

4-1-1991

Union-Community Relations in Buffalo: A Preliminary Assessment

Lawrence G. Flood
Buffalo State College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/buffalolawreview>



Part of the [Labor and Employment Law Commons](#), and the [Law and Economics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Lawrence G. Flood, *Union-Community Relations in Buffalo: A Preliminary Assessment*, 39 Buff. L. Rev. 445 (1991).

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/buffalolawreview/vol39/iss2/9>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Journals at Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Buffalo Law Review by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. For more information, please contact lawscholar@buffalo.edu.

Union-Community Relations in Buffalo: A Preliminary Assessment

LAWRENCE G. FLOOD*

INTRODUCTION

UNIONS in the United States are in serious trouble. They represent an ever-smaller proportion of the work force, have lost political power, are forced into concessionary bargaining, and face active hostile attack from management while receiving less and less support from government and the public. Whether or not “[l]abor is a toothless, ossified institution,”¹ it is true that “even its most incurable optimists now acknowledge that the labor movement is in crisis.”² Scholars and activists dispute the exact dimensions of labor’s disaster, and argue about its causes.³ But all agree that labor must act decisively, now, if it is to avoid becoming simply one more interest group, representing a small segment of the work force⁴ and relegated to one or two regions of the country.⁵

* Lawrence G. Flood is a professor of political science at Buffalo State College, with a PhD from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is active in United University Professions, the union which represents academic and professional staff in the State University of New York. His scholarly work centers on labor politics, and he is editor of the recent symposium on unions and public policy in the *Policy Studies Journal*. The author thanks Carolyn Morell, Peter Pitegoff and Susan Woods for very helpful editorial and substantive critiques; the individuals cited below who agreed to be interviewed and who provided much of the material for the paper; and Dean Marilyn Hoskin’s Small Grant Fund Committee at Buffalo State College, for financial support.

1. Serrin, *Labor as Usual*, Village Voice, Feb. 23, 1988, at 30. In a later article Serrin praised some activists in the union movement and stated “there is much good to be said of the labor movement. . . .” *A Salute to the Remnant For Whom Love’s Labor’s Not Lost*, NAT’L CATH. REP. 12 (1988).

2. Klare, *The Labor-Management Cooperation Debate: A Workplace Democracy Perspective*, 23 HARV. C.R.-C.L. L. REV. 39, 41 (1988).

3. For an extended and provocative analysis of labor’s decline see M. GOLDFIELD, *THE DECLINE OF ORGANIZED LABOR IN THE UNITED STATES* (1987). For a different perspective see Getman, *Ruminations on Union Organizing in the Private Sector*, 53 U. CHI. L. REV. 45 (1986).

4. Richard Freeman estimates that private sector union membership will continue to decline through the year 2015, at which time unions will represent less than 5% of that work-force. Freeman’s estimate is cited in Weiler, *Who Will Represent Labor Now*, 2 THE AMERICAN PROSPECT 79 (Summer 1990).

5. A number of useful books probing the current practices and future possibilities of unions are available. Differing analyses and prescriptions are found in the following: S. ARONOWITZ, *WORKING CLASS HERO: A NEW STRATEGY FOR LABOR* (1983); R. EDWARDS, P. GARONNA & F. TODTLING, *UNIONS IN CRISIS AND BEYOND: PERSPECTIVES FROM SIX COUNTRIES* (1986); R.

It is, however, too early to predict the "death" of labor. I am persuaded, with Debra Friedman, that "[o]rganic imagery applies poorly to trade unionism: resurrection is not only possible, it is common."⁶ Indeed, "[u]nions do not emerge, mature, and die. They appear, change, disappear, reappear in new form, grow, merge, and disappear once again."⁷ The analysis below is based on that understanding of the ebb and flow of unionism. It also draws upon the spirit of the AFL-CIO position paper, "The Changing Situation of Workers and Their Unions," which emphasizes the importance of new approaches and the need to reevaluate old ways.⁸ I share that document's confidence that the "labor movement has the capacity to continue the never-ending process of renewal and regeneration"⁹ which will make it a clear voice for workers and their communities.

