementally increasing the number of hours worked over the course of several years. The union also recognizes that market conditions, the most important of them being real estate prices, are likely to differ across the areas covered by the “master” contract; thus, if necessary it is willing to negotiate tiered wages and standards for sub-areas. Members do not always share these goals, and the discrepancy between the union’s and members’ goals in bargaining contributes to the conflict that each local union typically deals with post-organizing.

By contrast to the union’s stance in bargaining, many members in a newly organized market have confronted employers for the first time in their lives. In my interviews, workers attest that the memory of the fight makes them unwilling to compromise on goals. Likewise, many workers say they do not want increased hours, especially if working six hours instead of four will force them to quit their second job because they can no longer make the hours necessary for that job. Lastly, workers find it hard to accept tiered wages. The solidarity workers build in fighting together for unionization makes it hard for workers to accept that not all workers doing the same kind of work will receive the same pay.

For these reasons that surface during the bargaining phase, the JfJ leaves in its aftermath some tensions and questions to be resolved as workers enter the organized employment relationship. I elaborate on the tensions embedded in the JfJ model in pages 49-50.

Ongoing Organizing: Sustaining Unionization

The subcontracted nature of the janitorial industry necessitates that organizing be a constant phenomenon. One reason behind the constant organizing imperative is that the union can only take wages out of competition when an entire market is unionized. Non-union growth of the market, such as into suburban areas adjacent to a unionized downtown, is a direct threat to upholding standards in unionized areas. Owners and contractors can then point to non-union competition as a rationale for why they cannot concede to further improvements in wages and conditions for unionized workers. Union contractors’ expansions into other industries trigger a
similar dynamic. The contractors that the SEIU deals with are large, multinational contractors. Increasingly, they clean not only office buildings and airports but also hospitals, amusement parks, stadiums and event halls, and race tracks. They provide not only cleaning\(^2\), but a range of integrated building maintenance services complete with landscaping and even catering and food services. If a building office cleaning contractor wins jobs in the airport industry, the union is pressed to negotiate with the airlines that own the contracts. As in office buildings, organizing efforts in such new markets are primarily geared towards owners. Since owners foot the bill on higher wages (by, in turn, charging more rent), contractors and the union are usually not at odds in entering new markets except when the contractor tries to hide new jobs from the union.

A second occasion for ongoing organizing is contractor turnover. Owners for whatever reason may switch contractors, and some may switch to non union contractors without the union’s knowing. Hence, the union is constantly engaged in what staff call “fight back campaigns”, mobilizing workers against an owner that hired a non union contractor. In order to prevent owners from defecting on the union contract, the SEIU has successfully mobilized to pass the Displaced Worker Protection Act (DWPA) in seven cities\(^3\). The DWPA mandates the retention of workers during a turn-over of contractors; under the DWPA, the new contractor carries over the workforce from the old contractor, and the union’s bargaining rights are also retained per the National Labor Relations Act.

Finally, the expiration of an area-wide (“master”) agreement necessitates that the union re-organize the market. This is necessary because the union cannot count on the continuity of the employment relationship in a subcontracted industry, and must pressure the owners each time the labor contract needs to be renewed. Re-building public and worker support each time a contract has to be renewed (usually within five to seven years) has been difficult and costly for

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\(^2\) In fact, cleaning services constitute a small portion of building service contractors’ revenues. (SEIU. 1994. Building service division: State of the Union Revisited, SEIU Research Department. Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs: Wayne State University.)

\(^3\) These localities are: Washington DC, Los Angeles (covered by California-wide DWPA), San Francisco (covered by California-wide DWPA), Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, New York City, and Chicago (covered by Cook County DWPA).
the union. Thus, since the late ‘90s SEIU has moved to coordinate contract expiration dates by region, so that for example, most building services contracts in the East Coast expired in 2007, and most contracts in the West Coast will expire in 2008. Such convergence of contract expirations is likely to move the emphasis of contract campaigns more towards top-level negotiations than towards increased grassroots mobilization. However, direct action by workers is always the best alternative to break-downs in negotiations, and so maintaining member interest and participation throughout the duration of the labor contract is crucial. But unlike the employer’s side of the JfJ, which is well developed into a template of practices, there are no such rules that dictate how to engage members while organizing in scale.

Tensions in the JfJ Model

The JfJ model depends on the coming together of two very different forces— the planning and coordination capabilities of a talented bureaucracy, and the powerful moral force of politicized social actors. The confluence of such distinct forces is the cause for a number of tensions that reside in the execution of the model. I discuss here three such tensions – the tension between the local and the global; the tension between members’ and organizational interests; and the tension between social structure and organizational structure.

First, there is tension between national elements and local elements in the model. The union wants to lift wages out of competition for a particular industry across the country, yet the fights and issues are felt by workers and staff in the campaign city to be very local. The JfJ is often felt by local union staff to be a national union project; it can also be perceived as a threat to local control by local union leaders. Furthermore, the history of relationships between workers and employers in a particular locality makes the fight personal for local actors, yet to the union they are one city in a larger scheme of campaigns.

Second, there is tension between what members want and what the union wants. In interviews, members talk about their grievances as emerging from their social conditions as immigrants in a system that exploits their work but does not recognize them as full citizens. Not entirely incidentally, large scale turn-outs of janitors in JfJ campaigns have paralleled surges of political
activity in immigrant communities. For example, the rising of immigrants against the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 and more recently the mass marches of immigrants in the Spring of 2006 against the criminalization of undocumented status have been directly associated with workers' turnout at JfJ events. Yet the outcomes of the campaign are represented by a labor contract that is not designed to resolve workers' social grievances. Workers want respect and status, and they demand it from both the employers and the union. These desires explain why for workers, "representation" is an important goal. Being well represented goes beyond having their workplace issues resolved by the union, as important as that is for members; it is an important indicator of how much they are respected by the employer as well as by the union. In comparison, the union's primary interests can be described in terms of the organizational impetus for growth that scholars on bureaucratic organizations have pointed out. Lipsky predicted that the inclination towards growth will conflict with clients because the quality of service to clients will suffer: "the inherent impulses organizations display toward growth will lead to increasing organizational scope even though the quality of service cannot be expected to improve with growth." (Lipsky, 45)

Third, there is tension between the social structure of workers and the organizational structure that the union has developed and is developing for the future. The structure of workers' social lives and private networks revolve around the immigrant community; workers' aspirations and the meanings they draw from their injuries are rooted in an extended family structure and in ethnic communities. But the union's goal of building larger and more efficient power has led to organizational structures that move farther afield of the workers' communities. After divisionalization in the mid to late '90s, local unions merged into state-wide structures. Currently, state-wide structures are merging to create region-wide structures - for example, all building services local unions south of Rhode Island in the East Coast have merged into the New York City local, 32BJ. Such consolidations reduce the number of staff positions per member as well as the number of executive board seats accessible to members. Thus, there exists a discrepancy between members' desires to validate their politicized views post-JfJ organizing and the evolution of the bureaucratic structure that seeks to represent them.
As noted earlier, a large body of scholarly literature generally attests that bureaucracies in themselves do not carry the answers to resolving the tensions I outlined above. But the introduction of social movement elements into the bureaucracy through the IfJ has necessitated a new organization of bureaucratic union careers. In the following section, I describe the changes in the organization of careers in the SEIU and show how these careers may go some way in resolving such tensions.

Changes in the Organization of Careers

Prior to the reforms of the ‘80s, most careers in the SEIU adhered to the structure of the organization. The typical career started by being a member of the union, then progressed to being front line staff in a local union, and later possibly to a managerial staff position in the same local union. Lateral transfers, from one local union to another, were rare. Also rare were movements from being a local union staff to being a national union staff due to the fact that the latter group was relatively small. If these careers progressed vertically along the organizational structure, a radically different career was introduced with the advent of the IfJ, a career defined by the contours of a social movement. These latter types of careers, whose progression in the union is lateral, are not completely new to the SEIU or to other labor unions for that matter.

The precursor to movement careers is found in field organizers’ careers that existed in the SEIU from the ‘50s up until the ‘70s. Earlier field organizers had joint responsibilities as an officer of a local union and as an organizer for the national union. During the ‘70s, the field organizer was increasingly freed from responsibilities in his local union. In accordance to the increased importance that organizing received across the SEIU, increasingly in the ‘70s, the field organizer was expected to move from one location to another and expand the union territory. Thus, he acquired skills and status mobility through achievements in organizing rather than by moving up in his local union. The introduction of the IfJ necessitated careers, which, compared to field organizers’ careers, were even more separated from organizational structure. The IfJ also opened doors for members to construct informal careers in the union primarily relying on the social structure and not on the bureaucracy.
The new careers differ from previous careers structurally in their progression within the union and thus imply a change in the relationship staff have with members. Moreover, although individual variations exist, those who are recruited into lateral careers are prone to exhibit ideological differences in the way they see a union career. Below I discuss these differences.

The main structural progression of organizational careers in the SEIU was a vertical one. Vertical careers in the SEIU did not look dissimilar with staff careers in other unions that had a federated system characterized by a national union with its affiliated locals (Sayles & Strauss, 1967; Stieber, 1962; Ulman, 1955). Prototypical vertical careers are exhibited by national Presidents – all SEIU (and earlier, BSEIU) Presidents, including the current President Andrew Stern, started as a member, then typically led their own local union before they became a national staff and later the President.

I pointed out that field organizer careers were different in that since the ‘70s, they progressed laterally from local union to local union, and their mobility was characterized not by the vertical climb up the administrative ranks of the union but by skills and status acquired through organizing. But these were by far not the dominating form of career in the SEIU: in 1971, there were fifteen field organizers. SEIU records also suggest the field organizer career was lower in status than vertical careers. Pre-1970s, field organizers often led a precarious status in either or both of their fields of responsibility – they received little in the way of organizing subsidies from the national union and could and did get fired by local union Presidents who didn’t value their work. In 1973, President Hardy reported to the national Executive Board, whose members were primarily representatives of local unions, that he had righteously barred field organizers from attending national union conventions and that they would be required to be tested for Researcher positions:

I refused to agree to permitting the organizers to come to International Conventions. I believe that only the elected representatives of locals have a right to come to those conventions. With respect to the research positions, we told them that we would permit any who could meet the qualifications to take the tests for the Research Specialist positions. (SEIU, 1973)
In 1970, a field organizers' union was founded in the SEIU with ten members. The establishment of a union exclusively for field organizers underscores their separate identity in the SEIU.

Reforms under President John Sweeney in the '80s required a fortification of national level organizers for various reasons. By this time, the national union had taken responsibility over new and "break through" organizing. Presumably, national staff felt that local unions could not be counted on to implement large scale organizing as concurrently, they were undergoing re-organizing for divisional representation, a process that often proved contentious. Finally, because campaigns had developed standard practices, there was a perceived need for organizers who had received centralized training in these skills. Although no comprehensive record could be found on the numbers of new organizing recruits, I can infer from periodic references to new recruits and training programs, first at the national union, and then at the AFL-CIO's Organizing Institute, that dozens of organizers went through centralized training each year. In addition to graduates of centralized training programs, local unions hired their own organizers who then joined the national pool of organizers.

Like earlier field organizers, organizers hired since the '80s reforms built careers laterally and not vertically. They were charged with moving the frontiers of the JfJ rather than growing the union in a particular location. But unlike earlier field organizers, the new group of staff were recruited not among SEIU members but from outside the SEIU, from colleges and community organizers. The requisites of carrying out JfJ style organizing were thought to be so different from what was expected of local union staff that local unions, even when given the option of allocating their existing staff to new organizing jobs, found they simply could not. A report by a national union staff to Anna Burger, then a director at the national union and currently the President of the Change to Win federation, declared:

Each of these locals can be seen to be overstaffed in one way or another. Often, it is that there are too many service reps for the current membership. At the same time there are new staff members hired to do

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4 The AFL-CIO funded Organizing Institute (OI) was founded in 1990 with heavy involvement from SEIU and UNITE-HERE in designing and implementing its programs. The OI played an instrumental role in providing standardized on-the-job training for labor organizers designed to provide a deep immersion in a movement experience.
organizing. It is rare that the local has been able to convert a service rep to an organizer under the new types of projects we help locals create. Consequently, the local faces an extremely high staff cost. I think it is too easy for the local and the International to underestimate the costs of changing the nature of a local union.

(SEIU, 1986 - 1992)

A second factor that sets the JJJ organizers apart from earlier field organizers is the prominent role they played in the national union and, correspondingly, their relatively high status. The SEIU in the ‘80s and ‘90s was a draw for young, progressive college graduates. On the one hand, the directors of the newly created divisions made sure that only the best candidates came into the union. On the other, the union was not afraid to take risks by recruiting smart organizers who may not have had the required background on paper – as many staff would tell me, it was more important to see if the recruit had “the heart in the right place”. The union was especially open to hiring from minority groups, particularly second generation immigrants. Once hired, these organizers were immediately charged with the role of change agent and were given responsibilities that often exceeded their experience. Whether they expected it or not (or whether they wanted to), JJJ organizers were frequently charged with not only moving the organizing but also reforming the local union that hosted their campaign. Records show that JJJ organizers have been resented (and sometimes even personally attacked) by local union staff and officers, but they certainly were not regarded as low status.

Ideological differences also exist between earlier careers and the careers that were launched through the JJJ. The values espoused by organizational careers as apparent in the documents produced by local unions and the national union mainly adhere to building a strong union in order to protect workers’ rights. SEIU did have a strong moral current and it is safe to assume that those building careers in local unions and the national union shared a commitment to organizing low wage workers and semi professionals regardless of race, ethnicity or religion. But these values emerged from the work and identity of the union itself. By comparison, the new careers could potentially transport subjective values formed outside the organization into the work of the organization. Many staff hired into the JJJ had progressive worldviews formed from their education, upbringing or former worker experiences that made them ready to view the JJJ as a social movement. In fact, many staff recounted in interviews with me that seeing the JJJ primarily as a social movement and not only a union campaign was what attracted them to
their jobs with the SEIU. Such views formed prior to joining the SEIU dramatically influenced how staff related to members and their interests. In Essays 2 and 3 of this dissertation I argue that staff whose careers progress laterally (and not vertically) and have undergone politicizations that lead them to view their union work primarily as a social movement are building movement careers.

While staff movement careers are more readily visible because they are more institutionalized, I find that members also lead movement careers. Like staff, members’ movement careers start with politicizing experiences outside the realm of organizational life. The transportation of these experiences and worldviews into the organization transforms the meaning of roles that members play inside the union. Barriers to upward mobility as well as disinclinations prevent most members from obtaining staff jobs. But members obtain lateral mobility by acquiring skills and status in the completion of an organizational task. They also obtain mobility by acquiring status and respect within the community of janitors. Unlike members who ascend in the union through organizational careers, these members do not get absorbed into the union but remain a primarily local force.

I argue that changes in the organization of careers, specifically, the inception of lateral careers in the SEIU brought about by the implementation of the JfJ, represents the most significant feature of institutional change in current unionism as seen through changes in the SEIU in the last three decades. The shift from organizational orientation to movement orientation in staff careers and the development of members’ careers that are independent of hierarchical structures in the union have mediated the distance between the bureaucracy and social actors more than have structural reforms and changes in the allocation of resources. Furthermore, the new types of careers that reforms admitted into the union have the potential of helping resolve the tensions brought about the reforms.

The tension between global and local elements in the JfJ can be mediated by staff careers that move laterally, connecting the experiences of one locality to another and thereby buffering the relationship between rules and policies of the national union and the circumstances that dictate local needs. Likewise, members who build movement careers understand both the
organizational constraints faced by the union as well as the pain and grievances harbored by the members.

The tension between members’ desires for greater voice and representation and organizational interests for growth can be mediated principally by groups of members who collectively push for better representation in their local union. Staff also have mediating capabilities, but they are contractually bound to the organization and thus their efforts at changing the organization are heard as dissent or seen as exits from the organization.

Lastly, the tension between social structure and organizational structure can be mediated by the fact that movement careers emerge not from an organizational mandate or from technical expertise but from the social experience of being disadvantaged. These social experiences can be directly acquired, as in the case of members, or indirectly acquired, as is more frequently the case for staff. Thus interests and narratives from the social structure of the members are able to be communicated to the organizational structure through movement careers.

Movement careers then translate meaning across the realm of bureaucratic organization and social action, two spheres that have stood apart in tension in labor unions. Where these careers are strongest, I find a vibrant democracy with sustained member engagement and a tenacious commitment at the local union level to member representation. In Essays 2 and 3 I show empirically for members in Los Angeles and staff in the JfJ how movement careers help resolve tensions between the JfJ as a social movement and the SEIU as a bureaucracy. Essay 4 discusses the organizational and environmental contexts that foster movement careers.

Discussion: Institutional change in the labor movement

I stated in the Introduction to the dissertation that a major problem in the literature on institutional change in the labor movement has been that the process of organizational change has remained black boxed. Additionally, it is difficult to understand what exactly is new about social movement unionism because the shift to social movement unionism from bureaucratic unionism has been depicted as discontinuous states impacted by trends in the environment. I
have tried to address both these problems in this paper by extracting from the historical change process in the SEIU. Several observations can be made with respect to the emergence of social movement unionism.

First, the SEIU case proposes that institutional change is a dynamic, political process that often entails shifts in power across groups that embody the old and new institutions. In the SEIU, reforms accompanied political battles that purged the old guard and introduced into the local unions actors favorable to the reforms.

Second, bureaucratic unionism and social movement unionism did not change hands with organizational reform. Instead, elements of bureaucratic unionism have remained and ironically been fortified with the introduction of social movement elements into the union. The result is a hybrid model of templates that draw both on bureaucratic planning and social action.

Third, unanticipated consequences of the change process have opened doors to new relationships between the bureaucracy and members of the union. The designing of a campaign based on generating a social movement among immigrant janitors necessitated that the union institutionalize and elevate in status a career form that was unconventional and low status in previous years. Although lateral careers for staff were officially sanctioned by the union, the emergence of alternative careers for members was not anticipated by the change agents. In this paper, I have laid out the theoretical background for why movement careers are capable of mediating tensions inherent in top-down change in bureaucratic systems. In Part II of the dissertation I will show empirically how movement careers built by members and staff of the SEIU help sustain member engagement and prevent goal displacement.

The historical change process in the SEIU posits that institutional change in the labor movement is less wholesale and more piecemeal, and that it represents the dynamic co-existence of opposing elements. What scholars have characterized as a shift of unionism from bureaucratic to social movement types builds on past structures and practices. This study then supports work in historical institutionalism that has argued that institutional change is often an incremental process and involves political negotiations around meaning and practice. Thus, from this perspective, "major changes in institutional practice may be observed together with
strong continuity in institutional structures.” (Streeck & Thelen, 2005: 18). The launching of new organizing campaigns such as the Justice for Janitors has itself further centralized control into the national union, which has been pointed out for decades as the central trait of the bureaucratic union. Building bargaining power, the characteristic organizational goal of the bureaucratic union, still explains why the SEIU does what it does. But there are now other goals, such as effecting social change for the benefit of the low wage service worker, that drive the organization, goals that are tenaciously held and carried out by actors who have come into the union with their own visions and projects for social change.
## Appendix A. List of Justice for Janitors campaign localities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Local number</th>
<th>Year campaign started</th>
<th>Year campaign settled</th>
<th>Janitorial membership (Feb 06)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pittsburgh</td>
<td>29, merged into 517-29, now 3</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>993 (in '94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>mid 1986</td>
<td>Dec 1986 (6 months); 1993</td>
<td>2,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego</td>
<td>2828, merged to 1877</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>703 (in '94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Francisco</td>
<td>87, merged into 1877</td>
<td></td>
<td>never lost density</td>
<td>3,000 (in 94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seattle</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>1,800 (in '94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>399, later merged into 1877</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>1995 (and 2000)</td>
<td>9,500 (in '94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Jose</td>
<td>77, now 1877</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>5,040 (in '94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Failed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington DC</td>
<td>525, merged into 82, now 32BJ</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Aug-93</td>
<td>8,000 (4000 commercial)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baltimore</td>
<td>82, now 32BJ</td>
<td>late 90s, 2000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hartford</td>
<td>531, 32BJ</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detroit</td>
<td>79, now 3</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>1,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milwaukee</td>
<td>150, now 1</td>
<td>1991 or 92</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>380 (in '94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>1990</td>
<td>1,328 (in '94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>36, now 32BJ</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>4,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago suburbs</td>
<td>1 (merged with 25 in '98 &amp; 73 in '02)</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>suburbs 5,000 (total for Local 1: 22,000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYC</td>
<td>32B</td>
<td>1995?</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>63,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,500-2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Louis</td>
<td>50, now 1 (since 2003)</td>
<td>c. 1992</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>14,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern CT suburbs &amp; Stamford, CT</td>
<td>531, merged into 32BJ</td>
<td>1999-2000</td>
<td></td>
<td>4,700 (1,800 Stamford)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>32E, merged into 32BJ</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>new territory for 32BJ</td>
<td>6,000-7,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westchester, NY</td>
<td>32BJ</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>new territory for 32BJ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cincinnati</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indianapolis</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Houston</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td></td>
<td>6,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia suburbs</td>
<td>36, now 32BJ</td>
<td>ongoing</td>
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Essay 2 Linking Movement to Organization: Members' Movement Careers

Introduction

In the realm of progressive movements for social change, a long standing problem has been that while vulnerable social groups stand to gain most from them, movements are often dominated by formal organizations. The nature of the relationship between formal movement organizations and the beneficiaries of the movements is critical for the welfare of movement beneficiaries whom the movement seeks to serve, and thus for the overall effectiveness of the movement. This relationship, however, has faced inherent challenges that go as far back in history as the formal organizations themselves: structural oligarchy and goal displacement.

This paper is part of a larger project examining the organizational change process of a large service sector union, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). The SEIU has organized a predominantly immigrant workforce in its flagship campaign, the Justice for Janitors. In Los Angeles, where the campaign resulted in thousands of new members, the mobilization of workers was based on a social movement among immigrant janitors. I find that twenty years after the initial organizing under the Justice for Janitors in Los Angeles, the social movement exists in tension with the bureaucratic organization of the union. This finding contradicts the received wisdom in the literature about the SEIU and the Justice for Janitors, which generally emphasizes the social movement element and obfuscates the role of the bureaucratic organization.5

In addition to contradicting recent studies on reformed unions including the union in my study, my finding points to a broader theoretical puzzle. That is, the literature on social movements

5 Exceptions to this trend is Ruth Milkman's LA Story: Immigrant workers and the Future of the Labor Movement and Fantasia and Voss's Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement.
provides little wisdom about the dynamics under which bureaucracy and social movements can co-exist. The over-riding prediction in the resource mobilization tradition is that over time, members will become disengaged and initial goals will be displaced as a movement organization bureaucratizes. Despite this prediction, I show that member engagement and movement goals can be sustained, and they can be sustained when members build movement careers – careers that are defined not by the organization but by the experience acquired from being politicized in a movement.

We tend to think of careers in the context of bureaucratic organizations, but careers also exist in movements. These careers may appear in forms familiar to us in the organizations operating in the field of social movements. But movement careers also differ structurally as well as ideologically from conventional organizational careers. That is, while the typical progression of organizational careers is premised on vertical mobility within the organization, movement careers progress radially and horizontally, and within the larger movement community. In addition, movement career builders’ subjective understanding of their careers differ from that of those who build conventional organizational careers – their evaluation of progress in their careers revolves around changing the existing social arrangements rather than around self advancement. This paper helps resolve long standing problems in social movement literature – how to prevent organizational decay by inducing participation from members – by drawing on career theory. The bulk of the paper provides an inductive definition of movement careers and shows how these careers contribute to sustaining member engagement and movement goals in the SEIU Local Union in Los Angeles.

**Empirical puzzle: The bureaucracy that gave birth to a social movement**

In recent years, reformist trade unions including the SEIU have launched organizing campaigns that seek to revive elements of protest and social movement. The new tactics used by these unions and the ensuing growth in membership has prompted excited discussions among labor scholars about the return of “social movement unionism” – a model of unionism premised on organizing workers based on their social identities and ideas of social justice rather than
traditional collective bargaining issues (Clawson, 2003; Fantasia et al., 2004b; Lopez, 2004; Milkman & Voss, 2004). Studies on these unions have largely focused on the effectiveness of their organizing strategies. The fact that all of these reform unions are heavily bureaucratized organizations has seldom been the focus of attention in the scholarly literature. But scholars examining the decision-making process in these unions have pointed out that they more frequently employ top-down methods rather than grassroots deliberation (Fantasia et al., 2004b; Voss & Sherman, 2000), providing indications that bureaucracy is alive and well in these reformed unions.

Once we recognize that reformed unions that have re-introduced elements of social movement into their organizing campaigns are in fact large bureaucratic organizations, these unions present an empirical puzzle. That is, most empirical observations have rendered pessimistic predictions regarding the ability of bureaucracies to co-exist with social actors. In fact, with a few exceptions, studies have shown that bureaucratic organizations crowd out social actors over time (Michels, 1959 (1911); Piven & Cloward, 1977; Selznick, 1949). While studies have pointed to exceptions (Jenkins, 1977; Voss et al., 2000), these have tended to portray snapshots of the changes that existing bureaucracies go through in order to become ideologically radicalized or adopt new strategies. We do not then adequately understand how movements can be sustained inside a bureaucratic organization.

Theoretical puzzle: Sustaining the movement inside the bureaucracy

The empirical puzzle outlined above is paralleled by a similar theoretical puzzle. That is, two central tenets of the literature on social movements have been that organizations that represent or serve social movements will i) develop structural rigidity; ii) develop routinized behavior that will distance them from the stated goals of the social movement. The structural rigidity thesis is perhaps best known in the form of Robert Michels’ "iron law of oligarchy". Michels pointed out that progressive organizations, like all organizations, need to contend with the twin goals of efficiency and coordination. The most effective such organization is found in a bureaucracy, a form of organization in which general rules govern the pursuit of stated goals under a rationalized system of hierarchical roles (Weber, 1964; 1968: 956-58). Once
bureaucratized, Michels argued that the specialization and political skills necessitated to climb up the hierarchy in the bureaucratic organization will allow only some members of the organization to dominate decision-making. Thus a structural oligarchy, in which a select group that Michels called the “political class” (Michels, 1959 (1911): 33), emerges. The predicted outcomes in this thesis have been that over time, in a structurally rigid bureaucracy, members become disengaged and the organization moves away from initial movement goals (Michels, 1959 (1911); Selznick, 1949).

A productive stream of research since Michels has sought to identify conditions under which structural rigidity in movement organizations can be prevented. Inter alia, scholars have drawn attention to environmental factors such as inter-organizational competition (Minkoff, 1997); institutional contexts (Isaac et al., 2002; Zald et al., 1966); and the ebb and flow of protests (Staggenborg, 1998) as relevant to determining to what extent movement organizations develop structural rigidity. At the organizational level, Lipset, Trow and Coleman (1956) have pointed to existing social divisions in the International Typographical Union that created a balance of power among factions within the union and prevented one group from dominating the organization. But more recent research by Osterman (2006) suggests that the emphasis on structural rigidity per se may have been misplaced. Osterman, in a study of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), separates the problem of oligarchy from its consequences, and shows that despite the presence of oligarchy in the IAF, a progressive ideology re-enforced through training has encouraged member participation and prevented goal displacement in the IAF.

