

# ORGANIZING AT THE INTERSECTION OF LABOR AND CIVIL RIGHTS: A CASE STUDY OF NEW HAVEN

Dorian T. Warren & Cathy J. Cohen†

The demand is increasing for a new type of union activism; one which puts the community, and not the workplace, at the center of the struggle.<sup>1</sup> This model recognizes that workers exist within a larger network of social relationships which are dependent upon and supportive of union struggles.<sup>2</sup> It insists on labor's recognition that people live much of their lives outside of the workplace, bounded by certain identities which correlate to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. These identities, while neither originating out of nor confined to the employment sector, often limit an individual's choices in the workplace. This view is in direct contrast with the traditional vision that labor struggles, while at times related to issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality, should not be conflated, despite the fact that these "limiting" classifications often determine an individual's type of work and specific job.

In this article, we side with those who contend that when organizing individuals, the multiple identities and social locations that structure and determine all aspects of a worker's employment and living conditions must be made central.<sup>3</sup> "Working" from this realization, the labor movement can mobilize new constituencies and address the multiple issues that concern

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† Dorian T. Warren is a graduate student in the Department of Political Science at Yale University. Cathy J. Cohen is Professor of African and African American Studies and Political Science at Yale University.

1. See AFL-CIO, *COMMUNITIES AT WORK: A GUIDE TO RESTORING OUR RIGHT TO ORGANIZE: TIPS, TOOLS AND RESOURCES FOR UNION AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZERS* (1997) [hereinafter *COMMUNITIES AT WORK*]; Linda Chavez-Thompson, *Communities at Work: How New Alliances Are Restoring Our Right to Organize*, 3 *NEW LAB. F.* 110 (1998).

2. Some scholars argue that unions have always involved their workers, and the communities in which they live, in labor struggles. See Kim Scipes, *Labor-Community Coalitions: Not All They're Cracked up to Be*, *MONTHLY REV.*, Dec. 1991, at 34; see also *BUILDING BRIDGES: THE EMERGING GRASSROOTS COALITION OF LABOR AND COMMUNITY* (Jeremy Brecher & Tim Costello eds., 1990) [hereinafter *BUILDING BRIDGES*]; James A. Craft, *The Community As a Source of Union Power*, 11 *J. LAB. RES.* 145 (1990).

3. See Tamara L. Jones, *Union Institutionalism & Lesbian/Gay Organizing in District Council 37, AFSCME*, (1999) (unpublished manuscript, on file with author).

these workers. It is this form of labor organization that may aid in the survival of labor groups into the future and contribute to an improved society for individuals.

Implementing this type of model, where the intersection (not the superiority) of class issues with struggles around racism, sexism, and heterosexism as the centerpiece, will not be easy.<sup>4</sup> This model dictates that labor activists must engage in efforts to build alliances with community, grassroots, civil rights, religious and other social justice organizations. However, these relationships cannot be similar to the old labor-community alliances where the union only came to the community during times of contractual renegotiation. Instead, if this new intersectional model is to work, the labor movement must position itself as a central player in the social movements of the marginalized and exploited. Unions must organize in communities of color, not only to swell their ranks, but to build a mass movement that can transform how Americans think about and participate in the global economy, state and society. The relationship must be based on a principle of reciprocity, where labor commits to the alliance for the long-term and continues to work with community and civil rights organizations between negotiation periods. Of course, community organizations must strengthen their contribution to the partnership as well. Community organizations must organize their own constituents in ways that allow them to deliver bodies, votes, and resources. They must be involved proactively in developing a broad agenda for social change, as opposed to only responding to the crises of their individual neighborhoods. Finally, community groups must be willing to organize around economic justice (class) issues as they impact all segments of the community.

A valid question, though, addresses whether such a principled alliance or partnership can emerge and endure. The recent labor struggles in New Haven, Connecticut serve as an example of the possibility for such an arrangement. In 1996, Local 217 engaged in a battle with Omni Hotel management regarding the Omni Hotel at Yale University.<sup>5</sup> During the period of struggle, the union worked with local community groups to advance its agenda as it had done in previous struggles. However, this time, community groups waged their own campaigns against the Omni. These numerous battles helped to build and reinforce a working relationship between labor and local civic organizations. Eventually, all

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4. See, e.g., Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, in *CRITICAL RACE THEORY: THE KEY WRITINGS THAT FORMED THE MOVEMENT* 357 (Kimberle Crenshaw et al. eds., 1995).

5. See Kevin O'Connell & Erin White, *All Eyes, Including Labor's, on the Omni*, *YALE DAILY NEWS ONLINE* (Apr. 2, 1997) <<http://www.yaledailynews.com>>; Mark Zaretsky, *Omni, Union Agree on 'Neutrality'*, *NEW HAVEN REG. ONLINE* (July 8, 1997) <<http://www.ctcentral.com>>.

the parties involved institutionalized this relationship by creating the New Haven Community and Labor Coalition. The pages that follow detail the effectiveness of the alliance and explore some of the inevitable complications. Despite the success in the battle with the Omni, the New Haven story is not complete. Instead, the work between the unions, civil rights organizations and other community groups continues to evolve. At each stage, everyone involved is confronted with the strengths and frailties of such coalitions.

In the case of New Haven, community groups were instrumental in winning the union struggle with the Omni. For example, if community groups had not mounted numerous mini-campaigns against the Omni management, it is doubtful the union would have won its demand for a neutrality agreement when it did.<sup>6</sup> However, what seems to be in question is not what benefits these alliances provide to the union, but rather what benefits are derived by the community groups. Specifically, we question whether a true partnership or alliance can exist with some longevity where everyone's voice is heard and everyone's agenda is equally pursued. In the case of New Haven, there is a question as to whether the union was willing to be a full or equal partner in struggles against the Omni, especially in those struggles that did not focus explicitly on the union concerns of wages and benefits for workers.

This article outlines in very broad terms the struggle of the unions, local community and civil rights organizations against the Omni at Yale. Integral to this discussion are the arguments both for and against a union and community alliance. There is growing literature on the benefits and dangers of labor/community relationships which is briefly discussed in the following section. Having presented the contextual framework, the specifics of the struggle in New Haven are detailed. A commentary of this type cannot do justice to the work, planning, organizing, and strength of the activists involved, but it aims to provide a general picture of the struggle with a goal to motivate others to think about and discuss alliances between labor and community.<sup>7</sup>

## I. UNIONS AND COMMUNITIES

Some scholars argue that the labor movement has always recognized

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6. A neutrality agreement is an agreement where an employer agrees to remain neutral on the question of the workers' right to organize a union. The employer also agrees to recognize the union if a majority of workers sign union authorization cards designating the union as their collective bargaining agent.