There is nothing certain about a revival of the union movement or about its coming dimensions. As the CIO was different from the AFL, and public sector unions grew in a legal environment distinct from that of the private sector, so the next labor movement will be unlike that of the present or the past. The United States is in a period of "postindustrial transition", characterized by dramatic changes in technology, international competition, union density and labor-force participation, and we should expect a post-industrial labor movement. As Klare suggests, we are in "a period replete with transformative possibilities."¹⁰

The problems of labor are multifaceted. Some are associated with rigidities and failed approaches within the union movement, others with

FREEMAN & C. ICHNIOWSKI, *WHEN PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS UNIONIZE* (1986); M. GOLDFIELD, *supra* note 3; C. HECKSCHER, *THE NEW UNIONISM: EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT IN THE CHANGING CORPORATION* (1988); K. MOODY, *AN INJURY TO ALL: THE DECLINE OF AMERICAN UNIONISM* (1988); *ORGANIZED LABOR AT THE CROSSROADS* (W. Huang ed. 1989) (W.E. UpJohn Institute); *UNIONS IN TRANSITION: ENTERING THE SECOND CENTURY* (S.M. Lipset ed. 1986); P. WEILER, *GOVERNING THE WORKPLACE* (1990). Of course many articles are available in the popular and scholarly press. Also see the Symposium on Unions and Public Policy in 18 *POL'Y STUD. J.* (Winter 1989-90). For a strongly positive evaluation of recent union innovations, and a series of useful case studies, see A. SHOSTAK, *ROBUST UNIONISM: INNOVATIONS IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT* (1991).

6. Friedman, *Toward a Theory of Union Emergence and Demise*, in *SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS: THEIR EMERGENCE, MAINTENANCE AND EFFECTS* 291 (M. Hechter, K.D. Opp & R. Wippler eds. 1990).

7. *Id.* at 304.

8. AFL-CIO COMMITTEE ON THE EVOLUTION OF WORK, *THE CHANGING SITUATION OF WORKERS AND THEIR UNIONS*, AFL-CIO DOCUMENT NO. 165 (Feb. 1985).

9. *Id.* at 7.

10. Klare, *supra* note 2, at 45. For postindustrial perspectives, in addition to Klare, see F. BLOCK, *POSTINDUSTRIAL POSSIBILITIES: A CRITIQUE OF ECONOMIC DISCOURSE* (1990) (especially chapters one and four), and L. HIRSCHHORN, *THE WORKPLACE WITHIN: PSYCHODYNAMICS OF ORGANIZATIONAL LIFE* (1988).

corporate aggression and government policy, still others with changes in the national and international economy. No single approach will "save" unions in the years ahead.¹¹ Because the focus of this symposium is on the Buffalo community I will focus on local union-community relationships. I will argue that one particular strategy—the building of union-community coalitions—offers a promising way to increase the influence of labor while improving local conditions. An alternative and more common approach unions take to community—becoming part of its social infrastructure—has positive and often overlooked impact. But that activity must be reassessed in this era of changing economic and political structures and serious decline of union influence.

In the following pages I first describe various ways unions make contributions to the Buffalo community through involvement in its social infrastructure. I then reflect on why several aspects of this connection may undermine rather than expand labor's strength. Next I illustrate Buffalo's recent experience with community coalition building by describing four examples. Calling for coalitions is easy; creating them is not. In the paper's conclusion I examine problems encountered in Buffalo and offer general proposals for unionists who seek to collaborate with other groups to develop common tactics for progressive social change.

ON DEFINITION

Discussion of union-community relations is made difficult by a simple definitional problem: what do we mean by "union" and by "community?" Organized labor includes internationals and locals, a variety of federations, at the national, state and local levels, unions which are and which are not part of the AFL-CIO; some unions include strong "rank and file" movements or alternative caucuses. Unions have internal conflicts, and there are conflicts between unions.

"Community" is an even more difficult term. Almost any group within a city might be considered a "community group" and almost any leader might be a "community leader." Ethnic and minority groups, the United Way, churches, neighborhood associations and schools are all in

11. Unions confront pressures locally and internationally, and the two interact. The focus of this paper is on local action. For valuable discussions of global issues and strategies for labor see *INSTABILITY AND CHANGE IN THE WORLD ECONOMY* (A. MacEwan & W. Tabb eds. 1989). Especially instructive is Tabb's article in that volume, *Capital Mobility, the Restructuring of Production, and the Politics of Labor*, in *supra*, at 259. Also see Faux, *Labor in the Global Economy*, *DISSENT*, 376 (Summer 1990).

and of the community. Community groups are rarely "democratic" or "representative" in a formal sense. And community groups may share some interests, but disagree on others.