The second problem faced by social movement organizations is that of the development of routines among functionaries in bureaucratic organizations that distance them from the beneficiaries of the movement and its goals. While Michels associated the displacement of initially proclaimed goals with structural rigidity, other scholars appear to see the problem as a cognitive and behavioral issue that is quite separate from organizational structure. Merton (1940), an early authority on the problem of goal displacement, identified three trends in the behavior of functionaries in bureaucracies that can lead to a distancing of the organization from its client and membership base. First, rationalization of procedures, which initially is devised as a means to pursue organizational goals, can become routinized in practice, and eventually
become perceived as the end itself. Merton associated this blind habitual following of rules with Veblen’s concept of “trained incapacity”, or “that state of affairs in which one’s abilities function as inadequacies or blind spots” (Merton, 1940: 562). Second, bureaucrats develop an “esprit de corps”, a group mentality that privileges their own professional norms and judgments about the work of the organization than those prescribed by policy. Strong group identity among functionaries, then, can lead to their distancing from the base. Third, Merton referred to the tendency of bureaucrats to think of themselves as representatives of a higher order, that represented by the entire structure of the bureaucracy. He pointed out that this tendency can lead to over-confidence in their judgment, and in worse cases, a usurpation of authority (Merton, 1940: 566).

Weber, in his theories on the emergence of bureaucratic systems, also expressed concern about the formation of a distinct “status group” among functionaries (Weber, 1968: 1001). Weber thought routinization of functions was necessary if a movement was to survive the eventual demise of its founding leader, whose authority Weber characterized as “charismatic authority”. Nevertheless, Weber worried that “routinization” on the part of the administrative staff in a bureaucracy would transform what was initially an ideological conviction based on faith in the movement into economic interests. Thus, Weber pointed out, the consequences of the “routinization of charisma” for administrative personnel are that:

Only the members of the small group of enthusiastic disciples and followers are prepared to devote their lives purely idealistically to their call. The great majority of disciples and followers will in the long run 'make their living' out of their 'calling' in a material sense as well. Indeed, this must be the case if the movement is not to disintegrate. (Weber, 1964: 367)

Given that structural rigidity appears to have progressed fairly rapidly in the SEIU during the ‘70s and ‘80s, and given the important role that paid staff have played in the union, the Justice for Janitors campaign presents a theoretical puzzle at the same time as it represents an empirical puzzle. That is, in a bureaucratized organization where structural rigidity has already developed, how can members’ engagement be sustained and the displacement of movement goals prevented? The distinction made by Osterman (2006) between structural oligarchy and what scholars perceive to be the consequences of structural oligarchy seems relevant to this research. In addition to Osterman’s emphasis on organizational culture, I identify alternative
career forms as a mechanism that prevents the consequences of routinizing practices and behavior in a structurally rigid bureaucracy.

Central to the rigidity – member disengagement/goal displacement nexus has been an assumption that formal careers sponsored by the bureaucracy are the main and perhaps only means by which organizational members can gain ascendancy. These careers are constructed around functional tasks in the organization; thus, their structures are integrated into the hierarchy of the bureaucracy. Mobility in conventional careers in bureaucracies is defined by a vertical progression within the organization, represented by a series of jobs that are incrementally placed higher up in the hierarchy (Weber, 1968: 958-963). Alternative careers to the vertically progressing formal career in the bureaucracy have hitherto not been addressed in the bureaucracy literature. Career theory in the tradition of the Chicago School of Sociology provides a basis for understanding alternative careers and why they may provide a means for sustaining idealism inside a bureaucratised organization.

A proposition: Alternative career forms, movements, and formal organizations

Research on careers has produced a much richer view of how careers are shaped than is suggested by the iron law thesis. The Chicago School of Sociology tradition in career research in particular has emphasized that careers originate in social structures and are nurtured by groups outside of hierarchical organizations – for example, communities of practice, occupations, affinity groups (Barley, 1989; Becker, 1953; Becker & Strauss, 1956). Much of this insight emerged from ethnographic studies of individuals in diverse occupations and user communities, such as janitors (Gold, 1950), marijuana users (Becker, 1953), physicians (Becker, 1961), and real estate salespersons (Hughes, 1928). Central to the Chicago School of Sociology tradition in the study of careers is the notion that careers encompass both objective criteria and subjective values. Careers not only embody job characteristics and movements among organizational positions, but equally importantly, they encompass subjectively-held meanings attributed to one’s progress (Stebbins, 1970; Van Maanen et al., 1976). Such subjective evaluations take place when one draws on one’s past experiences and visions of the future in order to explain one’s current status (Faulkner, 1974). Subjective evaluations are also arrived at by thinking of one’s
position as a member in a collectivity and judging one’s progress with respect to this collectivity (Barley 1989: 51); thus, careers link individuals to social structure.

The Chicago School tradition in career research has inspired conceptualizations of career progressions in organizations that are non-vertical. Studies of blue collar workers by Robert Thomas (1989), for example, provided the basis for understanding how in some careers, progress is defined not by obtaining larger roles along the organization’s hierarchy, but by the accretion of knowledge, respect and social skills on the job. John VanMaanen and Ed Schein (1976) also showed that careers can progress radially, which they defined as moving from the periphery to the core of an organization’s culture. Figure 4 depicts radial and horizontal progressions of careers within organizations.

<Figure 4> Horizontal, radial, and vertical progressions of organizational careers

While initial theorizing of alternative career trajectories has depicted these progressions as taking place within the organization, it also forms the basis of understanding larger trajectories of mobility – within the occupational group, within communities of practice, and within affinity groups.

The concept of movement careers builds on research on alternative career forms to the vertical career in large organizations. It draws on the idea that careers originate from the individual’s interpretation of experiences among collectivities, and proposes that politicizing experiences in social movements can germinate such careers. The context for such careers moves to organizations as actors seek organizational roles that validate their movement experiences. For various reasons, movement careers do not progress vertically when they unfold within
organizations. Studying the progression of movement careers necessitates expanding the current definitions of radial progression to include movements from the periphery to the core of the social community. I propose that movement careers help resolve the dilemma of sustaining member engagement and movement goals inside the bureaucratic organization.

Methodology

Data Collection

The research question for this project, how member engagement and movement goals are sustained in a bureaucratic organization, necessitated choosing a field site where the JfJ had generated a social movement among workers in its initial organizing phase. I chose Los Angeles as a field site because earlier studies showed that the initial mobilization phase was protracted and conflictual; included large scale street actions; and involved the participation of large numbers of workers (Erickson et al., 2002; Fantasia et al., 2004b; Fisk, Mitchell, & Erickson, 2000; Mines & Avina, 1992; Rudy, 2004). I used secondary accounts to determine that a social movement had occurred among janitors in Los Angeles during the first five years of the JfJ, from 1987 to at least 1992. Subsequently during my field work, I was able to confirm that many members still present in the union who had participated in the organizing activities were politicized by the experience.

Interviews with organizers who played key roles in the thirty JfJ campaigns nation-wide (conducted October, 2005 – March, 2006) and archival work in the archives of the SEIU (March, 2006 and March, 2007) were used to compile a background history of the SEIU and the JfJ campaign, as well as a detailed history of the JfJ in Los Angeles. Intensive fieldwork in Los Angeles was conducted on a full-time basis during April – June, 2006. Ethnographic

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6 I draw on Oberschall (1972) and Melucci (1989) to define a social movement in the JfJ campaign as involving i) the mobilization of the majority of the workers for broader social change and not just economic issues, such as higher wages and benefits; and ii) politicization of the workers who participated in the campaign. I do not argue that the JfJ campaign is itself a social movement. In fact, interviews and document analysis in 2005 prior to field data collection revealed that very few JfJ campaigns resulted in a social movement because in most cities, mobilization for union recognition happened rapidly, and used top-down methods to reach large numbers of workers. In these latter cities, only a subset of members is presumed to have experienced alternations in their worldviews.
observations in Los Angeles included actors’ behavior, events (meetings, rallies, workplace visits, social parties) and processes. In addition, I conducted 37 interviews with members, and 26 interviews with staff and administrators of the union. Interviews with members were conducted inside the union if the member was thus inclined, and otherwise in members’ homes and public spaces. Interviews with staff and administrators were conducted either in the union building or in cars while driving long distance with interviewees for union work. Interviews were conducted by the author in either Spanish or English depending on the interviewee’s language of choice.

Early in my fieldwork, it emerged from initial observations that the political behavior of members had implications for organizational outcomes. I thus theoretically sampled (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), from among the members I had interviewed, 27 members who were at visibly different stages in the extent of their politicization. Taking a narrative approach to obtaining life histories, I obtained from these twenty-seven members their narrated biographies (Cochran, 1990). In these latter interviews, I asked members to recount the story of their lives, probing them additionally about their journeys to the United States, how they became janitors and the structure and content of their involvement with the JFJ and the SEIU. A typical interview in which I obtained someone’s narrated biography lasted from one to two hours. Often, a second or third interview was conducted with the same individual.

In addition to interviews and observations, a full set of Executive Board minutes, labor contracts and dues records were obtained from the LA local for the years 2000-2006 and analyzed for this study.

As part of a larger dissertation project, I also conducted observations and interviews in three other SEIU JFJ sites: Washington DC (fieldwork for two months); Boston (fieldwork for one month); and Houston (fieldwork for two weeks). Work in these sites contributed to my analysis of the conditions under which movement careers are likely to develop and play a significant role in organizational politics.
Analysis

Interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Interviews and observations were analyzed using a software package for qualitative analysis. In coding the narrative biographies, I was able to discern distinct stages of social development throughout the course of members’ politicizations from the movement as well as subsequently in their engagement with the union. These stages built on one another – they were interdependent – and formed a cohesive trajectory in what members saw as their long term involvement with the JfJ and the SEIU. These stages became the bases for developing the concept of movement careers.

Separately from the narrated biographies, I coded members’ actions in the union as well as the union’s organizational practices. From this process an association emerged between members’ actions in the union and their career stages. I then re-coded the actions with stages of careers in mind to trace more systematically the linkages between the particular stage of a member’s movement career and the scope of action of that individual inside the union.

Factors outside the immediate fieldwork environment, such as the organizational history of the SEIU local union in Los Angeles as well as the social context of immigrant Los Angeles, were taken into account in interpreting the results of my analyses at the individual (careers, actions) and organizational (practices, processes, culture) level.

The units of observation in this study are behavior, narratives and practice. The unit of analysis is the intersection between individual careers that members lead and organizational practices at the union.

<Table 5>  Graphical representation of analytical scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Observed categories</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Stages of careers, Actions in union</td>
<td>Interaction bet. career stages &amp; actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td>Practices, Processes</td>
<td>Interaction bet. individual &amp; organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual</td>
<td>Organizational history, Immigrant Los Angeles</td>
<td>Interaction bet. individual, organizational, and contextual factors</td>
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The Setting

Development of bureaucracy and oligarchy in the Los Angeles union

The JfJ was introduced to Los Angeles in 1986 after its first and successful debut in Denver the previous year. Los Angeles was selected among several potential markets by national organizers who had assessed the potential for success there. Union membership in the Los Angeles building services market peaked in the mid-1970s but fell precipitously after that due to increased subcontracting and non-union growth in the suburbs, trends that also de-unionized the janitorial industry across major cities in the U.S. (Erickson et al., 2002; SEIU, 1986a).

Efforts to organize Los Angeles targeted specific districts for a visible success that would help galvanize other districts. Union organizers were deployed to these districts to mobilize non-union workers as well as union members who were estranged from a formerly inactive union. Initial efforts to target Wilshire Corridor stalled, but a change in target area to Century City, a posh Hollywood back office, generated large momentum among workers there. Workers organized a strike in Century City in 1990; when police beatings during the strike caused a worker’s death and countless injuries, the Century City strike became engrained as the symbol of JfJ militancy and, for workers, a moral basis for arguing for their ownership over the union.

The launching of the JfJ in Los Angeles brought organizational changes that intensified administrative bureaucracy in the local union. Bureaucratization was enhanced by the involvement of the national union in local union affairs - I identify three phases over which this involvement unfolds. In the initial phase, from 1987 to approximately 1992, the national union planned and directed the campaign. The local union administration, which had weak support from the membership, cooperated with the national union by putting its staff to work on the campaign. The intervention of the national union in local union affairs through campaign administration helped integrate local union practices and policies with those of the bureaucratized national union. After the initial mobilization phase, a second period of national union involvement ensued during 1995 to 1997, this time through “trusteeship” of the local by
the national union.\footnote{A trusteeship, a right that is constitutionally guaranteed in most national trade unions, puts the local union leadership and resources directly under the control of the national union.} Structural rigidity in the Los Angeles union has also ensued from mergers with other local unions in the region since 1997 that created a California-wide local. The LA local first merged into Local 1877, a Northern California-wide local at the time; later, San Francisco and San Diego locals joined in. Regional mergers, which are being promoted nationally throughout the SEIU, make it harder for ordinary members to participate in formal union governance. <Figure 5> summarizes the sequence of events in the Los Angeles local relevant to this study.

**Figure 5** Timeline of the Justice for Janitors in Los Angeles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>National union starts research on LA</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>National union hires LA Organizing Director; JfJ launched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>Century City strike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Opposition wins internal elections; National union puts LA in trusteeship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>LA trusteeship ends; LA is merged with Northern California local (presidency remains in LA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>LA workers strike for contract renewal; LA union implements national plan to raise members' dues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>San Francisco members merge into state-wide local</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>San Diego members merge into state-wide local</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Distribution of formal authority and power across groups**

Formal authority in the union is distributed across three distinct groups in the union who hold different interests. The largest group is the members, who pay relatively high monthly
membership dues compared to members of other unions in comparable occupations\textsuperscript{8} and want more voice and ownership in the local. Most immigrant janitors who are members of the LA local are first generation immigrants from either Mexico or Central America. Members have grievances originating not only from their low wage jobs but also from a lack of legal status in this country and low social mobility. Members want the union to do more – obtain higher wages, more respect at the workplace, and opportunities for advancement.

The second group comprises members of the administration. The administration of the union includes elected officers (President, Vice President, Secretary-Treasurer), as well as senior directors who head the functional departments of the local (such as organizing, member representation, politics, etc.) and hold disciplinary power over other staff in their unit. Most members of the administration have previous experience as line staffers, but this identity does not by itself unify their interests with staff; moreover, some of them have been recruited by the union directly into managerial jobs. Collectively, members of the administration are charged with fulfilling organizational goals, and the success of their individual careers depends on how much they each do towards this end.

The last group consists of staff, who are paid employees of the local union. Staff construct formal careers in the union - their jobs are classified by function, level, and tenure. Staff in the Los Angeles local belong to an independent union of their own. With a few exceptions, staff have at least some college education, and several hold graduate degrees. Though they play crucial roles in fulfilling the goals of the organization, staff at the Los Angeles local are not the local’s ultimate decision makers: staff operate under the authority of the union administration, and, on the whole, turn over too quickly to have lasting influence.

Formal democracy in the local is established by both the constitutions of the local and national unions. By formal democracy, I refer to regular elections, and the existence of a decision-making body that includes members. Formal authority in the union is shared by members and officers –

\textsuperscript{8} In 2000, the national union introduced the Unity Fund, a separate fund dedicated to break-through organizing projects used at the discretion of the national union. In LA, the introduction of the Unity Fund increased members' dues by a monthly \$4.33 each year for 5 years. Currently, a janitor earning hourly wages of \$10 (a rate that translates into monthly wages of \$1,600) pays \$52.65 in monthly dues, which includes a Unity Fund tax to the national union of \$21.65.
members are eligible to run for seats in the executive board, the highest decision making body in the local, and officers hold seats ex-officio seats in the executive board. In reality, however, power is not equally distributed across these groups. Officers turn over very rarely, whereas members who hold executive board position can lose their seats as a result of an internal election, held every three years. Administrators, which includes directors of functional union departments as well as office-holders, command the work of staff and hold hire-and-fire authority over them. Administrators, then, are the oligarchs of the local union. <Figure 6> is a diagram of the current governance and organizational structure of the Los Angeles local (highlighted boxes in grey show governance structure relevant to the geographic area covered by the initial LA JfJ campaign).

Figure 6 Governance Structure and Organization of Los Angeles Local

The structure of governance of the Los Angeles union and the advantage that administrators hold over staff and members are not dissimilar to those of local unions belonging to other service sector unions. The organizational diagram is that of a bureaucracy – it is organized by functional units with line managers reporting to an executive body. Members would normally
only appear in the formal organizational chart if they held executive board seats. Typically under such circumstances, members would be marginalized from decision making.

Outcomes to be explained: Vibrant democracy, engaged members and contested goals

The conception of unions as self-governing, participatory organizations has long been plagued in reality by such things as member apathy and the legal mandate for members to join unions as a condition of employment (Anderson, 1978; Lipset, Trow, & Coleman, 1956; Sayles et al., 1967; Strauss, 1991). Despite bureaucracy and oligarchy, which are alive and well in the Los Angeles union, the striking aspect about the Los Angeles union is that it is a vibrant democracy. In other unions of similar size and scope, there typically also exists a structure for formal democracy – members sit on the executive board and committees – but decisions are taken only by a few. By contrast, in the Los Angeles union, members play functional roles in all aspects of union work, including organizing, representation, contract enforcement, political mobilization, and training. Members make up the thematic committees in the union, where they deliberate on recommendations to the executive board. These recommendations are then voted on by the executive board and ratified as policy. At the workplace level, there is a system of member tutelage where more experienced members teach newer workers how to defend themselves in the workplace. One member described what this system looks like on the ground:

I learned a lot from those who were stewards [worksite member representatives] in other buildings, from the executive board members. They would go on teaching me how to do things, how to be a steward, so that I could attack the company or know how to win [grievance] cases. From there I think I got very involved and I think I showed the people in that building [his worksite] that I was capable of doing anything legal in that building. We agitated to get bad supervisors out or managers at [company] who made errors. We removed a lot of people there who were unfair from the part of the company.

Second, members play an integral role in union governance. Members use the executive board to promote policies friendly to members and contest and at times block policies that may jeopardize their interests. Members are active in ad hoc and advisory committees set up to investigate new or problematic issues, such as the sale of the union building, dues increases, and allegations of member mistreatment by staff. Through their roles in the union, members work to increase transparency and fairness in the union. Members have sought and obtained
changes in union policy to require the disclosure of union records. For example, in 2005 members initiated a proposal (which the executive board ratified) to mandate mailing copies of quarterly union financial records to all members. The executive board passed a vote to mandate mailing copies of quarterly union financial records to all members. In June 2006, members in the executive board requested and obtained from the administration a promise to share records on members who were paid to work on union projects. There is an opposition faction among the members, and, although not very large and certainly not the major countervailing power to the union administration, this group acts as a catalyst to individual members’ political participation in the union.

Third, members carry movement ideals into the organization and hold the union accountable to them. Members expressed the belief that the JfJ emerged from their purposive actions rather than from strategies devised by the national union. Members distinguished between the movement, which they believed they themselves had built, and the union, which they saw as an organization occupying and managing the JfJ movement. In many members’ accounts, both publicly proclaimed and privately disclosed in interviews, the only group that can faithfully carry out the goals of the janitorial workers’ cause is the janitors themselves. I listened to countless statements such as the following expressed by a member who spoke to fellow workers in a union meeting:

We have struggled to get the company off our back and sometimes we have struggled to make even the union listen to us. What we have now is the result. We want no one to take advantage of us because we are workers. For us, there are very little opportunities. An undocumented worker has little chances. No one can help you, not the union, your government, not the companies.

Lastly, members pushed to keep organizational goals close to the interest of members and not that of the union administration. SEIU as an organization, and the Los Angeles local as its local unit, prioritizes organizational growth and “power building” over member representation and internal union governance. Building power through organizational growth is thus an organizational goal that has led SEIU’s efforts for reforming the broader labor movement. By contrast, members on the whole desire better service and representation. For most staff, both organizing and representation were important, but as mentioned previously, staff turn over too quickly to have an impact on internal affairs. I observed a constant, almost daily contestation between members on the one hand and staff and administrators on the other over organizing
and representation. Participants in this contestation examined the relative merits of these goals and fought to secure staff time and other resources for their respective desired goal. Members raised the issue of re-prioritizing organizational goals in small ways, as was observed in an executive board meeting I attended where members refused to discuss an item on the table before ways to ensure proper member representation was first tackled. They also raised this issue more formally, such as by organizing member delegations from their area to executive board meetings in order to convey their discontent with the quality of member representation. Members’ agitation for better representation over the years have resulted in the introduction of internal reforms in 2006 that included re-allocating staff time to dedicate more time to member representation. Thus, despite predictions in the literature that a bureaucratized organization moves away from goals relevant to its members, the Los Angeles union has kept member representation among its priorities. This outcome has not come easy in this local union, nor is it the norm in other unions pursuing “social movement” strategies. Rather, it is the result of constant member agitation for re-prioritization of organizational goals.

Members in the Los Angeles union

One possible explanation for the vibrancy of member participation in the Los Angeles union is if the members in this union were exceptional and thus different from those of other unions. But members in this union are poor candidates for mobilization. Although the union does not collect data on members’ characteristics, my interviews point to several factors that indicate no prior reason to expect members to participate in union activities.

Janitors in Los Angeles, as in most cities in the U.S. and other advanced industrialized countries, are mostly immigrants. In the U.S., they are mostly from Mexico or from various countries in Central America. Many are undocumented. They are people who have, in the words of a union staff, “fallen through the cracks” of community organizations. Janitors often work a second job.

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9 It should be apparent to students of the labor movement that this debate mirrors the larger debate around goals in the labor movement.

10 The scholarly literature has tended to depict immigrants as members of communities that are institutionally rich (Breton, 1964), densely networked (Massey et al., 1993; Saxenian, Motoyama, & Quan, 2002), and high in social capital.
during the daytime or on weekends in addition to their full time union job (the second job is usually not unionized and pays less). Thus most janitors are pressed for time to spend on developing themselves outside of their work.

In addition, some workers faced a host of additional problems for participating in the union. Some members were recent arrivals to the U.S. Some worked only temporarily in their job as unionized janitors and thus had less occasion to interact with the union. For others, life cycle issues affected how much time they could devote to union activities. Some members considered themselves too old to get involved; others were busy with childcare responsibilities, whether their own or their children’s. These reasons explained why, out of the twenty-seven members I collected narrated biographies from, eight were not building movement careers. I focus the rest of the paper on those nineteen members whom I identified as currently building movement careers, including one member whose career was temporarily put on hiatus as he was going through some difficult personal times.

The Making of Movement Careers

If members in the Los Angeles union are not natural candidates for mobilization, what distinguishes those members who build movement careers from their peers? I construct an inductive definition of movement careers from members’ narrative biographies. Excerpts below from the narrative biography of Liliana\(^\text{11}\) show most of the elements of a movement career.

As with all members I interviewed, I asked Liliana how she got involved with the union. She replied:

How I started getting involved in politics... I worked with [company name] and they started asking for papers. I felt my face going like it was paralyzed because all my family was working with [company name]. [Liliana’s family members were all undocumented at the time]. Little by little I realized that electing politicians that are going to be on the side of workers, one can bring about change. I started as a door knocker and then became lead for a small group. Then last year they gave me the opportunity to be

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\(^\text{11}\) All names of interviewees are pseudonyms.
a coordinator of a campaign. So I’ve climbed step by step. Not only for my family, but we can make change for many families. And that’s why I’ve liked it and I’d like to learn more to see what more we can do.

I knew that Liliana was active in her children’s schools around issues of bilingual parents’ rights, and asked her how she became engaged in them.

[How did you become involved in your children’s schools?] I realized that it’s important to be involved in the union but also in your personal life to be involved in your children’s schools and know the process. I started when my son was in 3rd grade and now he’s in 8th grade. I started to be part of the school board. Now I am president of the bilingual program that’s called ILA. I thought that the administration was doing things right at first, but little by little as I got involved I realized that they weren’t doing things right.

Eventually I learned that Liliana ended up divorcing her husband, who did not approve of her new activities.

First, those who I report as having movement careers report having had politicizing experiences, whether these occurred during members’ involvement in the JFJ campaign, or in other facets of their lives. Many workers spoke of an epiphany at work, or experiences of discrimination and degradation stemming from their social status as immigrants. I draw from Gamson, Fireman, and Rytina (1982) to define politicization as involving the development of an injustice frame, or the attribution of blame for one’s predicaments to a systemic source. Politicization happened in a relational context, and it was often the assignment of collective meaning to personal injuries that transformed people’s outlook on their situations. One member said that thinking about his participation in the JFJ strike in terms of fighting for his family and his co-workers enabled him to step into his role as a leader in the strike:

[How did you decide to get involved in the strike?] I am a janitor, a member, I am fighting for these workers that don’t have anything. When we were on strike, I thought it three times. I was the steward and pushing people to come out, but I thought it over three times. Why? Because I have a family, a home to maintain, my wife and daughter. But if I threw myself everyone was going to join under me. I was thinking about it but what was I going to say to the people, I had impelled them. And how I decided was, I am going to go out for my family, I am going to go out for me, I want better wages, more respect, and health insurance.

Second, through politicizing experiences, members acquired a new worldview, and this transformed view typically affected various facets of their life. In Liliana’s case, the initial politicizing experience came from realizing that her entire family could be dismissed due to their immigration status. This realization not only changed her views about union activity but
also how she related to institutionalized politics, her view of her role in her children's education, and ultimately her sense of power in the relationship with her husband.

Politicized members began to think of themselves as members of a collectivity, and to define their progress in terms of their position within this collectivity. For most members I spoke to, this collectivity was broadly the community of immigrant workers, and more narrowly the community of janitors who had gone through the JFJ together and had a common base of experiences that defined them as a group. In this way, they became political actors in the sense construed by Hannah Arendt, a citizenry that can only be practiced in a community of equals (Arendt, 1958).

Lastly, politicization made members likely candidates to fill organizational roles, both because they sought to fulfill a heightened sense of political awareness, and because staff were always on the lookout for interested members. These individuals brought into the roles they played at the union their changed worldviews and sense of selves. The infusion of organizational work with changed subjective values often transformed the meaning of these roles for these members. Liliana explained her involvement in electoral politics through the union as being able to improve conditions not only for her family but “for many families”. Similarly, other members told me their work at the union was their personal “wealth” and “prize”, and a chance to “help others”. Maria, a mother of three who has been separated from her children in El Salvador for eleven years, expressed this most succinctly:

I like the work here because I am helping my own coworkers and trying to help them and take on the [grievance] cases, see how they are in terms of salaries, warnings, firing. [Explains the work she does at the members Service Center.] And like that, all of us fight here. It is a chain here. But yes, it gives me pleasure to serve my co-workers, my own co-workers.