7. This specific discussion began at a symposium in March 1999 sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania Law School and its *Journal of Labor and Employment Law* on "Activism and the Law: The Intersections of the Labor and Civil Rights Movements."

that community involvement is crucial to its success, noting the hard lessons learned from employers' manipulation of communities to undermine and defeat union efforts.<sup>8</sup> Labor scholar James Craft, however, suggests that unions first became involved in an organized fashion with local communities following World War II and, in particular, after the merger of the American Federation of Labor with the Congress of Industrial Organizations ("AFL-CIO") in 1955 when unions experienced an upsurge in membership, resources, and influence. Craft notes that both the AFL and the CIO formed community service and community relations committees. These community programs exemplified the approach to community involvement that unions would endorse long into the future. Two of the more dominant goals of the programs were to encourage union members to become involved as leaders in community service organizations and to help existing community agencies in assisting union members with personal, health, and welfare problems.<sup>9</sup> Ultimately, the motivation behind these activities was to strengthen the image and community standing of the unions, and to enhance union organizing and objectives. Not surprisingly, the unions typically used the community on an "ad hoc" basis, mobilizing community support only when needed in a struggle against an employer.<sup>10</sup>

Due to structural changes in the economy and complaints and demands from marginal workforce sub-communities such as women, people of color, gays, and lesbians, it has become increasingly difficult for unions to ignore community activism. For example, many scholars argue that factors such as deindustrialization, the changing racial, ethnic, and gender composition of the workforce, and technological innovations beginning in the 1970s have forced unions to reexamine the nature of their relationship with communities, particularly communities of color.<sup>11</sup> Evidence reveals that as the fastest growing sector in the economy, the service sector has the smallest share of unionized employees.<sup>12</sup> The service sector also features African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, and women as the dominant part of its workforce, creating problems for the traditional model of union organization which primarily focused on the concerns of white

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8. See BUILDING BRIDGES, *supra* note 2; Craft, *supra* note 2; Irving Bluestone, *Walter Reuther: Working-Class Hero*, TIME, Dec. 7, 1998, at 157-58.

9. See Craft, *supra* note 2.

10. See *id.*

11. See WILLIAM JULIUS WILSON, *THE TRULY DISADVANTAGED: THE INNER CITY, THE UNDERCLASS, AND PUBLIC POLICY* (1987); Norman Hill, *Forging a Partnership Between Blacks and Unions*, MONTHLY LAB. REV., Aug. 1987, at 38-39; JoAnn Wypijewski, *A Stirring in the Land*, NATION, Sept. 8, 1997, at 17-18.

12. Monika Bauerlein, *Beyond the Lunch Bucket: Labor Discovers Community Issue*, UTNE READER, May-June 1996, at 20.

men.<sup>13</sup> Thus, unions that have traditionally relied on white men working in blue-collar manufacturing jobs are now realizing that the new source of union workers will undoubtedly come from the African-American, Latino and Asian workers who dominate the workforces of the low-wage industries. These workers possess an intersectional view of their plight, regarding multiple systems of oppression, including their employment, as defining their living conditions.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, these groups increasingly demand that organizations interested in their progress, including unions, address the multiple concerns and barriers that they and their families confront in their workplaces and neighborhoods.

Union activists now realize that new constituents are not only concerned with traditional "labor" issues, but also with issues such as residential segregation, welfare reform and repressive immigration restrictions. This, in turn, has prompted the reconstruction of labor/community alliances. More broadly, the recent failures of both labor and community groups to secure important victories for their constituents has led the two entities to each other. Some scholars argue that the realignment of the economy, the ideological victories of the right, the explosion in temporary, part-time and low-wage work, the growth of workfare and prison labor, the assaults on poor people and immigrants, and the failure of "identity politics" and "business unionism" have all challenged labor and civil rights organizations to produce radically different organizing structures.<sup>15</sup> Labor unions are concentrating on ways to access new members, primarily focusing on people of color, and have responded by turning to community organizations for assistance. In addition, unions are demonstrating their commitment to communities of color by entering into various community struggles.

One manifestation of the evolving relationship between labor and community groups can be seen in the changes in labor leadership and organizing efforts. According to Peter Dreier, another labor scholar, the unions that have made the most progress in recent years in recruiting members have all formed alliances with church and community groups,

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13. See Hector Figueroa, *The Growing Force of Latino Labor, November/December*, NACLA REPORT ON AM., Nov.-Dec. 1996, at 19-22; Rinku Sen, *Winning Action for Gender Equity: A Plan for Organizing Communities of Color*, in *WOMEN TRANSFORMING POLITICS: AN ALTERNATIVE READER* 302-23 (Cathy J. Cohen et al. eds., 1997); Eve S. Weinbaum, *Transforming Democracy: Rural Women and Labor Resistance*, in *WOMEN TRANSFORMING POLITICS: AN ALTERNATIVE READER* 324-39 (Cathy J. Cohen et al. eds., 1997).

14. See Jones, *supra* note 3.

15. See Stanley Aronowitz, *Towards Radicalism: The Death and Rebirth of the American Left*, in *RADICAL DEMOCRACY: IDENTITY, CITIZENSHIP, AND THE STATE* 81 (David Trend ed., 1996); Michael C. Dawson, *A Black Counterpublic?: Economic Earthquakes, Racial Agenda(s), and Black Politics*, in *THE BLACK PUBLIC SPHERE* 199 (The Black Public Sphere collective eds., 1995); Wypijewski, *supra* note 11.

borrowed tactics from civil rights and grassroots campaigns, and recruited organizers from civil rights, neighborhood and women's groups.<sup>16</sup> Under new national leadership, Dreier continues, the labor movement has an emerging political agenda very similar to that taken up by many progressive social justice organizations.<sup>17</sup> This new community-based agenda of labor includes: protecting social programs, advocating for national health care, demanding increased enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, and working for an increase in the minimum wage. Labor's expanded agenda is believed to have resulted, in part, from the infusion of new leadership into the labor movement. In particular, it has been argued that organizers with backgrounds in the social movements of the 1960s are emerging as the leaders in the new collective action-oriented labor/community coalitions.<sup>18</sup>

Community and civil rights organizations are beginning to regain confidence in the labor movement's commitment to a broader agenda. Historically, African-American, Latino, and Asian American leaders have been willing to work with labor activists for the advancement of workers of color, despite labor's history of excluding people of color from unionized jobs. However, in light of recent gestures toward workers of color from the labor movement, the increasing representation of people of color in the leadership of labor unions, the predominance of service sector low-wage jobs as the only available employment "opportunities" for the majority of people of color, and the survival needs of community and civil rights organizations, new coalitions involving both labor and community groups are being explored.<sup>19</sup> When necessary, community and civil rights organizations have been willing to accept labor's waffling position on controversial issues because these organizations, searching for resources to stay afloat, need the financial, institutional, and membership support that labor can provide. Community/labor coalitions often differ from traditional "ideological politics" by not agreeing on a single party line. Instead, the coalitions operate with political norms that recognize that groups in the coalition sometimes agree to disagree.<sup>20</sup>

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16. See Peter Dreier, *What Farrakhan Left Out: Labor Solidarity or Racial Separatism?* 17 COMMONWEAL, Dec. 15, 1995, at 10-11.

17. See *id.*

18. See Joan Fitzgerald & Louise Simmons, *From Consumption to Production: Labor Participation in Grassroots Movements in Pittsburgh and Hartford*, 26 URB. AFF. Q. 512 (1991).

19. See Bauerlein, *supra* note 12; Figueroa, *supra* note 13; Linda Ocasio, *On the Line: Latinos on Labor's Cutting Edge*, NACLA REP. ON AM., Nov.-Dec. 1996, at 18; Linda Ocasio, *Portrait of an Organizer: Edgar DeJesus*, NACLA REP. ON AM., Nov.-Dec. 1996, at 27; Margot Hornblower, *Picking a New Fight*, TIME, Nov. 25, 1996, at 64-65; Barry Yeoman, *Spiritual Union: A Case Study*, NATION, Dec. 1, 1997, at 15-16.