Staughton Lynd, confronted with this problem, chose to focus on those "labor-community coalitions" which in his view expressed the best organizational and social relations for a more democratic future: ". . . class-conscious, raucously democratic, militant mass movements based (for the most part) not on existing labor organizations, but directly in the rank and file."¹²

This is a powerful and positive vision for organizing, with its emphasis on democracy and mass movement. But it is problematic for a study of Buffalo for two reasons. First, such movements do not exist here, so they can not be studied. Secondly, this view ignores the very real contributions made to Buffalo by a variety of less mass/class connections between unions and the community. It rejects as irrelevant, negative or at best "circumscribed" the work of existing unions and it concludes there is little good reason to work with unions in the current setting.

This paper does not try to resolve the definitional difficulty, although that belongs on an agenda for future research and writing. Rather, I attempt to identify and evaluate the various ways the union movement and the community interact. My evidence is drawn from interviews with labor and community activists and from my own experiences as a member of United University Professions (AFT #2190) and of The Coalition for Economic Justice, a local union-community coalition.¹³

UNIONS AND SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Unions first appeared in Buffalo in the 1820's. A United Trades and Labor Council, comprised of skilled trades unions, was formed in the 1890s. These unions depended heavily upon community support for their successes. Evidence presented by historian Brenda Shelton suggests that strikes without community support were likely to be lost, those with

12. Lynd, *From Protest to Economic Democracy: Labor-Community Ownership and Management of the Economy*, in BUILDING BRIDGES: THE EMERGING GRASSROOTS COALITION OF LABOR AND COMMUNITY 263 (J. Brecher & T. Costello eds. 1990).

13. I am indebted to the following individuals for frank and insightful discussions of unions and the Buffalo community. They are not, of course, responsible for my interpretations and conclusions: Roger Cook, WNYCOSH; James Duncan, UAW; Lou Jean Fleron, Institute for Industry Studies; Tom Grace, Public Employees Federation; David Keicher, AFL-CIO; Ellen Kennedy, Citizen Action; Sheila Nickson, Affirmative Action, Buffalo State College; George Wessel, AFL-CIO; Susan Woods, New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations.

such support more likely to be won.¹⁴ Community, especially church support was also essential to the 1930s successes of the CIO in Buffalo according to another historian of the city, Mark Goldman.¹⁵

By the 1940s Buffalo was a center of manufacturing, and thus a center of industrial unionism. But despite their long existence in Buffalo, unions are often given little attention in local histories. One "Economic History of Buffalo: 1825-1984" mentions unions only in reference to the late 1940s Bell Aircraft strike in which "union leaders were accused of being communists."¹⁶ This is hardly a full discussion of the role of unions in the economy.

In recent years unions in Buffalo have followed the course found throughout the United States: a severe decline in the total number of unionized workers and in the unionized proportion of the work force, which would be worse if not for growth in unionized government and service sector jobs. According to the *Buffalo News* "the labor movement is on the defensive," giving concessions, losing strikes and work places. Author Charles Anzalone notes, "The kinds of industries that traditionally gave local unions their strength and influence on the Niagara Frontier have virtually all disappeared or declined. What is left is an economy now geared toward occupations unions have never had much success in organizing."¹⁷

"Deindustrialization"¹⁸ and the growth of the service sector in the United States led to the exchange of good jobs for bad, to increased demand for public services and to loss of tax revenues.¹⁹ Union jobs (and thus union membership) simply disappeared. This process encouraged corporations to demand subsidies from communities and concessions from unions: indeed communities compete with communities and unions with unions in the struggle to maintain or attract good jobs. Federal state and local government programs designed to promote economic develop-

14. B. SHELTON, *REFORMERS IN SEARCH OF YESTERDAY: BUFFALO IN THE 1890S* (1976) (especially chapter 7, at 159-93).

15. M. GOLDMAN, *HIGH HOPES: THE RISE AND DECLINE OF BUFFALO*, NEW YORK 232 (1983).

16. DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND RESOURCES, M AND T BANK, *ECONOMIC HISTORY OF BUFFALO: 1825-1984* (1985).

17. Anzalone, *State of the Unions: The Good Times are Gone*, *THE BUFFALO NEWS MAGAZINE*, Nov. 18, 1984, at 10, 14.

18. For a general discussion of this process see B. BLUESTONE & B. HARRISON, *THE DEINDUSTRIALIZATION OF AMERICA* (1982).

19. For an account of recent improvements in the Buffalo economy, which also notes continuing problems, see *From Rust and Frost Belts to Money Belt in Buffalo*, *N.Y. Times*, July 20, 1990, at B1, col. 2.

ment often serve to reinforce this competition. And recent public policy has narrowed the scope of union power.

