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# "A Good Place to Make Money": Business, Labor and Civil Rights in Twentieth-Century Charlotte

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# "A Good Place to Make Money": Business, Labor and Civil Rights in Twentieth-Century Charlotte

## **Abstract**

North Carolina, long regarded as among the most politically progressive states in the American South, has also maintained the lowest union membership rate in the nation. This dissertation attempts to explain this paradox by examining civil rights, labor, and the politics of economic development in Charlotte--a city that would eventually become the nation's second largest banking center after New York. In recent years, civil rights scholarship has focused increased attention on the movement's emphasis on economic justice. At the same time, labor and business historians have become interested in the role of business interest groups in undermining organized labor and the New Deal order. This dissertation bridges these two often-divergent bodies of scholarship by looking at public employee unionism, the politics of racial moderation, and the development of pro-business governance in the urban South. Public employees became the face of the American labor movement in the second half of the twentieth century, yet surprisingly little has been written on them--an oversight especially pronounced in literature on the Sunbelt. However, the fates of public and private sector workers were deeply intertwined and telling the story of one without the other leaves an incomplete narrative of post-World War II labor history. One only has to examine the primary opponents of public sector unions--businessmen and their organizations--to appreciate that even if public workers were not waging war against capitalism, capitalists were nonetheless waging war against the public sector. Drawing on labor union records, government documents, court cases, personal papers, newspapers and oral histories, this dissertation argues that the same politics of moderation that stymied civil rights activism in North Carolina became an indispensable tool for undermining and neutralizing organized labor and worker protest in Charlotte. Through the lens of public employee unions and the campaigns waged against them, this study traces the evolution of racially moderate, anti-union politics that have fundamentally reshaped the American political landscape.

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“A GOOD PLACE TO MAKE MONEY”: BUSINESS, LABOR, AND CIVIL RIGHTS  
IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHARLOTTE

Julia Elizabeth Gunn

A DISSERTATION

in

History

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

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“A GOOD PLACE TO MAKE MONEY”: BUSINESS, LABOR, AND CIVIL RIGHTS  
IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHARLOTTE

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Julia Elizabeth Gunn

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*For my parents*

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encouragement, I hope that I have molded it into something more interesting. I have also been fortunate to work with Kathy Peiss, whose careful reading and thorough comments have improved my work immensely. Adolph Reed and Bryant Simon came late in the game, but at a crucial juncture. In addition to being a brilliant scholar, Adolph lived in North Carolina and worked with some of the people I write about, enabling him both to save me from numerous mistakes and to point me in more interesting directions. Bryant Simon was generous enough to lend his Southern History expertise to the project, despite being immersed at the time in all things Taney Dragons. I also want to express my gratitude to Michael Katz, who passed away the week of my dissertation defense. Michael's incisive comments during the early stages of this project unquestionably changed it for the better. Michael's brilliance was only matched by the generosity he showed toward his students; he set the bar high for aspiring historians and will be missed.

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## ABSTRACT

### “A GOOD PLACE TO MAKE MONEY”: BUSINESS, LABOR, AND CIVIL RIGHTS IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHARLOTTE

Julia Elizabeth Gunn

Thomas J. Sugrue

North Carolina, long regarded as among the most politically progressive states in the American South, has also maintained the lowest union membership rate in the nation. This dissertation attempts to explain this paradox by examining civil rights, labor, and the politics of economic development in Charlotte—a city that would eventually become the nation’s second largest banking center after New York. In recent years, civil rights scholarship has focused increased attention on the movement’s emphasis on economic justice. At the same time, labor and business historians have become interested in the role of business interest groups in undermining organized labor and the New Deal order. This dissertation bridges these two often-divergent bodies of scholarship by looking at public employee unionism, the politics of racial moderation, and the development of pro-business governance in the urban South. Public employees became the face of the American labor movement in the second half of the twentieth century, yet surprisingly little has been written on them—an oversight especially pronounced in literature on the Sunbelt. However, the fates of public and private sector workers were deeply intertwined and telling the story of one without the other leaves an incomplete narrative of post-World War II labor history. One only has to examine the primary opponents of public

sector unions—businessmen and their organizations—to appreciate that even if public workers were not waging war against capitalism, capitalists were nonetheless waging war against the public sector. Drawing on labor union records, government documents, court cases, personal papers, newspapers and oral histories, this dissertation argues that the same politics of moderation that stymied civil rights activism in North Carolina became an indispensable tool for undermining and neutralizing organized labor and worker protest in Charlotte. Through the lens of public employee unions and the campaigns waged against them, this study traces the evolution of racially moderate, anti-union politics that have fundamentally reshaped the American political landscape.

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1964, Charlotte journalist Harry Golden remarked, “[Charlotteans] would elect Martin [Luther] King or Malcolm X mayor if somehow one of them could give them a guarantee of no labor unions and no minimum wage for laundry workers.”<sup>1</sup> Though something of an exaggeration, Golden’s comment intended to highlight the contrast between the city’s seeming progressiveness on civil rights issues and its steadfast opposition to organized labor. Charlotte had garnered its reputation as a bastion for Southern progressivism by avoiding the racial clashes that had engulfed cities like Birmingham and Little Rock. The city served as a national model for school busing efforts in the 1970s, and in 1983 it distinguished itself as the first large white-majority city in the South to elect a black mayor, architect Harvey Gantt. Yet, at the same time, Charlotte became the financial capital of a right-to-work state with the lowest rate of union membership in the nation.<sup>2</sup> North Carolina remains also—specifically because of events that occurred in Charlotte in the late 1950s—one of only three right-to-work states that prohibit all public sector bargaining.<sup>3</sup> Although better known in recent scholarship as

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<sup>1</sup> Pat Watters, “Charlotte” (Atlanta: SRC, 1964), 76.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2011, North Carolina’s union membership rate was 2.9% and the national average was 11.8%. See Bureau of Labor Statistics Press Release, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.t01.htm>. On union density rates over the past 50 years, see Leo Troy and Neil Sheflin, *Union Sourcebook: Membership, Structure, Finance, Directory* (West Orange: New Jersey, 1985).

<sup>3</sup> The other right-to-work states that prohibit all public sector collective bargaining are South Carolina and Virginia. Texas and Georgia also enacted prohibitive legislation, but created an exemption for police and firefighters. Tennessee case law has determined public sector bargaining to be illegal, but the state legislature has exempted public school teachers. Milla Sanes and John Schmitt, “Regulation of Public Sector Collective Bargaining in the States,” Center for Economic and Policy Research Report, March 2014, <http://www.cepr.net/documents/state-public-cb-2014-03.pdf> (Accessed 15 August 2014).

the site of the landmark *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971) school desegregation case, Charlotte also provides a useful lens through which to view post-World War II era contests over labor, civil rights, and economic development.<sup>4</sup> Eventually becoming the nation's second largest banking center by assets after New York, Charlotte is well situated to shed light on a strain of pro-business, anti-labor politics that has come to dominate the American political scene.

\* \* \*

Since political scientist V. O. Key famously described North Carolina as the most politically progressive state south of the Mason-Dixon Line, scholars have debated to what extent the Tar Heel State deserves that reputation.<sup>5</sup> Nearly three decades after Key, Jack Bass and Walter De Vries characterized the state as having “evolved into a progressive myth that remains accepted as fact by much of the state’s native leadership, despite ample evidence to the contrary.”<sup>6</sup> William Chafe extends the critique in his seminal study of the black freedom struggle in civil rights era Greensboro, arguing that the state’s “politics of moderation” was more stylistic than substantive, and at odds with black political aspirations: “By renouncing the harsh language of massive resistance, white leaders believed, they could reinforce the progressive image of their city and state

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<sup>4</sup> On school desegregation, see, for example, Stephen Samuel Smith, *Boom for Whom? Education, Desegregation and Development in Charlotte* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2004); Davison O. Douglas, *Reading, Writing and Race: The Desegregation of the Charlotte Schools* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Frye Gaillard, *The Dream Long Deferred* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

<sup>5</sup> V. O. Key, Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Vintage Books, 1949), ch. 4-10.

<sup>6</sup> Jack Bass and Walter De Vries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequence Since 1945* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1976), 221.

and, at the same time, alter only minimally the racial status quo.”<sup>7</sup> North Carolina’s politics of moderation included “an insistence on defining the world in polar opposites, both of which made the middle seem automatically reasonable and just.”<sup>8</sup> In many instances, North Carolina’s leaders did just enough to hold disorder at bay.

In the years since Chafe’s *Civility and Civil Rights* was published, scholarship on the Sunbelt has illustrated the ways in which business boosters used the politics of racial moderation to attract Northern industry and capital investment. Matthew Lassiter has described this political formulation as the “Sunbelt Synthesis”—“a booster vision designed to transcend the burdens of the region’s history through the twin pillars of rapid economic development and enforced racial harmony.”<sup>9</sup> In Atlanta, business-minded white and black civic leaders desegregated the city’s buses, libraries, airports, and other public spaces—leading Mayor William Hartsfield to famously boast that his was “the city too busy to hate.” However, according to Kevin Kruse, “The idea of ‘the city too busy to hate’ was invented and sustained by a moderate coalition born not out of chance but through careful calculation.” Despite the fact that some white politicians and corporate leaders may likely have held segregationist ideals in private, these pragmatic men

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<sup>7</sup> William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 7.

<sup>8</sup> Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 11. Legal historian Davison Douglas also shows how the state’s politics of moderation influenced its reaction to the Brown decision: “North Carolina’s ‘moderate’ response to Brown did not open the doors of the state’s white schools to black children. By engaging in well-publicized but decidedly token, integration, North Carolina managed to maintain an almost completely segregated school system for the first decade after Brown.” Douglas, *Reading, Writing and Race*, 26.

“discovered to their delight that progressive politics—or the appearance of it at least—resulted in economic progress and profits.”<sup>10</sup>

In Charlotte, civic leaders likewise understood that in order for the city to become a national center of finance, it must embrace the politics of racial moderation. As economist Gavin Wright and political scientist Stephen Smith have shown, such moves proved tremendously beneficial for economic growth. Wright explains how “desegregation opened clogged channels for outside investment in the region,” encouraging major national corporations such as IBM to open offices in Charlotte.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, it is impossible to understand Charlotte’s transition into a national financial capital without first understanding the policies of racial moderation that encouraged this vast influx of capital.

From the early 1950s through the late 1980s, a biracial—though unequal—coalition of affluent whites from southeast Charlotte and African Americans from the northwest section of the city governed Charlotte, with a cadre of elites representing both groups. The city’s at-large voting system necessitated such a political alliance because neither group could fully govern without the assent of the other.<sup>12</sup> Unlike Atlanta, which had gained a black majority by 1970, the proportion of blacks in Charlotte’s population remained fairly constant between 1970 and 2000, only increasing from 30 to 33 percent

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<sup>10</sup> Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 41.

<sup>11</sup> Gavin Wright, *Sharing the Prize: The Economics of the Civil Rights Revolution in the American South* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 210.

<sup>12</sup> In cities with at-large city council elections, all councilmembers are elected by entire city, rather by districts or wards. In Charlotte’s at-large system, the top seven finishers were given seats on city council.

over the three decades.<sup>13</sup> Black political representation and by extension, power, relied on cooperation with white leaders in business and government. Also influential in the city's political trajectory were North Carolina's aggressive annexation laws, which allowed the city of Charlotte to acquire economically prosperous, mostly white outlying areas while maintaining essentially the same racial balance for the better part of the twentieth century.<sup>14</sup> Because Charlotte never approached having a black voting majority, its trajectory resembles national political trends more than that of other seemingly similar southern cities, such as Atlanta.

Like Atlanta, however, Charlotte's governing coalition was unified by pro-growth, neo-Keynesian ideals typical of the era. The city's business and political leaders maintained a shared faith that continual economic growth would eventually solve problems of poverty, underemployment and unemployment.<sup>15</sup> Assumptions of perpetual economic expansion and America's unrivaled economic strength shaped not only U.S. foreign trade policy during this period but also informed approaches to social issues, such as civil rights. According to Judith Stein, the neo-Keynesian consensus viewed racially discriminatory hiring policies as incompatible with a growth agenda because segregation

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<sup>13</sup> This coalition remained, though somewhat battered, through the election and reelection of Harvey Gantt, who left office in 1987. *Smith, Boom for Whom?* 24-44.

<sup>14</sup> The most substantial demographic change came near the end of the twentieth century, when Latino immigrants began to constitute an increasingly substantial portion of the population. During the 1990s, Charlotte's Latino population increased 600 percent and between 1990 and 2005, North Carolina saw a 394 percent increase in its Latino population. *Smith, Boom for Whom?* 24. For more on Latino immigration into Charlotte, see Jose L. S. Gamez, "Mi Rena: Latino Landscapes in the Queen City (Charlotte, N.C.)" in William Graves and Heather A. Smith, eds. *Charlotte, NC: The Evolution of a New South City* (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 2010), 263-283.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 153-164; Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth Century US History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 144.



“interfered with the proper functioning of the labor market.”<sup>16</sup> In Charlotte, this mindset translated into an economic boom that trickled down largely to the city’s financiers, lawyers, real estate developers and associated industries.

As in other Sunbelt cities, Charlotte’s business leaders historically dominated local politics.<sup>17</sup> These civic boosters spent much of the twentieth century obsessed with the city’s national image, working tirelessly to distinguish their city from other southeastern “Ch” cities like Charleston, South Carolina or Charlottesville, Virginia.<sup>18</sup> Lacking Charleston’s historic charm and Charlottesville’s college town advantages, Charlotte’s leaders set out to put their city on the map by transforming it from a regional trading hub into an international center of finance.<sup>19</sup> So great were their efforts that one

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<sup>16</sup> Market-based arguments for affirmative action would have little effect on industries collapsing because of the deindustrialization of the United States, however. The “notion of affluence” ignored broader structural economic transformations occurring in the mid-1960s and workplace desegregation would have limited influence on equality in an economy where jobs were disappearing. In the Carolina Piedmont, for example, American foreign trade policies eventually enabled the decline of the region’s textile sector due to a flood of imports from across the globe, prompting mills to move abroad in search of cheaper labor. Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy, and the Decline of Liberalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 4. On the collapse of the textile industry in the Carolina Piedmont, see Timothy J. Minchin, *Empty Mills: The Fight Against Imports and the Decline of the U.S. Textile Industry* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2013); Marko Maunula, *Guten Tag, Y’all: Globalization and the South Carolina Piedmont, 1950-2000* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), ch. 2.

<sup>17</sup> On other Sunbelt cities, see Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); James C. Cobb, *The Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-90* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982); Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); Kruse, *White Flight*.

<sup>18</sup> Lassiter, *Searching for Respect*, 25.

<sup>19</sup> The most detailed study of Charlotte’s development in the first half of the twentieth century is Thomas W. Hanchett’s *Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class, and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1998). Also see political scientist Stephen Samuel Smith’s excellent *Boom for Whom? Education, Desegregation and Development in Charlotte*, which examines the relationship between school desegregation and economic development policies in Charlotte. Also on Charlotte’s development in this period, see selected chapters in *Charlotte, NC: The Global Evolution of a New South City*, ed. William Graves and Heather A. Smith (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010).

visiting journalist famously observed, “Charlotte . . . may edge out Dallas and Atlanta as home to the purest strain ever discovered of the Southern booster gene.”<sup>20</sup>

Charlotte’s civic promotion resulted from and, in turn, fostered deep ties between business and city government. Between 1935 and 1979, every mayor of Charlotte, with only one exception, had been either the president or owner of his own business. Many of these men came directly from the Chamber of Commerce boardroom. Serving as the chairman of Charlotte’s Chamber of Commerce virtually guaranteed a mayoral candidate’s win, as was the case for Stanford Brookshire and John Belk, Charlotte’s longest serving mayors in the twentieth century. Many in the city were proud of the Chamber’s prominent role in city politics. Not least among these were the editors of the city’s morning and evening newspapers, the *Charlotte Observer* and *Charlotte News*. “Some towns are run by one man, some by a handful of men,” boasted the *Observer*’s editorial staff in 1960, “Not Charlotte . . . Charlotte is run, primarily and well, by the Chamber of Commerce . . . We are pleased to acknowledge its bossism and to wish it continued health.”<sup>21</sup> By the early 1970s, the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce had adopted what one visiting journalist described as “the world’s bluntest Chamber of Commerce slogan”: “Charlotte: A Good Place to Make Money.”<sup>22</sup> The business community’s influence in Charlotte, however, had more serious implications than regrettable Chamber of Commerce slogans. In striving to create the political and

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Applebome, *Dixie Rising: How the South is Shaping American Values, Politics and Culture* (New York: Times Books, 1996), 153.

<sup>21</sup> “Guess Who’s Boss of Our Town,” *Charlotte Observer*, 12 February 1960. This use of the term “bossism” may have been inspired, at least in small part, by the recent defeat of union “bosses” through the 1959 public worker union ban.

<sup>22</sup> Applebome, *Dixie Rising*, 154; this overview of Charlotte politics draws on Smith, *Boom for Whom?* 23-55.

economic climate most hospitable to business, Charlotte's leaders worked to create a city free of organized labor. The influence business organizations wielded over labor legislation in North Carolina was not lost on the state's union leaders. During the 1958 North Carolina AFL-CIO Convention, for example, one national labor leader described Charlotte as "the seat of more vicious anti-union propaganda than any other city of the United States of America."<sup>23</sup>

This dissertation sits at the intersection of several fields of scholarship including postwar labor history, the development of the Sunbelt, civil rights politics, and late twentieth century political economy and the emergence of neoliberalism. In the second half of the twentieth century, public workers—a major focus of this dissertation—would become the face of the American labor movement. From the early 1960s to the early 1990s, government employee union density increased from just below 13 percent to almost 40 percent while private sector union density dropped from more than 33 percent to less than 12 percent over roughly the same period.<sup>24</sup> By 2013, nearly half of union members nationwide were public employees, despite representing a much smaller sector of the American workforce.<sup>25</sup> Yet, with a few notable exceptions, scholarship on public worker unions remains thin.<sup>26</sup> Part of this neglect likely stems from a relatively small

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<sup>23</sup> Statement by Chicago AFL-CIO Regional Director Eugene Moats, *Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the North Carolina State AFL-CIO for 1958*, Held in Charlotte March 19-21 (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, Co., 1958), 120.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph E. Slater, *Public Workers: Government Employee Unions, the Law, and the State, 1900-1962* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>25</sup> See Bureau of Labor Statistics Press Release, "Union Members—2013," <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Important exceptions include Slater, *Public Workers*; Richard B. Freeman, "Unionism Comes to the Public Sector," *Journal of Economic Literature* 24 (March 1986): 43; Joseph A. McCartin, "Bringing the State's Workers In: Time to Rectify an Imbalanced US Labor Historiography," *Labor*

public sector in the first half of the twentieth century combined with public workers' exclusion from the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (NLRA)—more commonly known as the Wagner Act—which protects the rights of private sector workers to join unions, bargain collectively, and declare strikes.<sup>27</sup> In 1959, however, Wisconsin became the first state to grant organizational and “proto-bargaining rights” to public workers and in 1962, President John F. Kennedy granted limited bargaining rights to federal workers through Executive Order 10988.<sup>28</sup> In the years that followed, however, public workers' ranks and militancy grew tremendously, thus challenging the declension narrative of post-World War II American labor history.

By including public employee unions in the narrative of the postwar era, as Joseph McCartin and Joseph Slater have argued, the trajectory and composition of labor union activism looks substantially different. Instead of viewing the 1950s as the high water mark for organized labor and the period that followed as one of decline, the years between the 1960s and 1980s witnessed substantial growth in public sector union numbers, percentages of the total union numbers, and general public sector political

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*History* 47 (February 2006): 73-94; Joseph A. McCartin, “A Wagner Act for Public Employees: Labor’s Deferred Dream and the Rise of Conservatism, 1970-1977,” *Journal of American History* 95 (June 2008): 123-48; Margaret C. Rung, *Servants of the State: Managing Diversity and Democracy in the Federal Workforce, 1933-1953* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2002); Joseph A. McCartin, *Collision Course: Ronald Reagan, the Air Traffic Controllers, and the Strike that Changed America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); and Frances Ryan, *AFSCME’s Philadelphia Story: Municipal Workers and Urban Power in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> Due to the power of Southern Democrats in Congress, the Wagner Act also excluded domestic and agricultural workers. The exclusion of public sector workers, however, had bipartisan support, including that of President Roosevelt. See Slater, *Public Workers*, 90-91; Boris and Klein, *Caring for America*, 24.

<sup>28</sup> On Wisconsin’s law, see Slater, *Public Workers*, 158-192.

activism.<sup>29</sup> In addition to seeing a more militant labor movement, centering government workers and their unions also reveals a labor movement that is increasingly composed of black and female workers. In short, excavating the history of public sector workers is crucial to a comprehensive understanding of twentieth-century America.

Attention to public worker unions in the post-World War II era is also important because assaults on both the public sector and organized labor became integral to dismantling the New Deal order. Attacks on public worker unions—which represented both labor and the state—should figure centrally in the historiography of the business-led assault on the New Deal and the rise of the New Right. Nevertheless, the otherwise robust body of scholarship on American conservatism has largely overlooked public employee unions—an oversight especially pronounced in literature on the Sunbelt.<sup>30</sup> In the Sunbelt as elsewhere, however, the fates of public and private sector workers were deeply interconnected and to tell the story of one without the other leaves an incomplete narrative of postwar labor history. For example, one only has to examine the primary opponents of public sector unions—businessmen and their organizations—to appreciate that even if public workers were not waging war against capitalism, capitalists were nonetheless waging war against the public sector. As anti-public sector unionism became

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<sup>29</sup> McCartin, “Bringing the State’s Workers Back In;” Slater, *Public Workers*.

<sup>30</sup> For example, a recent edited collection on the Sunbelt, *Sunbelt Rising*, overlooks public sector workers entirely. Another recent edited volume, *The Right and Labor in America*, includes an excellent essay by Joseph A. McCartin and Jean-Christian Vinel on the Sunbelt origins of one strand of anti-public sector union ideology, but it does not include any discussion of the workers themselves. Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuk, *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Place, Space and Region* (Philadelphia, 2011); Joseph McCartin and Jean-Christian Vinel, “‘Compulsory Unionism’: Sylvester Petro and the Career of an Anti-Union idea, 1957-1987” in *The Right and Labor in America: Politics, Ideology, and Imagination*, eds. Nelson Lichtenstein and Elizabeth Tandy Shermer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 226-251.

one of the Sunbelt's most successful ideological exports to the rest of the nation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, historians interested in both the Sunbelt and twentieth century political economy would be wise to refocus their attention on public workers and the campaigns waged against them.

Examining the battles over public employee unions also reveals a more complete picture of how North Carolina became—and has remained—the least unionized state in the nation. Most North Carolina labor histories focus primarily on rural struggles, with a heavy bent towards the state's textile mills.<sup>31</sup> This is somewhat understandable, given that for much of the late nineteenth and twentieth century, textile mills dominated the state's manufacturing sector and mill owners were unrivalled in their opposition to organized labor. The labor struggles in and around the Piedmont are essential to understanding American labor history. By the 1970s however, when the textile industry began to collapse and mill labor became a dwindling sector of the state's economy and labor force, textile industrialists' opposition to unions no longer sufficiently explains North Carolina's low union rates or the state's contribution to anti-labor ideology. Instead, as I argue in chapter four, it is important to look at Charlotte, the state's largest urban area and emerging financial capital in order to understand the persistence of anti-unionism in North Carolina.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> There are exceptions, of course, such as Robert Korstad's *Civil Rights Unionism*, but such examples do not challenge the larger point that the power of textile mills has often been used to explain North Carolina's persistent anti-unionism. Robert Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> Despite the importance of labor to understanding Charlotte's development and, in turn, the importance of Charlotte to the state's anti-union stance, existing scholarship on Charlotte has all but ignored organized labor. The most recent anthology on Charlotte, for example, relegates discussion of unions to two sentences on NASCAR *Charlotte, NC*, 85.

This dissertation also contributes to recent scholarly debates on neoliberalism, late capitalism, and modern political economy. Much recent scholarship on the emergence of neoliberalism focuses on international policy, right-wing think tanks, or events in northern cities, such as the fiscal crisis in New York, to explain the rise of this phenomenon.<sup>33</sup> As Nancy MacLean has argued, however, understanding the origins of American neoliberalism requires looking south: “No better tutors could be found than conservative southern elites for what David Harvey depicts as the core project of neoliberalism: the reassertion of class power in its rawest form so as to reduce everything to a commodity, especially labor, in the quest to free capital of social obligations and political constraint.”<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth Tandy Shermer’s work on the Phoenix businessmen’s efforts to use the state to undermine unions, lower taxes, and decrease regulations suggests that scholars should also look south and west to understand the origins and development of neoliberal ideology and practice. My dissertation contributes to this endeavor in showing how Charlotte became a laboratory for neoliberal labor-relations ideology in the 1970s.

This dissertation also engages scholarship on the War on Poverty and black politics in the civil rights era South. It draws on political scientist Preston Smith’s distinction between “racial democracy” – the idea that all races should share proportional

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<sup>33</sup> Joshua B. Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II* (New York: New Press, 2000), chapter 15; Jason Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology and Development in American Urbanism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> Nancy MacLean, “Southern Dominance in Borrowed Language: The Regional Origins of American Neoliberalism,” in *New Landscapes of Inequality*, ed. Micaela di Leonardo and Jane Collins (Santa Fe: School of American Research, 2007).

access to essential social goods — and “social democracy”— that individuals should have equal access irrespective of social class —as a way of explaining Charlotte’s politics during the 1960s.<sup>35</sup> The city’s biracial civic leadership’s adoption of a racial democracy framework converged with changing ideas at both the local and national level about the relationship between the state and poverty, employment, and economic growth. At the same time that it reinforced Charlotte’s well-cultivated image of a progressive Sunbelt metropolis, the dominance of the racial democracy framework served to undermine social democracy arguments. Consequently, this often meant that the interests of the civic and professional class displaced those of the city’s working classes.

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The dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter One explores Charlotte’s long history of labor activism. It begins by charting the city’s labor history from a streetcar strike in 1919 through the General Strike of 1934 and Operation Dixie in the mid-1940s. It then examines a series of strikes in Charlotte in 1958 and 1959 and the resulting campaign by the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce in 1959 to ban all public employees from collective bargaining and police and firefighters from unionizing entirely. Within the context of growing support for the rights of public workers nationwide, Chapter One examines the political power that Charlotte’s Chamber of Commerce wielded to shape both local and state laws in their interests and, in the

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<sup>35</sup> Preston H. Smith, “The Quest for Racial Democracy: Black Civic Ideology and Housing Interests in Postwar Chicago,” *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 26 No. 2 (January 2000), 133-4. Smith expands on this framework in *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis: Housing Policy in Postwar Chicago* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2012).



process, shape the fates of workers throughout the state for the remainder of the twentieth century. Although this chapter concerns the primarily white and male workers who filled Charlotte’s union halls during the first half of the twentieth century, mid-twentieth century Charlotte’s contests over organized labor have had important implications for African American and female workers as public jobs became integral to these groups’ economic mobility in the following decades.<sup>36</sup>

Chapter Two examines civil rights era politics in Charlotte using both “racial democracy” and “the politics of moderation” as an organizing framework. During the early 1960s, unionization struggles in the city faded to the background—in large part because of the 1959 ban—and civil rights struggles took center stage. In response to pressure from black activists and fearful of attracting negative attention to the growing Sunbelt metropolis, Charlotte’s Chamber of Commerce joined with civic leaders in spearheading the peaceful desegregation of the city’s public establishments, winning the city substantial praise on the national political scene for racial moderation and “peaceful race relations.” The chapter then turns to civil rights and anti-poverty activism in Charlotte, and specifically, the efforts of Charlotte’s domestic workers to improve their wages and working conditions with the help of the Charlotte Area Fund (CAF), a wing of the pioneering North Carolina Fund. While the North Carolina Fund’s creation signaled

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<sup>36</sup> As Michael Katz and Mark Stern have shown, public sector work, which they argue became “African Americans’ distinctive occupational niche,” became crucial for black and female economic mobility in the second half of the twentieth century. Though fewer than 15 percent of African American women worked in government-related jobs in 1950, this number had almost tripled to 43 percent by 2000, with public jobs paying significantly more than the private sector. For an overview of the significance of public employment to African American economic mobility in the second half of the twentieth century, see Michael B. Katz and Mark J. Stern, *One Nation Indivisible: What America Was and What It Is Becoming* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006), 91-95.

an important achievement in efforts to combat southern poverty, the North Carolina Fund also had its limitations, some of which become evident by looking at the CAF. This chapter follows CAF staff, local activists, domestic workers, business leaders and elected officials as they debate poverty and inequality, revealing how the politics of racial moderation benefited the city's civic elites but also stymied challenges to the prevailing economic order.

Chapter three examines public employee activism in Charlotte in the late 1960s in the wake of North Carolina's 1959 ban on police and firefighter unions and public sector collective bargaining. It examines the events surrounding the city's all-white firefighters union to hire the state's preeminent black civil rights attorney, Julius Chambers, to challenge the ban in federal district court in 1969. In so doing, the chapter reveals a history of white working class political activism in postwar urban South not captured by narratives of Massive Resistance and the Silent Majority. The chapter also examines efforts by the city's poorly paid and predominantly black sanitation workers to organize and exert influence on the city to raise wages and improve working conditions. It shows how city leaders' embrace of racial moderation both enabled initial gains for sanitation workers while thwarting substantive challenges to anti-labor politics in the city.

Chapter Four tells the story of how local and national political interests converged as the city of Charlotte became an innovative center of the anti-union ideology in the 1970s. The city's history during this decade also brings together many important strands of 1970s political economy, including financialization, anti-public unionism, private sector union-busting campaigns, and the emergence of neoliberal politics. It was during

this decade that Charlotte's rise as a financial center and its anti-union activism became mutually reinforcing. This chapter traces the evolution of anti-labor politics in Charlotte in the 1970s. It examines the career of Edward J. Dowd, Jr., an important yet almost entirely overlooked figure who helped solidify Charlotte's anti-union position in the face of growing labor militancy in the city and across the state. From relatively humble origins as executive secretary of an employers association, he helped reframe anti-unionism into a "progressive" and "modern" ideology, spread these new ideas to national organizations, and in so doing, became an important innovator in the 1970s assault on organized labor.

The dissertation's final chapter explores the political and economic development of Charlotte in the late 1970s and 1980s. Specifically, the chapter examines black reverse migration and the implications this demographic phenomenon had for black politics and Charlotte's growing black professional class. During this period, the city's decades-long emphasis on racial democracy and elite-led, growth-oriented politics culminated in the 1983 election of Harvey Gantt, the city's first black mayor. It also explores the continued ascendancy of Charlotte's financial industry and the central role banks played in driving the redevelopment of downtown Charlotte. In conclusion, this dissertation offers a brief discussion of the Democratic National Committee's decision to hold its 2012 national convention in Charlotte, the financial capital of the least unionized state in America.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **From “Union Bosses” to Chamber Bosses: The Charlotte Bus Strike of 1958, Public Workers, and the Politics of Anti-Unionism**

On March 19, 1958, the North Carolina AFL-CIO held its first annual convention in downtown Charlotte since the merger of the state’s two houses of labor the previous year.<sup>37</sup> Among the first speakers to welcome this assembly of union leaders was Charlotte’s Chamber of Commerce president, publisher Thomas L. Robinson. Robinson told the crowd, “Labor has played a very significant part in the development of this great state. In fact, without the... relentless work of your labor groups we could not possibly have achieved the standard of living and the substantial gains which have been made in recent years in this great state of North Carolina.”<sup>38</sup> Although at the time, it was unremarkable for civic leaders such as the Chamber of Commerce president to address a convention of this size, Robinson’s remarks would carry special significance in the period that followed. Within the span of a few months, the city of Charlotte would become embroiled in a battle between city and state officials, business leaders, and labor unions over the rights of both public and private workers to organize and bargain collectively.

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<sup>37</sup> The national AFL and CIO merged in 1955, but the state affiliate did not formally merge until 1957. According to local labor leader Floyd Henderson, the Mecklenburg County Council (CIO) and the Charlotte Labor Council (AFL) “effectively carried out the spirit of the national merger” on 30 April 1957. See J. Floyd Henderson to Charles R. Brockman 5 August 1960, “Trade Union Movement: Charlotte and Mecklenburg County,” Charlotte Trade Unions Clippings File, Robinson-Spangler North Carolina Room, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library (hereafter CMPL).

<sup>38</sup> Proceedings of the First Annual Convention of the North Carolina State AFL-CIO for 1958, Held in Charlotte March 19-21 (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, Co., 1958), 3.

These confrontations culminated in an effective Chamber of Commerce-led campaign to persuade the Charlotte city council to ban municipal employees' unions. The ban solidified a power dynamic in Charlotte politics that flowed directly from the Chamber's boardroom to city council and on to the mayor—a dynamic that had disastrous consequences for both the city's unionized and non-unionized workers. The Chamber's actions, moreover, had political implications that extended beyond the local level. Attempts to organize city workers and the ensuing Charlotte municipal employee ban, along with a prolonged textile strike elsewhere in the state, prompted the North Carolina General Assembly to pass legislation in 1959, HB 95-98, prohibiting all public employees from collective bargaining and banning police and firefighters from unionizing entirely. Although the latter portion of the legislation was overturned a decade later, the public employee collective bargaining ban has remained intact for more than five decades, fundamentally shaping and constraining the options for workers throughout the state of North Carolina.

These events occurred at an important turning point for the nation's public workers, whose numbers had grown dramatically in the post-World War II years. In the two and a half decades following the war, state and city employee rosters tripled, while federal worker numbers doubled. Though excluded from the Wagner Act's collective bargaining protections, public worker activism increased across the nation in the late 1950s, especially in larger cities. For example, in 1958, due to growing activism on the part of the city's sanitation workers, bus drivers, social workers, teachers, police officers, and firemen and with pressure from AFSCME, New York City mayor Robert Wagner,

Jr. granted city workers the right to organize and bargain collectively. The following year, Wisconsin became the first state to recognize public sector bargaining rights and in 1962, President John F. Kennedy extended bargaining rights to federal employees through Executive Order 10988.<sup>39</sup> As this chapter elucidates, however, Charlotte and the state of North Carolina chose a decidedly different path, passing some of the most stringent restrictions on public workers in the nation.

This chapter begins by exploring Charlotte's history of organized labor in the first half of the twentieth century in order to put the events of the late 1950s into a broader historical context. Specifically, the chapter looks at an explosive streetcar workers strike in 1919, textile mill unionism in the 1930s, and Operation Dixie efforts in the Carolina Piedmont. It then turns to struggles over public employee unionism in late 1950s Charlotte, showing the ways in which the business community, and especially the Chamber of Commerce, exerted considerable political influence during this period over the fate of the city's working class. This chapter illustrates how the city of Charlotte experimented with various responses to organized labor before ultimately settling upon a course of legislative action intended to prevent unions from gaining political traction in the second half of the twentieth century.

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<sup>39</sup> Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013 edition), 181-2; Slater, *Public Workers*, 166; Joshua Freeman, *Working-Class New York: Life and Labor since World War II* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 179-200; and Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900-1980* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 196-226.

## **Organized Labor in the Carolina Piedmont**

By the middle of the twentieth century, Charlotte emerged as a city steadfast in its opposition to organized labor. This path, however, was not inevitable. Instead, the first decades of the twentieth century were marked by workers' repeated attempts to gain union recognition, increase wages and benefits, and improve overall working conditions. Charlotte's predicament at midcentury was decades in the making, much of which can be traced to the emergence of the state's textile industry, which dominated the political economy of the region surrounding Charlotte for the better part of the twentieth century. Often referred to as the Carolina Piedmont, this region of North Carolina was ideally situated for textile production. It contained flat expanses of land suitable for constructing large factories, abundant rivers to provide hydroelectric power, and an almost entirely non-unionized labor force, consisting primarily of women and children, willing to work for substantially less than their northern counterparts.<sup>40</sup> Though cotton mills in the region dated to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the industry took off between the 1880s and the 1920s when area industrialists began erecting mills modeled after and intended to compete with those in the Northeast. The Charlotte Cotton Mill, for example, which opened its doors in 1880, was a single-story brick building outfitted with ventilation skylights, walls of windows, and modern machinery purchased from Northern manufacturers. Within a few years of opening, the mill was turning out profits of \$155 dollars per day—profits that amounted to nearly two and half times that of the \$60 per day it cost to operate the mill.

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<sup>40</sup> The Piedmont contained many of the region's smaller mill towns, such as Kannapolis, Burlington, and Fort Mill, as well as larger cities including Charlotte, Winston-Salem, Raleigh, and Durham in North Carolina and Greenville, Columbia and Spartanburg in South Carolina.

Following the success and profitability of the Charlotte Cotton Mill, other textile mills soon opened, leading to substantial economic growth in the region. Also following the pattern of Northern industry, many of Charlotte's textile mill owners constructed mill villages in which millhands and their families would reside.<sup>41</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, the Piedmont had become the state's industrial and economic center. The growth of the region's textile industry enticed Northern investors to open mills in the Piedmont and by 1927, the South had supplanted New England as the nation's largest textile producer, putting Charlotte "at the center of a textile manufacturing territory having 770 mills...and consuming more cotton than any other section of the world."<sup>42</sup> According to Charlotte historian Tom Hanchett, North Carolina's "leaders (and many ordinary folks) felt that cheap labor was the only way that [the state] could compete with more advanced and more capitalized regions. The alternative to low wages was not higher wages, in their minds, but instead a non-industrialized wasteland."<sup>43</sup> In the era before American textile manufacturers began outsourcing production across international borders and oceans, the Carolina Piedmont was America's Mexico.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, 48-52.

<sup>42</sup> This quote is from Miller's Official Charlotte, N.C. City Directory, p.8, as quoted in Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, 92.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Hanchett, correspondence with author, 6 February 2013.

<sup>44</sup> On the effects of the textile industry's move south on organized labor, see Tami J. Friedman, "Exploiting the North-South Differential: Corporate Power, Southern Politics, and the Decline of Organized Labor after World War II," *Journal of American History* 95 No. 2 (September 2008) 323-48; on capital mobility across regional and national borders in the twentieth century, see Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's 70-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1999). Also see Elizabeth Tandy Shermer "Take Government Out of Business by Putting Business into Government: Local Boosters, National CEOs, Experts, and the Politics of Midcentury Capital Mobility" in *What's Good for Business: Business and American Politics since World War II*, eds. Kim Phillips-Fein and Julian E. Zelizer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 91-106.



As a result, this period of unprecedented economic growth in the Carolina Piedmont witnessed a consolidation of power in the hands of an overconfident and paternalistic merchant and manufacturing class that traveled the nation proudly marketing their low-wage, non-unionized, and purportedly docile workforce. Duke Power advertised, “The birth rate of the Carolinas is the highest in the United States. Already a second generation of textile workers has come along, and in many older textile centers a third generation has grown up.”<sup>45</sup> Another industrialist boasted of “willing labor, unhampered by any artificial restrictions on output.”<sup>46</sup> It would not be long, however, before labor conflicts undermined the message of North Carolina’s industrialists and manufacturers.

Among the lowest paid industrial workers in the nation, Piedmont workers would face an uphill battle in improving their economic circumstances throughout the twentieth century. The first set of contests occurred when Charlotte’s millworkers and streetcar drivers went on strike in response to post-World War I cuts in hours and wages. Like cities across the nation, Charlotte witnessed significant labor unrest during the economic recession following the war.<sup>47</sup> In May of 1919, 150 workers at two of the city’s Highland

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<sup>45</sup> Allen Tullos, *Habits of Industry: White Culture and the Transformation of the Carolina Piedmont* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 171.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> On general labor unrest in 1919, see Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (Boston: South End Press, 1972), 101-43; David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 41-44; James R. Green, *The World of the Worker: Labor in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 93-9. Labor historians have written extensively on the life and politics of workers in the North and South Carolina Piedmont in the decades following the World War I. See Jacqueline Dowd Hall, et al., *Like A Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987); Allen Tullos, *Habits of Industry: White Culture and the Transformation of the Carolina Piedmont* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1989); Bryant Simon, *A Fabric of Defeat: The Politics of South*

Park Mill plants walked off the job protesting the elimination of wartime bonuses and the implementation of a four-day workweek, which decreased workers' total weekly wages. Following the walkout, most of the strikers joined the United Textile Workers. Refusing to negotiate with union labor, Highland Park's management closed both plants and evicted workers and their families from company-owned houses. Workers responded by forming armed patrols to protect their homes and property. The strike lasted longer than either labor or management anticipated and, as it stretched into its third month, Charlotte's mayor, Frank McNinch, called on the state's governor, Thomas Bickett, to mediate. As area industrialists watched carefully to see how the state's leadership would respond, North Carolina's politically moderate governor supported the strikers, much to the chagrin of Highland Park management. A lawyer by training from the eastern part of the state, Bickett had few debts to Piedmont textile manufacturers and supported the rights of industrial workers to organize.<sup>48</sup> "This position on the part of the mill owners is unwise, unjust, and cannot be maintained. Labor has just as much right to organize as capital," proclaimed the Governor. "This right—the right of collective bargaining on the part of labor—is recognized by every civilized government in the world." Bickett called for moderation on the part of management and labor:

When the mill owners discharged the operatives because they joined a union, they resorted to force and not to reason to sustain their position. A lockout is war—industrial war waged by organized capital against labor. A walkout is war waged by organized labor against capital... In the case of a walkout or a lockout each side is trying to starve the other side into

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*Carolina Millhands, 1910-1948* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); and Timothy J. Minchin, *What Do We Need a Union For? The TWUA in the South, 1945-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

<sup>48</sup> For more on Bickett, see Hall et. al., *Like A Family*, 186-90.

submission to its will...The only hope for better conditions, for enduring peace, is for labor and capital to stand together in a spirit of mutual helpfulness.<sup>49</sup>

Governor Bickett concluded by issuing a stern warning to Highland Park management, “I give my solemn warning that the full power of the State will be exerted to protect any man who wants to work, and any one who shall dare to interfere with a willing worker will do so at his peril.”<sup>50</sup> Shortly thereafter, pressure from state authorities combined with higher cotton prices to persuade management to reach an agreement with workers.<sup>51</sup> Piedmont workers, at least for a moment, had captured some degree of control over their working conditions. In their landmark study of millworkers in the Carolina Piedmont, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall et. al. characterize the settlement as a “watershed in southern labor relations.”<sup>52</sup>

Within a few months of the Highland Park strike’s resolution, Charlotte’s streetcar workers also declared a strike. This came on the heels of the Amalgamated Association of Street and Electric Railway Employees decade-long campaign to unionize streetcar workers in Charlotte, Winston-Salem, and Greenville, South Carolina. Although the union’s campaign initially met with limited success, Charlotte’s streetcar workers’ mounting frustration with their working conditions converged with general unrest during the summer of 1919. On August 10, 1919, Southern Public Utilities (SPUCo.) workers in Charlotte went on strike, hoping to win higher wages and official union recognition.

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<sup>49</sup> R.B. House, ed., *Public Letters and Papers of T. W. Bickett*, “To the People of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County for Cooperation of Labor and Capital,” submitted to the *Charlotte Observer*, 30 May 1919 (printed the following day in the *Charlotte Observer*, as well as many other leading newspapers across the state), 149-50.

<sup>50</sup> *Public Letters and Papers of T. W. Bickett*, 149-50.

<sup>51</sup> Hall et al., *Like A Family*, 185-90.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

Numbering in the hundreds, the streetcar workers gained the support of thousands of Piedmont millworkers, many of whom had likely participated in strikes during the preceding months.<sup>53</sup> Not long after the strike began, SPUCo.'s management raised the stakes by hiring strikebreakers. Solidarity among the city's white working classes materialized as thousands of textile workers assembled outside SPUCo.'s streetcar barn on the evening of August 25 to support the strikers. Just before midnight, police officers and armed strikebreakers opened fire into the large crowd, killing five men and wounding twenty more. Within days, national guardsmen were patrolling Charlotte's streets and SPUCo.'s employees had returned to work by the beginning of September, demoralized by the city's and their employer's response as well as the lack of substantive redress for their losses.<sup>54</sup>

In a few short years, following other failed strikes in Spartanburg and Columbia, South Carolina, streetcar unions in the Carolinas dwindled and many disappeared. One SPUCo. conductor explained that participants in the 1919 strike were "advised not to say too much about it in order to prevent younger employees from 'getting ideas' about unionism."<sup>55</sup> SPUCo., on the other hand, emerged from the strikes stronger than ever. Renamed to honor founder James B. Duke in 1927, Duke Power eventually became the

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<sup>53</sup> Loy Connelly Cloniger, interviewed by Allen Tullos, 18 June 1980, Interview H-0158, Southern Oral History Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (hereafter SHC).

<sup>54</sup> For a detailed study of the 1919 Charlotte Streetcar Strike, see Jeffrey M. Leatherwood, "Between the Wheels: Quest for Streetcar Unionism in the Carolina Piedmont, 1919-1922" (Ph.D. Dissertation, West Virginia University, 2009), especially chs. 1, 6, and 8; also see Carol Shaw, "A City in Conflict: The 1919 Charlotte Streetcar Strike" (unpublished honors thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1980); and Dan Morrill, *Historic Charlotte: an Illustrated History of Charlotte-Mecklenburg* (Historical Publication Network, 2004), 78-81.

<sup>55</sup> Leatherwood, "Between the Wheels," 224.

largest electric power holding company in the nation. Charlotte's industrial leaders and civic boosters demonstrated collective amnesia toward the incident and, over time, the 1919 streetcar strike would become a forgotten chapter in the city's history.<sup>56</sup>

Organized labor in the Carolina Piedmont faced resounding defeats in the years that followed. By 1921, textile workers throughout the area had lost virtually all World War I-era gains.<sup>57</sup> The Great Depression exacerbated their plight and in 1934, Piedmont laborers joined more than 400,000 textile workers across the nation in a general strike, which was the largest single-industry strike to date. Largely self-organized, the General Strike of 1934 was marked by repeated incidents of violent repression of unionists. In the Carolina Piedmont, the escalation of violence and intimidation reached its zenith at the Chiquola Mill in Honea Path, South Carolina on September 6, 1934 when factory guards shot and killed seven factory workers and injured 20 more.<sup>58</sup> Though the strike ended roughly three weeks after it began, management's retaliation had more lasting consequences. Workers across the South were refused jobs when they returned to the mills, evicted from company-owned houses, and blacklisted from future employment. The strike had been a decided failure. "Millhands learned from their history, and in 1934 the lesson for many was deep distrust of government and trade unions alike,"

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<sup>56</sup> The SPUCo. car-barn was also demolished after an unsuccessful preservation campaign in the early 2000s, a fate emblematic of many historically significant structures in Charlotte. See Leatherwood, 213-216, on preservation effort, p. 14; for more on Southern Power and the Duke family, see Tullos, *Habits of Industry*, 134-71.

<sup>57</sup> Hall et al., *Like a Family*, 190-1; George Sinclair Mitchell, *Textile Unionism*, p. 51-2.

<sup>58</sup> For more on the General Strike of 1934, see Dowd Hall, et al., *Like A Family*, 289-357; Simon, *A Fabric of Defeat*, 109-122; John A. Salmond, *The General Textile Strike of 1934: From Maine to Alabama* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2002); Janet Irons, *Testing the New Deal: The General Textile Strike of 1934 in the American South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

explains Jacquelyn Dowd Hall. “Above all, the General Strike drove home the cost of challenging the established order. Better the familiar security of job and home than ‘air and promises,’ followed by exile, suffering and defeat.”<sup>59</sup>

If the General Strike of 1934 signaled the end of an era for organized labor in the South, then its death throes lasted for more than two decades. This trajectory, however, was not readily apparent to labor organizers operating on the ground as World War II-era wage increases and growing union rosters breathed new life into industrial unionism. Between 1932 and 1945, union membership across the United States increased from under 3 million to 14.5 million and, in 1945 unions won 82.9 percent of the nearly 5,000 National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) elections held.<sup>60</sup> By the end of the war, the CIO had an estimated 225,000 members in southern states.<sup>61</sup> Small signs of progress were also evident at the local level. During the 1930s and 1940s, Charlotte became home to the *Charlotte Labor Journal and Dixie Farm News*, an American Federation of Labor (AFL) newspaper dedicated to “presenting news and views without fear and without favor.”<sup>62</sup> For a subscription of two dollars per year, union members received a weekly newspaper supported by advertisements from local businesses and filled with articles and editorials detailing labor’s accomplishments across the state and nation.

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<sup>59</sup> Hall, et al., *Like A Family*, 354.

<sup>60</sup> Timothy J. Minchin, *Fighting Against the Odds: A History of Southern Labor since World War II* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 38.

<sup>61</sup> To put this into perspective, the Southern labor force by 1942 included roughly 14 million workers comprised of 375,000 mine workers, more than 1.25 million manufacturing workers (500,000 of these in textiles) and 700,000 transport workers. See U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census: Population*, vol.3, *Labor Force*, part I, U.S. Survey (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1943), 192. For a more detailed breakdown of the labor force, see Robert H. Zieger, *The CIO, 1935-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 228-9.

<sup>62</sup> *Charlotte Labor and Dixie Farm News*, all issues, CMPL.

However, indicative of the changing political landscape for organized labor in Charlotte in the years to come, the newspaper was out of business by Labor Day 1953.

Labor's unprecedented gains during the Second World War gave union leaders a renewed determination that they could finally breach the anti-union South. Labor's optimism best manifested itself in Operation Dixie, the Congress of Industrial Organizations' (CIO) campaign launched in 1946 to add millions of southern industrial workers to union rosters.<sup>63</sup> Operation Dixie targeted a variety of industries, but focused most of its financial resources and manpower on the textile industry, still the South's largest employer. As textile manufacturing continued migrating to Southern states, it became imperative for unions to protect the contract gains of their membership base in other parts of the nation. According to Robert Zieger, Operation Dixie differed from previous campaigns in that it "abjured the fiery rhetoric and provocative tactics of the 1930s and attempted to divert attention from racial matters."<sup>64</sup> Moreover, explains Zieger, "the privileging of textiles, the marginalization of the left, and the relegation of blacks to a subsidiary role shaped every aspect of the campaign."<sup>65</sup> The CIO's intentionally moderate approach yielded few results and the forces operating against southern workers proved insurmountable. The TWUA, for example, spent more than two years and four million dollars to gain only an additional 15,000 members. Operation

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<sup>63</sup> Zieger, *The CIO*, 227.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 235.

Dixie, like its predecessors, was unable to crack the Carolina Piedmont's enduring anti-union edifice. In short, the campaign was an expensive failure.<sup>66</sup>

In addition to the internal forces Zieger offers to explain Operation Dixie's defeat, other scholars have highlighted the significance of social and economic transformations occurring in postwar America. Timothy Minchin emphasizes how millworkers' improved standard of living in the postwar era, combined with textile management raising wages to stave off unionization, made it difficult for labor organizers to convince workers that unions could benefit them. "Management was able to harness the war-induced prosperity far more effectively than the TWUA was," asserts Minchin, "and it was this ability that accounted for its continued hegemony over the union in these years."<sup>67</sup> In an era of growing consumer affluence where textile workers drove cars and owned television sets, it became ever more challenging to convince them they should put it all on the line to join the union.