20. See BUILDING BRIDGES, *supra* note 2.

Other scholars are beginning to look more closely at the multiple forms in which these alliances develop. For example, Craft provides a typology of the different relationships and alliances that labor forms with different segments of communities.<sup>21</sup> He and others contend that without a clearer understanding of the type of community/labor alliances being employed, analysts and activists will have a difficult time discerning what went wrong or right and why. The strategic alliances outlined by Craft include the extensive community model, community subgroup model, community action groups model, and local government officials/units. He argues that the goal of an extensive community alliance is to involve the entire community in actions taken against an employer. Such a strategy usually involves semi-coordinated mass grassroots activity from community groups, clergy, politicians, and even chambers of commerce in the form of actions such as citywide boycotts. The community subgroup model attempts to develop alliances with issue-oriented sub-groups in the community including civil rights groups, women's groups, churches, and consumer groups. Ultimately, these alliances are used to provide domain-targeted leverage against an employer, by mobilizing constituencies that the employer needs. Alliances with community action groups are a third model of labor/community relations.<sup>22</sup> These groups usually include grassroots organizations comprised of neighborhood groups, small businesses and churches that are willing to engage in an array of unpredictable, and more public, tactics against corporations. Finally, the last community/labor alliance that Craft outlines involves government officials.<sup>23</sup> In this case, unions encourage politicians to take political positions which will publicly legitimize the union's demands. Public officials proposing ordinances and official resolutions that can affect employers often manifest such a strategy. Borrowing from Craft's typology, the New Haven-Omni case may be best understood as typifying either an extensive community alliance or a community subgroup model.

In addition to labor/community alliances being different in each location and each struggle, unions also approach differing communities by emphasizing different themes. There are three major strategies that unions often use to forge community alliances: (1) identification of shared goals and interests; (2) emphasis on equity; and (3) practicing reciprocity.<sup>24</sup> The objective of the first strategy is to convince the community that its goals and the union's goals converge, and that both parties have mutual interests in "the" situation. Unions use the second strategy, emphasizing equity, to point out employers' violations of the community's norms of fairness and

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21. See Craft, *supra* note 2, at 148.

22. See *id.* at 149.

23. See *id.* at 150.

24. See *id.*

reasonable behavior toward workers who are also members of the community. Finally, unions use strategic reciprocity over the long-term and short-term. In the long-term, the union becomes involved in community service efforts and draws on this accumulated credit to seek the community's support in the union's efforts or drives.<sup>25</sup> In the short-term, the union asks for help in a particular effort, offering in exchange to help with another struggle being waged by politicians or civil rights groups.<sup>26</sup> As illustrated later, the unions in New Haven, like most unions, engaged in a combination of the outlined strategies in their struggle against the Omni.

Again, recent moves by labor to locate its struggles in communities is not the result of purely principled thinking. Instead, as some observers have argued, the labor movement's participation in coalitions with diverse groups, including women's organizations, environmental groups, and grassroots activists, results from the internal crisis of the labor movement.<sup>27</sup> This perspective forces one to consider the potentially negative consequences and difficulties of forming such alliances. In fact, there have been several critiques of labor/community coalitions offered by scholars.<sup>28</sup> Labor scholar Scipes details numerous weaknesses with community and labor alliances.<sup>29</sup> She argues, for example, that traditionally both national and local unions are structured hierarchically and bureaucratically, and once union leaders become bureaucrats, they become primarily concerned with keeping their positions of power. She contends that we should expect union leaders to oppose "rank and file participation in any movement which the leaders cannot directly control, [like those mounted independently by local community groups]."<sup>30</sup> Additionally, labor/community coalitions often are asymmetric in terms of power and fragile with regard to lasting power. Specifically, Scipes notes that the structures of the coalitions themselves are neither democratic nor equal, so that when unions become involved in coalitions, it is usually to a limited extent and under conditions which force community groups to submerge their goals to labor's goals. Finally, she maintains that workers are generally not ideologically progressive on most social issues, so that other forms of oppression, including racism, sexism and heterosexism, may eventually tear the coalition apart.

Craft also ponders the difficulties of these alliances, arguing that recent experiences of labor/community alliances have been "ad hoc

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25. *See id.*

26. *See id.*

27. *See* BUILDING BRIDGES, *supra* note 2, at 195; Aronowitz, *supra* note 15, at 82; Scipes, *supra* note 2, at 34.

28. *See* BUILDING BRIDGES, *supra* note 2, at 245, 325; Craft, *supra* note 2; Scipes, *supra* note 2.

29. *See* Scipes, *supra* note 2, at 37.

30. *Id.*



reactions to crises" rather than planned mutual and strategic partnerships.<sup>31</sup> He also contends that union leaders, having no training in the community coalition-building process, may be uncomfortable with the specific tactics used by community groups, and may have difficulty working with local or professional activists and organizers who reject their "hierarchical structures of authority."<sup>32</sup> Craft predicts that this coalitional/alliance approach is unlikely to emerge as a sustained practice used widely by labor.<sup>33</sup>

The fate of labor/community coalitions and alliances has yet to be decided. Unlike Craft and Scipes, some see these new coalitions as the solution to the troubles plaguing both labor and civil rights organizations.<sup>34</sup> Kim Moody suggests that labor's participation in coalitions might lead to a breakdown in the bureaucratic structure that has had a stranglehold on labor over the past fifty years.<sup>35</sup> Brecher and Costello, in their book *Building Bridges*, make a similar argument suggesting that labor/community alliances could be a radical challenge to the hierarchical and established power relations that have plagued American society since its inception.<sup>36</sup> They assert that labor/community coalitions could serve as a vital strategy for effective social change.<sup>37</sup> These alliances could also have extensive political clout because they would speak for the majority of the population which is currently excluded from economic and political decision making and, if mobilized, would represent a tremendous social force.<sup>38</sup> As noted earlier, the data on these new and complicated relationships between labor and communities is being accumulated day-by-day and city-by-city. Only by examining the different examples of this type of alliance can we begin to gain a knowledge that will allow us to discern how and why these alliances work. To that end, consider this brief discussion on New Haven, which delineates the successes and difficulties such alliances may face.

## II. NEW HAVEN

Throughout its history, New Haven has always been a bastion of union organizing. For example, citywide activity in the form of labor organizing led *The New York Times* to report in 1886 that New Haven had

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31. See Craft, *supra* note 2.

32. *Id.*

33. See *id.*

34. See Kim Moody, *Building a Labor Movement for the 1990s: Cooperation and Concessions or Confrontation and Coalition*, in *BUILDING BRIDGES*, *supra* note 2.

35. See *id.*

36. See *BUILDING BRIDGES*, *supra* note 2.

37. See *id.*

38. See *id.*

more strikes per capita than any other city in the country.<sup>39</sup> This history also includes the organizing of nearly 10,000 garment workers during the 1930s, as well as the creation of two labor newspapers, including one in Italian to serve the poor Italian immigrants who built most of the gothic buildings currently occupied by Yale University.<sup>40</sup> More recently, the labor conflicts in New Haven have been dominated by the struggles of Locals 34 and 35 of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (H.E.R.E.) at Yale. It is in this context of labor activism and struggle that the Omni-New Haven case is set. Before the story is detailed, however, some understanding of recent labor struggles at Yale is necessary to meaningfully assess the Omni struggle.

#### A. *The Emergence of Local 34*

As one might expect from the largest employer in town, most of New Haven's recent and public labor struggles have been waged against Yale University and its employment practices. Currently, two union locals organize Yale workers: Local 35, which represents service and maintenance workers (many of whom are people of color), and Local 34, which represents clerical and technical workers (many of whom are white women). Both Locals are part of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (H.E.R.E.), which also includes Local 217, the local responsible for representing the workers at the Yale Omni, and the Graduate Employees and Students Organization (GESO), the organization of Yale graduate students attempting to unionize. These four groups constitute the H.E.R.E. Alliance in New Haven.