She then went on to say that helping others at the union helped keep her “alive” because it meant that she too “can go out and collaborate and put down [her] little grain of sand in this movement”:

I like the work here because I am helping my own coworkers and trying to help them and take on the [grievance] cases, see how they are in terms of salaries, warnings, firing. [Explains the work she does at the members Service Center.] And like that, all of us fight here. It is a chain here. But yes, it gives me pleasure to serve my co-workers, my own co-workers.
Because roles members play at the union provide a chance to fulfill their personal visions of a better world, members seek out more roles. As I show below, the outcomes of this process for the individual are status, skill, and power.

That roles can be transformed through the attribution of subjective meaning is central to the integrative tradition in career theory. This tradition maintains that careers encompass both external and internal perspectives. That is, careers carry both objective criteria, such as the occupation, job level, and task characteristics of one's work, as well as subjective evaluations, such as how one defines oneself in light of what one does, what one values and how one defines success (Van Maanen et al., 1976). The infusion of objective roles with subjective value has the potential to transform these roles. In Van Maanen and Schein's words:

The internal career created by an individual transforms the purely real or external career as the course of events unfolds. It reflects the goals and values held by the individual in relation to his working life and the criteria of success by which he judges himself. (Van Maanen and Schein, 1976: 48)

Examples of how such transformations help sustain one's dignity and view of self-worth for workers with low prestige jobs abound (Gold, 1950; Hughes, 1984; Lamont, 2000; Thomas, 1989).

The combination of internal and external perspectives is also central to Sabel's (1980) concept of "careers at work". For Sabel, careers are the subjective response of workers to the objective conditions of production - the unfolding of workers' worldviews through a series of experiences at work over time (Thomas, 1989: 372). Such a view contrasts with the conventional notion of careers as a series of objectified roles or jobs, and is the basis of thinking about meaningful progressions of careers that are not dependent on vertical mobility inside the organization.

The Progression of Movement Careers

Three portraits of successful movement careers

At the height of their movement careers, actors can have a broad impact on the organization that operates in the movement domain. Not only do they possess the skills, expertise and political savvy to influence organizational practice; they are also legitimated by the reputation
and status they have gained in the movement community, and thus command mobilizing power over others. I identified several members in the union as being at the height of their careers; these individuals possessed great wisdom and charisma, and above all, a sense of moral obligation that drove their work at the union. Below I present the portraits of three such individuals.

<Bernardo Santos>

Bernardo came to the United States from Guatemala in the ‘80s because he could not find a job in the economic unrest following civil war. His first job was as a day laborer in a construction crew run by ethnic managers. He saw many problems in this job: workers were mistreated and exploited, and work was irregular. He turned to a janitorial job because, “This was a stable job, if nothing else.” He did not realize at first that he was brought in by a non-union cleaning company that replaced a unionized contractor in the building he cleaned. He was angered when he found out he earned half the wages of the previous workers who worked there, and tried to get information on union representation. At the time, the JfJ organizers were targeting a different area of Los Angeles, and Bernardo was told to wait. When the union started organizing in Century City in 1989, Bernardo, who worked in Century City, became extremely active in the JfJ. He mobilized co-workers from his own building and from surrounding buildings. He was part of the core group of strike workers who participated in the now historic Century City strikes, which was instrumental in galvanizing public opinion in support of the janitors and ultimately won them union recognition with the largest cleaning companies.

Bernardo recounted being transformed by the solidarity, hope, and sense of ownership that emerged among workers partaking in the strikes. He also stated that he subsequently became disenchanted with what he perceived as the union’s exclusion of members in the contract negotiations that followed. In Bernardo’s words:

We were quite joyful because we were getting close with each other who had been working close by but previously we didn’t have that “convivio” (conviviality). For me it was the best because there was no interest intervening, it was pure, I felt it and my coworkers felt it. If someone gave us a pizza we would cut it up into little pieces and eat it together happily. And with the passing years things have changed and they are not the same. [...] We thought we were fighting for a new contract that we were going to make. It turned out they already had a contract and all they wanted to do was to level the contract across LA. That wasn’t bad but they didn’t instruct us, they treated us like, like, let’s say [we were] a little
ignorant. But we weren't ignorant, we knew what we were doing. [Were you satisfied with the contract?] Yes, we were, but we wanted participation, and we didn't have participation.

Bernardo then got involved with the burgeoning opposition movement among members in the Los Angeles local and eventually became one of the most prominent opposition leaders in the building services local union. Although the opposition group has never gained political power in the union since 1995, Bernardo's personal influence both within the opposition group as well as in the union as a whole has grown. He has won every election he has run for and has held his seat as a member of the executive board since 1995, the first year that newly-organized janitorial members under the JfJ were eligible to run for executive board seats. Bernardo's political constituency in Century City is strong and vocal. At building meetings I attended in Century City where Bernardo was present, the reverence members held for him was evident. He is a quiet but very effective public speaker. Others in his jurisdiction had run against Bernardo in elections, but in vain. People in the union said that Bernardo embodied the legacy of workers' struggle in the Century City strikes.

Over the years Bernardo has served on various committees of the union, including the important Finance and Personnel committees. Bernardo's popularity and political power is respected by the administration.

Bernardo says his family has sacrificed much during his most active days in the late '80s and early '90s. Now, he tries to balance union activities with time for his family, by for example, trying not to attend meetings over the weekend. He is devoted to his wife and child, and told me that “many people who are rich don’t have the peace that we do”.

<Josefina Reyes>

Josefina was a guerrilla activist in El Salvador before she fled to the U.S. in the late '70s when her cover was revealed. She worked as a seamstress in a sweatshop for a number of years before becoming a janitor. She said she hated the abuse and the precariousness of the piece rate system

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12 The opposition movement among members in Los Angeles included both janitorial workers as well as healthcare workers who were dissatisfied with the local union's administration being increasingly directed by policies set by the national union. After the local union was re-organized in 1997 by industry and healthcare members joined another local union, the opposition group in building services lived on as the Reformistas.
in sweatshops. For Josefina, the janitorial job was an alternative to jobs in sweatshops and "domestic" jobs cleaning someone else’s house, which she considered demeaning. On several occasions, Josefina pronounced the janitorial career as a “profession” worthy of respect.

But respect on the job has been hard earned for Josefina. Even before she was known to union staff and offered roles at the union, she had a history of mobilizing her co-workers against management whenever someone was mistreated. When she was “discovered” in a union meeting in the early ‘90s, she quickly moved to the forefront of the JfJ campaign, and since then, has been in every major JfJ demonstration, whether in California or out of state, often appearing in pictures that accompanied newspaper articles on JfJ organizing. She walked miles on each of these demonstrations despite her diabetic condition. Josefina is held in esteem by union administrators, members in the opposition faction, mentees, and members in her district alike.

For Josefina, the union represents the outcome of a workers struggle that she knows only too well. She personally feels “one with the union”, and because she has “sacrificed too much” to have it, she said she could not let others attack it. Politically, she has been associated with the pro-administration faction ever since she emerged as a leader. In an interview, she explained her vision of the union as the incarnation of the janitors themselves:

I’ve told people if this ship sinks I sink with it, and if it floats I float with it. Because to have what we have, it’s cost me, it’s cost me. […] They [members of the opposition group] attack the organization. [The local’s President] can be ousted but what about us? [The local’s President] is not the union, not the leader. He is the one who gets the business, up there with the politicians and the International. But we are the ones who fight to organize and to grow. All of us, we are the leaders, not one of us, [but] together. It’s a general, universal leadership. […] I tell them you know, your ideas are good, but don’t use them against [the union], because if you hurt the organization, you hurt yourselves. We can’t throw us away.

Josefina’s view of the union as an embodiment of the workers downplays the role of administrators, whom she calls “lightbulbs” because they are useless without electricity. She did not hesitate to plan the ousting of a particular administrator if and when she believed he had disavowed his commitment to member representation. At the time of my fieldwork, she told me she was planning a “coup d’état” against the union president, meaning that she would mobilize against his re-election. The failure of this plan (as it ultimately did not come to fruition) did not jeopardize her career, though. She was elected in the 2006 elections as an at-large
executive board member, a more prestigious seat than a district-based executive board seat, which she insisted the administration nominate her for.

Josefina re-married after coming to the U.S. but kept close in touch with children from a previous marriage in El Salvador. The loss of one of these children, who had been abused in her marriage, drove Josefina to drink for a few years. She said grief thrust her farther into union activities. She leads a modest and relatively quiet personal life. She has often had to leave her husband alone while she did union work.

<Manuel Villegas>

Manuel described his life prior to coming to the U.S. as not a particularly political life. He had a drinking problem, which he called his "vice". His sister, a janitor in Los Angeles and a member of the union, invited him to join her in the early '90s in the hopes of providing the change of scenery needed to reduce his drinking (he eventually became sober). He joined his sister as a co-worker in the downtown Los Angeles building where she worked. Manuel became politicized through the experience of what he said were many injustices at his workplace and through what he heard from janitors who worked in other buildings. His main contact with the janitorial movement happened initially through colleagues involved in the opposition faction, of which downtown Los Angeles was a hotbed. He became very involved with this group towards the '95 union elections, the year that the opposition won, to the extent that he put his own money into the campaign.

The opposition group was hard hit during the national union's trusteeship over the local union during '95 - '97 and the ensuing re-organization of the local union by industry. Manuel went "back to work" (although he had never left his job), but shortly afterwards, he and his sister were laid off by their employer. They became part of the union's pool of temporary janitors, who were called in to work through a union-run hiring hall. He did not delay in taking action towards what he saw as mismanagement and unfairness in the operation of the hiring hall. As a member of the union committee on temporary workers' issues, he became known to the union administration and members for his knowledge and tenacity in representing members' interests. When Manuel and his sister re-gained their full time status and left the hiring hall, Manuel was
a well known figure in the union. He used this recognition to engage in other projects in the union, always a critical voice against the union administration.

Early during my fieldwork in Los Angeles, Manuel was asked to join the administration’s slate in the upcoming internal elections as a candidate for an executive board seat in his work area. He accepted the offer. Despite his apparent defection from the opposition group, in public meetings Manuel continued to agitate for member representation and point out faults with current administration policies. Manuel indicated to me that it was important to him to maintain distance from both the opposition group and the administration, and that the true base for his influence in the union was the support he got from common members:

I am Reformista [name of opposition group], but I don’t want that either the administration uses me or that that group uses me. I consider myself an internal leader who helps the people. When I decide that we need the people, they come to me. If it’s a meeting of 40 or 50 stewards, we have it.

Married with four children, two of whom are teenagers, Manuel is an imposing patriarch whose family has dutifully supported him throughout his engagement in union affairs. His two teenage daughters accompany him regularly to union meetings and volunteer for union work. His children are also involved in his small enterprise as a DJ and equipment loaner for parties, the majority of which are linked to union members.

The three individuals whose biographies I presented are in the mature stages of building careers motivated by the movement experience. Other members could be identified as being at earlier stages of development. The different stages of development in a movement career matter for members’ scope of influence and action inside the union.

**Stages in movement careers and scopes of action**

The progression of movement careers occurred through stages that can be characterized by a process of social adjustment to new roles, a process that has been discussed in the careers literature as *transitions* (Nicholson & West, 1989; van Gennep, 1960). I discerned three distinct stages – early, middle, and mature – of a member’s movement career. One’s progression through these stages is associated with larger scopes of action that the member is able take in
their primary action space. I identified two distinct paths by which stages in movement careers unfold. The first path involves gaining status and respect through activities within the organization. The second path was defined by levels of acceptance within the community of janitorial workers. Movement careers had organizational impact when they developed through both paths. Although a majority of the members I identified as building movement careers (ten out of nineteen building movement careers) relied equally on both these paths, some members relied more on organizational roles and others leaned more towards building a reputation among fellow janitors. To explain the structure of movement career progression, I draw on the concepts of horizontal and radial progression of careers, and, at the same time, expand on these concepts.

Movement within a community of equals: Radial progression

Politicized members in the union came to see themselves as part of a collectivity, and to view their status and progression in terms of their position within this collectivity. In interviews, members described their status most frequently with reference to the community of janitors in the union. I take this to be the unit within which a members’ movement career progresses radially. I define radial progression from the periphery of the community of janitors to the core. VanMaanen and Schein (1976) define radial progression in organizational careers in terms of movement from the periphery to the core of an organization’s culture. I expand on this concept to include movement among one’s relevant social structure – be it a a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), or an affinity group (Benhabib, Shapiro, & Petranovic, 2007; Polletta 2002: 222). Graphically, the community of janitors can be represented as a circle surrounding the union. Thus, movement in this circle is manifest within the organization, but the progression of the career inside the organization is only part of a larger trajectory of movement in the community of workers (see Figure 7 below).
The early phase of radial progression is characterized by personal relationships and networks. The actions associated with this stage are mentoring and helping. Members maintained and built networks by helping someone get a job; protecting another worker in a dispute with the supervisor; or through small acts of sacrifice for others on the job. But one’s sphere of influence at this stage remained small and spatially constrained.

In the mid-career phase, workers gathered status and recognition beyond their friendship networks. They gained recognition from staff and administrators of the union as well as their own constituency. Members become key nodes in their social network. The scope of actions at this stage includes mobilizing other members, and challenging union practices. Examples of such actions taken by members include playing key roles in mobilizing other workers in a union strike, and becoming important members of the opposition faction, a largely informal group.

In the mature stage of radial progression workers gain a loyal following among other janitors and autonomy vis-à-vis the union administration as well as factions in the union. Members develop a strong constituency that does not desert them, whether or not they win the executive board member seat in a particular election, and whether they are with the opposition faction or

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13 Without necessarily taking on the organizational role of ‘strike captain’.
the pro administration faction. They thus become powerful figures. Members at this stage see themselves as commanding greater personal authority among janitors than any particular position can give them. They are also likely to see themselves as having earned legitimacy among the members which will not be questioned easily, as is evident from the following quote from an interview:

Look, I am not interested in the position with ambition. It’s not the position that makes me, it’s I that’s making the position be what it is. [The President] said, you are a leader. [I said] “I am not a leader, that’s what you call me.” He said, the members don’t love you anymore. I told him I don’t go waging fights in the streets so that the members will love me. I fight from my heart. [I told him] You take care, because you DO live from the members. Not me.

In the mature stage of radial progression, members are able to mobilize other leaders, change the course of action in the two factions in the union, and plot plans and act on behalf of the entire community of janitors in the union.

**<Table 6> Stages in radial progression**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Achievement</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early</td>
<td>Relationships, networks</td>
<td>- Mentor others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Help others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>- Organizational recognition</td>
<td>- Mobilize other members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Constituency</td>
<td>- Challenge practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature</td>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>- Mobilize other leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- (Re)-design factions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Plot outcomes for community</td>
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</tbody>
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*<Movement within the organization: Horizontal progression>*

Movement careers begin with personal transformation in the field of social movements. But politicization makes individuals likely to accept organizational roles that allow them to enact their vision, and thus a large part of their growth takes place in the organizations that the individuals building movement careers inhabit. Members I interviewed acquired lateral mobility by fulfilling organizational roles in the union, through which they gained knowledge, respect, and social skills. In this respect, members' horizontal progressions did not differ significantly from the horizontal mobility conceptualized by Edgar Schein (1971) and explicated...
in terms of blue collar workers' careers by Robert Thomas (1989). Thomas showed that faced
with structural barriers to upward mobility, blue collar workers created their own mechanisms
of status assertion at work. He observes:

"Even in the absence of a career marked by clearly defined ascending steps in an organizational or
professional hierarchy, blue collar workers both confront and create hierarchies that mediate the work

As with radial progression, I identified three stages of horizontal progression in members’
movement careers. At the early stage, members gain knowhow and expertise about an area of
union work. The scope of this knowhow is nevertheless limited to a small sphere in this stage –
one’s workplace, or a particular function of the union tied to one’s role, such as processing
member grievances, or working on the issues of temporary workers.

In the middle stage, members gain status and respect from the union administration for their
expertise and knowhow. They become the "go-to" person in that area, be it organizing new
members or running electoral campaigns, and thus are able to influence union practices and policy
in that area. The main distinction between the middle and mature stages of horizontal
progression is that in the middle stage, members are able to influence union work at the
functional task level. A typical account of a member shows that even in the middle stage,
influencing union work at the task level requires organizing other members:

I can say, I can give myself the luxury of saying that I gave a lot to that committee, and we the members
were organized. Yes, I did it. And I've fought considerably and we've won our respect from the
administration.

But to affect change at a higher level of union policy, members need political skills. In the mature
stages of their career, members learn how to use and maneuver their way around factions; and
how to run for and win elections. Thus, they are able to influence union work at the organizational
level. Members who become privy to organizational shortfalls while fulfilling a union project
use their later acquired political skills to pressure the union administration into changing these
practices. Bernardo Santos, who was earlier introduced in one of the portraits, discovered
through his involvement in the early strikes of the JfJ that the union usually made little
provision to protect workers from employer retaliation after an organizing drive. He thus based
his subsequent political activity in the union on improving protection for workers in their workplaces. In Bernardo's words:

The union never has a plan for after the contract is gotten. When they get the contract they work to transition people officially to membership and they establish all the contacts with the companies to negotiate dues and all, and.... But they don't have a plan about how to provide stability for the worker in his/her job. They just leave the workers there. So then the company backlashes. [What do you mean?] During the first three months of having the union, the company put [forth] the immigration article that everyone should have documents. The union didn't have the legal recourse, but they needed another strategy with the employer [he refers to negotiations].

Table 7 summarizes the achievements that characterize each stage of horizontal development in movement careers and the corresponding scopes in members' actions.

<Table 7>  Stages in horizontal progression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Achievement</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early</td>
<td>Expertise, knowhow</td>
<td>- Become a leader in the workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Perform union work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Status, respect</td>
<td>Influence union work: functional level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature</td>
<td>Skills in union politics</td>
<td>Influence union work: organizational level</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Movement Careers vs. Other Forms of Participation

How do movement careers compare to other known forms of participation in unions? There are at least three reasons to think that movement careers provide a new analytical category in forms of participation in organizations.

First, movement careers do not adhere primarily to politics in the union. They are not opposition careers. They encompass everyone who has been politicized either outside or inside the union and seeks to continue validating his or her changed views. Examining movement careers forces us to break out of the mold of interpreting dissent in unions as mere "politics" dictated by conflicting group interests. At the same time, it allows a deeper insight into why some individuals who build opposition careers may be morally committed to them – i.e. movement careers suggest that opposition careers can be motivated by a cause larger than their
immediate self-interest. The conventional interpretation of classic studies of union democracy such as Lipset, Trow and Coleman’s (1956) study is that it is a proposition in favor of the importance of factions. But a closer reading of LTC’s study reveals that the factions originated from cleavages among the members owing to the social structure of different occupational communities. The authors explain that such existing cleavages facilitated the creation of union policies that supported democracy and procedural fairness, such as elections by popular vote and the referendum. They conclude that “social structure - using the term in this case to refer to the social system comprising the occupation, the industry, and the union - defines the probabilities that given historical events can result in an enduring institutional pattern such as a two-party system.” (399) Opposition careers shaped and motivated by social structural experiences then have an enduring impact on the organization. It is reasonable to think that some opposition careers may indeed be movement careers – that is, the actors may be seeking to validate transformational experiences acquired as part of a movement.

Second, movement careers seldom move up the hierarchy of the union and thus are distinguishable structurally as well as philosophically from formal careers in the union. There are real barriers for members to obtaining staff jobs – for example, English proficiency and knowledge of American labor laws. But members who have established movement careers also view staff jobs as undesirable. First, members believed staff jobs to be precarious. Despite the existence of a staff union at the Los Angeles local, staff were subject to performance and disciplinary reviews and could be dismissed. Second, these members had developed a perception of status hierarchy of groups in the union that put members at the top. In this view, staff existed to service members. Thus what could have been construed as an upward move in terms of salary levels was often conceived by members as a downgrading of status. Lastly, members attached moral value to doing unremunerated work in the union. They professed that working without a salary put them on higher moral ground than the staff, who received material rewards for their jobs. Josefina Reyes, whom I introduced through her portrait on pX, expressed these thoughts most eloquently in an interview:

[Did you ever consider other jobs in the union?] I am a representative, whether I am a steward [worksite member representative] or not, whether I am an executive or not. Where Josefina Reyes is, there are thousands of janitors. I am not looking for a job with the union. Many others are. But if I were to get a job with the union, then my co-workers would be my bosses. And secondly I would have no voice nor vote
to be able to protest against [union President]. Even if I had a union [referring to the staff union], I am an employee and they can shut my mouth. And secondly my principles, morally and spiritually, don't permit it, don't permit fighting for a salary. Dignity, respect and justice don't have prices.

Transitioning to formal careers in the union by taking staff jobs offered dilemmas to members, because staff careers often were not compatible with movement careers. The high costs of trying to build both careers in parallel were demonstrated by the dismissal of three staff members who were formerly members of the union shortly after the completion of my fieldwork. All three cases involved the staff's involvement in internal elections against the administration. One of the three ran for office against the current administration's slate on the opposition's side. The other two had campaigned for the opposition group.

Last but not least, movement careers dictate a particular organization and sacrifice of one's personal life that other forms of participation and commitment do not. Many times, the member's entire family gets involved one way or another with union activities. In other instances, the member is the only one in the family to be involved in union activities, but does so at the cost of time spent at home. One member, who currently held an executive board seat, suspected her son was not going to school and was instead mingling with gangsters; she painfully professed to not having the time to give him her attention. Talks of marriage trouble and divorces abound among members who hold active movement careers. Movement careers then exert pressures on personal lives in similar ways to those well known for professional careers (Bailyn, 1993). The restricted resources that low wage workers have to deal with problems at home mean that these pressures may be even more problematic for these workers. Such sacrifices in personal life further suggest that these are serious careers to be distinguished with member voluntarism.

Given the sacrifice in personal life, the lack of formal credit given to members' commitment to union work is a frequent source of tension in the union. I observed a particularly emotional debate over remuneration for union work, where the administration had just proposed to provide more expensive health benefits to directors of the union, citing the need to compensate them adequately at a "professional" level. This proposal immediately drew fire from the board members, who argued that the JfJ is "a worker's struggle" and that professionals are not the
only people whose families suffer from their absence. An excerpt from my field notes demonstrates the contours of this tension:

[Board member 1] We want to give you much better benefits but it’s a question of principle because this is a workers’ struggle. One needs to pay respect to the martyrs of the movement: those workers who have sacrificed, who have lost their eyes. They have died in battles.

[Board member 2] I’ve done staff work for several months, and we [members] should also get recognized that we work 8 hours and then work for the union. I also hurt to be leaving my family. It’s not only the staff who have families; we have families too.

Discussion

The Justice for Janitors campaign poses an empirical and theoretical question. That is, given that unions have developed bureaucratic structures, how can members stay engaged and movement goals be sustained in a union campaign based on a social movement? I have proposed that the puzzle can be answered by bringing in the concept of movement careers.

The movement careers concept contributes to theory on social movements and organizations in at least two ways. First, it challenges the premise of the consequences of structural oligarchy set forth by Robert Michels and others by pointing out that this thesis rests on restricting our understanding of careers in large movement organizations to formal and vertical careers. Previous empirical studies of organizations that have fended off the consequences of the iron law of oligarchy have focused on organizational traits – such as organizational culture, ideology, or recruitment methods – but none have looked at careers as the mechanism by which social movements can be sustained inside bureaucratic organizations. By showing that alternative career forms are accessible to members, a group assumed to lose their foothold in bureaucratic movement organizations in previous literature, I add to a growing body of research examining the role of social actors in formal organizations (Gamson, 1992; Ganz, Voss, Sharpe, Somers, & Strauss, 2004; Polletta, 2002). This body of literature has observed that formal organizations and solidarity-based groups need each other to advance movement goals, yet a precise mechanism by which the two can influence each other inside organizations has not been identified. Movement careers are one such mechanism.
Second, movement careers link experiences in social movements to behavior in organizations. These two phenomena have hitherto been discussed separately in the literature, with the result that the motivations of activism in organizations have been incompletely understood. We understand from McAdam's (1989) study of participants in Freedom Summer that participating in a social movement tends to bring about enduring changes in individuals' labor market participation and life style choices. Ganz et al.'s work on California union leaders who bring into their unions personal projects of social justice suggest that organizational factors can either foster or impede the development of personally held visions for social change. Yet more rigorous theoretical development linking experience in movement to action in organization has been lacking. The concept of movement careers is a step towards filling that gap. In taking this step my research provides a theoretical framework for understanding existing empirical studies of member engagement in movement organizations.

In addition to contributing to social movement theory, this study extends career theory in two ways. First, this study expands the concept of the occupational community (Van Maanen & Barley, 1984) – a concept that stresses the role of community as a lateral structure on which careers are built as opposed to the hierarchical structure of the organization - to the realm of political behavior. Second, it extends and complements work on internal and external perspectives in careers by applying this concept to understanding agency in organizations. I show how identities and subjectively held values can transform organizational roles, and by doing so infuse roles with a new source of agency.

Last but not least, this paper adds to industrial relations theory and labor sociology, particularly the literature on organizational revitalization in trade unions. This literature has largely advised on obtaining the right formal organization – by putting more resources into organizing new members, changing organizational structures to respond to environmental change, etc. I show that unions are revitalized when they draw from what social actors bring into the labor movement.
Essay 3  Linking movement to organization: Staff movement careers

Introduction

Functionaries in bureaucratic organizations have been regarded with guarded suspicion in previous literatures with regard to their role in distancing their organizations from the organizations' base. Bureaucratic functionaries have been doubted for behavioral habits and mental models that jeopardize their organizations' relationship with their clients or members. These include: routinizing the pursuit of efficiency to the point of confounding the means with the ends (Merton, 1940); putting their interests for economic stability over the pursuit of organizational goals (Weber, 1964); and developing group norms among themselves that bias how they carry out the organization’s work (Lipsky, 1980; Merton, 1940). Thus goal displacement, which Merton describes as the degeneration of organizational goals due to the mindless following of “prescribed patterns of action” (Merton, 1940: 562), has been shown to happen more frequently in organizations where the staff are professionalized (Jenkins & Eckert, 1986; McAdam, 1982; McCarthy & Zald, 1977).

In Essay 2 of this dissertation I showed that the ideals of a social movement can be sustained in careers that, unlike popular conceptions of organizational careers, do not depend on the hierarchy of the organization. What hold these careers together are not organizational structures, but the experience of having been politicized, which McAdam (1989), among others, showed can have lasting influences in one's personal and professional life.

In Essay 1 I showed how reforms in the SEIU opened the way for a new form of career which progressed laterally instead of vertically. Laterally progressing careers were introduced to fulfill the organization’s need for growth in non-unionized markets. In interviews with those who have come into the union since the reforms, I find that many of these new staff see their careers
in terms of serving the ideals of a social movement, much the same way as the members I studied in Essay 2. These staff, I will argue, are also building movement careers. The movement careers that new groups of staff build in the SEIU help sustain the social movement ideals inside a bureaucratic organization. Furthermore, they help resolve the tensions in the JfJ model I introduced in Essay 1. In this essay I show how movement careers provided a means for SEIU’s reforms to interact with the ideals brought into the union by a new generation of politically active youth. I distinguish between two main types of structural progression in staff movement careers and show that they have implications for how staff are able to link the movement to the organization.