In 1947, North Carolina joined ten other Sunbelt states in passing "right-to-work" legislation that created a new series of obstacles for organized labor.<sup>68</sup> Such legislation

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<sup>66</sup> On Operation Dixie, see Barbara S. Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), 12-21; Hall, et. al., *Like A Family*; and Robert Zieger, *The CIO*, 213; and Michael Goldfield, "The Failure of Operation Dixie: A Critical Turning Point in American Political Development," in Gary Fink and Merle E. Reed, *Race, Class, and Community in Southern Labor History* (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 166-189.

<sup>67</sup> Minchin, *What Do We Need a Union For?* 202-3.

<sup>68</sup> These states included: Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Virginia. For more on the origins and extent of the right-to-work movement nationwide, see Gilbert J. Gall, *The Politics of Right to Work: The Labor Federations as Special Interests, 1943-1979* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988). Currently, 24 states have passed right-to-work laws or constitutional amendments, with Michigan being the most recent state in December 2012. See United States Department of Labor, Wage and Hour Division, State Right-to-Work Laws



emerged as the result of section 14b of the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, which allowed individual states to pass legislation banning the “union shop”—the condition whereby unions and employers were prohibited from making union membership a requirement for employment.<sup>69</sup> While such legislation generally did not imperil unions that were already strong, it made organizing new unions more difficult as workers who decided not to join unions could still take advantage of union-negotiated wages, contracts and benefits. This “free-rider” problem made it doubly challenging for labor organizers to convince workers to join unions in states already hostile towards organized labor as those same workers could reap the benefits of membership without paying the dues. Within a decade of such legislation being passed, the percentage of the workforce belonging to unions in many “right-to-work” states began to decline.

At the same time that organized labor struggled to overcome this legacy of defeat, Charlotte’s bankers, merchants, manufacturers, and real estate developers had never been better off. The Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond had recently opened a branch in Charlotte, making it the region’s financial center and the city was able to sustain substantial economic growth throughout the post-World War II era. Manufacturing, wholesaling, transportation and banking provided a diversified economic base for the city, which meant that the textile industry’s decline after the Second World War did not hurt Charlotte’s economy to the same degree that it did other textile-heavy cities.<sup>70</sup>

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and Constitutional Amendments in Effect as of January 1, 2009. <<http://www.dol.gov/whd/state/righttowork.htm> (accessed 10 September 2012)>.

<sup>69</sup> The “union shop” which requires union membership upon hire, varies slightly from the “closed shop,” which makes union membership a prerequisite for employment.

<sup>70</sup> Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, 225-6.

North Carolina's elected officials and businessmen joined Governor Luther Hodges—the self-described “businessman in the statehouse”—in scouring the nation in pursuit of new industry to recruit to the Tar Heel State.<sup>71</sup> Hodges relished the title of “industry hunter” as he restructured the state’s tax code to be more business-friendly and touted the state’s achievements with full-page advertisements in national publications like the *Wall Street Journal*.<sup>72</sup> Unsatisfied with the promotion of his achievements in print alone, Hodges recruited a team of the state’s most successful salesmen to travel with him to New York to publicize the state’s economic advantages and its people who were “anxious to work and interested in their jobs.” Hodges extended his marketing tour to Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Chicago, hoping business leaders would interpret North Carolinians’ “anxious[ness] to work” to mean that the state was not burdened with strong labor unions and their capacity to hamper productivity or profits.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> This was, in fact, the title of Hodges’ autobiography, *Businessman in the Statehouse: Six Years as Governor of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1962). For more on industrial recruitment to the South, see Cobb, *The Selling of the South*; Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt* and, most recently, Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, “Sunbelt Boosterism: Industrial Recruitment, Economic Development, and Growth Politics in the Developing Sunbelt,” in *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Place, Space and Region*, eds. Michelle Nickerson and Darren Dochuck (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 31-57.

<sup>72</sup> Hodges, *Businessman in the Statehouse*, 29.

<sup>73</sup> Hodges, *Businessman in the Statehouse*, 61. Hodges was interesting, however, because at the same time he abhorred labor unions, he also advocated raising the state’s minimum wage, which was among the lowest in the nation when he took office. Addressing the Southern Garment Manufacturers Association in Memphis in 1955, he stated, “We are very conservative in many of our Southern legislatures in matters of labor and wages. When minimum wage legislation was brought before our North Carolina General Assembly it had rough sledding. This shouldn’t be so. We must be more liberal and understanding in our thinking and actions on the subject. Just remember that it will cost you more in taxes if we fail to get the money through better income for our people.” James W. Patton, ed., *Messages, Addresses and Papers of Governor Luther Hartwell Hodges, Volume I, 1954-6* (Raleigh, 1960), 186.

## **The Herald of 1958: The Charlotte Bus Strike**

Within months of Charlotte's Chamber of Commerce president praising organized labor's contributions to state prosperity at the 1958 AFL-CIO convention, both public and private workers became engaged in a series of highly publicized and contentious labor disputes with the city. The first among these conflicts involved the city's bus drivers and mechanics who staged a nearly month-long strike in October of 1958. At issue were the workers' wages and job security, but also at stake was determining what role the city would take in mediating a labor dispute between a private company and its employees. Perhaps most importantly, this transportation strike would inform the way that Charlotte's Chamber of Commerce, city council, and mayor would react to public workers attempting to unionize a few months later.

Like many southern cities during this era, Charlotte did not have publicly funded mass transit. Instead, the city leased franchise rights to City Coach Lines, Inc., which was headquartered in Detroit but operated buses in municipalities across the nation. In Charlotte, City Coach operated 97 buses estimated to have transported more than 25,000 riders per day, a substantial portion of the city's population.<sup>74</sup> A step ahead of public employees, the city's drivers and mechanics had been unionized since 1909 and in early September 1958, representatives of the International Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen Local 1038 began renegotiating the contracts of its 140 bus drivers and 25 mechanics

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<sup>74</sup> It was estimated that buses had 52,000 ticketed rides per day, but it is reasonable to assume that the average rider made two trips per day. See Lu Stanton, "52,000 Bus Riders Had to Find New Way to Go," *Charlotte News*, 8 November 1976.

that were set to expire in October.<sup>75</sup> After nearly a month of negotiations between City Coach and the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, a compromise between the company and the union eventually hinged on the union's demand for a two-year contract and a 20-cent per hour increase from the current wage of \$1.57 for drivers and \$1.92 for mechanics. National Deputy President of the union, W.F. Lester, who had come to negotiate on behalf of local 1038, argued that these improvements would make Charlotte's wages and benefits comparable with other southern cities. City Coach's vice president, Merl C. Morrow, who had also come to Charlotte from Detroit to negotiate on behalf of the company, rejected these demands, maintaining that the company was only willing to offer was a 3-cent per hour cost of living raise. The company hoped this increase would be just enough to stave off a strike. The union, however, found such a modest increase insufficient. In the second round of negotiations, Lester stated that Local 1038 would be willing to accept a two-year contract composed of a 10-cent increase the first year and a 5-cent increase the second but City Coach again declined their offer. This time, the company countered with a one-year contract, but stuck to the 3-cent cost of living increase despite Lester and other union representatives' avowal that this was still insufficient to avoid a strike. Neglecting the fact that progress was at a standstill and a citywide transit strike was imminent, Morrow returned to Detroit, signaling that upper management had made its final offer.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> J. Floyd Henderson to Charles R. Brockman, 5 August 1960, "Trade Union Movement: Charlotte and Mecklenburg County," Charlotte Trade Unions Clippings File, CMPL.

<sup>76</sup> Don Seaver, "Unions Threatens Bus Strike on Wednesday," *Charlotte Observer*, 28 September 1958.

As the strike deadline approached, city officials made clear that they would not intervene in what they considered to be a decidedly private matter.<sup>77</sup> The dispute became more than a private affair, however, on the morning of October 1 when City Coach's buses remained in their lot behind locked gates. The strike captured the *Charlotte Observer's* front-page headline in an article highlighting the absence of picket lines, thus implying that Charlotte's workers were not inclined to public displays of labor unrest. However, given the highly visible nature of a transit strike, picket lines were almost beside the point. Local 1038 had all the publicity it needed. Streets were without buses, bus stops void of waiting passengers, and automobile traffic in this normally quiet city congested many of the city's major thoroughfares. Also affected were thousands of city school children who relied on the 40 additional buses City Coach operated during the school year, as Charlotte lacked a publicly funded school bus fleet.<sup>78</sup> Hardest hit were domestic workers, the vast majority of whom were left stranded miles from the neighborhoods where they worked. The *Charlotte News* also fomented concern that the strike would prevent thousands of city residents from attending Billy Graham's upcoming crusade, set to begin the same day as the strike, although union representatives had already released a statement that as "a Christian organization," union drivers were "willing and anxious" to transport crusade participants free of charge.<sup>79</sup>

In the first week of the strike, Charlotte's city council and the mayor stuck to their "hands off" policy. However, with the capacity to directly affect a wide swath of

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<sup>77</sup> "Bus Strike Looming As Deadline Nears," *Charlotte Observer*, 29 September 1958.

<sup>78</sup> "Stranded Charlotteans Begin Looking for Transportation," *Charlotte Observer*, 1 October 1958.

<sup>79</sup> "City Bus Strike Deadline Nears," *Charlotte News*, 30 September 1958.

the public, mass transit strikes inevitably create a sense of urgency and as the strike moved into its second week with no compromise in sight, the city's position became increasingly difficult to maintain. The situation became even more tenuous as City Coach management began publicly lashing out at striking workers. Speaking with reporters, one spokesman for the company charged that union members were content being out of work because many had taken side jobs as cab drivers and others had leased their cars to cab companies. The City Coach representative also chided the men for "allowing" their wives to work.<sup>80</sup> Union representatives were quick to respond to these attacks, however. Speaking with reporters for the *Charlotte Observer*, Lester said, "I can't blame the boys for holding other jobs and letting their wives work. It's the only way they could live on the wages they've been getting. And if some of them are acting as cab drivers, well, I'm glad to see them get a buck or two."<sup>81</sup> Despite daily meetings between union representatives, company management and city officials, negotiations remained deadlocked well into the middle of October. In an effort to use what leverage it could, City Coach began threatening service cutbacks if the union did not end the strike immediately.<sup>82</sup>

Mounting hostility between City Coach and its workers, combined with growing public frustration, eventually forced city council to address the strike. This time they took a more public stance, passing a resolution requesting that City Coach's general manager, Merle Morrow, return to Charlotte immediately to resume negotiations.

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<sup>80</sup> John Gardner, "Firm Says Bus Drivers Not Anxious to Return," *Charlotte Observer*, 9 October 1958.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> "Company Threatens Bus Service Cutback," *Charlotte Observer*, 12 October 1958.

Councilmembers, the mayor and the city attorney expressed frustration that City Coach's leadership did not believe the strike was pressing enough to warrant their full attention.<sup>83</sup> Still, Charlotte's mayor, James Smith, took an ambivalent position towards the strike. On the one hand, he created an "Emergency Advisory Committee" and appointed none other than Chamber of Commerce president, Thomas L. Robinson, to chair the new body.<sup>84</sup> On the other hand, Smith resisted clamping down on the strikers, recalling his experience of living through Charlotte's violent streetcar strike of 1919 to explain his position to the city council. Smith reminded his colleagues that the oft-forgotten streetcar strike was "a horrible experience" and one that had convinced him that the only way to handle labor-management issues, from a governing perspective, was through persuasion, not heavy-handed tactics.<sup>85</sup>

After another week of buses at a standstill, Mayor Smith and the city council held a series of emergency meetings and Morrow eventually bowed to pressure from the city and returned to Charlotte on October 23 to continue strike negotiations. Mayor Smith also threatened to call on North Carolina's governor, Luther Hodges, to intervene.<sup>86</sup> Unlike governor Bickett a generation before, Hodges's antipathy toward organized labor was well known throughout the state, signaling to the union that the city's hands-off

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<sup>83</sup> Charlotte City Council Minutes. 15 October 1958. Minute Book 38. Page 154.

<sup>84</sup> Other members included the editors of the *Charlotte News* and *Charlotte Observer*, the president of the Charlotte Merchants Association, the school superintendent, two prominent ministers, the president of Johnson C. Smith, the city's African American university, as well as all sitting members of city council. Although it remains unclear what exactly this advisory committee was tasked with, the committee's composition is reflective of who the mayor believed to be integral to civic decision-making. Charlotte City Council Minutes. 25 October 1958. Minute Book 38. Page 171.

<sup>85</sup> Charlotte City Council Minutes. 15 October 1958. Minute Book 38. Page 154.

<sup>86</sup> John York, "Mayor May Go to Hodges For Help In Settling Strike," *Charlotte Observer*, 23 October 1958.

approach might have an expiration date. In response, City Coach and union representatives held a series of meetings with negotiations hinging primarily on two issues: the second phase pay raise and whether the company would agree to rehire all drivers and mechanics employed when the strike began.<sup>87</sup> After two tense days of negotiations, City Coach and union representatives finally reached an agreement. On the morning of October 25, Local 1038 voted by a wide margin to accept a three-phase contract whereby drivers and mechanics would receive three 4-cent hourly wage increases spread out over the following twelve months. Additionally, City Coach agreed that all striking mechanics and drivers would return to work, despite Morrow's repeated insistence that the company could not afford to rehire all employees.<sup>88</sup> As the final piece of the negotiations package with City Coach employees, union members were able to retain all fringe benefits they had enjoyed previously.

Although the bus strike ended peacefully and strikers won modest gains, this episode had a lasting influence on elected officials, business leaders, and city residents. In the future, city council and the Chamber of Commerce would become more proactive in shaping labor policy in the city as a response, in part, to the frustration city residents expressed with how the strike progressed. Some argued ownership of city buses should be made public. "Isn't the bus strike ample proof that the problem of public transportation in Charlotte is no longer a business for private enterprise," wrote Charlotte resident Charles Manchester to the *Charlotte Observer*, "but rather, like water-supply; fire and police protection; health and sanitation—a department of city operation? Many

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<sup>87</sup> Loye Miller, "Parties Coming Together," *Charlotte Observer*, 23 October 1958.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*



cities have already come to this.”<sup>89</sup> Another reader pleaded with city officials to “Kill—their—franchise; the public, the citizens, should not be made to suffer for [an] argument of this nature between people of that type and unions.”<sup>90</sup> Others advocated legislation to prevent transportation workers from striking.<sup>91</sup> This final suggestion, as it turned out, would be the path the city ultimately chose.

### **Lessons Learned: Municipal Organizing Efforts**

Less than two months after the City Coach bus strike ended, Charlotte again found itself at the center of labor tensions, this time over the right of municipal employees to join unions. Still licking its wounds from the disappointments of Operation Dixie, the recently merged AFL-CIO had once again set its sights on organizing workers across the North Carolina Piedmont.<sup>92</sup> Between 1957 and 1959, labor organizers managed to bolster their ranks with broad sectors of public employees—from sanitation workers to law enforcement officers and firefighters—but municipal workers’ right to remain unionized came under attack from elected officials, business leaders, and the city’s newspapers. These contests, although seemingly minor at first, would escalate and shape both local and state labor policy for the remainder of the twentieth century.

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<sup>89</sup> Charles Manchester, *Charlotte Observer*, 23 October 1958.

<sup>90</sup> William McIntire, “Settle The Strike OR Take Franchise,” *Charlotte Observer*, 23 October 1958.

<sup>91</sup> Henry Maxwell, “He Urges Settlement of Local Strike,” *Charlotte Observer*, 17 October 1958.

<sup>92</sup> Although the national AFL-CIO merged in 1955, the state affiliate did not formally merge until 1957. According to local labor leader Floyd Henderson, the Mecklenburg County Council (CIO) and the Charlotte Labor Council (AFL) “effectively carried out the spirit of the national merger” on 30 April 1957. See J. Floyd Henderson to Charles R. Brockman, 5 August 1960, “Trade Union Movement: Charlotte and Mecklenburg County,” Charlotte Trade Unions Clippings File, CMPL.

In order to understand the conflict, it is useful to look at the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees' (AFSCME) campaign to organize city workers in the summer of 1957. AFSCME's campaign was a response to more than 200 garbage collectors who had recently staged two spontaneous work stoppages to protest the city granting raises to police and firefighters while neglecting all other employees.<sup>93</sup> Sanitation workers were among the city's lowest paid workers, with more than half being African American. Drivers of the trucks, who were invariably white, had a starting salary of \$225 per month that reached a ceiling of \$291 per month after 25 years' service while black workers received a fraction of this, with their pay starting at \$182 per month. From these low wages, workers were then responsible for paying taxes, hospitalization insurance, and (for drivers) liability insurance that covered the use of city equipment. After these deductions, average take-home pay for most city workers was \$150 or less per month.<sup>94</sup> The recent garbage strikes, albeit brief, made AFSCME organizers optimistic that the city's sanitation workers, and hopefully other public workers, might be receptive to unionizing. H. L. McCrorie, a city employee with more than twenty years of experience as a labor organizer in Charlotte, led the campaign which specifically targeted employees of the Motor Transport Department (primarily the city's garbage

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<sup>93</sup> Memo from Regional Director Carey Haigler to Bob Christofferson, 25 July 1957. AFL-CIO Region 5/8 Collection, Box 2775, Folder 11, Southern Labor Archives, Special Collections Department, Georgia State University (hereafter SLA); Donald MacDonald, "Pay Protest Slows Work," *Charlotte News*, 24 July 1957; "City's Garbagemen Continue to Work," *Charlotte News*, 25 July 1957.

<sup>94</sup> Memo from Regional Director Carey Haigler to Bob Christofferson, 25 July 1957, AFL-CIO Region 5/8 Collection, Box 2775, Folder 11, SLA.

workers within the department), the Street Maintenance Division of the City Engineering Department, the Signal Department, and the Water Department field employees.<sup>95</sup>

Throughout the summer, AFSCME held a series of informational meetings at the AFL-CIO's Labor Temple to enlist new members. It was primarily employees of the motor transport and street maintenance department who attended these meetings, as organizers had predicted.<sup>96</sup> AFSCME reported that by mid-summer, more than 140 city employees had signed union cards and consented to paycheck deductions. At one of these meetings, the president of the Charlotte firefighters' union, Jim Long, spoke to city workers about the benefits of organizing.<sup>97</sup> Long told the approximately twenty white and forty black workers in attendance about his union's success in lowering firefighters' average week's work from 84 to 60 hours a week, a substantial decrease for another group of overworked and underpaid city workers. "Had we not been organized and had some way of collectively bargaining," explained Long, "I don't think we would have had too much of a chance."<sup>98</sup> Municipal workers officially organized as AFSCME Local 984 and were chartered in August of 1957. By November, they had negotiated a grievance

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<sup>95</sup> Memo from Regional Director Carey Haigler to Bob Christofferson, 25 July 1957, AFL-CIO Region 5/8 Collection, Box 2775, Folder 11, SLA.

<sup>96</sup> Letter from AFSCME leaders C.A. Cross, H.L. McCrorie, and Bob Christofferson to Local 984 members, 16 September 1957, AFL-CIO Region 5/8 Collection, Box 2775, Folder 11, SLA.

<sup>97</sup> Letter from Bob Christofferson to AFSCME members, 16 August 1957, AFL-CIO Region 5/8 Collection, Box 2775, Folder 11, SLA.

<sup>98</sup> "Union Men Speak to City Workers," *Charlotte Observer*, 15 August 1957; Memo from Bob Christofferson to Regional Director Carey Haigler, 19 August 1957, AFL-CIO Region 5/8 Collection, Box 2775, Folder 11, SLA.

procedure, a wage increase and a three-dollar per month payroll deduction that would go towards life insurance policies for all members.<sup>99</sup>

At the same time, two interrelated AFL-CIO developments on the national level threatened AFSCME's success in Charlotte. The first issue involved the AFL-CIO's recent expulsion of the Teamsters on charges of corruption in December of 1957. The AFL-CIO maintained that the Teamsters' expulsion was an act of self-preservation, but this action had detrimental financial consequences for the many remaining unions.<sup>100</sup> With one of the largest dues-generating unions gone, the AFL-CIO had to find a way to finance organizing campaigns, especially those already fragile ones in southern states, on a budget that was now ten percent smaller.<sup>101</sup> The second issue occurred a month later, in January 1958, when the AFL-CIO's removed 100 of its 215 field organizers.<sup>102</sup> All of

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<sup>99</sup> Letter from H.L. McCrorie, AFSCME Representative, to AFSCME members, 1 November 1957, Box 2775, Folder 11, SLA.

<sup>100</sup> The AFL-CIO's expulsion of the Teamsters came as a direct result of the McClellan Committee hearings in the late 1950s. However, their expulsion was a part of a larger campaign on the part of antiunion conservatives to convince both Congress and the public that organized labor posed a "racketeering menace" and that the "racketeering menace" was connected to, and was as dangerous as, the threat of Communism. According to David Witwer, "this racketeering scare had much in common with the contemporaneous red scare. Both pictured an internal threat to the nation's security and warnings about both threats came from the same voices on the political right, who frequently pointed out the parallel nature of these conspiracies." Beyond the McClellan hearings immediate impact on the Teamsters, the hearings also hurt the labor movement's image more broadly. According to Witwer, "Polls showed growing public skepticism toward unions, and especially union leaders. Such attitudes helped conservatives win a new round of legislative restrictions on organized labor in the form of the 1959 Landrum-Griffin Act. See David Witwer, "The Racketeer Menace and Anti-Unionism in the Mid-Twentieth Century US," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 74 (Fall 2008): 124-147. Demonstrating no small degree of sarcasm, the *North Carolina Federationist* noted, "Never before in history have the US Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers shown such zeal for the protection of the workingman." "Why Not 'Protect' the Stockholders, Too?" *North Carolina Federationist*, vols. 22-23, No. 12 and 1, May-June 1959.

<sup>101</sup> Joseph A. Loftus, "Organizers Held Ousted by Labor," *New York Times*, 15 January 1958.

<sup>102</sup> According to one *Wall Street Journal* article, fourteen organizers were forced into retirement, thirty were transferred to other jobs, and fifty-six were fired outright. "AFL-CIO Organizers Win Approval to Vote On Forming a Union," *Wall Street Journal*, 16 May 1958.

these organizers were fired, transferred, or forced into early retirement. The union also dismissed five of its ten North Carolina organizers, including Bob Christofferson, who had organized Charlotte's municipal workers.<sup>103</sup> The AFL-CIO was embarking on a new, expensive public relations campaign and argued it could no longer afford to employ so many field organizers without Teamster dues.<sup>104</sup> This explanation, however, rang hollow to Christofferson and other organizers who believed that these firings were in retaliation to the recently formed union of labor organizers, the Field Representatives Federation (FRF). Christofferson, who served as the FRF's secretary treasurer, and Albert Bradt, the union's chairman, told the *New York Times*, "Despite the pattern of anti-union behavior followed by responsible officials of the AFL-CIO in their dealings with the Field Representatives Federation, we are nonetheless shocked by this sudden uprooting without cause of so large a number of faithful employees . . . Such treatment of loyal employees only serves to dramatize further the very real need for a union of field representatives."<sup>105</sup> Even the *Charlotte Observer* detected the irony: "The world's most powerful labor organization has put in years of acrimonious hair-pulling with management to get job security yet it is now seemingly unwilling to offer that same basic

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<sup>103</sup> Bob Christofferson, born and raised in West Palm Beach, Florida, was a lifelong southern union member and organizer. A journalist by trade, he took his first job with the *Palm Beach Post Times* in 1934. From 1944 until 1956, he was an organizer and publicist for the CIO in Birmingham, edited a paper for the shipbuilder's union in Mobile, and worked with the steelworkers union in Alabama. In 1956, Christofferson became a field representative for the newly merged AFL-CIO until his firing in 1958. After his discharge, he became an international representative of the Newspaper Guild, representing workers throughout the Southeast, until becoming executive secretary of the Newspaper Guild's contract committee in 1965. He held this post until his death at age in 1975, at age 50, of pneumonia. See his obituary, "Robert W. Christofferson, Official With Newspaper Guild of AFL-CIO," *The Washington Post*, 20 February 1975.

<sup>104</sup> Joseph A. Loftus, "Organizers Held Ousted by Labor," *New York Times*, 15 January 1958.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

benefits to its own employees.”<sup>106</sup> Ultimately, the NLRB ruled in favor of the field organizers, declaring that there was “no incompatibility between faithful performance of duty” and union membership. The episode undermined the AFL-CIO’s attempts to improve its image, despite the organization’s recently launched public relations campaign.<sup>107</sup> The NLRB’s decision also did nothing to reverse the AFL-CIO’s decision to cut its field staff in half, diminishing an already fragile organizing force in the state of North Carolina.

Notwithstanding these setbacks, the remaining organizers in Charlotte pressed ahead in attempting to unionize other sectors of Charlotte’s municipal workers. This time they set their sights on the city’s police force. While organizing Charlotte’s sanitation workers did not elicit substantial opposition from city leaders, the creation of a police union was a different matter altogether. One of the most vocal adversaries was the police chief himself, Frank Littlejohn, who had successfully barred labor organizers from the halls of Charlotte’s police stations for the entirety of his career.<sup>108</sup> The International Association of Police Chiefs (IAPC) agreed, highlighting tensions between the rank-and-file and those in leadership positions. Fortunately for AFSCME, however, its attempt to unionize the city’s police officers coincided with Chief Littlejohn’s retirement in 1958.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Loye Miller, “AFL-CIO’s Ironic Ouster of Organizers Stuns U.S.,” *Charlotte Observer*, 17 Jan 1958; “AFL-CIO Fires Organizers for Forming Union,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 January 1958; “Organizers Fight Union Firings,” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, 18 January 1958.

<sup>107</sup> “AFL-CIO Organizers Win Approval to Vote On Forming a Union,” *Wall Street Journal*, 16 May 1958.

<sup>108</sup> John Kilgo, “Group of City Policemen Join Union, Will Get Charter,” *Charlotte Observer*, 2 September 1958.

<sup>109</sup> There was also apparent tension, or at least indifference, between the rank-and-file police officers and certain sectors of city workers. One AFSCME internal memo indicates that police officers showed interest in joining a union with City Hall employees but not with sanitation or street

Littlejohn's successor, E.C. Selvey, took a more neutral stance and within a year of his arrival, many of the city's police officers joined the recently chartered AFSCME Local 1492. However, the union had limitations from the outset as its charter prohibited striking, collective bargaining, and the use of a national union to bargain on behalf of its members. While the strike ban was common for police and firefighter unions, the elimination of bargaining reduced the union to little more than a fraternal organization offering life insurance and a few other modest benefits to its membership.<sup>110</sup>

Nonetheless, despite its relative weakness, Charlotte's police union faced opposition from all sides. In December of 1958, the Chamber of Commerce's Board of Directors passed a resolution calling on city council to forbid police officers and all other municipal employees from unionizing. According to the resolution:

We believe it to be fundamentally important in any community that governmental employees shall be neutral and impartial. Certainly this is an absolute essential as to those who enforce the law. Controversies in the field of labor relations have a widening impact not only upon the employers and employees and labor unions directly involved, but also upon the general public. Such controversies sometimes result in strikes and picketing, which in turn may be accompanied by high tension, violations of law, and breaches of peace and violence...

The unionization of our police department has disturbed the community and is a threat to its continued good order and effective law enforcement...

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department employees. While the reasoning behind this sentiment is unclear, it was likely due to the fact that employees of the sanitation and streets departments were among the lowest paid municipal workers and included many African Americans. See "Memo from Organizing Director Morgan to Shorty Rowe," 13 September 1958, AFSCME Records, AFSCME Records, Office of the Secretary, Box 123 Folder 4, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University (hereafter WPRL).

<sup>110</sup> John Kilgo, "Group of City Policemen Join Union, Will Get Charter," *Charlotte Observer*, 2 September 1958.

It is further resolved that the Charlotte City Council and the Mecklenburg County Commissioners be respectfully requested to make it known officially to all employees of the City and County that their becoming aligned with a labor union is not in the public interest.<sup>111</sup>

The Chamber of Commerce worried that a police union would jeopardize one of its most vital instruments of labor control. They argued that union membership created a conflict of interest for the city's law enforcement officers since a unionized police force might sympathize with the strikers they would be ordered to disperse, intimidate, or arrest. *Observer* columnist Joe Doster best articulated this hypothetical scenario when he rhetorically asked, "Would a policeman walk a beat to maintain peaceful picketing during duty hours and then join the strikers to walk the picket line at night?"<sup>112</sup> These concerns were disingenuous, however, given that the police union had a no-strike clause written into its charter. Moreover, the police union drafted a letter to the *Observer*, which unequivocally reiterated the union's policy of requiring members to follow orders "fairly and impartially."<sup>113</sup>

The Chamber's resolution received broad support, though a few members voiced concerns about the resolution's expansive language. "It would be more effective to confine this to the police," asserted A. Stokes King, a local Southern Bell telephone executive. "When you scatter shots you're going to meet with more resistance."<sup>114</sup> Despite King's protestations, however, the Chamber moved forward with the terms of the resolution. The Chamber's Board of Directors then sent its resolution to Charlotte's

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<sup>111</sup> "A Resolution of the Board of Directors of the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce," 30 December 1958, AFSCME Records, Office of the Secretary, Box 123, Folder 4, WPRL.

<sup>112</sup> Joe Doster, "2 Officials Would Ban Cop Union," *Charlotte Observer*, December 1958.

<sup>113</sup> Letter from Police Union to *Charlotte Observer*, [unpublished]" 23 September 1958, Folder 9, Box 2775, SLA.

<sup>114</sup> Rolfe Neill, "Council Urged to Ban Union," *Charlotte Observer*, December 1958.



city manager, Henry Yancey, and county commission chairman Sid McAden, who agreed they would present the resolution to their respective boards. “Labor unions are all right in their place,” asserted McAden, “but they have no place in any police force.”<sup>115</sup>

In addition to opposition from the chamber, unions and their organizers also had to contend with interference from anti-labor organizations posing as legitimate labor unions. The most pernicious of these in Charlotte was the United Southern Employees Association (USEA).<sup>116</sup> Based in Rock Hill, South Carolina and with small chapters throughout the Piedmont, USEA leaders attempted to attract white workers to this self-described “Southern Man’s Union” with the promise that it would remain a segregated organization.<sup>117</sup> Also hoping to stir up anti-communism, one pamphlet distributed to city workers claimed, “All the [AFL-CIO] wants is to collect dues from you so they can use the money to stir up race trouble between the races which is in harmony with the Communist plan.”<sup>118</sup> The USEA, however, ultimately gained little traction among Charlotte’s municipal workers as they discovered that the USEA offered little in the way of actual, work-related benefits, despite its claims. This held true outside of Charlotte, as well. According to economist Ray Marshall, “The USEA apparently generated more publicity than collective bargaining contracts. It was temporarily active in many places but it never succeeded in winning bargaining rights or apparently in establishing

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<sup>115</sup> Joe Doster, “2 Officials Would Ban Cop Union,” *Charlotte Observer*, December 1958.

<sup>116</sup> For more on the USEA, see Ray Marshall, *The Negro and Organized Labor* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1965), 192-6.

<sup>117</sup> Loye Miller, “One Charges Other Deceives Employes,” *Charlotte Observer*, 10 August 1957; Don Crerdorfer, “Union Asks City for Vote by Employees,” *Charlotte Observer*, 16 August 1957.

<sup>118</sup> “Attention City Employees of Charlotte” Pamphlet distributed by the United Sothern Employees Association, Inc., undated, AFL-CIO Region 5/8 Collection, Box 2775, Folder 11, SLA.

permanent labor unions.”<sup>119</sup> One AFL-CIO organizer at the time charged, “This organization, we find, had no workers, no contracts, and the two locals are in name only and just on paper.”<sup>120</sup> The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) agreed. In 1960, the NLRB ordered, and the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld, “the disestablishment of the USEA as a labor organization and require[d] it to cease and desist from engaging in employer-dominated activities, maintaining agreements with employers, and restraining employees.”<sup>121</sup>

The city’s newspapers, too, railed against the police union. Like many southern newspapers during this era, the *Charlotte Observer* and *Charlotte News* were only too happy to ridicule unions and their perceived influence on the city.<sup>122</sup> The *Charlotte Observer* was hardly an impartial party, as it had recently been dealing with an attempt

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<sup>119</sup> Marshall, *The Negro and Organized Labor*, 194.

<sup>120</sup> Quote from organizer Bob Christofferson, “Union Men Speak to City Workers,” *Charlotte Observer*, 15 August 1957.

<sup>121</sup> A few years later, the USEA’s successor, the National Federation of Labor, Inc. (NFL), was charged with similar infractions. In 1967, the same appeals court upheld an NLRB ruling that the NFL had engaged in unfair labor practices. See *NLRB v. National Federation of Labor, Inc.*, 387 F.2d 352, n. 24466 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir. 6 December 1967). In a strange twist, these NLRB hearings revealed that the USEA’s leader, William Somersett, had been serving as an FBI informant. He got his start as a “criminal and racial informant,” then also began reporting on labor unions and the Ku Klux Klan (where he was an officer) in the mid-1950s. In 1960, however, the FBI recommended that he be discontinued as an informant because of the unreliability of his information. Despite being terminated, Somersett continued offering unsolicited information to the FBI until his death in 1970 and achieved notoriety for passing along information about an impending assassination attempt on President Kennedy just days before his actual assassination. He also reported that he had overheard longshoremen and sanitation workers in Memphis discussing a plot against Martin Luther King, Jr. for “meddling” in the 1968 Sanitation strike. Somersett allegedly informed a Miami police officer of the plan just a day before King’s assassination on April 3, 1968. See *The Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations of the U.S. House of Representatives* (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1979), 365-8.

<sup>122</sup> For more on the role of the Southern press in taking anti-labor positions throughout the twentieth century, see Cobb, *The Selling of the South*, 106-7; George Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: The Louisiana State University Press, 1967) 523-5; and Joseph B. Atkins, *Covering for the Bosses: Labor and the Southern Press* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2008).

by the Teamsters to organize the paper's drivers and truck-loaders.<sup>123</sup> In editorials and news items, staff writers criticized organized labor with charges of corruption, bloated budgets, and being a general danger to American economic prosperity. Some columnists asserted that unions held disproportionate power in labor negotiations, creating an uneven playing field on which business could not fairly compete. In effect, the newspaper portrayed industry as the underdog. One editorial demanded, "If unions can help each other win strikes, why can't employers do the same?"<sup>124</sup> The editors argued that businesses should organize themselves and work collectively to protect against labor's "excesses." In the same way that members of one union do not cross a picket line of another, went the argument, business leaders should show solidarity toward one another, working collectively against organized labor and if one company's workers threatened to strike, then other companies within the same industry should threaten a preemptive shutdown in retaliation.<sup>125</sup> The *Observer* also missed no opportunity to equate alleged Teamster corruption with union operations in general and in late 1958, ran a four part series "investigating" the union drives with a byline describing the series as "an attempt to determine whether Jimmy Hoffa's Teamsters Union is trying to take over at City Hall."<sup>126</sup> With such pressure from the city's newspapers, as well as the Chamber

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<sup>123</sup> "Paper Accuses Hoffa," *New York Times*, 9 August 1958.

<sup>124</sup> "Business Adopts a Union Tactic" *Charlotte Observer*, 24 November 1958.

<sup>125</sup> One could reasonably argue, as labor leaders frequently did, that NAM and the Chamber of Commerce effectively constituted "organized business."

<sup>126</sup> See Joe Doster "City Officials Not Blocking Hoffa Drive," *Charlotte Observer*, 26 December 1958; Joe Doster, "Fear of Ballot Box Repercussions Keeps Councilmen Mum on Issue," *Charlotte Observer*, [undated], "Charlotte City Employees-Local Union" Clippings File, CMPL; Joe Doster, "Police Union Was Disliked By Littlejohn," *Charlotte Observer*, [undated], "Charlotte City Employees-Local Union" Clippings File, CMPL.

of Commerce and municipal officials, it became increasingly difficult for the Charlotte city council to ignore the issue of a unionized police force.

### **A Disproportionate Response: The City and State Ban Public Union Collective Bargaining**

On New Year's Eve of 1958, Charlotte city councilman Steve Dellinger presented his colleagues with a resolution banning all municipal employees from joining unions. Dellinger referenced recent allegations against the Teamsters to drum up fear of union corruption and warned fellow council members that "whether you like it or not, the thing that is now going on in New York is not going to stop there. It is coming to Charlotte."<sup>127</sup> Some of Dellinger's colleagues, however, were unwilling to support this broadly anti-labor resolution. Councilmembers Martha Evans, Claude Albea, and H.H. Baxter indicated that they would not support this resolution should it come to a vote. Evans, Charlotte's first female city councilwoman and a candidate who had carried all of the city's African American precincts and many white working class ones, called the resolution "horribly...dictatorial." She added, "I think city employees should have the right to decide for themselves if they want to join a union."<sup>128</sup> Also during this meeting, Floyd Henderson, President of the Charlotte Labor Council, led local labor leaders in speaking before the city council in opposition to Dellinger's broadly conceived resolution. All of the labor leaders in attendance were AFL-CIO members who encouraged council members to target resolutions at the Teamsters, who the AFL-CIO

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<sup>127</sup> Rolfe Neill, "Most of City Council Will Not Support Dellinger Resolution," *Charlotte Observer*, 2 January 1959.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

had recently expelled, rather than penalizing all city workers affiliated with any union. “If you want to fight [the Teamsters],” asserted Henderson, “I’ll help you fight them.”<sup>129</sup> The leaders of the police and fire unions also stepped forward to publicly endorse these anti-Teamster sentiments. After much deliberation, the council passed a narrower resolution that “opposed any organization of any employees by the Teamsters.” Having no enforcement mechanism, the resolution served the symbolic function of demonstrating the council’s opposition to Jimmy Hoffa and the Teamsters.<sup>130</sup>

Many in the business community, however, voiced their dissatisfaction with this compromise. The *Charlotte Observer* and Chamber of Commerce pressured city council to take stronger measures against organized labor. The board of directors of the Charlotte Merchants Association also adopted a resolution opposing the police union and called for a state law prohibiting police officers from unionizing.<sup>131</sup> Three days after the council passed its first resolution, the *Observer* declared, “a policeman’s uniform and a union card don’t mix...Attorney General Malcolm Seawell has said clearly that North Carolina cities have authority to forbid union membership. This is an issue the Council can’t dodge.”<sup>132</sup>

The city’s firefighters also found themselves ensnared in the anti-union crusade. Members of the business community and some city officials argued that striking firefighters, like police officers, were a part of unique category of municipal employees

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<sup>129</sup> Joe Doster, “Council Votes Opposition to Hoffa’s City Union Plan,” *Charlotte Observer* [undated 1959], “Charlotte City Employees-Local Union” Clippings File, CMPL.

<sup>130</sup> See Jason Burton and David A. Zonderman, “Where Did This Law Come From?: A History of General Statute 95-98” (Raleigh, North Carolina: North Carolina State University, undated).

<sup>131</sup> “Merchants Oppose Union of Police,” *Charlotte News*, 5 January 1959.

<sup>132</sup> Burton and Zonderman, “Where Did This Law Come From?”

who would present a danger to the public good. As with their law enforcement counterparts, however, this was a moot point since the firefighters union, the International Association of Firefighters Local 660, included a no-strike clause when it was chartered in 1940. The union also provided firefighters with a \$5000 insurance policy which, given the risks inherent to their line of work, was no minor concern.<sup>133</sup>

Labor leaders in Charlotte were outraged by the Chamber's actions. The president of AFSCME Local 984, C.A. Cross, told the press, "The real issue is whether the Chamber of Commerce and the Merchants Association are going to be allowed to dictate policy to our elected officials."<sup>134</sup> The hypothetical answer seemed to be a resounding yes. Cross went on to say, "it is too idealistic to depend solely on a hoped for beneficial attitude of public administrators since they are subject to political pressures of such groups as the Chamber of Commerce and the Merchants Association."<sup>135</sup> More than 40 North Carolina labor leaders submitted a letter to the City Council and County Commissioners asserting that fears of Charlotte's firefighters going on strike were disingenuous. Instead, they maintained, it demonstrated the business community's resistance to "labor organizations in any form," demonstrated by the assertion that the city's firefighters had been working "without any conflict of interest or duty" since their

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<sup>133</sup> Burton and Zonderman, "Where Did This Law Come From?"

<sup>134</sup> Press release from C.A. Cross, President of AFSCME Local 984 to the *Charlotte News*, 7 January 1959, AFSCME Office of the Secretary-Treasurer: Gordon Chapman Records, Box 122, Folder 11, WPRL.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid. This quote ran in article by Anne Sawyer, "Labor Representatives Hold 'Unity' Meeting," *Charlotte News*, 7 January 1959. In the same press release, Cross also stated, "It was no surprise to us when the Chamber of Commerce idiotically attempted to destroy our inherent and constitutional right to organize. It was no surprise to us when the merchants association and the Chamber of Commerce sent an identic note to our governing officials. Theirs were ignoble acts..." The *Charlotte News*, however, omitted this portion.

union formed more than 18 years ago.<sup>136</sup> Some union leaders drew comparisons with other fraternal or professional associations, arguing that the city would never win widespread support for barring citizens from joining the Freemasons, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, or the Chamber of Commerce and the police union once again issued a public statement to the *Charlotte Observer* and *Charlotte News* reminding readers that its charter included a no-strike clause.<sup>137</sup> Still other labor leaders charged that this move was all part of the Chamber's long-range plan to rid the city of all organized labor and make city workers "second-class citizens."<sup>138</sup>

On January 5, 1959, the Charlotte Labor Council drafted a letter to the mayor, city manager, city attorney, county commissioner, and all members of city council expressing scorn for private interference in the matter—specifically, the role of the city's newspapers, Chamber of Commerce, and local businesses and business interest groups, whose efforts the letter described as "arbitrary, capricious, and dictatorial." The Labor Council accused these entities, especially the Chamber and local businesses, of encouraging their members to "impress the governing bodies by mail and other communication" in an effort to make their numbers seem larger than they were. These groups, argued the Labor Council, "being opposed to labor organizations in any form, which they will of course deny, are attempting to use this concerted effort as a means to

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<sup>136</sup> Internal memo from North Carolina labor leaders to the national AFSCME Office, 28 December 1958, AFSCME Office of the Secretary-Treasurer: Gordon Chapman Records, Box 122, Folder 11, WPRL.

<sup>137</sup> Statement Released to the *Charlotte Observer* and *Charlotte News* by the Charlotte Law Enforcement Officers Local 1492," 3 January 1959, AFSCME Records, Office of the Secretary, Box 123 Folder 4, WPRL.

<sup>138</sup> "Board to Discuss Unions Resolution," *Charlotte Observer*, 5 January 1959; Joe Doster, "City Union Vows Fight for Lives," *Charlotte Observer*, 4 January 1959; "Resolution on Unions Opposed," *Charlotte Observer*, 6 January 1959.

create an unfounded fear and apprehension” of unions in Charlotte. Moreover, the letter asserted that business interest groups were trying to use “guilt by association” tactics—claims that all unions were inherently corrupt because some labor groups had been found guilty of mishandling of funds—when the same could be said of businesses. “One could . . . say that because some few business firms have been guilty of . . . wrongful corrupt influence in Government, specific facts of which are common knowledge and can be enumerated, that consequently all business firms and management are guilty of such.”<sup>139</sup>

Pressure continued to mount and the council convened again on January 9, this time passing a resolution prohibiting employees of the police and fire departments from forming a union. Councilmen Steve Dellinger, Herbert Baxter, Ernest Foard, and Everett Wilkinson voted in favor of the resolution. Claude Albea, a member of the Charlotte Labor Council and the city’s only elected representative of organized labor, voted against the measure and councilmembers Herman Brown and Martha Evans were absent for the vote.<sup>140</sup> The resolution required the unions to disband by the first of February.<sup>141</sup> North Carolina’s Attorney General Malcolm Seawell affirmed the legality of city council’s resolution, stating, “Neither the City nor any of its departments of government have any right to enter into any collective bargaining agreement dealings with wages, hours, and working conditions of any public employees of Charlotte.” Joining Seawell, the Chamber of Commerce and Merchants Association of course praised city council’s decision. Sutherland Brown, president of the Merchants Association, said his

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<sup>139</sup> Letter from the Charlotte Labor Council to Charlotte Officials,” 5 January 1959, Box 2775, Folder 9, AFL-CIO Region 5/8 Records, SLA.

<sup>140</sup> Charlotte City Council Minutes, 7 January 1959, Minute Book 38, Page 264.

<sup>141</sup> Burton and Zonderman, “Where Did This Law Come From? 5-6.



organization was “delighted at this action” and Chamber of Commerce president Buell Duncan called the resolution “a wise move.” Duncan added that Charlotte’s law enforcement officers were “now free to look after the welfare of the community without any embarrassment whatsoever.”<sup>142</sup> What this “embarrassment” might have been remains unclear, but the stance of Charlotte’s business leaders was certain: they would not tolerate a unionized police department.

As these events unfolded, Attorney General Seawell worried unions might attempt to use the language of the state’s labor law to defend the rights of labor unions (i.e. while workers have the right not to join a union, they also have the right *to* join a union), despite the fact that both unions and their opponents agreed that right-to-work legislation’s main purpose was to undermine unions. In other words, Seawell was concerned that the language of the law could be used to undermine the intent of the law and thus, he tried to circumvent this problem by claiming that public workers were precluded from the state’s right-to-work law.<sup>143</sup> One Mecklenburg County legislator, Representative Frank Snepp, Jr., attempted to clarify the issue through state legislation and, together with fellow Mecklenburg County representative Earnest Hicks, introduced House Bill 118 on February 19, 1959 before the North Carolina House of

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<sup>142</sup> “Union Ban by Council Is Praised,” *Charlotte Observer*, January 1959.

<sup>143</sup> AFSCME retained Greensboro labor attorney, Robert S. Cahoon, to challenge the city council’s resolution in Mecklenburg County Superior Court on behalf of two local police officers. Cahoon filed a lawsuit on January 29, but it ultimately proved unsuccessful after both officers failed to appear in court, likely out of fear of retribution. Burton and Zonderman, “Where Did This Law Come From? 5.

Representatives. The bill would outlaw public worker unions and prohibit all public employees from collective bargaining with city, county or state government entities.<sup>144</sup>

In response, AFSCME retained Greensboro labor attorney Robert Cahoon to advocate on their behalf. He sent a letter to all members of the state legislature arguing that the bill violated both police officers' First Amendment right to free assembly as well as the state's right-to-work laws. Members of the police union also petitioned the state's legislature, asking that they not "make criminals of us or any public employee."<sup>145</sup>

HB118 passed its first reading in the House and moved on to the Committee on Manufacturers and Labor. The chairman of the committee, Representative Edward Wilson of Caswell County, made an important alteration to the bill: he limited the public employee ban to just the state's police officers and firefighters. Some legislators worried that the modification would create tension—firefighters were not the same as police and should not be unfairly penalized—while others thought the change would make the bill more likely to pass since it did not outlaw all public unions. When HB118 reached the Senate, the bill drew opposition from a minority camp of legislators. It was public employees' petitions that convinced some lawmakers to vote against the bill.

Representative Ed Kemp of High Point explained that the deluge of letters from Greensboro's firefighters along with the absence of letters from constituents supporting

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<sup>144</sup> State representatives from other counties who joined Snapp and Hicks included: James Bowman (Brunswick County), Marcellus Buchanan (Jackson County), Hugh Johnson (Duplin County), Herbert Hardy (Greene County), C. Blake Thomas (Johnston County), and Ashley Murphy (Pender County). Burton and Zonderman, "Where Did This Law Come From?"

<sup>145</sup> Letter from Police Officers to the North Carolina House and Senate, 22 March 1959, AFSCME Records, Office of the Secretary, Box 123 Folder 4, WPRL.

the bill persuaded him to vote in opposition.<sup>146</sup> One senator from eastern North Carolina, James Simpkins, argued that the legislation was just another example of the state's textile magnates exerting undue influence on labor legislation. "I've got a belly full of Charles Cannon telling the General Assembly what to do!" howled Simpkins to his colleagues.<sup>147</sup>

Even if Simpkins might have exaggerated his claims, it is useful to consider the larger political context in which North Carolina's General Assembly was debating this legislation. Just over forty miles north of the state capital, textile workers at the Henderson and Harriet Cotton Mills had been striking for almost eight months, since November 1958. The Textile Workers Union of America (TWUA) Locals 578 and 584 declared a strike on behalf of their more than one thousand members after John D. Cooper, Jr., president and owner of the mills, eliminated an arbitration clause from the union's pending contract.<sup>148</sup> Over the course of the strike, a delivery truck driver was beaten, two union members were shot, several bombs exploded in the mill village, and TWUA leader Boyd Payton was violently attacked outside his motel room. Despite his initial hesitation to intervene, Governor Hodges responded to the escalation by sending 130 highway patrolmen and then the National Guard into Henderson, which the union interpreted as the former textile executive siding with management. By April, it looked like both sides had reached an agreement allowing the majority of strikers to return to

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<sup>146</sup> Letter from Ed Kemp to A.C. Stewart, 10 March 1959, AFSCME Records, Office of the Secretary, Box 123 Folder 4, WPRL.

<sup>147</sup> "North Carolina Outlaws Union Membership for Firemen, Enforcement Officers," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, 4 June 1959.

<sup>148</sup> The TWUA representative responsible for contract negotiations (along with Boyd Payton), Julius Fry, stated, "Only 25 of the 300 grievances filed at the two mills in the last five years have gone to arbitration. The company won only two of those 25 cases." Julius Duscha, "Bitter Carolina Strike Could Have Far Echoes," *Washington Post and Times Herald*, 28 June 1959.

work at the mill. Almost as soon as they have started, however, talks collapsed when millworkers realized that management had only held 30 jobs for them and that the remainder would be given to strikebreakers.<sup>149</sup>

Unresolved and continuing to garner national attention, the Henderson strike was likely on the minds of many North Carolina legislators as they debated HB118.<sup>150</sup> The issue also weighed heavily on Governor Hodges who later described the episode as “the most tragic single matter” he faced during his administration and “a blot on North Carolina.”<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> In July, following the passage of HB118, Payton was one of eight TWUA members charged with conspiracy to dynamite a boiler room at the Henderson Cotton Mill. All eight men were found guilty, with Payton and the other organizers receiving six to ten year sentences and the strikers receiving slightly less time. The prosecution and defense agreed that Payton was not present when the attack was planned, but the prosecution nonetheless convinced the jury that he still had knowledge of the attack. After failed appeals and Hodges’ refusal to pardon any of the men, several important state figures came to Payton’s defense because of dubious evidence used to convict him, including journalist Harry Golden, *Raleigh News and Observer* editor Jonathan Worth Daniels, Raleigh minister William Finlator, Sr., and evangelist Billy Graham. These advocates began petitioning Terry Sanford, North Carolina’s newly elected governor, in 1961. Sanford was receptive to the cause, reducing the defendants’ sentences and ultimately pardoning Payton on the final day of his term as governor, January 31, 1964. This victory was bittersweet at best; the events in Henderson led to the collapse of the two TWUA locals and fewer than 75 of the strikers returned to their original jobs. The strike had been an undeniable failure. One study of the strike even argues that it was, “in all probability, doomed before it began,” as Cooper could run the mill at full capacity using strikebreakers, thus making the strikers readily dispensable. Lisa S. Fisher, “Union Solidarity in a Southern State: The Henderson, North Carolina Strike, 1958-1961” (M.A. Thesis: University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 1990), 7. Also on the Henderson strike, see Daniel Clark, *Like Night and Day: Unionization in a Southern Mill Town* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Boyd Payton’s autobiography, *Scapegoat: Prejudice, Politics, Prison* (Philadelphia: Whitmore Publishing Co., 1970); and Julius Duscha, “Bitter Carolina Strike Could Have Far Echoes,” *Washington Post and Times Herald*, 28 June 1959.