Despite these national and local changes, unions are still a critically important part of the social infrastructure of Buffalo. The importance of contracts signed and administered by the unions, while not further discussed in this essay, must be noted at the outset. These contracts provide the pay and benefits which made a middle class life style possible for the industrial working class. They provide personal security for individuals and families and considerable stability for the community. Labor-Management Committees, also not further considered below, are another significant example of union involvement in the community. These committees, organized through cooperation between unions and management, are in place in a number of local companies. They meet regularly to consider a variety of work place issues in order to improve labor-management relations.²⁰

Beyond the contract, unions are part of the city's infrastructure through electoral, organizational and charitable activities. Individual unions and the AFL-CIO Council regularly endorse and support candidates for public office at all levels. They assist their endorsees with money, some staff assistance and efforts to register their members and to persuade them to vote for endorsed candidates. Unions generally work with and through the Democratic party, and the large number of union members who are registered Democrats in the city provides them some influence. (Of course much electoral activity focuses on higher level elections: Nationally the UAW spent \$3 million in 1988 simply gathering information about and selecting the endorsed candidate for President—Michael Dukakis.²¹) The number of campaigns in which unions are involved in western New York varies from year to year. In 1990 unions will endorse candidates in some 30-35 races, but in 1991 this number could rise to 80. Electoral activities later relate to union lobbying. On an issue-by-issue basis union leaders meet with city and county legislators and administrators to express concerns and attempt to influence policy decisions.

Union impact is also felt through the various non-union organizational positions held by union leaders. These leaders are very much a

20. "New labor-management relations" is another important subject this paper will not consider. Controversy on questions of cooperation and conflict between labor and management divides the literature and the shop-floor. A genuinely more democratic workplace would have implications for community politics which will have to be explored elsewhere.

21. This figure comes from James Duncan, New York State UAW CAP Council Director.

part of what might be called the local establishment. The exact number of formal positions held by union leaders can not be determined, but their presence is clear. George Wessel, President of the Buffalo AFL-CIO Council, sits on numerous local, county and state boards and various committees. These include the State Job Training Partnership Council, the local Private Industries Council, the Erie County Industrial Development Agency, the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority, the Boards of three local health care programs, Boards of the United Way, the Buffalo Labor Studies Program, the Union Occupational Health Care Clinic and the public television station as well as the Drug Abuse Task Force. He previously served for six years as a Director of the Federal Reserve Board. What is striking about this list is the breadth of responsibility and the amount of time and energy required to keep up with it. And Wessel serves this and other functions of the Council with the assistance of only one staff person.

Other unionists are also involved in similar positions of influence. A recent Business Agent of IBEW Local 41 was at the same time also a member of the Board of the Erie County Medical Center, the Governor's Task Force on teenage job skills, the Executive Committee of the Democratic Party; he was also a co-chair of the Coalition for a Better Buffalo, a labor-community coalition which attempted to unseat incumbent Mayor Griffin in 1985. Thus there is a labor voice in many (although certainly not all) deliberations concerning Buffalo and its future.

Finally, unions make major charitable contributions to the community. This is well illustrated by the work of the Community Services Liaison of the AFL-CIO. According to the national AFL-CIO, ". . . labor's interest in its members has gone beyond the eight hours of work, to reach beyond the plant gates to the neighborhood and community."²² Labor's concern now includes the home, streets, family, recreation and cultural facilities. To implement this concern the AFL-CIO has approximately 200 full-time state and local community services liaisons in 155 communities. The basic principle of these programs is that, ". . . the union member is, first and foremost, a citizen of the community who cooperates with other citizens in making the community a good place in which to live, to work, to raise children and to retire."²³

Community liaisons, including the one in Buffalo, work through lo-

22. AFL-CIO DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES, PUB. NO. 458, COMMUNITY SERVICES IN YOUR LOCAL UNION, (1985).

23. UNITED WAY OF AMERICA, LABOR AND UNITED WAY: WORKING FOR A BETTER COMMUNITY (1985).

cal United Way offices. The liaison here is paid by United Way, but works for the AFL-CIO; he is a union member who was appointed through a highly competitive process which involved both the local and the national AFL-CIO. The liaison takes on a variety of tasks, including speaking on behalf of United Way, running training programs for "union counselors," handling worker and union calls to United Way, and special projects such as the Labor Day parade and establishment of strike supports such as the "Adopt a Striker" program for Eastern Airlines strikers. He is supported by and works with both the New York State and national AFL-CIO Community Services Programs.