*Bureaucracies, Bureaucrats and Social Movements*

Movement careers among staff in the SEIU can be conceptualized in contrast to two tenets in theories of bureaucracy that have defined the way we think about bureaucratic functionaries. The first tenet about functionaries’ careers in bureaucratic organizations is that they are absorbed into the bureaucratic structure. Weber argued that the position of the official in the bureaucracy derived from functional divisions in the bureaucracy and was based on the technical competence of the official in each of the bureaucracy’s functions. Thus, Weber wrote, “the official is set for a ‘career’ within the hierarchical order of the public service” (Weber, 1968: 963). By contrast, staff who build movement careers follow a structure that is not prescribed by the hierarchy of the organization; instead, movement careers are defined by the contours of the movement field. A movement field is constructed by the re-configuration of existing fields when certain structures, which previously were submerged, are mobilized (Klandermans, 1992: 94-95). If society is made up of many cultural fields, each comprising of over-lapping sets of beliefs, and individuals and organizations are actors in these fields, a movement field is constructed by politicizing some structures across existing fields around a set of social problems (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996; Rao et al., 2000). Thus, a movement field is multi-organizational. Movement careers then, are mobile within a multi-organizational field, and the allegiance of movement career builders is primarily with developing the movement field rather than developing any particular organization within it.
The second tenet of staff careers in theories on bureaucracy is that staff are ideationally bound to group norms within their occupation rather than to members' interests or the goals of a social movement. Merton characterized it as the "esprit de corps" among bureaucratic functionaries. He argued that the development of group norms among bureaucrats is likely to cause goal displacement in formal organizations (Merton, 1940: 564-565). Similarly, Lipsky, who studied front line bureaucrats who interact more closely with the beneficiaries of their organization, rejected the idea that outside clients can determine the role behavior of "street level" bureaucrats:

Clients are not a primary reference group of street level bureaucrats. They do not count among the groups that primarily define street level bureaucrats' roles. [...] Work related peer groups, work related or professionally related standards, and public expectations generally are much more significant in determining role behavior. (Lipsky, 1980: 47)

By contrast, staff who build movement careers are ideologically committed to the members of the union. They not only state in interviews that the reason they are working in the SEIU is because they like working for the members; they protest against organizational policy that they deem is detrimental to members. When protests are not heeded to and it becomes difficult to reconcile their subjective goals for advancing the movement in the organization, movement career builders leave for another organization in the movement field. As I show below, that movement careers are triggered by personal transformations explains why commitment to members and to movement goals do not wane for these staff.

Reforms at the SEIU that introduced a social movement element to the organizing of low wage service workers created an opening for movement career builders to develop their careers with the skills acquired in the JFJ. Some of them develop allegiances to the SEIU and the JFJ in addition to their primary allegiance to the movement field; others primarily evaluate their careers in terms of the standards of the movement rather than in terms of organizational measures. I characterize the former group of staff as building horizontal movement careers and the latter group as building radial movement careers. I discuss these two trajectories of the staff movement career with implications for outcomes.

Staff who build movement careers link the movement to the organization by i) carrying with them personal experiences of political transformation that become symbolic resources for the
Justice for Janitors; ii) providing the union with the geographic mobility necessary to unify and, at the same time, diffuse the movement across the country; and iii) mediating between organizational goals and members' interests. Finally, a significant number of movement career builders, for varied reasons, transition to building organizational careers and progress upwards in the SEIU. Although this last group of staff are no longer building movement careers, they exert significant influence over the organization and I thus include them in the discussion.

Methods

Data for this paper is part of a larger body of data collected for my dissertation. The main analysis in the paper, that of the make-up and progression of movement careers led by SEIU staff working on the union's campaign for janitorial workers, draws from interviews with seventy-seven staff members in various positions with the SEIU's building services sector. The functional occupations that these staff represent in the SEIU are varied – they include Organizers, Representatives, Political Directors, Researchers, and Presidents and other executives of local unions as well as staff in various roles at the national union. The majority (58) of these staff members work in one of four field sites I visited as part of my dissertation research: Los Angeles, Washington DC, Houston, and Boston. Staff in the twenty-six other JfJ sites who were interviewed (20) were referred to me by people I met in my field sites as well as by national union staff who had been part of the initial team of organizers for JfJ. Interviews were designed to understand these individuals' personal histories, how they came to work for the janitors' union, and their experiences within the union and the JfJ campaign. In addition, interviews covered the history of the JfJ in the locality that the interviewee was currently serving, the structure and governance of the local union, and issues around member participation.

In initial coding of the interviews, it emerged that most of the staff I talked to had been influenced by experiences that politicized them, and were pursuing visions for social change motivated by these experiences through their roles in the union. This realization provided the foundation for understanding the commonalities between careers that staff led in the union and
careers led by members who were similarly transformed and validating these experiences through work at the union. I thus termed both groups of careers “movement careers” in analytical contrast to organizational careers. Several differences are found in staff and members’ movement careers. While staff’s movement careers unfold in the form of formal jobs inside the SEIU, members’ movement careers tend to appropriate informal jobs in the union. Second, in contrast to the members I studied in the Los Angeles union, who experienced limited mobility out of their janitorial jobs and thus pursued their movement careers primarily in the union, some staff moved out of the SEIU to continue their movement careers in other organizations in the movement field. Third, while members’ movement careers seldom moved upwards in the hierarchy of the organization, many staff who led movement careers later took positions that moved them vertically in the hierarchy of the union. In summary, I determined that a staff person was building a movement career if the person i) has never held a managerial position in the union; ii) explicitly expresses a disinterest in upward mobility in the union; and ii) explains how he/she became involved in the union by referring to an event or episode that politicized them.

The initial analysis outlined above suggested that the structure of progression in staff movement careers mattered for their ability to sustain the movement inside the SEIU. I thus proceeded to code each individual’s movement career according to their progression. The result of this second analysis is presented as Table 9.

Staff in the Justice for Janitors

The JfJ in its earlier mobilizing phase (late 80s and 90s) had a tenuous relationship with the local unions that were the nominal sponsors of the campaign. As I showed in Essay 1, the JfJ was adopted by the SEIU in a period when SEIU was undergoing a vast re-organization project. The re-organization project, which is described in detail in Essay 1, consisted of the national union’s efforts to transform local unions into vehicles for new organizing. The best structure in which to carry out the new organizing was deemed to be the model of the “industrial union”, where local unions would represent those workers that belonged to a particular industry – in this case, the
public sector, healthcare, or building services. These reforms were met with great resistance from many local unions. The IfJ was seen as a project of the national union; therefore it was met with dubious responses from local unions sponsoring the campaign ranging from suspicion to downright opposition. The hostility from the local unions coupled with belligerent employers and the challenges of organizing low wage immigrant workers, many of whom were undocumented, posed a unique set of challenges for staff who joined the IfJ.

In the early days of the IfJ, the Organizing Department recruited a new group of people whose characteristics were very different from the existing SEIU staff. These people were young, idealistic, and believed more in achieving social justice and social change through campaigns such as the IfJ than in working for a union. The national union relied on these staff to organize new markets under the IfJ during the early years of the campaign, and later to sustain the IfJ momentum in cities where early mobilizations had let on to the daily work of sustaining the growth and keeping the members engaged.

Few studies have been conducted on the demographic and educational backgrounds of union staff; three studies conducted at different intervals serve as reference points to my sample. The first study, conducted by the sociologist C. Wright Mills in 1948, depicted unionists as self-made men who had risen from mostly working-class backgrounds to positions of power at a time when most unions were at the peak of their influence (Mills & Schneider, 1948). The second study, cited by Bok and Dunlop (1970: 54-56), is a 1967 survey of union officials comprising of presidents, secretary-treasurers, vice presidents of each union. In the 1967 study, 61% of union officials surveyed came from working class families – only 15% cited that their fathers owned businesses or were executives of businesses. Approximately half of all union officials had no more than a high school degree; while 21% had college degrees and 25% never completed high school. Bok and Dunlop noted that most union officials had been members of their union; they noted the absence of intellectuals, politicians, or other outside professions’ involvement in union leadership. Bok and Dunlop attributed this to the decentralized bargaining process of American unions, which required knowledge of minute details of jobs held by workers that the local union represented. They wrote:
Intellectuals and professionals are most often drawn to a labor movement as a vehicle for their own political advancement or a force for promoting certain political and social ideals. The American labor movement has been rather unattractive for these purposes, for it has never been profoundly ideological, nor has it provided a particularly easy entry to a political career. Instead, the work of the unions has centered upon the bargaining process and, especially at the lowest levels of the union hierarchy, upon the day-to-day business of administering the working conditions in the shop and factory. These issues require an intimate knowledge of the workplace naturally acquired by union members who have worked in the trade. (Bok and Dunlop, 1970: 55)

The third study, conducted in 1984 by Marshall Ganz and his colleagues of a group of 68 non-randomly selected labor leaders in California, shows that over the two decades since the study cited by Bok and Dunlop, significant demographic changes have taken place among union leaders (Ganz et al., 2004). While 53% of staff still had working class backgrounds, 47% classified themselves as coming from middle class backgrounds. By contrast to the 1967 survey, of the union leaders surveyed in 1984, 56% had a college degree prior to working at the union. 32% had been recruited from outside the union without ever having been a member, and 53% had been active as political or social activists prior to joining the union. 22% came from immigrant families. Ganz and his colleagues asked about initial ‘projects’ that union leaders harbored upon entering their union. They defined projects as “motivational narratives”: “one’s ‘project’ is his account of where he hopes to go (his goals), why he wants to get there (his motivation), and how he thinks he can arrive at his destination (his means)” (Ganz et al, 2004: 152). Using this definition, the authors identified that 53% of the union leaders surveyed had joined the union to carry out social reform; 15% cited improving conditions for members in their community (here, defined in terms of ethnicity, gender, or whichever community the respondent referred to); 16% of respondents cited interests in building an organization; and 16% cited motivations related to personal advancement.

Comparing my sample of SEIU staff in the JFJ with earlier studies on union staff, I find that staff in the JFJ have significantly high levels of education – 55% had college degrees, and about the same number of interviewees had graduate degrees as those who had high school degrees. The majority of my interviewees were members of minority groups (58%), and 47% of total respondents came from immigrant families. Only 13% of staff interviewed had ever been a member of the janitors’ union; 87% were recruited from outside the union. As I show later in the paper, the vast majority of interviewees entered the union in order to create social change – 66
out of 77 described their work in terms of creating a more just society for low wage workers. Table 8 shows individual characteristics of JfJ staff interviewed.

### Table 8  Individual characteristics of JfJ staff interviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Ever a member?</th>
<th>Immigrant family?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate degree</td>
<td>15 19%</td>
<td>No 64 87%</td>
<td>No 41 53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College</td>
<td>42 55%</td>
<td>Yes 13 13%</td>
<td>1st Gen. 19 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College</td>
<td>1 1%</td>
<td></td>
<td>2nd Gen. 17 22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school</td>
<td>14 18%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>5 6%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total number of staff in sample: 77

In general, staff fall into three demographic groups. The first group is comprised of former members who have been recruited to become SEIU staff. These individuals tend to be first, or less commonly, second generation immigrants. For reasons I specify in the accompanying paper in this dissertation on movement careers of members, members have difficulty accessing staff careers and thus, this group is smallest in size. 13 out of 77 interviewees belong to this group. The second group is comprised of native (non immigrant family background) college graduates. 38 interviewees belong to this group. This group tends to have responded to the union’s recruitment program while in school or come into the union from other labor or social justice jobs. These individuals are mostly from working class or middle class backgrounds. Members of the third group are second generation (and, rarely, first generation) immigrant college graduates. 16 interviewees belong to this group. These individuals have similar educational and occupational backgrounds as the second group in their adult lives, yet their perceptions are shaped by the experience of their parent’s generation of immigrants. Many of them explain their participation in the JfJ in terms of a service to their immigrant families and ethnic communities.

Front line staff in the SEIU are comprised of External Organizers, Internal Organizers, Researchers, and Political Organizers. External Organizers are responsible for identifying opportunities for growth in membership and mobilizing non-union members. Internal Organizers are responsible for cultivating member leaders, moving members for all types of
union work including strikes, and resolving members' grievance cases. Researchers are charged with analyzing employers' market and non-market relationships to identify vulnerabilities that the union uses to plan its campaigns.

The lines across these functions are much more blurred in the building services than in other sectors of the SEIU and in other unions. First, because of the subcontracted nature of the cleaning industry, members constantly risk losing their jobs. The distinction between unionized workers and non union workers is far from stark in this industry; the union relies on existing members to organize non members. Thus, by contrast to other unions, where different titles are awarded to staff who primarily organize non-union workers ("organizers") and those who primarily represent union members ("representatives", or "business agents"), SEIU only distinguishes the two occupations by naming the first External Organizer and the second Internal Organizer. Second, the union's need for putting societal pressure on the building owners as well as the subcontractors necessitates all functions - research, internal and external organizing, and politics - to work in close coordination with each other. In fact, front line staff move easily from one function to another, with Research and Politics harboring some exceptions. But in these cases as well, a brief period of on-the-job training will accommodate the staff who transfers from another function to Research or Politics.

The common requisites for being recruited for the JfJ, as seen in vacancy announcements, include a commitment to social justice; analytical skills; written and oral communications skills in English and often in one other language (usually Spanish, but also includes Portuguese, Somali, Haitian, and any other language spoken by the members); and computer skills. In addition, Organizers are required to demonstrate the ability to mobilize workers and build leadership, as well as to be willing to travel. Internal Organizers are expected to have a command of labor laws as they relate to, for example, the arbitration procedure for grievances.
The Making of Staff Movement Careers

Recruitment into the JfJ

Recruitment into the JfJ is greatly facilitated, on the demand side, by union institutions focusing on recruiting front line staff, and, on the supply side, by the staff’s own experiences and perceptions of the Justice for Janitors. Sources such as www.unionjobs.com make finding out about jobs in the labor movement easy for those who are looking. The AFL-CIO funded Organizing Institute (OI) was founded in 1990 with heavy involvement from SEIU and UNITE-HERE in designing and implementing its programs. The OI, and later SEIU’s own WAVE program (after funding for the OI was cut off in part due to the split in the AFL-CIO led by SEIU), played instrumental roles in recruiting and providing standardized on-the-job training for labor organizers designed to provide a deep immersion in a movement experience. The criteria for being retained after the training are stringent, hinging on the trainee’s successful contribution to 2-3 ongoing organizing campaigns in different localities around the nation in the course of 3-6 months. The OI and WAVE programs introduce an organizational discipline to the movement career by instilling in trainees an imperative for organizing, and organizing quickly with proven methods from other successful campaigns.

Staff come to the SEIU through one of two common ways, or both. The first way is through friendship networks – staff tend to have had friends in the labor movement who were knowledgeable about the SEIU and the JfJ contexts and who encouraged them to apply for a job. The second way in which staff come into the JfJ is that they have, through various channels, heard about the JfJ and approached the campaign for a job. In interviews, I heard countless accounts about wanting to work with low wage workers, and immigrant workers, and knowing that the JfJ provided a unique setting to do so, as reasons for applying for a job at the SEIU. Many staff emphatically added that the JfJ sector of the SEIU is the only union job they saw themselves in. In these staff’s minds, the JfJ was different from other union jobs because it was

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14 The first Executive Director of the Organizing Institute in 1990 was Marshall Ganz. Ganz worked with AFL CIO member unions to instill in the OI program a movement experience based on his work with the farm workers’ movement (SEIU. 1986 - 1992. SEIU Organizing Department collection: Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University).
closer to a social movement than any other union campaign. In more than one staff’s account, the primary reason for joining the SEIU was that the JfJ was “the shiny star” in new approaches to mobilizing the more vulnerable social groups. In staff’s own personal stories, the JfJ provided a “natural” environment for them to continue a long term commitment to social change, a commitment that originated from their own politicizing experiences.

Initial politicizing experiences

Movement careers for staff, as for members, start with initial politicizing experiences. Most staff mentioned seeking the JfJ out as their next work because they have already been politicized somewhere else - whether through family, community, or activist experiences in school or with other organizations. By “being politicized”, I refer to an interviewee’s mention of an event or episode that transformed the way they viewed existing social arrangements. The SEIU, through its recruitment and training programs, also provided the initial politicizing experience for the rookie activist. Participation in the JfJ also re-politicized less nascent activists who had already been politicized elsewhere.

Contexts that politicized staff prior to their joining the SEIU - described by staff as “getting hooked”, “getting the activist bug”, “opening my eyes” – varied. Politicization was a developmental experience and it accompanied coming to age and achieving independence. Many staff mentioned their family and upbringing as having been conducive to their choice of a life as a “leftist” or “labor person”. Some had parents who were janitors; others had immigrant parents in whom they saw the JfJ cause; yet others mentioned that their parents had been role models who instilled in them a sense of service to others who were worse off.

So, as a young girl, my mother was an activist. She took me to my first Cesar Chavez rally when he was boycotting the grapes and she was really an advocate of social justice in my life. She is a single parent with four children. She worked in factories, she was a waitress, she did everything she could...you know, I never had thought that I was poor. I never...we used to use food stamps. We grew up on welfare. She really helped me. Not just opened my eyes, but [to] be sensitive to people who are in worse situations than we were.

My parents worked really hard to make sure they sent us to private schools. It was off of working their butts off. We didn’t have vacations, we had a pair of new shoes in a year. It’s not like we were unhappy. ... That leads to why now I’ve chosen to do this type of work. Just because I know what people
go through. We never had any medical insurance, any dental insurance, none of that. It was like, go off to Tijuana and go see a doctor if it was really getting that bad. Other than that there was home remedies, and hope for the best.

Staff Organizer

Previous job experiences, such as having worked as a teacher in a public school system, worked for the Volunteers In Service to America (otherwise known as the “domestic Peace Corps”), been a public housing tenant organizer, or worked in community organizations, etc., also provided radicalizing experiences.

My last job as a teacher I was teaching in a community college in upstate New York. They had a program in the XXX correctional facility, it’s a maximum security New York state prison, and I applied in the prison. And that was a pretty radicalizing experience for a young middle class kid like myself. So that’s really what did it.

Staff Director

The labor movement, particularly through its training programs, gave some staff the transformative experience they cited. These individuals mentioned they had worked with other progressive organizations but that these organizations did not provide what they were looking for. Staff said they were “inspired”, “fell in love with the OI [Organizing Institute] experience”. They contrasted this experience with previous involvements with advocacy organizations that they sometimes felt were “futile”, “not connected to base planning”, and said that “the people working with me were too much like me”.

As I noted earlier, SEIU staff are on the whole relatively highly educated, with 15 of the 77 staff I interviewed holding graduate degrees. I am told that there are several ABDs (all-but-dissertation PhDs) on the payroll in the building services division. Individuals with graduate degrees explained their exit from academe in terms of an impatience with analyzing social change rather than creating it. Some of them liked academic work but found activism gave them a more tangible sense of progress. One ABD I spoke to put it in this way:

There was nothing wrong with it [Sociology PhD program which he left] because part of how I got here was being there, but I just didn’t see that collecting demographic surveys and looking for funding was going to help me create social change. There may have been a time when academics were powerful and then there was a time when the church was powerful but now most of the power is in the government and the corporate sector and there is nothing that challenges them in the way that unions do - the union offers a unique opportunity to challenge these institutions. As a student I was involved in all the politics and wanted to do something that was more valuable to me.

Transformative experiences can be deeply personal, or occur through empathy with someone else’s experiences. When transformation is a personal event, time is required to interpret it, to
turn the injury into something that propels action. One female staff organizer related her commitment to social change in terms of a difficult relationship with her mother, a first generation Puerto Rican immigrant who opposed her daughter's plan to go to college. She described her occupational choice as a validation of the difference between her views of the world and her mother's:

But I guess the hardest thing was realizing that I was different. I was being treated different from my brother. ... I think it was one of the obstacles in my life emotionally, how she advocated for education so much and me coming to realize that for her that meant a high school diploma... So I had a lot of trouble coming to some terms with what that meant. And then finally got past it. Then I think it was part of what helped me finish school; getting past that anger. [pause, then she takes out a picture out of her wallet] Picture of my mother.

Transformations that occurred through observing life changes in others were also described as cathartic experiences. Staff often told me that the best part of their jobs in the SEIU was being able to improve others' lives. One staff organizer described the electrifying effect that observing change in members she helped had on herself:

They stand up straight and walk taller, and they look you in the eye when you talk to them. And they say something the next time around. And I think that that changes their lives so that, I am not sure but I think, that when the landlord is screwing them or that grocery store is charging them more for something, you know that they'll ask questions and say something. There was L, who was this obese guy and he had diabetes and he had a hoarse, he talked like this [mimicks his voice], and he had blood shot eyes was tired all the time. And when L got his money [from the employer] he became a different person. He lost like fifty pounds, and his voice straightened and it was so funny when he said he'd taken his kids to Disneyland with the money he won. He was just amazing, it was always so good to have him around.

Carrying movement experiences into the union

As with members, staff carried these transformative experiences into their jobs at the union. First, movement experiences became symbolic resources that complemented the material resources given to staff in carrying out hard physical and emotional work at the union.

Front line staff at SEIU work sixty to seventy hour weeks at relatively low pay. For example, a typical Internal Organizer's day starts between 10-11am and ends around 11pm. During the day, the Internal Organizer works out of the union offices unless an outside rally or meeting is planned. Day time is devoted to attending to members with grievances, and working on pending grievance cases. He/she will take a break around 6-9pm, and then commence nightly
"building visits", or visits to workplaces in an area assigned to the Internal Organizer. Because office janitors work during the night time, these visits usually take place between 10-11pm, when workers have their “lunch break”. On a typical day, an Internal Organizer will do anywhere between one and three building visits. Table 9 lists approximate salary levels for different staff positions in the four JfJ local unions of my fieldwork.

Table 9  **Staff positions and approximate salary levels***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>68,925</td>
<td>92,231</td>
<td>48,084</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External organizer</td>
<td>41,633</td>
<td>65,247</td>
<td>11,931</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal organizer</td>
<td>43,802</td>
<td>70,641</td>
<td>18,623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>44,063</td>
<td>63,200</td>
<td>17,114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Labor LM2 forms, [www.dol.gov/esa](http://www.dol.gov/esa), for SEIU building service units in Boston, Houston, Los Angeles, and Washington DC

* Salaries comprise gross annual salary plus allowances

Union work then, is hard physically. It is also often emotionally challenging, as staff are under pressure from various sources – employers, members, and the union administration – and in their line of work, are witness to danger, grief, and adversity. But when staff talk about the meaning of their work, they seldom talk about the routine work. Instead, they speak of union work in terms of being involved in a movement making social change. And bringing about social change has personal rewards because it is construed in the language of their individual transformation. Blanca, a staff organizer who was previously a janitor, referred to helping other janitors as a privilege and a personal victory. She said of her work: “It’s satisfactory not just because I’ve helped but because it’s a challenge that I’ve overcome”. For Sara, who said her radicalization happened when she worked for a Marxist slum organization in Mexico City, the JfJ was “the closest thing to a revolution today”. One staff organizer expressed the personal effect that the JfJ had on her, the first college graduate in her Mexican American family, as a process of empowerment.

[I was] looking at the campaign and I was like, wow, that’s so great and really giving workers who have a tendency to step back and shy away from the light, give them in their own worksites the power to take on...
the supervisor, to appreciate their rights, their contractual rights, their legal rights. And it’s really an empowering...very empowering for me and so I really wanted to be here in this union.

Staff often contrast their jobs with jobs in the corporate world, and with other union jobs. In staff’s minds, the JfJ had a special place that made it different from working for a union because it was part of an immigrant workers’ movement. I often heard statements such as the two statements below:

I’m not working for a big corporation, for a company making a bunch of assholes richer or somebody richer. I’m working for a labor organization that focus their [sic] effort on the people, the working class. So even though we have a boss, we actually are working for the workers, right? That’s what we are all working for. So I like that feeling, you know? Not working for a company who is making profit out of people.

Staff Organizer

I mean winning these buildings, and you know, I go down to the field and see the workers and see them obtain their benefits, so rewarding. Because I see them and I see my parents. I don’t think I’m working for a union. When I go out there and I see the workers it could be my Aunt or my Mom, their livelihood. You know, working for something that’s trying to better their livelihoods, that’s what takes it home.

Staff Organizer

Second, that staff are conscious of attaining movement goals through their work at the union imbues them with an expectation and willingness to follow the JfJ campaign wherever it may go. The availability of staff centrally trained and experienced with the basic elements of the campaign, which one senior staff with decades of experience called the “recipe book”, is the basis on which the organization sustains and expands the movement element in the JfJ. Staff experience pains in relocating themselves and their families but justify it by explaining that without people like them to fight the battle in new territories, there would be no movement. One staff organizer who expressed hesitancy to move from Chicago to an East Coast city said her co-worker told her she should re-think why she was in the labor movement in the first place “because it was never about building one local [union] but building power nationally”. She relocated her family to the new post. The organization enhances these commitments in various ways, for example, by periodically flying in teams of organizers and members from unionized cities to a city where a campaign is ongoing. Together, organizers and members from different JfJ cities “blitz” (a concerted number of visits to selected buildings in a short period of time with the aim of mobilizing the workers there) buildings, and talk to non-unionized workers about the benefits of being union. In this way, a sense of responsibility for growing the movement nationally is shared by all who participate in the JfJ.
Third, staff’s positions in the union and commitment to the goals of the movement mean that they have a unique understanding of the tension between organizational goals and goals closer to the interest of members. In many cases, staff mediate between the organizational goal of Organizing and members’ desires for Representation, which are often at odds in the JfJ. In particular, staff who are Internal Organizers and responsible for representing members at the workplace tend to advocate for stronger internal representation of members and leadership development. In the absence of a well-developed general framework for representation relative to organizing, representation of members often is seen to locally by committed Internal Organizers. One Internal Director said that he found what he called the ‘organizing ethos’ of the JfJ problematic because it assumed members do not care about the decision making process:

Constantly organizing means that you need to constantly build consensus throughout the union on organizing. It’s a constant tension because there is no other source of money for organizing than the members. But members want service, it’s inescapable. But at the same time there is an ethos and culture in the union that the union is all about improving the lives of members. Underlying this culture is an assumption that members don’t care about the process by which that happens. But in [this city], it turns out that that doesn’t always hold true.

But not all movement career staff respond to the tension between organizational and movement goals in the same way; neither is everyone’s career predicated upon his/her geographic mobility to the same extent. I argue that the structure in which movement careers progress matters for where staff stand between movement and organization. Despite staff’s narratives about working for the members and not for a union, the reality is that staff are contractually bound to the union and its administrators, and not to the members. For some staff, the tension with the bureaucracy of the union comes to a head and they seek to fulfill their movement goals elsewhere. Others stay in the union in front line positions that allow them to be in close proximity to members, and thus to the movement side of the JfJ. Still others accept larger organizational roles that bring them further into the structure of the union, and thus achieve upward mobility in the hierarchy.
Progression of Staff Movement Careers

My analysis of interviews with staff building movement careers in the SEIU identified two main trajectories for these careers - radial, and horizontal. These paths matter for how they relate to the organization that sponsors the JfJ. What distinguishes the different structural progressions in staff careers? How do staff justify taking particular courses in building their careers? For each type of progression, I offer a description of the structure of career mobility associated with it; outline the induction processes into this trajectory; and describe the motivations of staff who take that path. I concentrate on analyzing the career paths themselves and the implications for staff relationships with the union rather than focus on the characteristics of the people who take these paths. That is, predicting the types of individuals that take a certain path in lieu of another is not the focus of this paper.