In the early 1980s when only Local 35 existed amongst Yale workers, John Wilhelm, now the President of the H.E.R.E. International, was among many influential figures responsible for and instrumental in encouraging an organizing drive for Local 34.<sup>41</sup> In response to Yale's persistent attacks on Local 35 in the 1970s, Wilhelm decided that it was best to increase the number of unionized workers on campus.<sup>42</sup> Wilhelm, then a Yale graduate recently hired by Vincent Sirabella of H.E.R.E. Local 217, convinced the International to put major resources behind this organizing drive. Since they were attempting to organize a largely female clerical pool, there was also a decision to focus on developing rank and file leaders who were

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39. See Paul Bass, *Hidden History: New Haven Finds a New Past*, THE PROGRESSIVE, July 1990, at 28-29.

40. See *id.*

41. See Interview with Andrea Cole, Secretary, Department of Economics, Yale University and Staff Person for Locals 34, 35, 217, and GESO (Jan. 27, 1999).

42. See *id.*; see also John Wilhelm, *A Short History of Unionization at Yale*, in SOCIAL TEXT, Winter 1996, at 13.

mostly women. One of the individuals to emerge from this effort was Andrea Cole, a secretary from the Economics department and a local anti-Apartheid activist.<sup>43</sup> As it turned out, Cole would be instrumental in winning that first fight for recognition of Local 34 and establishing and maintaining the labor/community alliance in New Haven.

Andrea Cole, then known as Andrea Ross, emigrated from South Africa during the early 1980s at the height of the anti-Apartheid movement. She became actively involved in such efforts, helping to organize the anti-Apartheid organization at Yale. During this process, Cole built strong relationships with other local activists and community members across the city. She later drew upon these contacts and her legitimacy as an organizer for the unions. Specifically, during Locals 34 and 35's contract struggles in 1989, 1992, and in 1995/96, it was Cole's responsibility to obtain support from community groups for the Locals' organizing effort. After the union secured victories in each of these struggles, she was one of six rank and file members hired to a full-time organizing position. She has held this position since 1996, continuing her efforts to obtain community support for union projects.

While Cole's role as the community organizer signaled the importance of New Haven's communities to the union's success, it would be some time before the union would once again venture back into the community for any sustained interaction. It seems that the unions effectively relegated their work with New Haven community groups to an "ad-hoc" status. Cole has explained that in the intervening years between the union's first victory in 1984 and the renegotiation of their contract in 1989, and then again in 1992, the union's small staff was overwhelmed by dealing with and responding to the university administration.<sup>44</sup> The antics of the university consumed the time and energy of the staff, leaving no resources for maintaining the community relationships that had been essential to their victory during the first strike.<sup>45</sup> However, in 1989 and again in 1992 when the unions needed help, Cole, a bit sheepishly, called on the same community leaders for support.<sup>46</sup>

Not surprisingly, when Cole approached community leaders again in 1992, she encountered some resentment about the absence of the union during the intervening years.<sup>47</sup> Even when the union attempted to respond to community needs, they often did so without fully understanding the interests of the community. For example, during the 1989 contract negotiations the union heard complaints from community members about

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43. See Interview with Warren Heyman (Jan. 22, 1999).

44. See Cole, *supra* note 41.

45. See *id.*

46. See *id.*

47. See *id.*

Yale's unwillingness to hire New Haven residents, particularly people of color.<sup>48</sup> Attempting to address this need, the union demanded that Yale institute a training program. As it was initially conceptualized, individuals would receive training but no guarantee of a job. The union even agreed to use its own money to implement the program when Yale balked at the idea of funding such an endeavor. However, much to the surprise of union negotiators, community leaders were not interested in a program that consisted of mere training. They wanted jobs and insisted that this program guarantee employment. Consequently, Local 34 returned to the bargaining table with Yale and renegotiated the training program to ensure that jobs for trainees were guaranteed after their successful completion of the program.<sup>49</sup> The New Haven Residents' Training Program is still running successfully.

### *B. 1996 Battle with Yale*

In 1996, with Local 35's contract up for negotiation, Yale commenced an aggressive attack on the unions.<sup>50</sup> For eighteen months, Yale attempted to eliminate and replace union jobs with temporary, outsourced employment. Replicating global business trends, the university decided to contract out 600 union jobs to a non-union employer, transforming them into low-wage, no-benefit, temporary positions.<sup>51</sup> The university engaged in numerous tactics to reach its goal, including spending more than \$2.5 million on consultants with union-busting experience and implementing a public relations campaign targeted against the unions.<sup>52</sup>

In response to pressure from Yale, Locals 34 and 35 embarked on what Cole deemed ten weeks of "rolling strikes." Cole recalls:

[F]irst Local 34 went out for a four-week period, while Local 35 members contributed \$100 each per week to a strike fund but did not observe picket lines. Then, when students left town for two weeks of vacation, everyone went back to work. When classes resumed, Local 35 went on strike while Local 34 members were at work and contributing \$100 per week to sustain Local 35 strikers.<sup>53</sup>

It became clear that striking alone would not win this battle. The

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48. *See id.*

49. *See* Interview with Andrea Cole, Secretary, Department of Economics, Yale University and Staff Person for Locals 34, 35, 217, and GESO (Mar. 24, 1999).

50. *See* Cole, *supra* note 41; Heyman, *supra* note 43.

51. *See* Cole, *supra* note 41; Heyman, *supra* note 43; Bruce Robbins & Andrew Ross, *The Yale Strike Dossier*, SOCIAL TEXT, Winter 1996.

52. *See* Cole, *supra* note 41.

53. *Id.*

unions needed outside assistance. Thus, Cole found herself going back to community groups and asking them to support the unions, only to receive the same resentment as before. The community wanted to know, "where have you been?"<sup>54</sup> The unions went into the community believing they would once again be able to garner support. Having not been highly visible since the 1992 effort, assistance was much more difficult to earn this time. Facing possible failure, the unions were forced to embrace a new strategy.

Traditionally, the strength of the Locals is centered in the organizing committees in each department on campus. However, the unions initiated a new strategy that was a hybrid of national recommendations and local innovation: organize in members' neighborhoods. Using a computer-mapping program that Cole says they just "happened upon," the unions mapped where each member lived, paying special attention to the neighborhoods in which workplace leaders resided. From these lists, they then established neighborhood organizing committees. Members of the neighborhood organizing committees lobbied their families, neighbors, clergy, and elected officials. They also held neighborhood meetings where workers "testified" about the ramifications for themselves, their families, and their community if they lost their jobs and benefits. A total of thirteen of these meetings were held in a two-week period with an overall attendance of about 2,500 people.<sup>55</sup> In addition to the meetings, the unions produced pamphlets profiling different segments of the union membership. The pamphlets highlighted the stories of specific workers and detailed what Yale's efforts meant for these workers, their families, and neighborhoods. Different pamphlets were distributed in various neighborhoods, which featured workers familiar to residents in each area.

Obviously, such efforts began to demand the attention of New Haven community leaders, elected officials, and the clergy. In many ways, it was a group of clergy in New Haven who would "morally" break Yale. As the struggle heated up, Cole began approaching members of the clergy, asking them to come up with a statement to "raise the moral floor."<sup>56</sup> Two local pastors were appointed by the Greater New Haven Clergy Association to draft a statement in support of the union struggle and circulate it to other clergy members.<sup>57</sup> The statement, crafted on behalf of the Association, eventually became known as the "David and Goliath" statement. It was a bold statement which condemned Yale for its action against the union, portraying the university as Goliath fighting against a smaller, but moral, David:

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54. *See id.*

55. *See id.*

56. *Id.*

57. The New Haven Clergy Association is an organization of local clergy involved in various social justice causes in the New Haven area.