In addition to the full-time Liaison position, the United Way Board includes three local union leaders (the President of the AFL-CIO Council and representatives from UAW and CWA). There is also a United Way Labor Advisory Committee comprised of labor leaders and a Community Services Advisory Board. Through the labor advisory committee, labor nominates members for the local boards of various United Way supported agencies such as Child and Family Services and the Red Cross.

With these activities unions help meet the social needs of their members and of workers more generally. They provide their members with information, referrals and financial support and they also encourage their members to volunteer in community programs. Specific services include: training for employee assistance program workers, alcohol and drug abuse education, blood banking, consumer counseling, disaster assistance and preventative health programs. Further, individual locals provide many community services which are often not noted by the press, including special charity fund-raisers such as the UAW-CWA Children's Hospital Telethon. And, of course, union commitment to United Way provides millions of dollars each year to local agencies.

Another example of this kind of approach is found in the UAW's Community Action Program (CAP). The CAP conducts both service and electoral campaigns. Its community activities in Buffalo include fund raising for Children's and Veteran's Hospital, work for cultural groups such as the Symphony Orchestra and volunteer efforts for dozens of other charitable agencies. Considerable sums of money are raised from members and through fund raising events each year. For instance, plant gate collections have produced about \$130,000 for the Veteran's Hospital over the past ten years.

Community charitable work by unions has been pressed from two directions in recent years. First, declining federal support for social pro-

grams has necessitated raising more funds from private groups such as the unions. Second, the Reagan era assault on labor and social programs required unions to put more of their funds into explicitly political activities: election campaigns and lobbying. Thus unions have been forced to reorient their work away from charitable endeavors and towards politics. The UAW State Cap Coordinator estimates that the local CAP used to divide its efforts about 70% to community and 30% to political; today that proportion is reversed.²⁴

Unions thus make significant contributions to community life in Buffalo. Electoral politics, organizational contributions and strong support for charitable activity all help to better the life of working people in Western New York. But these activities, at least as currently practiced, also have clear limitations, both as mechanisms for improving lives and as ways to increase support for labor and its future.

Union electoral work tends to focus on the Democratic Party, and especially on incumbent officials. This has the disadvantage of leading unions away from candidates who might be more progressive but whose ties to the party are not strong. It also often means expending great effort for the "lesser of two evils," something which does not help unions in the legislature or with their members. Victories in such campaigns may simply recreate an undesirable status quo. Another difficulty with electoral politics is that it tends to focus on *voters*, which means ignoring those at the bottom of the socio-economic scale. With fewer than 50% of eligible voters bothering to go to the polls, an election campaign simply fails to communicate to many who might support unions and their values. Those at the margins of society are certainly excluded from this major political effort by unions. Finally, elected officials often don't "deliver" for the unions. This has been clear at the national level, but it is also obvious locally. Additionally, later non-endorsements by the unions do not appear to do much damage to incumbents who have not supported labor positions.

Organizational strategies also present limitations. Appointments to local boards bring some influence but they also identify the union leader as a partner in the local establishment. The union representative may even find him or herself sitting on "both sides of the aisle" on issues which involve conflicts between Boards and workers. This causes the union leader some loss in legitimacy with workers. Further, union members and those with less power in Buffalo may come to identify union

24. Interview with James Duncan (July 30, 1990).

leaders simply as one more level of the local hierarchy, better connected to elites than to those at the bottom. Union leaders may then share the blame for the problems of the city, while getting little credit for positive influence. A clear, independent and critical voice for labor must be maintained.

Charitable work, despite its great importance to those in need of the support and services, is a limited way to increase the influence of labor or improve conditions of life. In general, charitable efforts are devoted to responding to the effects of problems in the local community, they can not focus on causes or conditions. Further, they tend to emphasize individual rather than collective problems and solutions, thus weakening the understanding that the problems of individual workers are not simply their own personal "fault."

Contract administration will remain a major union activity and a key protection for workers. The labor voice in organizational life will continue to be important, and unions will certainly not abandon electoral politics. Economic trends do not promise a lessening of the number of people in need of assistance, so the charitable work of unions will also persist. But these activities no longer appear to improve the economic or political power of unions, or even to help them maintain public support.

Improving union strength at the local level will require that unions find new approaches to the community. Expanding grassroots cooperation with other local groups is, according to Jeremy Brecher, "proving to be an important means for renewing the labor movement and overcoming some of its widely recognized ills, such as isolation from the growing female and minority segments of the work force, lack of rank-and-file participation and public perception of organized labor as a special interest group rather than an advocate for the needs of all working people."²⁵

As described below, Buffalo unions and community groups have coalition building experience. While these coalitions themselves show clear limitations, they also indicate valuable future directions.