<sup>150</sup> Burton and Zonderman, “Where Did This Law Come From?” 15.

<sup>151</sup> At the Southern Governors’ Conference in October 1959, each governor was asked to discuss the most difficult situation or event during his tenure and Hodges chose the Henderson strike. Luther Hodges, “Remarks on ‘One of My Most Difficult Problems as Governor’ at the Southern Governors’ Conference in Asheville, October 12, 1959” in *Messages, Addresses and Papers of Governor Luther Hartwell Hodges, Volume III, 1959-60*, 280-282; Hodges also devoted an entire chapter of his autobiography, entitled “Labor Management, Law and Order,” to the Henderson strike. Hodges, *Businessman in the Statehouse*, 224-50. Allegedly, the entire incident marred Hodges’s future

Despite some objections, the North Carolina Senate passed HB118 on June 3, 1959 (now known as General Statute 95-98) with a final vote of 75-31. Governor Hodges signed it into law the following day. At the time that the law was passed, firefighters and other public workers believed the law was likely unconstitutional. According to firefighter Bob Middleton, who joined the department not long after GS 95-98 went into effect, “We all knew that [the law] couldn't stand. The Supreme Court had already upheld the right for people to belong to the Communist Party, so how in the hell could they keep us from belonging to a union?”<sup>152</sup> Nevertheless, it would take firefighters in Charlotte nearly a decade to muster the considerable resources necessary to challenge the city and state ban in federal court.

The section of the bill pertaining to the right of police officers and firefighters to join unions would be ruled unconstitutional in the years that followed, but the prohibition against public sector collective bargaining remains and has continued to shape labor relations throughout the state of North Carolina for more than half a century.<sup>153</sup> It reads as follows:

Any agreement, or contract, between the governing authority of any city, town, county, or other municipality, or between any agency...of the State of North Carolina, and any labor union...as bargaining agent for any public employees...is hereby declared to be against the public policy of the State, illegal, unlawful, void and of no effect...Any violation of the provisions of this article is hereby declared to be a misdemeanor....

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political aspirations, costing him the opportunity to become John Kennedy's running mate in 1960 and almost preventing the Senate from confirming him as Kennedy's Secretary of Commerce.

<sup>152</sup> Bob Middleton, interview with author, 27 June 2014. Middleton is probably referring to the decision in *Yates v. United States*, 354 U.S. 298 (1957).

<sup>153</sup> *Atkins v. City of Charlotte* (1969) is discussed in detail in chapter 3.

By February 1960, all of Charlotte's municipal unions had disbanded.<sup>154</sup>

## **Conclusion**

What a difference a year makes. Just over a year after the North Carolina AFL-CIO assembled in downtown Charlotte to discuss strategies for bolstering the state's unions, another group congregated downtown to discuss the role of organized labor in the city. But unlike the union leaders a year before, these were area businessmen who had come downtown to hear a lecture by New York attorney and labor-relations consultant Benjamin Werne. Emboldened by their recent legislative victory with HB118, Charlotte's business community was now moving to the offensive and recruiting national anti-labor experts to advise them on methods of combating unions and their organizers. Despite southerners' oft heard pronouncements against northern meddling in the southern workplace, Charlotte's business community welcomed such influence if it helped them thwart labor unions.

Benjamin Werne did not disappoint. A rapt audience listened for more than two hours as he recounted experiences working in one of the most heavily unionized cities (and states) in the nation. Painting a somber picture of a business's future once its workers unionized, Werne offered a variety of maneuvers for avoiding, obstructing, and defeating organized labor. He warned against the dangers of shortsightedness, rhetorically asking his audience, "Do [you] want to be crippled for a short period of time, or crippled for the rest of [your] life [by a union]?" To this end, employers should devise

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<sup>154</sup> Letter from Local 984 President Cross and Secretary Gardner to Arnold Zander, 20 January 1960, AFSCME Office of the Secretary-Treasurer: Gordon Chapman Records, Box 122, Folder 11, WPRL.

delay tactics, such as demanding an NLRB hearing (which often took months or years to settle) if they got word that workers were attempting to organize, thus slowing a union's momentum and, hopefully, making workers distrust labor organizers and their promises.<sup>155</sup> Werne's recruitment to Charlotte was consistent with larger national trends. The late 1950s witnessed a boom in the anti-labor consulting business, one that would continue to grow in the decades that followed. This occurred within a larger context of business lobbying groups, such as the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and the National Chamber of Commerce, and businesses themselves working to influence national social and economic policies as well as popular ideas about business, labor and the state.<sup>156</sup>

In spreading the gospel of free enterprise to every segment of society, business lobbying groups also took their message into schools, hoping to influence primary school students and their teachers as well as university undergraduates and professors.<sup>157</sup> In Charlotte, the Chamber of Commerce proposed surveying local high school students regarding their opinions about corporate profits and right-to-work legislation. Among the survey's questions were: "Should a man be required to join a union to hold a job"—to which North Carolina, of course, had already answered a resounding "no." If the Chamber considered students' answers to "indicate a weakness," it would then develop

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<sup>155</sup> "Anti-Union Procedure Outlined," *Charlotte Observer*, 13 June 1959.

<sup>156</sup> See, for example, Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2009); Phillips-Fein and Zelizer, *What's Good for Business*; and Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism*.

<sup>157</sup> Fones-Wolf offers an excellent discussion of the variety of ways business interest groups worked to inculcate students and educators on the virtues of the free enterprise system. See Elizabeth Fones-Wolf, *Free Enterprise: The Business Assault on Labor and Liberalism, 1945-60* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); ch. 7.

courses to remedy the situation, which would be followed with another round of surveys to determine “how well the point of view was accepted.”<sup>158</sup>

Business leaders during this period also increasingly called on one another to run for political office in order to shape public policy in their favor.<sup>159</sup> At the time, some business interest groups worried businessmen were not sufficiently interested in political office, be it local or national. In an effort to stimulate increased interest in politics among Charlotte businessmen, the Chamber of Commerce hired a Davidson College political science professor to teach a 9-week “Course in Practical Politics.” In February 1960, actor-turned-General Electric spokesman Ronald Reagan reinforced this message to the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce. In a talk entitled “Business, Ballots, and Bureaus,” Reagan emphasized, “the modern importance of business in politics and government.”<sup>160</sup> Reagan’s audience, however, hardly needed instructions on becoming more involved in policymaking. The Chamber of Commerce’s swift and successful crusade to outlaw municipal unions exemplifies the effectiveness with which business leaders had convinced elected officials that what was good for business was good for Charlotte.

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<sup>158</sup> “City C of C To Poll High School Students,” *Charlotte Observer*, 21 April 1959.

<sup>159</sup> Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*, 107.

<sup>160</sup> Emery Wister, “Ronald Reagan Coming to Town,” *Charlotte Observer*, 15 February 1960.



## CHAPTER TWO

### **“Just Enough to Keep the Match from Being Struck”: The Shaping of the Civil Rights Landscape in Charlotte**

At the 1964 convention of the North Carolina AFL-CIO, delegates passed a resolution endorsing the Civil Rights Act that President Johnson had signed into law just two months earlier. John W. Jennings, an African American vice president of the North Carolina AFL-CIO and chairman of its Human Relations Committee, drafted language recognizing the AFL-CIO’s role “at the forefront of the struggle to end discrimination.”<sup>161</sup> He called on the state’s Central Labor Councils and union locals to “join with other organizations in the field of Civil Rights who are friendly to Labor ... to bring an end to discrimination in all its forms because of race, creed, color, or national origin.”<sup>162</sup> During the discussion of the resolution, the white president of the Charlotte Central Labor Council, Floyd Henderson, rose to offer his positive experiences working with civil rights activists on political issues. He described a call he had made to Reginald Hawkins, a Charlotte dentist and civil rights activist, in the lead-up to a city council election. According to Henderson, Hawkins immediately expressed his eagerness to collaborate with organized labor, and from there the two men “started talking about politics and the shape we’re both in” and how “all of our problems are economic...they stem from the same thing.”<sup>163</sup> During the conversation, they drew connections between

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<sup>161</sup> *Proceedings of the 1964 North Carolina AFL-CIO Annual Convention*, August 31-September 2 (Durham, North Carolina: Allied Printing, 1964), 122.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

the civil rights movement of the 1960s and the labor movement of the 1930s—discussing how both shared some of the same protest strategies—and determined that moving forward, their respective organizations, the Charlotte Central Labor Council and the Mecklenburg Organization for Political Affairs (MOPA), should endorse the same candidates. Within this civil rights-labor alliance, Henderson believed Hawkins and his organization maintained the upper hand, and often called on them to help labor gain influence in dealing with local elected officials. “When I have a problem with the city councilmen or county commissions, I call Doc [Hawkins],” Henderson told his fellow labor delegates. “I say, ‘Doc, see if you can help me out a little bit,’ and he does ... A year before, we couldn’t even talk to the county commissioners. They wouldn’t listen to us.”<sup>164</sup>

The dynamic captured in Henderson’s description of relying on civil rights leaders reflected broader political realities unfolding in Charlotte in the early 1960s. Unions across the state were reeling from North Carolina’s 1959 ban on public sector collective bargaining and firefighter unionization and the concomitant loss of more than 17,000 union members statewide and thousands of dollars in revenues.<sup>165</sup> For unions in Charlotte, especially those representing public sector employees, a lack of substantive political influence characterized the early 1960s. In contrast, civil rights struggles commanded the city’s attention during these years, winning ground on important issues and, in turn, winning the city accolades on the national political scene for racial moderation and “peaceful race relations.” In 1963, the city’s civic leadership, pressured

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

by black activists, spearheaded the voluntary desegregation of restaurants and other public spaces. In 1965, when unidentified whites threw explosives into the homes of four leading civil rights leaders—in the city’s lone attack of this sort—Charlotte’s mayor and the city’s white leadership closed ranks in public condemnation of the violence. The *Charlotte Observer* raised over \$8,000 in reward money for information leading to the bombers’ arrests, city police launched a full-scale investigation of the bombing, and civic leaders organized a “community meeting” attended by more than 2,500 white and black city residents to demonstrate collective outrage. As a result of the city’s efforts to integrate public accommodations and its rejection of violent racial intransigence, Charlotte successfully distinguished itself in the eyes of the nation as a racially moderate southern city.<sup>166</sup>

Broad civic support for racial moderation, however, had additional consequences for city politics. Most significantly, it served at times to neutralize class-based arguments about economic inequality. In order to make sense of the political dynamics operating in the city during the 1960s, this chapter employs political scientist Preston Smith’s distinction between “racial democracy”—the idea that all races should share proportionally in equal access to essential social goods—and “social democracy”—the idea that individuals should share equal access to social goods irrespective of social class—as a framework to understand Charlotte’s political landscape during the 1960s. “A key distinction between the two ideological orientations,” explains Smith, “is that racial

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<sup>166</sup> Importantly, as other scholars have argued, the limitations of Charlotte’s racially progressive politics can be seen in civic leaders’ unwillingness to throw any real support behind a widespread school desegregation plan in the years before the Swann decision. See Stephen Smith, *Boom for Whom?* and Douglas, *Reading, Writing and Race*.

democracy focuses exclusively on external race relations, while social democracy can pay attention to interracial class relations.”<sup>167</sup> Racial democracy, as opposed to social democracy, ignores the class divisions found within races. Wealthy black funeral home owners and professionals held different objectives than black sanitation workers. Charlotte’s early and, for a southern city, aggressive adoption of a “racial democracy” framework by a bi-racial coalition of black and white civic leaders converged with changing ideas, on both the local and national level, about the relationship between the state, employment, poverty and economic growth. As a result, the dominance of the racial democracy framework served to marginalize and delegitimize social democracy arguments in city politics while, at the same time, reinforcing the city’s well-cultivated image as a progressive Sunbelt metropolis. In Charlotte, this often meant that the needs and desires of the civic and professional class of both races displaced the needs and desires of the city’s working-class residents.

The following chapter examines a series of representative episodes in Charlotte’s political evolution in the 1960s, demonstrating how the image of progressive politics yielded dividends for the city’s business class, while at the same time subverting challenges to the city’s economic status quo. The governing coalition’s emphasis on a racial democracy framework became a central part of the city’s resistance to organized labor and class-based political agitation, as journalist Harry Golden noted in his comment on Martin Luther King and Malcolm X (mentioned in the dissertation introduction). In

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<sup>167</sup> Preston H. Smith, “The Quest for Racial Democracy: Black Civic Ideology and Housing Interests in Postwar Chicago,” *Journal of Urban History*, Vol. 26 No. 2 (January 2000), 133-4; Smith, *Racial Democracy and the Black Metropolis: Housing Policy in Postwar Chicago* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

Charlotte, seeming racial progressivism often inhibited attempts to improve the economic and political power of the city's working classes.

### **Challenges to Charlotte's Governing Coalition**

The political dominance of Charlotte's elite-led governing coalition built around support for "racial democracy," economic growth, and a distrust of labor unions did not remain unchallenged. Martha Evans, Charlotte's first female city councilmember, challenged the supremacy of Charlotte's governing elite. Evans offers an example of political roads not taken—she represented a vision of inclusive local politics built along economic lines. As a progressive female candidate who did not court the city's business elite, Evans threatened the hegemony of the governing coalition. Although the city's at-large election system favored candidates endorsed and usually bankrolled by Charlotte's business community, a coalition of white working-class and African-American voters secured Evans's election in 1955 and reelection in 1957.

Evans took divisive and unpopular stands on issues. She advocated for the appointment of women and African Americans to important city posts and opposed the disproportionate influence of business interests in city politics. In her first year, Evans pushed for African American and female representation on Charlotte's urban renewal planning commission—nominating the president of Charlotte's all-black Johnson C. Smith University, Rufus Perry, and a local female real estate agent, Jane Duncan, to serve on the commission—a suggestion Evans's colleagues roundly rejected. Councilman Steve Dellinger complained that he could not understand "why any certain groups should

be represented when the whole city should be represented by the board members.” The at-large election<sup>168</sup> system, however, made Dellinger’s objection ignorant at best and disingenuous at worst, as it had thus far proven impossible for African American voters to elect a single black candidate to the council. Evans’s nominations, of course, would not have remedied the absence of black participation in or potential obstruction of Charlotte’s urban renewal scheme, yet the rejection of her nominees points to the difficulty African Americans would have in gaining white support for city posts. This feat would only prove doubly challenging for those candidates at odds with the city’s economic development agenda. When the council finally voted, both of Evans’s nominees received only her vote.<sup>169</sup> Undeterred by taking unpopular positions, Evans did not attempt to hide her support for organized labor. According to union leader and firefighter Bill Brawley, “When [Martha Evans] was on council, she was always a friend of ours. When the city manager said we couldn’t, shouldn’t meet, she would show up in the fire station...She had no qualms about meeting with us.”<sup>170</sup>

In 1959, Evans ran for the highest office in the city, challenging incumbent mayor James Smith, again with support from the same coalition of voters who had boosted Evans twice to city council. Although Evans could not overcome her well-funded opponent, she did receive forty seven percent of the vote, carrying most African American precincts and many working-class white ones.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> The at-large election system meant that all city council members were elected by the entire city, rather than representing particular districts within the city.

<sup>169</sup> *Charlotte News*, 28 November 1957.

<sup>170</sup> Brawley interview; Smith, *Boom for Whom?* 35-39.

<sup>171</sup> According to Stephen Smith, Evans’s “tally was especially impressive because she ‘did little advertising and hired no poll workers,’ the latter being a frequent euphemism for individuals who

Undeterred by her loss, Evans again threw her hat in the mayoral ring in 1961. Given her strong showing two years before, the city's business leadership worried that she might actually win and began actively soliciting local businessmen to challenge Evans.<sup>172</sup> After a few potential candidates declined, local business leaders called sitting Chamber of Commerce president Stanford Brookshire into the downtown office of Rush Dixon, a textile executive and local financier, to try to persuade him to enter the race. Explaining his fellow businessmen's motivation for pushing him to run, Brookshire offered the following explanation: "Maybe it was because...the woman's lib movement hadn't advanced far enough, but they just couldn't quite see Ms. Evans as mayor."<sup>173</sup> Equally troubling to the business establishment was the fact that much of Evans's political support came from African American, immigrant, and working-class white neighborhoods. "She had a very good campaign organization when she had run for council before," explained Brookshire, "Her greatest strength was in the communities of minorities; the Jews, the Greeks, the Negroes. In fact, she was very liberal in her attitude on race relations."<sup>174</sup>

Taking a lesson from her loss to the well-funded Smith to inform her campaign against Brookshire, Evans attempted to use her campaign's financial handicap to her advantage. One widely circulated campaign flyer, for example, told voters, "If you want a

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received gas money or other financial compensation for mobilizing white working class and black voters, by whatever means necessary." Smith, *Boom for Whom?* 35.

<sup>172</sup> Smith was also in primary, running for a third term, but according to Brookshire, he lost because Charlotteans were unhappy with the fact that he had recently relocated his business to Gastonia. Stanford Brookshire, interviewed by Edward Perzel, 16 February 1973, WSOC-TV Oral History Project, J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

mayor who represents ALL THE PEOPLE, not just people with money, you will vote on Tuesday for Martha W. Evans.”<sup>175</sup> Evans’s underdog rhetoric, however, proved insufficient to defeat Brookshire and she again lost to the candidate with deeper pockets, but still carried both black precincts and most white working-class ones. Despite her loss, some local observers credited Evans’s candidacy with pushing Brookshire to become more progressive on civil rights to attract potential Evans voters.<sup>176</sup>

### **The Business of Racial Moderation**

The Charlotte governing coalition’s embrace of “racial democracy” began in earnest under the Brookshire administration. After his win over Martha Evans—using the campaign slogan “Beauty and Betterment with Growth and Greatness”<sup>177</sup> Brookshire portrayed his lack of African American support at the polls in a positive light. He argued that losing the so-called black vote actually freed him, in the minds of both black and white Charlotteans, of political debts to the city’s black voters. “The white community,” maintained Brookshire, “had to accept the fact that if I did anything for the blacks afterwards it was on my own and not in paying back any political obligations” and “the blacks had to be somewhat appreciative of any efforts I made to improve their status as citizens because I had made no commitments to them and they had not supported me.”<sup>178</sup> And despite his paternalistic tone, Brookshire became known for his progressive stance

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<sup>175</sup> Campaign flyer, Martha Evans Papers [unprocessed], CMPL.

<sup>176</sup> For more on Evans, see Smith, *Boom for Whom?* 35-37.

<sup>177</sup> John Christopher Schultz, “Going to Hell to Get the Devil: The ‘Charlotte Three’ Case and the Decline of Grassroots Activism in 1970s Charlotte, North Carolina” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Georgia, 1999), 17.

<sup>178</sup> Brookshire interview.



on civil rights, especially for a Southern mayor in the early 1960s. Brookshire explained to one visiting journalist that a combination of “social consciousness, civic pride, and economic considerations” motivated his position on civil rights.<sup>179</sup> Two additional factors which Brookshire glossed over, however, were also important in his political trajectory: Martha Evans’s challenge in the mayoral election, which pushed Brookshire to the left on civil rights, and persistent political pressure from black Charlotteans once he was in office, which kept him there. According to one study of civil rights efforts in Charlotte, such pressure “moved Brookshire to do ‘voluntarily’ what he knew was inevitable.”<sup>180</sup> Though the mayor may not have had any political debts to black voters per se, civil rights activists during Brookshire’s first years in office exerted increased pressure on the city to end the segregation within the city’s hotels, restaurants, hospitals, and other public spaces. As Martha Evans later explained, “The black community did a job on him ... they really put him through the ropes and educated him.”<sup>181</sup>

Responding to such pressure, especially from local dentist and civil rights activist Reginald Hawkins, and out of fear that the city might go the way of Birmingham or Little Rock, Brookshire created the Mayor’s Committee on Community Relations in 1961. Brookshire and Charlotte’s civic leadership determined that segregation had become a political and economic liability for the city. As such, *Charlotte Observer* editor C.A. McKnight, mayor Brookshire, and Chamber of Commerce president and local banker Ed

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<sup>179</sup> Watters, “Charlotte,” 4.

<sup>180</sup> For more on African American efforts to pressure the city to desegregate public accommodations, see Damaris Etta Brown Leach, “Progress Under Pressure: Changes in Charlotte’s Race Relations, 1955-1965” (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1976), 167.

<sup>181</sup> Martha Evans, interviewed by Bill Moye, 26 June 1974, SHC.

Burnside agreed to target the city's restaurants and hotels to spearhead the desegregation process. According to McKnight, the push to desegregate came after McKnight told Brookshire that, "if you want to keep Charlotte out of the headlines of the New York Times, the leadership must take concerted action."<sup>182</sup> Brookshire agreed and soon thereafter, McKnight drafted and the Chamber unanimously passed a resolution on 23 May 1963 recommending the immediate desegregation of all local businesses that served the general public.<sup>183</sup> After the passage of the resolution, Ed Burnside convinced a group of local hotel and restaurant owners to be the first to integrate their businesses, thereby setting a precedent for other city establishments to follow. In late May 1963, several prominent businessmen invited black guests to lunch in restaurants across the city, precipitating what became known in city lore as the either the Charlotte "eat-in" or the "let's do lunch" initiative.<sup>184</sup> Southern historian David Goldfield has described Charlotte's approach to desegregation of public spaces as being characterized by "lunching rather than lynching."<sup>185</sup> Moreover, as L.M. Wright Jr., the City Editor of *Charlotte Observer* proudly told a meeting of the South Carolina Council on Human Relations in November 1963, the call to desegregate Charlotte's public facilities in 1963

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<sup>182</sup> McKnight, as quoted in Frye Gaillard, *The Dream Long Deferred* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 22.

<sup>183</sup> Gaillard, *The Dream Long Deferred*, 23; Douglas, *Reading, Writing and Race*, 25-106, and Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 10-15, 126.

<sup>184</sup> Douglas, *Reading, Writing and Race*; Smith, *Boom for Whom?*

<sup>185</sup> David Goldfield, "A Place to Come to," in *Charlotte, NC: The Global Evolution of a New South City*, ed. William Graves and Heather A. Smith (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2010), 15.

carried particular historical significance: Charlotte's began its desegregation process on the centennial anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation.<sup>186</sup>

Of all the arguments Burnside made to convince Charlotte business owners to desegregate, his economic argument proved most persuasive to Charlotte businessmen. According to one business owner in attendance, "The vivid reminder of the years that Little Rock went without a single new industry coming to town after its racial difficulties in 1957 was the most effective point made."<sup>187</sup> An executive for Eastern Airlines confirmed that his company had chosen Charlotte over other southern cities to build a six-million-dollar computer center because of "the admirable way race relations had been handled."<sup>188</sup> In an article entitled "Credit and the Development of the South," published in the University of Virginia Newsletter, Preston T. Holmes, the Vice President of State-Planters Bank of Commerce and Trust in Richmond wrote,

The manner in which [desegregation] is handled will have a tremendous effect on the ability of the South to attract new industry and to encourage existing industries to expand their present facilities. North Carolina, with legal compliance with the [Brown v. Board of Education] and little social unrest, had new plant investment in 1958 totaling \$253 million, while Arkansas, with its massive resistance and unsettled conditions, had only \$25.4 million in 1958 compared with \$44.9 in 1957 and \$131 million in 1956.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Here, Wright meant 100 years after the Emancipation Proclamation, not the exact date. L.M. Wright, Jr., "Charlotte Chose A Different Way," Folder 551, North Carolina Council On Human Relations Collection, SHC.

<sup>187</sup> Leach, "Progress Under Pressure," 171-5.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Anti-Defamation League, "The High Cost of Conflict: A Roundup of Opinion from the Southern Business Community on the Economic Consequences of School Closings and Violence" (New York, 1961); For a broad view of the economic impact of the civil rights movement on the South, see Wright, *Sharing the Prize*.

Indeed, Charlotte's recent economic growth was likely the most important determining factor in Brookshire's and the business community's decision to openly support desegregation efforts. With Charlotte finally becoming the city its boosters had long envisioned, the city's civic leadership was eager to avoid anything that might compromise Charlotte's rising economic status.

Both of the city's newspapers, the *Charlotte News* and the *Charlotte Observer*, also held fairly progressive positions on civil rights for papers in the South. The *News* established itself as a voice of racial liberalism as early as the 1930s, and the *Observer* was among the city's leading proponents of compliance with the Supreme Court's 1954 Brown decision. The *Observer's* position only intensified when C.A. "Pete" McKnight, a Shelby native and Davidson College graduate, became editor in 1955. McKnight, who had been editor of the *Charlotte News* since 1939, left his post in 1954 to become the first editor of the *Southern School News*, a Ford Foundation-funded agency established to monitor southern states' compliance with Brown.<sup>190</sup> Under McKnight's leadership, the *Observer* would remain a voice of southern racial liberalism throughout the 1950s and 1960s. McKnight saw segregation as both a moral injustice and a practical impediment to the region's economic development, arguing that it could not, "as an abstract moral principle...be defended by any intellectually or spiritually honest person."<sup>191</sup> McKnight's leadership also extended beyond the newsroom; he drafted the 1963 Chamber of

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<sup>190</sup> Interestingly, in addition to touring the South to cover southern school desegregation efforts, McKnight's mission also included travelling through the northeast and midwest to discuss local desegregation efforts with local newspaper editors, suggesting that McKnight and the Ford Foundation viewed school segregation as more than a southern problem. See Douglas, *Reading, Writing and Race*, 59-60 and Jack Claiborne, *The Charlotte Observer: Its Time and Place, 1869-1986* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 252-277.

<sup>191</sup> "Editorial—Handwriting on the Wall," *Charlotte News*, 7 June 1950.

Commerce resolution calling for the desegregation of the city's public accommodations, the school board frequently consulted him before making important decisions, and he was a key member of the Mayor's Community Relations Committee. McKnight also served as president of the North Carolina Fund, a statewide anti-poverty program discussed in more detail later in the chapter.<sup>192</sup>

In addition to McKnight's leadership, another important change at the *Observer* contributed to the paper's stance on civil rights. In late 1954, the *Observer's* owners sold the paper to John S. and James L. Knight, who also owned the *Akron Beacon-Journal*, the *Miami Herald*, the *Detroit Free Press*, and the *Chicago Daily News*.<sup>193</sup> According to Jack Claiborne, an *Observer* editor, "the *Observer*, as the smallest member of the Knight organization, [became] a 'boot camp' for ambitious young people who were seeking bigger jobs in journalism".<sup>194</sup> This infusion of young journalists from outside of the South with ambitions of returning home likely moderated the tone of the paper's news and editorial pages regarding civil rights issues.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Douglas, *Reading, Writing and Race*, 60.

<sup>193</sup> The *Observer's* sale to a national conglomerate, while among the first in North Carolina, was part of a larger national trend. Within a decade of the Knights buying the *Observer*, large, corporate publishing groups owned most major North Carolina daily papers. See Claiborne, *The Charlotte Observer*, 249-50.

<sup>194</sup> Claiborne, *The Charlotte Observer*, 252.

<sup>195</sup> The quality of the *Observer* improved dramatically following the sale to the Knights, with the paper winning several state and national awards, as did its circulation numbers. Between 1954 and 1959, the paper increased its lead over the *Charlotte News* by tenfold, from 1,300 papers to 13,000 papers. Outpaced in circulation and prestige, the *News* leadership realized the paper could not contend with its morning competition (and, in all fairness, most North Carolina cities had already merged their morning and afternoon papers); In April 1959, *News* owner Thomas L. Robinson announced he was selling the paper to the Knights. Claiborne, *The Charlotte Observer*, 276.

## **Black Moderation**

With business and city leaders showing increased support for civil rights initiatives, African Americans also found new openings for formal participation in local politics. In 1965, Charlotte voters elected the first African American to a city office since Reconstruction, funeral home director Frederick Douglass Alexander. Throughout the 1960s, Alexander proved integral to the city's moderate governing coalition. He was also one of the leading black proponents of the "racial democracy" framework that governed the city. "Embracing racial democracy," Preston Smith explains, "meant black civic elites accepted class privileges and the distribution of social goods according to conventional political economy."<sup>196</sup> Like many black elites during this era, Alexander believed that the black middle class should serve as representatives of the race and he distrusted alliances between the white and black working classes.

The son of Zechariah Alexander, a district manager for North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company, one of the nation's largest African American-owned businesses at the time, Fred Alexander had opportunities unavailable to most black Charlotteans in large part because of his family's financial independence from whites. Alexander attended high school in Charlotte but headed north for college, to Pennsylvania's Lincoln University. Alexander's elite education and affluent family background shaped his faith in the educated black middle class. Upon graduation from college, Alexander returned to Charlotte intent on improving opportunities for black Charlotteans, focusing his energy on registering black voters and lobbying for the city to hire more black employees. "The Alexanders admit their father had an advantage," wrote local journalist Harry Golden,

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<sup>196</sup> Smith, "The Quest for Racial Democracy," 133.

“He didn’t work for whites. He and his two sons could agitate and speak out for Negro rights. It was hard for whites to discipline them.”<sup>197</sup>

Even with his favorable reputation among the city’s governing coalition, Alexander knew that winning a council seat in a predominantly white city with an at-large election system would be challenging, even for a moderate black candidate with substantial bi-racial support. After all, his brother Kelly Alexander, who was the president of the North Carolina NAACP, had run and lost twice.<sup>198</sup> In 1965, then, when Alexander decided to run for city council, he and his supporters determined that his only realistic chance of election was if his supporters cast “single shot” votes. This meant that rather than voting for a full slate of seven candidates, as voters were traditionally expected to do, supporters would cast a lone vote for Alexander and leave the remainder of the ballot empty. On Election Day, Alexander’s strategy paid off. He finished within the top seven, ensuring him a position on city council. However, the single-shot strategy enraged the Charlotte political establishment, which included his new fellow councilmembers, numerous city officials, as well as the *Charlotte News and Observer*. Alexander had “pushed his way” in, the *Observer* contended, and in so doing had manipulated the democratic process.<sup>199</sup> In reviewing post-election poll numbers, the Alexander campaign was able to demonstrate decisively that the single-shot strategy was

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<sup>197</sup> “A Lifetime Struggle Against Injustice,” *Charlotte Observer*, Box 28, Folder 4, Kelly Miller Alexander Papers, J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina at Charlotte [hereafter UNCC].

<sup>198</sup> See biographical description in Kelly Miller Alexander Papers finding aid, UNCC.

<sup>199</sup> Alexander countered this claim, however, by reminding his critics that the strategy was entirely legal. Moreover, accusations about Alexander’s violation of the “the democratic process” likely rang hollow to his supporters given the many barriers still in place limiting African American political participation. Had a white candidate employed the same strategy, Alexander maintained, it would have been praised as “smart politics.” “One-Shot Votes Help Alexander,” *Charlotte Observer*, 27 April 1965; “Alexander Shrugs at 1-Shot Voting,” *Charlotte Observer*, 28 April 1965.

the only tactic sure to get Alexander—or any other black candidate—elected in Charlotte’s at-large white-majority system.<sup>200</sup> For many voters, Alexander’s election to city council proved an important first step in bringing home the gains of the recent Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Despite Alexander’s controversial entrée into city politics, he proved to be a fairly moderate city councilman, favoring dialogue and closed-door negotiations over protests and direct action in the struggle for black civil rights.<sup>201</sup> He faced resistance from his colleagues during his first year on the council, which likely stemmed from a mixture of lingering resentment over his single-shot strategy and racism. Alexander could rarely get a majority of councilmembers to support his motions and nominations, such as his attempt to appoint an African American to the Charlotte Redevelopment Commission.<sup>202</sup> Nonetheless, Alexander managed to develop and maintain a fairly congenial relationship with Charlotte’s business community. He became the first black member of the city’s Chamber of Commerce in 1962 and more than two-thirds of those who voted for him in his first city council race were white.<sup>203</sup> Throughout his political career, Alexander emphasized conciliation over conflict regarding civil rights issues, winning him

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<sup>200</sup> Randy Penninger, “The Emergence of Black Political Power in Charlotte, North Carolina 1965–74” (M.A. Thesis, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 1989) 15-27.

<sup>201</sup> Pat Watters, *Charlotte*, 33; Randy Penninger, “The Emergence of Black Political Power in Charlotte, North Carolina 1965–74” 15-27.

<sup>202</sup> For example, Alexander tried unsuccessfully to get Bishop Dale, a local black businessman who had run unsuccessfully for city council in 1935, 1949, and 1957, reappointed to the Charlotte Redevelopment Commission, after his initial temporary appointment to fill a vacancy. City Council Minute Book, 29 November 1956; Charlotte City Council Minute Book, 6 December 1965, 254. For more on Dale, see Mary Norton Kratt, *Charlotte: Spirit of the New South* (Tulsa, Oklahoma: Continental Heritage Press, 1986), 253; Smith, *Boom for Whom?* 33, and Leroy Warren, “Rites for Bishop Dale, Businessman,” *Washington Afro-American*, 23 October 1979.

<sup>203</sup> Penninger, “The Emergence of Black Political Power in Charlotte, North Carolina,” 23.



substantial support among the city's business and civic leadership, as well as moderate white voters.<sup>204</sup>

The other side to Alexander's pro-business outlook and cordial relationship with Charlotte's business community was a general distrust of organized labor, a position not uncommon among southern black elites and black organizations during this period.<sup>205</sup> In 1960, the NAACP's labor department issued a well-publicized report on racial discrimination in unions and Herbert Hill, the NAACP's white labor director during the 1950s and 1960s was among the most outspoken critics of racial discrimination in unions.<sup>206</sup> Echoing Hill, Fred Alexander argued that "labor unions offer little to nothing in the struggle for Negro rights in the South, not even membership."<sup>207</sup> African Americans had reason to distrust organized labor, given many unions' historic exclusion and discrimination against black workers, especially in southern industries and the

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<sup>204</sup> Smith, *Boom for Whom?* 39-41.

<sup>205</sup> On the relationship between black elites and organized labor more generally, see Brian Kelley, "Industrial Sentinels Confront the 'Rabid Faction': Black Elites, Black Workers, and the Labor Question in the Jim Crow South," in Eric Arnesen, ed., *The Black Worker: A Reader* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007); 94-121; and Beth Tompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>206</sup> In response, organized labor was highly critical of Hill and the NAACP's attacks on some of the nation's most progressive unions such as the Steelworkers, the United Auto Workers (UAW), and the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union (ILGWU). see Paul Frymer, *Black and Blue: African Americans, the Labor Movement, and the Decline of the Democratic Party* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 44-47; Hill also famously critiqued the emerging field of "New Labor History" in the late 1980s for romanticizing the relationship between organized labor and black workers, see Herbert Hill, "Myth-Making as Labor History: Herbert Gutman and the United Mine Workers of America," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 2 (Winter 1988): 132-33. Eric Arnesen puts this critique into larger historiographical context in "Following the Color Line of Labor: Black Workers and the Labor Movement before 1930," *Radical History Review* 55 (1993): 53-87.

<sup>207</sup> Pat Watters, "Charlotte," 37.

building trades.<sup>208</sup> Yet at the same time, Alexander's position was in keeping with a longer history of black moderates' antipathy towards organized labor. According to Adolph Reed, "Advocates of accommodationism, which was uplift ideology's most conservative expression, opposed trade unionism or labor-based political action for blacks almost by definition."<sup>209</sup> Alexander was especially skeptical of interracial alliances between African Americans and the white working class. "You can't get anywhere dealing with the poor white man," Alexander maintained. "He's just like the Negro—struggling."<sup>210</sup> Although Alexander recognized that the black and white working classes shared many of the same economic struggles, he, like other black elites, worried that white workers were particularly susceptible to racist appeals, making them untrustworthy and potentially dangerous allies of African Americans.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Much has been written on racial discrimination by unions and their members in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. The first scholarly critiques of organized labor's policies towards black workers came not from labor historians, but scholars of African American history. See Charles H. Wesley, *Negro Labor in the United States, 1850-1925: A Study in American Economic History* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1927); Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement* (New York: Athenaeum, 1931); Lorenzo Greene and Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro Wage Earner* (New York: Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, 1930); Horace R. Cayton and George S. Mitchell, *Black Workers and the New Unions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939); St. Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1945); and Herbert Northrup, *Organized Labor and the Negro* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1944). The aforementioned scholars understood the labor dimension to be central to the black experience in America, an insight it took labor historians decades to discover. For later studies, see F. Ray Marshall's *The Negro and Organized Labor* (1965); William Gould, *Black Workers in White Unions* (1977); Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*; and Honey, *Black Workers Remember: An Oral History of Segregation, Unionism, and the Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); and *The Black Worker: Race Labor and Civil Rights Since Emancipation*, Eric Arnesen, ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), the introduction of which offers an excellent overview of this body of scholarship.

<sup>209</sup> Reed, *Stirrings in the Jug*, 27.

<sup>210</sup> Watters, "Charlotte," 34.

<sup>211</sup> Preston Smith notes similar tendencies among the black middle class in Chicago towards interracial working-class alliances. Smith, *Quest for Racial Democracy*, 133.

After Fred Alexander's election to city council, Kelly Alexander offered his reflections on the class politics that had gotten his brother elected. In a paper titled "The Role of the Negro in Charlotte City Politics," Kelly Alexander evaluated the circumstances most likely to facilitate the election of black officials in southern cities with at-large, non-partisan local elections, as Charlotte still had at the time.<sup>212</sup> Alexander highlighted class divisions among and between black and white Charlotteans when they went to the polls. "Upper and middle class whites will now vote for black candidates who approximate their class level within the black community," asserted Alexander. "The reasons for this are complex. The main one being in my opinion that a middle class black candidate is less of a threat to their value system than a lower class one." Candidates who posed a challenge to the racial order were less threatening than those who challenged the "business-friendly" political climate Charlotte's civic leaders had worked so hard to cultivate. Like his brother, Kelly Alexander believed that successful black candidates must be well regarded publicly and "appear to be rational, well dressed, cosmopolitan in outlook and seem to have a solid middle-class or upper middle-class orientation."<sup>213</sup> In other words, a candidate's electability had to do more with the politics of respectability—appearing to be middle class or above—than with the candidate's actual economic status.<sup>214</sup> At the same time, asserted Alexander, the candidate "must present himself as not being afraid to represent the interests of the community loudly if necessary.

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<sup>212</sup> The paper was likely delivered at an NAACP meeting, but the document does not state when or where it was given.

<sup>213</sup> Kelly Alexander, "The Role of the Negro in Charlotte City Politics," undated, Box 52, Folder 21, Frederick Douglass Alexander Papers, UNCC.

<sup>214</sup> On the politics of respectability and black uplift ideology, see Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

Regardless of his income he must identify himself squarely with the poor mass of blacks.”<sup>215</sup> Alexander then turned to the symbolic value of black elected officials for cities eager to display their racial tolerance to the nation. “For a community to have black elected officials has marked it as progressive,” asserted Alexander. “Such an official is a symbol of racial harmony within the city. In times of racial unrest it is a positive thing to present a quiet content city.”<sup>216</sup>

Charlotte’s relatively quiet reputation was shaken in the early morning hours of November 22, 1965, when a group of unidentified whites bombed the homes of several black leaders, including Fred Alexander, Kelly Alexander, civil rights activist Reginald Hawkins, and attorney Julius Chambers.<sup>217</sup> Miraculously, no one was injured in any of the explosions.<sup>218</sup> The bombings made headlines in newspapers across the nation, including the *Baltimore Evening Sun*, *Washington Evening Star*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Chicago Daily News*, each of which highlighted Charlotte’s moderate reputation on civil rights.<sup>219</sup> *The Washington Post*’s headlines read, “4 Negroes’ N.C. Homes Dynamited: Racially Peaceful Charlotte Without Clues to Blasts,” and the *Los Angeles Times* prefaced its article on the bombing, titled “Bomb Rips Peace of Charlotte, N.C.,” by saying, “Charlotte is one of the few major southern cities that has escaped racial trouble

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<sup>215</sup> Kelly Alexander, “The Role of the Negro in Charlotte City Politics,” UNCC.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Chambers and believed the bombing was likely the result of his, Hawkins’s and the Alexanders’s involvement in a lawsuit involving the desegregation of a local annual high school football tournament, the Shrine Bowl. Douglas, *Reading Writing and Race*, 123.

<sup>218</sup> Douglas, *Reading Writing and Race*, 120-123; “Bomb News Flashed Across U.S.,” *Charlotte Observer*, 23 November 1965; “NAACP Chief: This Was Done to Destroy Us,” *Charlotte Observer*, 23 November 1965; “After Bombings, Nation Saw a Different Charlotte,” *Charlotte Observer*, 24 November 1965.

<sup>219</sup> Batten, “After Bombings, Nation Saw a Different Charlotte,” 24 November 1965.

in recent years; schools there were integrated on a limited basis in 1957 and public accommodations were desegregated long before enactment of the Civil Rights Act of last year.”<sup>220</sup>

Following the bombing, Charlotte’s civic leaders acted swiftly to demonstrate their collective condemnation for what had occurred. Mayor Brookshire called on city residents to contribute funds for rebuilding the damaged homes, and the *Charlotte Observer* organized an “antiterrorism fund” to offer a reward for information on the bombers. Civic leaders also organized a gathering at Ovens Auditorium as a public display of collective condemnation. More than 2,500 black and white citizens turned out to protest the bombings and hear speeches from local and national civic and civil rights leaders.<sup>221</sup> The protest was likely the largest interracial audience ever convened in Charlotte for the purpose of discussing racial injustice in the city. Roy Wilkins, the executive director of the NAACP, who was among the national civil rights leaders in Charlotte for the event, remarked how “this kind of thing undermines the whole leadership...of the church and law-abiding, decent elements of the community.”<sup>222</sup> In reference to Kelly Alexander, Wilkins said, “here is a man who, having spent his time promoting law and order and legal remedies, comes to suffer this rebuke when it begins to appear his viewpoint might prevail.” Wilkins argued that violence against moderate black leaders only emboldened the cause of black militants—a group Wilkins believed to

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<sup>220</sup> “4 Negroes’ N.C. Homes Dynamited: Racially Peaceful Charlotte Without Clues to Blasts,” *Washington Post*, 23 November 1965; “The Nation: Racial: Bombs Rip Peace of Charlotte, N.C.” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 November 1965.

<sup>221</sup> Hannah Miller, “Plain Folks Turned Out with Kinds for Meeting,” *Charlotte Observer*, 29 November 1965.

<sup>222</sup> Joe Doster, “Wilkins Says Violence Undercuts Moderates,” *Charlotte Observer*, 29 November 1965.

be nearly as great an obstacle to civil rights progress as white supremacists. Furthermore, Wilkins warned, “The danger is not that they will win recruits from those who have a stake in the community—the doctor, the dentist, the lawyer. The danger is that they will win recruits from the younger Negroes—the misfits, the dropouts.”<sup>223</sup>

A few speakers, however, used the rally as an opportunity to address the fact that Charlotte’s reputation for racial progress was often inconsistent with the experience of many black residents across the city. George Leake, a local African Methodist Episcopalian (AME) minister, emphasized that much work remained to be done if Charlotte was to live up to its carefully crafted national image. Leake urged “that Charlotte not use the meeting as a salve for its conscience but as a prod to provide more opportunities for Negroes.”<sup>224</sup> To rousing applause, Leake demanded, “Does this mean that the dispatcher at police headquarters will stop using the word ‘nigger’ when making calls to cars? Does it mean in our lifetime we will see a Negro with enough sense to patrol the [downtown] square?”<sup>225</sup> Over the course of his speech, Leake implored Charlotte’s civic leadership to use this opportunity to do good rather than just to feel good. Like journalist Harry Golden, one of the keenest observers of Charlotte politics in the mid-twentieth century, George Leake was an adept critic of the limitations of the city’s politics of moderation. “Charlotte is such a smart town,” asserted Leake, “that

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<sup>223</sup> Joe Doster, “Wilkins Says Violence Undercuts Moderates,” *Charlotte Observer*, 29 November 1965.

<sup>224</sup> Hannah Miller, “Plain Folks Turned Out with Kinds for Meeting,” *Charlotte Observer*, 29 November 1965.

<sup>225</sup> Doster, “Wilkins Says Violence Undercuts Moderates,” 29 November 1965.

whenever it finds a grievance that's most acute, it'll solve that one and wait for you to push the next one. It does just enough to keep the match from being struck.”<sup>226</sup>

### **Poverty Politics in Charlotte**

The city's anti-poverty initiatives also reflect the influence of the “progressive mystique” and “racial democracy” politics. The Charlotte Area Fund (CAF), established on August 29, 1963, became a wing of the state's pioneering North Carolina Fund on July 6, 1964. Financed by the Ford Foundation, the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, and the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, along with the state and federal governments, the North Carolina Fund eventually became the mechanism through which the federal government channeled anti-poverty funds after the creation of the War on Poverty's Office of Economic Opportunity in 1963.<sup>227</sup> At the time of the North Carolina Fund's creation, there existed substantial poverty and economic inequality in North Carolina, and in Charlotte in particular. In Mecklenburg County, 14,000 families—more than 20

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<sup>226</sup> This quote comes from a remarkable—and, as far as I can tell, never before cited—interview conducted in July 1968. Leake discussed political, ideological, and programmatic divisions among black leaders in Charlotte. Unlike most oral histories, this interview was conducted in the midst of the events—the civil rights movement—it was intended to chronicle. Leake's discussion of black politics during this period reveals that in Charlotte, as in other cities, the idea of a singular “black community” during this period was more a rhetorical tool than a description of historical reality. Leake described the significant factionalism that characterized Charlotte's black leadership “Sometimes in our struggle... for leadership and prominence,” stated Leake, “we get tied up over who's going to be the biggest nigger—excuse the expression—and that man out in the street is the one who's really suffering.” As a result, the city's black citizenry, and especially working-class blacks, had largely lost faith in the city's black leadership, maintained Leake. “Many of the old leaders no longer have any input with the people of the community” because ordinary black Charlotteans believe that the city's black leaders “sold out at election time and sold their votes.” Black voters felt they got little in return for their votes and, according to Leake, they lacked the political strength to command anything more. George Leake, interviewed by Stanley Smith, July 1968, The Civil Rights Documentation Project, Ralph J. Bunche Oral History Collection, Howard University.

<sup>227</sup> For the most comprehensive study of the North Carolina Fund, see Robert R. Korstad and James L. Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs: The North Carolina Fund and the Battle to End Poverty and Inequality in 1960s America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

percent of the city—lived on annual incomes of less than \$3,000. According to one CAF report, “Poverty in Mecklenburg County is recognized not only as a problem to the whole general populace, but most particularly, as a racial problem.”<sup>228</sup> Indeed, there was substantial income disparity between white and black Charlotte area residents; the median income for white families was \$6440 while it was just \$2,904 for black families, with more than half of the county’s black families living \$1000 under the national poverty line.<sup>229</sup>

When Terry Sanford unveiled the North Carolina Fund in 1963, many progressives in the state held great optimism that the state of North Carolina, with the help of private and federal dollars, had the tools to combat poverty, while spurring economic growth. During a press conference in Raleigh introducing the North Carolina Fund, Terry Sanford told North Carolinians that this would be “the first massive statewide effort in our country to find ways to break the cycle of poverty and dependency.”<sup>230</sup> Sanford’s ideas about poverty, like those of progressive policymakers across the nation, were heavily influenced by “culture of poverty” arguments put forward by social scientists and widely popularized in Michael Harrington’s 1962 *The Other America*. In short, the “culture of poverty” thesis held that a wide array of cultural pathologies— isolation, passivity, hopelessness—explained poor people’s status, not economic restructuring or unemployment. Over time, these pathologies became self-

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<sup>228</sup> “History of the Charlotte Area Fund,” Box 328, Folder 3979, Series 4.5, North Carolina Fund Papers, #4710, SHC.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Terry Sanford, as quoted in Korstad and Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs*, 88.



perpetuating across generations, leading to a “cycle of poverty.”<sup>231</sup> C.A. McKnight, editor of the *Charlotte Observer* who had become president of the North Carolina Fund, said the two biggest problems the state faced were education and jobs—and that no one expected to “remake adults...the real hope is to cut off this generation of kids from the cycle of poverty.”<sup>232</sup> That McKnight, the head of North Carolina’s leading anti-poverty organization and a prominent white progressive in the state, viewed adults as beyond hope illustrates the increasing acceptance in the mid-1960s of the idea that a stable job with decent wages was insufficient to lift adults out of poverty. Instead, “culture of poverty” proponents argued, the poor were not in poverty because they lacked money; they were poor because they demonstrated deeply imbedded and often irreversible cultural pathologies.

The emergence of the “culture of poverty” thesis converged with and was informed by social scientists’ and policymakers’ shifting ideas about the relationship between economic policy, employment, and the state. Neo-Keynesianism, the dominant economic ideology of the 1960s, emphasized the importance of full employment in sustaining economic growth. Poverty, proponents of neo-Keynesianism argued, was incompatible with the goal of full employment. For this reason, along with a growing concern among progressives about scarcity in a land of plenty, poverty emerged on the national agenda. As Alice O’Connor explains, particular neo-Keynesian notions of individual agency framed ideas about poverty during the Kennedy and Johnson

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<sup>231</sup> On the history and influence of the theory of the “culture of poverty,” see Michael B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare* (New York: Pantheon, 1989) and O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 99-123.

<sup>232</sup> Watters, “Charlotte,” 73.

administrations. Gains made by the American working classes were understood “not as the product of institutional factors such as unions, government policy, or firm practices, but . . . market returns on individual investments.”<sup>233</sup> This individualized worldview gave rise to human capital theory, which “exaggerated the role of rational choice, individual behavior, and the level playing field.”<sup>234</sup> Focusing on individual behavior and skills, proponents of human capital theory emphasized investment in education and job training as the most productive route to realize economic mobility for those living in poverty. “Most important,” emphasizes O’Connor, such a political framework “made fighting poverty, through human capital investments, compatible with economic growth,” at least in theory.<sup>235</sup>

While Governor Sanford and the hundreds of social workers, students, and activists involved with the Fund throughout the state likely held a sincere commitment to combating poverty, the North Carolina Fund, and especially CAF, had fundamental limitations from the start. The city’s commitment to economic growth overshadowed commitments to combating poverty, limiting the ability of CAF to achieve the latter. CAF’s leadership, for example, was heavily stacked with representatives of the city’s business community and initially included few black representatives—all of whom came from the middle class—and no representation of the poor or organized labor.<sup>236</sup> After fierce opposition from dentist and local civil rights activist Reginald Hawkins, who pointed out that exclusion of poor people from the CAF board violated the OEO’s

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<sup>233</sup> O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge*, 142.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-2.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>236</sup> Bylaws of the Charlotte Area Fund, Box 28, F 16, Kelly Miller Alexander Papers, UNCC.

“maximum feasible participation” directive, the CAF added six new directors, most of whom were poor and African American.<sup>237</sup> But, as Hawkins pointed out, the fact that these members were added later meant that they were not involved in the initial planning stages of the CAF, but were confined to decisions the existing board had already made.

Equally problematic was the fact that even when low-income representatives were added to the board, they were not active participants in meetings. Instead, explained one CAF report, the “primary spokesmen for the poor and Negro interests are still the polished, higher income Negroes and whites on the board. The Negro professor, lawyer, and undertaker remain the most outspoken minority group members.” One of the black board members was reported to have said during a meeting, “The poor are reluctant to participate in civic affairs. There is no sociological evidence that the poor are crying for representation, and I personally believe they would rather have someone in a higher income group as their representative.”<sup>238</sup>

On June 29, 1965, the Senate Subcommittee on Poverty invited Hawkins to Washington to testify, an opportunity which he used as a platform to voice his criticisms of the CAF. He underscored his support for the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, but emphasized that he was “appalled at the manner in which proposal constructions and programming were submitted and accepted”—namely the exclusion of the poor from the

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<sup>237</sup> “Area Fund Will Add 6 Directors,” *Charlotte Observer*, 21 May 1965.