I define as radial the movement career whose primary field of action is the movement field and not the organization. Those staff I determined were building radial careers spoke of their job with the JfJ as part of a long-term plan to acquire skills and status in a movement field. How these staff defined the movement field varied - some spoke of community activism; others said they wanted to remain in organizations that fought for social change on behalf of low wage workers. I determined that 17 out of my 77 interviewees were building radial careers.

Those whom I characterized as building horizontal careers primarily defined their field in terms of the Justice for Janitors; thus, while these staff also thought of their work in terms of advancing a movement, the movement they had in mind, the Justice for Janitors, was organizationally defined, and thus their careers resided primarily within the boundaries of the SEIU. I determined that 26 out of the 77 interviewees were building horizontal careers.

I also determined that a significant number of staff - 22 out of 77, or almost 30% of interviewees - had previously had movement careers and later transitioned to conventional organizational careers that progressed vertically in the union. Although I do not include them in my discussion of staff movement careers, I discuss these careers separately.
I coded 6 interviewees as Never Movement Careers because they were either progressing vertically in the union or they did not refer to incidences that politicized them as a reason for wanting to work in the JfJ. Finally, for another six interviewees, I was not able to identify whether they had undergone politicization or not. My analysis below of staff movement careers is based on the 43 staff persons whose careers are progressing either horizontally or radially.

Table 10 Interviewees and their movement career paths

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Career Types</th>
<th>Career Progressions</th>
<th>Initial Politicizing Experience?</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Movement careers</td>
<td>Radial</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Horizontal</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movement career → Organizational career</td>
<td>Vertical</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never Movement Careers</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undetermined</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Interviewees</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis I present of the number of radial and horizontal shows a cross-section of career types at the time I studied the Justice for Janitors. Naturally, some individuals whose careers I studied may change courses over time, and thus the ‘counts’ for the number of career types I observed will likely vary in the future. The variability of counts of people pursuing each type of career does not take away from the importance of distinguishing these structural models of progression analytically for our understanding of movement careers’ role in linking the movement to the organization.

My analysis of the different structural progressions relates them to two outcomes critical for sustaining the movement element inside the SEIU. The first is geographic mobility, which is construed as the willingness and ability of staff to relocate for the movement (movement here can mean the JfJ or another movement that the staff thinks as relevant to their career). The second is staff’s willingness and ability to mediate between organizational goals and goals close to members’ interests. A third outcome, the infusion of subjective valuations of social change
onto organizational roles, is common to all three progressions. My analysis shows that those pursuing radial mobility in their movement careers are most likely to move for the benefit of the movement. However, their progressions are likely to eventually carry the staff outside of the organizational boundaries of the union, and thus they are less likely to be able to mediate between the two types of goals. Movement careers progressing horizontally are likely to be mobile and mediate between organizational and movement goals. When movement careers transition to organizational careers and progress vertically, they are less likely than horizontal career paths to be mobile or mediate between organizational goals and movement goals. A graphic display of these relationships is provided in Figure 8.

Figure 8    Structural progressions in staff movement careers and outcomes

Mobility in the movement community: Radial progression

In the JfJ, there are staff who see their position primarily in relation to a larger collectivity of activists committed to social change. I take the larger movement community as the unit in which staff movement careers progress radially and define radial progression as movement from the periphery to the core of the movement community. I understand “movement community” as a broad concept, allowing for staff’s own definitions of the movement that they choose to affiliate with. Staff whose movement careers progressed radially tended to see the Justice for Janitors as a means for achieving broader social transformation rather than a campaign to enlarge unionization.
Profile: Carla Perez

For years, Carla had eagerly awaited the Justice for Janitors' arrival at her city. Her mother was a janitor and, as a child, she and other members of her family went to clean office buildings with her mother. Growing up in a state bordering Mexico, Carla became convinced of the cruelty of the country's immigration system. She was working for a non profit organization specializing in immigration and refugee issues when the SEIU began activities in her state. Reluctantly, she applied for a job with SEIU's political program geared towards increasing voter registration among minority groups in Carla's state. She said the reason for her hesitancy was the negative perception there was at the time about the union:

SEIU in the immigration advocate community was seen by a lot of organizations as the big bully. The big bully, now they're coming into immigration so that they can bully us into following their own agenda. And they [SEIU] were beginning to recruit people from immigrant organizations with a national agenda. It's a small network, and they were taking people who were very committed, and paying them higher salaries and better benefits than a small non profit could offer. But then things changed at the organization that I was at, and I decided to come into the SEIU.

With the SEIU, she worked to dispel anxieties that the immigration community had about the SEIU and laid the groundwork of community relationships for the Justice for Janitors campaign which commenced in 2005. Her work was recognized in the union as an innovative community-based approach. As the campaign got off-ground, Carla recruited organizers for the JfJ who were a lot like her - second generation Latinos in the city who had experience in community organizing and knew local politics. But as the organizing accelerated, Carla became increasingly disenchanted with the directing of the campaign by the administrators of another local union which was SEIU's regional powerhouse. Her dissatisfaction peaked when Lead Organizers from other local unions were "flown in" by the national union to dominate what she felt had been a local endeavor up to that point. She saw this as the union's disinterest in cultivating local talent. Carla left the union after several years of working on its immigration and Justice for Janitors campaigns and joined a non profit advocacy organization for civic participation.

Staff who built their movement careers radially had varying starting points in their jobs with the SEIU. Instead of being recruited centrally through, for example, the Organizing Institute, these staff were hired locally for their experience in community organizing or knowledge of local politics. Many of them never became quite the "SEIU person", taking an outsider's view to

15 All names of interviewees are pseudonyms.
the union's work. The largest group among these staff (8 out of 17) is people with backgrounds in community organizing prior to coming into the JfJ. These people were hired into the JfJ because sometimes winning a particular JfJ campaign depends on mobilizing workers in a particular immigrant community based on their social identities. Individuals who know the communities, or better yet, have mobilized these communities before, are highly sought after. Community-based organizing strategies were taken with, for example, the Latinos in Denver, the Somalis in Indianapolis, and the Brazilians and Dominicans in Boston.

Two smaller groups also built radial movement careers. One is a group of people (4 out of 17) who saw themselves as catalysts of change in the political system, and saw the union as primarily a political organization that could exert influence by mobilizing votes and volunteers for progressive politicians. This group of people came into the SEIU from working in politics - for example, from working for a congressperson - and thought of their careers as unfolding in the realm of institutionalized politics. Many of them talked about leaving the JfJ and “returning” to politics some day. The second is a group of people (5 out of 17) who mostly came into the SEIU from other unions and saw themselves as specialists in labor organizing. These people were aware that the skills they acquired with the SEIU were eagerly sought after by other unions who valued their experience with immigrant workers and non-NLRB organizing tactics.16

Of the above groups, staff with roots in the communities that union members belong to were inclined to strongly favor member Representation over organizational Growth. However, they usually did not possess formal authority in the union that would have enabled them to exert influence over internal matters. 8 out of the 17 who built their careers radially left the organization to pursue their careers in other organizations inhabiting the movement field. 3 out of the 8 people who left the union left because they disagreed with SEIU policies that they experienced as a conflict with their subjectively held values, values influenced by the larger movement community. Disagreements with the top-down handling of campaigns and the lack

16 Staff at SEIU believed that there was most affinity between SEIU and other unions interested in organizing methods that did not rely on NLRB elections. In fact, I saw several staff leave the union during my fieldwork to other unions that are part of the Change to Win coalition, particularly the UNITE-HERE.
of involvement of the members in the process were frequently cited as reasons for leaving the organization. One Staff Organizer who left the union summed it up this way:

I think that the Justice for Janitors is a campaign sign, and it's a sign to be implemented in any city, right? And you can take the campaign plan and try to implement it, but without genuine interest of the community or people who believe in it and who believe it'll make a difference in the community, without the heart and the passion then there's a big missing component of it. ... What I can see at least from this campaign that the objective was to get to the bargaining table and to get a contract as quickly as possible and in the process you're going to burn as many people and you're going to step on as many toes, and that's just the reality.

Two people cited the desire to apply skills learned in the JfJ to other campaigns and thus contribute to making a difference in the larger movement community. Three people left to pursue advanced degrees in related fields. Thus, going back to Figure 8, radially progressing movement careers in the JfJ are highly mobile and tend to have limited potential for mediating between organizational and member-defined goals.

Mobility within the Justice for Janitors: Horizontal progression

26 of the 77 staff I interviewed thought of themselves as having “grown out of the movement” of Justice for Janitors. Typically these staff applied for jobs at the SEIU because they had heard about the JfJ and liked the idea of improving immigrant janitors’ lives. Many of these staff remained enthralled with the JfJ as a movement. They defined their progress primarily in terms of what they were doing to improve lives for immigrant workers and only secondarily in terms of the union’s organizational interests. All of them chose to stay in positions that allowed them to stay close to the action and to the members rather than ascend through the hierarchy of the union. I define horizontal progression in staff movement careers as the acquisition of skills and status within the JfJ, which is perceived by these career builders as a movement field.
Profile: Luisa Secundo

Luisa grew up in a female-headed household. Her mother, a Mexican American woman, was an activist. She was sent to a private high school and then to a four year college in the University of California system with help from members of her extended family. At college, she wanted to study psychology and become a doctor but her interest in activism swayed her into community organizing. A stunt in community organizing while in college opened Luisa’s eyes to an entirely different arena of possibilities for choosing an occupation:

I was mostly doing community organizing in school, you know, organizing on campus and I realized that I wanted to improve the lives of people but I didn’t know how. And I did campus organizing and that really wasn’t...it was good exercise, good skills but it wasn’t getting me to make...improving people’s lives. So I tried community organizing and I really enjoyed it. I was wondering how can I make a living out of this; you know? I love doing this.

She then met a person who was a “liaison” for labor unions recruiting on her campus and interned for an SEIU local union in the public services sector. She says that this experience changed her from someone who previously could not see herself as “doing labor organizing” into an enthusiast about the work of unions:

Before I first joined labor I had all these criticisms about unions and they were just about giving money to politicians and were really corrupt and I tapped into...I was...in this campaign it changed my opinion completely about giving workers power. Instilling these values of power, of building worksite power within the workers, changed my perspective on the labor unions. And I would have never thought I’d do labor organizing.

When she decided to move back to her hometown after graduation, she was offered a job with an SEIU local union there, this time the healthcare sector union, but she chose the building services local because, she said, “It was close to home, it was immigrant families, giving the immigrant families a voice in the work site.” As a twenty-three-year-old Internal Organizer, Luisa looks like a lot of beginner Organizers in the SEIU – she is young, relatively inexperienced, idealistic, and feisty. I saw Luisa cry at least once during my fieldwork, an incident she attributed to work-related stress. But Luisa is not ready to quit, and calls her work a “career”:

I think they didn’t take me seriously there, like, how old are you? You look like you’re 16. And it’s been hard being on top of them [members], resolving issues, letting them know that I’m here to work in good faith, not to play around. This is my job. I take it seriously. This is my career and I think that they have respected that.
Staff whose careers move horizontally typically underwent a powerful politicization when they
came into contact with the JfJ. They acquired status and skills by working on campaign after
campaign. They became committed to their respective roles in the Justice for Janitors and were
disinterested in moving up the hierarchy of the union. Career mobility for them was perceived
as being known as a great Organizer or Researcher whose ability to innovate has been proven in
battle through various critical campaigns, often in different localities. Staff explained the
motivation for their careers in terms of the types of people that needed to be helped in society,
and in terms of learning and innovating on ways to do so. One staff organizer, whom I will call
Bob, explained that he wanted to make his career in the JfJ because it was a “new frontier”:

I really wanted to work with low wage workers. I wanted to work with immigrant workers. To me, it’s a
really exciting model. I think anybody you talk to that’s done external organizing and then more
traditional NLRB election model will express a lot of frustration with that. And sometimes it’s the only
way and the best way and so you know, you go along, but for me it became apparent that there’s an
alternative model out there and we need to explore that. It’s sort of a new frontier. Even though they say
the Justice for Janitors has been around since the 80s and that’s true, it’s constantly pushing new
boundaries and there’s really a spirit of innovation and a little bit of daring and to me that’s what’s
appealed to me most cuz I just feel like we need to find a new way of doing things.

Bob said his job as an Organizer took a turn when he worked on his first JfJ campaign in the
Midwest a couple of years after he was hired into the SEIU. The janitors in that city got health
insurance for the first time, and seeing that was life-changing for Bob. He worked on a couple of
more JfJ campaigns in other Midwest cities and later became the Director of Organizing for a
new Midwest local union overseeing various new organizing projects in the JfJ. Bob denied that
what he is excited about is organizing. Rather, he associated his excitement with the fact that the
JfJ pushes the boundaries of existing institutions and, as a result, is able to improve low wage
workers’ lives:

I have to say that the more I worked around the JfJ the more I wanted to work on the JfJ and that’s really
not the same as saying that I want to work on external organizing. It’s just that I wanted to work with that
program.

The horizontal progression of staff careers is best captured by borrowing a term used by a
senior member of the SEIU’s executive board who included himself in the characterization. He
called them “missionaries”, a group of people dedicated to advancing the JfJ as a movement. He
distinguished “missionaries” with others he characterized the “Pope”, who administers the
union in a certain jurisdiction and is concerned primarily with protecting the turf in that jurisdiction. In the words of the senior executive:

You need people who wake up every day and worry about how to build a movement. They can’t be bogged down by managing grievances - the locals can do that. Also, some jobs always have to be freed up in the union leadership so that they can be about building the movement.

There are two induction processes in becoming a “missionary”, with potentially different implications for how staff relate to national union policies. One induction process happens through SEIU’s institutional training program. The typical program starts with a 14-day trial in a campaign. Successful completion of the 14-day trial moves the trainee onto a three-month campaign in a different location. Only at the end of the three-month campaign is the decision to retain the trainee in the SEIU made. Often, once the trainee “passes” the three-month trial he or she is matched to a local union, which decides after a six-month probation period whether or not to take on the organizer (no longer a trainee) on its payroll. Despite the fact that the organizer’s direct employer is the local union that makes the last hiring decision, organizers who have gone through the national union’s centralized training program often identify strongly with the need to advance movement goals at the national level. They are already familiar with national union policies and, I find, seldom resist them. These organizers, however, hate to think of themselves as elitist; most say that they chose the JFJ among other SEIU campaigns because they wanted real social change, as opposed to mere organizing. One Latina organizer who went through the training, like many others, differentiated the JFJ with more “elitist” organizing:

I did a J for J, and then I did a home care [campaign]. I did a nursing home, another J for J, and the Head Start [a public sector campaign]. So I got a good mix. The only thing I didn’t do was health care but I really didn’t want to do healthcare. Based on what I had heard, health care was sort of the prestige organizing, and generally, again, it was local white organizers. They considered it professional organizing. They created this thing called a flight team where they would send the top people, this flight team, and they did hospital organizing and went around the country to do it. Only selected people were put in this team, so they were kind of elitist, and that was national.

The second type of induction process to horizontal movement careers involves joining the movement locally, either as a former member of the union or from the community. “Indigenous leadership” was thought to be a crucial source for missionaries in the union. The senior executive I quoted earlier considered himself to be a member of this group:
We need to develop indigenous leadership. Our workers are pretty smart people. Many of us like me will grow out of the movement. That's what it has been like in [recent campaign location]. We found these little jewels in the field. The union needs missionaries, and it is an organizing core of young people who are ready to go wherever the action is. They don't have to be professionals deployed by the international.

Staff who join the campaign this way imbued the JfJ with perspectives acquired through local experiences in the campaign. Although they may be equally committed to expanding the movement nationally, they were not initiated in the same way as the nationally recruited staff have to national-level policies. And although they aspire to being able to relocate for the movement, some are more attached to realizing changes in the local context.

Compared to staff who build radial movement careers, those whose careers progress horizontally were more likely to stay in the union and to support members' efforts to secure involvement in the union. Countless staff explained why they stayed in the SEIU by referring to how close and loyal they felt towards the members; typical answers were: “Because of the members. Our members give us a hard time but I love them”; “We have the most colorful members in any union”. Several staff of immigrant backgrounds told me what one Researcher said: “I see them and I see my parents”. Proximity to members makes staff building horizontal movement careers likely candidates to mediate between organizational goals for expansion, which they understand from their induction into the national movement, and members’ desires for better representation. Although formal union policies favor organizing as an organizational priority, staff respond to members’ demands for representation in their daily jobs by involving members in their work, cultivating leaders among members, and advocating for Representation to the union administration on members’ behalf.

Power plays an interesting role in perceptions of progress in horizontal movement careers. Many staff told me that institutionalized power has always eluded or abused them and their loved ones. They recounted that the SEIU and the Justice for Janitors enabled them to use a countervailing source of power to reclaim for themselves and, especially for those staff who are second generation immigrants, for their communities, the dignity that eluded them while growing up. Tales from the fields that staff told of their encounters with authority, whether the police; security guards at buildings they leafleted; or boards of directors of a target employer, were at times peppered with bravado, but also emanated pride and assertion. More than a few
staff referred to their youth as a constant struggle to stay out of trouble with the law. In these staff’s accounts, the SEIU “took risks” by hiring them and allowed them to channel their rebellion into a movement worthy of their efforts. They thus were subverting the system in a legitimate way.

Rafael, an Internal Organizer in California who described his youth with the words “I was at the cusp of being OK and being in trouble all the time”, explained that the Justice for Janitors and the SEIU were “a natural environment” for him. He said his work made him proud because he was “working for the working poor”. The union hired him on the same day he came in for an interview when he was unemployed and his wife was about to deliver their first born. Like many other staff who had experienced economic difficulty, Rafael said he was “indebted” to the union for his job: “I feel a personal indebtedness with the union for having taken me in, and for having taken a risk with me who didn’t have experience and didn’t study this.” In his capacity as SEIU representative, Rafael brushed with members of an older generation of Chicano activists in the planning of massive demonstrations against the criminalization of immigrants in the Spring of 2006. He told me that the mentality of these older generation activists was from “another era” and “old school”. In his view, issues the older generation fought against, such as racism and school segregation, have largely been resolved. Rafael and countless other second generation staff saw it as their generation’s mandate to move from issues of racial equality to economic justice issues that they saw as more amenable to integration across multiple ethnic groups. They saw the Justice for Janitors as a good terrain in which to do so.

From Movement Careers to Organizational Careers

I determined that 22 out of my 77 interviewees had had movement careers in the past but were now pursuing conventional organizational careers, defined by vertical progression in the hierarchy of the organization. These people had transitioned from organizing, politics, or research positions that primarily served the JfJ campaign to managerial positions in the union. I define “managerial positions” as equal to or higher than a head of a functional department of a local union. I also include a move from a “field” JfJ position to a position at the national union.
as a transition to a vertical organizational career due to the fact that national union positions are
designed to have supervisory authority over several if not all JfJ campaigns and often are
required to make decisions that affect local union administration.

Profile: Nadia Vargas

Nadia’s family emigrated from Central America to a southern East Coast state where she grew up. She told me growing up in the only Latino family in her southern town where even the teachers at school made racial slurs was what influenced her decision to join the labor movement. She attended a prestigious liberal arts college where she got involved with a sister organization of MECHA, a Chicano student activist organization with branches in major U.S. colleges. Both Nadia and later her sister went through the Organizing Institute. After training, Nadia worked on the then ongoing campaign to organize a major East Coast city, a prolonged campaign that proved to be one of the most difficult JfJ campaigns, both for the ferociousness of employer opposition and internal divisiveness in the local union. She joined when the campaign was at one of its lowest points and tensions were high in the local union due to the adjoining of the JfJ organizing team into a traditional local union focused more on servicing its members than on organizing. She said the staff at the local had to make things work with very little resources.

When she eventually took a leadership position in the local, Nadia told me she wanted to “build an organization”, which to her meant a stable budget, job security for staff, and a reason to unify the different cultures in the local union. She married a colleague organizer in the JfJ campaign; her family life revolves around the local union and the people who go through it. When her local union merged into a larger East Coast local, Nadia was recognized for her service to the SEIU and promoted to the position of Director. But Nadia is sober about opportunities for minorities in the union. She does not think it realistic to expect that unions will treat people of different sexual orientations or women or people of color any differently than the rest of society. It has been more important for her to first “move on”, and once in a position of power, to think about how she will position herself with regard to issues of promoting minorities. Nadia’s goal in her current position as Director is to work on staff development so that the staff who were hired “from the field” into the SEIU can stay on in the organization. Her concerns include narrowing the discrepancy between the skills sets that staff hired locally possess and the organizational requisites of competence that SEIU sets for staff.
It is a lot more common to observe a transition from horizontal to vertical progression than it is to observe a radial to vertical transition. On the supply side, life style issues are one reason why people transition. Parents who want stability for growing children, and staff with spousal constraints in mobility or pregnancies are likely to seek out "desk" jobs that typically have more managerial responsibilities associated with them. In addition, like Nadia, some see the negative effects of constant campaigning and turn to organization building. Lastly, vertical mobility may appeal to some who build movement careers for the authority and recognition that accompany it.

On the demand side, the organizational pull for vertical progressions is strong. Originally, vertical progressions in the building service sector came from the success of the initial JfJ campaigns and the ensuing need for the original architects of the campaign to assume positions overseeing multiple campaigns over a rapidly expanding campaign territory. As the campaign stabilized and authority over new campaigns devolved to local unions, initial organizers of the JfJ were promoted to Presidents and Directors of newly founded building service local unions. In addition, there is talk in the high echelons of the national union of the need for "new blood" - a constant demand is present for staff, who, in the national union's view, have the ability to "see the big picture". In addition, the organization has publicly committed, through convention resolutions, its highest body of rules, to "looking like our members". This translates into an effort to promote qualified women and candidates of color to managerial and executive positions in the union. Vertical accelerations, such as from being member to being staff to being President of a local in a relatively short period of time, are a distinct trait of personnel management in the building services division. These cases become valuable indicators, not least because of their rarity, to the organization of its commitment to building its leadership from the ground up.

Transitioning from a movement career to an organizational career entails going from having responsibilities over campaigns to having responsibilities over geographically-bound organizational units. Thus, compared to a movement career, an organizational career involves rooting oneself to a geographic locality (albeit sometimes with heavy travel). Unlike the organization's credo that Organizers should be ready and able to move to the next campaign,
the union is open to accommodating the locational preferences of those it has selected into higher management positions, for example, by facilitating a match with a local union in the staff’s locality of choice. In the words of the senior executive I quoted earlier, the transition from a movement career to an organizational career is equivalent to transitioning from being ‘missionary’ to being ‘Pope’.

How do former movement career builders relate to the tension between the opposing goals of Organizing and Representation? Being in a managerial position in the SEIU usually necessitates that staff support Organizing, even in instances where it may conflict with Representation. Many former movement career builders have accepted the view that Organizing is a more pressing goal to be met than is Representation. A local union president in the Midwest and a member of the initial group of JfJ organizers in the ‘80s echoed many others’ sentiments on this issue:

SEIU spends a lot of time saying, “Look, our industry is confronted with vicious predatory industry such as janitorial work.” Men and women can be thrown out of their jobs along with the rest of the contractors when the building owner says, “I ain’t going to have that raise. I’ll fight you to the death if I’m ever going to let you come back in.” To me, I can say do I spend a lot of time and energy getting people to attend meetings versus attend rallies, where’s my emphasis going to be? I do, I mean, we do mailings here to get people to come out to the meetings, but the important thing is we need people to come out to go attack this building owner that just cut us. (sighs). In some ways you can say, if our meetings only have 50 people is that vibrant? 50 people out of 2000? On a Saturday? I’d be pretty impressed by it. But I’d be very depressed if I only had 25 workers show up to a rally. I’d really yell and scream. Then I’m really worried about my message.

In addition, because organizing has traditionally fallen under the responsibility of the International, gaining upward mobility in the SEIU is accompanied by a tacit (and at times not so tacit) endorsement of national union policies. Throughout the ‘80s and ‘90s, the SEIU worked on standardizing and tuning local union practices with national union policy. Today, it is widely understood that national policies will provide the golden standard for local operations. Conflicts may arise between national and local priorities, and staff may fall on different sides of these debates. But upward mobility to positions of responsibility, such as local union President, is premised on prioritizing national over local goals. A vivid illustration of this was manifest in Los Angeles when the national union trusted the local union in 1995 and thereby annulled the first electoral victory of the members’ opposition faction. Many senior staff in the union who
had grown in the union through the JfJ defended the need to trustee the local union based on
the view that a local union under the rule of an opposition faction could undermine the
standards achieved under the JfJ in Los Angeles. These staff resented the negative press that the
national union received from leftist media in Los Angeles for trusteeing the local:

The left of LA were calling the union “internacionalistas”, and here’s an Internationalist - we funded it
close to the tune of 20 million dollars over the course of I don’t know how long that was, fighting to
resurrect a city that basically had a neutron bomb dropped on it. You could win for losing because people
wanted to talk about democracy. It’s like, what’s democracy to someone who’s gone from 10 dollars an
hour to 4.75 at that time. And we had the nonsense of that debate. … And a lot of good people went out
of the union because of it. At the same time, we’re still struggling. There’s parts of LA where we couldn’t
implement as good as we wanted they’re still… [forcefully] So here we are arguing about whether or not
someone has the right to vote and whether or not they merge and somebody’s making 5 dollars and
fifteen cents out in some strip mall off of Ventura boulevard.

The relationship with the bureaucratic side of organization is greatly helped by the staff’s belief
that theirs is a reformed bureaucracy serving progressive ideals. This belief is accentuated
through the sharing of organizational legacy, according to which campaigns such as the JfJ
emerged through battles between the “old guard” and the more progressive forces inside the
local unions (the latter heavily backed by the national union). Representation is associated with
the practices of the old guard in local “fiefdoms”; reforms thereof are associated with the
ensuing organizing drive. Seeing themselves as part of a reformed organization justifies the
bureaucratic functions that former movement career builders play and permits them to
continue seeing themselves as activists. Jaime, a Latino staff person who rose through the ranks
of the national union and eventually became part of the new force that toppled an old guard
regime at one of SEIU’s largest local unions, explained to me that what was important to him
was that the new administration opened the way for higher member involvement in the local.
In the old local union, there was no department dedicated to organizing, or political activities,
or market research, or, important personally to Jaime, involvement in immigration issues. The
new local union has helped establish a non profit civic participation project that, together with
other community groups, worked on a just reform of immigration legislation.

Perhaps most commonly, many staff in positions of organizational responsibility tolerated the
daily challenges of meeting bureaucratic requirements because they believed largeness in size
meant more power to advance social change. A common stance was voiced by one local union president whose local recently merged into a larger local:

There is plenty of stuff to talk about the problems of bureaucracy and having one giant union and there’s plenty of problems. Believe me, I can go on for an hour on that, but the reality is that it also helps us organize faster, win more and win better rates and benefits for our members. We have trade off’s. For one, we’re a bureaucracy so when you want to get something done out of [merged local’s base] it’s very difficult, it’s plodding, it’s like moving a giant ship, a cruise liner or whatever. It takes a long time to move that sucker. But once you move it then it goes; it’s like a tank - just plow the water and it’s very powerful.