THE ANCIENT BIBLICAL STORY of David and Goliath is an event that illustrates how the strength of justice prevails over raw power. As members of the clergy, we have watched with increasing concern as Yale University, like the Goliath of old, has unleashed its enormous economic and corporate power on two little David unions, the working men and women who are the members of Local 34 and Local 35. . . . Yale University is a pioneer, a leader, and an innovator in medicine, in law, and the natural sciences. Why not also in social justice, in employee relations?<sup>58</sup>

With the help of the union, the statement was sent out to clergy across the city with a signature card attached asking them to sign on to the effort. Additionally, union members on the neighborhood organizing committees approached their own, as well as neighborhood clergy asking them to join as well. Ultimately, 105 church leaders signed the bold statement. Once all the signatures were secured, the union, sensing the statement was a winner, went the extra step and decided to publish it in the local newspapers.<sup>59</sup>

Riding the momentum shift in favor of the union, generated by the David and Goliath statement, the Locals organized a massive demonstration on December 10, 1996. The coalition of people consisted of union members (including AFL-CIO president, John Sweeney), clergy, elected officials, and leaders of civil rights and community organizations. During the demonstration, 312 people were arrested as part of the massive civil disobedience action on the Yale campus.<sup>60</sup> Reeling from the David and Goliath statement, the massive arrests and the resulting bad press, the university settled the contract dispute seven days later.

It was after this victory that the H.E.R.E. Locals made a conscious and deliberate decision concerning community activism. They agreed that they could not relegate the community to secondary status, but rather they must commit to building strong, long-term alliances. The locals decided that an outreach position needed to be institutionalized, with Cole serving as the community liaison. Such positions are found only in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and now New Haven. Soon after that decision, Cole went back to the community groups that had assisted the union in their struggle against Yale and discussed with them what their next collaborative steps should be.<sup>61</sup>

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58. The ad ran in *The Inner City* from December 18, 1996 until January 1, 1997.

59. See Cole, *supra* note 41; Heyman, *supra* note 43.

60. See Behi Rabbani, *AFL-CIO President, 300 Union Supporters Arrested*, YALE DAILY NEWS ONLINE (Dec. 11, 1996) <<http://yaledailynews.com>>.

61. It was also during this time that the H.E.R.E. Alliance, including Locals 34, 35, 217, and GESO, was formed. This union alliance was initiated in recognition of the fact that during this latest campaign, better coordination was needed among the Yale unions in New

During her meetings with community groups, Cole heard repeatedly that people wanted to take on another campaign. Not content with their victory against Yale, a coalition of labor and community groups wanted to venture into new territory. Talk began to focus on a living wage amendment. During the 1996 negotiations with Yale, the Locals introduced a living wage proposal. Although it was not considered, the coalition discussed introducing it again, this time at the city council. With the momentum of the recent victory in December, the coalition of groups consisting of the H.E.R.E. Alliance, New Haven Clergy Association, Elm City Congregations Organization (consisting of twenty-two religious groups), New Haven Central Labor Council (a coalition of the AFL-CIO and the state federation), and the Greater New Haven NAACP decided to take the living wage fight to the city council. Surprisingly, the mayor and city council, not wanting to take on this charged coalition, pushed the bill through in a fast four months. The resulting ordinance is limited in its reach, guaranteeing pay above minimum wage only to workers employed by subcontractors doing work for the city. Despite the limiting scope of the amendment, it should be seen as illustrative of recent trends among labor and community alliances, which in increasing numbers have engaged in successful municipal fights for living wage ordinances in over thirty-one cities across the country such as Chicago, Baltimore, and Milwaukee. With yet another victory in place, the coalition of groups listed above decided to institutionalize their working relationship in the form of the New Haven Community and Labor Coalition (NHCLC). Members believed that this body would ensure the longevity of a reciprocal relationship of action and social change. Everyone in the group would have an equal chance to shape the agenda and lives of their constituents, while making accountability clear. It was not long after the establishment of the NHCLC that the struggle at the Omni emerged.

### *C. The Omni at Yale*

In August of 1994 the City of New Haven announced that Baltimore Inner-Harbor developer David Cordish had agreed to take over the then bankrupt Park Plaza Hotel. The Park Plaza Hotel, which sat a few blocks from Yale's main campus, was built during the 1960s and was expected to

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Haven. More generally, some staff members believed that the labor movement as a whole needed to figure out how to organize big groups of people and this alliance was a step in that direction. The H.E.R.E. Alliance is not officially recognized on paper, although the member organizations meet weekly and have overlapping staff. Andrea Cole was appointed as the staff person working for Locals 34, 35, 217 and GESO. She is responsible solely for organizing and maintaining contacts between the unions and community and civil rights organizations.

be New Haven's "premier hotel and convention center."<sup>62</sup> However, in 1993, suffering from low occupancy rates in the midst of an economic recession and competition from hotels and conference centers in the suburbs, the owners of the Park Plaza filed for bankruptcy. An unsuccessful search was performed by the Yale administration to replace the failing Park Plaza with another first-class hotel and/or conference facility close to the campus. This failed search helped facilitate the near consensus among local stakeholders to support Cordish's effort to purchase and redevelop the Park Plaza.

With nearly ten million dollars in state aid plus his own private financial contribution, Cordish promised to upgrade the Park Plaza to a four-star operation with 306 rooms, a 9,000 square foot ballroom, a 7,000 square foot rooftop restaurant, and a 22,000 square foot conference center. The hotel was also to provide 250 new jobs and \$270,000 a year in taxes to New Haven residents. The significance of new jobs and tax monies is magnified considering that New Haven continues to suffer from economic devastation and depression. For instance, in 1997 New Haven registered an unemployment rate of 6.4%, significantly higher than the statewide 5.1% unemployment rate.<sup>63</sup> Between 1992-1997, New Haven experienced a decline in the growth rate of its labor force of 4.9%, compared to the rest of the state, which experienced an increase of 4.3%.<sup>64</sup> Thus, this hotel was intended to serve as the centerpiece for a larger renewal project of downtown and of the broader New Haven community.

In 1995, at the very first meeting held in Philadelphia to negotiate the development agreement between Cordish and the City of New Haven, all the stakeholders were in the room: Cordish, New Haven officials, Connecticut representatives and leaders of Local 217, which had organized employees at the Park Plaza from the late 1960s until it closed. At the end of the day, everyone walked out of the meeting believing they had crafted an agreement that would facilitate the continued development of the hotel and the unionization of its employees. There were however, "unsuspecting" parts of this agreement that would fuel a nearly two-year battle between the hotel and labor and community groups. For example, as part of the plan, city and union officials agreed to move bus routes and three major bus stops away from the hotel area, without realizing that this seemingly innocuous agreement would mobilize New Haven citizens against the Omni. Furthermore, the original document agreed upon also included commitments from Cordish that he would hire former Park Plaza

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62. Dee Segel, *State to Aid Ailing New Haven Hotel; Park Plaza to Undergo Major Conversion*, HARTFORD COURANT, Aug. 27, 1994, at F1.

63. See CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, TOWN PROFILES 1998-1999 (1999).

64. See *id.*



employees and that at least thirty-five percent of workers hired at the hotel would be New Haven residents.<sup>65</sup> Again, this part of the plan would stir community action as the Omni management and civil rights and union leaders differed on the type of training and jobs these prospective employees should receive.