<sup>238</sup> “History of the Charlotte Area Fund,” Box 328, Folder 3979, Series 4.5, North Carolina Fund Papers, SHC. The CAF board member’s remark exemplifies one variation of what Adolph Reed has called the “politics of racial custodianship”—the process whereby self-appointed black elites speak on behalf of the so-called masses. As Adolph Reed explains, such a formulation has deep historical roots reaching back into the late nineteenth century but remarkably, has survived well into the post-segregation era. Adolph L. Reed, *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 18.

board of the CAF. “Those of us who are leaders in the civil rights struggle, especially in the South are not so naïve as to believe that our oppressors, who make up the power structure in these southern states, are, all of a sudden, going to become altruistic toward the Negro and voluntarily organize poverty programs to eliminate the root causes of poverty,” Hawkins told the subcommittee. “We know from hard, immediate and vivid experiences that poverty programs in the South are being formed by political and economic interests, which are only concerned with controlling the pace and types of programs started. For this reason, there is no real enthusiasm or renewed hope among our poor about the poverty programs.”<sup>239</sup> Moreover, if the poor were to be included, Hawkins asserted, and poverty were somehow eradicated, the South’s “very structure of subserviency” and economy based on cheap labor would be destroyed.<sup>240</sup>

Though Hawkins had a point, there was one CAF program—Domestics United—that included poor people in its planning and targeted its efforts at the dual problems of racial subordination and cheap labor among some of the city’s most vulnerable workers. Founded in 1966, the organization sought to represent domestic workers in Charlotte who often made less than 75 cents per hour, just half of the federal minimum wage at the time. Indeed, federal labor law exempted domestic workers from the minimum wage.<sup>241</sup> As

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<sup>239</sup> Reginald Hawkins, testimony before the Senate Subcommittee in Poverty, 29 June 1965, Box 2, Folder 10, Reginald Hawkins Papers, UNCC.

<sup>240</sup> As an alternative to CAF, Reginald Hawkins formed an organization called Job Opportunities for Better Security. He received backing from local labor leaders, including Jim Pierce and J. Floyd Henderson. Lee Stinnett, “War on Poverty Shifts to Action,” *Charlotte News*, 28 May 1965; Reginald Hawkins, Testimony before the Senate Subcommittee in Poverty, 29 June 1965, Box 2, Folder 10, Reginald Hawkins Papers, UNCC.

<sup>241</sup> Domestic workers had been excluded from New Deal minimum wage standards and federal labor protections because they were not seen as “engaged in commerce or in the production of goods for

Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein have asserted, domestic workers, like care workers, faced numerous challenges to workplace organizing, the biggest hurdle being for workers to redefine the home as a workplace and household labor as real work. “Before caregivers were even able to bargain for better conditions,” explain Boris and Klein, “they had to see themselves as workers and fight for such recognition by the public, the state, and the very users of the services.”<sup>242</sup> Among the organization’s top priorities were helping Charlotte’s overworked and underpaid domestic workforce increase their wages, expand their housekeeping and childcare knowledge base, secure Social Security contributions from employers, and, more generally, raise domestic work to a respected, professionalized, and adequately compensated occupation. At its height, the organization had six chapters, more than 600 active members, and was among the first of its kind in the nation.<sup>243</sup>

Domestics United began as a collaboration between progressive Charlotte church women, the CAF, and domestic workers. The idea for an organization of household workers arose in March 1966 after members of the Christian Social Relations Committee of the Mecklenburg County United Church Women’s Organization met with staff members of the Westside Center, a CAF-funded community center, to discuss issues facing the neighborhood. According to one CAF report, “staff members at the center jumped at the chance for publicizing and creating interest in domestic workers through a

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commerce.” Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 268. Also on the relationship between domestic workers and the state, see Jennifer Klein and Eileen Boris, *Caring for America: Home Health Workers in the Shadow of the Welfare State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>242</sup> Boris and Klein, *Caring for America*, 10-16.

<sup>243</sup> Annual Report of the Charlotte Area Fund, 21 February 1968, Box 28, Folder 16, Kelly M. Alexander Papers, UNCC.

‘respected, middle class’ organization” and after a few meetings, Domestic United was born.<sup>244</sup> One of the United Churchwomen involved was Vera Swann, wife of Darius Swann, both of whom were at the center of Charlotte’s landmark school desegregation case, *Swann v. Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools*. Vera Swann, who had done missionary work in India for ten years before returning to Charlotte, was hopeful that the city’s churchwomen would be as concerned with injustices in their own city as they were for those in developing countries halfway across the globe. “We spend a lot on missions sending people to other countries,” asserted Swann, “Is there any way to appeal to churchwomen to say that here is an opportunity right in their own backyards to witness? That the opportunity not be across the sea?”<sup>245</sup>

On May 18 when the new organization held its first meeting, only forty domestics attended. After concerted efforts to get the word out to household workers across the city, more than 200 domestic workers attended the second meeting held on June 8.<sup>246</sup> Shortly thereafter, the organization began advocating for higher wages for household workers in Charlotte. In July 1966, the organization approached the Mayor’s Committee on Human Relations, the Mecklenburg Christian Ministries Association, and the local NAACP for support in securing hourly wages of \$1.50, paid vacation time and sick leave, a daycare center for domestic workers’ children, and Social Security contributions from employers. Domestic United’s members also organized a letter writing campaign to state legislators,

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<sup>244</sup> “Confidential Domestic United Report,” undated, Folder 4079, Subseries 4.5, Charlotte Area Fund, in the North Carolina Fund Records #04710, SHC.

<sup>245</sup> Dorothy Ridings, “Domestic Rumble: Maids Want Pay Raise,” *Charlotte Observer*, 20 July 1966, Box 16, Folder 30, National Committee on Household Employment Records, National Archives for Black Women’s History, Mary McLeod Bethune Council House NHS [hereafter NABWH].

<sup>246</sup> “Domestics United: An Exercise in Free Enterprise,” Folder 4081, Subseries 4.5, Charlotte Area Fund, in the North Carolina Fund Records #04710, SHC.

urging them to support the inclusion of household workers in minimum wage legislation.<sup>247</sup>

Wilhelmenia Adams, a domestic worker born and raised in Cherry, a predominantly black working-class neighborhood abutting Myers Park, one of Charlotte's wealthiest neighborhoods, served as Domestics United's first president. Her parents were homeowners who had only two children, Wilhelmenia and her brother, Edward, Jr. Growing up, Adams's neighbors included janitors, laundresses, domestic workers, truck drivers, cooks, as well as a handful of barbers and beauticians. Adams's father, Edward Roper, was a chauffeur and World War I veteran born in Charleston, South Carolina, and her mother, Arlene Roper, was a cook for a private family in Charlotte. Like many domestic workers in the 1940s, Adams's mother would often work in excess of 70 hours a week, leaving little time to spend with her own children or tend to family affairs.<sup>248</sup> Unfortunately for Charlotte's domestic workers, little had changed in a generation, making the work of Domestics United all the more essential to Adams and other women involved in the organization.

Despite sharing many of its goals with organized labor—such as raising wages and improving working conditions through collective action—Domestics United insisted from the beginning that it was not a union. This was likely an effort to stave off

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<sup>247</sup> "Maid Group Demands \$1.50 An Hour Pay," 20 July 1966, *Charlotte News*, Box 16, Folder 30, National Committee on Household Employment Records, NABWH.

<sup>248</sup> United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1940. T627, 4,643 rolls; (Accessed via ancestry.com 21 June 2014); North Carolina State Board of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics. North Carolina Death Certificates. Microfilm S.123. Rolls 19-242, 280, 313-682, 1040-1297. North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh, North Carolina. (Accessed via Ancestry.com, 21 June 2014).

opposition to the organization given Charlotte's anti-labor climate. Nevertheless, the Domestic United became the center of local controversy almost immediately because some members of the community believed it sufficiently resembled a union. One CAF board member, for example, went on record as opposing the organization, insisting, "You know, this is a union."<sup>249</sup> More generally, some affluent and vocal Charlotte families resented efforts to undermine their reliance on cheap household labor. According to one confidential CAF report, Domestic United rapidly "attracted the attention of women all over Charlotte."<sup>250</sup> The *Charlotte Observer* dubbed the controversy "The Domestic Rumble" after both city papers received a flood of letters regarding the situation.<sup>251</sup> One letter asserted that these were unrealistic demands for black women to be making of the white "community." "It seems the Negro thinks all he has to do is get a group together and then present the community with his demands," asserted the anonymous author, "I think it's high time that the white people organized and refused to meet all of these absurd demands...I don't know any maids who do work [warranting \$1.50 an hour]. Most are unskilled, untrained, and unwilling."<sup>252</sup> Another Charlottean accused Charlotte's "do-gooders"—the United Churchwomen—of "creating unrest" among the city's domestic workers who the author argued were already being paid as much as Charlotte families could afford.<sup>253</sup> Other critics of Domestic United pointed to the fact that many

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<sup>249</sup> "Confidential Domestic United Report," undated, Folder 4079, Subseries 4.5, Charlotte Area Fund, in the North Carolina Fund Records #04710, SHC.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Dorothy Ridings, "Domestic Rumble: Maids Want Pay Raise," *Charlotte Observer*, 20 July 1976, Box 16, Folder 30, National Committee on Household Employment Records, NABWH.

<sup>252</sup> "Maids' New Demands Are Silly," *Charlotte News*, 8 July 1966.

<sup>253</sup> "Pie-in-the-Sky for Maids," *Charlotte News*, 2 July 1966; "Who Can Pay The New Maids?" *Charlotte News*, 2 July 1966, Box 16, Folder 30, National Committee on Household Employment Records, NABWH.



employers of domestics were working-class themselves and if household workers were lobbying for free or reduced-cost childcare, perhaps it should be available to all working mothers.<sup>254</sup> Among the letters published in the paper, one was from a domestic worker responding to another letter-writer who had argued that domestic workers' labor was not worth \$1.50 an hour. "I am wondering if he as an employer of a domestic has really thought of the value of a domestic? Could he work for a mere \$5.00 a day with the current price of living? In one day, I am a cook, washer, ironer, cleaner, scrub woman, window washer, and babysitter... Can I do so many jobs in one day at less than the national minimum wage and be effective?"<sup>255</sup>

Even the director of the CAF, John Zuidema, initially expressed concern about an organization of domestic workers since many CAF board members employed domestic workers.<sup>256</sup> In response to rumors of "a maid's union," some employers voluntarily raised the wages of their domestic workers to between \$1.00 and \$1.50 an hour to undermine the allure of joining a union. Others, however, according to the CAF report, "became angry at the impudence of maids and the meddling of the United Church Women who had led the action."<sup>257</sup> As a result of the article and the general level of backlash against

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<sup>254</sup> "Maids in for a Shock," *Charlotte News*, 8 July 1966, Box 16, Folder 30, National Committee on Household Employment Records, NABWH.

<sup>255</sup> "A Domestic Comments on Her Pay," *Charlotte News*, [date cut off, but in response to 2 July letter], Box 16, Folder 30, National Committee on Household Employment Records, NABWH.

<sup>256</sup> Samuel Andrew Moseley, "Poverty Politics and Political Transformations in North Carolina: A Comparative Case Study of Three Cities" (PhD Dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1989), 164.

<sup>257</sup> "Confidential Domestics United Report," undated, Folder 4079, Subseries 4.5, Charlotte Area Fund, in the North Carolina Fund Records #04710, SHC.

Domestics United coming from white middle-class neighborhoods, the United Church Women severed ties with Domestics United.<sup>258</sup>

Though no longer affiliated with the United Church Women, Domestics United pressed on, shifting its attention to what became the organization's largest undertaking—a citywide survey of domestic workers. Funded by a \$12,000 grant from the North Carolina Fund, Domestics United conducted a survey in January 1967 to attempt to identify how many household workers were employed in the Charlotte area and to evaluate their wages, social security benefits, working conditions, and job security and satisfaction.<sup>259</sup> Kelly Alexander, who sat on the North Carolina Fund Board, was among those who expressed their strong support for the idea of the survey.<sup>260</sup> The survey team, which included fifty paid domestic workers, interviewed 1,586 women—roughly one fourth of the city's domestic labor force—in January 1967. Interviewers dispersed across the city, interviewing domestic workers who lived in Brooklyn, Third Ward, Dilworth, North Charlotte, Griertown, and the West Side.<sup>261</sup> The survey revealed a number of significant findings. Almost half of the women interviewed reported that they were the primary wage earners in the family and 75% earned less than \$35 per week, with 41% working more than 36 hours or more per week.<sup>262</sup> The majority of women also struggled

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid.

<sup>259</sup> Letter to Charles Lowe, 31 August 1966, Folder 4079, Series 4, Subseries 4.5 Charlotte Area Fund, in the North Carolina Fund Records #04710, SHC.

<sup>260</sup> "Confidential Domestics United Report," SHC.

<sup>261</sup> "Domestics United Work Program," 9 November 1967, Box 28, Folder 16, Kelly M. Alexander Papers, UNCC.

<sup>262</sup> \$35 dollars per week in 1967 would have the buying power of \$249.30 in 2014. See CPI Inflation Calculator, Bureau of Labor Statistics Website [http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm) (Accessed 14 June 2014).

to find full-time work and two-thirds of respondents reported “a desperate need for adequate, competent, low-cost day care.” Perhaps the most revealing finding of the survey was the fact that 72 percent of interviewees indicated a desire for more basic education and 77 percent reported a desire to train for another line of work altogether.<sup>263</sup>

Domestics United chose not to address directly the finding that most household workers disliked their work. Instead, they decided to focus on creating educational courses for domestic workers, hoping that an expanded skill set would lead to higher pay and, ultimately, increased job satisfaction. The first course Domestics United offered, in conjunction with the Red Cross, provided training on post-natal care for infants and mothers. Nineteen women attended the six-week course, all of whom reportedly found work after the course’s completion earning at least \$1.75 an hour. In an effort to recognize the women’s efforts as a significant educational achievement, Domestics United planned a graduation ceremony followed by a reception for those who had completed the course.<sup>264</sup> The post-natal course also spawned interest in a driver education course after it was discovered that forty percent of domestics could not drive, a skill in great demand among employers. With assistance from the Washington D.C. based National Committee on Household Employment and the CAF’s Homemaking Education

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<sup>263</sup> Originally, Domestics United was planning to also interview employers to determine what wages they could afford and what they were looking for in their employees, but according to a 1968 CAF report, the employers survey never happened. “Report on Expenditures on Domestics United Grant Through September 30, 1967,” 13 February 1968, Folder 4079, Subseries 4.5, Charlotte Area Fund, in the North Carolina Fund Records #04710, SHC. Results from domestic workers’ survey come from: “Domestics United,” 15 May 1967, Folder 4079, Subseries 4.5, Charlotte Area Fund, in the North Carolina Fund Records #04710, SHC; “Domestics United Work Program,” 9 November 1967, Box 28, Folder 16, Kelly M. Alexander Papers, UNCC.

<sup>264</sup> Wilhelmenia Adams to Lois Harper, 14 June 1968, Box 16, Folder 30, National Committee on Household Employment Records, NABWH.

staff, Domestics United also developed a six-week evening course in general household management skills. Such topics covered included: housecleaning, childcare, time management, laundering skills, infant care, and employer-employee relations.<sup>265</sup>

Throughout its lifespan, Domestics United maintained that it was not a union. One article on the organization in a CAF newsletter entitled, “Domestics United: An Exercise in Free Enterprise,” revealed the agency’s ideological framework. Nonetheless, the organization often employed the same language and arguments as unions to encourage women to join. For example, one flyer for a meeting of Domestics United read “ALONE WE CAN DO LITTLE, UNITED WE CAN DO MANY THINGS.” Another read, “In unity, there is strength. One domestic, by herself, may not be able to get higher wages, vacation pay or Social Security benefits. But a large group of domestics, working together for these and other improvements, may succeed.”<sup>266</sup> The theme of collective action ran throughout the rhetoric of the organization. At a meeting at the Brooklyn Neighborhood Services Center, one domestic worker asserted, “We want our homes and our children to be as clean as those of the white ladies that we work for...and the only way we’re going to succeed is by working together.”<sup>267</sup>

It is understandable that the Domestics United would have wanted to distance itself from unions given the hostility towards organized labor in Charlotte and the particularly vulnerable position of domestic workers, many of whom already struggled to

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<sup>265</sup> “Report to the North Carolina Fund: Accomplishments of Domestics, United, Inc.,” 22 April 1968, Folder 4079, Subseries 4.5, Charlotte Area Fund, in the North Carolina Fund Records #04710, SHC.

<sup>266</sup> DU Flyer, undated, Folder 4079, Subseries 4.5, Charlotte Area Fund, in the North Carolina Fund Records #04710, SHC.

<sup>267</sup> “Confidential Domestics United Report,” SHC.

find full-time employment. However, given that many critics of Domestic United already assumed it was a union and that the organization was trying to offer its members many of the benefits of unionization, Domestic United might have had little to lose from formally attempting to organize, considering that it lost funding and dissolved in 1968. “All the good seed money left,” explained Wilhelmenia Adams, “and we couldn’t get back the funding...we weren’t strong enough to continue.”<sup>268</sup> The hostility towards Domestic United and the organization’s efforts to distance itself from being considered a union reflects Charlotte’s “racial democracy” ideology that refused to recognize the demands of the city’s domestic workers. Specifically, it highlights the city leadership’s general resistance towards challenges to the economic status quo and the city’s dependence on cheap labor.<sup>269</sup> Finally, CAF’s “culture of poverty” ideology prevented the organization from recognizing the real work that some members of Domestic United were trying to accomplish. Not long before Domestic United lost funding, for example, one CAF report asserted that one of the primary tasks remaining for anti-poverty organizations was “convincing the poor...that an effort to change one’s chances in life is a worthwhile one.”<sup>270</sup> Too often, CAF focused on individualized (and condescending) concerns, like encouraging the poor to be more motivated, rather than structural factors keeping many of the city’s domestic workers under the poverty line.

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<sup>268</sup> Ann Valk and Leslie Brown, *Living With Jim Crow: African American Women and Memories of the Segregated South* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 155.

<sup>269</sup> After the collapse of Domestic United, Adams stayed involved in advocating for domestic workers, becoming the first vice-president of the National Committee on Household Employment. Valk and Brown, *Living With Jim Crow*, 155.

<sup>270</sup> “Confidential Domestic United Report,” SHC.

Despite the disappointments of Domestics United, the late 1960s witnessed a growing movement of domestic workers across the nation to organize.<sup>271</sup> Domestic workers in Atlanta, for example, formed the National Domestic Workers Union of America (NDWUA) in 1968. According to Premilla Nadasen, “Their agitation, along with that of dozens of other groups around the country, helped bring domestic workers under protection of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) in 1974 and reshaped the character of the job” and “transformed domestic workers’ self-perceptions and enhanced their dignity and sense of self worth.”<sup>272</sup> Similar to Domestics United in Charlotte, NDWUA worked to professionalize and standardize domestic work through organizing so that workers could develop “specialized and technical training to provide better services in the field of Household Management.”<sup>273</sup> In New York, household workers picketed City Hall with signs demanding “Take Us Out of Slavery” and successfully organized with SEIU in 1978.<sup>274</sup> In Las Vegas, similarly vulnerable and underpaid workers also demonstrated the benefits of formal unionization. Casino employees, also a predominantly black and female workforce, won important workplace victories through unionization. The casino workers—maids, porters, and kitchen staff—joined the Culinary and Hotel Workers Union, a national union with organizing experience, staff, and funding. Unlike Domestics United, the Las Vegas union had effective tools to fight

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<sup>271</sup> Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women’s Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 198; Boris and Klein, *Caring for America*, 135.

<sup>272</sup> Premilla Nadasen, “Power, Intimacy and Contestation: Dorothy Bolden and Domestic Worker Organization in Atlanta in the 1960s,” in Eileen Boris and Rhacel Salazar, eds. *Intimate Labors: Cultures, Technologies, and the Politics of Care* (Stanford University Press, 2010), 204-215.

<sup>273</sup> Nadasen, “Power, Intimacy and Contestation,” 204-215.

<sup>274</sup> Boris and Klein, *Caring For America*, 137.

management. In 1976, it waged the largest strike in Las Vegas history. Twenty-two thousand rank and file members refused to work and blocked non-union workers from breaking the line. After two weeks, the workers secured the raises they sought in every major Las Vegas hotel.<sup>275</sup> Domestics United, of course, was operating in a decidedly more anti-union climate than New York or Las Vegas; the CAF and North Carolina Fund—which were hardly among the state’s most politically conservative organizations—essentially defunded an organization of black household workers because their relatively modest demands were perceived as being too similar to those of a union.

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<sup>275</sup> Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesar’s Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), 245.

## CHAPTER THREE

### **“Time to Turn Down the Heat”: Julius Chambers, the Firefighters Assembly, and Public Worker Unrest**

On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr., planned to visit North Carolina to campaign on behalf of Reginald Hawkins, the state’s first African-American gubernatorial candidate.<sup>276</sup> Two days before King was to arrive in Charlotte, however, Hawkins received a telegram from the director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference’s (SCLC) Citizenship Education Program explaining that King was occupied with the sanitation workers’ strike in Memphis and would be postponing his visit. King’s and the SCLC’s decision to commit extensive resources to Memphis was part of a broader effort to place more emphasis on issues of economic justice.<sup>277</sup> As King told strikers in Memphis, “Now our struggle is for genuine equality, which means economic equality. For we know now, that it isn’t enough to integrate lunch counters. What does it profit a man to be able to eat at an integrated lunch counter if he doesn’t have enough money to buy a hamburger?”<sup>278</sup> King, however, would neither see the resolution of the sanitation strike, nor would he stump for Hawkins in North Carolina. On the day that he was originally scheduled to arrive in Charlotte, King was assassinated while he was standing on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel. The massive riots and demonstrations

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<sup>276</sup> Reginald Hawkins, interviewed by Melinda H. Desmarais, 11 June 2001, interview #OHHA0077, New South Voices Collection, UNCC.

<sup>277</sup> This was more of a programmatic shift than an ideological one; King’s ideas about economic justice and political economy had been formative in his intellectual development and political activism. See Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

<sup>278</sup> Martin Luther King, “Address to Striking Sanitation Workers in Memphis,” 18 March 1968 in *All Labor Has Dignity*, ed. Michael K. Honey (New York: Beacon Press, 2011).



following King's murder fixed the eyes of the nation on Memphis. With escalating pressure from civil rights, labor, and religious leaders, as well as from President Lyndon Johnson and Tennessee Governor Buford Ellington, Memphis's mayor and city council finally agreed to settle the strike. On April 16, 1968, AFSCME announced an agreement with the city of Memphis that raised sanitation workers' wages and allowed them to join the union's Local 1733. After more than two months of protest, nearly 1,300 of the city's poorest-paid African-American workers had secured an unprecedented victory in the fight for dignity on the job.<sup>279</sup>

For public employees in Charlotte, the events in Memphis inspired a new sense of urgency to organize. The city's sanitation workers declared five strikes between 1968 and 1970, and its firefighters hired one of the state's preeminent civil rights attorneys, Julius Chambers, to challenge North Carolina's 1959 ban on public employee collective bargaining and police and firefighter unionization. The events in Memphis had been instructive—they demonstrated to Charlotte's public workers that labor strikes, when accompanied by mass mobilization and media exposure, could facilitate better wages and improved working conditions. Charlotte's civic leaders gleaned a different lesson: do not make the evening news. Unlike Memphis, Charlotte did not witness overt acts of violence and injustice against strikers. Charlotte's mayor did not publicly flout worker demands, and the city's police officers did not assault marching demonstrators with tear gas.

National Guard tanks and soldiers wielding bayonets were nowhere to be found. In fact,

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<sup>279</sup> For more on the Memphis strike, see Michael K. Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2007); Laurie Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); and Joan Turner Beifus, *At the River I Stand: Memphis, the 1968 Strike, and Martin Luther King* (Memphis: St. Luke's Press, 1990).

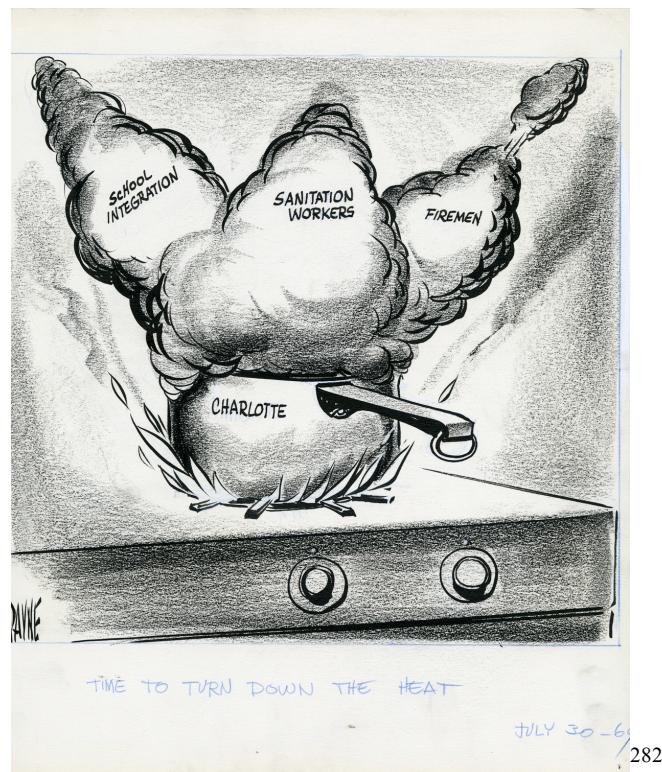
Charlotte's public employee strikes and activism barely made the national news, and this, of course, was no accident. Charlotte's leadership had successfully avoided the public clashes with civil rights activists that consumed cities like Birmingham, Little Rock, and now Memphis, and they were loath to ruin a good thing now.

This chapter draws upon William Chafe's "Progressive Mystique" framework-- and those works that have built upon Chafe's work, such as Matthew Lassiter's concept of the "Sunbelt Synthesis," as discussed in chapter two--to explain business and civic leaders' responses to public worker activism in civil rights era Charlotte, the emerging economic center of the least unionized state in the nation.<sup>280</sup> In the same way that the Greensboro establishment cast black activists as extremists, as was the focus of Chafe's study, Charlotte's business and political leadership portrayed labor organizers and workers interested in unionizing as dangerous fanatics, despite their small numbers and relatively modest demands. Business leaders would proclaim that wages were fine and workers were content, that unions were radical and Charlotte workers did not need them, despite workers' persistent assertions to the contrary. Expanding on the work of Chafe, Lassiter, and other scholars who have argued that North Carolina's politics of moderation stymied civil rights activism in the state, I argue that the same politics of moderation became an indispensable tool for undermining and neutralizing organized labor and worker protest in Charlotte. Through the lens of public employee unions and the campaigns waged against them, this chapter traces the evolution of a particular brand of anti-union politics that would become instrumental in American politics in the decades that followed.

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<sup>280</sup> Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*; Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*.

Although battles over school desegregation dominate most accounts of Charlotte during the late 1960s and early 1970s, conflicts over the rights of public workers to organize and bargain collectively were equally important during this period, though they have received less scholarly attention.<sup>281</sup> As the *Charlotte Observer* editorial cartoon below illustrates, however, school desegregation, firefighter unionization, and sanitation strikes took equal billing on the local political stage and each represented potential conflagrations the city wanted to resolve and keep out of the national spotlight.



<sup>281</sup> Scholarly discussions of organized labor in Charlotte during this period are primarily confined to a few (albeit excellent and detailed) footnotes in Smith, *Boom for Whom?* and an article by Roger Brown and Terrel Rhodes which focuses primarily on public managers' attitudes towards the ban on public sector bargaining and examining the strategies public workers and city managers have pursued to resolve conflicts in more recent years. Roger G. Brown and Terrel L. Rhodes, "Public Employee Bargaining Under Prohibitive Legislation: Some Unanticipated Consequences," *Journal of Collective Negotiations in the Public Sector*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1991), 23-90.

<sup>282</sup> Eugene Payne, "Time to Turn Down the Heat," *Charlotte Observer*, 30 July 1969, Eugene Payne Cartoon Collection, J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections, UNCC.

This chapter traverses the political landscape of public employee activism in Charlotte in the aftermath of both North Carolina's 1959 ban on police and firefighter unions and public sector collective bargaining as well as an emergent civil rights movement in Charlotte and the nation. Specifically, this chapter examines the Charlotte firefighters' partially successful 1969 challenge to the law in federal district court and the decision of an all-white fire department to hire the state's preeminent civil rights attorney, Julius Chambers, to litigate the case. In the process, it uncovers a history of white working-class political activism in the postwar urban South not captured by narratives of Massive Resistance and the Silent Majority.<sup>283</sup>

The chapter also looks at a series of strikes wages by the city's poorly paid and predominantly black sanitation workers. It shows how city leaders' embrace of racial moderation both enabled initial gains for sanitation workers—especially when they feared strikers might resort to violence, potentially marring the city's image in the eyes of the nation—while, at the same time, stymying substantive challenges to the city's broader economic order. Both the history of the Charlotte sanitation strikes and the events surrounding the *Atkins* case are significant because they contribute to scholarly understandings of public worker unionism in the civil rights era South, a subfield that still

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<sup>283</sup> On Massive Resistance, see Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South During the 1950s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969); Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Vintage, 1975); Neil R. McMillen, *The White Citizens' Council: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction, 1954-64* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971). For a longer view of white resistance to racial change beginning in the New Deal—a sort of “long segregationist movement” corollary to the “long civil rights movement” literature—see Jason Ward, *Defending White Democracy: The Making of a Segregationist Movement and the Remaking of Racial Politics, 1936-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011). On southern white suburban politics in this period, see Lassiter, *The Silent Majority* and Kevin Kruse, *White Flight*.

remains remarkably thin.<sup>284</sup>

### **The Changing Landscape of Public Employee Unionism in State and Nation**

The 1960s proved to be a transformative decade for the nation's public workers. By 1962, one-eighth of the American workforce labored in the public sector, and between 1955 and the early 1970s, public employee union rosters grew from about 400,000 to over 4 million members, helping AFSCME become one of the AFL-CIO's largest affiliates.<sup>285</sup> In addition to their growing numbers, public sector unions also won a number of important legal victories during this period. In 1959, Wisconsin became the first state to pass legislation granting public workers organizational and bargaining rights—leading twenty-two states to follow suit over the next decade.<sup>286</sup>

Just a few years after Wisconsin, on January 17, 1962, President John F. Kennedy issued Executive Order 10988, recognizing the right of all federal employees to join unions and bargain collectively. This represented a watershed moment for public workers, who had been excluded from the 1935 Wagner Act, and led AFL-CIO president George Meany to proclaim the executive order “a Wagner Act for public employees.”<sup>287</sup> A number of factors influenced Kennedy's decision to pass Executive Order 10988.

Since the 1919 Boston police strike, policymakers—including, President Franklin D.

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<sup>284</sup> On sanitation workers in Atlanta, see Joseph McCartin, “‘Fire the Hell Out of Them’: Sanitation Workers’ Struggles and the Normalization of the Striker Replacement Strategy in the 1970s” *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 2:3 (Fall 2005): 67-92; on sanitation workers in Memphis, see Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road*; on the Charleston hospital workers’ strike of 1969, see Leon Fink, “Union Power, Soul Power: The Story of 1199B and Labor’s Search for A Southern Strategy” *Southern Changes* (1983) vol. 5, No. 2.

<sup>285</sup> Slater, *Public Workers*, 162.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 158-192.

<sup>287</sup> As quoted in Joseph C. Goulden, *Meany* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 327.

Roosevelt—expressed fear of and opposition to public employee unionization.<sup>288</sup> By the 1950s, however, developments in the private sector had decreased fears of a militant and strike-prone public workforce: the passage of the 1947 Taft-Hartley Act, which weakened labor radicalism and provided more protections to business; the CIO’s expulsion of communist-influenced unions and the creation of a more conservative AFL-CIO; the increasingly routinized nature of private sector labor relations; and growing support for government employee unionization among public administrators.<sup>289</sup> In addition, Kennedy was also beholden to the AFL-CIO for its voter mobilization efforts, which had been decisive in his election. To begin to repay his political debts to organized labor, Kennedy appointed prominent labor lawyer and general counsel for the United Steelworkers of America, Arthur Goldberg, as Secretary of Labor and issued Executive Order 10988.<sup>290</sup> According to Joseph McCartin, the decision to issue an executive order rather than go through legislative channels was a calculated one: “Kennedy preempted the legislative process and issued an executive order intended to placate his labor allies while ensuring that the advent of collective bargaining in the federal service would alter existing labor

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<sup>288</sup>In a letter to the President of the National Federation of Federal Employees, President Roosevelt maintained, “Since their own services have to do with the functioning of the Government, a strike of public employees manifests nothing less than an intent on their part to prevent or obstruct the operations of government until their demands are satisfied. Such action, looking toward the paralysis of government by those who have sworn to support it, is unthinkable and intolerable.” Franklin D. Roosevelt: “Letter on the Resolution of Federation of Federal Employees Against Strikes in Federal Service,” 16 August 1937, online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/sw/?pid=15445> (Accessed 10 February 2014).

<sup>289</sup> Joseph A. McCartin, *Collision Course: Ronald Reagan, The Air Traffic Controllers, and the Strike that Changed America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 31-32. Also see Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 98-140; and Robert H. Zieger and Gilbert J. Gall, *American Workers, American Unions* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 182-213.

<sup>290</sup> For a useful overview of the history behind the passage of Executive Order 10988 and the failed 1948 Rhodes-Johnson bill, which would have offered more expansive organizing rights to public sector workers, see McCartin, *Collision Course*, 33, 36-43.

relations as little as possible.”<sup>291</sup> President Kennedy supported public employee union rights because the labor movement no longer threatened his political success, but instead assured it.

In the years that followed, public workers staged an unprecedented number of strikes. In 1966, teachers declared thirty-three walkouts across the nation—more work stoppages in one year than in the previous ten combined. The following year, the United States witnessed a record 250 public employee strikes, a fourfold increase over the previous one-year record.<sup>292</sup> A few strikes, such as the New York and Memphis sanitation strikes of 1968, the Charleston hospital workers strike in 1969, and the wildcat postal workers strike in 1970—carried out by 180,000 postal workers nationwide, two-thirds of whom were black—were particularly effective in capturing national attention and throwing light on the difficult, dangerous, and often demeaning work carried out by many of the nation’s public employees.<sup>293</sup> As Joseph McCartin has argued, “sanitation workers were in many ways the militant vanguard of the public sector union movement ... they symbolized the liberating potential of public sector unionism, and their job actions helped inspire many other public sector workers to strike.”<sup>294</sup> In the state of North Carolina, sanitation workers followed the national trend by leading public sector unionism. Municipal employees declared 26 strikes, slowdowns, and work stoppages between January 1, 1968, and July 1, 1970 and of the 10,443 days lost due to labor

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<sup>291</sup> McCartin, *Collision Course*, 35.

<sup>292</sup> Zieger and Gall, *American Workers, American Unions*, 165.

<sup>293</sup> Joseph McCartin adds that public employees also developed creative alternatives to striking: “In 1966, the police officers of Pontiac, Michigan conceived of the mass sickout as protest against inadequate wages. They called their tactic ‘the blue flu.’ It was a bug that spread quickly to other public sector workers in the 1960s. Fire fighters called it ‘red rash;’ teachers referred to it as ‘chalk dust fever.’” McCartin, “Bringing the State's Workers In,” 73-94.

<sup>294</sup> McCartin, “Fire the Hell Out of Them,” 72.

disruptions, 82 percent (or 8,851) were caused by the state's 2,251 sanitation workers.<sup>295</sup> When placed at the fore rather than at the periphery of the post-1945 labor movement, public unions force the narrative to become more rather than less militant.<sup>296</sup>

Within the national context of an increasingly militant public sector in the late 1960s, Charlotte's firefighters renewed efforts to improve their working conditions after nearly a decade of inactivity. Since the 1959 state ban, firefighters had grown increasingly frustrated with stagnant wages, dangerously long hours, outdated equipment, and the absence of any formal organization through which to express grievances. According to firefighter Jesse Atkins, the department had been a "very proud organization for years, but all the pride had gone out of it" after the state legislature passed the 1959 law. "People couldn't belong, you didn't know who to talk to, you didn't know what to say, you didn't have any representation, period," explained Atkins. Promotions and job assignments were also determined "haphazardly," often based on personal connections rather than merit.<sup>297</sup> Atkins described constant discord within the department, "guys complaining, 'I don't trust him, he don't trust me,' [and] your lives depend on each other."<sup>298</sup> For Jesse Atkins and other firefighters, the union provided a hope to overcome the problems of a job that paid barely enough to survive, much less one that compensated workers for risking their lives on the job.

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<sup>295</sup> Governor's Study Commission on Employer-Employee Relations, December 1970 Report (Raleigh: State of North Carolina Printing Office, 1970).

<sup>296</sup> Joseph McCartin emphasizes this point in "Bringing the State's Workers In," and *Collision Course*.

<sup>297</sup> Jesse Atkins, interviewed by Kieran Taylor, 19 May 2008. Interview U-0370. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), SHC.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*



In addition to grievances over wages and working conditions, the men also resented the city's unofficial policy of coercing firefighters and other public employees to donate their "fair share" to the United Appeal, an organization that shared many members with the Chamber of Commerce.<sup>299</sup> Mayor Brookshire was likely influential in this policy as he chaired the United Appeal in 1956 and spoke proudly of his role in helping the organization raise its first million dollars.<sup>300</sup> The firefighters felt that this was essentially a tax on their already low paychecks, and one from which they saw no benefits. More importantly, they argued that the city was essentially creating a dues check-off for United Appeal, while it refused one for the union.<sup>301</sup> Pressure to give came directly from the fire chiefs. "Say you were making some money at that time," explained firefighter and former Assembly member Bob Summey, "and you were told you owed 3 dollars and you didn't want to give 3 dollars a week, you wanted to mark that out and put a dollar. That card would come back to you from the chief saying 'Sign it.' And that's just the way that was."<sup>302</sup> The fire department leadership required the "fair share," whether or not a fighter could afford the contribution or not.

In response to such grievances, city firefighters formed the Firefighters Assembly

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<sup>299</sup> According to Charlotte Observer editor C.A. McKnight, "You were nothing [in Charlotte] until you headed the United Way or build a Red Cross building... There was no prestige in Charlotte until you worked for the community." Gaillard, *The Dream Long Deferred*, 23. The United Appeal's fundraising efforts in Charlotte, which essentially amounted to a payroll deduction, were common throughout the United States in the post-World War II years, when the charity relied almost exclusively on workplace fundraising, especially through unions. For more on the history of the United Appeal's workplace fundraising efforts, see sociologist Emily Barman's *Contesting Communities: The Transformation of Workplace Charity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 32-40.

<sup>300</sup> Stanford R. Brookshire, interviewed by Edward Perzel, 16 February 1973, WSOC-TV Oral History Project, UNCC.

<sup>301</sup> Jim Black, interviewed by author, 26 June 2014; Lee Abernethy, interviewed by author, 27 June 2014.

<sup>302</sup> Jim Black interview; Bob Summey interview.

in March 1967 under the leadership of Jesse Atkins.<sup>303</sup> Like many white working class residents of the Carolina Piedmont, Atkins was born into a family of millworkers who had been involved in textile strikes through the 1930s and 1940s, and these experiences informed his views toward unions.<sup>304</sup> Not long after he was born, in 1928, Atkins and his mother moved to Charlotte from nearby Pineville. Once there, his mother secured a job at Highland Park Mill Number Three, where his uncle was a supervisor, and moved into a mill-owned house. Atkins's mother soon remarried, and one of his earliest childhood memories was sitting on the picket line with his stepfather, also a millworker. He described the Christmas of 1938 being "one of the hardest Christmases in the world. We knew we were going to have to get out of the mill house by January one, because Papa [his stepfather] got fired for union participation."<sup>305</sup>

In the years that followed his family's eviction from the mill-owned home, both work and housing remained precarious for the Atkins family. Making things worse, Atkins's stepfather had also developed a steady gambling habit and, unbeknownst to his family, had begun wagering the family home in his regular games. His enthusiasm for

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<sup>303</sup> Jesse Atkins, interviewed by Kieran Taylor, 19 May 2008. Interview U-0370, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), SHC.

<sup>304</sup> In addition to coming from mill families, many firefighters came from families with numerous relatives who worked for the fire department, the police department, or both. Jim Black, for example, had a father who was a police officer and two brothers in the fire department. Charlotte instituted a civil service law against multiple family members working in the same occupation in the mid-1950s, but reversed it sometime in the mid-1960s. Bob Summey, a firefighter and the brother-in-law of Don Black, recalled being told by his father, who was a police officer and former millworker who had been in a union, "Get on the fire department, police department, or post office. If you keep your nose clean, there will be a paycheck every Friday." Many of the city's firefighters grew up near one another and for many, Charlotte's technical high school and Central High became the gateway to working for the city. "You had a choice of either going back into the mill," explains Bob Summey, or you could go work for "the fire department, police department, and the post office. And if you were an excellent baseball player, you could get hired to the police or fire department if you didn't even hardly know your own name!" Jim Black interview; Bob Summey, interview with author, 26 June 2014.

<sup>305</sup> Jesse Atkins interview.

gambling eventually outmatched his luck, however, and Atkins's family found themselves homeless for a second time. Again, Atkins and his mother moved, but this time leaving his stepfather behind. By sixteen, Atkins, too, had begun working in the mill, putting in a seven-hour shift after school cleaning textile harnesses, which he described as a "very dirty, very nasty job," but one that provided he and his with mother much-needed income after his stepfather lost their second home in that fateful poker game. Atkins soon dropped out of school to work full-time in the mill to provide for his mother, who had developed severe rheumatoid arthritis from decades of textile work.<sup>306</sup>

In 1951, Atkins left the mill to work as a firefighter in Charlotte, which he described as a childhood dream. Because of their low pay, many city firefighters took second jobs to make ends meet.<sup>307</sup> Atkins held a series of part-time jobs working as an announcer and host for local radio station WIST.<sup>308</sup> At the time of the Firefighters' Assembly's creation, Atkins was hosting two shows: *Charlotte Speaks* and *Comment*, which he described as an "interview talk show" on local issues. Atkins's experience in radio proved an asset in both persuading his fellow firefighters to support the Assembly and in serving as one of the Assembly's primary spokesmen.<sup>309</sup>

From its founding, the Assembly's leadership insisted that the organization was

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<sup>306</sup> Jesse Atkins interview.

<sup>307</sup> Atkins estimated that 60-70% of men had to work two jobs. He had worked as many as three jobs "because we don't make enough to feed our families," Atkins told the lawyers during the *Atkins* deposition. Jesse Atkins deposition, *Atkins v. City of Charlotte*, p. 37.

<sup>308</sup> This being the same station that the FCC censured in 1966 for announcing that "an amoeba is loose somewhere on the outskirts of the city!" causing mass hysteria across the city as locals jammed police and health department phone lines. See Mark Washburn, "The Day an Amoeba Attacked Charlotte," *Charlotte Observer*, 1 November 2013.

<sup>309</sup> Jesse Atkins interview.

not a union.<sup>310</sup> Nevertheless, Charlotte's political and business leadership opposed any organization of firefighters, as they had nine years prior (in events that precipitated the state ban). The Chamber of Commerce urged city council to "use whatever means necessary" to disband the Assembly, claiming it "disturbed the community" and posed "a threat to its continued good order and effective operation."<sup>311</sup> City Manager William Veeder seconded the Chamber's call, declaring that the organization sufficiently resembled a union enough to violate both the 1959 state law and a 1962 city ordinance prohibiting firefighter unions. He issued a report recommending that City Council immediately order the Assembly to disband.<sup>312</sup> The city's Fire Chief, Walter Black, also opposed the union and, according to numerous firefighters, would arbitrarily transfer men from one firehouse to another in retaliation for union involvement.<sup>313</sup> Such moves created substantial resentment among the men. Bob Middleton, one of the founding members of the Assembly and someone who Jesse Atkins described as having "a lot of guts," believed that if such treatment continued, "then the job wasn't worth having. I'd go find a job somewhere else. I wasn't going to live under the tyrannical rule of Walter Black."<sup>314</sup> Middleton and other firemen were tired of a city and department that ignored and belittled their needs.

The city's papers, too, were less than enthusiastic about firefighters unionizing and took positions that could best be described as cautious ambivalence. "The public

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<sup>310</sup> Jerry Adams, "They Plan New People's Assembly," *Charlotte Observer*, 11 July 1967.

<sup>311</sup> Emery Wister, "Chamber Attacks," *Charlotte News*, 13 April 1967.

<sup>312</sup> "Firemen's Case: Two Basic Questions Need Answers," *Charlotte Observer*, 11 July 1967.

<sup>313</sup> Jesse Atkins, for example, was moved twice after he became involved with the Assembly. These transfers would become an important piece of evidence in the case Chambers brought against the city. Atkins interview.

<sup>314</sup> Bob Middleton, interview with author, 27 June 2014; Atkins interview.

interest,” maintained the *Observer*, “does not lie in firing Charlotte firemen who feel strongly enough about the Assembly to risk their jobs,” nor “does it lie . . . in inviting a full-fledged labor union into the department and conceding the right to strike to employees who protect property and human life.” Instead, the paper made two suggestions: (1) firefighters should challenge the untested state law in court; and (2) City Council should review its “non-recognition” policy, which “so far has caused the council to allow major discord in the fire department to build up for too long. The least these men deserve, even now, is a fair and public hearing before an open-minded council.”<sup>315</sup> While the *Observer* was not necessarily supportive of unions, it thought that the firefighters were getting a raw deal and should challenge the restrictions being placed on them.

Whether or not it was intentional, the Assembly heeded the *Observer*’s suggestion. On July 10, 1967, the Assembly convened a meeting at the Firemen’s Hall to formulate a response to Veeder’s report. With more than 200 firefighters and their wives in attendance, the Assembly voted to challenge North Carolina’s law banning firefighters from unionizing and prohibiting all public employee unions from bargaining collectively.<sup>316</sup> With unanimous approval from its membership, the Assembly’s

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<sup>315</sup> The *Observer* also framed the debate within the language of taxpayer rights, saying that [the legality of the Assembly] “raises fundamental questions for Charlotte firemen and for city taxpayers, who are their employers.” “Firemen’s Case: Two Basic Questions Need Answers,” *Charlotte Observer*, 11 July 1967. The use of “taxpayer rights” language foreshadowed a fundamental shift in debates over public sector workers that dominated the second half of the 1970s (and beyond). See McCartin, “Fire the Hell Out of Them,” 82.

<sup>316</sup> At the time the case was filed, the department consisted of approximately 438 employees—the Chief, two assistant chiefs, 14 deputy chiefs, 60 fire captains, and 56 fire lieutenants, with the remainder being fire fighters, inspectors, fire alarm personnel and office personnel. The plaintiffs consist of deputy chiefs, captains, lieutenants and fire fighters and range in service with the department from two to 40 years. *Atkins v. City of Charlotte*, 296 F. Supp. 1068 (W.D.N.C., 1969).

leadership resolved to take the state law “to the U.S. Supreme Court if necessary.”<sup>317</sup>

According to one report of the meeting, “the crowd ... let out a roar” when Assembly secretary Robert L. McCall charged that the state law against unionization violated the firefighters’ “civil rights.”<sup>318</sup>

That the Assembly’s leadership would make claims using the language of “civil rights” to an all-white audience of firefighters and their wives is significant. Ten years before, when the firefighters lost their right to unionize, they did not frame—and would not have framed—the state’s actions in terms of an infringement on their “civil rights.” Such vocabulary would have held little meaning for a group of white working-class firefighters articulating their grievances against the city. But in the wake of a well-mobilized and well-publicized civil rights movement that had captured the attention of the nation, the Assembly now had a new framework to understand and protest the ban on firefighter unions. Conscious of Charlotte’s moderate stance on civil rights in comparison with other southern cities and aware that reporters were attending the Assembly meeting, the Assembly leadership’s choice of the term “civil rights” was likely deliberate, and it offers an interesting example of white workers taking cues from black civil rights activists. Jesse Atkins, in fact, confirmed being inspired by black activism: “In the

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<sup>317</sup> Jerry Adams, “They Plan New People’s Assembly,” *Charlotte Observer*, 11 July 1967.

<sup>318</sup> Even though he had only recently joined the fire department, Jim Black described joining the Assembly out of frustration over the city ordinance against the firefighter union, which prohibited more than three firefighters from congregating to discuss fire department affairs. Jim’s older brother, Don Black, was the one who initially told him about the ordinance’s restrictions, to which Jim recalls telling his brother, incredulously, “So, what you’re telling is that if you and I and my older brother Eddie, have dinner at momma’s house on Sunday, we can’t discuss the fire department.” When Don responded in the affirmative, Jim told his brother, “Well, I’ll be at that meeting!” Jim Black, interview with author, 26 June 2014. Civil rights quote comes from Jerry Adams, “They Plan New People’s Assembly,” *Charlotte Observer*, 11 July 1967.

sixties,” he said, “there was big movements, Martin Luther King and all these other people. I thought to myself, ‘They can’t get me for free assembly.’”<sup>319</sup> Historians have focused substantial attention on organized labor’s influence on black political activism, and, conversely, on negative white responses to the civil rights movement, but the Assembly’s actions offer an interesting counterexample of an unlikely group of white working-class southerners who emulated the language of the black freedom struggle in the hopes of winning political ground.

As the city’s firefighters were building their case, Charlotte’s sanitation workers staged a three-day strike in August 1968. Like the city’s firefighters and all other municipal employees, sanitation workers were prohibited from bargaining with their employer, the city of Charlotte. Fed up with long hours, dangerous working conditions, low wages, inadequate equipment, and no organization through which to express their grievances or seek remediation, the city’s sanitation workers resorted to the only option they had left: not working. After two days of uncollected garbage piling up on sidewalks and overflowing into streets across town, city officials, pressured by the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), struck a deal with its workers and offered a fifteen-percent wage increase—greater than the ten percent the city initially proposed—to settle the strike. City leaders were eager to avoid escalating the situation or drawing national attention, as they had watched unrest unfold in Memphis. With AFSCME’s help, the strikers negotiated a \$588 raise for the coming year.<sup>320</sup> Although the strike ended, many of the sanitation workers’ grievances remained and, as a

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<sup>319</sup> Jesse Atkins interview.

<sup>320</sup> Tom W. Seslar, “Mayor Warns Against Unions,” *Charlotte News*, 25 September 1968.

result, AFSCME saw the moment as a prime opportunity to organize a large segment of the city's still lowest-paid public employees.