Discussion

This paper has developed an analytical concept for an alternative type of career to the organizational career for staff in large movement organizations. The origins of these careers differ from those of organizational careers in that they are rooted in political experiences and not in organizational tasks or roles. In addition, I have shown that the structure of their progressions also differs from the vertical progression that is typical of organizational careers. These structures matter for how staff are able to connect movement elements to bureaucratic organization.

Staff movement careers originate in movement experiences, but they unfold in organizations that inhabit the social movement field, and thus their development is intimately related to the organizational goals, practices, and culture. I have shown that two different induction processes exist for horizontal movement career paths; of these, one is highly dependent on training and recruitment institutions in the SEIU. But even when staff movement careers access higher positions in the organizational hierarchy, they contrast with those staff who have an organizational career in motivation and in the mental models that actors hold about the organization. For current and former movement career builders, the organization is perceived as a vehicle to achieve “fundamental change” in the way those with less means are treated in the power structure, and not an end in itself. I quote at length from an interview with the SEIU senior executive whose movement career started with the farm workers’ movement in California in the ‘60s. He transitioned from a movement career to an organizational career in the early ‘90s when he took a position with the SEIU as the president of a local union. His
understanding of the organization as a vehicle for change illustrates how, despite the structural similarity in mobility, former movement career builders who are now building organizational careers differ in the principles that guide them from those who have never thought of their careers in terms of a movement career.

I was very fortunate that my career with the labor movement started with the farm workers' union. We had from the very beginning, because of the conditions that we were working under, the way we were treated, it wasn't just about making 5 cents an hour more, it wasn't just about toilets in the fields, it wasn't just about cool drinking water, as important as that was. We also felt that as human beings we were being abused that we weren't respected that we weren't being treated fairly. So part of our fight with the growers was that we wanted to also be respected, as well as improving our conditions of work and so forth.

So from the beginning I understood that what we were trying to create was some fundamental change in the way things were. Everything from the west side of the lane where I grew up having no sidewalks and dirt streets, and our schools being worse than the east side schools, all of these things, you know, were things that we wanted changed because our kids weren't and shouldn't be second class citizens, but they were the way the power structure worked. So having a union was a way to address all these issues. Fundamentally, off of that we say to our organizers that this is not about just getting more money and getting more benefits, this is also a way to make some fundamental change in the way things are run in this country. And workers need an instrument, they need an organization that can help them to amalgamate their little dollars and their votes and then together be able to make an impact on public policy.

This study contributes to resolving the problem of goal displacement and member disengagement in large social movement organizations by drawing and expanding on career theory. The concept of the movement career provides a theoretical framework for understanding empirical studies of organizational reforms led by professionals. Furthermore, it adds to the literature on bureaucracy by suggesting one avenue for the development of variable perceptions among front line staff in large bureaucratic organizations - politicizing experiences that transform the meaning and structure of careers.

The structure of movement careers' progressions denotes larger implications for the diffusion of knowledge and ideas in a movement field as well as for organizational change. Horizontal progression of movement careers potentially enable the transportation of ideas and knowledge from a movement field into an organization. Radial progressions, by comparison, are likely to enable diffusion of knowledge and ideas across multiple organizations within a movement field. Both progressions are conducive to normative isomorphism in movement fields (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). That is, staff may carry with them norms that legitimate certain structures and
practices, thereby converging practices and structures across organizations. Former movement career builders who now hold managerial positions potentially explain progressive reforms at top organizational levels, such as the changes that have characterized reforms under the John Sweeney administration in the American labor movement in the last two decades.
Essay 4  Sustaining idealism in formal organizations: Fostering Movement Careers

Introduction

In the labor scholarship, social movement unionism has been regarded as a potential model for revitalizing the labor movement. This argument is associated with the diagnosis that bureaucratization contributed to the decline of the labor movement; and the belief that a new infusion of idealism may galvanize an old movement (Clawson, 2003; Fantasia & Voss, 2004; Milkman & Voss, 2004). Contrary to the largely optimistic forecasts in previous literature, I find that sustaining idealism poses an organizational dilemma in three out of the four JfJ sites studied for this dissertation. In this essay I draw from my case studies to examine the factors that contribute to sustaining idealism in the JfJ. In Essays 2 and 3 I argued that movement careers, or careers that are defined by the experience of participating in a social movement and remain relatively independent of the bureaucratic hierarchy, are crucial to sustaining member engagement and organizational accountability. Given the importance of movement careers in sustaining the movement in the organization, my discussion of sustainability in the JfJ addresses organizational and environmental factors that foster the movement careers of members and staff.

Bringing together solidarity structures with formal organizations in a way that benefits both has been a key issue in the literature on social movements (Breines, 1982; Cohen, 1985; Fantasia, 1988; Staggenborg, 1989). In a programmatic statement for research made in 1992, Gamson defined the problem between solidarity structures, which he described as “free spaces, prefigurative politics, and affinity groups”, and formal social movement organizations as one of the “unsolved problems” of social movement theory:
Free spaces, prefigurative politics, and affinity groups reflect social psychological insights on building commitment and solidarity, but they frequently exist in tension with the strategic imperatives of SMOs. The reconciliation or trade-offs involved remains one of the unsolved problems on the frontiers of social movement theory. (Gamson 1992: 63)

Since Gamson has urged research into these questions, several studies have emphasized the mutual benefits that solidarity structures and formal organizations can reap by coming together. In a study of American movement groups of the ‘60s and ‘70s committed to internal democracy, Polletta finds that organizational members soon faced limitations of what at the time was widely known as prefigurative politics. Polletta defines prefigurative politics as “movement groups whose internal structure is characterized by a minimal division of labor, decentralized authority, and an egalitarian ethos and whose decisionmaking is direct and consensus oriented.” (Polletta, 2002: 6) Over time, participants recognized the limits of making decisions based on social relationships, and sought to routinize commitments to informal relationships and institutionalize customs (Polletta, 2002: 207, 222). Fine, in her study of community unions, which she describes as “modest-sized community-based organizations of low-wage workers that, through a combination of service, advocacy, and organizing, focus on issues of work and wages” (Fine, 2005b: 153), finds that while these unions are effective in improving conditions for workers through public policy, they do not possess the market power to make direct labor market interventions. Thus, Fine writes that in order to be successful, community unions:

...need to be connected to a larger institution that has membership and resources and can protect and support them when they are battling with employers. The best scenario would be for more of them to be in an ongoing relationship with union partners who recognize their value and want to work together in a respectful, cooperative way. (Fine, 2005: 190)

On the other hand, Polletta (2002), Clemens (1993), Staggenborg (1989) and Fine (2005) have shown that prefigurative politics can have tactical benefits and can become an integral part of strategic decision-making and organizational innovation. Polletta points out that while prefigurative politics are typically only appreciated for their solidarity benefits, they also have pragmatic benefits, such as providing safe environments for members to engage in strategic innovation, and helping bring about the personal development of participants as political actors. Strategic benefits of participatory democracy arise from the fact that when actors make strategic
choices, they are guided by both what is familiar and what is consistent with who they are (Ganz, 2000; Polletta, 2002). In Polletta’s words,

When activists decide how to conduct their deliberations, how to structure their organization, [...] they may be influenced not only by what is likely to be instrumentally effective and what is likely to be ideologically consistent but also by what is familiar. [...] An option may be appealing to activists because it accords with their view of who they are. (Polletta, 2002: 21-22)

Drawing on the social movements literature, I focus on two factors, linkages with community and free organizational spaces, to assess the sustainability of idealism in each of the four JfJ sites I studied. Although other factors, such as the existence of tight connections between informal structures of solidarity and the bureaucratic apparatus; elapsed time since the launching of the JfJ campaign; and the union’s market power in the locality mattered, these factors did not by themselves determine sustainability. Instead, they strengthened or weakened the effect of the two main factors.

**Linkages with Community**

In Essay 2, I pointed to the fact that members and staff who had been politicized went through a process of understanding the low social mobility of immigrant workers in America not as a personal problem but as a collective problem. Scholarship on politicization has maintained that it involves claiming membership in the larger society (Melucci, 1989); inserting voice into the larger political discourse; and demanding respect as an individual and as a citizen (Arendt, 1958). Studies of “new” social movements in Europe in the ‘80s attest that defining the self through the construction of a collective identity may in itself be a measure of success in these social movements (Melucci, 1989; Pizzorno, 1981). Melucci notes that the purposive individuals depicted in Olson (1965) as conducting utilitarian calculations of the costs and benefits of joining in collective action are actors “who are capable of defining themselves and the field of their action”. But Melucci argues that for actors who feel their identities have not been adequately represented by existing structures of interest representation, the construction of a collective identity precedes interest formation.
The process of constructing, maintaining, and altering a collective identity provides the basis for actors to shape their expectations and calculate the costs and benefits of their action. (Melucci, 1989: 34)

Another European social movements scholar, Pizzorno, asks, why would a worker also want to be represented as a black or even prefer to be? He answers this question by echoing Melucci’s point:

An answer to these kinds of questions can only be given if the process of identification is considered to precede and encompass the process of definition of interest and also to constitute a goal in itself when either no collective identity exists or the old ones are weakening. (Pizzorno, 1981: 280)

New social groups, then, challenge existing societal values in order to assert their sovereignty and right as a group. In order to do so, Pizzorno observes that they often lay “claims of a higher universalism than the current social order permits” (280). Their goal then, is “not the improvement of the position of a certain social category within a given system of value distribution” but a re-examination of the value system underpinning the current social order (280).

What structures support the process of reinterpreting traditional values and creating new institutions that would honor the particular identities new groups are laying claim to? A compelling amount of scholarship has pointed to the community and communal life as structures that incubate such discussions (Clemens, 1993; Evans & Boyte, 1986; Morris, 1984; Polletta, 2002). Communities provide a stable base for voluntary organizations where, in the words of Evans and Boyte, ordinary people are “able to learn a new self respect, a deeper and more assertive group identity, public skills, and values of cooperation and civic virtue.” (Evans and Boyte, 1986: 17)

In my fieldwork on the JfJ, I find that the presence of a larger community of immigrants in the vicinity enabled workers to see their problems not solely in terms of the employment relationship, as important as this were, but as the by-product of an immigration system that acknowledges employers’ demand for immigrant labor while it criminalizes the immigrant worker. The larger immigrant community encouraged workers to see their problems as the product of current political arrangements in which both their country of origin and the United States benefited economically from the political disenfranchisement of migrants. It also helped workers understand that their demands were directed as much to the state as to their employers.
A quote from a janitor in Washington DC who was formerly an agricultural engineer in El Salvador illustrates these points. “Salvador” said he was not particularly active in the Latino community but that he identified very much with the political problem that immigrants faced in this country. Salvador had been politicized while attending immigration marches throughout the spring and summer of 2006 and meetings held in organizations such as the Central American Resource Center.

I think really that we are not the first ones to immigrate to this country; no one can say to certain groups that these are the immigrants if they too were immigrants one day. [...] It may be that one day we become so large that we are the ones who will decide who will govern us. The politicians need to start seeing this problem from another viewpoint because really in the core, they themselves have created this. Why are our countries so poor, that’s the motive that gives rise to immigration. In my opinion, the reasons for emigrating are political, economical and have to do with how the US has treated its neighbors. These politics and economics have permitted our countries to go poor. We can't maintain our systems like they do here, the social and economic market system isn't for us because we have a history of a lot of paternalism in the institutions especially in the government. I think they should help to solve this problem. Also the politicians in our country should do something, not just depend on the people who have emigrated, to lift our economy.

Thus, I propose that linkages with immigrant communities where union members reside and from which they draw their motivation for continuing the JfJ struggle, would be important for sustaining idealism.

Free Spaces for Deliberation

The question posed earlier in this essay was how to combine centralized and strategic decision making with what scholars have termed solidarity structures. In their study of California labor leaders, Ganz, Sharpe, Somers and Strauss (2004) point to the importance of ‘free spaces’ in unions that allowed union leaders with their own visions for social reform to continue their personal projects while fulfilling their organizational roles in the union. I borrow this concept of ‘free spaces’ and define it as the areas within a bureaucracy that are not fully delineated by the system of rules in the bureaucracy and thereby allow for distinct goals, visions and values to be aired and deliberated. I draw from two literatures to further develop this concept.

The first body of work that relates to free spaces comes from the literature on social movements. This body of work describes the conditions under which distinct social structures and the
alternative visions and narratives they generate are institutionalized in formal organizations. One way in which to conceptualize free spaces in a formal organization is to think of them as the routinization of the social relationships that undergird deliberative decision making. I noted earlier that organizations committed to participatory democracy had formalized social interactions that may otherwise be too ad hoc and dependent on personal relationships (Polletta, 2002). Lipset, Trow, and Coleman (1956) traced the origins of democratic institutions in the ITU—such as the two-party system and the use of the popular referendum—to pre-existing “cleavages” among the social and occupational groups within the ITU. By free spaces, then, I refer to institutionalized mechanisms that encourage the exchange of conflicting values and disparate goals, and that foster the development of the individual as a whole person. At a broader societal level, free spaces have been conceived as organizations that provide an opportunity for ordinary people to reinterpret traditional values and to learn democratic processes (Evans and Boyte, 1986). Evans and Boyte point to the black church in the civil rights movement, the ethnic and community ties in the 19th century workers’ movement, and loose networks of organizations in the women’s movement as examples of free spaces. Free spaces within organizations can take the form of meetings, informal clubs, factions based on socially distinct groupings, and other congregations of organizational members where values and ideas are debated.

A second reference for free spaces can be drawn from the management literature on symbolic bureaucracy. Symbolic or soft bureaucracy (Jacobs, Jun., 1969) denotes a bureaucratic system “with a rigid exterior appearance symbolizing what key stakeholders expect but with a loosely coupled set of interior practices.” (Jermier and Slocum, 1991: 189) In their study of a police department, Jermier and Slocum (1991) use the notion of soft bureaucracy to explain the existence of five distinct models for police work that front line police drew on for daily practice despite the espousal of an officially prescribed “crime fighting” model. Officers subscribed rhetorically to the organizational goal of fighting crime, but in practice only about a fifth of them followed this model. Four other cultural models were practiced, including police work as ‘maintaining social order’, minimal intervention, social work, and professional service. The authors show that the different models of police work are systematically associated with variations in the social experience of police work, including tenure, rank, the presence of
physical danger in one’s work, and educational levels. Studies of soft bureaucracy suggest that the loose coupling (Weick, Mar., 1976) of formal structure and practice in formal organizations emerge from socially cohesive groupings within the organization.

Free spaces have been associated with several positive outcomes. These include: increased democratic capacity in a bureaucratized organization (Lipset, Trow, & Coleman, 1956); new organizational forms that emerge from alternative narratives (Clemens, 1993; Polletta, 2002); and the inclusion of social groups and networks in the formulation of organizational strategy (Narayanan & Fahey, 1982). Free spaces, then, are able to combine centralized decision making with decentralized support for social relations. I propose that free spaces provide a structure where movement career builders can construct personal visions for social change while fulfilling organizational roles.

Method

This essay is based on an iterative consultation between deductive theory-building and analysis of empirical cases in four JfJ sites – Los Angeles, Boston, Washington DC, and Houston. As I mentioned, the four cases selected here contribute to building a theory of the conditions that help sustain idealism in a bureaucracy rather than to testing existing theories. Overall, the cases were selected to understand the JfJ model holistically, which meant that variations were sought on several dimensions, including market conditions, time of campaign, organizing strategy, and union strategy regarding linkages with community organizations. Initially, Washington DC and Los Angeles were selected to understand how early-phase JfJ sites were dealing with member participation in the aftermath of the initial mobilizing phase, which happened more than two decades ago. These campaigns were two of the earliest JfJ campaigns, and in many ways Los Angeles and Washington DC represent two very different markets in which the JfJ organizing model was tested. Incidentally, the outcomes for movement careers and member engagement have been starkly different in Los Angeles and Washington DC, and so the differences in conditions between the two sites provide insight into contexts that are likely to sustain members’ participation. Houston and Boston were added as field sites in order to understand
the later generation of JfJ campaigns; in addition, Houston provided an opportunity to observe an ongoing JfJ campaign.

I considered a survey of all JfJ sites in the early phase of planning this dissertation and ruled it out, as the indicators I am dealing with are mostly qualitative and some of the topics addressed could be considered sensitive. For example, to determine whether members in a particular local union built movement careers and whether these careers had any impact on organizational practice alone would have required some amount of fieldwork in each of the twenty-nine locals.

Although the cases were not selected to vary on all factors I study in this essay, they do systematically vary on the two main factors – the extent to which the local union was linked with members’ communities; and the amount and quality of free spaces in the union for deliberation and growth of members. Table 11 shows the variation across the four sites in terms of factors that affect the sustainability of idealism. Los Angeles had both strong linkages with members’ communities and abundant free spaces, while Washington DC lacked in both. Boston and Houston each measured high on only one of the two factors. Among the three secondary factors, union market power was measured in terms of the percentage of union members who are full time. I selected this measure as an indicator of the union’s market power over the percentage of the workforce unionized because unionization rates after the JfJ surpassed 90% in all four cities and differences among these rates were insignificant. Post-organizing, the union’s primary efforts in part time markets had been expended in full timing the work; the union considered markets (and its own local organization) stable only when work had been full timed.

In analyzing the case studies, I initially treated each of the cities as separate case studies, analyzing within-case data for each (Eisenhardt, Oct., 1989; George, 1979). I then looked for cross-case patterns that helped identify similarities and differences across the cases using the principle of “structured focus” comparison (George, 1979). A structured focus comparison asks the same set of research questions for each case analyzed, and makes systematic comparisons across the cases on the dimensions relevant to the research question(s). For each case study, I outline the history and context of the JfJ; market conditions; extent of linkages with members’ communities; and the amount and quality of organizational free spaces.
A Comparison of Four Justice for Janitors Sites

- **Los Angeles** -

*History and Context of the JfJ*

The initial mobilizing phase (1987 – approximately 1992) in Los Angeles was a period of intense activity that is remembered and recounted by many who had the first hand experience of being organized and of organizing their peers. Unlike Houston or Washington DC where no union members were present in the commercial sector at the time of the campaign, in Los Angeles, union members themselves organized their non-union peers. Many of the latter were former union members whose workplaces went non-union when the work was subcontracted (density in downtown Los Angeles fell from 33% to 8% from 1977 to 1985). Documentary videos of Los Angeles marches in the ‘80s show faces and actions charged with passion. The police beatings during the Century City strikes, while traumatizing for the participants, also resolved workers to fight longer and harder. In interviews, members who lived those days said that the JfJ events transformed their beliefs about what was possible; members said it changed the way they thought about themselves and about their lives.

Three factors particularly contributed to member engagement in organizing. First, the large geographic area under the union’s jurisdiction at the start of the campaign and the rapid geographic expansion of the campaign thereafter necessitated more involvement from members,
and meant that members quickly took on roles that in other cities were played by paid staff. At the beginning of the campaign, the union’s jurisdiction covered roughly what was Los Angeles County (an area covering more than 4,700 square miles). Over the initial mobilizing period, organizing expanded union jurisdiction to most of the Combined Statistical Area known as Greater Los Angeles, including Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura Counties. In 1999 and 2000, the union added four other counties, including Orange County. Employer opposition in Orange County was fierce and the union mounted a series of grassroots organizing initiatives to engage workers in action.

Second, the extensive connection between student activists from colleges and universities around the area and the Los Angeles labor movement, as well as the popularity of the JfJ among student activists, particularly among second generation immigrant activists, meant that there was less of a need for the Los Angeles union to recruit its staff from among its members. Compared to locals where members at early stages of their politicization were absorbed into staff jobs, Los Angeles members have had ample opportunity to develop informal careers relatively independently from the formal hierarchy.

Third, members’ engagement in organizing during the early ‘90s prompted the emergence of a member-organized opposition faction, whose activities culminated with an electoral victory in 1995. While the mainstay of the opposition faction up to the elections in ‘95 was members in healthcare within the then amalgamated local union, the opposition faction lived on after the local union re-organized sectorally in 1997, and continued to provide a reason for grassroots organizing among janitorial members.

Union’s Market Power

For as long as staff in the local union can remember, office cleaning jobs in Los Angeles have been full time. Even during the ‘80s when density in downtown Los Angeles fell to a record low of 8% and wages fell precipitously, union and non union workers remained full time. Table 12 summarizes the decline of unionization in the Los Angeles building services industry from 1977 to 1985. Wages for workers under the standard agreement rose from $5.83 to $8.02 during this period, but only 100 workers were covered by these wages in 1985 compared to 2,500 workers
in 1977. The suburban agreement paid hourly wages of $4 in 1984, only slightly higher than the $3.35 hourly rate for non union workers (Mines et al., 1992; SEIU, 1986a).

Table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Union density in downtown L.A.</th>
<th>Members covered by standard agreement</th>
<th>Standard agreement hourly wage</th>
<th>Members covered by suburban agreement</th>
<th>Suburban agreement hourly wage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1977</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>$5.83</td>
<td>2500</td>
<td>$3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>$8.02*</td>
<td>1200</td>
<td>$4.00*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* These wage figures are for 1984.

At the time of my fieldwork, I discovered that many full time members of the union worked part time second jobs during the day or on weekends. This included those members who I determined were building movement careers, with the exception of those who were most active. Despite being tired and busy, workers in Los Angeles showed a great deal of interest in the union. Two factors seem to have helped members' attachments to the union. First, workers seldom moved out of their janitorial jobs and rarely changed workplaces. Most members I talked to had worked in one building for years and knew all their co-workers, many of whom were active in the union. This made it hard even for by-standing workers not to get involved from time to time. Workers did not only keep their janitorial jobs because they wanted to; many workers explained to me that they did not think they could find another “main” job that paid decent wages and benefits, including a family healthcare. Within such a stable community of janitors, over time, a status hierarchy developed. For Los Angeles members, being involved in the union was a means to gain recognition in the community of janitors, to have fun, and to learn. Second, the Los Angeles union and its staff were committed to empowering members and including them in all aspects of union work. It must be noted that in other cities where workers were full time and seldom changed workplaces, such as New York and Boston, the disinterest of the union administration in engaging the janitorial membership kept the union out of members' lives for decades prior to reforms.
Linkages with Community

The long history of the Latino community in Los Angeles has helped workers to see their struggle as not solely in terms of a labor action but as a Latino struggle. Although a proper study of the influence of the Latino community on the JfJ in Los Angeles lies outside the scope of this paper, at least three aspects of this influence can be pointed out.

First, organizations existed in Los Angeles that were rooted in the Latino experience and these organizations publicly sanctioned the campaign. Members and staff of many such organizations marched alongside janitors, and these acts seem to have legitimated the janitors' cause in the eyes of the Latino community and in the eyes of the workers themselves. The JfJ was embedded in the larger context of a strong bond established between the labor movement in Los Angeles and the Latino community, a bond that was forged through institutions such as the Los Angeles central labor council, a federation of AFL-CIO affiliated unions in the area. Many Latino activists built their careers in labor unions, and later in the larger stage of the central labor council. Several of these activists successfully ran for political office, and, as politicians, helped strengthen the association between community and labor issues.

Second, the JfJ entered the public narrative of the Latino community, through the coming together of Latino activists and janitors, and through the coverage of the JfJ campaign by the Spanish language media. The thematic congruence of the labor movement in Los Angeles and the Latino/Chicano movement has occurred over several decades and cannot be attributed solely to the JfJ campaign. But many janitors expressed in interviews that through the campaign, they came to understand how intimately the plight of the immigrant was tied to their lack of power in the workplace.

Third, most of the staff working on the Los Angeles JfJ campaign had either grown up in the Latino community or, if they themselves were not Latinos, had been politicized through close

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17 Even after the SEIU split away from the AFL-CIO, the SEIU locals in Los Angeles maintained close ties to the central labor council.
interactions with the Latino community. In interviews, staff often explained their work on the JfJ campaign as following the ideals of the Chicano movement in Los Angeles in the ’70s. One senior staff explained his trajectory from a Chicano activist to a top level union staff as follows:

[When he was growing up] There was police injustice, police violence and harassment, housing discrimination. When my dad was buying his first house the only place he could buy it was in Pacoima, In the San Fernando Valley. People say shit, how did East LA [the early Mexican American ghetto] arise in the San Fernando Valley? In the late 1950s they wanted my dad to sign something saying he was Spanish not Mexican so he wouldn't diminish the land value. And he wouldn't sign it. It was largely a Latino and black area. [...] My life changed at the Chicago studies department, it was the largest and most radical, the first Chicano studies department in the state. Rodolfo Acuna wrote a famous book, Occupied America. Whole radical Chicano history in LA. Real estate injustices, tracking, police injustice, Vietnam, all these injustices, everything that happened to my family. It empowered me, and it changed my life and radicalized me. So I got into the Chicano movement. [...] I realized after I started working with youth [issues] that what we need is more economic justice just like my family’s experience. The labor movement is what’s going to empower people, give them a sense of self respect and dignity, and change their lives economically. So I decided to dedicate my life.

Free spaces

To the visiting researcher, what I termed ‘free spaces’ were initially difficult to identify in the Los Angeles union. Upon longer stay, and upon comparison with other unions, I discerned that free spaces in the union exist not only inside the union building, although the union building is a center of communal activities, but also in members’ workplaces. The long term organization of strikes and rallies by “areas”, which refer to the industry’s market divisions (determined mainly by real estate prices), has cultivated distinct identities and cultures in each of these units. For example, Downtown South is known as the hotbed of opposition activity; it was home to the first small clique of members who started the opposition faction among building service members, and still remains as the center of a loose network of oppositionists. Century City is known for the militancy of its members; it consistently produces more than its share of leaders in strikes and demonstrations. In meetings I attended at the San Fernando Valley area, which is home to a large Latino community, I saw that the workplace meetings there had a greater cohesion having to do with the fact that unlike other areas, the janitors who worked there also lived there.

In Los Angeles, workplace meetings, which are convened by the steward (a member) and sometimes attended by a union staff person, constitute another free space. They are held during
workers' “lunch” times (around 10pm) and provide a chance for workers to voice their opinions about union policy, or to discuss problems and solutions rising from their work. Workplace meetings in Los Angeles provided a more informal way of getting acquainted with union affairs than did meetings that took place at the union.

Union work and union meetings provide another kind of free space in which members make social contacts, vie for recognition, and debate amongst themselves and with staff about small and large priorities. Meetings in the Los Angeles union, unlike in other unions I visited, started early and finished late; always, I could find members lingering in the hallways after meetings had ended, chatting with each other and with staff. Participating in the Committee on Political Action during election time was a much coveted and competed for affair – I have witnessed several heated arguments around the selection of members to participate in week-long door knocking campaigns. The union in Los Angeles, then, is represented by a central structure that appears on an organizational chart with various functional departments, but it is also a distributed structure residing in workplaces and amidst the community of janitors. A frequently heard phrase among the members, “The union is us,” summarizes the participatory structure of the Los Angeles union.