Union-Community Coalitions

Labor/Community cooperation is not a new idea, and the importance of locality for unions has long been recognized. As noted above in the discussion of Buffalo history, strikes often depend for their success upon broad support. More recently, at least two additional union en-

25. J. BRECHER & T. COSTELLO, *BUILDING BRIDGES: THE EMERGING GRASSROOTS COALITION OF LABOR AND COMMUNITY* (1990) [hereinafter, *BUILDING BRIDGES*].

deavors have depended upon community: the "corporate campaign" in the private sector, and public sector defenses of government services.

The corporate campaign, developed by Ray Rogers in the 1970s, is today recognized by labor as an effective way to expand the struggle with corporate power. It includes such activities as pressuring members of corporate boards through their interlocking corporate and banking connections, consumer boycotts, and raising public consciousness about the moral dimensions of labor issues. But unions conducting such campaigns cannot succeed on their own. As Jane Slaughter concludes, ". . . the actual carrying out of a well-conceived [corporate] campaign depends entirely on the hard work of the affected union members themselves and on the solidarity they are able to generate from other unions and from their communities."²⁶ In the future, variants of the corporate campaign are likely to become staple elements among labor's tactical options.²⁷

The public sector suffered a severe attack throughout the 1980s. Reaganomics blamed government for economic and social problems, and sought solutions through the elimination of social programs and privatization. Confronted with the destruction of essential services and a clear threat to their jobs, public sector unions reached out to clients and to the general public. A New York State example is the "SAVE SUNY" campaigns orchestrated by United University Professions. When disastrous SUNY budget cuts were proposed, parents, students, other unions and community groups concerned with education and with the economic development implications of education were mobilized. The campaigns succeeded in part because they were understood by politicians and others to be community-based, and not exclusively the activity of a special interest trying to protect itself. Today public sector unions are essentially required to consider and to mobilize community support; while private sector unions do not confront the same imperative, public support can be decisive in their struggles as well.

These two examples of community building for specific problems suggest the potential value of more continuous coalitions. Buffalo's experience with several such efforts reinforces that conclusion.

26. Slaughter, *Corporate Campaigns: Labor Enlists Community Support*, in BUILDING BRIDGES, *supra* note 25, at 47-48 (emphasis added).

27. See INDUSTRIAL UNION DEPARTMENT, *DEVELOPING NEW TACTICS: WINNING WITH COORDINATED CORPORATE CAMPAIGNS* (1985).

Resisting Economic Decline: The Coalition of Religious, Union, Community and University Leaders (CRUCUL) Despite Buffalo's long history of severe job loss due to capital mobility, local response to plant closings has been modest. Community groups often do not react at all to announced closings. Groups in other cities with similar problems have proposed a variety of new interventions into the power of capital, including worker ownership, corporate campaigns, consumer boycotts, the use of eminent domain, and creation of new local or regional political authorities.²⁸ Strikes have been threatened and carried out as well. In Buffalo emphasis has been on dislocated worker programs, severance packages, employee concessions and government incentives. A partial exception to this pattern occurred when TRICO Corporation announced a move to Mexico.

In November 1985, TRICO Corporation disclosed a plan to move most of its production activity to Brownsville Texas and Matamoros Mexico in a *maquiladora* or twin plant arrangement. Approximately 1300 jobs would be lost. Trico was the world's largest manufacturer of windshield wiper systems. It was also an old and locally owned Buffalo Company, established in 1917 by the inventor of the windshield wiper. Thus, in addition to the income and tax losses represented by TRICO's announcement, the planned shift had powerful symbolic meaning. Some in the community responded.

CRUCUL (the Coalition of Religious, Union, Community and University Leaders) was established at a meeting of leaders of UAW Region 9 and Local 2100 (which represented the Trico workers), the Western New York Council on Occupational Safety and Health, the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations, United University Professions (AFT# 2190), and religious leaders (including some from the Buffalo Area Metropolitan Ministries Council on Economic Justice and Work and the Interreligious Task Force). The founders were all community and labor activists.

CRUCUL worked on the problem of TRICO, and the related issue of the impact of *Maquiladoras* on jobs and communities in New York state from November 1985 through 1989. It organized and sponsored trips to the Texas/Mexico border, produced a slide show about the impact of the TRICO move on Buffalo and on Mexican workers, sponsored and publicized local impact studies completed by the Midwest Center for

28. BUILDING BRIDGES, *supra* note 25, includes a number of cases and analyses of such responses. A valuable set of case studies from the South is found in COMMUNITIES IN ECONOMIC CRISIS: APPALACHIA AND THE SOUTH (J. Gaventer, B. Smith & A. Willingham eds. 1990).