AFSCME organizer Jim Pierce spearheaded these efforts and, more generally, was instrumental in forging alliances between civil rights activists and labor organizers, though little has been written on him. Like Jesse Atkins, Pierce was born into what he described as a "union family" on the Osage Reservation (his father was white and his mother was half-Cherokee) in Oklahoma that Pierce described as heavily unionized. His father, a member of a local carpenters' union, was involved in interracial organizing of sawmill workers and as a child, Pierce frequented AFL meetings with him, or what he called "anti-CIO meetings." Preachers used tent revivals to lambast the CIO, explained Pierce, "and they had some of the most horrible movies and films that you have ever seen. Industry was using the preachers to defeat the CIO, and the AF of L was glad to see it happen, I guess."<sup>321</sup>

Pierce's experience during World War II, however, changed his perception of industrial organizing and the CIO. Pierce explained, "While I was in the Navy ... the miners went on strike, and they were CIO and everybody was raising hell about the miners striking during the war, and I thought they were pretty gutsy people ... I think that brief exposure to John L. Lewis ... made me feel pretty good about the CIO."<sup>322</sup> After the war, Pierce used the technical training he had received in the military to install office equipment for Western Electric in Fort Worth, Texas. Since he "had always been taught that any union is better than no union," Pierce joined a small company union there, which

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<sup>321</sup> Jim Pierce. Interviewed by Bill Finger. July 16, 1974. Interview E-0012-3. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007). SHC.

<sup>322</sup> Jim Pierce interview.



staged a wildcat strike in 1947 not long after he arrived. In the years that followed, Pierce became more involved in labor organizing, working in various positions across the South, first as a field organizer and eventually as the Southeast Regional Director of the International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE) and the southern coordinator for the Industrial Union Department (IUD) of the CIO.<sup>323</sup>

As Southern Coordinator of the IUD, Pierce was appointed to lead the Carolinas Coordinated Organizing Drive, the Textile Industrial Drive and the Wood and Furniture and Related Industries Drive. Of his position, Pierce said, “I accepted the appointment with a great deal of enthusiasm and a very humble heart.”<sup>324</sup> During his time with the IUD, Pierce was asked to address the North Carolina AFL-CIO Annual Convention on a number of occasions. At the 1964 Convention, he discussed the dire conditions under which too many of North Carolina’s citizens still labored and his hopes that organizing these workers might prove the first step in improving their predicament. Pierce condemned the fact that North Carolina’s workers received, on average, 75 cents per hour less than elsewhere in the nation, yet the fruits of their labor were sold on the national market for the same price as goods produced in high-wage regions. “What would 75 cents an hour do to North Carolina if we were to come up to the average wage in the United States?” Pierce enjoined the audience. To this, his answer was unequivocal:

If we got that \$1500 in the workers’ pay checks, it would mean that every worker in North Carolina could pay off a mortgage on a \$20,000 home.

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<sup>323</sup> IUD was established after the merger of the AFL and CIO in 1955 to ensure cooperation within international unions and to overcome the factionalism that had plagued unions before the merger. See Timothy J. Minchin, *Don’t Sleep with Stevens! The JP Stevens Campaign and the Struggle to Organize the South, 1963-80* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2005), 15-16.

<sup>324</sup> Jim Pierce, *Proceedings of the 1964 North Carolina AFL-CIO Annual Convention* (Raleigh: Allied Printing, 1964), 85.

Every worker in North Carolina. If all the workers in North Carolina were getting the average wage, it would mean that every child in North Carolina could be assured of a college education; and I call thieves who come to North Carolina and build a factory and use the community—the businessmen, the ministers, the mayor, the sheriff, the governor—to exploit workers; I call them thieves. I don't think they can be called anything else.

While he was with the IUD, Pierce focused a disproportionate amount of energy on a National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) hearing against textile manufacturer JP Stevens. “It just was a legal battle,” Pierce recalled years later, “and I needed ... direct action. I tried in many cases to say, you know, screw the NLRB, let's go out and organize like they did in the thirties. Let's organize and strike and come hell or high water we will either win or lose, but the legal thing was just tearing us apart and always will. It just is not the way to organize unions.”<sup>325</sup> Pierce felt that that IUD was not doing enough for the workers of North Carolina and before long, he left.

Pierce moved to AFSCME in 1968, which he saw as a more militant left-leaning organization—something he was looking for as a self-described “devout socialist.” In contrast to his work with the IUD, explained Pierce, “[AFSCME] offered the opportunity to get back into the real struggle not only for unions, but for Civil Rights. It looked like a union that was really willing to fight and I needed a fight pretty bad then.”<sup>326</sup> If it was a fight that Pierce needed, the city of Charlotte would prove to be a formidable, if slippery, opponent. In his work organizing, Pierce often had to contend with workers who worried they might be fired for joining a union. However, as Pierce told sanitation workers after the 1968 strike, without a union, their recent gains “were just pieces of paper to be torn

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<sup>325</sup> Jim Pierce interview.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid.

up.”<sup>327</sup> Pierce, along with Joseph (Joe) Ames, the secretary-treasurer of AFSCME, and William (Bill) Lucy, assistant to AFSCME’s president and the highest ranking African American in the organization,<sup>328</sup> tried to capitalize on their role in the Memphis sanitation strike to enroll more of the city’s workers in the union and, hopefully, expand the presence of organized labor in Charlotte.

On a warm evening in September 1968, Pierce, Ames, and Lucy—all of whom had also been involved in the Memphis strike—stood in the bed of a pickup truck to address roughly 100 Charlotte sanitation workers in the Motor Transport Department’s Siegle Avenue parking lot. Exhausted from a long day’s work, the men nonetheless stayed after hours to hear the organizers’ appeals. “Who wants you to join a union?” asked Pierce. “Your wife wants you to have a union so you can bring home better wages. Your kids want you to have a union so they can have better food and clothing.” Pierce reminded the workers of those in Charlotte who did not want public employees to unionize, which included mayor Stanford Brookshire, city manager William Veeder, and the Motor Vehicle Transport Department’s superintendent, E. G. (Buck) Davis, whom Lucy called the “master foot-on-the-neck-keeper.” The connotations imbedded in Lucy’s phrase tied the unequal power dynamic between Charlotte’s predominantly black sanitation workforce and white political leadership to the long history of whites’ violent

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<sup>327</sup> “Charlotte Sanitation Workers Vote to Form an AFL-CIO Local,” *Charlotte Observer*, 25 September 1968.

<sup>328</sup> Bill Lucy, along with a few other community leaders in Memphis, devised the “I am a Man” slogan that defined the city’s sanitation workers strike. Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality*, 282. Lucy would go on to become the president of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and would succeed Joe Ames as Secretary-Treasurer of AFSCME in 1972. For more on Bill Lucy, See Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road*, 106-121.

suppression of African Americans in the Jim Crow South.<sup>329</sup>

In addition to framing the city's opposition to unions as both an assault to sanitation workers' masculinity—as had been a central issue in Memphis—and their race, the AFSCME leaders also connected the plight of Charlotte garbage men to that of workers throughout the nation.<sup>330</sup> “The city is stronger than any one of you,” Ames told workers, “but they're not stronger than all of you ... not stronger than an organization you can put together that has the backing of more than 400,000 other public employees throughout the country.” “This union spent over \$300,000 backing up the people in Memphis,” Pierce added, “Just get ready and we'll be with you.” Pierce, Lucy, and Ames impressed upon workers the particular effectiveness of garbage strikes, which inconvenienced even the city's most affluent residents. “When the garbage cans get full—especially out in Myers Park [one of Charlotte's wealthiest neighborhoods]—the mayor gets a lot of calls, and he can find money awfully fast when he wants to. The longer you strike, the easier it makes it for the old big boy to open his bank account.” By the end of the meeting, the AFSCME organizers had persuaded all the men in attendance to vote in favor of union representation.<sup>331</sup> In all, about 100 city sanitation workers voted for the union and 283 men (more than half of the city's sanitation workforce) applied for membership to AFSCME's newly formed Local 1127.<sup>332</sup> Hoping to build on the recent Memphis sanitation strikes, AFSCME soon launched a unionization drive in 1969 in

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<sup>329</sup> Tom Seslar, “Union Leaders Sock It To City,” *Charlotte News*, 25 September 1968.

<sup>330</sup> On gendered rhetoric and the civil rights movement, see Steve Estes, *I Am A Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

<sup>331</sup> Seslar, “Union Leaders Sock It To City.”

<sup>332</sup> Charlotte Sanitation Workers Vote To Form An AFL-CIO Union Local,” *Charlotte Observer*, 25 September 1968.

eleven southern states under Pierce's direction.<sup>333</sup>

Pierce and his fellow organizers envisioned new political possibilities for this growing Sunbelt metropolis. "I don't think there's any question that the advent of a strong union like this in the South will force more recognition of the Negro and the poor white," maintained Pierce. "This is the group that the power structure has refused to deal with, but we're not a traditional union."<sup>334</sup> Pierce hoped the union might begin to bridge racial divides in the city to focus on economic issues both black and white working-class Charlotteans faced. Pierce was also optimistic that Charlotte municipal workers would benefit from the national surge in public worker organizing, stating, "If there is a group of forgotten people, it's those that work for the public."<sup>335</sup>

Despite Pierce's optimism, city leaders publicly opposed the efforts of sanitation workers to organize, as they had done with the city's firefighters. Mayor Brookshire also affirmed his objection to unionized public workers, arguing that city employees had nothing to gain by joining a union and only take-home pay to lose. However, union dues would amount to less than ten percent (\$52 annually) of the raises sanitation workers had recently won (\$588), due in no small part to union backing.<sup>336</sup> Brookshire moved from attempting to persuade workers to veiled threats just a few weeks later when he warned, "This is a free country, and everybody who works for the City of Charlotte has options and the city itself has options in the matter of offering employment." In barely coded

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<sup>333</sup> As a part of this drive, Pierce was also involved in organizing workers at Charlotte's Memorial Hospital. Bob Rosenblatt, "100 of Hospitals' Workers Vote To Pay Union Dues," *Charlotte Observer*, 31 January 1969; Marion Ellis, "11-State Unionization Drive Begins For Public Employes," *Charlotte Observer*, 1969.

<sup>334</sup> "City Employee Union Surge Anticipated," *Charlotte Observer*, 24 January 1969.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid.

<sup>336</sup> "Shun Unions, Mayor Tells Employes," *Charlotte Observer*, 11 September 1968.

terms, Brookshire insinuated that the city might revise its policy of only hiring employees who lived in Mecklenburg County (thus attracting workers from surrounding counties accustomed to lower pay scales).<sup>337</sup> The *Charlotte Observer* objected to sanitation workers' wage demands on the grounds that they exceeded "fair market wages." How could the city's garbage workers, even those who had been working for decades, expect higher wages than beginning teachers, asked one editorial?<sup>338</sup> Despite the *Observer's* objections, however, the "market" could and, in fact, did sustain higher wages for sanitation workers, as exemplified by higher wages in other cities across the nation with comparable costs of living.<sup>339</sup>

### ***Atkins v. City of Charlotte, Julius Chambers, and the Pursuit of Economic Justice***

After the Firefighters Assembly declared its intent to pursue legal action against the state ban, the organization made an even more unpredictable move—it hired African American attorney Julius Chambers as lead counsel on the case.<sup>340</sup> Although fairly inexperienced at the time, Chambers would soon become one of North Carolina's, and arguably the nation's, preeminent civil rights attorneys of this period. Best known for his decisive role in *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*, Chambers secured the 1971 unanimous Supreme Court decision affirming the constitutionality of

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<sup>337</sup> Tom Seslar, "Mayor Warns Against Unions," *Charlotte News*, 25 September 1968.

<sup>338</sup> "Fair Pay, But No More," *Charlotte News*, 26 September 1968.

<sup>339</sup> The concept of "fair wages" was very much in flux during the mid-twentieth century, as human capital theory, which advanced an individualized framework for conceptualizing labor, displaced more collective and social understandings of work that predominated in the New Deal era (and before). For an overview of the ways in which dominant thinking about wages changed throughout the twentieth century, see Jenny Stepp Breen, *Capitalizing Labor: What Work is Worth and Why, From the New Deal to the New Economy*, (PhD dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2011).

<sup>340</sup> Ernie Stallworth, "Unit Plans to File Suit Tomorrow," *Charlotte News*, 6 September 1967.

mandatory school busing to desegregate public schools.<sup>341</sup> Describing his initial call to Chambers, Atkins recalled, “I didn't know him. I knew what he had done, his house had been bombed and all this,<sup>342</sup> and so I called . . . and told him who I was and what I wanted him to do. I said, ‘Would you help me?’ He said, ‘I'd be delighted.’ I like to fell out of the damn chair.”<sup>343</sup> Marvin Wilson, who joined the fire department during the *Atkins* case and became president of the union in the mid-1980s, described Chambers as giving the firefighters “a big break. He only charged them \$50,000 to take it all the way to the Supreme Court and said ‘pay it when you can.’”<sup>344</sup>

Bill Brawley, vice-president of the Assembly and eventually president of the Charlotte Labor Council, explained that hiring Chambers served two interrelated strategic functions. First, it bought the firefighters time. With the fire department still being “lily-white,” the department’s leadership believed an anti-discrimination lawsuit was imminent. Brawley maintained that the fire department would have been headed towards a racial discrimination lawsuit “had it not been for the fact that the best civil rights lawyer in the state, who would probably have handled the suit, was representing the firefighters, and he wouldn’t take those cases because of the conflict [of

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<sup>341</sup> In response to *Swann*, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) implemented one of the nation’s most successful busing plans. On the *Swann* decision, see Douglas, *Reading, Writing and Race*; On grassroots white suburban backlash to busing in Charlotte and the mobilization of “color-blind” ideology, see *Lassiter, Silent Majority*; On the aftermath of the *Swann* decision and the re-segregation of Charlotte’s schools, see Stephen Samuel Smith, *Boom for Whom?* Smith contends that the city’s aggressive economic development agenda both contributed to city leaders’ support of mandatory busing—as desegregated schools reinforced the city’s progressive appearance—but also led to busing’s ultimate demise.

<sup>342</sup> I discuss this bombing in chapter two.

<sup>343</sup> Jesse Atkins interview.

<sup>344</sup> Marvin Wilson, interviewed by Kerry Taylor, 21 May 2008, interview number U-0376 from the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), SHC.

interest?].”<sup>345</sup> The second consequence of hiring Chambers was it sent a message to city officials. The city of Charlotte had already acquainted itself with Chambers during his skillful litigation of *Swann v. Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools* and it was not eager to face him again.

Some firefighters objected to hiring Chambers, especially in light of his role in the *Swann* case, but Brawley said his response to such complaints was always the same: “Hell, that’s why we hired him! He wins.”<sup>346</sup> Another firefighter, Jim Black, explained the reasoning behind hiring Chambers, Stein, and Ferguson, saying, “the reason they hired them, was to get [the lawsuit] into federal court without going through local courts. It probably would never have made it to federal court otherwise ... this was during the civil rights era, so if we got into federal court, then this is a civil right we have to unionize, and if it went into federal court then we would have a good chance of winning it.”<sup>347</sup> Though some firefighters disliked Chambers’s role in the desegregation of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, his proponents in the fire department, who were in the majority, prized his winning record.

Throughout his career, Chambers was known for his reserved, quiet confidence. His unflappability worked to his advantage in the courtroom. “A lot of people were

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<sup>345</sup> William Moore (Bill) Brawley, interviewed by Elizabeth Gritter, May 12, 2006, Interview U-0093. Southern Oral History Program: Long Civil Rights Movement Project, SHC. In 1970, the fire department began an openly recruiting more black applicants. “City Begins Campaign to Hire Black Firemen,” *Charlotte Observer*, 17 July 1970.

<sup>346</sup> Atkins recalled receiving two letters of resignation after they hired Chambers, but he destroyed them in an effort to keep internal dissent over Chambers to a minimum. Discontent was not limited to rank-and-file members. Some of the chiefs and fire department personnel objected to hiring a “nigger-lawyer” and began threatening to integrate the department if Chambers was not removed. Within a month, higher-ups in the department hired its first black firefighter, Hazel Erwin, in retaliation and assigned him to a bed right beside Brawley’s. Brawley interview; Atkins interview.

<sup>347</sup> Jim Black, interview with author, 26 June 2014.



surprised to see Chambers in court,” said his partner Jim Ferguson. “Some people expected him to be bombastic and always on the attack. Chambers never raised his voice. He was always very low-key and very calm, and because of this approach, he disarmed the witness.” Chambers often twiddled a string or rubber band while questioning witnesses, which, according to former law partner John Gresham, had the hypnotic effect of “lulling the witness into a false sense of security.”<sup>348</sup> Gresham also described how Chambers would begin interrogating witnesses with overly simple questions, leading witnesses to believe that Chambers was not adequately prepared for trial. “You could see the witness relaxing and thinking, ‘This guy doesn’t even know how we operate.’ Then Chambers would very carefully draw a circle around what he wanted to know, and as soon as he had the loop closed, he would bore in, and you could see the witness thinking, ‘Oh, my God!’”<sup>349</sup>

Although much of Chambers’s courtroom success was undoubtedly owed to what both colleagues and adversaries recognized as a brilliant legal mind, the NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund (LDF) provided much needed support for Chambers to get his practice off the ground in a community still largely hostile to black attorneys, especially those working to destabilize the segregationist regime.<sup>350</sup> In 1963, after Chambers had

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<sup>348</sup> Danye Romine Powell and David Perlmutter, “Pioneering Civil Rights Attorney Julius Chambers Dies,” *Charlotte Observer*, 1 February 2014.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

<sup>350</sup> For more on the LDF and its approach to systematically dismantling legalized racial segregation, see L. Joseph Mosnier, “Crafting the Second Reconstruction: Julius Chambers, The NAACP Legal Defense Fund, and Title VII” (PhD Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2004), ch. 3; Genna Rae McNeil, *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); Mark V. Tushnet, *The NAACP’s Legal Strategy Against Segregated Education, 1925-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), and his *Making Civil Rights Law: Thurgood Marshall and the Supreme Court, 1936-1961*

graduated at the top of his class from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Law School and after serving as the first African American editor-in-chief of the North Carolina Law Review, he was chosen to be one of the organization's two inaugural civil rights interns.<sup>351</sup> The LDF created this position to train and support young black attorneys willing to return to the South to work on civil rights cases. "It was a great experience," recalled Chambers, "where one learned first-hand how the Fund operated, how it went about preparing cases and briefs, [and] the kind of approach it was taking and principles it was trying to evolve."<sup>352</sup> The LDF provided interns with a year of litigation training in its New York office, as well as \$25,000 in seed money to help them get their firms off the ground. The seed money went towards the purchase of office furniture, stocking a law library, as well as salary subsidies for the firm's first three years in practice.<sup>353</sup>

In moving to North Carolina, Chambers became part of a small but growing cadre of African American attorneys in the state who had faith in the courts to remedy the injustices of Jim Crow. One study estimates that by the mid-1950s, there were no more than 40 to 50 black attorneys throughout North Carolina, and when Chambers arrived in Charlotte, he became one of fewer than ten black attorneys who had ever practiced in the

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(New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Constance Baker Motley, *Equal Justice Under Law: An Autobiography* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1998); and Jack Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts: How a Dedicated Band of Lawyers Fought for the Civil Rights Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

<sup>351</sup> Greenberg was not alone in recognizing Chambers's potential; Robert Kennedy also offered Chambers a position in the Justice Department, but Chambers declined in favor of the LDF internship. Mosnier, "Crafting Law in the Second Reconstruction," 125.

<sup>352</sup> Chambers, as quoted in Mosnier, "Crafting Law in the Second Reconstruction," 169.

<sup>353</sup> The salary stipend consisted of \$12,000 the first year, \$6,000, the second, and \$2,500 the third year. Mosnier, "Crafting Law in the Second Reconstruction," 123-4, 257; Greenberg, *Crusaders in the Courts*, 45.

city. The LDF supported Chambers's choice of Charlotte to open his office, hopeful that North Carolina—with its reputedly moderate political climate and strong statewide civil rights leadership supportive of using the courts to undermine segregation and white supremacy—might yield courtroom victories that could provide breakthroughs for the civil rights movement. As chance would have it, Chambers opened his law office in July 1964, the same week that President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act into law.<sup>354</sup>

As soon as Chambers opened his practice in a modest second-floor, cold-water walkup at 405½ East Trade Street, he began travelling around the state to meet with black attorneys, clergy members, businessmen, and civil rights leaders about potential lawsuits. Following the Civil Rights Act's passage, Chambers hoped to challenge segregation in North Carolina's schools, public accommodations, and places of employment. In 1967, Chambers hired James Ferguson, a black attorney from Asheville who had just graduated from Columbia Law School, and Adam Stein, a white attorney who had interned with Chambers, thus creating the first integrated law practice in the state of North Carolina.<sup>355</sup>

Chambers and his colleagues saw economic justice as central to the civil rights

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<sup>354</sup> Before Chambers, the state's leading black Attorney was Conrad O. Pearson who also worked with the NAACP and the Legal Defense Fund. From his arrival in Charlotte, Chambers worked to ingratiate himself to the black legal community, especially Pearson, and draw on their local knowledge of the legal landscape in North Carolina. See Mosnier, "Crafting Law in the Second Reconstruction," 201-206, 253-4 and Douglas, *Reading, Writing and Race*, 17-18, 108-111. For an overview of black attorneys' efforts to challenge Jim Crow in North Carolina from the 1930s to the early 1960s, and especially the state NAACP's Legal Redress Committee, which carried out LDF-supported litigation to challenge segregation in areas such as education, parks, and hospitals, see Mosnier, "Crafting Law in the Second Reconstruction," ch. 5.

<sup>355</sup> Adam Stein, interviewed by Amanda Robertson, 19 September and 17 October 1995, Interview number J-0039 in the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), SHC.

struggle. In choosing cases, they focused on filing class action lawsuits, rather than individual cases. In their estimation, if one employee faced unfair or discriminatory practices within a particular company or industry, it was likely that others did as well. Thus, the firm concentrated its energy and resources on cases with the potential to establish broad legal principles that would improve the employment opportunities for workers across the nation.<sup>356</sup> In addition to its better-known work on school desegregation, Chambers, Stein and Ferguson litigated a number of influential employment-related cases throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In arguably the most important case, *Griggs v. Duke Power* (1971), the Supreme Court unanimously held that private employers could not use tests or other screening devices to select employees if such tests disproportionately excluded African Americans. *Griggs* established the legal doctrine of disparate impact in employment discrimination, thus holding that an employer who employed race-neutral testing could still be found to have violated Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act even if there was no intent to discriminate.

Robert Belton, a law professor and attorney who joined Chambers's firm as it was litigating *Griggs*, argues that the case "ushered in one of the greatest social movements in the history of this nation because it opened up jobs and other employment opportunities, previously limited to white males, in both the public and private sectors for millions of African Americans [and] women," an outcome that would have been impossible under the intent-based framework of the pre-*Griggs* era.<sup>357</sup> In what is regrettably the only full-

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<sup>356</sup> James Ferguson, interviewed by Willie Griffin, 16 May 2008, interview number U-0424 from the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), SHC.

<sup>357</sup> Belton as quoted in David J. Garrow, "Review Essay: Toward a Definitive History of *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.*," *Vanderbilt Law Review* 67, no. 1 (2014), 236.

length study of Chambers's impressive legal career, one scholar further contends, "Chambers would do more to shape the contours of evolving civil rights law than any other single attorney in private practice, and perhaps more than any other single attorney of this period save, in view of his influence atop the LDF, Jack Greenberg."<sup>358</sup> *Griggs* and *Swann*, along with Title VII landmarks *Robinson v. Lorillard Corporation* (4<sup>th</sup> Circuit, 1971) and *Albemarle Paper Company v. Moody* (1975), "defined the limits of federal civil rights law in employment and education in that era," fundamentally "reshap[ing] the nation's workplaces and schools."<sup>359</sup>

Similarly to the above cases in significance, Chambers would later describe the *Atkins* case as both one of the most important civil liberties cases of his career and for workers in the state of North Carolina.<sup>360</sup> In making their case, Chambers and his colleagues, who were also joined by attorney Reg Hamel, argued that the state ban constituted a violation of the Firefighters' Assembly members' First and Fourteenth Amendment rights.<sup>361</sup> Given the civil liberties concerns at issue, the North Carolina Civil Liberties Union (NCCLU), an affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), filed an amicus brief in the case, upon Chambers's request.<sup>362</sup> The NCCLU's brief opened by quoting Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*: "The most natural

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<sup>358</sup> Mosnier, "Crafting Law in the Second Reconstruction," xiv.

<sup>359</sup> Mosnier, "Crafting Law in the Second Reconstruction," iii.

<sup>360</sup> It is likely that Chambers, like other progressive lawyers at the time, saw civil rights and civil liberties as being part of the same struggle—even if he was litigating on behalf of a still-segregated fire department. Julius Chambers, "Great Lives in the Law Lecture Series: Julius Chambers, A Struggle for Equal Justice Through the Courts," Duke University School of Law, 22 October 2002; Some of the firefighters Chambers defended also believed he took the case, in addition to the aforementioned reasons, because he was eager to get back into federal court. See Jim Black interview.

<sup>361</sup> Jane Rogers, "City Violates Rights Of Firemen-Atkins," *Charlotte News*, 27 February 1968.

<sup>362</sup> Charles Lambert to Julius Chambers, 21 November 1967. "*Atkins v. City of Charlotte* folder," Box 2, American Civil Liberties Union/North Carolina Civil Liberties Union Records, Rubenstein Library and University Archives, Duke University (hereafter RLUA).

privilege of man, next to the right of acting for himself, is that of combining his exertions with those of his fellow creatures and of acting in common with them ... One hundred and twenty three years after Alexis de Tocqueville reported his prescient observations of America,” continued the NCCLU’s amicus brief, “the Supreme Court of the United States accorded freedom of association full and independent status as an explicit aspect of liberty protected by the due process clause of the fourteenth amendment...” The NCCLU further maintained that North Carolina’s ban on public sector bargaining was overly broad, constituting an unnecessary violation of the First Amendment. While the state could legally prohibit, penalize, and ultimately fire those public workers who engaged in strikes judged to be “imperiling the public safety,” it was unconstitutional for the state to jail, fire, or otherwise penalize “citizens merely for joining together for lawful purposes in a national labor union. At least it may not do so while the First and Fourteenth Amendments remain a part of the Constitution and while this court sits.” The brief also highlighted the fact that North Carolina’s ban on police and firefighter unions was the most restrictive in the nation.<sup>363</sup>

US 4<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals Judge J. Braxton Craven and Judges Woodrow Wilson Jones and Wilson Warlick of the Federal Court of the Western District of North Carolina heard the case. Craven was named US District Judge for the Western District of North Carolina in 1961 by President Kennedy, and subsequently promoted to the 4<sup>th</sup> Circuit in 1966 by President Johnson. By the time he was litigating *Atkins*, Chambers had already faced Craven a number of times in the courtroom. Throughout much of his

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<sup>363</sup> “Brief on the North Carolina Civil Liberties Union as Amicus Curiae,” Box 2, ACLU/NCCLU Records, RLUA.

judicial career, Craven espoused North Carolina's particular brand of moderate ideology. While serving as a state Superior Court judge, Craven made a widely publicized speech in 1956 regarding school desegregation in which he advocated that North Carolina's school districts take the path of moderation—in the form of “token integration”—in an effort to forestall court-ordered “total integration.”<sup>364</sup> In 1965, Chambers encountered Judge Craven in the courtroom when the judge ruled in favor of Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (CMS) in the lower-court *Swann* ruling. Craven affirmed a controversial portion of the school district's plan allowing CMS to exclude ten black schools from city-side desegregation efforts on the promise that they would eventually be included, although it “appeared clearly unconstitutional,” asserts legal historian Davison Douglas. “The judge in effect concluded that the school board would eventually afford these students their constitutional right to a nonracial school assignment; a delay of one or two years was not unreasonable. Left unaddressed,” emphasizes Douglas, “was the general unwillingness of the courts to delay the vindication of constitutional rights on grounds of administrative expediency.”<sup>365</sup> Craven and Chambers would encounter one another again that year when Chambers challenged the segregated policies of a local annual high school football game, the Shrine Bowl. Craven ruled that the 1965 game could be allowed to proceed, but that future games would be integrated.<sup>366</sup> As for the other two judges, Wilson Warlick was a self-described “states' rights individualist” who opposed federal intervention in public

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<sup>364</sup> See Craven, “Legal and Moral Aspects of the Lunch Counter Protests,” *Chapel Hill Weekly*, 28 April 1960.

<sup>365</sup> Douglas, *Reading, Writing and Race*, 117; “Court Won't Block Shrine Bowl Game,” *Charlotte Observer*.

<sup>366</sup> This would become a source of controversy and, many local observers believed, the reason Chambers house was bombed in 1965. This is discussed in more detail in chapter two.

school desegregation, while Woodrow Jones, who replaced Craven when he was appointed to the federal bench, was also a noted conservative jurist.<sup>367</sup>

During the deposition, Chambers along with Reg Hamel, a local attorney, and Harry L. Riddle, an attorney and former judge from Morganton, also worked to highlight the fact that City Manager Bill Veeder's personal feelings about unions influenced the city of Charlotte's decision to outlaw them and that the city of Charlotte had recognized Local 660 until Veeder became city manager. During the deposition, Veeder affirmed his position that union membership was incompatible with public employment.<sup>368</sup> Chambers then drew Veeder's attention to an excerpt published in a 1956 International City Managers' yearbook, an organization in which Veeder had served as Vice President from 1965-1967, and had him read aloud:

It should be emphasized that an employee organization in itself is desirable and that it gives the administrator a regular means of enabling employees to participate in the formulation of fundamental policies relating to salaries, tenure, and working conditions. To the extent that such participation is denied, the grievance would then become processed—opposition will be enhanced. The Administrator will make every effort to establish a fair labor policy and to permit employees to participate through their organization in the formulation of this policy.

Chambers then had Veeder read a similar passage from a City Managers' Association Fire Administration Book and eventually got Veeder to agree that he was opposed to public employee unionization "for policy reasons," not because he was implementing

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<sup>367</sup> As quoted in Jack Walter Petelson, *Fifty-eight Lonely Men: Southern Federal Judges and School Desegregation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971) 8; Douglas, *Reading, Writing and Race*, 131.

<sup>368</sup> Veeder deposition in *Atkins v. City of Charlotte*, p. 310.



modern city management techniques objectively. Chambers then had Veeder again read from another City Managers' Association handbook printed in 1967 that said, "There is general legal recognition of the right of public employees to organize for their mutual aid and protection. Equally important, an increasing number of cities are adopting positive employee relations programs that recognize this right."<sup>369</sup>

On February 25, 1969, the three-judge panel handed down a decision declaring unconstitutional the North Carolina law banning firefighters from joining unions and striking down GS 95-99, which declared any violation of the aforementioned statutes to be a misdemeanor. Given the conservative leanings of the judges, however, it should perhaps be of little surprise that they left in place the portion of the law prohibiting public employees from bargaining collectively, limiting the potential effectiveness of the new union. The judges held that the law prohibiting firefighters from joining unions violated their rights to free speech and peaceful assembly under the First Amendment and the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, citing the ruling in *De Jonge v. Oregon* (1937), which held that the due process clause of the Fourteenth Amendment applies to freedom of assembly.<sup>370</sup> The judges concurred with the city of Charlotte's reasoning for outlawing fire unions—that fire departments have a necessarily quasi-military structure and the state has an interest in firefighters' responding to fires without questioning the

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid., p. 315-349.

<sup>370</sup> *De Jonge v. Oregon* 299 U.S. 353 (1937) held that "[Consistently] with the Federal Constitution, peaceable assembly for lawful discussion cannot be made a crime. The holding of meetings for peaceable political action cannot be proscribed. Those who assist in the conduct of such meetings cannot be branded as criminals on that score. The question, if the rights of free speech and peaceable assembly are to be preserved, is not *as to the auspices under which the meeting is held* but as to its purpose."

orders of their superiors—but the panel disagreed with the legislation’s latitude. The decision stated, “The thought of fires raging out of control in Charlotte while firemen, out on strike ... watch the flames, is frightening. We do not question the power of the State to deal with such a contingency.” However, the judges nonetheless maintained that the law constituted an unnecessary “overbreadth” and that “valid state interest may be served by more narrowly drawn legislation so as not to infringe the First Amendment.”<sup>371</sup>

Importantly, the decision also included a passage about the importance of unions in establishing equitable labor-management relations:

It is beyond argument that a single individual cannot negotiate on an equal basis with an employer who hires hundreds of people. Recognition of this fact of life is the basis of labor-management relations in this country. Charlotte concedes in its brief that the right of public employees to join labor unions is becoming increasingly recognized and even admits that collective bargaining might be beneficial in many situations in the case of municipal firemen.

Despite the panel’s contention that it was “beyond argument” that individual workers could not negotiate on an equal footing with employers, they did not go so far as to throw out the second portion of the law, NC 95-98, which prohibited public employees from bargaining collectively. Instead, maintained the judges, this was a political issue, not a constitutional one, and thus it should be decided by the North Carolina General Assembly, not the courts. The judges asserted, “There is nothing in the United States Constitution which entitles one to have a contract with another who does not want it ... The right to a collective bargaining agreement, so firmly entrenched in American labor-management relations, rests upon national legislation and not upon the federal

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<sup>371</sup> *Atkins v. City of Charlotte*.

Constitution.”<sup>372</sup>

Among the firefighters and their attorneys, the response to the *Atkins* decision was fairly positive, although tinged with disappointment that the ruling did not go further. Nevertheless, Assembly leader Jesse Atkins told the *Charlotte News* that the decision “was what we had hoped for ... and are well pleased with the outcome.”<sup>373</sup> At a fish fry not long after the firefighters’ partial court victory, Bill Bradley, the new union president, told firefighters that “when we walk into city hall, everyone cheers because they know if we get any benefits, they will too, because of the Fireman’s Union. And this is going to happen all over the state.”<sup>374</sup> During the *Atkins* case, Brawley described leaving the courtroom the night that Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated imbued with a newfound sense of solidarity with King and the Memphis sanitation workers. He stated that King “was in Memphis over the sanitation workers’ right to belong to a union in Tennessee ... Here’s [one black man] and the rest of the lily-white fire department suing the state of North Carolina over the same thing that [the] black sanitation workers are fighting. It’s the same battle.”<sup>375</sup> Not long after the decision, 405 of the eligible 430 Charlotte firefighters joined Local 660 of the International Association of Firefighters and union leaders reported that in the wake of the court victory, general morale in the department had improved.<sup>376</sup>

Once again deploying the language of the “progressive mystique,” Mayor

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<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Jane Roehrs, “Unionists Are Happy At Decision,” *Charlotte News*, 26 February 1969. Not long after the decision was handed down, Atkins resigned his post with the Assembly. See Atkins interview.

<sup>374</sup> “Union Wooing Gastonia,” *Charlotte News*, 9 April 1969.

<sup>375</sup> Brawley interview.

<sup>376</sup> Charlotte City Council Meeting Minutes, 21 April 1969, Minute Book 51, 493-501.

Brookshire announced that the city would comply with “both the letter and the spirit of the law,” saying that the city had “always tried to be most progressive and fair in all its relationships with city employees.”<sup>377</sup> A month after the ruling, North Carolina Assistant Attorney General Andrew Vanore, Jr., and Charlotte City Attorney Henry Underhill stated that neither the city nor the state had any plans to appeal the decision, citing a recent Nebraska court ruling legalizing public employee unions as well as “recent Supreme Court attitudes” as factors influencing his office’s decision.<sup>378</sup>

### **North Carolina Public Employee Unionism at the End of the 1960s**

Despite *Atkins* returning to firefighters the legally protected right to join a union, the ruling still left unresolved the problem created by a combination of state laws that permitted public workers to unionize while prohibiting government entities from formally negotiating with them. Local banker turned Mecklenburg County Representative, Arthur (Art) Jones complained that public employee strikes were “intolerable,” yet “right now, no avenues for negotiating are open.”<sup>379</sup> Early in the General Assembly’s 1969 session, Jones unsuccessfully submitted a resolution calling on the state to commission a study on public employee relations. In May of 1969, following strikes by cafeteria workers in Chapel Hill and growing public worker unrest throughout the nation, Jones again proposed a bill to improve the state’s policy on public worker unions. Jones’s bill would have permitted city administrators to bargain with public workers over wages, hours, and

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<sup>377</sup> Jane Roehrs, “Unionists Are Happy At Decision,” *Charlotte News*, 26 February 1969.

<sup>378</sup> Nick Taylor, “City Won’t File Appeal on Unions,” *Charlotte News*, 13 March 1969.

<sup>379</sup> Joe Flanders, “He Says Strikes Intolerable,” *Charlotte News*, 18 March 1969; Charlotte City Council Meeting Minutes, 21 April 1969, Minute Book 51, 493-501.

working conditions but this effort, too, was defeated. Speaking from the floor of the North Carolina House of Representatives, Jones urged his colleagues to rethink their position, “By our shortsightedness, we shall now promote the very things the resolution was designed to prevent...”<sup>380</sup> Indeed, without a formal process for dealing with public worker unions, city administrators in the state were in a bind.

In an effort to move beyond this impasse, the Charlotte City Council held a public hearing on April 21, 1969, to consider a new policy toward municipal employee unions. Mayor Brookshire presented the policy, which he had developed in consultation with William Veeder, the city manager, and R. A. Earl, the city’s personnel director. The policy would allow union representatives to make “suggestions” concerning wages and working conditions to the council, but would not recognize union officials as the sole bargaining agents for city employees. It also threatened city workers who declared strikes or work stoppages with unspecified disciplinary action. The policy appointed Veeder to be spokesman for the city in meetings with public workers, but final policy decisions would be reserved for the mayor and city council.<sup>381</sup>

At the city council hearing, both business and labor leaders criticized Brookshire’s proposal. The president of the newly re-formed Firefighters union, W. J. Martin, said that the proposal would effectively nullify the recent *Atkins* victory. Julius Chambers’s law partner, Adam Stein, spoke as counsel for both the firefighters and sanitation workers unions and attempted to clarify what he perceived as the city’s

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<sup>380</sup> The bill also would have forbidden strikes and reinforced public employees right to work without belonging to a union. Joe Flanders, “Bill Would Permit City-Union Pacts,” *Charlotte News*, 27 May 1969; “Legislature Ignores Reality of Public Employee Unions,” *Charlotte Observer*, 26 May 1969.

<sup>381</sup> Charlotte City Council Meeting Minutes, 21 April 1969, Minute Book 51, 493-501; Pat Smith, “Only Mayor Likes Policy on Unions,” *Charlotte News*, 22 May 1969.

misrepresentation of *Atkins*. The decision, explained Stein, affirmed North Carolina’s ban on public employee collective bargaining—i.e. agreements and contracts—but said nothing that would prohibit a city from recognizing, negotiating, or discussing employment matters with public sector unions. “For the council to hide behind the statutes and say it cannot recognize the firemen’s union,” argued Stein, “is to misconstrue what Judge Craven said.” Jim Pierce, as AFSCME’s representative at the meeting, called the plan “nothing more than six pages of meaningless evasion ... an attempt to once again pacify the employes of the city of Charlotte and ignore their desires in this matter. It says nothing: it will not work, it is unfair, and is an insult to the over 5,000 public servants of our city.”<sup>382</sup> Pierce and H. L. Riddle, another representative of the firefighters, argued that the plan violated public workers’ constitutional right “to petition the government for redress of grievances.”<sup>383</sup>

Representatives of business were equally outspoken in their opposition to the plan. Edward J. Dowd, executive vice-president of Central Piedmont Industries, an organization that represented 221 of the region’s largest corporations, said the new policy would undermine both “the letter and the spirit” of North Carolina’s recently upheld ban on public sector collective bargaining.<sup>384</sup> Despite objections from both sides, however, on May 26, 1969, the Charlotte City Council unanimously passed a resolution adopting the new policy towards public employees.<sup>385</sup>

Not long after the city council hearing, Dowd issued a public letter to industry

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<sup>382</sup> Paul Clancy, “Hearing on Policy is Today,” *Charlotte Observer*, 21 April 1969.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>384</sup> David Gelsanliter, “City Workers Don’t Need Unions—Exec,” *Charlotte Observer*, 3 April 1969.

<sup>385</sup> City Council Minutes, 26 May 1969, Minute Book 52, page 58; Pat Smith, “\$100-A-Week Starting Pay Asked By Sanitation Men,” *Charlotte News*, 27 May 1969.

leaders, reprinted in the *Charlotte Observer*, that unions were unnecessary “because Charlotte already has generally enlightened employment practices.”<sup>386</sup> *The Observer* agreed with Dowd’s contention that unions were bad for Charlotte, but conceded that until working conditions improved, unions would remain appealing to particular sectors of the city’s workforce. Before the strike, garbage collectors had starting salaries below \$80 a week, and following the strike, the city council had “scraped up enough money” for a 15 percent raise (keeping their salaries still under \$90 per week)—“not exactly the lap of luxury,” maintained the paper. If Dowd wanted to ensure that unions would not find a warm welcome in Charlotte, the *Observer* advised that he should present the city with a proposal that would improve on the recent city council policy. “Or better still, maybe he ought to try his views out about 7 a.m. some morning on Seigle Avenue at the staging yard where garbage collectors report for work. They’re the people who have to be convinced that unions aren’t necessary.”<sup>387</sup>

Charlotte’s garbage workers were indeed unconvinced, and the effects of the political impasse came to bear in the summer of 1969. In mid-July, the city and the sanitation workers union were again at odds over pay raises for the coming year, as well as the city’s grievance procedure and other non-budgetary items. Pierce argued that the city had promised a five percent raise on top of a cost-of-living adjustment, while Veeder maintained that the cost-of-living increase was not included.<sup>388</sup> Unable to reach an agreement, on July 29, 1969, the mostly African American AFSCME Local 1127

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<sup>386</sup> Dowd would go on to become a consultant for the Council for a Union Free Environment and to coauthor “A Collection of Union-Free Position Statements” in 1983 for the National Association of Manufacturers.

<sup>387</sup> “Convince The Garbage Collectors,” *Charlotte Observer*, 5 April 1969.

<sup>388</sup> Doug Smith, “Union Tell City of Disagreements,” *Charlotte News*, 17 July 1969.

declared a strike, the first since the *Atkins* decision. Not long after the strike began, Jim Pierce announced that he had been in contact with civil rights organizations and that the union could “turn this place into Memphis or Charleston in a few days.”<sup>389</sup> The *Observer* urged the state legislators to reconsider their positions on public employee unions. Under the current circumstances, argued the paper, cities faced two choices in a strike: “either capitulating or going all out to break the strike. The latter course . . . usually means taking on not just the local strength of the union, but a coalition of union and civil rights forces mustered on a national basis.”<sup>390</sup> Without formal negotiating mechanisms in place, it was only labor organizers’ “thinly veiled threats of racial violence” that convinced city hall to settle the strike and yield to some of the workers’ demands. Some city councilmembers confided that “they had a choice of giving into union pressure or focusing national attention on the city as racial unrest flared”—something, as always, the city was eager to avoid.<sup>391</sup> A *Charlotte News* article described strikers as “an uncontrollable mob bent on violence and ready to start trouble at a moment’s notice” and placed the strike within the larger local political context of protests over school desegregation and urban renewal, as well as “the growing influence of a militant band of Negro youths who wear the Black Panther uniform.”<sup>392</sup>

Fearful that Charlotte’s sanitation strikes would repeat the events in Memphis, the city council settled the strike after more than one hundred hours of negotiations,

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<sup>389</sup> “Charlotte Workers On Strike, *The Burlington Daily Times-News*, 29 July 1969.

<sup>390</sup> Marsha Canfield, “City Union ‘May Strike Because...’” *Charlotte Observer*, 18 July 1969; “Modern State Labor Law Needed,” *Charlotte Observer*, 31 July 1969.

<sup>391</sup> The *Charlotte Observer*, as quoted in Jim Grant, “The Organized Unorganized,” *Southern Exposure: Here Comes the Wind: Southern Labor on the Move IV* (1976), 135.

<sup>392</sup> Bill Noblitt, “Behind the Settlement: Desire to Quell Unrest,” *Charlotte News*, 5 August 1969.



recognizing the union and meeting some of their demands, though still refusing to institute a check-off procedure.<sup>393</sup> The provisions of the agreement included: (1) guaranteeing union members that they would be provided a union mediator during grievance proceedings; (2) seniority considerations in promotions; (3) worker participation in improving unsafe working conditions; (4) reaffirmation of city's non-discrimination policy toward municipal employees; and (5) continuation of fringe benefits guaranteed in writing. "The biggest thing this [settlement] means to you," Pierce told sanitation workers, "is the boss can't shove you around anymore. You got union recognition. You got it and it's yours. You took it from them."<sup>394</sup>

In the meantime, Jim Pierce was involved in a food workers strike at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the fall of 1969, a strike which came as the result of the university breaking promises it had made in order to end another strike which took place earlier that year. Encouraged by recent activism at Duke University and North Carolina A & T and within the context of increased black political activism on North Carolina's university campuses, black food workers at UNC Chapel Hill staged a strike on February 23, 1969. With the support of the Black Student Movement (BSM), an organization that replaced the university's NAACP chapter, the food workers' strike lasted nearly a month. In response to growing unrest, Governor Bob Scott called in forty highway patrolmen in riot gear as backup. In so doing, the governor had defied the wishes of UNC system president William Friday and Chancellor Sitterson, who did not believe interference from the state police was necessary. As the strike progressed, a

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<sup>393</sup> Paul Clancy, "City Garbage Strike Ends; Court to Rule on Check-Off," *Charlotte Observer*, 5 August 1969.

<sup>394</sup> Bill Noblitt, "Sanitation Workers Accept Settlement," *Charlotte News*, 5 August 1969.

growing number of students came to support the strike and some faculty members argued that Scott's actions threatened academic freedom on campus and, in the process, the university's progressive image. On March 13, Governor Scott ordered the Chapel Hill police to arrest BSM members who were still occupying one of the university's dining halls, which they were operating as an alternate cafeteria. According to historian William Link, the governor's response "united the Chapel Hill campus against [Scott]."<sup>395</sup>

Upon their arrest, students retained Julius Chambers and Adam Stein as their attorneys who encouraged the striking workers to unionize, which they did, forming the UNC Non-Academic Employees Union. On March 21, the union was finally able to negotiate a raise to \$1.80 per hour for all minimum wage workers on campus and the strike ended. The university did not hold up its end of the deal for long, however and by May, UNC had reneged on its pledges by raising workers' hours—many of whom had since joined AFSCME—without giving them overtime pay and outsourcing dining services to the SAGA corporation, a California-based catering contractor. SAGA also fired a number of workers for union involvement. In response, 250 of the 275 food workers again went on strike on November 7, demanding union recognition, a contract, and the rehiring of six employees allegedly fired by SAGA for union involvement.

The strike had strong support from the state AFL-CIO, who had just elected Durham tobacco worker Wilbur Hobby as president in September. The *Charlotte Observer* described him as a "portly" man whose "work garb is an open-necked dress

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<sup>395</sup> William A. Link, *William Friday: Power, Purpose and American Higher Education* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 152.

shirt and baggy trousers and he looks as if he had been born on the picket line.”<sup>396</sup>

Indeed, his experience as a child during the 1935 General Strike—similarly to those of Atkins and Pierce—proved formative in his political and economic worldview.<sup>397</sup> Taking stock of Hobby’s election, as well as recent events in Charlotte and elsewhere in the state, the *Observer* speculated that the state’s labor movement might become more active in civil rights as it worked to organize public employees in the state, a growing number of whom were poorly paid African Americans. To Hobby, “the labor movement ha[d] a duty to speak out for these people who are in poverty and degradation.”<sup>398</sup>

Since the food workers were now AFSCME members, Jim Pierce, as AFSCME’s regional director, got involved. After more than a week on strike, Pierce threatened “immediate escalation” if SAGA did not agree to bargain with AFSCME. “We’re not going to permit a company to come on this campus, destroy an agreement between the workers and the university and get away with it,” railed Pierce, “They’re going to give these people justice, or there is not going to be food service at this university.”<sup>399</sup> Pierce was arrested for disorderly conduct while picketing with food workers outside one of UNC’s dining halls on November 31.<sup>400</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> Paul Jablow, “Union Chief Predicts Pressure To Change Law,” *Charlotte Observer*, 29 September 1969.

<sup>397</sup> Wilbur Hobby, interviewed by William Finger, 13 March 1975, Interview E-0006, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), SHC.

<sup>398</sup> Paul Jablow, “Union Chief Predicts Pressure To Change Law,” *Charlotte Observer*, 29 September 1969.

<sup>399</sup> “‘Immediate Escalation’ of Chapel Hill Strike Threatened,” *The Lexington Dispatch*, 19 November 1969.

<sup>400</sup> On the food workers strike in Chapel Hill, see J. Derek Williams, “‘It Wasn’t Slavery Time Anymore:’ Foodworker’s Strike at Chapel Hill, Spring 1969.” (M.A. Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1979); Korstad and Leloudis, *To Right These Wrongs*, 324; Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights*, 266; and Link, *William Friday*, 128-158.

Back in Charlotte, the city failed to hold up its end of agreements reached with sanitation workers in 1969 and, lacking any procedures to hold the city accountable, sanitation workers again staged strikes in February, June, and September of 1970.<sup>401</sup> On February 5, nearly 400 of the city's sanitation workers walked off the job over the city's recent firing of 11 union members—a group which included the union president and vice president, as well as stewards and members of the negotiating committee—who refused to work in weather below 20 degrees.<sup>402</sup> The 11 men were concerned for their safety after two fellow workers were recently killed while warming their hands over the muffler of a garbage truck when it accidentally backed over them—mirroring the events that sparked the Memphis sanitation strike. In response, the city fired all strikers who did not immediately return to work. Central Piedmont Community College students, local representatives from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, outspoken AME minister and civil rights leader George Leake, as well as other Charlotteans joined in support of strikers.<sup>403</sup> Ben Chavis, later a member of the Wilmington Ten and a local civil rights activist, also became a prominent supporter of the union and the strike.<sup>404</sup> Despite such public support, however, the union was operating without one of its most experienced advocates, Jim Pierce, who resigned his post in December 1970. One account indicated that Pierce left because of differences with national union leadership, although his official reason (as reprinted in the *Observer*) was that he wanted to spend

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<sup>401</sup> Grant, “The Organized Unorganized,” 135; “Cold Garbage Men Strike in Charlotte,” *The Baltimore Afro-American*, 14 February 1970 (on Feb. 1970 grievances); Terry Wooten, “Tar Heel Union Leader Splits with U.S. Group,” *The Dispatch*, 20 March 1970; Pierce interview.

<sup>402</sup> Cheree Briggs, “Police Guard City Hall in Local Garbage Strike,” *Charlotte Observer*, 6 February 1970, Folder 6, Box 2330, North Carolina AFL-CIO Records, SLA; “Groups Pledge to Support Garbage Strike,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 9 February 1970.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>404</sup> “Groups Pledge to Support Garbage Strike,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 9 February 1970.

more time with his family.<sup>405</sup>

Pierce's replacement, Morton Shapiro—who had also been involved in the 1968 Atlanta sanitation strike—negotiated an end to the strike. However, many sanitation workers were unsatisfied with the terms of the agreement. According to union members, Shapiro did not take the arbitration hearings seriously, allegedly playing tic-tac-toe during the meetings. Of Shapiro's leadership style more generally, explained one worker, "He just don't have the soul Jim had."<sup>406</sup> On February 10th, the union members voted to submit a letter to the union's international president criticizing Shapiro's handling of the negotiations, charging him with using "back-door" negotiations that excluded them from the process, and demanding that he be barred from further negotiations on their behalf.<sup>407</sup> As a result, the sanitation men withdrew from AFSCME in the spring of 1970 and formed an independent union, the Brotherhood of Charlotte City Workers Local No. 1. Gene Gore, whom Pierce trained and who had been involved in organizing Charlotte sanitation workers, coordinated the break with the national union.<sup>408</sup> Gore said of the split,

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<sup>405</sup> According to one source, Pierce quit over differences with the international regarding the Chapel Hill food workers strike and related efforts to organize maids, janitors, and hospital employees of the university. The international, Pierce charged, was primarily concerned on winning dues check-offs, whereas Pierce, who was described as "one of the most aggressive and imaginative union organizers in the South," was interested in a more comprehensive organizing campaign to improve wages and working conditions. Six months after he quit, Pierce went to work for the National Sharecroppers Fund. Elizabeth Tornquist, "Organizing Labor in North Carolina," *New South* 25, no.1 (Spring 1970): 57-69; Pierce interview; Bill Finger, "At the Graham Training Center: New Life for the Small Farmer," *Southern Exposure: Our Promised Land*, Volume 2 (1974), 33-37; Grant, "The Organized Unorganized," 135.