Sustaining idealism through movement careers

Constant grassroots organizing, a stable membership with strong ties to the Latino community, and vibrant free spaces make the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors a supportive environment for movement career builders. In Essay 2, I documented nineteen members who were building movement careers in the Los Angeles union. Out of a total of 26 staff persons in Los Angeles, I determined that at least ten were building movement careers; in addition, four staff persons who had previously built movement careers now were in managerial positions but remained loyal to movement goals. In the absence of a comprehensive survey of movement careers across the JJ local, it is difficult to ascertain that more people build movement careers in the Los Angeles union than in other JJ locals. But I have not witnessed the extent of the vibrancy of democratic participation in other locals that I have observed in Los Angeles – I describe this in detail in Essay 2.
History and Context of JfJ

For at least two reasons, organizing in Washington DC was prolonged (the organizing period lasted from 1987 to 1997) and extremely difficult. First, the majority of building owners in Washington DC were local owners rather than the national or regional owners that the SEIU dealt with in other markets. These owners, through the building owners' association, organized assiduously against unionization. National union staff noted that in other cities, although individual owners often resisted unionization, owners had not organized to resist the union; these staff characterized the owners in Washington DC as being "southern" in their anti-unionism. Second, organizing for the JfJ in Washington DC was mired with internal conflict that alienated existing members from the process of organizing non-union workers. In fact, the national union, expecting the conflict with existing members, initially charted a separate local union for the JfJ for the first five years of the campaign. The JfJ local merged with the existing building services local in 1991. Unlike Boston or New York, where the resistance came from the local union leadership, the conflict in the Washington DC local ensued from a predominantly African American membership and staff who felt the JfJ introduced a way of organizing that was considered interventionist and disrespectful of the community that existing members had built. One former staff person who was interviewed for an oral history project in 1995 compared the JfJ organizing to "yesterday's organizing", which she believed was more interpersonal:

With yesterday's organizing we organized workers. Today we are organizing employers and not so much the individual workers. [...] We used to ride the bus with people, pick them up in cars. If we could get two or three people, [we would] pick them up, go somewhere, and have a meeting. But it was done on an individual basis. Now it's done on a group basis. (Chenven, 1997: 16)

In the same publication of the local's oral history project, members reminisced about pot luck meals shared together at general membership meetings in the local, and "cabarets, picnics, things like that" (Chenven, 1997: 93). Of SEIU locals that had a program for seniors over 75, the Washington DC local had the most members in their senior citizens' program; one former staff attributed it to relationship-building: "because we did spend a lot of time on building relationships after people were organized" (Chenven, 1997: 17).
To the national union, located a stone’s throw away from the local union, complaints from existing members in DC registered as a reluctance to see the benefits they enjoyed in the unionized government buildings sector being extended to a predominantly Latino workforce in the non unionized commercial sector. Past history between the national and the local (the local has been trustees by the national a total of five time in its history) also did not help the JfJ gain trust among existing members. Thus, unlike in Los Angeles, where the JfJ galvanized existing members to organize their non union co-workers, the Washington DC JfJ did not receive full scale support from existing members. Staff deployed to the Washington DC JfJ worked hard in a hostile environment and, except for a few, turned over quickly.

Many commercial janitors became extremely involved in the series of militant actions - large scale public demonstrations which included the well known blocking of bridges leading into downtown Washington DC - hence giving the campaign a grass roots approach. However, many of the workers who remembered the initial politicizations got other jobs and left the union. As a result, staff in Washington DC are constantly trying to create meaningful experiences for new members. In addition to grassroots organizing, the union engaged in public campaigns against targeted owners by exposing their breach of zoning and tax laws. The union was also involved in legislative activities, and successfully passed a Displaced Workers Protection Act in Washington DC, which mandated the retention of workers when contractors changed hands; and Initiative 51, which stipulated that the public be able to examine corporate property tax records.

Union’s market power

The Washington DC local’s total membership of 8000 is approximately equally divided between the federal government and educational facilities sector where work is full time, and the commercial sector, where work is part time; a few hundred workers work in a third sector containing race tracks and stadiums. The market in government and educational facilities has always been stable; jobs and standards in the federal government buildings have been protected by the Service Contract Act of 1965 even as they were contracted out. As in Boston, differences in the social reality of work in the two unionized sectors map onto different social groupings among the union membership.
The union’s experience with commercial office building owners in Washington DC has been that they are predominantly local millionaires operating in one of the most profitable office real estate markets in the country, and they are fiercely anti union. In addition, the Washington DC cleaning market is considerably less consolidated than other markets, and the national cleaning contractors that SEIU has relationships with in other markets have lower market share in the Washington DC market. For example, in Los Angeles as of the end of 2006, approximately two thirds of the market was cleaned by two national contractors; whereas in Washington DC the top two contractors cleaned only 27.6% of the market and the biggest market share (15%) is held by a local contractor. In the Jifj model, where pressure is applied on contractors and owners using the union’s relationships with these companies in other cities, smaller and local contractors and owners have proved harder to negotiate with than larger and national contractors and owners.

As a result of prolonged campaigning for the Jifj, lower dues for part time members, and purposeful concealment of worker turnover records by employers (which prevented the union from deducting dues from new employees), the local has been in perpetual financial crisis in the past. Staff say that the local ran in the red for most of the '90s up to 2001, when the union began to confront employers for more accurate employee records. Financial woes have contributed to the local union’s decision to merge with the New York local in 2005, a decision ratified by the local union’s executive board. While staff in Washington DC say they have lost considerable autonomy after the merger, they can appreciate the cost savings and scaling of power that the merger has helped bring about. For example, a high level staff told me that the merger, through the consolidation of administrative functions, has saved overhead costs; for example, the Washington DC unit saved $100,000 on legal costs alone in 2006, comprised mainly of attorney fees and arbitration proceedings.

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18 According to documents shared with me by the SEIU Research Department, the share of local owners in the market has decreased in recent years – as of October, 2006, the market share of national versus local owners was about equal.
Linkages with Community

The Washington DC local is one of the oldest locals in the SEIU (it appears to have been chartered in the early 1940s); the local was known among staff for a distinct culture rooted in the African American experience. An oral history project of members and staff in the local union conducted in 1995 records that members and staff saw the local union as an integral part of the Civil Rights movement, fighting against segregation, opposing the prohibition of the hiring of minorities as apprentices, and of course, organizing black workers in their workplaces (Chenven, 1997). The local appears to have been involved in all kinds of community activities and social programs in the '70s; union staff often were also board members in various community programs. Arline Neal, a former president of the local, gives some examples:

Local 82 [Washington DC local] had a program that [staff name] was heading up. It actually came out of our HRDI program, the Senior Citizens/Youth Program, where we took in young people who were having a difficult time making it. We have also been involved in the Job Corps Program that sits on the hill at Fort Lincoln. With this other one [the Senior Citizens/Youth Program], we were the direct sponsors of the program. Not only did we do things for our own senior citizens but for anybody in the community.

Unlike in Los Angeles, where a previously African American workforce in the commercial buildings sector was almost entirely replaced by an immigrant workforce, in Washington DC, blacks stayed on in the better jobs in the federal government office buildings. Currently, the union tries to represent both the black and the Latino communities. Staff persons’ own racial and ethnic backgrounds reflect the race and ethnicity of the members in each sector. But the union has lost both its identity as an organization representing the black community as well as the connections it had with African American community-based organizations. It is true that the greater employer opposition the union faced in mounting its campaign to organize commercial sector workers than in other cities limited the resources the union had to devote to building community relationships. But staff and members state that the break away from the African American community also resulted from the fact that being part of the community was valued less under the new leadership appointed by the national union than was building economic power. The union has had difficulty establishing new connections with the more recent Latino community. In many ways the Central American communities in Washington DC are only recently finding their political voice. Staff say that part of the problem has also been that the
focus of organizations representing both the African American and Latino communities in
Washington DC has moved away from grassroots representation to lobbying designed to affect
federal legislations. The local union played an important role in the Washington DC-Maryland-
Virginia coalition for fair immigration reform in 2006. However, the coalition's strategy
meetings, some of which I attended, tended to be conducted by high level representatives of
member organizations and had limited members' participation.

Free spaces

Partly because of the poor financial situation of the local (see next section), the local union has
suffered physical space constraints for much of its history. Unlike the Boston and Los Angeles
local, the DC local does not own its premises and has moved its rented offices several times in
the last two decades. This has made it difficult to hold impromptu meetings that can lead to
casual encounters and the growth of a community. The union rents out a church building for its
quarterly general membership meetings and bi-monthly steward meetings. Free spaces in
Washington DC existed in the form of trainings on union activities, called “member brigades,”
that members received for a week at a time. The trainings sought to engage members in a range
of union work, such as posting information bulletins, collecting contribution pledges for the
union's political fund, or phone banking for political candidates supported by the union. I
followed one group of members in training for a week and observed meaningful relationships
form among the members who participated. Participants said that they learned a lot and that
they may volunteer for more of such trainings. Staff said that some members do come back, and
those who make significant contributions to union work are asked to become staff. Brigades,
then, are the most constant type of participation that members have in the Washington DC local.
One of the participants in the training that I observed said of his experience:

The brigade has been really important because one starts to become aware of all the work that the union
is doing and also aware of what one's job is. Our people [from El Salvador] have this suspicion that any
workers that get together as a group are communists. Like I told you the other day, our government takes
advantage of these suspicions at election times. So the people don't get to become aware of things in a
proper way because they have that engrained in their minds, that any collectivization is communism. So
we need more representatives more people who can be close to the people. It's helped me a lot to be in
the brigade.
Another significant space where members formed ties and learned about union activities was the English language classes that the union offered through a partnership with a non-profit organization. I attended some of the classes and spoke with members there. Members were in general happy to be learning a skill that they believed would improve their chances in this country; they also enjoyed forming friendships there. I also attended a graduation ceremony where several graduates who had completed the six levels of classes required for a diploma wept openly; some graduates in their speeches said that this was the only diploma they received from any institution. These classes provided the potential for building a community among union members and for linking this community to union work, but except for handouts on immigration rallies that the local union was involved in organizing, I observed no significant linkages between the English classes and union activities.

In addition to the free spaces mentioned above, it is reasonable to expect that community-building among workers also happens in workplaces in the government buildings sector where the work is full time and many workers have worked in the same building for years. But during my fieldwork I observed few indications that the social networks built in these workplaces permeated into the official arena in the union. This is partly because the elimination of Washington DC's executive board after the merger with New York in 2005 has drastically reduced the linkages between workplace solidarity structures and the official activities of the union.

**Sustaining idealism through movement careers**

When I arrived for fieldwork in Washington DC in the summer of 2006, the Washington DC executive board had disbanded as a result of the merger with New York. Out of the thirteen members who previously served on the executive board of the Washington DC local, only one was chosen to represent all workers in Washington DC, Montgomery County, and Baltimore at the merged executive board in New York. This amounted to more than a doubling of the members each executive board member represented, from 920 members under the previous local (total membership: 12,000) to over 2,000 members in the new merged local (total membership: over 100,000). Two other members from Washington DC participated in New York-based committees. I interviewed some of the former executive board members in
Washington DC on the phone. Several of them said they still attend steward meetings and that they “are here when the union needs us,” but their involvement in the union had been reduced to about the same as the average steward’s. Plans had been proposed by the Washington DC administrators to invite former executive board members to form an advisory board but these plans had not been implemented. Arguably, the members I spoke to who were former executive board members represent the most knowledgeable and committed of members. Out of the four former executive board members I interviewed, at least two members had been politicized in the JfJ and invoked the characteristics of movement careers when speaking of their work at the union. It was uncertain at the time of my fieldwork whether these members’ movement careers would continue to influence the union now that they had lost their official role, or whether they would build it somewhere else.

A second difficulty with members’ movement careers in Washington DC is that several conditions necessitated their absorption into staff careers. For two decades Washington DC has served as a training ground for college educated JfJ organizers. These organizers generally turned over quickly due to the harsh conditions and slow progress of the campaign; they typically moved to another JfJ campaign where their honed skills were greatly appreciated. The rapid churning of staff hired externally created a large demand for the internal promotion of members who demonstrated commitment and skills into staff jobs. Out of a total of 23 staff in the Washington DC/Baltimore area, 10 were former members (in Los Angeles, 7 out of 26 staff were former members; three of them were fired during my fieldwork for engaging in political activity). With limited free spaces, part time janitors motivated to build movement careers found that taking a step into the hierarchy of the union, ironically, was often the only way to continue being engaged in the union.

- BOSTON -

History and Context of JfJ

Organizing for the JfJ in Boston had the dual goal of achieving higher standards in the market as well as reforming the local union. Janitors in Boston had always been union members (the
union never lost its density of 95-99% in the market), but their voice and economic welfare had been suppressed by past administrations of the local. The Boston local had long been under the control of the Sullivan family, which produced two successive local union Presidents. The national union finally trusteeed the local in 1998, setting the ground for a JfJ. During the trusteeship, all but two staff persons from the previous Sullivan administration were fired or quit on their own. In 2000, preparations began for a JfJ in the commercial sector as well as for janitors in Tufts and Harvard Universities. Grassroots organizing approaches were tried in all places, but staff stated that explosive organizing came from Tufts and Harvard Universities, where workers were full time (in contrast to the predominantly part time commercial sector), and where students helped workers confront the university administration. The campaign was relatively short, and ended within two years with new contracts that significantly improved wages for janitors and, for the first time nationally in the JfJ, secured healthcare benefits for part time workers. After the campaign, the newly politically invigorated janitors helped vote in several of the JfJ staff as the local union’s new leadership, in an election that was vigorously contested by non-janitorial members who had held privileges under the previous administrations.

The JfJ also touched the lives of many organizers, many of whom were not on the staff roster – they were community members who were volunteering and students in the universities where janitors worked. Some of these people stayed on in the organization, but most moved on to other organizations. Compared to Los Angeles, Boston’s university graduates are not from the area and tend not to stay on after completing their education; Boston also has a much smaller pool of second generation immigrants from immigrant communities that the members belong to.

Union’s market power

Boston’s membership includes commercial sector janitors, of whom there are about 9,000, and workers in higher education facilities, of whom there are about 3,000 – 4,000. Workers in higher education facilities include janitors as well as skilled maintenance workers and a few other

19 The contract clause for healthcare benefits for part time workers came into effect later, in 2005.

20 For example, maintenance workers at MIT moved to de-certify the local union and set up their own union, a move that ultimately did not come to fruition.
occupations. Social experiences at work differed across commercial sector workers, who were part time, and higher education workers, who were mostly full time. In addition, status in the union differed across janitors (in commercial and higher education sectors) and maintenance workers (in the higher education facilities). The latter group was the political base of the Sullivan administrations and dominated the executive board in the past. Maintenance workers also were predominantly male, and belonged to older ethnic communities in Boston. Many of them looked down upon janitors, the newer immigrants. One staff who had worked under the previous administration said that for decades, the executive board had been controlled by "White dudes". My notes on his description of the ritualistic show that organizing commercial sector janitors had been include the following:

Organizing was a hands-off affair for the union. He remembers that the organizing team would pay homeless people (their favorite homeless shelter was the XXX XXX Inn) $25 per day to go into non unionized buildings and posture them. They even dressed up a business agent as a priest and sent him into the companies to talk to workers [about the benefits of joining a union]. Then after the show was over, the companies would sit down with the director of organizing and "cut deals" on wages.

Staff in the Boston local said they experienced the usual difficulties with organizing part time workers during the JFJ campaign. One staff member who worked as an organizer in the Los Angeles campaign in the '80s and '90s told me the biggest difficulty she experienced in Boston was getting workers' time, because part time workers in Boston did not have 'lunch time'. In Los Angeles, lunch times were invaluable to organizers for talking to workers. But despite this draw back, the Boston local has not experienced much of the difficulties associated with representing a majority membership of part time workers. First, the Boston local has greater bargaining power over employers than other part time locals (recall that union density never fell in Boston), and thus it has been successful in full timing most of its commercial sector janitors in a relatively short period of time. A new contract won in 2007 for commercial janitors stipulates that the transition to full time work will start in 2008 and, by the end of the transition in 2012, 60% of downtown commercial janitors and 25% of suburban janitors will be full time. Second, the local union has not faced the same financial hardship as other part time unions. This is likely due to the maintenance workers providing a stable source of revenue for the union, as well as to the possibility that Boston's employers may have been more honest about part time employee turnovers than other cities' employers have.
Linkages with Community

Janitorial members in the Boston local come from diverse communities compared to janitors in Los Angeles, for example, where the majority of janitors are from Mexico or from Central America. The majority groups in Boston are Dominicans, Salvadorans, Brazilians, Colombians, and Guatemalans with minority groups from Trinidad and Tobago, Cape Verde, and Haiti. The communities that these nationalities represent in Boston vary in their history as well as in their organizational density – for example, while the Dominican and Haitian communities have longer histories in Boston and more established community-based organizations (Levitt, 2001), other communities have settled here in the recent decades and are not as organizationally rich.21 While the length of settlement is not the only parameter in institutional development within a community, none of these communities have the history that Chicanos have in Los Angeles or Houston. More importantly, there was not enough time during the 2001-2002 campaign for the union to involve organizations in members’ communities. Instead, the local union reached out to more influential and older community organizations with ties to institutionalized politics who were better positioned to help the union pressure the employers. Ties with smaller organizations in the communities where members reside are being built currently through ongoing programs in the union, but not all ethnic communities that members belong to possess the organizations that can potentially act as the union’s counterparts.

Free spaces

Given that the majority of commercial sector janitors have been part time for most of the history of the union in Boston and there is a relatively high turnover among workers, members say there is less communal interaction in the workplaces. Outside of workplaces, free spaces in Boston have been designed through the purposeful intervention of staff who felt it was crucial that workers have the means to build a community. Two types of such spaces exist in the union. The first is a training program that shares the union premises (and was funded by the union for the first four months) but is run as a separate non profit organization. Started by a staff person

who had formerly worked on the farm workers' campaigns in California, the program is unique in combining English language classes, organizing for power, and civic activities. For example, one of the events that the program organized was a bus tour of Boston where professors from area universities mingled with members and explained the history behind various Boston landmarks. The program director explained the intention behind the tour:

Workers who'd lived in Boston for 15-20 years had never been to Faneuil hall and Quincy market – they'd never heard of it. One worker who worked in the building right next to the public library didn't know that this building was the public library. But with just an entry point they blossom and they make their own connections. The most malleable things are people’s expectations of themselves and of situations, and that's really quite dramatic.

At the time of my fieldwork, the program had successfully negotiated for employers to contribute to training in maintenance skills. The director said that more than the training itself, which covered only a small number of members, the deliberation among janitors about how to select trainees among them and what career ladders might lead out of janitorial work was valuable.

A second type of free space emerged from the necessity to respect and nurture the diverse social groupings among members. Staff described to me a system of ‘community representatives’ who were elected by members belonging to a certain ethnic community. These representatives were involved in gathering information and coordinating activities in the union among janitors of their ethnicity. They also represented the union in their ethnic community and liaised with community-based organizations that the union had relationships with. Staff told me they were impressed with how this member-organized system had worked out, and said that it had contributed to more members participating in union activities.

*Sustaining idealism through movement careers*

Although my fieldwork in Boston did not survey how many members were building movement careers, it was possible to determine that a significant number of janitors in higher education facilities had become extremely active and influential in the union. In addition, many part time janitors in the commercial sector show intense commitment and fervor in their fulfillment of organizational roles and in their roles as community representatives.
Discoveries of past wrongs that most janitorial members had not known about fueled the politicization of many members. Furthermore, the social cleavages between newer immigrants and members from older ethnic communities in the union remain and are reproduced in the union’s own politics. These cleavages are likely to continue providing the need for deliberation and debate between different groups, and may motivate movement career builders. In addition, the existence of free spaces make it likely that despite the limited time part time workers have for scheduled participation in official union meetings, these members can still stay engaged in the union. One potential drawback for safeguarding movement careers is that like Washington DC, there is greater absorption of active members into staff careers in Boston. Although the reasons for this are unclear, one explanation that has been offered to me by a staff person is that Boston has a relative paucity of college graduates applying for staff jobs at the local union and so the union has drawn on members to fill staff jobs.

- HOUSTON -

History and Context of the JfJ

Organizing in Houston started with a community-based grassroots approach, then struggled to combine this approach with a more conventional JfJ organizing approach of creating a public relations crisis for employers and owners. At the time of my fieldwork, the two approaches co­existed in tension. SEIU’s organizing in Houston was planned for several years as part of strategic planning that had identified the South and South West as regions for what the union called “break through” organizing. Houston was also the first city where the SEIU mounted a series of campaigns in all of its major sectors, starting with the JfJ in building services, followed by campaigns to organize healthcare workers, city workers, and security guards. In a conference call with labor scholars in November 2005 that I participated in, the director of SEIU’s building services explained that a different approach was taken for the JfJ in Houston because it was the first right-to-work state in which the union had little in the way of a “base” - i.e. existing members, or SEIU local unions in healthcare or public services that could be of help

22 The other campaigns started in 2007 and are currently ongoing.
in reaching politicians and community groups. In the absence of a base, staff in the SEIU building services sector expected synergy could come from the SEIU’s civic participation program in Houston.

SEIU’s program on civic participation for immigrants started as part of an AFL-CIO committee on the legalization of undocumented immigrants, in which SEIU was an active force. The committee recommended a set of programmatic goals which were adopted unanimously by the AFL-CIO executive council in 2000. When after 9/11 the AFL-CIO program faltered, SEIU and a few other unions with large immigrant constituencies pressed on with a campaign for voter registrations among immigrants in Los Angeles. This campaign served as a model for similar campaigns in Chicago, Houston, and Miami and Tampa in 2003. The terrain for a labor-led civic participation program in Houston, according to SEIU staff I interviewed who worked on the project, was drastically different from that of Los Angeles. The union faced an established network of immigrant and community-based organizations that were on the whole suspicious of trade unions. The union’s response was to hire a staff person in 2001 from one of these organizations and have this person build up the union’s relationships with community organizations. At the same time, the national union was planning a JfJ in Houston; they asked the staff person from the immigration reform project to work on building a network of community organizations that could support the JfJ. A group of religious and immigrant community organizations were invited by the Houston staff person to form what became known as the Labor Organizing Committee. For several months, representatives of this Committee conducted discussions with non-union janitors in parking lots and house visits about the benefits of unionization.

Approximately a year into the activities on the ground by the Labor Organizing Committee, in Spring of 2005, SEIU started implementing a JfJ model in Houston. The Chicago local was given supervisory authority over the Houston campaign as an “anchor local” in the mid-west region. The ‘anchor local’ principle refers to SEIU policy that powerful locals provide a platform for break-through campaigns in their region by, for example, providing training for new staff and deploying their own staff to the campaign. A team of researchers were sent in from Chicago to

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23 There is a small SEIU public sector local union in Houston which staff said did not have much power.
Houston to brainstorm on how to tie the JfJ into common concerns for the Houston public. Two decisions were made early on. First, a decision was made to refrain from the militant tactics that the JfJ was known for. One of the researchers on the team put it to me as follows:

When we first started out down there in a hotel room, all outsiders essentially with the exception of maybe one or two people, and I made this list of all the stereotypes that people outside have about Texas – that it was a very conservative city, a very white city, all these different things and we debunked them systematically – and then we talked about what was very real about Houston. And what that led us to was, it led us to the idea that it was neither a very conservative city nor a very liberal city but that it’s a city that values moderation, values its ability to fix problems.

Another staff in Chicago involved with the Houston campaign suggested that this strategy had to do with SEIU’s perception of what would work in a new market with potentially hostile employers:

We also looked at the question of, would the normal tactics of creating a quick crisis, creating a public drama and lots of aggressive rallying, would that play in Texas or would it play into the hands of owners and the hands of contractors? We really needed to re-think doing JfJ in the south and in the new market.

A white paper issued by the union drew attention to the poverty among janitors who earned $5.15 in a city rich with oil money; this paper argued that employers who did not provide healthcare for immigrant workers were contributing to a crisis in Houston’s emergency rooms. With support from community groups, the JfJ team, which by now included staff from Chicago in addition to a crew of organizers recruited from community organizations in Houston, launched a very successful “organizing convention” in April 2005 attended by over a thousand people. At the same time, over a six-month period in 2005, about a hundred unionized janitors from other cities were flown in to Houston to persuade Houston janitors to sign union cards. The convention and the behind-the-scenes negotiations got most employers to sign the agreement. The union took workers in one downtown building out on strike mainly for demonstrative purposes on July 18, 2005, and claimed an unexpectedly early victory in Houston.

The quick success raised difficult questions among staff about the organizing method. The supervision of the campaign in 2005 by outsiders and the high-level negotiations approach to organizing created tension among the local members of the organizing team, whose understanding of the campaign prior to the advent of the outsiders had been more community-
based and grassroots. In an interview, one of the staff who was recruited locally said she objected to the pre-scripted roles given to workers:

I think that when we were talking about leadership building, it was more like here’re your talking points in front of the media and here’s what you need to say. Or you need to get people to the meeting or to get these cards signed. And the folks [workers] are going to be strong because they believe in it. But I think that there could have been also further investment in terms of actual leadership building and actually have them be part of the analysis in terms of how the campaign is going.

A couple of months after the card-check was complete, turnover among part time members invalidated a number of union cards and the union was thrust into a second round of card collection. Dozens of additional janitors from unionized cities were flown in to Houston. The union finally won an area-wide agreement in December 2006, more than a year since the first round of card collection was completed. The contract stipulated healthcare coverage for members and a two-fold increase in wages within 24 months (www.houstonjanitors.org). It appears that this latter phase of organizing was more grassroots in its approach as the union realized the importance of securing workers’ commitment to a unionized job. The union also diverted from the initial caution against large-scale direct action in the second round of the campaign, and staged demonstrations and rallies across Houston.

**Union’s market power**

As discussed above, organizing part time workers in a right-to-work state with no other significant unions in town to ally with has posed a tremendous challenge to the union. One illustration of the difficulty of this situation is that after card collection was completed in July, 2005, many workers went on vacation, and because they did not yet have a union contract and did not have vacation days, they did what they usually did in such cases – they quit their jobs.

The Houston Jff campaign has answered employers’ calls to revoke union recognition when those who had initially signed union cards left their jobs by vigorously re-organizing new part time workers. Currently, the union faces the same problem of retaining the participation of part time workers as do the local unions in Boston and Washington DC, but without the full time workers that these other local unions had to provide a stable community of workers and a stable source of revenue for the union. As is the case with other recently recognized SEIU groups in Texas, the Houston janitors’ unit is not deemed to have enough membership to be its
own local union. Currently, all Texas SEIU groups are recognized as a “branch office” of Local 5, based in Phoenix, Arizona. Should this structure be retained, the local union faces the dilemma of creating spaces for participation closer to the membership base than it can provide through its formal structure which is regionally centralized.