Labor Research and by members of UUP, promoted a Cornell study of TRICO (by Programs for Employment and Workplace Systems—PEWS) which concluded that many jobs could in fact be saved,²⁹ held a number of public programs and press conferences, appeared in documentaries by the Christian Science Monitor and the BBC, organized meetings between religious leaders and TRICO officials, and reached out to other organizations and communities, including the NYS Labor-Religion Coalition, The Council of Churches, the New York State AFL-CIO and the Great Lakes/Appalachian Ecumenical Project. It joined the Federation for Industrial Retention and Renewal (FIRR) a national plant-closings coalition of coalitions. While TRICO never accepted the full job-saving implications of the Cornell study, about 300 jobs were saved and a positive severance package for workers was negotiated.

While the TRICO move was the primary issue for CRUCUL for some time, other union/worker struggles came to its agenda. To some extent CRUCUL became an informal solidarity committee in Buffalo. It worked with local Teamsters in a fight against a California based union busting firm brought in by local beer distributors, with several different organizing campaigns among hospital and nursing home workers and with labor struggles at Blue Cross, Blue Shield and Buffalo China. In none of these cases did CRUCUL attempt to take the place of union organizers or of the AFL-CIO Council. Rather it served to link the work place struggles, in cooperation with leaders of the effected locals, to community, especially religious and university, groups. It called upon the research skills of the university and what might be called the moral resources of the churches, to focus attention on labor issues.

Throughout its existence CRUCUL suffered from lack of funding and staff. Members worked on the TRICO case, finding time in their own schedules and resources from within their respective organizations. This became increasingly difficult. The need for staff and funding became obvious as the coalition reached out to new issues and became involved in FIRR, the National Federation. The Federation included a number of local plant closings/economic development coalitions which were staffed and funded and which were thus able to carry on full-time progressive work. They presented a model of what CRUCUL might become.³⁰

29. See S. KLINGEL & A. MARTIN, *A FIGHTING CHANCE: NEW STRATEGIES TO SAVE JOBS AND REDUCE COSTS* 33-50 (1988).

30. Among the members of FIRR are: Tri-State Conference on Steel (PA), Cleveland Coalition Against Plant Closings (OH), Naugatuck Project (CT), Oakland Plant Closures Project (CA), Midwest Center for Labor Research (IL). FIRR provides a forum for its members, holds conferences, publishes studies and it promotes such policy initiatives as a national plant-closings law and creation

To meet its need for resources CRUCUL recently became incorporated at The Coalition for Economic Justice (CEJ). It presented funding proposals to the NYS Assembly and to one foundation, but has as yet raised no funds. It continues to operate "off the backs" of its members. CEJ's purpose is to work with those whose lives are threatened by economic injustice and dislocation. It is "concerned with retention and creation of jobs with adequate pay and benefits and with an improved standard of living within the community."³¹ To achieve these purposes it seeks to build a broadly based and representative coalition, develop research capability and publications and establish relationships with legislators regarding economic justice.³²

CRUCUL/CEJ has served primarily as a plant closing coalition.³³ Such groups are now a common forum for developing relationships between citizen and labor organizations. The sudden threatened loss of jobs is frightening, and the impact of a closing is fairly obvious to all. These coalitions are useful because they bring together diverse elements of the city in an endeavor which may lead to further cooperation. But there are problems with these coalitions.

Staughton Lynd argues plant-closing groups tend towards a deep conservatism, for two reasons. First, there is an "egoism" in emphasizing the saving of a particular plant. Other plants, jobs and workers are ignored, and indeed the effort to save a particular plant may come at the cost of other plants. Secondly, the effort to save plants forces community groups to depend upon many of the institutions which are part of the problem to which they were responding in the first place: capital markets, state grants, federal intervention. The result is likely to be further entrenchment of those institutions which may lead to more plant closings in the future.³⁴

Ann Markusen identifies a kind of "nativism" developing in plant

of regional jobs authorities. It is working with representatives of a number of industrial unions to build a national industrial retention network. In New York State it is part of a coalition supporting reform of the Economic Development Zones. See 2 *FIRR NEWS* (Summer 1990) (available at Political Science Department, Buffalo State College).

31. "Statement of Purpose," March 18, 1989, no page numbers (on file, Department of Political Science, Buffalo State College).