<sup>406</sup> Cheree Briggs, "New Union Gets Under Way, But What Will It Mean?" 22 March 1970, *Charlotte Observer*.

<sup>407</sup> Dick Hammerstrom, "Negotiation Tactics Hit by Workers," *Charlotte News*, 11 February 1970.

<sup>408</sup> Briggs, "New Union Gets Under Way, But What Will It Mean?" Gore's father was also a union organizer with the TWUA, which also gave the younger gGore his first job. In an angry letter to the *Charlotte Observer* after Gore made allegedly disparaging remarks about the TWUA, union organizer Robert Freeman responded, "the TWUA practically raised Gene Gore...He tried to organize textile

“Stemming from one of the most militant strikes in North Carolina history, we are now left with a handful of members and the tag ‘Uncle Tom Union.’”<sup>409</sup> In a statement to the press, Gore stressed that the move was “not against AFSCME, but only against Morton Shapiro.”<sup>410</sup>

After the split, Gore formed the North Carolina Labor Alliance in the hopes of bringing public workers across the state under one umbrella organization. Not long after its formation, the new organization became involved in a Greensboro sanitation strike in June of 1970. Some sanitation workers and black religious leaders in Greensboro, however, became unsatisfied with Gore’s efforts. Speaking on behalf of some of the sanitation workers, Reverend James Douglas of St. James Presbyterian Church in Greensboro said that Gore had performed “as best as he could as a white man. And apparently that’s not enough.”<sup>411</sup> A few days later, it was reported in the *Spartanburg Herald-Journal* that Gene Gore was no longer representing the Greensboro sanitation workers and pointed to a variety of issues plaguing his organization’s effectiveness, as Gore felt “it impossible to continue the struggle in Greensboro among municipal workers while waging battle against (race) separatists, the AFL-CIO, and city hall.”<sup>412</sup> Elaborating on what he viewed as an irreparable divide between black separatists in Greensboro and the union, Gore said, “The dispute gave the separatists opportunity to inject their Klan tactics upon the black community and feel this further divided the workers—some

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workers for approximately five years, but was not able to bring one member into the TWUA.” Robert A. Freeman, letter to the editor entitled “Gore’s Bad Taste,” *Charlotte Observer*, 20 January 1970.

<sup>409</sup> Terry Wooten, “Tar Heel Union Leader Splits With U.S. Group,” *The Dispatch*, 20 March 1970. *Southern Exposure: Our Promised Land*, Volume 2 (1974), 33-37; Grant, “The Organized Unorganized,” 135.

<sup>410</sup> Terry Wooten, “Gene Gore Has Quit Union Job,” *The Henderson Times-News*, 20 March 1970.

<sup>411</sup> “Blacks May Split from Labor Union,” *Washington Afro-American*, 30 June 1970.

<sup>412</sup> “Labor Alliance Not Connected With Dispute,” *Spartanburg Herald*, 2 July 1970.

followed the separatists, some followed the union. The others, seeing this division, decided to return to work.”<sup>413</sup> Not long after his split with Greensboro workers, Gore also resigned his post in Charlotte in the period between two sanitation strikes—one in June of 1970 and the other in September.<sup>414</sup> In the September strike, similarly to a recent strike in Atlanta that April, the city of Charlotte fired the 411 men who went on strike and began hiring to refill the positions within days.<sup>415</sup>

According to one *Charlotte Observer* article, “the workers’ battle with the city began to take on the flavor of the civil rights struggles of the early 1960s.”<sup>416</sup> At a meeting at Friendship Baptist Church in Northwest Charlotte, organized by the Black Solidarity Committee and attended by nearly 150 people, African American leaders called the strike a “struggle for freedom” and pursuit of “dignity.” Speakers included the Rev. Elo Henderson, leader of the Black Solidarity Committee; Howard Fuller, a Durham civil rights leader; Rev. C.E. Quick, minister of the East Stonewall AME Zion Church; Rev. Coleman Kerry, a member of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board and minister of Friendship Baptist Church; Roy Dunlap, vice president of the sanitation workers union, and a number of other speakers. The meeting raised \$859.28 towards food and other necessities for striking workers.<sup>417</sup> However, this would do little in the way of

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<sup>413</sup> “Labor Alliance Not Connected With Dispute,” *Spartanburg Herald*, 2 July 1970.

<sup>414</sup> According to one *Observer* article, Gene Gore “quit to go to Europe because he did not feel the union here had a chance and because he was greatly disappointed with the way things developed while he headed the union.” Ed Frankley, “Sanitation Workers Strike Over Loads, Harassment,” *Charlotte Observer*, 21 September 1970.

<sup>415</sup> The firing of striking municipal workers was becoming an increasingly common strategy of city administrations. See McCartin, “Fire the Hell Out of Them,” 67-92.

<sup>416</sup> Cheree Briggs, “Charlotte Seeking New Garbagemen,” *Charlotte Observer*, 24 September 1970; Ed Frankley, “100-Plus Seeking Sanitation Jobs,” *Charlotte News*, 24 September 1970; Jim Parks, “Strikers Get Support, Cash,” *Charlotte Observer*, 28 September 1970.

<sup>417</sup> Jim Parks, “Strikers Get Support, Cash,” *Charlotte Observer*, 28 September 1970.

providing for hundreds of families and the city of Charlotte refused to recognize or meet with strikers. Without the financial and organizational support of a national union, lacking Pierce's experience and ability to negotiate with city leaders, sanitation workers were able to make few substantive gains during these years.<sup>418</sup>

## Conclusion

In the wake of the ambiguous *Atkins* decision and without sufficient support in the state legislature to overturn the ban on collective bargaining, public employees throughout North Carolina were forced to rely on indirect methods to sustain their membership and influence the terms of their contracts, as public workers had done in what Joseph Slater has called the "pre-collective bargaining" period before the passage of Executive Order 10988 in 1962.<sup>419</sup> Although the city of Charlotte continued to forbid a dues check-off procedure, Local 660 found a way around by having union members travel to each fire house across the city once a month with a cigar box to collect dues from individual firefighters, as had been done since the law took effect in 1959.<sup>420</sup> At

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<sup>418</sup> Grant, "The Organized Unorganized," 135; "Cold Garbage Men Strike in Charlotte," *The Afro-American*, 14 February 1970 (on Feb. 1970 grievances); Terry Wooten, "Tar Heel Union Leader Splits with U.S. Group," *The Dispatch*, 20 March 1970; "Sanitation Workers Stand on Weak Ground in Strike," *Charlotte Observer*, 22 September 1970; Pierce interview.

<sup>419</sup> During this period, Joseph Slater describes how public workers employed a variety of tactics to influence the conditions under which they labored including lobbying, appeals to the public, and efforts to sway elected officials. In the process, many unions discovered that attempts to exert substantive political influence proved even more challenging, sluggish, and demoralizing than dealings with management. Despite some important and impressive victories by public sector unions in this period, "the lack of rights was crippling," contends Slater. "Public sector unions often failed to accomplish moderate goals or even to survive, largely because of the legal climate and the attitudes of employers." Slater, *Public Workers*, 12. For an overview of the strategies North Carolina's public workers have employed in the absence of bargaining rights, see Brown and Rhodes, "Public Employee Bargaining Under Prohibitive Legislation."

<sup>420</sup> Bob Summey interview.



some point in the 1970s, Local 660 began using the firefighters' credit union as an intermediary to collect monthly dues from union members, as the credit union had been doing for years for United Appeal donations. Although the president of the credit union balked at first to this plan, Jim Black recalls telling him, "It's not the city's credit union. It's our credit union. They shouldn't have a say in it. They're cutting our paychecks...but what I do with my dollar that I put in there doesn't concern them."<sup>421</sup> The credit union plan succeeded, and Local 660 relied on it to collect union dues until 2013, when city employees finally won a dues check-off procedure after more than fifty years of advocating for one.<sup>422</sup>

In the years after *Atkins*, Charlotte's firefighters also worked to establish relationships with councilmembers in order to steer votes in a favorable direction. As one study of North Carolina's public sector negotiations in the absence of a formalized collective bargaining procedure found, however, this has led to "a system of winners and losers" where "the advantages naturally accrue to public employees who happen to work for well connected, persuasive department heads, sympathetic city/county managers, or local elected boards who give high priority to positive employee-manager relations."<sup>423</sup> Among public workers in Charlotte, police and firefighters have been the winners while sanitation workers have been the losers.

However, as former Local 660 president Marvin Wilson explained, even the firefighters' "wins" posed problems for the union. "You do not want to put out in writing all of your accomplishments because some of those accomplishments were done behind

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<sup>421</sup> Don Black interview.

<sup>422</sup> Marty Puckett, interview with author, 26 June 2014.

<sup>423</sup> Brown and Rhodes, "Public Employee Bargaining Under Prohibitive Legislation," 26.

closed doors,” said Wilson. “You don’t want to put any of the Council people on the spot that have helped you achieve some of them.”<sup>424</sup> The union was also forced to downplay its influence in improving the working conditions for other public employees. “If somebody puts it on the front page of the Charlotte paper, ‘Firefighter’s union wins health benefits for retirees for all city employees,’ you know how long that’s going to last? Until the next budget session. It’s going to get the ax,” asserted Wilson.<sup>425</sup> In the wake of the Atkins decision, Local 660 and other public worker unions had to navigate between achieving gains for workers and avoiding publicity that could provoke a political backlash.

The *Atkins* case also exemplified Chambers’s and his colleagues’ belief that legal activism had the most transformative possibilities when it operated alongside sustained political mobilization. “In order to get a successful outcome,” maintained Jim Ferguson, “you need to create a certain climate in the community. Legal cases ... happen in the context of a political community ... And courts, though they like to say they’re nonpolitical, react to what’s going on in the community, so community support for a legal case is very important.” Chambers believed it was essential to work with activist communities throughout every stage of a case in order to both maintain political momentum. He recognized that the legal process’s sluggish nature could threaten to

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<sup>424</sup> Marvin Wilson interview. One councilmember (and future mayor) with whom the fire department maintained a particularly close relationship was Harvey Gantt, predominately facilitated by Brawley. “[Brawley] and Harvey Gantt went into a little room next to City Council. And Harvey filibustered for lack of a better term. Harvey filibustered until those firefighters...got a raise. For that I was always grateful to Harvey. I saw that happen.” Yet, despite the fact that, according to Brawley, “Harvey was personally responsible for fifteen percent of the pay scale that those guys have down there even today,” many white firefighters “because Harvey was black, wouldn’t vote for him for anything.” See Brawley interview.

<sup>425</sup> Marvin Wilson interview.

disrupt the fragile momentum of political movements. Court cases take years, and, according to Ferguson, “there's nothing that can kill a movement more than a legal case. What often happens is that the activists then get focused on the case and think that the case is going to solve the problem, and then they stop the activism, waiting for the case, and then it's like waiting and waiting and waiting. Then by the time the case comes around, the movement's dead.”<sup>426</sup> Although the *Atkins* case was indeed an important victory for North Carolina's police and firefighters, who for ten years labored under the most restrictive laws in the nation, one has to wonder if the considerable resources invested in the case in some ways distracted from potential political mobilization efforts to overturn the state ban. Turning to North Carolina's conservative state legislature to expand the rights of public workers would undoubtedly have been a risky endeavor in the late 1960s, but as Ferguson suggested, relying on the courts alone also had limitations.

In a state with an expanding public workforce legally barred from negotiating contracts with city and state employers, workers in the years after *Atkins* were left with limited options to improve their working conditions. In addition to creating a system of relative winners and losers, another important consequence of the remaining ban on public sector bargaining was that unions looked increasingly impotent, as they lacked reliable and enforceable means to improve conditions for their members, thus further weakening the position of organized labor in North Carolina. Nevertheless, the events surrounding the *Atkins* case were significant because they reveal how the civil rights movement informed the political agency of white workers in the civil rights era Sunbelt.

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<sup>426</sup> James Ferguson, interviewed by Willie Griffin, 16 May 2008, interview number U-0424 from the Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) SHC.

At the same time, the response of the city, the state, and the state judicial system to the labor activism of firefighters and sanitation workers offers another example of how the “politics of moderation” played out in Charlotte. These episodes are all representative of what AME minister George Leake described as giving people, or in case, some of Charlotte’s hardest working and lowest paid workers, “just enough to keep the match from being struck.”<sup>427</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> George Leake, interviewed by Stanley Smith, July 1968, The Civil Rights Documentation Project, Ralph J. Bunche Oral History Collection, Howard University. Also see discussion of Leake in chapter two.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### “These Damned Lawyers and Their Consultants”:

#### The Remaking of Anti-Union Politics in 1970s Charlotte

At the dawn of the 1970s, there was perhaps no group of workers with more to gain than those laboring in the South, who had long been excluded from the rewards of mid-century economic prosperity. Although the North-South wage differential had been declining since the 1940s, between 1973 and 1978 Southern workers still made 17 percent less than the national average. The region also claimed the largest income gap between black and white workers in the nation. In North Carolina, black workers' per capita income remained just 46 percent of their white counterparts by 1969.<sup>428</sup> In Mecklenburg County, blacks trailed whites by 43 percent in 1970.<sup>429</sup> Despite Southern boosters' oft-repeated claims that industrial development would benefit the entire region, the influx of capital into the post-World War II South had not trickled down to the state's workers, especially to those who were black. Emboldened by this disparity and by the civil rights, anti-war and feminist movements, black and white workers across the South joined with industrial, agricultural, and government workers throughout the nation in sustaining a level of labor militancy not seen since the 1930s.<sup>430</sup> Nevertheless, optimism about the decade's prospects began to fade as the United States witnessed record levels of inflation, unemployment, and wage stagnation; by the mid-

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<sup>428</sup> Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*, 176-8.

<sup>429</sup> Smith, *Boom for Whom?* 54.

<sup>430</sup> On rank-and-file militancy in “the long 1970s,” see *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below During the Long 1970s*, ed. Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner and Cal Winslow (New York: Verso, 2010).

1970s, many of the gains of the New Deal era had begun to collapse and the nation descended into the worst fiscal crisis since the Great Depression.<sup>431</sup>

For opponents of organized labor, however, the decade was a boon. Though hostility to unions was certainly not an invention of the 1970s, the decade nonetheless witnessed an unprecedentedly effective and unified front of business leaders, anti-labor lawyers, consultants, and employers' associations determined to undermine and dismantle the legal structure protecting American workers.<sup>432</sup> During this decade, North Carolina would lead the nation in its concentrated opposition to organized labor as traditional anti-union figures—like Republican Senator Jesse Helms and the state's outspoken textile executives—were joined by a new breed of anti-labor intellectuals,

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<sup>431</sup> As Stephen Smith explains in *Boom for Whom?*, economic disparities—which he determines by looking at income gaps, homeownership rates, and poverty rates—between blacks and whites in Mecklenburg County improved between 1970 and 1980, but then grew again between 1980 and 2000. Improvements in the 1970s may suggest, in addition to the variety of important factors that Smith highlights, that the anti-labor efforts of the 1970s (which kept wages among the lowest in the nation) took full effect in the 1980s. Moreover, the growing gap between 1980 and 2000 is crucial. As Smith asserts, "...the disparities are extremely important because they are a stark measure of ongoing black/white economic inequality in a place touted for its progressive race relations." (55). Smith, *Boom for Whom?* 46-55.

<sup>432</sup> As Nelson Lichtenstein has argued, "Business hostility to unions was not a post-1970 phenomenon, nor was it limited to firms in the labor-intensive sectors of the economy or the American South, but it has been present since the New Deal and before. There was no labor-management accord in the early post-World War II years: at best the relationship between unions and capitalists constituted an armed truce, punctuated by frequent episodes of economically costly industrial conflict." Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, xi. In recent years, a substantial body of scholarship on the business backlash against organized labor and the New Deal order has emerged. See especially Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*; Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise*; Shermer, "Counter-Organizing the Sunbelt," 81-118; Sophia Z. Lee, "Whose Rights? Litigating the Right to Work, 1940-1980," in *The Right and Labor in America: Politics, Ideology and Imagination*, ed. Nelson Lichtenstein and Elizabeth Tandy Shermer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 160-180; McCartin and Vinel, "Compulsory Unionism," 226- 251; and Friedman, "Exploiting the North-South Wage Differential," 323-348. Nonetheless, recent scholarship has shown that the 1970s constituted an important turning point in labor's decline. See, for example, Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), and Robert Michael Smith, *From Blackjacks to Briefcases: A History of Commercialized Strikebreaking in the United States* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), 97-118.

lawyers, and consultants who came from across the nation to set up shop in the Tar Heel state. As southern cities like Charlotte finally emerged on the national scene, however, business and civic leaders were eager to demonstrate their progressive credentials to the nation. The city's leading opponents of organized labor responded accordingly—they repackaged the anti-union message as “positive,” “modern,” “enlightened,” and “employee-friendly” in an effort to distance themselves from the incendiary rhetoric that characterized anti-union views during the first half of the century.<sup>433</sup> Shifting anti-union tactics and greater sophistication characterized the 1970s as opponents of organized labor abandoned raw intimidation in favor of more subtle methods of coercing and controlling their workforces.

This chapter tells the story of how local and national interests converged as the city of Charlotte became an innovative center of the anti-union movement in the 1970s. Though better known as the site of the Supreme Court's landmark *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* school desegregation case in 1971, the city's history during this decade also brings together many important strands of 1970s political economy, including financialization, downtown redevelopment, anti-public unionism,

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<sup>433</sup> On Sunbelt business and civic leaders' courting of Northern industry, see Cobb, *The Selling of the South*; Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*; Margaret O'Mara, *Cities of Knowledge: Cold War Science and the Search for the Next Silicon Valley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), and Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism*. On Southern cities' efforts to convince investors and the nation that the Jim Crow regime was a relic of the past, Atlanta broke the mold, taking the moniker “The City Too Busy to Hate.” See Kruse, *White Flight*; Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics: Governing Atlanta, 1946-88* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1989); and Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). On Atlanta and Charlotte, see Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*. On Charlotte and the relationship between desegregation and economic development, see Smith, *Boom for Whom?* On the opening page of the book's introduction, Smith quotes Hugh McColl, CEO and chairman of Bank of America, as saying, “Almost immediately after we integrated our schools, the Southern economy took off like a wildfire in the wind. I believe integration made the difference. Integration—and the diversity it began to nourish—became a source of economic, cultural and community strength.”

private sector union-busting campaigns, and the emergence of neoliberal politics. Charlotte's rise as a financial center and its anti-union activism became mutually reinforcing. In what follows, I trace the evolution of Charlotte's particular brand of anti-labor politics during the 1970s through the career of Edward J. Dowd, Jr., an important yet almost entirely overlooked figure who was active in local, state, and national efforts to combat organized labor. In just over a decade, Dowd went from serving as the executive secretary of Charlotte's nascent employers association to leading the Council on Union-Free Environment (CUE), which was funded by the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) and served as the educational mouthpiece of the organization. In the course of his career, Dowd helped solidify Charlotte's anti-union position in the face of growing labor militancy in the city and across the state. He reframed anti-unionism as a modern position to maintain Charlotte's progressive image and, in so doing, became a pioneer in the 1970s assault on organized labor. Across the nation, anti-unionists increasingly eschewed the virulent rhetoric of previous decades and adopted language and tactics similar to Dowd's, recognizing—to the frustration of union leaders—that such rhetorical twists made labor's foes deft opponents in the years that followed. Dowd's career also challenges the idea that North Carolina remained solidly anti-union into the 1970s because of textile industrialists whose power emanated from rural, manufacturing-heavy sectors of the state. While the influence of the textile industry was indeed substantial, Dowd, on behalf of Charlotte's leading financial institutions, energy conglomerates, and medical centers, waged a frontal assault on organized labor from the



state's emerging center of finance—a city which had spent decades self-consciously crafting an image of moderation and progressiveness.<sup>434</sup>

In addition, the work done by a new breed of savvy lawyers and consultants like Charlotte's Ed Dowd was instrumental in transforming the anti-union message into one that was exportable to parts of the nation with less history of hostility towards organized labor. As James Cobb aptly put it, "By the end of the 1970s anti-unionism had supplanted racism as the South's most respectable prejudice."<sup>435</sup> Taking this argument one step further, one can argue that the lingering impact of the mid-1970s fiscal crisis coupled with weakened Democratic support for unions at the national level made anti-unionism an increasingly respectable position across the nation.

### **Growth and Change in the 1970s: A Turning Point for Public Workers?**

As Charlotte emerged from the 1960s having avoided the major civil rights clashes that consumed other southern cities, Charlotteans had good reason to be hopeful that the 1970s might finally yield the growth and prosperity about which local boosters had always dreamed. Over the course of the decade, the city of Charlotte underwent dramatic spatial, political, and economic transformations, many of which facilitated its transition into the financial capital it would become by the late twentieth century.

Throughout this period, business interests determined many of the most substantial

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<sup>434</sup> In all fairness, this was not an inaccurate depiction of Charlotte, given the city's proactive response to the *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools* Supreme Court decision in 1971. However while the city's leadership was busy congratulating itself for implementing one of the nation's most successful school busing programs, the same leaders were also working to safeguard the city's "business-friendly climate." In fact, as political scientist Stephen Smith has aptly shown, the city's desegregated schools became a selling point for attracting Northern industries skeptical of relocating to regions perceived as being backwards or too socially conservative. Smith, *Boom for Whom?*

<sup>435</sup> Cobb, *The Selling of the South*, 259.

transformations in the city's spatial landscape. Like cities across the nation, Charlotte used federal urban renewal dollars to raze homes and businesses in predominantly African American and white working-class sectors of town to make way for expressways and commercial redevelopment. The most substantial of these projects targeted Brooklyn, the city's historically African American neighborhood, situated just east of downtown. According to Charlotte historian Tom Hanchett, "The Brooklyn project made no pretense at creating better quarters for residents. Not a single new housing unit went up to replace the 1,480 structures that fell to the bulldozer," ultimately displacing 1,007 Brooklyn families.<sup>436</sup> In the place of Brooklyn's demolished homes and businesses, the city constructed Charlotte's Government Plaza buildings, a city park and private commercial office space, all accessible by new, widened roads. The Charlotte Redevelopment Authority also utilized federal funds to bulldoze a section of the city's Dilworth neighborhood "that held a mix of groceries, pool halls, and eateries that catered largely to black and blue-collar shoppers" in order to erect the Charlotte Convention Center, a Radisson hotel, and a new headquarters for North Carolina National Bank (NCNB).<sup>437</sup>

Downtown redevelopment was central to the remaking of Charlotte into a neoliberal capital of finance with competition among North Carolina's banks fueling much of the construction.<sup>438</sup> In 1970, the city's leading banking institutions, North Carolina National Bank and First Union Bank, ranked forty-seventh and fifty-ninth nationally, respectively, by total assets, and Wachovia Bank, which was headquartered in Winston-Salem but would eventually relocate to Charlotte, ranked thirty-fifth. The

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<sup>436</sup> Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, 250.

<sup>437</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>438</sup> On neoliberal urban growth, see Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City*.

executives of these institutions envisioned a city whose towering steel and glass skyscrapers would serve as a symbol of their emerging economic power in the region. In 1968, NCNB erected a 123,000-square-foot \$4 million building at the intersection of College and Second Street and First Union constructed a 32-floor tower between College and Tryon Street.<sup>439</sup> Mayor John Belk, whose family owned more than 400 Belk department stores across the southeast and who was an NCNB stockholder, also had a financial stake in the development of downtown Charlotte.<sup>440</sup> In an effort to outdo First Union and Wachovia, and upon the urging of Mayor Belk, NCNB constructed another 40-floor tower that opened in 1974. According to one NCNB executive, “There was little happening in Charlotte that NCNB was not involved in.”<sup>441</sup> NCNB’s chairman, Addison Reese, was among the business community’s most prominent supporters of downtown redevelopment: “My banker’s mind is enthused at the thought of transforming this area in the heart of Charlotte, now mainly unproductive and decidedly unsightly, into a generator of jobs and income and tax revenues.”<sup>442</sup> Moreover, Reese told an associate, “You’d have to work at it now in North Carolina to fail in banking. All we want to do is get our share of the growth coming to North Carolina.”<sup>443</sup>

How the rewards of such growth might be distributed, however, was yet to be determined. Despite the setbacks of the 1969 *Atkins* decision, public workers in Charlotte

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<sup>439</sup> Howard E. Covington and Marion A. Ellis, *The Story of NationsBank: Changing the Face of American Banking* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 84.

<sup>440</sup> In April 1973, Judge James B. McMillan remarked in court that the city of Charlotte might have violated federal regulations when it sold land to NCNB, a company in which Mayor Belk was a shareholder, as a part of a downtown urban renewal project. As far as I can tell, nothing came of suggestion of Belk’s alleged conflict of interest. “Conflict Possible in Sale of Land,” *Times-News*, 14 April 1973.

<sup>441</sup> Covington and Ellis, *The Story of NationsBank*, 92.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

and throughout North Carolina were among those hopeful that they might finally share in the city's and state's promising future. On the national stage, it looked as if public workers in the early 1970s might even revive the national labor movement as teachers, sanitation workers, postal workers and other government employees waged increasingly militant strikes across the nation. Observers and labor leaders alike imagined that the era might finally yield "A Wagner Act for Public Employees."<sup>444</sup> For public workers in conservative states like North Carolina, this dream came one step closer to reality when, in 1970, the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR) issued a report outlining recommendations to improve state and local government labor-management relations.<sup>445</sup> Included in the report were recommendations that states require public employers to recognize the right of their employees to join or not join an employee organization, that strikes by public employees be prohibited, that states follow the "meet and confer in good faith" approach (in contrast to "collective bargaining"), and that voluntary check-off of organizational dues be permitted.<sup>446</sup> Though some officials on the commission argued that the recommendations did not go far enough in extending to public workers the same rights as workers in the private sector—such as Governor

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<sup>444</sup> McCartin, "A Wagner Act for Public Employees," 123-148.

<sup>445</sup> Established in 1959 under the Eisenhower administration, ACIR was created to be a permanent, bipartisan intergovernmental agency that functioned "to strengthen the American federal system and improve the ability of federal, state, and local governments to work together cooperatively, efficiently, and effectively." The Committee was comprised of 26 members and included mayors, county officials, senators, representatives, presidential cabinet members, and private citizens. Among its members was Senator Sam J. Ervin, the Democratic Senator from North Carolina. Over the years, ACIR issued a number of reports related to urban governance, improving the federal system, managing federal aid, and balancing public finances ACIR ceased operations in 1996. For more on ACIR, see *Public Administration Review* 71, no. 2, (March/April 2011)—the entire issue features articles reflecting on the impact of ACIR.

<sup>446</sup> Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Report, January 31, 1970, Washington, D.C., University of North Texas Digital Library, <http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc1160/>, Accessed May 26, 2014.

Nelson Rockefeller, who strongly objected to the endorsement of the “meet and confer” approach in favor of formal bargaining rights—ACIR’s proposal would have expanded the rights of public workers in states like North Carolina, which still denied both the right to “meet and confer” and to dues check-off to state employees. In discussing the report’s findings, Farris Bryant, the commission’s chairman and the former governor of Florida stated that without legislation permitting public workers to bargain collectively, states would essentially “encourage chaotic labor-management relations,” leaving such matters up to “the ebb and flow of the political power of employes,” unions, and state judiciaries.<sup>447</sup>

In North Carolina, government workers found increasing support for their rights on the job. Some observers speculated that the state legislature might be poised to do that which the judges in the 1969 *Atkins* decision had maintained the courts could not do, namely reverse the state’s ban on public sector collective bargaining. Since *Atkins*, and in the wake of growing public sector unrest, pragmatic government officials worried that the state’s collective bargaining ban would encourage labor militancy. Executive Director of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners and former city attorney John T. Morrissey warned attendants at the Metrolina Urban Conference in Charlotte that city governments were “sitting ducks” for “experienced and uninhibited” union leaders. He cautioned North Carolina’s elected officials that the state was approaching a “stone-age, head-in-the-sand attitude,” to which he added, “Head in the sand means rear in the air, a rather inviting target.”<sup>448</sup> In April 1970, Democratic governor Bob Scott publicly

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<sup>447</sup> Howard Covington, “His Labor Idea Now National,” *Charlotte Observer*, 26 September 1969.

<sup>448</sup> Jim Parks, “City-Union Talks Urged,” *Charlotte Observer*, 22 October 1969.

announced his position that North Carolina's laws concerning public employees were both inadequate and required revision. Local and state bodies, Scott maintained, needed to be allowed to negotiate with their workers' unions.<sup>449</sup> The governor called on state legislators to "be realistic," warning that municipal union activism was "part of our times."<sup>450</sup> Scott's position highlights the fact that by 1970, policymakers across the nation believed that public sector union rights were here to stay.

Many state newspapers, at least in urban areas, concurred. The *Charlotte News*, for example, urged legislators to reconsider what it referred to as the state's "know-nothing laws."<sup>451</sup> By April 1970, the *Charlotte Observer* reported that most Democratic contenders for local offices in Mecklenburg County supported the idea that state and city officials should be able to bargain openly and officially with public employees.<sup>452</sup> One *Charlotte Observer* editorial concluded, "The notion that public employes can't or shouldn't organize is out the window," noting that President Nixon had recently confirmed the rights of federal employees to bargain collectively, and that since 1959—the same year North Carolina passed its ban—at least 35 states had passed legislation expanding the rights of public sector workers to organize and bargain collectively. Considering such a political shift, in combination with the low wages of many public employees "and the special aspirations the civil rights movement has spurred among

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<sup>449</sup> "Modern State Labor Law Needed," *Charlotte Observer*, 31 July 1969; "Scott Supports Union Negotiations for N.C." *Charlotte Observer*, 21 April 1970.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid.

<sup>451</sup> Paul Jablow, "Let Unions, Cities Negotiate—Scott," *Charlotte Observer*, 31 October 1969; "Scott on Unions," 23 April 1970, *Charlotte News*.

<sup>452</sup> During the primary, the following candidates supported the idea: Incumbent reps. Hugh Campbell, Jim Vogler, and Louise Brennan, as well as Peter Foley, Eddie Knox, Craig Lawing and Hames Ross (who were each seeking their first term in office). Incumbent Senator Martha Evans and incumbent representatives Jim Beatty and Ernest Hicks would not comment. See Howard Covington, "Most Legislative Hopefuls Back Public Employees," *Charlotte Observer*, 30 April 1970.

many black public employes, more organized action seem[ed] certain...<sup>453</sup> To the city's newspapers and other local observers, maintaining the status quo of public workers seemed unsustainable.

### **The Governor's Study Commission**

In August 1970, responding to mounting political pressure, Governor Scott convened the Governor's Study Commission on Public Employe-Employer Relations and tasked the committee with the researching and making formal recommendations to the 1971 North Carolina General Assembly.<sup>454</sup> The commission held seven general meetings, two public hearings, and numerous subcommittee meetings. During the two public hearings, on 22 September and 11 November, local and state labor leaders, community associations, business executives, newspaper editors, city managers and other state officials testified concerning the state ban on public worker bargaining.

The majority of the speakers during the first meeting offered statements on behalf of organized labor.<sup>455</sup> Wilbur Hobby, the president of the North Carolina AFL-CIO,

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<sup>453</sup> "Labor Lull Could Be Misleading," *Charlotte News*, 2 August 1970.

<sup>454</sup> The commission's chairman was Jyles J. Coggins, a conservative Democratic state senator. Other members included: Frank Baldwin, Chairman of the Nash County Board of Commissioners; Otis Banks, Executive Secretary of the Highway and Prison Employment Association; Emmett Burden, Executive Secretary of the State Employees Association; Claude Caldwell, State Personnel Director; James C. "Pete" Dail, Edenton City Councilman and representative for Edenton Savings and Loan Association; Ralph Edwards, Deputy Commissioner of Corrections; David Flaherty, Republican state senator; Robert H. Jernigan, Democratic state representative; P.R. Latta; Jack Leath, representing Leath Hosiery Mills; Henry N. Patterson, Jr., Greensboro attorney; Richard H. Robinson, Assistant to the President, UNC-Chapel Hill; Dewey Sherrill, Teamster Union; Dewey Taylor, *Raleigh News and Observer*; and John T. Thrower, Charlotte City Councilman. Governor's Study Commission on Employer-Employee Relations, December 1970 Report, (Raleigh: State of North Carolina Printing Office, 1970).

<sup>455</sup> Representatives of labor included A.C. Dawson, of the North Carolina Association of Educators; Thomas Thigpen, president of the American Federation of Government Employees #1770 at Fort Bragg in Fayetteville; Wilbur Hobby, president of the North Carolina AFL-CIO; Ned Perry, president

began his testimony by reciting a portion of the North Carolina state constitution, which, interestingly, delineates citizens' rights over their labor. "We hold it to be self evident," read Hobby, "that all persons are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, *the enjoyment of the fruits of their own labor*, and the pursuit of happiness."<sup>456</sup> Hobby argued that the current ban on public worker bargaining constituted a violation of government workers' state constitutional rights, and though he did not explicitly cite the fourteenth amendment, he focused on the law's violation of the equal rights and protections of public workers. Hobby further argued that "the American way to do things" depended on a political process "where reasonable men sit down at the bargaining table." Unfortunately, he charged, "that is not the North Carolina way." If the North Carolina legislature could not create a legal infrastructure where business and labor could "sit down as gentlemen," then Hobby warned that public employees would "do as the early colonists did when they confronted England in 1776 and as North Carolinians did on May 20, 1775 when they adopted the Mecklenburg Declaration against those who 'wantonly trampled on our rights and liberties.'"<sup>457</sup> By alluding to the disruption of the eighteenth century, Hobby

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of the Firefighters Association in Raleigh; Leon Manning, president of the Raleigh City Workers, representing water, street, sanitation, parks and garage employees; Charles Hall, Vice President of the International Association of Firefighters; Robert Middleton, Vice President of the Charlotte Firefighters Association Local #660 in Charlotte; Herbert Maynor, President of the City Workers Union in Durham.

<sup>456</sup> Emphasis mine. This section constitutes Article 1 of the North Carolina Constitution. Echoing the Declaration of Independence and enumerating the inalienable rights of the state's citizens, this section was added as a part of the 1868 Reconstruction Constitution and was intended to reference the slave labor system. Nonetheless, since its addition, the clause has been invoked in some constitutional challenges to state employment and economic regulations. See John V. Orth and Paul Newby, *The North Carolina State Constitution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 46-7.

<sup>457</sup> Statement of Wilbur Hobby, Box 2354, Folder 4, North Carolina AFL-CIO Records, 1950-1981, SLA.



warned that North Carolina's current affluence was predicated upon a precarious peace of the present.

Labor leaders also emphasized that thousands of essential public workers across the state—federal employees—were already bargaining collectively, and, contrary to the critics' claims, the state had not descended into chaos. Such was the argument of William Cates, President of the North Carolina Council of American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) Locals, who testified before the commission. The NC Council of AFGE Locals headquartered in Fayetteville, was also the site of Fort Bragg, one of the nation's largest active-duty Army bases and home to the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division. Speaking at the height of the Vietnam War, Cates highlighted the fact that AFGE had 22 locals representing civilian employees of the Navy, Army, Air Force, Veterans Administration, Social Security Administration, Department of Agriculture, and the Army Corps of Engineers and was a body composed of workers of all ranks, from wage laborers to engineers and physicians.<sup>458</sup> Cates also pointed to President Nixon's recent signing of Executive Order 11491 on 29 October 1969, which expanded the rights of federal workers to unionize, as evidence of bipartisan support for public sector bargaining. He concluded by arguing, "simple, human dignity demands that public employees be given the right to negotiate conditions...which affect their employment. The federal government recognized the benefits of employee participation. Can the State

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<sup>458</sup> Under federal law and a Department of Defense directive, civilian workers within the military are permitted to unionize, but uniformed personnel are prohibited. See Richard C. Kearney and Patrice M. Mareschal, *Labor Relations in the Public Sector, Fifth Edition* (Boca Raton, FL: Taylor and Francis Group, 2014), 27.

of North Carolina do less?”<sup>459</sup> Cates and other union leaders pointed toward the nation’s military and Republican Party to legitimize the right of North Carolina’s public workers to unionize.

Other speakers testified against revising the state ban, such as Charlotte’s city manager (and later the Chamber of Commerce president) Bill Veeder. After outlining the history of public worker activism in Charlotte between 1968 and 1970, Veeder asserted that the city of Charlotte was “generally satisfied” with the present state law, especially in light of Charlotte’s recently passed Employee-Employer Relations Policy (as discussed in chapter three), which established a “meet and confer” policy with public workers, but reinforced that the city would not formally negotiate with employees. In contrast to ACIR’s recommendations, Veeder further urged the state legislature to pass a statute strengthening the current law by defining dues check-offs as unlawful and by adding a section to the law prohibiting public workers from declaring strikes. The executive director of the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners and the former Charlotte City Attorney, John T. Morrisey, warned the Governor’s Commission, “workers’ goals aren’t simply more money ... but more power. And political power is a heady wine.”<sup>460</sup>

Political power may indeed be intoxicating, but it was not North Carolina’s public workers who were most guilty of overindulging. Although the public sector was gaining momentum, visibility, and some measure of political influence across the nation, North Carolina’s business leaders and anti-union government officials had demonstrated

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<sup>459</sup> Statement of William E. Cates, Box 2354, Folder 1, North Carolina AFL-CIO Records, 1950-1981, SLA.

<sup>460</sup> Paul Jablow, “Municipal Union Study Group Warned,” *Charlotte Observer*, 9 September 1970.

remarkable zeal for keeping the state's union rates among the lowest in the nation. The same political forces now came before the Governor's Commission to testify in favor of the state ban. Chief among these was Ed Dowd, who spoke on behalf of North Carolina Associated Industries, an organization representing employers associations in Asheville, Charlotte, Gastonia, Greensboro, and Raleigh.<sup>461</sup> Since these employers associations represented virtually every leading corporation in the state, Dowd was, in essence, the voice of industry during these public hearings. As such, Dowd continued the long tradition of North Carolina industrialists proclaiming the fundamental incompatibility of economic prosperity with a unionized workforce. "North Carolina is today, and has been, the most attractive state in the United States for business and industry," declared Dowd. "Our industrial development efforts are the envy of the nation." The reason northern industries increasingly chose North Carolina for plant relocations was because of non-unionized workers' willingness to give "a fair day's work for a fair day's pay." Like many anti-union advocates, Dowd also emphasized organized labor's threat to individualism: the North Carolina worker was special because he is "his own man—talks for himself and speaks his mind." Dowd was unequivocal: unions, in both the public and private sector, were bad for business and bad for the state of North Carolina.

Although the Governor's Commission focused on the state's ban on public workers bargaining collectively, Dowd used his testimony as an opportunity to attack public workers' demands for higher wages. In contrast to their private sector

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<sup>461</sup> North Carolina Associated Industries represented Associated Industries of Gastonia, Capital Associated Industries of Raleigh, Central Piedmont Industries of Charlotte (of which Dowd was president), Piedmont Associated Industries, of Greensboro, and Western Carolina Industries of Asheville.

counterparts, Dowd argued, government employees (1) usually received better benefits and (2) generally had a different “philosophy” about their labor—public workers had chosen to serve the public and were not in it for the money. Indeed, some sectors of government workers had long been referred to as “public servants,” but for a variety of both practical and political reasons, the increasingly diverse public sector—both in terms of demographic composition and job description—had begun eschewing such terminology in favor of “government worker” by the late 1960s. According to labor historian Robert Zieger, “‘Public servants,’ a phrase smacking of the old gentility, became ‘government workers,’ more descriptive of the people who toiled at grimy social services offices and on the city road maintenance crews and garbage trucks.” Though Zieger does not mention it explicitly, one can also imagine that African American and female government workers were especially eager to dispense with job titles that included reference to servitude.<sup>462</sup> Moreover, while some (predominantly white-collar) government workers still viewed themselves as public servants, Dowd’s contention that all public employees viewed their work as a calling and thus were content with meager pay would have been news to Charlotte’s sanitation workers, who had been lobbying the city for years to raise wages and improve working conditions.

Dowd concluded his testimony with an argument typical of mid-century anti-unionism—that unions were anachronistic and unnecessary—but added a twist reflective of Charlotte’s boosterish optimism: North Carolina’s “outstanding business climate”

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<sup>462</sup> Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions*, 162.

resulted from its “enlightened” and “employee-oriented” labor practices.<sup>463</sup> Dowd outlined for the Governor’s Study Commission Central Piedmont Industries’ “positive” recommendations to improve employer-employee relations in the public sector: Public employers should establish grievance procedures (though he offered no specifics); public employers should “follow area practices in wages, fringe benefits, and other conditions of work” to increase competition; managers and supervisors should be given adequate training for how to “provide direction and leadership employees need and deserve”; and public employers should impress upon workers how “necessary and important” they are. Dowd offered the following example to illustrate his final suggestion: “Sanitation workers often feel they are the lowest, most unwanted and unnecessary people in the work force. There is no reason for that. Admittedly, they have dirty jobs. But they are so very, very important to the cities in which they live and work.” Paternalistic at best, Dowd’s proposal overlooked the possibility that such workers might “feel more appreciated” if their labor were adequately compensated and their demands to bargain collectively were taken seriously and protected by state law. On behalf of the employers associations he represented, Dowd issued a warning to state officials on the commission: “We beg you not to turn to Chicago or Detroit and elsewhere, as some of our public employers are doing, to seek guidance in this field. Those people, gentlemen, are living by their mistakes—don’t let them foist their errors on us.”<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>463</sup> “Employee-oriented,” of course, did not mean that employee demands would necessarily be taken into consideration. After all, state workers and their unions had been advocating for the right to bargain collectively for over a decade—a move that Dowd came before the Governor’s Commission to oppose.

<sup>464</sup> Statement of Edward Dowd before the Governor’s Study Commission, Box 2354, Folder 1, North Carolina AFL-CIO Records, 1950-1981, SLA.

After reviewing and deliberating on the testimonies of prominent business, labor, and community leaders from across the state, the Governor's Study Commission on Public Employe-Employer Relations ultimately recommended nothing of substance to encourage the legislature to revise or overturn the state ban on public sector bargaining. Although the report does not state whose testimony was most persuasive, the Commission's decision suggests that Dowd, as the representative of the state's most powerful business interests, exerted a substantial measure of influence. In its report, the commission determined that, based on the public hearings it organized, North Carolinians were "sharply divided ... regarding public employer-employee relations." Although the commission recognized that the *Atkins* ruling had caused statewide confusion regarding how city and county governments could and should engage with public employee unions, the body was "unable to agree on any fundamental changes."<sup>465</sup> When the Commission finally made its recommendation, it ultimately reinforced the current system that excluded public workers from the right to form a union in the state of North Carolina.

Not all commission members were satisfied with the report's conclusions, however. P.R. Latta, a prominent Wake County Democrat, issued a formal dissenting opinion that was included in the appendix of the report. Latta chided the commission for ignoring ACIR's recommendations and, more broadly, for overlooking what he believed to be the importance of workers' rights to influence the conditions under which they labor: "We are telling these 212,749 public employees that they are not qualified to have a voice in determining their working conditions. Yet we are entrusting these people with

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<sup>465</sup> Governor's Study Commission on Employer-Employee Relations, December 1970 Report, (Raleigh: State of North Carolina Printing Office, 1970).

the functions of our government...” Latta charged that the commission’s recommendations were “such a slight improvement that they are practically worthless,” had “no teeth whatsoever,” and that its members should “be ashamed to present such a program to the Governor of North Carolina.”<sup>466</sup> State labor leaders also criticized the commission for failing to include representatives of police, firefighters or sanitation workers unions, or any members that were black or female.<sup>467</sup> As Latta bitterly predicted, the commission’s tepid proposal proved insufficient to convince the North Carolina legislature that the state’s pro-business position on public workers needed revision. Due to changing political and economic circumstances in the years that followed, attempts to revise or overturn the state law lost momentum.

With respect to the creation of the Governor’s Commission, it remains unclear how supportive Governor Scott actually was of reversing the state’s ban on public sector bargaining. Such a reversal would likely have bolstered the ranks of public employee unions and, in turn, the labor movement writ large across the state. Even if Scott had been supportive of reversing the state ban, North Carolina governors have consistently paid a high price for anything that veers in the direction of support for unions. Former governor Terry Sanford, for example, once explained, “if you wanted to be halfway fair...to organized labor as such, it costs you politically. It cost me politically to be known as a person that thought labor unions were all right...I don’t doubt that it cost me votes.”<sup>468</sup>

Governor Scott was unlikely to have supported stronger recommendations from the

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<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

<sup>467</sup> “Few Labor Law Changes Seen,” *The Burlington Daily Times-News*, 22 December 1970.

<sup>468</sup> Oral History Interview with Terry Sanford, August 20 and 21, 1976. Interview A-0328-2. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) in the Southern Oral History Program Collection, SHA.

commission since even a nod toward unionism had the potential to hurt North Carolina's politicians.

### **Ed Dowd and the Central Piedmont Employers Association**

Charlotte businessman Ed Dowd, whose testimony before the Governor's Commission illustrated his political influence, began his rise to prominence as one of the city's leading voices against organized labor in the late 1950s, with a career that continued through the 1980s. Dowd was at the center of an ever-expanding network of anti-union operations in North Carolina's fastest-growing metropolis. His organization, the Central Piedmont Employers Association (CPEA) represented many of the city's and region's largest corporations, including Duke Power, North Carolina National Bank, the Greater Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, Belk Stores, Charlotte Memorial Hospital and Medical Center, Dillard Paper Company, First Union National Bank, Harris-Teeter Supermarket, Knight Publishing Company, Mecklenburg County, Presbyterian Hospital, WSOC-TV, and Woonsocket Spinning Company. One of CPEA's primary objectives was "to uphold the principles of free, private and competitive enterprise."<sup>469</sup> Many of the city's most powerful businessmen sat on CPEA's board of directors alongside city officials, such as W. J. Veeder, Charlotte's city manager during the sanitation strikes of 1968-70, who by then had become the president of the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce.<sup>470</sup> According to Martha Evans, a former Charlotte city councilwoman and state senator, CPEA had displaced the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce by the 1970s as

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<sup>469</sup> CPEA Pamphlet, Box 2, Folder 2297 "Edward Dowd," North Carolina AFL-CIO Records, 1950-1981, SLA.

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.



the most influential business organization in the city. Although it did not actively recruit candidates for city office, which the Chamber was known to do (as in the case of Stanford Brookshire), CPEA did support candidates, many of whom won.<sup>471</sup>

A northerner, Dowd cited his extensive experience with unions in Massachusetts and Ohio as one reason he chose to move south once a job opportunity presented itself.<sup>472</sup> Dowd was born in Holyoke, Massachusetts, in 1921 and earned an M.Ed. in Personnel and Industrial Relations from Springfield College in Springfield, Massachusetts.<sup>473</sup> He served in the United States Navy during World War II and, after the war, worked for Libby-Owens-Ford Glass Company, Toledo Edison Company, and the Employers' Association of Toledo—a city he once called the “black hole of Calcutta” in labor relations—before being recruited to Charlotte to work for Central Piedmont Industries (which changed its name to the Central Piedmont Employers Association in the late 1970s).<sup>474</sup> A *Charlotte Observer* profile on Dowd described him as “a tall, handsome man with a shock of smooth white hair. He’s sophisticated, articulate, middle class, conservative.”<sup>475</sup> His office, explained another regional publication, “is spacious and

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<sup>471</sup> Martha W. Evans, interviewed by Bill Moye, 26 June 1974, Interview A-0318, Oral History Program, SHC.

<sup>472</sup> Jim Parks, “Fight Against Union,” *Charlotte Observer*, undated, Box 2, Folder 2297 “Edward Dowd,” North Carolina AFL-CIO Records, 1950-1981, SLA.

<sup>473</sup> Edward J. Dowd obituary, *Charlotte Observer*, 9 February 2007.

<sup>474</sup> For the sake of simplicity, this chapter refers to the organization by the latter name, Central Piedmont Employers Association (CPEA). On the “black hole of Calcutta” reference, see “Proceedings of Symposium on Employee-Management Relations: Issues in the South,” University of North Carolina at Charlotte, November 1976.

<sup>475</sup> The profile also contrasted Dowd with AFSCME organizer Jim Pierce, “the fiery, less refined [union] leader.” Jim Parks, “Fight Against Union,” *Charlotte Observer*, undated, Box 2, Folder 2297 “Edward Dowd,” North Carolina AFL-CIO Records, 1950-1981, SLA.

tastefully furnished with couches and coffee tables, and he has a battery of secretaries to impede an intruder's progress."<sup>476</sup>

Not long after beginning his position with CPEA in 1959, Dowd became something of an itinerant preacher of the anti-union gospel, peddling his message to eager audiences on a virtually never-ending speaking circuit.<sup>477</sup> On September 10, 1962, he brought his message to a Greensboro Rotary Club luncheon at the city's O'Henry Hotel. Though Dowd told the audience that his organization (which was affiliated with Greensboro's employers association, Piedmont Associated Industries) was not anti-union, he nonetheless offered listeners, many of whom were local business leaders, a three-point plan for preventing the unionization of their employees, which included encouraging management to incorporate merit into its seniority process, adopting "workable" grievance procedures, and "recogniz[ing] work well done." Such measures, Dowd maintained, would allow North Carolina to maintain a friendly business climate free of union interference. "The Union movement in America is running scared and losing members," Dowd told the Rotary Club.<sup>478</sup>

Throughout the 1960s, Dowd increased the political clout of the organization by expanding its membership roster and developing important ties with other organizations.

Rare was the issue concerning labor that he was not involved in—nearly 50 years later,

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<sup>476</sup> Tony Dunbar and Bob Hall, "Union Busters: Who, What, When, Where, How and Why," *Southern Exposure*, Summer 1980, Vol. III, No. 2, p. 64. Established in 1975 at the Institute for Southern Studies in Durham, *Southern Exposure* magazine offered groundbreaking coverage of labor issues in the South at a time when most Southern newspapers were still predominantly critical of organized labor and efforts to improve southern working conditions. For more on *Southern Exposure*, see Atkins, *Covering for the Bosses: Labor and the Southern Press*, 127-141.

<sup>477</sup> Dowd became Executive Secretary in 1959, Executive Vice President in 1966, and President in 1971, Charlotte City Directory 1959, 1966, 1971, CMPL.