Linkages with Community

The JFJ in Houston represents a deviance from the conventional JFJ model in that it has approached non union workers through community organizations. In most other JFJ cities, community organizations were involved in moving employers and owners by, for example, endorsing the JFJ publicly and helping to mobilize key outside supporters. Staff I interviewed at the community organizations in Houston were positive about their new relationship with SEIU. In a no-union environment, these organizations were already working on workplace issues such as back pay and unjust firings, and did not feel they were particularly successful at resolving them. They believed that supporting the JFJ was a way of helping their own membership. One staff person at an inter-faith organization told me that the clergy in her organization’s member churches were “excited” about the prospect that the campaign would help undocumented immigrants:

They [the clergy] were excited about the idea. They were excited about doing something that would raise the wages of workers because they have a lot of immigrants in their community and obviously they want to see people doing better. But also what was important was the reaction of the workers because at that time you had SEIU out in the field and at the worksites trying to find janitors and you had a lot of people who were really afraid because they were undocumented. And they noticed a really big change as soon as we did these couple of weekends of announcements and everything in the parishes. That really helped some people come forward that had otherwise been reticent. Once they saw the church being out in front that was really important to them.

In a moving speech at a special mass convened in support of the campaign, the Archbishop of Houston blessed the organizing effort.

Another staff of a community organization that focused on affordable housing also believed that the JFJ would help members of her organization’s constituency, because some of this organization’s members were janitors, and because JFJ would provide a model for workplace organizing. She said:
We’re excited to have a huge organization with huge resources that can organize thousands and thousands and thousands of low income households. We were thrilled to turn out 300 people in their convention because we don’t get a chance to mobilize our members on workplace issues, but they’re begging to work on those issues because they all work low wage jobs. And vice versa, the union can’t organize around affordable housing, they can’t say to their members that they do affordable housing, but [they can say] our partner [organization] is and you can go to town hall meetings or go to city hall with them. It’s a way for both constituents to participate in issues that they care about even if they’re not members of these organizations.

It remains to be determined whether the right-to-work environment and the high turnover among workers will push the union to continue to build its identity in association with community organizations or whether the union will revert to the known model of privileging the bargaining relationship over community relations. At the time of my fieldwork, the union was preparing to bargain and had moved away from community relations. Over time, as the Houston local union builds up its organization, and as locally-recruited staff gain more voice in the union, community relations may once again gain momentum. In Houston, there exists a potential for a new model of community engagement in the JF.

Free spaces

I observed the Houston union at its incipient stage, after recognition had been obtained (as I mentioned earlier, this proved later to be temporary) and before the union had started bargaining for a contract. At that time, free spaces had started to emerge in the form of meetings and networks among the workers who were more active in the campaign. I attended one meeting where close to forty workers discussed priorities for bargaining. I noted that the workers’ visions of what could be possible and what should be possible often clashed with the union’s views, presented by staff on Powerpoint presentations, on what was realistic. The meeting provided a space for the politicized worker’s aspirations and the union’s knowledge of the market to engage in a contentious debate. This debate saw no resolution that day but would continue until the parties came to a resolution that workers could accept. The process of internal negotiations between the union and the workers over different interpretations of bargaining goals can build members’ voice in the union and their awareness of possibilities and limitations.

24 The SEIU is well known in the labor movement for the ubiquitous use of Powerpoint presentations in meetings. Staff brush off suggestions that this practice is too “managerial”, usually commenting that the labor movement needs to think strategically and that Powerpoint is a good tool for doing so.
in improving their economic welfare. An excerpt from my field notes taken in the pre-
bargaining meeting follows:

A male worker argues that Houston is the fourth largest U.S. city. Moreover, gas costs the same across the
U.S. His point is that Houston workers should get commensurate amounts as those in New York or
Chicago. The same worker says that he has seen a newspaper article where wages and benefits were
compared for janitors across the major cities and he remembers Houston being the only city earning less
than $10 with no health insurance.

Workers discuss numbers first, such as "$10", or "no, at least $15", why can’t we go for $20, we need to be
compensated for the 20 years we worked without a raise, for the exploitation...

Subsequent comments suggest different criteria for determining what they should go for: fairness under
the same employer dictates that they should get paid what other workers under that employer get paid
elsewhere; household costs like rent and food should be considered, etc.

[Staff person] asks the group “What is realistic?” The typical wage raise for unionized cities has been 3-
5% annually, which translates to 25 cents for Houston. She makes analogies with New Jersey and with the
suburbs of Chicago, places that were about 20 minutes away from high-wage New York ($20) and
downtown Chicago ($13.4), respectively. In New Jersey, janitors earned $5.15 in 2001 before they
organized. Now, parts of New Jersey earn from $7 to $9.75 to $11 in some places. The suburbs of Chicago
still earn $9.4.

Someone (the mother of six who has been pictured heavily in the media) says she talked to another
janitor who worked for a nonunion contractor who earned $8. “I am not fighting to get a dollar raise. I
need more than $8.”

*Sustaining idealism through movement careers*

Many if not all of the members I observed in the meeting I attended in Houston were candidates
for movement careers. The staff person who invited me to the meeting told me that all of the
people attending the meeting had been involved with the JfJ campaign throughout its duration
and that they had shown considerable commitment to obtaining union representation. That day,
a subset of these workers was selected (presumably before the meeting, by staff) as members of
a bargaining committee. When the names were called out, I detected quite a few looks of
disappointment from those who did not get selected. The duration of my fieldwork – two weeks
- was too short to determine how many movement careers had been started and whether there
would be spaces to sustain these careers inside the union. Should the ties with community
groups be continued in a way that supports the low wage immigrant worker as a whole person,
it will not be unreasonable to expect that movement careers started in the JfJ will continue
within the union as well as in other organizations for social change.
Analysis of Cases

The case studies above show that strong and durable linkages with members' ethnic communities and relatively unstructured spaces in the union where members could develop both personally and politically have direct effects on the sustainability of idealism. In Los Angeles, where both elements are strongly present, I observe the most sustainability in members' and staff careers, and, at the organizational level, sustainability of a vibrant democracy in the local union. In Washington DC, neither element had survived policy interventions by the national union in the early years of the JfJ and, more recently, the merger into the New York local. The JfJ, focused on militancy and political coalitions to fend off fierce employer opposition, had eroded ties that the local union had previously with the African American community. With few spaces that workers could congregate and self organize, staff constantly struggled to create the semblance of a movement that eluded members. Governance after the merger with the New York local was focused on the official apparatus of an executive board with which the average member had very little contact. The cases of Houston and Boston show that where either linkages with members' communities or organizational free spaces is present, the union has been partially successful in keeping members engaged and in sustaining functional democracies. In Houston, where in the absence of a base membership or other unions the SEIU experimented with creating new linkages with community organizations, members' participation in the JfJ did not depend solely on the union’s capacity to provide space for deliberation. Instead, members and staff used meetings and congregations in the community as a venue to discuss union work. There are reasons to believe that in a right-to-work state where SEIU is the lone labor organization, more equal and sustainable collaborations with community organizations may be sought by the union in the future. In Boston, where creating linkages with members' communities was made difficult by the large number of relatively small communities that members belonged to and the diversity of languages spoken, the local was engaged in creating ‘community’ among its members through its own programs designed to develop civic participation. Figure 9 plots the four cities’ positions with respect to the two factors that foster sustainability.
Figure 9  Elements of Sustainability in Four JfJ Cities

Linkages with Community

Houston  Los Angeles

Washington DC  Boston

Free Spaces
Three other factors influenced the main effect of linkages with community and free spaces on the sustainability of idealism in the JfJ. First, variations in the tightness of the linkage between the free spaces and the union appear to affect whether these free spaces are conducive to members’ participation in the union. For example, free spaces in Washington DC existed in the form of English classes largely outside the realm of union activities and had little impact on linking members to the union, whereas in Boston the training program was an integral part of organizing and representing the membership. In Los Angeles, networks and cliques formed among members in training sessions, informal meetings, and parties carried over to formal mechanisms of deliberation in the union, particularly the various committees – on organizing, politics, training, and human rights – as well as the executive board.

Second, where the local union was in the life cycle of the JfJ mattered for the types of challenges local unions faced in sustaining idealism. In Boston and Houston, where the JfJ was initiated in the early 2000’s under unlikely circumstances, the local unions both underwent changes in leadership and union structure in concert with the implementation of the JfJ. Thus, the local unions in these cities are incipient organizations. In different ways, these two local unions faced difficulty establishing credibility with community organizations as well as in creating meaningful spaces for members to build community. In Los Angeles and Washington DC, among the earliest cities where the JfJ was waged in the late ‘80s, the dilemma lay in keeping alive the spirit of the movement years after the initial mobilizing phase was over. As I demonstrate in Essay 2, in Los Angeles, members whose lives were transformed by the experience of participating in the movement went on to play important roles in the union and in the community of unionized janitors. A constant replenishment of professional staff from nearby universities who believed in the legacy of the JfJ as a social movement also infused the JfJ with new energy. Furthermore, sustained involvement of community organizations in the local union’s activities as well as union members’ and staff’s involvement in Latino politics in Los Angeles helped foster movement careers. By contrast, the union in Washington DC lacked the ties to the community and organizational spaces that could have helped engage members in union activities. In addition, members building movement careers in Washington DC tended to be absorbed into the cadre of staff. My sense from interviewing members who took on staff
responsibilities in the four local unions is that in general, the new responsibilities distance them from their constituencies and restrict their political activities.

Third, where the union had less market power, local unions had a more difficult experience in sustaining members' participation. The problem of market power in the JJF world was closely related to whether work in a particular city was part time or full time. In the cleaning services industry, part time work has been explained to me in terms of employers' beliefs that part time workers are more malleable; employers' preferences for flexible work allocation; and in terms of building owners' desires to cut down on electricity costs (by reducing the number of hours past business hours that the buildings are in operation). On the other hand, staff said, a market was full time if building owners in that market understood the difference it makes in both cleanliness and safety to have janitors who are full time. The full time - part time variation roughly correlated with the union's bargaining power in a particular city, and thus is a measure of the extent to which the union has been able to stabilize the market. Apart from creating financial strain from lower dues, part time work in the subcontracted building services industry has presented a difficulty for the union in tracking the rapid turnover of members; in keeping the members engaged in union activities; and in nurturing leaders, many of whom could be movement career builders. In addition, as seen in Washington DC and Houston, local unions with majority part time membership are likely to be merged into larger locals for the sake of financial sustenance. This further decreases chances for movement career builders to take on organizational roles.

In my fieldwork I find that part time janitors do not differ from full time janitors in their levels of politicization and in their interest in union work. Full time janitors also had part time second jobs in other industries that tired them and availed them just as much (or just as little) for union work as part time janitors who had full time second jobs. The significant discrepancy came from the fact that part time workers' linkage to the JJF could only be formalized through their tenuous job in the cleaning industry; their other job(s) was (were) unlikely to be unionized. Thus, part time workers who were politicized did not have enough time to develop their movement careers into higher stages of progression. While their movement careers may continue outside their cleaning jobs, the union no longer could contribute to or benefit from these careers once
the part time worker left the cleaning job. This problem was most starkly evident in Washington DC. But in Boston and Houston, both cities where the proportion of union members who are part time is higher than that of Washington DC, linkages with outside organizations (in Houston’s case) and informal organizational spaces (in Boston’s case) helped keep part time members engaged. Thus, I conclude that in local unions where members are part time, the importance of having linkages with members’ communities and building informal spaces for members to congregate is heightened. Such a conclusion, nevertheless, is contrary to both the direction in which the SEIU is moving as well as to the institutional arrangements that have been dominant in American trade unions.

SEIU’s emphasis in dealing with the dilemma of involving part time members in the union has been to bargain with employers for a progressive increase in work hours towards full timing the market. I pointed out in Essay 1 that full time work is not always what members who currently work part time desire. Differences in how part time work is seen can be a source of tension between the administration and the members. One high level staff in a majority part time city stated that the union’s priority lay in creating better jobs, even if these jobs may not fit the lives of current workers:

The goal is to full time the market, and if members can’t understand that or it disrupts their schedule, we have to think about the bigger picture, which is to turn these jobs into meaningful jobs.

This staff person pointed out that the union was moving towards “full timing the market” despite the fact that it was a net revenue loss for the union to do so – full timing the work meant less members for the union, and less revenue from dues.25

Changing the workforce may be one solution to the dilemma of stabilizing an organization, but it also is likely to prevent workers who prefer the flexibility of part time work – mothers, more recent immigrants, and workers who may need to hold two or three jobs – from access to unionized jobs. The question then is, what structures allow workers the flexibility of working part time while providing the union with a stable organization and the workers with

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25 This statement was made with the current dues structure in mind, which charged part time workers about 60-70% of the full time worker’s dues.
opportunities for meaningful participation? In the next section, I turn to a discussion of such structures based on a decoupling of formal structure with associational life.

Conclusions

The JfJ experience starkly reveals that some goals in the labor movement can be met with centralized structures while other goals cannot. My study suggests that there are considerable differences in the kinds of organizational spaces that are conducive to economic power building, which is primarily obtained through bargaining, and those that are conducive to organizing and representing. I in turn distinguish between organizing as mobilizing of economic power, and organizing as creating a vision for social change through interpersonal dialogue. Economic power can be effectively gathered through centralized structures. Creating visions for social change and representing requires communitarian structures instead of hierarchies. I propose that the centralization of representational structures in some local unions have jeopardized the sustainability of idealism in the JfJ.

Scholars in industrial relations have emphasized that bargaining is the primary goal of American unions (Barbash, 1984; Ulman, 1955). Undergirding this argument is an understanding of the psychology of the American worker, which, as I noted in Essay 1, earlier scholars understood expresses an essentially pragmatic outlook which values economic benefit over ideology or greater political power (Barbash, 1984; Commons, 1921; Perlman, 1966). The primacy of bargaining as an organizational goal, these scholars maintained, explains why the main model for the American union is bureaucratic, “business” unionism. In Barbash’s words, “’Business unionism’ represents the organizational adaptation to the needs of collective bargaining” (Barbash, 1967: 146). That is, scholars thought that in order to effectively bargain with employers, who themselves were large bureaucracies, unions needed to i) increase their sizes and centralize control into national bodies; and ii) operate like businesses (Barbash, 1984: 74). These scholars recognized that other goals, such as democratic representation, exist in tension with the necessity to build large unions and centralize control; yet, because they
believed the American worker cares more about "bread" than about political and social objectives, they thought business unionism to be a stable organizational form.

Yet the experience of SEIU and other unions shows that bureaucratic unions are seeking their own revival through the inclusion of social and political objectives, because, they have determined that workers desire changes in social and political arenas (Clawson, 2003; Fantasia et al., 2004b; Tattersall, 2007). My work suggests that bureaucratic unions whose jurisdictions are defined by industry are also ill equipped as participatory democracies for part time workers. On the other hand, decentralized and flat models of unions, such as community-based unions and workers' centers, are more responsive to workers' needs for building a community, but lack the power that comes from a union that operates in national markets (Fine, 2005b; Fine, 2005a). Effectiveness, not only in bargaining but increasingly also in politics and social change, necessitates large scale fund raising, expert skills, and coordination, which disadvantages the latter grassroots organizations.

I propose that a “loosely coupled” (Weick, Mar., 1976) organization that encompasses separate structures for bargaining and for representation may be better equipped to address these difficulties. The concept of a loosely coupled system is one in which the “identity, uniqueness, and separateness” (Weick, 1976: 7) of subsystems are preserved and where the subsystems are loosely linked to each other and to a larger body. Various elements can ‘couple’ the subsystems to larger organizations, and these elements can vary over time. Weick also stated that a main characteristic of such systems is that several means can produce the same ends. Although loosely coupled systems can be messy, Weick pointed out that they have several advantages (Weick, 1976: 6-9). Because loosely coupled systems are re-combinatory, they are more adaptive to changing needs. Subsystems are autonomous, so the system lends itself to local adaptations and creative solutions. Lastly and perhaps most important for the discussion of democratic worker representation, actors in a loosely coupled system operate under the principle of self-determination.

Building economic power is a crucial task of unions. The J&J organizing model offers an ingenious way of fulfilling this task. At the core of the J&J model is an understanding that today’s companies are social entities at the same time as they are market actors; companies exist
in a web of interdependent relationships, and hurting their public image will hurt their
economic performance. The JfJ model exploits the vulnerabilities of companies' social
relationships by creating public crises around them, by organizing employers into collectivities,
and by bargaining simultaneously with groups of employers to take wages out of competition
from entire markets. These tasks are best performed by a centralized body of experts trained in
the necessary skills. These experts need to be connected to local unions that relay localized
information, but overall the expertise resides at the national level. A centralized body, in the
form of a national union, or a "mega local" presiding over smaller local unions in a region, is
needed to build the power necessary to bargain for union recognition.

Other goals and tasks of a union do not lend themselves to centralization as easily. These
include goals that in the labor movement have been known as 'organizing' and 'representing'.
But there are two very different sides to organizing. The economic side of organizing
necessitates building power to take wages out of competition. This usually entails
understanding employers' (and, in a subcontracted industry, owners') vulnerabilities, and is a
task best performed when information is centralized, as noted above. This side of organizing is,
strictly speaking, 'bargaining'. The second side of organizing pertains to persuading workers of
the benefits of collective representation. Contrary to earlier literature suggesting workers care
mostly about economic issues, persuading workers to join unions today entails questioning the
existing order and creating a vision for a fairer society. Creating a new vision for social change
entails free spaces that allow workers to develop deeper perspectives about democracy, and to
come to see their own selves as having the capacity for democratic action (Evans et al., 1986;
Polletta, 2002). This side of organizing is social and political, and it is closely linked to
'representing'.

In conventional terms, representing has often been reduced to the union function of resolving
'grievances' for workers through the system of private arbitrations and mediations. But the
cases presented here suggest that members desire, and unions are struggling to offer, much
more than grievance processing. In fact, my observations are that in the janitorial industry,
where few union members in this industry know their rights under the labor contract, grievance
processing is a grossly incomplete measure of member representation. Representing in the JfJ
then, entails helping workers develop themselves through training and mentoring, through the building of community, and through the provision of spaces where deliberations could take place and where workers can share a sense of community. One outcome of ‘representing’ as aiding members’ personal development is exemplified by the tutelage system that Los Angeles union members had established for monitoring workplace violations (see Essay 2, page 78). Thought in this way, ‘organizing’ and ‘representing’ are tasks that are best carried out by local units in the union.

The experiences of Washington DC and Houston reviewed here suggest that the ongoing trend in the SEIU of enlarging local unions by merging them into mega-locals have resulted in a centralization of most union functions, including member representation. Currently, the primary representative mechanism of mega locals is the merged executive board, in which members of “districts” under the mega local are represented by delegates whose numbers are proportionally designated according to the district’s size. While it may be necessary to have a central decision making body, my research suggests that establishing such a central body should not occur at the expense of diminishing autonomous local structures and spaces for deliberation.

If one were to envision such a division of tasks between a centralized body and local units in a union, it will be important to think about the type of linkages between these two levels that best promote economic and political effectiveness as well as democratic representation. Drawing on Weick and the scholarship on soft bureaucracy, I propose that loose linkages between these two structures are more conducive to upholding both sets of goals than a tight system of control. There will not be one best way for linking local solidarity structures to a larger central body. SEIU’s now-neglected tradition of providing deliberative spaces in the form of councils and conferences, may serve as a reference point at this time.
Conclusions to the Dissertation

In the Introduction to the dissertation, I posed three questions that the SEIU case alludes to. I return to these questions now. I first summarize the salient points that we can learn empirically from an examination of organizational change and current practices in the SEIU. I then discuss broader implications of the SEIU case for theory, and conclude with remarks on future research.

First, how does the SEIU case contribute to our understanding of institutional change in the labor movement? The process of organizational change in the SEIU suggests that institutional change from bureaucratic to social movement unionism has been induced through a dynamic political process propelled by proponents of reform inside the labor movement. This contrasts with previous understandings of institutional change in the labor movement that tended to view models of unionism as rational organizational responses to changes in the environment that altered opportunity structures for unions.

Paradoxically, the adoption of social movement elements into the SEIU accompanied further centralization of control and bureaucratization at national and local levels; furthermore, building bargaining power, a trait of bureaucratic unionism, remains an important organizational goal. Thus, institutional change must be understood as a non-linear process that involves the co-existence of elements that are in conflict. The particular outcome of centralized control can be understood in terms of two aspects of the reforms that ushered in the social movement element. The first is that reforms were met with extreme opposition from traditional forces within the union; a high degree of centralized control ensured that the reforms were carried through. The second is that the ideals of the social movement appear to have legitimated organizational goals for growth, for which it was believed that centralization was a pre-condition. The formidable opposition imbued the reforms with a sense of crisis; the ideals of the social movement imbued the reforms with a moral justness.

Second, how have tensions between bureaucracy in the union and social actors been dealt with in the SEIU? Contrary to what the literature on bureaucratic functionaries would suggest, I find
that the tension between bureaucracy and social actors have been mitigated partly by some bureaucratic functionaries whose careers were defined not by an interest in upward progression in the hierarchy of the union but by their dedication to a social movement. These lateral staff careers were necessary for the union to expand the frontiers of unionized territory; thus, they were organizationally designed. However, members whose politicizations led them to regard the JfJ campaign as a social movement also built lateral careers, a phenomenon perhaps encouraged but certainly not designed by the union. I have introduced the term *movement careers* to distinguish these alternative careers from traditional organizational careers. Movement careers differ from organizational careers structurally – instead of vertically, they progress horizontally and radially – and ideologically – these careers are motivated by the ideals of the movement rather than by the fulfillment of organizational goals.

I further distinguish movement careers that progress horizontally, by acquiring skills and status within the *organization*, with those that progress radially, by acquiring skills and status within the *movement community*. Horizontal movement career builders can potentially reduce the distance between the formal organization and social actors with a stake in the formal organization by virtue of the fact that their careers expand primarily within the organization. On the other hand, radial movement careers’ trajectories span a multi-organizational field defined by the contours of the social movement. Because their primary allegiance is to the ideals of the movement rather than to any particular organization serving the movement, radial movement career builders in general are likely to remain close to the beneficiaries of the movement.

Third, how can ideals from social movements be sustained in large, bureaucratic organizations? The divergent patterns shown in four SEIU localities in the growth of movement careers imply that organizational and environmental factors influence to what extent movement careers can contribute to organizational renewal. I have argued that grassroots organizing practices, organizational free spaces, linkages with community, and “soft” bureaucracies (Jermier, Slocum, Fry, & Gaines, 1991) are likely to foster the development of movement careers. I propose that a loose coupling of a central structure and local representative bodies would better serve the dual organizational goal of unions – that of building market power and that of democratic
representation of its members – than a centralized command structure. While the goal of building bargaining power lends itself more to centralization, the goal of democratically representing members does not. My research suggests that safeguarding the autonomy of the local units and making sure local units in the union are close to the solidarity structures where the ideals of social movements originate would be crucial to sustaining the energy that led to SEIU's revival.

Implications

A broader set of implications for theory arise from this research.

The recent turn towards social movement unionism among several American unions suggests that previous literature that stressed the apolitical nature of workers and unionists equivocated an historical outcome to be a general tendency. The unions seeking their own revival by mobilizing workers based on social and political change are not only successful with immigrant workers, but they have inspired non-immigrant workers as well as young college graduates who join the unions as staff.

The particular combination of factors that brought about bureaucratic unionism include, *inter alia*, a mass production economy (Jacoby, 1985; Piore & Sabel, 1984); a decentralized, company-based collective bargaining system (Bok and Dunlop, 1970: 54); and the rise of a human resources management system based on the regulation of jobs (Jacoby, 1985; Piore et al., 1984). But changes in the environment, such as increased immigration and the transition to a service economy, cannot directly be associated with a return to social movement unionism. My research suggests that institutional change in the labor movement is significantly affected by the internal dynamics in organizations and choices made by organizational actors. The results of this study contribute to political process perspectives on institutional change (Fligstein, 2001b; McAdam, 1982; Meyer et al., 1996) This perspective has argued that changes in institutions are not exogenous to the social relations, but that in fact, they are brought about through changes in the configuration of social structures and social relations. The political process that accompanied reforms in the SEIU, in which strong opposition needed to be overcome in
political battles, is crucial to understanding why the resulting institution of social movement unionism may not diffuse so easily to other unions. Understanding the political process also offers insight as to why the adoption of social movement unionism further strengthened several traits of an earlier institution, bureaucratic unionism.

The political process perspective on institutional change has stressed that institutional change does not only necessitate changes in formal structure or practice, as conventional notions of institutional change have maintained, but that change must also entail exchanges, alterations, and transformations in interpretive frameworks (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Fligstein, 2001b; Klandermans, 1992). My research on the contextual factors fostering the development of movement careers suggests that special organizational spaces that support deliberation and personal development may be needed to incubate new interpretive frameworks and to review traditional ones. Older movements and institutions in need of revitalization can also support the establishment of free spaces in the form of inter-organizational spaces and cross-cutting committees.

Future Research

This research lends itself to several streams of productive future research.

First, further research can explore the role of career mobility as a mechanism for institutional change in social movements. Previous research has focused on the role of institutional entrepreneurs in founding new movements (DiMaggio, 1988; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991) and the impact of overall professionalization on social movements (McCarthy et al., 1977; Minkoff, 1999; Staggenborg, 1988). But to my knowledge, patterns of mobility in staff careers and their potential role in diffusing ideas and practices within and across movements have not been examined. The distinction I have made been staff movement careers that progress radially versus horizontally would be relevant for understanding the respective conditions that bring about broader changes in the movement field versus changes within one organization. Whether radial career builders contribute to intra and inter-field diffusion and thus to bringing about broader changes at the institutional level would be one avenue for future research. Horizontal
career builders, on the other hand, are likely to be carriers of ideas and practices from the movement field into the organization. Lastly, some movement career builders accept positions that are placed high in the organizational hierarchy. Future research could determine whether erstwhile movement career builders who move upwards in the organization are more likely to introduce changes at the top that are closer to the interests of the beneficiaries of organizational action than do those who are primarily interested in their own advancement.

Second, better theory is needed to understand how formal organizations and solidarity structures connect with each other. The theories on bureaucracy, epitomized in the proverbial “iron law of oligarchy”, are outdated and do not support the empirical phenomena we observe today. What theories can explain, for example, how national political parties today relate to immigrant communities, whose claims call increasingly for a higher moral order than that supported by national institutions (Guarnizo, Portes, & Haller, 2003; Itzigsohn, 2000; Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999; Sassen & Smith, 1992; Soysal, 2000)? How can unions, operating increasingly in global markets, reach out to workers in developing country communities at the bottom of the supply chain? New theories must be able to identify deliberative mechanisms that mediate between the needs of local actors and formal organizations with power in institutionalized arenas.

Third, further research is needed to understand different modes of participation in social movement organizations and voluntary associations. Previous research on participation has dichotomized our understanding of participation in terms of either causal volunteering on the one hand, and absorption into the organization as paid staff on the other. My research suggests that durable forms of participation among members can build skills and expertise. Members and volunteers can also develop an outlook on the organization that is both more objective and conducive to keeping the organization grounded among its constituents and accountable to its proclaimed goals. People who have experienced profound changes as a result of their contact with a movement may participate in movement organizations all their lives without earning a living off of their work. The motivations and actions of these informal career builders need to be better appreciated.
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