Finally, and most important to the Union, Cordish agreed to a card count neutrality process for the unionization of workers. The idea behind a card count neutrality agreement or process is that once a majority of workers sign union membership cards, labor leaders call on management to recognize the union. The card count system, in which employers remain neutral, is preferred to union elections where the employer can mount a nasty anti-union campaign.<sup>66</sup> The union believed this to be the most important guarantee because of their first-hand experience with employer harassment and intimidation during union elections and contract negotiations at Yale. Both local and national labor leaders were eyeing the agreement, believing that the former Park Plaza would be an ideal location to test this new union organizing strategy.

When Warren Heyman, the secretary/treasurer of Local 217 left the meeting in Philadelphia, he believed that the interests of the workers had been secured. Cordish had agreed in principle to a union shop and a card count neutrality process. Heyman was not even particularly alarmed when he received an eleventh-hour call before the signing of the agreement telling him that Cordish was now refusing a successor clause. A successor clause would have guaranteed that anyone to whom Cordish sold the hotel would be required to comply with the specified arrangements in the original document including the neutrality agreement. Believing that Cordish would never sell his controlling interest in the hotel and after receiving reassurances from numerous sources that any unforeseeable new owner would in good faith acknowledge the neutrality agreement, Local 217 agreed to the document without a successor clause.

In the summer of 1996, the Omni Hotel Corporation was named as David Cordish's partner and planned operator of the hotel upon its completion. This process, where the developer hires a company to run the hotel, is common in the world of hotel development. Consequently, the announcement of the selection of the Omni as the hotel operator was not particularly eventful. Labor activists knew that only two Omni Hotels out of thirty-five total properties were unionized; however, stakeholders in New Haven again provided public reassurances that employees would be

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65. See Molly Ball, *Omni, Local Leaders Feud over Minority Hiring*, YALE HERALD ONLINE (Oct. 3, 1997) <<http://www.yaleherald.com>>; Heyman, *supra* note 43.

66. According to Andrea Cole, "NLRB elections are used by employees and their legal consultants to create an atmosphere of fear and to thwart union organizing drives." Cole, *supra* note 49.

able to decide, free from fear and intimidation, if the Omni at Yale would be a union hotel. Notwithstanding all the reassurances, the optimism that once prevailed among union leaders changed to apprehension when Cordish sold all but one percent of his shares in the hotel to the Omni Corporation. This now meant that without a successor clause, the Omni was free to withdraw from Cordish's previous guarantee of a card count neutrality process. This, however, would not be the first battle Omni management would confront surrounding the new hotel at Yale.

The first public skirmish to develop with the Omni management was not initiated by the union, but by community groups. This conflict centered on the rerouting of bus lines and bus stops around the hotel. As noted above, buried deep in the original 130 page development agreement between Cordish and the City of New Haven was a tiny clause proposed by the developer and ratified by the Board of Alders (New Haven's City Council) that agreed to relocate thirteen bus stops away from the New Haven Green. The Green is an area directly across the street from the Omni where many of New Haven's poorer and younger residents, most of whom are people of color, congregate to take the bus. Hotel officials claimed that the bus stops occupied valuable parking spaces and caused traffic congestion.

The controversy around the bus stops began to heat up at the end of 1996, when a consultant's report publicly put the proposed rerouting into question. After a careful examination of the suggested change in bus routes, the consultant found that the existing routing plan, with its hub at the New Haven Green, was the most efficient plan for the city. The report subtly suggested that the agreed-upon move was merely a political concession to Cordish, which was of no benefit to citizens.

The finding of the city's hired consultant preceded the work of an advisory board, comprised of city officials and concerned citizens, that the mayor established in early 1997. The advisory board was put into place to deal with the increasing anger from community groups about the bus rerouting.<sup>67</sup> As the findings from the consultant's report were released, city officials hoped that the establishment of an advisory board would be a soothing response to citizens' demands that the city abandon its original agreement with Cordish (now the Omni Corporation) to reroute the buses. The city's decision to change the bus routes came under greater scrutiny as, "[c]itizen group representatives charged that Omni Hotel's motivations were racist and elitist, and that the city's decision-making process ignored the needs of the citizens—especially those of minority, poor, and disabled residents."<sup>68</sup>

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67. See Nicole Itano, *Compromise Reached on Bus Stops*, YALE DAILY NEWS ONLINE (Sept. 8, 1997) <<http://www.yaledailynews.com>>.

68. *Id.*

An alliance of community groups, including the NAACP and the Coalition for People, mobilized their membership in response to this issue. On one occasion it was reported that:

More than 30 senior citizens, residents with disabilities, and working mothers gathered at the Chapel-Temple bus stop yesterday morning, waving neon signs and chanting, "We shall not be moved."<sup>69</sup>

The struggle over the bus stops eventually died down once the city compromised with Omni management. The city agreed to move three bus routes, while keeping in place all the bus stops around the Omni. Activists counted the fact that very little change actually occurred as a victory. What seemed to be a disappointment for some activists was the ineffectiveness of the labor/community alliance. Specifically, some community groups voiced concern over the fact that the unions were largely absent from this struggle. Cole noted that the unions were not that involved in the effort, and in particular, they were unable to play a leadership role.<sup>70</sup> She did comment, however, that this fight along with others waged by local community and civil rights organizations, helped to establish the context and build support for union fights.<sup>71</sup> Heyman went one step further and suggested that the unions could not get fully involved in this struggle because they feared compromising their relationship with city officials.<sup>72</sup> Instead, they chose to play a smaller role behind the scenes. This initial struggle surrounding the bus stops is illustrative of the difficulties involved in crafting a reciprocal relationship between labor and community groups. It seems that while the unions were committed to supporting community-initiated struggles, at least behind the scenes, their first priority was to protect their interests and contacts in the domain of "worker's" issues.

The next issue to take center stage in the ongoing struggle against the Omni was the implementation of a training program for local residents. Local 217 already had experience securing and implementing training programs. For example, it had developed a training program four years earlier at the Westin Convention Center and Hotel in Providence, Rhode Island. There, the union trained over one hundred residents of Providence, mostly people of color, who were then given preferential placement for

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69. Isaiah Wilner, *Citizen Groups Protest Bus Stop Agreement*, YALE DAILY NEWS ONLINE (Oct. 2, 1997) <<http://www.yaledailynews.com>>.

70. Specifically, Cole notes that "the reason the unions were not involved publicly with the bus stop fight was because Local 217 was at the time that it surfaced publicly, involved in intense negotiations with both the Mayor and the Omni management. Correctly or incorrectly, it seemed likely that a public profile on the bus stop issue could potentially jeopardize a settlement on all the other issues." Cole, *supra* note 49.

71. *See id.*

72. *See Heyman, supra* note 43.

higher-paying, "front-of-the-house" jobs. The national trend of the hotel industry is to relegate workers of color to jobs that are out of sight of customers—jobs such as housekeeping or maintenance. These are known as "back-of-the-house" jobs and are usually filled by part-time and unskilled labor. Front-of-the-house jobs are those that necessitate contact with customers, such as responsibility at the registration desk. White workers populate those jobs most heavily. Collaborating with the Urban League, community groups, and other local unions in Providence, Local 217 instituted a training program that put local residents, mostly people of color, in front-of-the-house jobs.

Once planning for the Omni project was underway, the union attempted to import this type of job-training model to New Haven, where it would serve as the union's "safety-net".<sup>73</sup> Fundamentally, the union saw such a program as serving its interests, since it believed that people trained through such a program would be pro-union.<sup>74</sup> Unfortunately for the union, the city and Omni had a different type of training program in mind. The city devised a training program in conjunction with the Omni and the citywide Enterprise Community Council (ECC).<sup>75</sup> This program was in part a response to the head of the ECC, William Battle.