<sup>478</sup> "Union Membership is Held Declining," *Greensboro Daily News*, 11 September 1962.

union members in Charlotte still remember him as a constant fixture of the local business scene. Firefighter Bob Middleton described Dowd as “lambasting us every chance he got. Every time he could get in print he was hollering about us.” Jim Black recalled, “Most every time we would appear before city council, there was a gentleman that was president of another association in Charlotte...Ed Dowd...He would always get up there and say ‘you can’t do this. You can’t let these people unionize. It’ll put us out of business.’”<sup>479</sup>

In April 1970, Dowd’s organization was at the center of a row between North Carolina AFL-CIO President Wilbur Hobby and Governor Bob Scott over Scott’s decision to name Charlotte labor organizer Jim Pierce to the State Industrial Commission. After over a decade of battling one another in Charlotte city council meetings and other public forums, Dowd and Pierce had become well acquainted enough with one another to recognize that they stood on opposite sides of virtually every issue. As a result, Dowd had good reason to believe that Pierce’s appointment to the state commission would pose a threat to his organization’s political agenda. Less than a year before Dowd attempted to block Pierce’s nomination, Pierce stood before the Charlotte city council and announced that Ed Dowd “has been opposed to everything that is progressive in the City of Charlotte” since as far back as Pierce could remember: “He was for low wages, minimum fringe benefits, low taxes on industry, he was against unions, against minimum wages, against federal programs such as the poverty program, urban renewal, low cost public housing, welfare programs, and fair employment practices.”<sup>480</sup>

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<sup>479</sup> Bob Middleton, interview with author; Jim Black, interview with author. See chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of Dowd’s opposition to the firefighter unionization efforts of the late 1960s.

<sup>480</sup> Charlotte City Council Meeting Minutes, 22 July 1969, Minute Book 52, p. 188.

Thus, when CPEA discovered that Pierce was under consideration to lead the state industrial commission, Dowd initiated a letter-writing campaign to dissuade the governor from appointing the Charlotte labor leader. The letters and telegrams highlighted the fact that Pierce was in the process of appealing a conviction related to an arrest during the recent Chapel Hill food workers strike in February 1969 (as discussed in chapter three). One North Carolina industrialist urged Governor Scott to drop Pierce because, in addition to his “disregard for the law,” Pierce was “an extremely ambitious labor leader who would only ‘use’ this office to further his own career.”<sup>481</sup> Under pressure, Scott withdrew Pierce’s name within a day of submitting it and instead appointed former deputy commissioner William H. Stephenson to the post, a more politically neutral choice. Hobby charged that Governor Scott had “buckled” to “vicious anti-labor pressure,” and the AFL-CIO president demanded that the governor “investigate these anti-labor people.”<sup>482</sup> Ed Dowd, he declared, was “out to destroy organized labor and return the people of North Carolina to economic slavery.”<sup>483</sup>

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<sup>481</sup> Letter from W. Eston Ross to Governor Robert Scott, 6 April 1970, Box 573.13 “Industrial Commission,” Governor Bob Scott Papers, North Carolina State Archives [hereafter NCSA].

<sup>482</sup> “Scott Choice For Industry Group Vigorously Opposed,” *The Lexington Dispatch*, 25 April 1970.

<sup>483</sup> North Carolina AFL-CIO Press Release, undated, Box 2311, Folder 13, North Carolina AFL-CIO Records, 1950-1981, SLA. Hobby further threatened that “if the working people of North Carolina continue to receive this type of treatment from the present administration, then ... we will have a choice in 1972.” “Scott Choice For Industry Group Vigorously Opposed,” *The Lexington Dispatch*, 25 April 1970. In fact, Hobby put himself on the Democratic primary ballot in 1972, becoming the first southern union leader to run for governor. Although he only received 7 percent of the primary vote (ultimately losing to James Holhouser), Hobby believed his candidacy drew attention to the labor movement. “I think people know there is a trade union movement in the state now. They know that it can talk about uses, that eh bug people in the utilities and the banks and the insurance companies run this state, and that it ought to be people’s government. And I think they know now that the unions are the champions of the little man.” Hobby as quoted in Bass and Devries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics*, 239.

By the mid-1970s, CPEA entered the anti-union consulting fray by advertising a variety of “labor management” services it could offer to client companies—some of which were included as a part of membership and additional services that could be obtained for a fee. As a part of membership, services included: regular reports on the state of labor relations in the city, state and nation; a committee of representatives of member companies that met regularly to exchange information and share anti-labor strategies; professional assistance in dealing with labor relations problems, EEOC, and OSHA; and assistance “in working with civic and community agencies, schools and colleges, to bring to these groups an understanding of the problems faced by business and industry today.”<sup>484</sup> Additional services included “Attitude Surveys” that attempted to gauge employee’s feelings about their employer and, ostensibly, unions; union contract negotiating services, whereby CPEA would represent management in all parts of negotiations, using “factual statistical information and many years of staff experience in personnel and labor relations”; and an “Employee Benefits Program,” whereby worker’s benefits were “expertly communicated to the employee by means of personal interviews...and employee handbooks.”<sup>485</sup>

As its reputation grew in the business community, CPEA also began serving as the formal representative of some of its member businesses in negotiations with labor unions. For example, Dowd represented South Carolina Electric Corporation in

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<sup>484</sup> CPEA Pamphlet, Box 2, Folder 2297 “Edward Dowd,” North Carolina AFL-CIO Records, 1950-1981, SLA.

<sup>485</sup> For these services, in 1977-8 for example, each company paid a base rate of \$150.00 annually, \$3.50 per employee for the first 100 employees, \$2.00 per employee thereafter, up to a maximum membership of \$950.00. CPEA Pamphlet, Box 2, Folder 2297 “Edward Dowd,” North Carolina AFL-CIO Records, 1950-1981, SLA.

negotiations with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 379 in 1977.<sup>486</sup> Even major regional industries, such as Duke Power Company, believed it beneficial to employ CPEA's services. Union leaders, however, held that CPEA's representation and negotiation activities stretched beyond that which was permissible by law. On 27 June 1977, Carl Lansden, the International Representative of the IBEW, sent a letter to the Department of Labor on behalf of IBEW Local 967 in Charlotte claiming that Dowd, CPEA, and Duke Power had all violated various portions of the 1959 Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act (LMRDA). Lansden requested that the Department of Labor immediately forward such reports to him, but, "[i]n the event that such reports are not on file, a serious question is raised as to the Duke Power Company and Central Piedmont Industries' compliance with the Act."<sup>487</sup> To this, a representative from the Department of Labor responded that no such reports on either Duke Power or CPEA were on file and stated that, according to the LMRDA, Dowd would not need to file the consultant report if "he is a regular full time employee and consulting with

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<sup>486</sup> Herbert M. Cole to Harold McIver, 26 September 1977, Box 2, Folder 2297 "Edward Dowd," North Carolina AFL-CIO Records, 1950-1981, SLA.

<sup>487</sup> Specifically, Lansden charged that Dowd and CPEA had not filed necessary disclosure materials as required by Section 203 (b) of the 1959 Labor-Management Reporting and Disclosure Act (LMRDA), which requires consultants to file reports with the Department of Labor if they have direct contact with employees (often referred to as the "advise exemption" which had been in place since 1962). The letter also maintained that Duke Power was in violation of Section 203 (a) (3) (4) and (5) of the 1959 Act if the utility company "participates in the funding of Central Piedmont Industries." Moreover, the letter charged that in accordance with Part 406 (Title 29, Chapter IV of Code of Federal Regulations), which requires labor relations consultants to disclose certain arrangements with employers, access to CPEA's report, had it ever been filed, should have been made publicly available. Carl Lansden to the Director of Labor-Management and Welfare-Pension Reports, United States Department of Labor, 27 June 1977, Box 2, Folder 2297 "Edward Dowd," North Carolina AFL-CIO Records, 1950-1981, SLA.

employees about exercising their rights to organize and bargain collectively is a regular part of his job.”<sup>488</sup>

Although it is unclear whether CPEA violated the law in this case, it was not uncommon for anti-union consultants to do so. Although they vigorously denied it, consultants sometimes encouraged employers to use illegal means to undermine unionization efforts—such as firing pro-union employees—arguing that the rewards of preventing unionization outweighed any potential penalties. As one consultant told attendants at a management-consulting seminar in Los Angeles, “You got to remember you only lose once. What happens if you violate the law? The probability is you will never get caught. If you do get caught, the worst thing that can happen to you is you get a second election and the employer wins 96% of elections. So the odds are with you.”<sup>489</sup> Between 1968 and 1979, given the abundance and variety of legal and extralegal tactics anti-union consultants employed, it is little wonder that their efforts were highly effective, leading employers across the nation to increasingly consider it standard operating procedure to hire anti-union consultants.<sup>490</sup>

### **The Evolution of Anti-Unionism in the 1970s**

Though businesses had been employing anti-labor lawyers and consultants since the 1940s, these hired guns became an increasingly essential part of challenging and

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<sup>488</sup> Carl Rolnick to Carl Lansden, 17 August 1977, Box 2, Folder 2297 “Edward Dowd,” North Carolina AFL-CIO Records, 1950-1981, SLA.

<sup>489</sup> As cited in John Logan, “Consultants, Lawyers, and the ‘Union-Free’ Movement in the US Since the 1970s,” *Industrial Relations Journal* 33:3 (2002), 207.

<sup>490</sup> For more on how anti-union consultants operated, see Logan, “Consultants, Lawyers, and the ‘Union-Free’ Movement in the US Since the 1970s,” 197-214.

unraveling the legal infrastructure protecting workers and unions at both the state and national level during the 1970s. As Harold McIver, the Organization Director of the AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Department, explained, "You still get sheriffs scaring people away during an organizing drive, but the biggest headache now is these damned lawyers and their consultants."<sup>491</sup> According to Assistant Secretary of Labor William Hopgood in a testimony before the House Subcommittee on Labor Management Relations in 1980, "the number of consultants and the scope and sophistication of their activities...increased substantially."<sup>492</sup> In other words, the growth in the consulting industry was more a difference of degree than kind—but one that nonetheless had a substantial impact on organized labor. By 1979, consulting firms were believed to be doing at least 100 million dollars in business and, by the early 1980s, various sources estimated that more than 1,500 anti-union consultants had opened up shop across the United States. Herbert Melnick of Modern Management Methods, one of the nation's leading consulting firms, reported to Congress that the industry had witnessed a tenfold increase over the course of the 1970s.<sup>493</sup> According to one AFL-CIO report in 1979, "The staggering rise in decertification and union shop deauthorization elections—up 400 percent in the last 11 years—gives graphic testimony to the labor consultants' success in their attempts to destroy the process of collective bargaining."<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>491</sup> Tony Dunbar and Bob Hall, "Union Busters: Who, What, When, Where, How and Why," *Southern Exposures*, Summer 1980, Vol. III, No. 2, p. 54.

<sup>492</sup> Hopgood as cited in Smith, *From Blackjacks to Briefcases*, 104.

<sup>493</sup> Michael Goldfield, *The Decline of Organized Labor in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 109; Logan, "Consultants, Lawyers, and the 'Union-Free' Movement in the US Since the 1970s," 198; Minchin, *What Do We Need A Union For?* 207.

<sup>494</sup> Charles McDonald and Dick Wilson, "Peddling the 'Union-Free' Guarantee," *AFL-CIO Federationist*, April 1979.



Consultants' counter-organizing campaigns usually consisted of a variety of tactics intended to undermine employees' ability to vote freely and expediently for union representation.<sup>495</sup> Such tactics included: authorization card delays; manipulation of bargaining units; molding supervisors in "foot soldiers" of the anti-union message (so as to avoid actual interaction between consultants and employees, which would require reporting to the NLRB); and designing and disseminating anti-union pamphlets, captive audience speeches, and letters from management to be mailed to employees' homes. In general, consultants worked to create a divisive workplace environment for employees, often utilizing different strategies in white-collar and blue-collar settings. While consultants often believed using fear and intimidation was effective in industrial and other blue-collar workplaces, counter-organizing campaigns targeting white-collar workers usually emphasized that union membership was incompatible with their professional identity and disruptive in the workplace. Such a breadth of tactics contributed to both the growing effectiveness of the anti-labor consulting industry and the feeling among labor organizers that they were up against an increasingly impossible opponent.

In North Carolina, Dowd and the CPEA were part of a broad edifice of anti-union professionals that included members of law firms, consultant groups, employers associations, and think tanks. In the Charlotte area, corporations dealing with unions usually turned to either the Charlotte law firm Blakeney, Alexander and Machen or, in South Carolina, nearby Greenville's Ogletree Deakins. Whiteford Blakeney was best

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<sup>495</sup> Logan, "Consultants, Lawyers, and the 'Union-Free' Movement in the US Since the 1970s," 197-214.

known for his involvement with the J.P. Stevens Company, the nation's second-largest textile producer, which waged a well-publicized battle against the Textile Workers Union of America's unionization efforts between 1963 and 1980, and for being the General Council of the National Right to Work Committee (NRTWC).<sup>496</sup> Blakeney became infamous among labor organizers for developing the so-called "Blakeney Formula" for defeating unions: in negotiations, the company would refuse to allow union dues check-offs and prohibit arbitration of grievances, but would concede to workers the right to strike.<sup>497</sup> By refusing the first two points, considered essential to union organizers, Blakeney's strategy made it virtually impossible for organizers to finance and sustain a union. Such tactics, which came to be known as "preventative labor relations," were replicated across the nation.<sup>498</sup>

The state was also home to one of the nation's first African American-owned anti-union public relations consulting firms, B & C Associates, located in High Point, a furniture-industry dominated town roughly 75 miles northeast of Charlotte. Founded by Robert J. Brown in 1960, who served as Special Assistant to President Nixon from 1968-73, B & C represented a number of large national corporations, including Coors Beer, Woolworth's, Nabisco, Hanes, Southern Railway, and Wachovia Bank.<sup>499</sup> One of B & C's Greensboro clients told a *Charlotte Observer* reporter, "We consider that we are

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<sup>496</sup> For more on the J.P. Stevens campaign, see Minchin, *Don't Sleep With Stevens!*; James A. Hodges, "J.P. Stevens and the Union: Struggle for the South," in *Race, Class, and Community in Southern Labor History*, ed. Gary M. Fink and Merl E. Reed (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 53-64, 246-249; and James A. Hodges, "The Real Norma Rae," in *Southern Labor in Transition, 1940-1995*, ed. Robert Zieger (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

<sup>497</sup> Oral History Interview with Scott Hoyman, Fall 1973, Interview E-0009, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) in the Southern Oral History Program Collection, SHC.

<sup>498</sup> Minchin, *What Do We Need A Union For?* 207.

<sup>499</sup> A few of these firms, such as Coors and Woolworths, likely also employed B&C because of their image problem with African Americans. Dunbar and Hall, "Union Busters," 54.

buying protection. [Brown] can communicate with Negro employees and keep them quiet and keep trouble from generating with that group... We just give him a payoff to keep down trouble.”<sup>500</sup> One black minister from Concord, where Cannon Mills workers had waged a unionization drive, described how B & C targeted black clergy and community leaders to lead the anti-union campaigns. Another member of the clergy, Catholic nun Sister Imelda Maurer, who had assisted textile workers across the state in filing workers compensation, explained how “[Brown] helped wage a campaign of fear and intimidation against the workers, most of whom were black women.”<sup>501</sup> The Amalgamated Clothing and Textiles Workers Union (ACTWU) called the B & C’s work “union-busting with a civil rights twist.”<sup>502</sup>

Some of North Carolina’s most prominent black-owned businesses shared B & C’s antipathy towards organized labor. In 1978, the president of the Office and Professional Employees International Union, Howard Coughlin, complained about his union’s difficulties organizing employees of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company in Durham, the largest and oldest African-American owned life insurance

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<sup>500</sup> Ibid.

<sup>501</sup> Eric Harrison, “An Embattled Envoy Candidate Brown Considered Anti-Union in His Home State,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 July 1986.

<sup>502</sup> Timothy Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker*, 260-1. For a profile on Brown, see “Robert Brown Puts Black Consciousness In the White House,” *Jet Magazine*, 4 March 1971. B & C Associates was not alone in its efforts to tie the anti-union cause to the black freedom struggle. Beginning in the 1960s, for example, the National Right to Work Committee, and its legal arm, the Nation Right to Work Legal Defense Fund, used constitutional litigation to link their cause with the civil rights movement. See Lee, “Whose Rights?” 160-180. Although Brown vigorously denied his involvement in union-busting, such allegations nonetheless limited Brown’s future political prospects. In 1986, President Reagan nominated Brown to be the U.S. Ambassador to South Africa, but after criticism from labor leaders in the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, and *Philadelphia Inquirer*, as well as ties to a Nigerian leader who had been accused of corruption, Brown withdrew his name from consideration. “Brown Opts Out as Possible S. Africa Envoy,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 July 1986; Dudley Clendinen, “Anti-Labor Acts Laid to Brown, Who Denies Them,” *New York Times*, 20 July 1986.

company in the nation.<sup>503</sup> According to Coughlin, the union won an August 1972 election in which approximately 150 North Carolina Mutual employees participated, despite the company's "efforts to stall, distort the bargaining unit, and seek in every way to avoid an election."<sup>504</sup> Coughlin also noted North Carolina Mutual's refusal to give workers Martin Luther King's birthday as a paid holiday. Because the union was "reluctant to strike a [black-owned company]," however, it signed what Coughlin described as "an inferior contract" in March 1973. In the year that followed, North Carolina Mutual placed increased pressure on employees not to unionize. "When key people got discouraged and left for other employment," explained Coughlin, "they were replaced by those who were carefully selected for their anti-union attitudes...supervision kept up a constant war of nerves against the union."<sup>505</sup> Coughlin also alleged that the company attempted to persuade employees not to unionize by arguing that unions were racist and workers were indebted to North Carolina Mutual for rescuing them from Jim Crow's exploitative working conditions. Such arguments included: "As you know, all the power in unions is controlled by the WHITE man" and "How many of us are overly obligated to North Carolina Mutual for taking us out of laundries, maids in stores, kitchens and restaurants, factories, and other jobs where we had to slave and work hard, and put us in nice air

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<sup>503</sup> For more on North Carolina Mutual, see Walter B. Weare, *Black Business in the New South: A Social History of the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993 ed.); Leslie Brown, *Upbuilding Black Durham: Gender, Class and Black Community Development in the Jim Crow South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

<sup>504</sup> Howard Coughlin to Bayard Rustin, President of the A. Phillip Randolph Institute, 1 March 1978, Box 29, Folder 27, Kelly M. Alexander Papers, UNCC.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*

conditioned offices?”<sup>506</sup> In the end, such efforts proved successful—within a year of the original contract’s signing, the North Carolina Mutual union was decertified.<sup>507</sup>

Anti-union scholars and intellectuals also found a warm welcome in North Carolina. In Winston-Salem, law professor Sylvester Petro founded the conservative Institute for Labor Policy Analysis at Wake Forest University in 1973. According to Joseph McCartin and Jean-Christian Vinel, Petro advanced a critique of what he called “compulsory unionism,” which “linked the ideas of the Austrian school of economics to the venerable American antimonopoly tradition, drew on the midcentury debate over union violence and corruption, and ultimately forged a form of rights talk that challenged the class-based collective logic of the Wagner Act and asserted the worker’s right to be free of union ‘coersion’ based on the First Amendment.”<sup>508</sup> In the years following his arrival in North Carolina, Petro joined homegrown opponents of labor, such as North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms, transplanted Northerners like Ed Dowd, and national outfits like the National Right to Work Committee (NRTWC) in his strident opposition to public sector unions.<sup>509</sup>

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<sup>506</sup> Ibid.

<sup>507</sup> According to Coughlin’s letter, the union also faced similar problems organizing the black-owned Universal Life Insurance Company and Tri-State bank in Memphis. According to Coughlin, “One of the bank’s members on the Board of Directors wrote a letter to all employees deploring the fact that they were allowing themselves to be ‘exploited by a white controlled organization whose primary interest is in its own financial gain.’ The letter went on to intimate that they should be grateful for a job with the bank which hired them even though they were for the most part as capable or efficient as whites.” Howard Coughlin to Bayard Rustin, President of the A. Phillip Randolph Institute, 1 March 1978, Box 29, Folder 27, Kelly M. Alexander Papers, UNCC.

<sup>508</sup> McCartin and Vinel, “Compulsory Unionism,” 226-251.

<sup>509</sup> Ibid.

## The “Positive” Union-Free Message

Central to Dowd’s and CPEA’s public rhetoric was their progressive, modern spin on opposition to organized labor—a positive, friendly anti-unionism distinct from the vicious language of the past.<sup>510</sup> Such language was entirely congruent with Charlotte’s carefully crafted “Progressive Mystique” ethos. In 1974, Dowd was chosen to give the keynote address at an anti-union workshop sponsored by the NAM in Atlanta in 1974. Having previously served as the chairman of the NAM’s Industrial Relations Group, Dowd was well known to the organization and its members. Addressing an audience of business leaders eager to learn strategies for undermining organized labor, Dowd emphasized that employers should take a proactive role in thwarting unions rather than waiting for notice from a union or the NLRB about a union vote. “Over the years,” he explained, “I’ve developed a different approach. Why wait until the emotionalism of a union campaign when they will exploit your mistakes?” Instead, urged Dowd, businesses should train management to explain to workers that the company has “a strong desire to relate to the employees without going through a third party.”

To communicate the anti-union message, Dowd explained, management should organize informal meetings—smoking cigarettes, drinking coffee—to explain to workers that the company would “prefer to remain union-free because we prefer to deal with you directly in our concerns for your welfare.”<sup>511</sup> Dowd laid out reasons companies could offer workers to dissuade them from joining unions, including expensive memberships (a particularly persuasive argument in states with right-to-work laws); how under union

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<sup>510</sup> Jim Parks, “Fight Against Union,” *Charlotte Observer*, undated, Box 2, Folder 2297 “Edward Dowd,” North Carolina AFL-CIO Records, 1950-1981, SLA.

<sup>511</sup> “The Economy: A Case of the Blahs,” *Newsweek*, 22 April 1974, 92-95.

contracts, all workers were allegedly treated the same, “thereby equating the poorest worker with the best”; and the fact that under seniority systems, length of service, according to Dowd, mattered more than ability. In other words, Dowd emphasized the use of persuasion over fear tactics. According to *Newsweek* magazine, which covered the event, “As far as silver-haired, smooth-talking Edward Dowd is concerned there is absolutely no reason in the world why an employer has to knuckle under to the pressures of a labor union.”<sup>512</sup>

In Charlotte, other anti-union consultants adopted approaches similar to those recommended by Dowd. For example, one Charlotte organizer with the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW), Eileen Hanson, described how the Matthews-based grocery chain Harris Teeter—which had been (and remains) staunchly anti-union—shifted its approach to avoiding unionization in the 1970s. When Hanson began negotiations with Harris-Teeter in an attempt to get a first contract, the Blakeney Alexander law firm represented the grocery chain. True to the Blakeney formula, the firm’s attorney resisted the union’s efforts to negotiate an arbitration clause, grievance procedure, or dues check-off. “No union can survive in a right-to-work state without dues check-off,” explained Hanson, “and no grievance procedure is worth squat without arbitration as a final determination.” Even though the union was making little headway with negotiations, it was creating enough of an obstacle that Harris Teeter recognized its approach was still insufficient to get UFCW organizers to drop the case. According to Hanson, Harris Teeter replaced the Blakeney Alexander attorney—who, Hanson said, once bragged to union representatives during negotiations that what Harris Teeter had

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<sup>512</sup> Ibid.

spent on anti-union legal representation was enough for him to construct a new “wing” on his house—with a new attorney taking a totally different approach to dealing with unions. Hanson described the new attorney as friendly, approachable, and amenable to regular meetings with union representatives. Harris Teeter’s new attorney was “Mr. nice guy, he called everyone by name,” recalls Hanson. Nevertheless, the overall strategy was still the same—resist unions at all costs.<sup>513</sup>

In the late 1970s, the influence of Dowd’s “positive” anti-union message would extend beyond Charlotte and even North Carolina. Having served as chairman of the NAM’s Industrial Relations Group in 1968, Dowd went on to co-found the Council on Union-Free Environment (CUE) in 1977. In response to the 1977-78 congressional struggle over Labor Law Reform, the NAM created CUE to be the organization’s educational subsidiary.<sup>514</sup> CUE’s goals included “educating management and the general public of the benefits of a work environment kept union-free through voluntary employee choice and strong, progressive, positive relations between employers and employees.” According to a statement printed in CUE brochures, the organization “does not engage in

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<sup>513</sup> The cost of such anti-union campaigns was indeed substantial. Hanson described a meeting with Alex McMillan, former CEO of Harris Teeter and five-term congressman in the U.S. House of Representatives after he was a congressman. Hanson and McMillan both belonged to the same YMCA and she described “cornering him at the Y,” introducing herself as president of the union local involved in Harris Teeter negotiations, and asked if he would be willing to have coffee with her, to which McMillan agreed. “So we met over coffee at the Holiday Inn or something,” recalled Hanson, “and we laid out how much it has cost the company [to resist allowing its employees to unionize]—millions of dollars by this time.” To this McMillan allegedly responded, “Well, that’s the cost of doing business.” Eileen Hanson-Kelly, interview with author.

<sup>514</sup> Charles McDonald and Dick Wilson, “Peddling the ‘Union-Free’ Guarantee,” *AFL-CIO Federationist*, April 1979.



political, legislative, administrative or regulatory activities.”<sup>515</sup> Instead, CUE’s other co-founder, Arthur Prine of R.R. Donnelley and Sons, a large non-unionized printing firm, explained in a press conference announcing the council’s formation that the council’s goal was to “create a climate for healthy employer-employee relations without need for ‘third-party’ intervention.”<sup>516</sup> Heath Larry, former head of labor relations at U.S. Steel and current NAM president, was quick to point out that the new endeavor was not a union-busting organization. The new tax-exempt non-profit organization’s approach would be “positive,” Larry emphasized. “Unions don’t organize employees; management do by their mistakes.”<sup>517</sup> CUE’s leadership also emphasized that the new organization would not compete with the National Right to Work Committee, since CUE, due to its non-profit tax status, would not be involved in lobbying efforts.<sup>518</sup> According to Larry, CUE would be “the only single purpose national organization devoted to the maintenance of a union-free environment in the United States by encouraging the establishment of strong, progressive and positive employer-employee relations.”<sup>519</sup>

The focus on “positivity management” was consistent with broader trends. Across the nation, business consultants led management seminars, charging attendees anywhere between \$175 and \$600, on new strategies for delaying and undermining employee unionization. Charles Hughes, an industrial psychologist and leader in the field, was known to make \$27,000 for a three-day seminar, which he would then repeat up to 20

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<sup>515</sup> Chester W. Anderson and Edward J. Dowd, “A Collection of Union Free Position Statements,” (Washington, D.C.: Council on Union-free Environment/National Association of Manufactures Press, 1983), ii.

<sup>516</sup> Helen Dewar, “Council Is Formed by NAM For Union-Free Environment,” *The Washington Post*, 2 December 1977.

<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

<sup>518</sup> “Union-Free Movement Organized,” *Lodi News-Sentinel* (California), 2 September 1977.

<sup>519</sup> “Council Helps-Employer Employee Relations,” *Sarasota Journal*, 7 December 1977.

times a year.<sup>520</sup> By 1980, Hughes was travelling 350,000 miles per year to speak before audiences eager to learn the newest in anti-labor tactics.<sup>521</sup> Similarly to Dowd's and CUE's message, many of the seminars shifted the focus of anti-union efforts from attacks on unions to "Making Unions Unnecessary," which was also the name of a book by Hughes. Hughes explained the approach as follows: "Any management that gets a union deserves it—and they get the kind they deserve. No labor union has ever captured a group of employees without the full cooperation and encouragement of managers who create the need for unionization. Management language does not even have a positive word for operating a non-union. The positive approach is: MAKE UNIONS UNNECESSARY."<sup>522</sup> In essence, Hughes believed that management's "positive approach" to discussing anti-union ideals could effectively stave off organizing attempts.

Throughout the late 1970s and 1980s, CUE published dozens of booklets distributed across the nation to businesses who feared their employees would attempt to unionize or who were already in the midst of a unionization struggle. The titles included "The Morality of a Union-Free Environment," "Gaining Employee Acceptance: Whirlpool's Total Communication Program," "Winning the Hearts and Minds of Your Employees," and "A Tomorrow You Can Count On: Communicating Employee Security and Opportunity." In 1983, Dowd co-authored one such booklet with Chester W. Anderson, former president of a management consulting firm and employers association in Milwaukee and a member of the Mont Pelerin Society. Dowd's and Anderson's

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<sup>520</sup> McDonald and Dick Wilson, "Peddling the 'Union-Free' Guarantee."

<sup>521</sup> *Southern Exposures*, 62; Charles McDonald and Dick Wilson, "Peddling the 'Union-Free' Guarantee," *AFL-CIO Federationist*, April 1979.

<sup>522</sup> Charles L. Hughes, *Making Unions Unnecessary* (New York: Executive Enterprises Publications, 1976); *Southern Exposures*, 62; McDonald and Wilson, "Peddling the 'Union-Free' Guarantee."

booklet focused on “Union-Free Position Statements”—what they were, why they were important, and how companies should phrase them, and when they should be given to employees. Dowd and Anderson stressed that their “union-free” message should not be confused with being “anti-union.” “If any company is motivated by anti-union sentiments and not committed to enhancing the employee’s gain from maintaining independence,” wrote Dowd and Anderson, “it is almost certain to fail.” Instead, they urged employers to focus on convincing employees that they would benefit from a work environment “free of third-party interference.” The booklet also emphasized the importance of circulating position statements to employees immediately upon their being hired, rather than waiting until a union campaign, which the authors described as a period of “extreme employee emotionalism.” Moreover, they cautioned, “Any person in a highly emotional state, carefully nurtured by an experienced organizer, will not be receptive to a pro-employee union-free statement.”<sup>523</sup>

The AFL-CIO tracked the efforts of organizations like CPEA and CUE in two regular publications, *The Report on Unions Busters* (R.U.B. Sheet) and the *Statistical and Tactical Information Sheet* (STIR). Dowd and CPEA appeared a number of times in the R.U.B. Sheet, with the March 1979 issue describing Dowd’s organization as “the big [anti-union] outfit around Charlotte,” despite Dowd’s assertions to the contrary.<sup>524</sup> To local union organizers, Dowd was public enemy number one. One organizer described how, in the late 1970s, unions wanted to protest outside CPEA’s office, but the organization was so secretive that its address was not listed in the Charlotte phone book,

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<sup>523</sup> Anderson and Dowd, “A Collection of Union-Free Position Statements.”

<sup>524</sup> “Report on Union Busters, RUB Sheet, Issue 2 (Washington D.C.: AFL-CIO National Organizing Committee, 1979), 3.

making its office difficult to locate. Eventually, organizers who had located CPEA's headquarters in a nondescript building were not surprised to discover that the building lacked signage to indicate who occupied it.<sup>525</sup> Dowd's home address, however, was easier to find, and labor organizers used it to their advantage in their attacks against him and his organization. In one article published in a small progressive newspaper, *The Charlotte Advocate*, labor organizer Eileen Hanson charged, "Congratulations Mr. Dowd," continued the article. "We hope you sleep well in your \$100,000 home in Southwest Charlotte knowing that most of the production employees of your member companies are living near or below poverty level... While you and your friends eat steak, we can barely afford a night out at McDonalds." The article warned of the challenges unions would face in the future—namely, that workers attempting to organize would face opposition not just from their own employers, but also from CPEA and the hundreds of companies it represented: "Thus each union election, each contract struggle, each strike in Charlotte takes on a national and political character."<sup>526</sup>

### **Legislating the Anti-Union Message**

In the early 1960s, Dowd's organization financed workshops and seminars on business and economic policy for North Carolina schoolteachers, holding such events at the state's universities to lend them an air of objectivity and impartiality.<sup>527</sup> In July 1962,

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<sup>525</sup> Eileen Hanson-Kelly interview.

<sup>526</sup> Eileen Hanson, "Union Busters Celebrate 'Best Year Ever'," *The Charlotte Advocate*, Vol. 1, No. 6, November 1978, New Left Collection, UNCC.

<sup>527</sup> CPEA's attempts to influence public education in North Carolina were consistent with broader nation efforts by the business community to inject their ideology into public education in the post-World War II era. While these efforts waned during the Great Depression, they resumed with new

CPEA underwrote an “Economic Education Seminar” for high school economics and social studies teachers at Appalachian State Teachers College in Boone, North Carolina. Controversy arose, however, when CPEA discovered that seminar organizers at Appalachian had invited representatives of both business and labor to address the teachers. In particular, CPEA was upset that organizers invited Millard Barbee, president of the NC AFL-CIO, and Frank Fernbach, an AFL-CIO economist, to address a session entitled “Labor’s Role in the Economy of the Nation and State.” Dowd then demanded that Appalachian withdraw invitations from Barbee and Fernbach, to which its administrators obliged and notified the labor leaders just five days before the workshop was to begin. In response, union leaders Ted Silvey and Carey Haigler called the offices of Central Piedmont Industries to express their displeasure with efforts to exclude labor from the teachers’ workshop. Retelling the conversation before the 1962 North Carolina AFL-CIO convention, Silvey reported that Dowd explained he was only trying to “give scientific free enterprise education to school teachers.” To this, Silvey told the crowd, he “had to laugh, because economics is not scientific. I pointed out [to Dowd] that biology is scientific; mathematics, astronomy and physics are scientific, but social studies and economics are not scientific; they are according to one’s point of view.” In the end,

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fervor following World War II when the business community began funding conferences and sponsoring fellowships for college professors, promoting Business-Industry-Education days for primary school teachers, creating pamphlets and films advocating the importance of the “free enterprise” system, and sponsoring field trips to industrial plants for school children. Business leaders—led by the NAM and the American Economic Foundation—also invested substantial energy in the campaign to promote the teaching of economics. Such efforts were so successful that one economics professor in 1963 described his students as being “captives of the ideology of the right.” See Fones-Wolfe, *Selling Free Enterprise*, 189-217.

Dowd admitted to Silvey that he had demanded the labor representatives be removed from the workshop's list of speakers.<sup>528</sup>

In response to Dowd's actions, Fernbach drafted the following statement to be read at the convention:

The Appalachian State Teachers College... is supported and financed by all of the people of North Carolina and is one of the largest teachers colleges in the South. While it is permissible that Central Piedmont Industries, Incorporated should help finance a special opportunity for public school teachers to increase their ability to teach economics to the children of North Carolina if it chooses, it is totally improper that a public institution like Appalachian State Teachers College should be seized upon as a vehicle for an un-American brain-washing ... the labor movement of North Carolina does not seek to impose its views upon the public school teachers of the State; however, we cannot tolerate the misuse of public institutions in a cross-effort by a group of North Carolina industrialists to impose their single viewpoint upon teachers and, through them, upon the children.

In short, Fernbach objected to Central Piedmont Industries' use of a public institution to promote anti-union ideology. Following Fernbach's letter, the North Carolina AFL-CIO convention passed a resolution "vigorously denouncing this regrettable incident" and called upon the Governor and the Boards of Education and Higher Education to ensure that the state's colleges and universities "are not used in the future by any group or organization to 'brain-wash' or just partially inform another segment of our society."

The convention then forwarded a copy of this resolution to the Governor, the Director of the Boards of Higher Education, the Superintendent of Education, and the North Carolina Education Association.<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>528</sup> *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Convention of the North Carolina State AFL-CIO* (Raleigh: October 3-5, 1962), 74-9.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.*

In support of the resolution, Haigler stated, “[Dowd’s] organization does everything possible under the sun to prevent the organization of unions and unorganized industries, and he does everything he can to prevent [workers who do unionize] from getting a decent contract once they have been certified.” President Barbee further asserted that the resolution intended to inform the convention of Dowd’s actions, so that they would understand “what this Central Piedmont Industries has pulled over the citizens of this state,” and to make them “aware of what [Dowd’s organization] may try to do in the future.”<sup>530</sup> Indeed, Dowd’s efforts to suppress the influence of organized labor in the state did not end with the Appalachian incident nor was this the last attempt the state would see to enshrine pro-business ideology in educational legislation.

In March 1975, Dowd’s dream of North Carolina teachers as proselytizers of capitalism finally came to fruition when the state legislature passed a law ensuring that no student would leave high school without learning the virtues of the “free enterprise” system. Senator William K. Mauney, Jr., a Democrat and hosiery manufacturer from Cleveland County, authored the bill, and Representative Jo Graham Foster, a Democrat from Mecklenburg County, co-sponsored the bill in the House.<sup>531</sup> In its original iteration, the bill defined “free enterprise” as “an economic system characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods...by investments that are determined by private decision rather than by state control, and by prices, production, and the distribution of

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<sup>530</sup> Ibid.

<sup>531</sup> “Enterprise Bill Enacted,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 20 March 1975, Box 2352, Folder 10, North Carolina AFL-CIO Collection, SLA.

goods that are determined in a free manner.”<sup>532</sup> Republican Governor James E. Holhouser also supported the bill, and took the idea one step further by suggesting that the state require all high school students to pass a course on the subject in order to graduate. Holhouser’s suggestion never caught on, but Mauney’s bill passed the Senate with little debate and a resounding 36-5 vote.<sup>533</sup> The free enterprise bill garnered support from both sides of the aisle, confirming North Carolina’s reputation as a state built on the idea of market progress.

Despite state senators’ strong support for Mauney’s bill, the proposed legislation was not without its detractors. The least political criticism came from Superintendent of Public Instruction, Craig Phillips, who argued that the school system already instructed students on the free enterprise system. Senator Mauney did not assuage criticism when he admitted that he had not read any state textbooks and was unaware of how they currently explained the American economic system.<sup>534</sup> The *Raleigh News and Observer* also skewered the proposed legislation in a number of editorials surrounding debate of the law in the state legislature. “Pity the poor teacher,” asserted one editorial, “who might be asked by inquisitive students to square [Mauney’s definition of ‘free enterprise’] with tobacco subsidies and acreage allotments, with import quotas and textile tariffs ... or with

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<sup>532</sup> “Mauney’s Bill Full of Mischief,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 4 March 1075, Box 2352, Folder 10, North Carolina AFL-CIO Collection, SLA.

<sup>533</sup> Ferrel Guillory, “Free Enterprise Bill Nears Final Passage,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 12 March 1975, Box 2352, Folder 10, North Carolina AFL-CIO Collection, SLA; “Free Enterprise Tea Party Continues,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 14 March 1975, 12 March 1975, Box 2352, Folder 10, North Carolina AFL-CIO Collection, SLA.

<sup>534</sup> “Free Enterprise Tea Party Continues,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 14 March 1975, 12 March 1975, Box 2352, Folder 10, North Carolina AFL-CIO Collection, SLA.



the price-fixing activities of the State Milk Commission.”<sup>535</sup> The *Greensboro Daily News* charged that the bill was nothing more than a wasteful endeavor and mockingly suggested that legislators’ overwhelming support for the bill stemmed from “fear [that] their opposition might be equated with opposition to sin, motherhood, the flag, and apple pie.”<sup>536</sup> A number of legislators insisted that the bill constituted a dangerous overreach of government power. Democratic senator Charles Phillips of Guilford County argued that if the legislature could dictate what should be taught in public schools, “then next week...the legislature can say there are some courses you cannot teach, and that is the beginning of a dictator system.”<sup>537</sup> Others, such as Rep. J. Allen Adams, a Democrat from Wake County, maintained that the idea of a “free enterprise” system was a myth and students would recognize it as such.<sup>538</sup> Criticism came from across the political spectrum: from those who questioned the legitimacy of the legislature’s role in education to those who questioned the existence of “free enterprise” itself.

In the days following the bill’s introduction, opponents satirized the bill by introducing a series of amendments. Representative Adams proposed two amendments. The first attempted to highlight the hypocrisy of North Carolina legislators who championed “free enterprise” while also defending state price controls and other protectionist measures. Adams’ amendment explicitly forbade educators from teaching material that was critical of state support for the tobacco industry, utilities, or other

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<sup>535</sup> “Mauney’s Bill Full of Mischief,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 4 March 1975, Box 2352, Folder 10, North Carolina AFL-CIO Collection, SLA; “Free Enterprise Tea Party Continues,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 14 March 1975, 12 March 1975, Box 2352, Folder 10, SLA.

<sup>536</sup> William D. Snider, “Mandatory ‘Free Enterprise?’” *Greensboro Daily News*, 16 March 1975, Box 2352, Folder 10, North Carolina AFL-CIO Collection, SLA.

<sup>537</sup> Ferrel Guillory, “Free Enterprise Bill Nears Final Passage,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 12 March 1975, Box 2352, Folder 10, North Carolina AFL-CIO Collection, SLA.

<sup>538</sup> *Ibid.*

government interference in North Carolina's economy. The second proposed amendment required that students take a course comparing freedoms in the United States with those in totalitarian states, such as the Soviet Union. Other tongue-in-cheek proposals included adding portions of the North Carolina Constitution and Declaration of Independence to the bill and a proposal requiring that students take a course in "Abuse of government, as epitomized by the Nixon administration."<sup>539</sup> The bill's opponents in the House gained some traction when they convinced fellow legislators to reject Mauney's definition of "free enterprise" and instead revised the bill such that the law would require high schools to teach students about the "history, theory (and) foundation" of the "free enterprise system. The proposed bill would be more attentive to the fact that the theory of "free enterprise" was far removed from the reality of 1970s North Carolina. After the revised language was added, the bill passed the House by a vote of 78-34 and became law on 20 March 1975.<sup>540</sup> In response to the bill's passage, Raleigh Chamber of Commerce executive director Ed Garland praised the bill: "Unless we understand the principles of free enterprise, there is a danger of losing this system."<sup>541</sup> At the time of the bill's passing, North Carolina joined eight other states to require that public schools teach about

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<sup>539</sup> "House Plays With Free Enterprise Bill," *Charlotte Observer*, 14 March 1975, Box 2352, Folder 10, North Carolina AFL-CIO Collection, SLA; Gary Pearce, "Free Enterprise Riders Tumble," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 14 March 1975, Box 2352, Folder 10, North Carolina AFL-CIO Collection, SLA; "House Plays With Free Enterprise Bill," *Charlotte Observer*, 14 March 1975, Box 2352, Folder 10, North Carolina AFL-CIO Collection, SLA.

<sup>540</sup> "Free Enterprise Bill Amendment Acceptable," *The Raleigh Times*, 19 March 1975, Box 2352, Folder 10, North Carolina AFL-CIO Collection, SLA; Guillory, "Free Enterprise Bill Nears Final Passage," SLA; "Free Enterprise Tea Party Continues," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 14 March 1975, 12 March 1975, Box 2352, Folder 10, North Carolina AFL-CIO Collection, SLA.

<sup>541</sup> Richard E. Prince, "N.C. Boosts 'Free Enterprise'," *Washington Post*, 21 March 1975.

“free enterprise.”<sup>542</sup>

### **Free Enterprise or Union-Free Enterprise?**

Throughout the administrations of North Carolina’s governors during this period, it was North Carolina’s “excellent business climate”—i.e. non-unionized workforce—that became a selling point when the governor went on industry recruiting trips. Continuing in the footsteps of Luther Hodges, for example, Governor Bob Scott trekked across both the nation and the globe to recruit out-of-state and foreign capital to North Carolina. In 1972, for example, Scott travelled to Tokyo to meet with Japanese industrialists as part of an industrial development mission sponsored by the state of North Carolina and the Japan-Southern U.S. Association. “We are here to tell our Japanese friends of the industrial investment opportunities that await you in North Carolina,” Scott told his Japanese audience. “It is in keeping with our policy of aggressively pursuing international trade and reverse investment programs.” Scott boasted of “North Carolina’s attractive business opportunities,” “no huge metropolitan centers with all the problems associated with them,” and “an adequate and reliable labor force . . . who adhere to the concept of giving a day’s work for a day’s pay.” In effect, North Carolina’s cheap labor force had become its most prized commodity for sale in the global marketplace. “I can say, with pardonable pride I trust,” said Scott, “that [North Carolina’s industrial progress] is primarily due to the fact that we have the finest product in the world to sell—North

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<sup>542</sup> Sarah Elizabeth Leak, “The Treatment of Free Enterprise in North Carolina State Adopted Textbooks in American History and Economics” (PhD Thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1981), 2.

Carolina and her people.” At the end of his visit, the governor described the conference as “a shining example of the free enterprise approach.”<sup>543</sup>

Despite such rhetorical support for the “free enterprise” system, there were limitations to North Carolina politicians’ enthusiasm for unfettered capitalism, as can be seen in the Raleigh Chamber of Commerce’s formal written policy from 1975 articulating its anti-union position. The policy affirmed the chamber’s preference for industries “whose management subscribes to progressive and competent personnel policies and would not—as a matter of pre-established policy—automatically insist or encourage a union operation but rather (would) allow the local employees to express their freedom of choice on such an issue.”<sup>544</sup> The policy’s explicit pitting of “progressive and competent personnel policies” against “union operation” confirmed North Carolina’s place at the coalescence of traditional anti-union rhetoric with economic progress, marking the beginning of the neoliberal future. According to Robert E. Leake, North Carolina’s economic development director, who collaborated with the state’s chambers to recruit new industry to the state, Raleigh’s formal anti-union position stemmed from its efforts to recruit white-collar jobs to the city, particularly to the Research Triangle Park.<sup>545</sup> As of 1975, the city maintained a unionization rate below 5 percent, more than 3 percentage points below the state average, which was still the lowest in the nation.<sup>546</sup> As the Raleigh

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<sup>543</sup> Governor Bob Scott, “Seminar on Industrial and Trade Expansion,” Tokyo, Japan, October 18, 1972, in Memory F. Mitchell, ed., *Addresses and Papers of Governor Robert W. Scott, 1969-1973* (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1974), 491-3.

<sup>544</sup> Steve Berg, “Written Policy Against Unions Unique Here,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 17 November 1975, “Chamber of Commerce” file, John M. Belk Papers, UNCC.

<sup>545</sup> For more on the politics of high-tech economic development efforts, see O’Mara, *Cities of Knowledge*.

<sup>546</sup> David Zucchini, “Panel Admits Union Firms Not Welcome,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 8 November, 1975, “Chamber of Commerce” file, John M. Belk Papers, UNCC.

*News and Observer* noted, however, the Raleigh Chamber was not alone in its position towards unions, and that its policy in writing did not mean other North Carolina cities did not have similar policies. The Wilmington Chamber of Commerce president asserted, “It’s the attitude of the business community all across the country that good management doesn’t need a third party (unions).”<sup>547</sup>

State business leaders’ commitment to cheap labor was so intractable that they even turned away lucrative industries that wanted to relocate to North Carolina. In 1975, Miller Brewing Company expressed interest in building a \$100 million plant in the Raleigh area that would have employed at least 500 workers, and Xerox Corporation also hoped to open a unionized plant employing between 1,500 and 2,000 workers. The Raleigh business leaders squelched both plans because both plants already had union shops. The Miller plant would have paid workers \$5 to \$6 per hour, it was speculated, a substantial increase from the then-average hourly manufacturing wage of \$3.93 in the Raleigh-Durham area.<sup>548</sup> Seemingly minor union gains, such as representation and an hourly wage two dollars above the local average, threatened businesses’ unfettered power to control the conditions under which their employees labored and thus could not be tolerated, even in North Carolina’s more progressive urban centers.<sup>549</sup>

Numerous groups criticized the Chamber’s actions. North Carolina AFL-CIO president Wilbur Hobby argued that the Chamber’s efforts were part of a larger project to

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<sup>547</sup> Steve Berg, “Written Policy Against Unions Unique Here,” John M. Belk Papers, UNCC.

<sup>548</sup> David Zucchini, “Panel Admits Union Firms Not Welcome,” John M. Belk Papers, UNCC.

<sup>549</sup> This is a consistent story throughout the south. A 1975 study (collaborated on by then current Labor Secretary Ray Marshall) confirmed numerous instances in which Chambers of Commerce and other elected officials buckled to pressure from low-wage firms and turned a cold shoulder to companies like Brockway Glass, Philip Morris, as well as those listed above. Michael Brody, “Unionizing the South: Mobility of capitol is organized labor’s long-range target,” *Barron’s National Business and Financial Weekly*, 5 December 1977.

keep the Raleigh area free of high-wage unionized labor and, in response, he said the union was considering filing a lawsuit against the Chamber.<sup>550</sup> The *Raleigh News and Observer* charged, “The Chamber of Commerce philosophy here and everywhere rests heavily on ‘growth’ and ‘free enterprise,’ two pillars sometimes exposed as mere matchsticks. One can tell how weak they are from the way the Raleigh chamber snubs certain high quality industrial prospects because they are unionized.” In other words, suggested the *News and Observer*, the state’s industrialists were more concerned with maintaining an economy built on low-wage labor than they were with economic growth. Moreover, the paper criticized the Chamber’s self-appointed gatekeeper status in determining which industries were beneficial for the city of Raleigh and argued that the city should welcome well-paying industrial jobs, unionized or not. “The time has come,” concluded the paper, “for the Chamber to either halt this outrage or stop representing itself as the city’s spokesman in such matters.”<sup>551</sup> African American leaders argued that the Chamber’s behavior reflected a general disinterest in black job prospects in the Raleigh area—a city with the greatest income gap between black and white residents of the 50 largest cities in the United States.<sup>552</sup> The news of the Chamber’s role in preventing unionized plant relocations also came on the heels of a study by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill researchers tying North Carolina workers’ low manufacturing

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<sup>550</sup> Steve Berg, “AFL-CIO May Fight Ban,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, undated [November 1975], “Chamber of Commerce” file, John M. Belk Papers, UNCC.

<sup>551</sup> “How the Chamber Snubs Progress,” *Raleigh News and Observer*, 9 November 1975, “Chamber of Commerce” file, John M. Belk Papers, J. Murrey Atkins Library Special Collections, UNCC.

<sup>552</sup> Steve Berg, “Written Policy Against Unions Unique Here,” John M. Belk Papers, UNCC

wages to its low union density rates.<sup>553</sup> Labor, civil rights and university leaders criticized the Raleigh Chamber's efforts that prevented job and wage growth in the state.

## Conclusion

In 1979, the *AFL-CIO Federationist* reported, "Total intransigence to the right to organize and bargain collectively has spread from small isolated regions in the Southeast to encompass all geographical regions. It has permeated all aspects of American industry and has spawned an entirely new legal industry."<sup>554</sup> Given the events outlined in this chapter, as well as those elsewhere in the state that have been covered by other scholars,<sup>555</sup> it is difficult to imagine that the *Federationist* was not referring in large part to North Carolina. To be certain, North Carolina prior to the 1970s was home to some of the most unrepentant anti-union outfits in the nation and the South, more generally, had become an important breeding ground for anti-labor ideology. Nevertheless, the 1970s constituted a pivotal time for the spread of these ideas throughout the rest of the country as the New Deal order began to fracture--ushering in a federal retreat from protections for organized labor and American workers—and the nation (and the globe) witnessed the emergence of neoliberalism. As the financial capital of one of the most staunchly anti-union states, 1970s Charlotte became, in essence, a laboratory for a new strain of

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<sup>553</sup> Ibid.; Steve Berg, "Beer Company Rejects Raleigh for New Plant," *Raleigh News and Observer*, 7 November 1975, "Chamber of Commerce" file, John M. Belk Papers, UNCC; Jan Johnson, "Chamber's Union Attack Subtle," *Raleigh Times*, 24 November 1975. *Southern Exposure: Here Comes a Wind: Labor On the Move*, Volume IV, No. 1-2, 191; Cobb, *Selling of the South*, 262.

<sup>554</sup> Charles McDonald and Dick Wilson, "Peddling the 'Union-Free' Guarantee," *AFL-CIO Federationist*, April 1979.

<sup>555</sup> See, for example, McCartin and Vinel, "Compulsory Unionism," 118-127.