Bill Battle, an African-American conservative, proposed that the city and Omni institute an attitude-training program. The Omni structured the program, called the "Enterprise Training Program," around the idea that everyone enrolled would receive training in interpersonal or "soft skills," such as improving attitudes, dress, and hygiene.<sup>76</sup> The city's development office advocated this program over the union's training program, which predominantly concentrated on job-skills, not attitude and behavioral issues. In response to the city's proposal, both the Omni and the Regional Workforce Development Board (RWDB), which abandoned its agreed-upon partnership with the NAACP and Local 217 to develop a skills-based training program, eagerly accepted the "Enterprise Training Program." Those involved in running this program argued that skills-based training would come later. Specifically, they explained that individuals hired out of

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73. See Heyman, *supra* note 43.

74. See Cole, *supra* note 49. However, Cole notes that the total benefits of such a training program to the union are still unclear. Similar programs run by H.E.R.E. Locals in New Haven have in fact not had that effect. The major benefit of the program is the certainty that some workers of color obtain front-of-the-house jobs instead of unskilled back-of-the-house jobs.

75. The ECC is the citywide body administering the city's Enterprise programs—programs and funds generated by the city's federal status as an Enterprise City, similar to an Empowerment Zone.

76. Activists refer to training which focuses on these things as "soft skills," as opposed to those skills directly related to the performance of a job such as word processing. See Ball, *supra* note 65.

the training program for permanent jobs would be given on-site training in job-specific skills. Michelle Bennet, Omni's corporate communications manager stated:

[C]andidates are not necessarily graded on their past or even their present skills, but graded on their capacity to learn. Once Enterprise training is in place and the applicant is hired, we train them for whatever specific job they're hired for.<sup>77</sup>

Local community activists and union officials were unhappy with the Omni's proposed program, and argued that the Omni was only interested in teaching soft skills and potentially tracking employees of color into back-of-the-house jobs. In response to what they saw as another tactic by the Omni to deny full opportunities to New Haven residents, particularly residents of color, community groups in conjunction with the union again mobilized against the Omni. In spite of their actions, the program proceeded as scheduled for at least two reasons. First, the union was preoccupied with the fight over the neutrality agreement and worried that a full battle over the skills training program would again jeopardize the mayor's support for ensuring a neutrality agreement for the Omni. The union decided that the skills training program was not a winnable issue in terms of the losses it might generate in other areas. Thus, again the union did not or could not devote its full energies to a battle in which community groups had taken the lead. The second reason the program proceeded is that most New Haven residents in need of decent jobs are not in a position to oppose free training. This is particularly important in understanding the intricacies and nuances of indigenous community politics—in this case, the black community. While civil rights and community groups worried over the nature of the training program, residents in need of change did not believe they had the luxury to fight for something better this time. They were willing to enroll in any training program if securing a job was the possible end result.

This particular struggle may not be deemed a victory, but it did have important implications for the potential of labor/community alliances. First, as with the bus issue, this struggle siphoned both time and energy from Omni officials. As they sought to address the issue of the job-training program, union officials were able to plan and implement their offense around the neutrality agreement. Second, this encounter highlighted the flexibility, yet limited the power, community groups bring to an issue compared to unions. In this case, because of the union's need for ties with local officials in what they considered the more important goal of securing a neutrality agreement, the training program supported by the local black

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77. *Id.*

conservatives was implemented.<sup>78</sup> However, it was the position of civil rights groups and community activists as outside agitators that allowed them to engage Omni management and their allies more aggressively. If labor/community alliances can more effectively use the differing positions and statuses of these coalition partners, they can plan and implement a more comprehensive struggle against management.

The final battle which served as the central focus of the Omni struggle was the issue of the neutrality agreement. The conflict over neutrality seemed to be resolved when Cordish agreed to honor such an agreement. Once he sold the hotel to the Omni, however, the battle was renewed. At first, the Omni publicly signaled its respect for the "strong unions" at Yale and agreed to the concept of neutrality. As time passed, the Omni retreated from this initial public position. In a July 3, 1997 meeting, the first of three lawyers to represent the Omni in negotiations with the union declared that he did not like the neutrality agreement and wanted instead to institute an election to determine union representation. In response to this position, community activists again came to the aid of the union.

As noted earlier, the New Haven Community and Labor Coalition was formed during the successful living wage campaign in 1996-97. It was established to institutionalize the type of labor/community alliance that had been so successful in the unions' 1996 contract fight with Yale. The Coalition decided to meet regularly as issues relevant to their work arose, so when the issue of the neutrality agreement emerged, they were in a strong position to "persuade" the Omni to honor the neutrality agreement not just in principle, but in fact. While different members of the Coalition had participated in the other struggles, Andrea Cole, with the resources of the union at her disposal, was able to mobilize the entire alliance into a visible and impressive show of force against the Omni with regards to the neutrality agreement. The groups involved in this effort included the NAACP, the New Haven Clergy Association, the Elm City Congregations Organized (ECCO), and the Student Labor Action Coalition (SLAC). These groups employed tactics ranging from letters to boycotts to picket lines. In fact, from the time the hotel opened in January 1998 until a settlement was reached in April, picket lines in front of the Omni became a regular fixture, with different groups assigned different days to coordinate the protests.

The labor/community alliance exerted its power not only by visibly demonstrating in front of the hotel, but also by putting pressure on the other stakeholders who were instrumental to the Omni's future. For example, in October 1997, New Haven Mayor John DeStefano, Jr. changed the location of his annual Columbus Day dinner, moving it out of the new Omni Hotel

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78. See Cole, *supra* note 41.

ballroom to the Yale Commons dining facility.<sup>79</sup> Pressured by the Coalition, although he said he felt "no pressure whatsoever," DeStefano sent a strong signal to the Omni to compromise on a neutrality agreement.<sup>80</sup> In defense of its position, the Omni placed a full-page ad in the *New Haven Register* declaring that the "Omni Hotel is working hard to resolve all of the concerns of our community."<sup>81</sup> Luckily for the union, the ad did not curb the activity of community activists. Numerous groups like the New Haven Clergy Association continued to schedule meetings with Omni management asking them to enact the neutrality agreement. Furthermore, in December, several people representing the many organizations included in the Coalition testified at a Board of Alders hearing about the ramifications of the Omni's refusal to honor the neutrality agreement. The committee that sponsored the hearing subsequently passed a resolution urging the Omni to agree to neutrality.

January 12, 1998 marked the Omni's pre-grand opening, and punctuating the event were the picketers outside. Despite the opening of the hotel, efforts to disrupt the daily work of the Omni would not only continue but would intensify. For example, 2,000 postcards signed by members of the New Haven community were sent to Linda Libby, the General Manager of the Omni, ordering the hotel to meet the demands of the union and community. The ECCO organized a meeting of over 200 clergy and laity with Libby as well. Two Yale student organizations, the Student Labor Action Coalition and the Social Justice Network, held weekly protests in front of the Omni. Additionally, several groups, including Planned Parenthood, canceled their events at the hotel. On March 28, the Governor of Puerto Rico was scheduled to give the keynote address at a conference sponsored by Yale Law School addressing the status of Puerto Rico. The Governor, however, refused to cross the picket line in front of the Omni and forced the Dean of the school, Anthony Kronman, to move the keynote speech to the law school auditorium.<sup>82</sup> The last straw seemed to come when the ECCO, with the support of the unions, students, community members, and civil rights groups, called for a full-fledged boycott of the Omni to start on April 15 if the neutrality agreement was not in place.<sup>83</sup>

On April 14, after an eight-month fight with the coalition of labor and

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79. See Mark Zaretsky, *Mayor Yanks Omni Dinner, Backs Unions*, NEW HAVEN REG. ONLINE (Oct. 8, 1997) <<http://www.ctcentral.com>>.

80. *Id.*

81. David McClendon, *Omni Hotel Counters Barb*, NEW HAVEN REG. ONLINE (Oct. 17, 1997) <<http://www.ctcentral.com>>.

82. See Jeff Herzog, *Omni Labor Dispute Prompts Speech Move*, YALE DAILY NEWS ONLINE (Mar. 30, 1998) <<http://www.yaledailynews.com>>.

83. See Mark Zaretsky, *Church Coalition Threatens Omni Hotel with Boycott*, NEW HAVEN REG. ONLINE (Mar. 7, 1998) <<http://www.ctcentral.com>>.

community groups and with a threatened boycott looming, the Omni and union leaders settled. With help from the mayor and Yale University officials, Omni management and union leaders reached an accord that included the desired neutrality agreement as well as a no strike/no lockout provision. In turn, Local 217 promised to limit their organizing drive to inside the hotel. Heyman noted that the Omni probably regretted having the mayor of New Haven and representatives from Yale present as they negotiated the terms of the settlement.<sup>84</sup> He stated, "[t]hey didn't negotiate the kind of agreement they would have had Yale and the mayor not been in the room."<sup>85</sup>

This victory would not have been possible without the coalition of community and civil rights groups willing to act on behalf of the locals. More specifically, according to Heyman, this alliance would not have succeeded without their point person, Andrea Cole.<sup>86</sup> She provided a level of coordination rarely found in ad hoc coalitions. It was her persistent work with the community, civil rights, and religious organizations that proved to be so crucial in the union's struggles with the Omni. "The ECCO picket line was turned out by Andrea," said Heyman.<sup>87</sup> Cole, however, disagrees. While she acknowledges that she kept in daily contact with ECCO lead organizer Pat Spear, she argues that ECCO did a remarkable job of turning out its own members.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, according to Cole, the ECCO is the only community organization in the Coalition that consistently turns out its people.<sup>89</sup> This is one example of the problem of holding community organizations accountable in coalitions and alliances, especially when the major resource to be gained from working with such groups is people.

This model of community mobilization around union efforts embodied in the Omni struggle in New Haven is not unique, but is instead part of a national trend, especially as it is developing in the AFL-CIO initiative called Union Cities. The initiative is described as follows:

The ultimate goal of Union Cities is to build the capacity to involve the entire community in the effort to stand up to employers that violate workers' rights to organize and hold politicians accountable to working families.<sup>90</sup>

Obviously the relationships required for these models to work take a long

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84. See Heyman, *supra* note 43.

85. *Id.*; see also Cole, *supra* note 49. In fact, had the mayor and Yale not been present, the agreement probably would have been weaker.

86. See Heyman, *supra* note 43.

87. *Id.*

88. See Cole, *supra* note 49.

89. See *id.*

90. COMMUNITIES AT WORK, *supra* note 1; Chavez-Thompson, *supra* note 1.



time to build. In the New Haven case, Cole had been known for her activism in the anti-Apartheid movement since the early 1980s. What started originally as a "one-woman campaign" became an institutionalized strategy of the unions. Recognizing the importance of community mobilization, the H.E.R.E. Alliance is now committed to employing someone who builds and sustains relationships with community and civil rights organizations. But how broad and strong are these alliances? When union jobs or wages are not at stake, are the unions willing to devote resources and use their power to stop economic operations and production to support the political work of local community groups?

In the case of New Haven, the answer is unclear. Unequivocally, Cole enhances not only the work of the union, but also the effectiveness of the community groups with whom she works. However, as the union demands that she spread her energies between New Haven, Bridgeport, Hartford, and other cities in Connecticut, can she alone foster the types of continuous personal interactions that can sustain these coalitions? Or will the community be involved only when there is a new union battle on the horizon? The answers to these questions remain to be seen.

### III. CONCLUSION: LESSONS LEARNED—POSSIBILITIES FOR ALLIANCES IN NEW HAVEN AND ELSEWHERE

At the same time that the victories of the labor/community alliance in New Haven are celebrated, the struggle over the bus routes near the Omni must be remembered. In this instance, community and civil rights groups pressured the city to reverse the promise that they, and the unions who also signed the original agreement, made to Cordish to reroute the bus lines. While a compromise concerning the bus routes was reached between the city and hotel officials in October 1997,<sup>91</sup> noticeably absent from the activity around this struggle were Locals 217, 34, and 35. Union leadership decided not to participate actively in this struggle because the H.E.R.E. Alliance made a decision that they could not fight on all fronts, and wanted to focus their attention on the job-training issue and the neutrality agreement.

If we return to the concerns of labor scholars discussed earlier in the paper regarding labor/community coalitions, one finds many of the issues noted exemplified in the Omni struggle. Most problematic was the union's wavering commitment to the community's struggles. As Cole noted, she felt increasingly uncomfortable returning to community activists only when it was time to renegotiate a contract. The good news, of course, is that the H.E.R.E. Alliance took steps to correct this difficulty by hiring Cole full

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91. See Itano, *supra* note 67.

time as the community liaison. Even with Cole, however, the union made decisions about when to participate which did not always optimally serve community organizations. Further, the struggle over the job-training program shows how the union also made decisions about the form and content of their intervention, making a conscious "political decision" to concentrate their efforts on the neutrality agreement at the expense of a protracted struggle for a skills-based program. Both instances point to the asymmetrical relationship that can develop in even the most principled labor/community alliances. Without some type of governing board, involving all the members of the coalition and independent of its strongest members (like unions), the continued reciprocity needed to sustain such coalitions will always be an issue.

Closely aligned with the concern over an asymmetrical relationship in the labor/community alliance is the concern over the inability of community and civil rights groups to hold unions accountable. Are community leaders really willing to turn their back on the union when they come calling at contract time? Much like the relationship between African-Americans and the Democratic Party, supporting an inattentive union may be the lesser of two evils for community members when the other option involves losing union jobs and benefits. Of course, community members can hold unions accountable by withdrawing their support when the union calls for action.

However, there is an alternative form of accountability. Specifically, civil rights and other community organizations must mobilize their own base, particularly that part of their membership who are also union members, if they are to attain some realistic level of accountability. Similar to the union's recognition that people are not just workers, but individuals enmeshed in communities, community groups must also see their members as workers. Overlapping membership may provide an avenue into the union, where questions of accountability and trust can be resolved. This, of course, will not be an easy task since one of the difficulties Cole reports is the inability of many community groups to mobilize their members.<sup>92</sup> However, some thought must be given to institutionalizing mechanisms of accountability that run in both directions.

Finally, while in the last few pages we have raised a few concerns that must be addressed when considering labor/community alliances, fundamentally these entities hold great promise. It is clear from the New Haven case that community and civil rights activism was essential to the numerous struggles that were waged against the Omni, especially the fight for a neutrality agreement. However, the future of the Coalition, as it seeks to move into non-employment based issues, will be the real test of its

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92. See Cole, *supra* note 41.

sustainability. Already the New Haven Community and Labor Alliance is meeting about future union campaigns including an organizing drive with Local 1199 to unionize hospital and nursing home workers. Other issues of concern to New Haven workers include the failing public education system, continued police brutality and harassment, and the lack of economic opportunities available to New Haven's poorest residents. What will the union do on these issues? These issues appear to be the test of whether the labor/community alliance in New Haven is prepared to be the basis for long-term systemic change, or a needed and very valuable support unit for the local unions when employment issues emerge. We hope for the sake of New Haven that the former agenda comes to take hold with a labor/community alliance serving as the centerpiece for a new social movement of marginal communities.