“progressive” anti-unionism that was more palatable and easily exportable to the rest of the nation.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### Sunbelt Booms in the Age of Austerity

In a speech to members of Leadership Charlotte in 1995 upon receipt of a lifetime achievement award, NationsBank CEO Hugh McColl told the many business and civic leaders assembled, “Any vision for Charlotte comes naturally: the use of the public-private partnership. A cornerstone of Charlotte’s progress is the combination of a business-minded public sector and a community-minded private sector, one that understands that it bears both a responsibility and a long-term self-interest to help the city. And In this era of shrinking government,” McColl told the audience, “the importance of the partnership only grows.”<sup>556</sup> The central role private enterprise could have in Charlotte as described by McColl was no hypothetical vision of what might be; instead, McColl was describing the very partnerships he and the city’s growing business class championed during the previous decade that had fundamentally shaped the direction of the city’s development over the course of the 1980s.

This chapter looks at the political and economic transformation of Charlotte into one of the nation’s preeminent centers of banking and finance, a process that began full-force in the late 1960s and has continued through the remainder of the twentieth century. Once just a regional textile and manufacturing center, Charlotte emerged as the nation’s second largest finance capital after New York. While Charlotte’s boosters always

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<sup>556</sup> Hugh McColl, “A Vision for Charlotte: Remarks to the Leadership Charlotte Lifetime Achievement Awards Dinner,” 20 September 1995, in *Words That Mattered: The Speeches of Hugh L. McColl, Jr.*, ed. John Cleghorn and Todd Rubenson (no publisher listed, April 2001), 329.

dreamed that the city would grow to national significance, it was not until the mid-1970s that this dream had the potential to become reality. This chapter looks at how business and politics, on both the local and national level, influenced economic growth in Charlotte in the 1970s and beyond. It examines the evolution of Charlotte's "racial democracy" vision during this decade, the growth of the black middle class, and the election of the city's first black mayor, Harvey Gantt, whose administration is generally considered to be a final expression of the influence of Charlotte's biracial coalition around economic growth. It was during the 1980s, that Charlotte came to epitomize the neoliberal city as business elites—especially the city's financial sector—used the state to further their own economic interests. In Charlotte, the paradoxical reality of neoliberalism was its tolerance for and, at times, promotion of racial diversity in service of business imperatives.

### **The North Star Fades from the Sky**

In 1983, *Black Enterprise* magazine ran a feature story on Charlotte, touting the city as "a magnet for black professionals" because of "responsive government officials and expanding business opportunities."<sup>557</sup> The article highlighted the city's relatively peaceful civil rights history: "While tear gas, billy clubs, cattle prods and fire hoses were being used against civil rights demonstrators and activists in other southern cities,

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<sup>557</sup> David D. Porter and Rosalyn Gist Porter, "The Changing Profile of Charlotte," *Black Enterprise*, June 1983.

Charlotte integrated many of its restaurants nonviolently,” explained the article.<sup>558</sup> In the years since, the city had become one of opportunity and prosperity for black professionals and business was booming. The article profiled a number of local businessmen, including Sam Johnson, who had moved to Charlotte from East St. Louis, Missouri and whose local Lincoln Mercury dealership business had accrued \$18 million in sales in 1982, making it the second most profitable Lincoln-Mercury dealership in the Southeast and the 38<sup>th</sup> grossing black-owned business in the nation.<sup>559</sup> It also featured John McDonald, a local businessman raised in Charlotte’s rural outskirts who moved to New York City in the early 1940s to escape the oppressions of Jim Crow. Once there, he operated a beauty products company and restaurant for nearly 30 years before returning to Charlotte to open McDonald’s Cafeteria on Charlotte’s west side. The restaurant, which soon expanded to a second location, served home-style Southern food and was popular with blue-collar and white-collar, black and white Charlotteans from across the city. Reflecting on his entrepreneurial success in Charlotte, McDonald told *Black Enterprise*, “There is room for pioneers. A black man can be successful because he is not limited to the black community. He can go downtown. The field is wide open for young aggressive men.”<sup>560</sup>

The *Black Enterprise* story also reflects a broader interest during this period in black reverse migration to the South, a phenomenon that gained widespread attention beginning in 1970, when the United States census revealed that an historic turning point had been reached: more African Americans were moving to the South than departing

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<sup>558</sup> Ibid.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid.

<sup>560</sup> Ibid.

from it. In contrast to previous decades that were defined by the two Great Migrations, James Gregory has called the years since 1970 the “post-diaspora period.”<sup>561</sup> Just the previous year, Louis E. Martin, the *Defender*’s editor and himself a migrant from Tennessee, told readers, “North Star had fallen out of the sky. That promised land has turned out to be a mirage,” and the North had become “no more promising than Dixie.”<sup>562</sup>

The census findings launched an explosion of coverage in both the black and the mainstream press.<sup>563</sup> Most articles, like the one in *Black Enterprise*, focused on increased job opportunities in growing southern cities like Atlanta, Charlotte, Richmond and Houston, especially for educated middle-class black professionals. In 1970, the *Baltimore Afro-American* and *Chicago Defender* highlighted job opportunities in Charlotte for young black professionals interested in entering the banking industry. Black college

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<sup>561</sup> James Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 38.

<sup>562</sup> Martin, in addition to his position as editor, wielded considerable political influence by the mid-1970s and was even dubbed by some “the godfather of black politics” for his role as advisor to three presidents. Louis Martin, “Dixie Negroes Not Looking North for the Promised Land,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, November 22, 1969. On Louis Martin, see Alex Poinsett, *Walking with Presidents: Louis Martin and the Rise of Black Power* (Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1997). Positive coverage of African American migration south in the 1970s and 1980s constituted a major reversal in the position the black press had taken in previous decades. The *Chicago Defender*, after all, played a significant role in encouraging the black exodus from the South in the first half of the twentieth century. On the *Defender* and black migration from the South, see James Grossman, *Land of Hope: Chicago, Black Southerners, and the Great Migration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

<sup>563</sup> There was initially some confusion in the press regarding how to interpret the 1970 census figures and whether these figures were even accurate. For example, one editorial that was printed in both the *Pittsburgh Courier* and *Chicago Defender* reported that the figures on black population movement had been incorrect. Instead, it argued that black migration north had kept pace with earlier decades. It blamed southern demographers for presenting population estimates that lacked a “sound mathematical basis.” Moreover, it did not discuss the 1970 census’ findings on migration South, thus ignoring the fact that even if African Americans were migrating north at the same rate as they had in previous decades, the net flow of black migrants was still northward. From “In Our Opinion,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, March 20, 1971, pg. 8.

students who would likely have left the south a decade before were staying, pursuing college degrees, and finding an increasingly diverse set of job opportunities opening to them. Although Charlotte and other “New South” cities still had a long way to go in terms of black hiring, asserted the *Defender*, the potential was there, especially for black professionals like 25-year old Charlotte banker Robert Walden, who was “one of a growing number of blacks who have discarded the myth of the ‘promised land’ in the north and are staying to carve out careers in a south they say is slowly changing in racial attitudes.”<sup>564</sup> Charles Prejean, an Atlanta resident and former director of the Federation of Southern Cooperatives, an organization that assisted struggling black farmers, contended that economic factors were a primary consideration for the reverse migrants with whom he had worked. “It was a bread and butter thing,” said Prejean, “I’ve come into contact with many blacks in Chicago, Detroit and New York who say they are coming home because, for the first time, they can get a job with reasonable pay down here.”<sup>565</sup> These anecdotes supported a 1970 report from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Southeast office in Atlanta predicting that prospects for black college graduates in the South were “very good.”<sup>566</sup>

By the mid-1970s, newly elected black officials showed a level of optimism about the political and economic potential of cities like Atlanta and Charlotte only rivaled by that of similarly minded white boosters. John Lewis, former chairman of the Student

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<sup>564</sup> Terry Wooten, “Blacks Finding ‘A New South’,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, 18 July 1970; Terry Wooten, “Young Blacks See New Opportunities,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, 21 July 1970.

<sup>565</sup> William Chaze, “Blacks Lured Back to South by Opportunity,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1972.

<sup>566</sup> Wooten, “Blacks Finding ‘A New South;’” Wooten, “Young Blacks See New Opportunities.”

Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and, by 1974, the executive director of the Atlanta-based Voter Education Project (and eventually a United States Representative), believed there were fewer differences in quality of life for the average black family between the North and South than ever before. “During the past five to 10 years” stated Lewis, “we have witnessed... a revolution in this whole area of the South.”<sup>567</sup> Recent changes, Lewis asserted, such as the election of Atlanta’s first black mayor in 1973, Maynard Jackson, had led many Southern blacks, especially those living in growing urban areas to feel optimistic about the future of the South.<sup>568</sup> Indeed, Charlotte’s first black mayor, Harvey Gantt, credited increased black political participation--likely due to the city’s growing black population—as an important factor in his election, saying, “I read about the *Observer’s* report yesterday on the increasing amount of blacks that are registering. That is significant to me and its been significant enough in this community that I've been elected to public office and it's been in no small part due to the increased amount of participation by black voters in the electoral process.”<sup>569</sup>

Many commentators viewed reverse migration as a potential vehicle for black political empowerment and offered various advice on how best to capitalize on a growing black electorate. One 1971 *Chicago Defender* article pointed out that 102 counties in the United States had black majorities and that, of these counties, the majority were located in southern states. “It is in these predominantly black counties that Negroes see their best

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<sup>567</sup> Frank L. Stanley, “Being Frank: Blacks Leaving South Despite New Progress,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, October 2, 1974.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid.

<sup>569</sup> Harvey B. Gantt, Interviewed by Lynn Haessly. 6 January 1986, Interview C-0008, Southern Oral History Program Collection, SHC.

opportunity to win political control,” explained the *Defender*, “More than 200 Negroes are running for office in Mississippi this year.”<sup>570</sup> The *New York Times* weighed in on reverse migration for the first time in 1971. Like the *Chicago Defender* and *Pittsburgh Courier* during the same years, the *New York Times* focused mainly on the political implications of migration. The first in-depth *Times* article on reverse migration, entitled “Black Political Potential Shown,” included a large, detailed map of the 11 ex-Confederate states, highlighting the counties with a black population of more than 50 percent and quoted one census official as saying that “the political potential for blacks is tremendous.”<sup>571</sup> The chairman of the predominantly black National Democratic Party of Alabama urged a “mass reverse migration,” arguing that “this would be the quickest way for blacks to take over political control of entire areas.”<sup>572</sup> Similarly, Julian Bond, a founder of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and a state representative in Georgia, encouraged northern blacks to return south because, he argued, “the south holds greater promise than any other region.”<sup>573</sup> While fully acknowledging that the remnants of Jim Crow were still very much alive in many parts of the South, Bond urged a “re-migration” of blacks to the South “come home,” he urged, “We need you... Your roots, like ours, are here. Put them down again. The black soil here—both actually and spiritually—is rich.”<sup>574</sup>

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<sup>570</sup> “Black Vote, Black Power,” *Chicago Daily Defender*, July 19, 1971.

<sup>571</sup> Paul Delaney, “Black Political Potential in South Shown,” *New York Times*, July 6, 1971, pg. 1.

<sup>572</sup> Thomas A. Johnson, “Black Migration to South is Urged,” *New York Times*, September 5, 1971.

<sup>573</sup> “Black Voices of the South,” *Ebony*, August 1971.

<sup>574</sup> *Ibid.*

During this period, labor organizers also reported a connection between reverse migration and increased black militancy in unions. In 1974, Scott Hoyman, the regional director of the Textile Workers Union of America (TWUA) explained, “Great numbers of Southern blacks have worked in Northern industries and know the benefits and job security provided by collective bargaining.”<sup>575</sup> Eileen Hanson, an organizer who worked with the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) in North Carolina in the 1970s and 1980s reported similar observations.<sup>576</sup> Not unlike black GIs returning from the Second World War demanding civil rights in the Jim Crow South, these anecdotes from labor organizers in North Carolina suggest that black workers’ experiences in the more heavily unionized Northeast and Midwest may have made them, upon return to the South, less tolerant of the region’s entrenched anti-unionism.<sup>577</sup>

Yet, given the anti-union forces that had been unfolding in the state for decades, unions in North Carolina during the 1980s would need more than sympathetic migrants to rebuild their ranks. Despite union organizers’ hopes that black return migrants would inject militancy into their campaigns, they had to contend with businesses moving to North Carolina explicitly because of its hostility towards organized labor. Moreover, national and international forces at work would make Charlotte in the 1980s a challenging arena for the most dedicated unionists. As white-collar work in banking and

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<sup>575</sup> Francis B. Kent, “Organizer Sees Hope for More Dixie Unions,” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 November 1974.

<sup>576</sup> Eileen Hanson interview.

<sup>577</sup> While these are only two anecdotes, the idea of a connection between reverse migration and increased labor militancy deserves further study.



finance dominated the city's labor market in the wake of the textile sector's collapse, business and civic leaders' stepped up their efforts to create a city free of organized labor.

### **Banking and Finance**

Charlotte's rise as a financial center coincided with the collapse of federal support for cities. The two processes were entangled. In the 1960s, Charlotte had benefited from Great Society spending. Under President Lyndon B. Johnson, urban areas received governmental aid through a variety of mechanisms including the Housing Acts of 1964 and 1965, the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1964, the Demonstration Cities (Model Cities) Act of 1966, and the Housing and Urban Development Act of 1968 as well as through the creation of the of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in 1965.<sup>578</sup> By 1968, however, support for Johnson's urban initiatives was declining as a part of growing disillusionment with both the nation's domestic and foreign policy agenda. "As American involvement in Vietnam deepened," explains Roger Biles, "many policymakers explained the failure of domestic policies as a direct consequence of swelling military budgets that siphoned dollars away from needy neighborhoods."<sup>579</sup>

As support for the Great Society waned, subsequent presidential administrations would devote fewer resources to urban initiatives. Under what became known as "New Federalism," President Richard Nixon cut funding to HUD and issued a moratorium on

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<sup>578</sup> Roger Biles, *The Fate of Cities: Urban America and the Federal Government, 1945-2000* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2011), 112.

<sup>579</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

the construction of new public housing in 1973 and the federal government would continue a path of retreat from American cities in the years that followed. And although the big city mayors were hopeful that Carter would bolster urban spending, his anti-inflation measures and austerity budgets left federal aid to cities on the chopping block.<sup>580</sup>

For Charlotte, the federal retreat from the urban sphere occurred at the same moment the city was entering a period of substantial demographic growth. Consistent with African American reverse migration trends, much of this growth stemmed from people coming to Charlotte from elsewhere in the nation. Between 1970 and 2000, Mecklenburg County's population increased by 96 percent, from 354,646 residents in 1970 to 695,454 residents three decades later. The city of Charlotte grew at an even faster rate, growing from 241,178 residents to 540,828 residents—a 124 percent increase.<sup>581</sup> As with any other city facing such a vast influx of people, funding the construction and maintenance of adequate infrastructure to accommodate this rapidly expanding population would be a vital concern.

Adding to the potentially dire consequences of a precipitous decline in federal support during this time of population expansion was the erosion of the historically dominant economic base for the entire Piedmont region, the textile industry. As foreign competition took a toll on the manufacturing sector nationwide during the early 80s, the

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<sup>580</sup> Ibid., 186-7; Thomas J. Sugrue, "Carter's Urban Policy Crisis," *The Carter Presidency: Policy Choices in the Post New Deal Era*, ed. Gary Fink and Hugh Davis Graham (Lawrence: Univ. Press of Kansas, 1998), 137-57.

<sup>581</sup> Gerald L. Ingalls and Isaac Heard Jr., "Developing a Typology of African American Neighborhoods in the American South," in *Charlotte, NC: The Global Evolution of a New South City*, ed. William Graves and Heather A. Smith (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2010), 168.

United States saw a decline of 4.5 million jobs (roughly a quarter of all jobs in those sectors) during the period between 1980 and 2005. In the Charlotte metropolitan area, where the textile industry dominated for most of a century, this twenty-five year period witnessed the loss of 40,300 jobs – a decline of 84.5 percent. Overall, the percentage of employment within manufacturing fell from almost 30% of all Charlotte-area jobs to ten percent between the dawn of the 1980s and 2005.<sup>582</sup>

Stepping in to fill the vacuum left by the declining textile industry and the federal government's decreased economic support of American cities were private interests. In Boston, Atlanta, Kansas City, Pittsburgh and other cities across the nation, this pattern was repeated as major corporations spearheaded downtown redevelopment and revitalization efforts through public-private partnerships.<sup>583</sup> In Charlotte, a new infusion of capital came from banks and the financial sector. One of the distinguishing features that made banks a particularly potent force was the lack of regulation limiting certain aspects of their growth. In contrast to most states, North Carolina did not restrict banks' ability to branch out to multiple locations throughout the state, giving local banks a head start in figuring out how to operate larger and more complex financial institutions long before most others in the industry. Then, in 1982, North Carolina National Bank (NCNB)

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<sup>582</sup> Patricia Atkins, et. al., *Responding to Manufacturing Job Loss: What Can Economic Development Policy Do?* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 2011).

<sup>583</sup> Some scholars have described such initiatives under umbrella terms as “Corporate Citizenship” and “The New Corporate Philanthropy.” Heather Smith and Emily Livingstone, argue that “the visionary leadership and corporate citizenship of NCNB (now Bank of America) initiated a process” of “corporate-led, neighborhood-based revitalization [that successfully achieved the goals of ‘improving life for others while at the same time improving life for oneself.’” Heather A. Smith and Emily Thomas Livingstone, “Banking on the Neighborhood: Corporate Citizenship and Revitalization in Uptown Charlotte” in *Charlotte, NC: The Global Evolution of a New South City*, ed. William Graves and Heather A. Smith (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2010), 141.

attorney Paul Polking found a loophole in the 1927 McFadden Act—intended to prohibit interstate banking--allowing NCNB to purchase banks in Florida, thus becoming an interstate bank. By the mid 1980s, other southern states realized the necessity in revisiting their banking laws and worked out between themselves the Southeast Regional Banking Compact. This agreement extended merger rights to banks specifically headquartered in the South and ushered in a new era characterized by banks' aggressive expansion through other southern states, many of which had burgeoning markets fueled by concomitant population increases. Leading this consolidation of wealth were two Charlotte based CEOs: Hugh McCall, of NCNB, and Ed Crutchfield, of First Union Bank. It is difficult to overstate the competitive advantage this gave North Carolina banks, which were able to expand their size and influence long before industry-wide deregulation in 1994. By 2000, the city's total financial assets approached 2 trillion dollars—roughly equivalent to China and Canada's combined GNP—making Charlotte the nation's second largest financial center after New York.<sup>584</sup> In Charlotte, the expansion of the financial industry served to offset losses in the textile industry.

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<sup>584</sup> William Graves and Jonathan Kozar, "Blending Southern Culture and International Finance: The Construction of a Global Money Center," in *Charlotte, NC: The Global Evolution of a New South City*, ed. William Graves and Heather A. Smith (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2010), 87; Covington and Ellis, *The Story of NationsBank*. Some scholars, however, have questioned scholars' reliance on total bank assets to measure a city's financial ranking. Geographer William Graves, for example, suggests that looking at the percentage of total employment in the financial, insurance and real estate (FIRE) sectors offers a better indicator of a city's ranking and influence. Using this metric, Graves contends that "Charlotte banks have a smaller local economic impact per dollar of assets than other regional banks" suggesting that banking's prominence in Charlotte "may overshadow the diversity of the area's economy and overstate the economic contributions of the city's most prominent players." William Graves, "Charlotte's Role as a Financial Center: Looking Beyond Bank Assets," *Southeastern Geographer* 41, no.2 (2001): 230.

The financial boom also stimulated substantial growth within other interrelated sectors in the Charlotte area economy. Between 1980 and 2005, real estate development, professional services, education, health care, scientific and technical fields all experienced growth rates from 280 to nearly 500 percent, translating to almost 100,000 jobs in these categories alone. Clearly, the surge of money into the city center had important effects beyond filling the vaults of area banks.<sup>585</sup>

### **Urban Redevelopment in Charlotte**

As Charlotte's boosters had been convinced for decades, carefully crafting and re-crafting the image of the city in the eyes of the nation was important to keeping new residents and new business flowing into the city. Matthew Lassiter has described these efforts to transform the image of Charlotte from a second-rate city forever in the shadow of Atlanta to a first-rate city in its own right as Charlotte's "a search for respect."<sup>586</sup> Over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, Charlotte's Chamber of Commerce experimented with a variety of slogans that would serve as selling points for the city including "Spearhead of the South" in the late 1950s and "Charlotte: The Action City" in the early 1960s. In the 1970s, the Chamber finally settled on a slogan that captured the city's ambitions for the decade: "Charlotte: A Good Place to Make Money."<sup>587</sup> According to Lassiter, "The corporate priorities of economic growth and metropolitan expansion

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<sup>585</sup> Atkins, et. al., *Responding to Manufacturing Job Loss*.

<sup>586</sup> Matthew Lassiter, "Searching for Respect: From 'New South' to 'World Class' at the Crossroads of the Carolinas" in *Charlotte, NC: The Global Evolution of a New South City*, ed. William Graves and Heather A. Smith (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2010), 24.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-35.

have therefore dominated the presentation of Charlotte as a full-throttled embodiment of American capitalism...Charlotte's business leaders and politicians pursued this public relations strategy in order to overcome a regional inferiority complex based on persistent national stereotypes about southern racial and economic backwardness by converting these liabilities into the virtuous synthesis of New South interracial harmony and Sunbelt metropolitan development."<sup>588</sup>

One example of Charlotte's "full-throttle" capitalism can be seen in the efforts of Charlotte's banks to redevelop downtown. Much of the redevelopment of Charlotte was focused on the city's Fourth Ward neighborhood, which directly abutted downtown. Charlotte's downtown is divided into four wards and previous urban renewal efforts had razed two of the four, both of which were primarily African American neighborhoods. The city's First Ward was demolished to make way for the Earle Village public housing complex in 1967 and Second Ward, which was once home to the city's vibrant African American neighborhood of Brooklyn, was destroyed to construct a plaza of government buildings. Third Ward was primarily industrial, marred by empty factories and contaminated lots, and thus of little interest to urban redevelopers. As a result, redevelopment efforts were focused primarily on Fourth Ward, whose Victorian houses had been home to Charlotte's most prominent business leaders and elected officials from the late nineteenth century until the 1940s but had fallen into disrepair as its middle-class residents fled to the city's streetcar suburbs. Like many historic neighborhoods adjoining downtown business districts in mid-sized cities across the nation, Fourth Ward's homes

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<sup>588</sup> Ibid., 24.

had fallen into a state of disrepair—absentee landlords subdivided some homes into poorly maintained multi-family units while others remained unoccupied, often until they reached such a state of deterioration that they were demolished.<sup>589</sup>

NCNB's interest in the revitalization of Fourth Ward was a part of the bank's larger vision of remaking Charlotte's downtown into a vibrant and business-friendly urban center. Fourth Ward abutted NCNB headquarters, making the neighborhood's depressed condition of particular concern to a bank increasingly hosting clients from across the nation and the globe. Moreover, the bank had more money invested in downtown development than any other entity in Charlotte, so it had a substantial stake in the center city's success. In the mid-1970s, then, NCNB joined several preservation-minded organizations—Citizens for Preservation, Friends of Fourth Ward, the Charlotte Junior League, and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission—in working to preserve Fourth Ward's historic homes. These organizations emphasized the importance of preserving and revitalizing Fourth Ward's historic yet dilapidated housing stock, rather than turning to demolition, as had been the pattern of previous redevelopment projects under urban renewal.

Although at first NCNB took a backseat role in the coalition of organizations focused on revitalizing Fourth Ward, it soon moved to the fore, as the bank had a vested interest in seeing downtown redevelopment succeed since NCNB's executives believed that Charlotte's unimpressive downtown was stymying efforts to recruit top financial

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<sup>589</sup> Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, 142-3, 248-55; Smith and Livingstone, "Banking on the Neighborhood," 147-8.

sector workers. According to Charlotte attorney and NCNB executive J. Dennis Rash who would soon move into Fourth Ward, the bank was “bringing people in from London who didn’t know how to drive” who were deterred by Charlotte’s shortage of suitable neighborhoods where white-collar professionals could walk to work.<sup>590</sup> NCNB’s executives believed that to recruit financial sector workers from New York, London and San Francisco, the city needed more than quiet tree-lined residential neighborhoods and a downtown that cleared out by six in the evening.<sup>591</sup> NCNB was not the only bank in the city doing business with international clients and concerned with giving the city a more cosmopolitan feel. By 1973, Charlotte’s three biggest banks, NCNB, Wachovia, and First Union had offices in London, Tokyo, and the Caribbean and had goals of expanding elsewhere in Europe and South America. If international bankers saw Charlotte as a backwater, the city’s financial sector would not reach its potential.<sup>592</sup>

In 1976, NCNB, now the largest financial institution between Philadelphia and Texas, convinced the six other major banks in the Charlotte to loan \$100,000 to the city, each creating a pool of \$700,000 designated for low-interest loans to area residents willing to renovate Fourth Ward homes.<sup>593</sup> Hugh McColl, who was promoted to president of the bank in 1974, became one the city’s leading proponents of Fourth Ward

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<sup>590</sup> Rash as quoted in Smith and Livingstone, “Banking on the Neighborhood,” 149.

<sup>591</sup> Covington and Ellis, *The Story of NationsBank*, 146; Smith and Livingstone, “Banking on the Neighborhood,” 148.

<sup>592</sup> “N.C. Banks Are Expanding Overseas,” *Charlotte Observer*, 15 July 1973.

<sup>593</sup> NCNB held with 4.25 billion in assets. The other banks involved in the program included City National, First Citizens, First Union National, Northwestern, Southern National, and Wachovia. Covington and Ellis, *The Story of NationsBank*, 146; Smith and Livingstone, “Banking on the Neighborhood,” 150; NCNB: John H. Allen, *NCNB: Banking Giant of the Southeast*, Raleigh News and Observer, 12 May 1974, Box 2395, Folder 14, North Carolina AFL-CIO Records, SLA.



revitalization efforts. “I’d like to see the city reinvent itself,” stated McColl. The bank “does have an interest in making this the most exciting inner city in the US. That is my personal goal. That is our corporation’s goal.”<sup>594</sup>

Through the public-private partnership, NCND and the city collaborated with Duke Power to subsidize sidewalk construction, decorative streetlamps, underground power lines, and other infrastructure improvements. Because many of Fourth Ward’s historic homes had been demolished in the previous decades due to neglect, Victorian houses from across the region was trucked in to replenish the neighborhood’s housing stock. As the newsletter of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, *Preservation News*, noted, “The few late Victorian houses that remain may not be highly significant architecturally but they are all the people of Charlotte have left.”<sup>595</sup> Nevertheless, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Commission designated the neighborhood as a Historic District, the first step toward making buildings there eligible for the 1976 Historic Preservation tax credit program.<sup>596</sup>

NCNB expanded its role in Fourth Ward’s redevelopment in 1978 through the creation of a Community Development Corporation (CDC) whose goal was to “assist in revitalizing inner-city residential neighborhoods.”<sup>597</sup> The NCNB CDC became the first such non-profit subsidiary dedicated to urban redevelopment “in the public interest” in

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<sup>594</sup> McColl as quoted in Heather Smith and William Graves, “Gentrification as Corporate Growth Strategy: The Strange Case of Charlotte, North Carolina and the Bank of America,” *Journal of Urban Affairs*, Vol. 27, No.4 (2005), 407.

<sup>595</sup> Phillip Hayward, “Turning the Tables on Charlotte’s Blight,” *Preservation News*, vol. 14, no. 8, August 1978.

<sup>596</sup> Smith and Livingstone, “Banking on the Neighborhood,” 150.

<sup>597</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

the nation.<sup>598</sup> Under the tutelage of McColl and Dennis Rash, whom NCNB hired as CDC president, the non-profit development corporation worked to prove to investors and developers that it was possible, and even profitable, to transform downtown Charlotte into a vibrant urban space attractive to young professionals otherwise destined for the affluent suburban-style neighborhoods of South Charlotte. NCNB turned to the CDC idea, explained Rash, because the bank “saw it as a vehicle for projects that the private sector didn’t want to do downtown, couldn’t do downtown, but were too important not to do.”<sup>599</sup>

In the years that followed, property values in the area rose exponentially as hundreds of new professionals and families moved into the area. According to Rash, the offer of downtown living alone was not enough to attract new buyers. “We couldn’t sell location,” explains Rash, “so we offered below market loans” starting at \$50,000 to buyers willing to invest time and money into revitalizing residential properties.<sup>600</sup> This strategy proved effective and between 1979 and 1980 alone, 450 homes and apartments were sold in Fourth Ward and by 1981, just over 1,400 residents lived in the neighborhood.<sup>601</sup> Property values increased from \$1.2 million before the redevelopment project began to \$32 million in 1984.<sup>602</sup> In roughly a decade, NCNB spearheaded the transformation of downtown Charlotte into a more suitable environment for what would soon become one of the nation’s leading financial institutions.

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<sup>598</sup> Covington and Ellis, *The Story of NationsBank*, 147.

<sup>599</sup> Mitch Lubitz, “New Housing is the Key to Charlotte’s Downtown Revival,” *St. Petersburg Independent*, 7 November 1984.

<sup>600</sup> *Ibid.*; Smith and Graves, “Gentrification as Corporate Growth Strategy,” 407.

<sup>601</sup> Smith and Graves, “Gentrification as Corporate Growth Strategy,” 410.

<sup>602</sup> Lubitz, “New Housing is the Key to Charlotte’s Downtown Revival.”

Like similar redevelopment efforts of urban residential neighborhoods across the nation, the Fourth Ward project resulted in the displacement of existing residents, in favor of attracting middle-class and wealthy newcomers. One resident voiced frustration that existing residents were clearly an afterthought of the project: “When the white people were here, they wanted to move to Myers Park. Now, they want to come back to Fourth Ward. This is our home. Why don’t they fix it up for us? We’re the ones that’s been living here all the time.”<sup>603</sup> Although NCNB made some efforts to minimize the impact of gentrification through offering low-interest loans and additional subsidies to elderly residents as incentive to stay in the neighborhood, for many low-income residents who had been renters for decades, becoming a homebuyer was not a feasible financial option. For all of its faults, urban renewal programs had as a central mission providing affordable housing, but for NCNB, the poor were an obstacle.

Geographers Heather Smith, William Graves, and Emily Thomas Livingstone, who write about the redevelopment of Fourth Ward, address the neighborhood’s history of redevelopment to highlight two points: that the neighborhood’s gentrification was business-driven, thereby defying traditional patterns of gentrification, and that it offers an excellent example of “corporate citizenship.” According to Smith and Livingstone, “NCNB’s leadership in the private-public partnership that facilitate[d] Fourth Ward’s transformation took on a complex, perhaps more ‘enlightened’ and forward-thinking tone than other examples detailed in the literature.”<sup>604</sup> Defining corporate citizenship as “improving life for others while at the same time improving life for oneself,” Smith and

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<sup>603</sup> Smith and Livingstone, “Banking on the Neighborhood,” 152.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid., 155.

Livingstone argue that on the balance, NCNB's "visionary leadership team" improved Charlotte for the better. They worry about the fate of the city's downtown in the wake of the banks' "waning corporate influence" following the upheavals of the economic collapse of 2008.

While NCNB may indeed have been a better "corporate citizen" than some, Smith and Livingstone's characterization ignores the broader historical and political context in which this corporate-led urban redevelopment effort unfolded. Rather than being seen as an example of a corporation behaving admirably, NCNB's efforts to transform downtown Charlotte are better understood as a part of the ongoing federal retreat from cities in the 1970s. Under the administration of President Jimmy Carter, the federal government's approach to cities was, for the most part, a continuation of Nixon's and Ford's New Federalism. "With its austerity budgets and penchant for cultivating private funding sources," explains Roger Biles, Carter's "New Partnership" continued the "path of devolution and a reduced role for the federal government. Rather than reestablishing the kind of relationship between the cities and the federal government forged in the Great Society, Carter's presidency paved the way for the accelerated decentralization of the Reagan Era."<sup>605</sup>

Moreover, NCNB's leadership role in redeveloping downtown Charlotte—which successors NationsBank and Bank of America would continue—epitomizes the neoliberal urban project of remaking city spaces to better serve the interest of capital. As

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<sup>605</sup> Biles, *The Fate of Cities*, 222; Dennis R. Judd and Todd Swanstrom, *City Politics: Private Power and Public Policy*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Longman, 2004), ch. 3.

Jason Hackworth and others have argued, the public-private partnership has been central to neoliberal regimes in American cities. Hackworth explains: “These alliances can vary considerably in form, but city governments are increasingly expected to serve as market facilitators, rather than salves for market failures. Cities have moved from a managerialist role under Keynesianism to an entrepreneurial one under neoliberalism.”<sup>606</sup> Over time, Hackworth notes, “[n]eoliberalism became naturalized as the ‘only’ choice available to cities in the United States and elsewhere.” Charlotte’s bankers put the city on the cutting edge of that neoliberal transformation.<sup>607</sup>

### **Harvey Gantt and the Emergence of Charlotte’s “Post-Racial” Coalition Around Economic Growth**

Within the context of ascendant neoliberalism, the federal government’s retreat from cities, and increased black migration to Charlotte, as well as the political gains of the civil rights movement, Charlotte elected its first black mayor, architect Harvey Gantt, in 1983. Gantt’s election signaled the zenith of Charlotte’s “bi-racial coalition around economic growth” that had been in control of city politics for the better part of three decades.<sup>608</sup>

Much of Gantt’s political worldview was a product of the family, community, and period in which he came of age. Born on the Sea Islands just outside of Charleston, South Carolina, Gantt and his family moved into public housing in the city of Charleston not

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<sup>606</sup> Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City*, 61.

<sup>607</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>608</sup> Stephen Smith uses this phrase drawn from Carl Abbott’s *The New Urban America: Growth and Politics in the Sunbelt*, rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 257.

long after he was born. He and his parents stayed in public housing for four years, during which time his father secured a job working at Charleston's naval shipyard during World War II that, along with other side jobs, helped him "[get] a leg up on the economic ladder."<sup>609</sup> After the war, the Gantt family had the financial resources to move out of public housing into a home Gantt's father built in the center of Charleston. The house expanded to fit the needs of the family, which eventually included Gantt's four younger sisters. Gantt described his parents as "salt of the earth working people" who showered their children with love and affection and who instilled in them "a great belief in America as the land of opportunity if you work hard and you get an education."<sup>610</sup>

Reflecting on formative events in his youth, Gantt describes 1954, the year the Supreme Court handed down the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, as being "a watershed year in my whole life."<sup>611</sup> In the years that followed, Gantt watched his parents become increasingly involved in efforts to improve opportunities for black schoolchildren in Charleston, which then inspired him to lead student sit-ins when he was a senior in high school. "I had to act on my own conscience then about the system and had been sufficiently radicalized enough that I thought we ought to do something," Gantt explained. Along with other youth members of the NAACP a month away from graduation, Gantt organized a sit-in in 1960 at the S.H. Kress lunch counter in Charleston. The group chose their members carefully, recalls Gantt, "We started reading about Martin Luther King and non-violence and we were concerned that we got people

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<sup>609</sup> Harvey B. Gantt, Interviewed by Lynn Haessly. 6 January 1986, Interview C-0008, Southern Oral History Program Collection, SHC.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid.

who were not hot-headed because they would be a liability...We didn't want any violence beyond what was necessary."<sup>612</sup>

As a National Merit Scholar, Gantt chose Iowa State University for college, imagining that the Midwest would offer more opportunities for a bright black student hoping to major in architecture. Not long after his arrival, however, Gantt became disappointed with both the lack of a black student presence on campus and the bitter Iowa winter, prompting him to eventually transfer back south. Gantt decided upon Clemson University because of its strong architecture program and in 1963, with assistance from the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund, he became the first black student admitted to the university.<sup>613</sup>

After graduation, Gantt moved to Charlotte, because, like many black migrants, he believed the city's job opportunities were promising for young, well-educated black professionals and certainly more promising than his prospects in South Carolina. "I was graduating third in my class in architecture," explained Gantt," and usually the first three or four or five students are the ones that are gobbled up. It didn't take me long to figure out I wasn't getting the offers from South Carolina, I was getting them from North Carolina and...Atlanta."<sup>614</sup> Gantt described falling in love with the city upon his arrival thinking, "hey, here is a place that's growing. [I] might be able to grow with it."<sup>615</sup> He left for a few years to pursue a master's degree in city planning at the Massachusetts

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<sup>612</sup> Ibid.

<sup>613</sup> Gantt described the lawyer who helped his case, Matthew Perry, as being like Charleston's Julius Chambers. Perry received financial support from the NAACP's Legal Defense Fund and was involved in a variety of civil rights cases throughout the city. Gantt interview.

<sup>614</sup> Gantt interview.

<sup>615</sup> Ibid.

Institute of Technology and then returned to Charlotte to open an architecture practice in the city.

Gantt entered local politics in 1974 when he was appointed to fill the seat of city councilmember Fred Alexander who had recently been elected to the North Carolina Senate. In the 1975 election, Gantt won the seat outright. Like Alexander, Gantt had faith in the conference approach to handling differences of opinion, whether personal or political. “I just always have this confidence that if I can get you to sit down and look you in the eye we can talk, we can get to know each other,” explained Gantt. Contrasting his political outlook with that of more militant black leaders, Gantt drew on his middle-class background to explain his belief that “the way to do things is not to destroy them but to negotiate power.”<sup>616</sup>

Gantt was reelected in 1977, but under very different local political circumstances. In that year, Charlotte city council elections shifted from at-large to district representation.<sup>617</sup> Though Gantt won an at-large seat, district representation made it easier to elect black candidates and, according to many local observers, began to break the stranglehold the business elite had on city politics. According to Stephen Smith,

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<sup>616</sup> Ibid.

<sup>617</sup> Up until 1977, the city elected seven city council members in an at-large election, meaning that every candidate was elected by the entirety of the city and the top seven finishers won council seats. On April 19, 1977, the city charter was amended such that the city would retain four at-large seats while adding seven seats represented by different geographic districts within the city. This change was the result of growing dissatisfaction among disparate portions of the city over both the city’s school-busing plan, which disproportionately impacted the children of white working-class residents, and zoning issues in the city. In response, neighborhood groups gathered 5,000 signatures from residents across the city in order to force a city referendum on the at-large system. Hanchett credits the referendum with bringing an end to the city’s urban renewal projects. For more on the 1977 referendum, see Hanchett, *Sorting Out the New South City*, 255.



however, the referendum did not pose a significant challenge to elite agendas. In fact, Smith credits the referendum with facilitating further economic growth in the city, pointing to the fact that a bond initiative to fund airport expansion that failed in 1975, due to black political mobilization against the measure, passed in 1978 under the new district election system.<sup>618</sup> Following the shift from the at-large system, Gantt would be reelected to city council in 1981, this time serving as mayor Pro Tem.

In 1983, Gantt was elected mayor, becoming the first black mayor in a large white-majority southern city.<sup>619</sup> According to *Black Enterprise* magazine, Gantt won because he was able to build an electoral “coalition that included businessmen and grassroots organizers.”<sup>620</sup> This description characterizes what scholars would later call the “biracial coalition around economic growth”—a term used to characterize political coalitions in a variety of Sunbelt cities.<sup>621</sup> Gantt became one of a growing cadre of black mayors elected in the last third of the twentieth century. In many ways, Gantt represented the “post-racial” trajectory of American politics that would become more common in the decades following his election. Much of the press coverage surrounding Gantt’s election emphasized that while he had been the first student to desegregate Clemson, he was decidedly different than black candidates who had emerged from efforts

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<sup>618</sup> According to Smith, “the airport bond failed, largely because a group of black leaders saw mobilization of a No vote as a way to indicate both dismay at the city’s neglect of African American needs and anger at Charlotte’s more established black political leadership that supported the bonds.” The bond was defeated by a 54-46 percent margin. Smith, *Boom for Whom?* 220. The expansion of the airport was no small matter: the ability of professionals to travel between Charlotte and other large metropolitan areas, both in the United States and abroad, became a major factor in allowing Charlotte-based corporations to grow and attract new business to the area.

<sup>619</sup> Gantt also made a failed bid for the mayor’s office in 1979. Smith, *Boom for Whom?* 34.

<sup>620</sup> “Gantt Grabs Mayor’s Seat,” *Black Enterprise*, February 1984.

<sup>621</sup> See Smith, *Boom for Whom?* 32.

to topple the Jim Crow regime. An article in *Black Enterprise* quoted Gantt as saying that “race was not an issue in the campaign.”<sup>622</sup> Gantt’s colleagues and other local leaders agreed with this assessment. Ron Leeper, a black city councilmember in Charlotte in 1986 described Gantt as “just has the kind of personality that has allowed him to transcend racial lines in a way that few of us do.”<sup>623</sup> Robert Alston, president and chief executive officer of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Urban League said of Gantt: Whites don’t seem to perceive Harvey as a ‘Black mayor.’ They see him as a mayor who happens to be Black. It’s as though because he’s articulate and successful, he’s somehow an exception to the rule.”<sup>624</sup> Gantt himself said just before winning mayor election: “There a lot of southernness in Charlotte, but I think there are more and more people who are getting beyond race. It’s an interesting place to live.”<sup>625</sup> One journalist observed, “Gantt’s lexicon was that of an urban planner, not a civil rights activist.”<sup>626</sup>

Indeed, throughout much of his mayoral career, Gantt’s primary focus was on what had come to be called Smart Growth. Like other architects and planners during this period, Gantt had become increasingly worried about the costs of the city’s expansion and population growth. Instead of allowing the city to follow the path of Atlanta, with its sprawling suburbs and traffic congestion, Gantt hoped to refocus political and financial resources on Charlotte’s urban center. However, explains Matthew Lassiter, while Gantt made curbing certain types of development a priority during his administration, “his

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<sup>622</sup> “Gantt Grabs Mayor’s Seat,” *Black Enterprise*, February 1984.

<sup>623</sup> Charles Whitaker, “Harvey Gantt,” *Ebony*, April 1986.

<sup>624</sup> Ibid.

<sup>625</sup> David D. Porter and Rosalyn Gist Porter, “The Changing Profile of Charlotte,” *Black Enterprise*, June 1983.

<sup>626</sup> Margaret Edds as quoted in Smith, *Boom for Whom?* 44.

unreliable allies at the Chamber of Commerce never really abandoned their belief in the inherent value of any new growth anywhere in the sprawling Metrolina region.”<sup>627</sup>

In February 1984, Gantt unveiled a proposal for a payroll tax on non-residents in an effort to more fairly distribute the cost of providing city services to a rapidly expanding metropolis facing cuts in federal funding to the city. According to Gantt, it was only reasonable to require all those who worked in the city to contribute their “fair share” since commuters, like Charlotte residents, used roads and other city amenities funded by paid for with tax dollars.<sup>628</sup> “It’s easy for any local politician to say he supports lowering taxes, tightening the belt, and working with interest groups to fund needed projects without increasing the property tax,” asserted Gantt, but considering that federal support for Charlotte had dropped from 23% to 8% since 1980, and state funding was on similar decline, Gantt argued that such measures were necessary if the city was to maintain its AAA bond rating and current level of economic growth.<sup>629</sup>

The proposal drew immediate criticism from Charlotte’s business community and many private citizens who argued that the new tax would hurt Charlotte’s competitive advantage in attracting new companies. In the days following the proposal’s introduction, Gantt received a slew of letters, many of which resembled one another, suggesting a coordinated effort, likely on the part of the Chamber of Commerce. Some drew negative comparisons between the growing Sunbelt and declining northern cities such as Detroit

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<sup>627</sup> Lassiter, “Searching for Respect,” 35.

<sup>628</sup> Given that the United Way had been soliciting donations from workers in Charlotte for decades by asserting that such contributions constituted workers’ “fair share” to the community, Gantt’s choice of terminology, if not intentional, would have at least been familiar.

<sup>629</sup> Harvey Gantt, “The Need for Alternative Revenues,” Box 4, Folder 14, Harvey Gantt Papers, UNCC.

and Philadelphia. In a letter to Gantt, one employer argued that in Detroit, a city he had lived in before moving to Charlotte, high city taxes caused Detroiters to abandon the city for the suburbs.<sup>630</sup> Ed Crutchfield, the president and CEO of First Union Bank asserted that “a local income tax would send a high profile signal that we have a mentality of preying on workers and their wages.”<sup>631</sup> Still other critics argued that the tax would unfairly burden low income workers, who could barely afford their current tax rates, much less an increase.<sup>632</sup>

Some opponents of the tax proposal offered alternative suggestions. Hugh McColl of NCNB suggested shifting the tax burden to consumers through a consumption tax that he argued would “tax those with the highest incomes since they spend the most money and therefore pay the highest consumer taxes.” Moreover, asserted McColl, it would bring in additional money from visitors and tourists.<sup>633</sup> Many Southern states had high sales taxes, but McColl overlooked the fact that they fell hardest on low and middle-income taxpayers, who spent more of their disposable income on consumer goods than did the wealthy.

Other business leaders presented their own alternatives to the income tax. Margo Whitfield, the Vice President of a local temp agency employing over 900 people, urged the mayor to erect toll booths at the city limits and charge incoming and outgoing traffic

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<sup>630</sup> Boris G. Sellers to Harvey Gantt, 20 February 1984, Box 4, Folder 9, Harvey Gantt Papers, UNCC.

<sup>631</sup> Edward J. Crutchfield, Jr. to Harvey B. Gantt, 21 February 1984, Box 4, Folder 9, Harvey Gantt Papers, UNCC.

<sup>632</sup> Margo P. Whitfield to Harvey B. Gantt, 27 February 1984, Box 4, Folder 9, Harvey Gantt Papers, UNCC.

<sup>633</sup> Hugh L. McColl, Jr. to Harvey B. Gantt, 24 February 1984, Box 4, Folder 9, Harvey Gantt Papers, UNCC.

\$.10 per car while cutting down on traffic and pollution.<sup>634</sup> South Carolinians also joined in attacks. At a National League of Cities meeting in 1985, South Carolina Representative Herbert Kirsch told Gantt, “The idea that South Carolinians should also help underwrite the costs of Mecklenburg County...is an insult and affront to those of us who have worked long and hard to build strong working relationships between the two states.” In response, Gantt told the *Charlotte Observer* that Kirsch’s letter was “the most far-fetched thing I’ve heard.” Moreover, asserted Gantt, “I think its ridiculous to say that we don’t want to welcome our friends from South Carolina; we just want our friends to help us out.”<sup>635</sup> Despite Gantt’s arguments for the benefits of the payroll tax, it failed due to substantial and continued opposition from the city’s business community as well as that of a committee appointed by Gantt to study the plan.<sup>636</sup>

On many other issues, however, Gantt’s political and economic agenda was consistent with the city’s business class. For example, Gantt aggressively pursued a professional sports team, winning an NBA franchise in 1987 and, in the process, gaining widespread approval from business and civic leaders, the city’s newspapers, and the 50,000 fans that turned out for the Charlotte Hornets’ first basketball game. Gantt was instrumental in numerous other development projects and when it came to the city’s downtown, Gantt and the city’s banking leaders were often on the same page, working

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<sup>634</sup> Margo P. Whitfield to Harvey B. Gantt, 27 February 1984, Box 4, Folder 9, Harvey Gantt Papers, UNCC.

<sup>635</sup> “Southern Neighbors Treat Gantt Inhospitably,” *Charlotte Observer*, 27 March 1985, Box 4, Folder 9, Harvey Gantt Papers, UNCC.

<sup>636</sup> John Minter, “New Search for Revenue Sources Urged,” *Charlotte Observer*, 13 November 1985.

together to transform the city's urban center and, in turn, the political and economic trajectory of Charlotte.

This political alliance and, more broadly, Charlotte's bi-racial coalition around economic growth unraveled when Gantt lost reelection to Republican Sue Myrick in 1987. As Stephen Smith and other observers have argued, Gantt's loss was due in large part to the changing demographics of the city—specifically, the massive influx of whites from Northern and Midwestern states to outlying areas of Charlotte that remained within city limits because of the city's aggressive annexation laws.<sup>637</sup> Despite this political transition, however, Charlotte continued its economic ascent in the years that followed, laying the groundwork for it to become the financial capital it is today. As historians become increasingly interested in understanding the emergence of neoliberalism, late capitalism and modern political economy, it becomes evident that Charlotte's history in the late twentieth century still warrants further investigation.

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<sup>637</sup> Smith, *Boom for Whom*, 44-45.

## EPILOGUE

In September 2012, Charlotte, North Carolina was chosen to host the Democratic National Convention. As was to be expected, a variety of speakers addressed the convention and, like its Republican counterpart, the convention served as an opportunity for speakers to rally the so-called base of the Democratic Party. First lady Michelle Obama, San Antonio mayor Julian Castro, former President Bill Clinton, and a host of Democratic Party celebrities and rising stars all made their case for President Obama's reelection. Vice President Joe Biden told the audience of loyal Democrats, as he announced numerous times on the campaign trail, "Bin Laden is Dead, General Motors is alive." United Auto Workers President Bob King also addressed the convention, saying, "The auto industry has added a quarter of a million jobs and is thriving once again. These are good middle class jobs –jobs making things for an economy built to last." Importantly, however, King failed to mention that many of these jobs are at foreign-owned plants throughout the American South such as Toyota and Volkswagen, which do not employ union labor.

In fact, as cameras panned across the diverse crowd of delegates and party members, organized labor beyond the United Auto Workers was one group not visibly present in large numbers. In fact, when the Democratic National Committee announced that it had chosen Charlotte as the site for the 2012 Convention, UNITE HERE, the nation's largest hotel worker's union, threatened a boycott due to the fact that none of the

city's hotels are unionized.<sup>638</sup> There was such union dissatisfaction with the DNC's decision that a number of unions and labor activists held an alternate conference at a nearby church. Rick Sloan, communications director for the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, told the press, "Going to a right-to-work state and starting a convention on Labor Day for the Democrats? Wow. That's quite the equation."<sup>639</sup>

The DNC's selection of Charlotte to host its convention highlights a number of political trends that have defined the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. First, it signifies what has arguably been the Democratic Party's abandonment of organized labor and the American working-class. As Judith Stein and other scholars have argued, this was a process begun in the 1970s with profound effects on both domestic and foreign policy in the decades that followed.<sup>640</sup> Equally significant is the fact that the DNC chose Charlotte—home to Bank of America and former home of Wachovia (now home to the East Coast Operations of Wells Fargo, which acquired Wachovia in 2008)—just four years after the largest global financial collapse since the Great Depression. Given the financial sector's role in the 2008 crisis and its disproportionate impact on the working-class and middle-class Americans, and especially public employees and their pensions, there are but so many ways to interpret the DNC's convention site selection. While it is understandable that the Committee would choose a city in a battleground state to host the convention, the DNC's message to organized labor was hardly mistakable: What is good

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<sup>638</sup> Melanie Mason, "Democrats and Labor Part Ways for Convention," *Los Angeles Times*, 11 August 2012.

<sup>639</sup> <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0211/48901.html>, accessed 1 September 2013.

<sup>640</sup> Stein, *Pivotal Decade*.



for business is good for the Democratic Party. Finally, in the wake of former union stronghold such as Michigan becoming a right-to-work state and Wisconsin passing some of the nation's most restrictive anti-union legislation, a fate unimaginable two decades ago, we see the anti-union trends that unfolded in Charlotte over the second half of the twentieth century becoming common on the national political scene.

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