32. *Id.*

33. The plant closing literature is sizable. For a partial bibliography see H. WAY & C. WEISS, *PLANT CLOSINGS: A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MATERIAL PUBLISHED THROUGH 1985* (1988). For detailed case studies of local government responses to plant closings consult J. PORTZ, *THE POLITICS OF PLANT CLOSINGS* (1990).

34. Lynd, *From Protest to Economic Democracy: Labor-Community Ownership and Management of the Economy*, in *BUILDING BRIDGES*, *supra* note 25, at 263.

closing movements: the local plant is the enemy, while capital mobility and the development process are ignored.³⁵ Actually, the plant may be seen as savior or enemy: if it "does right" and stays it is good, if it leaves it is bad. And in fact, in the effort to retain jobs, a local community may encourage exactly the capital mobility process which has cost the jobs in the first place, as when a local community bids against others for new plant/equipment/jobs. This of course leads to the spectacle of communities vying against each other in terms of which can "give" the most to the potential new company: the most tax breaks, labor concessions, regulation exemptions. A renowned recent example of this occurred when General Motors announced the establishment of its new Saturn Division and more than twenty states bid for it.³⁶

An additional risk is that plant-closings and moves to third world countries may bring on racism and the bashing and blaming of third world workers. This scapegoating is destructive to international solidarity and ignores the real capital processes which are associated with corporate moves to the poorer nations.

All of this has the additional disadvantage of making the building of national coalitions more difficult, although this is not simply the "fault" of local organizers. Indeed, as Beaugard argues,

Restructuring is responsible for generating the conditions that make response necessary, but it is also responsible for undermining the conditions that make collective action possible. . . . [R]estructuring . . . is taking place at the expense of the collective interests of labor . . . [but] the spatial and temporal unevenness of restructuring undermines the bases for collective consciousness and mass organization in response to such threats to labor.³⁷

CRUCUL found several ways to respond to these problems, as they became apparent. First, Mexican workers were not blamed for the problem but rather CRUCUL identified the many problems caused for Mexican workers by *Maquiladoras*. The slide show conveyed the difficult living and working conditions of those workers. Second, CRUCUL reached out to join with any local workers threatened by plant closings

35. Markusen, *Industrial Restructuring and Regional Politics*, in *ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING AND POLITICAL RESPONSE* 115-49 (Urban Affairs Annual Reviews, Vol. 34, R. Beaugard, ed. 1989) [hereinafter *ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING*]. Beaugard's collection provides a number of insights into problems of local response to economic change.

36. For a critical discussion of Saturn see Russo, *Saturn's Rings: What GM's Saturn Project is Really About*, 9 *LABOR RESEARCH REV.* 67 (1986). See also Gerber, *Saturn: Today's Jobs Yesterday's Myths*, in *COMMUNITIES IN ECONOMIC CRISIS: APPALACHIA AND THE SOUTH* 75 (J. Gaventer, B. Smith & A. Willingham eds. 1990)

37. Beaugard, *Space, Time and Economic Restructuring*, in *ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING*, *supra* note 35, at 224-25.

and it engaged in solidarity efforts with striking workers. Finally, it joined the Federation for Industrial Retention and Renewal in order contribute to the building of a national coalition.

Health and Safety: The Western New York Council on Occupational Safety and Health and the Health Care Co-op The Western New York Council on Occupational Safety and Health (WNYCOSH) was founded in 1978. A coalition of fifty-two local unions, it was federally funded through The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and provided training and technical assistance on work-related safety and health matters. Its Board of Directors was predominantly union, but included health care professionals as well. As OSHA funding declined in the early 1980s, WNYCOSH reached out to the community for support. It received that support from United Way in the form of planning grants, and after several years of effort and strong support from the AFL-CIO Council it became a regular United Way agency. Its funding today comes primarily through United Way and a grant from the NYS Department of Labor.

In 1980 WNYCOSH began a planning process which ultimately led to the opening of the first and only cooperative, democratic, union health care clinic in the United States. The clinic was made possible by efforts of committed unionists, including the executive of the local AFL-CIO Council, but it could not have succeeded without community support.

In order to pursue funding it was necessary to prepare a health needs assessment and a business plan. George Wessel, Buffalo AFL-CIO Council President, served on the clinic board and was liaison to the United Way. Through his intervention, in the fall of 1981 United Way provided \$34,000 to complete the assessment which was subsequently performed by the School of Social and Preventative Medicine at the State University of New York at Buffalo. The Center for Applied Research in Urban and Regional Development at Buffalo State College provided *pro bono* assistance.

In 1981 an Advisory Board was established comprised of union officials plus health professionals and representatives from the NYS Department of Health and local United Ways.

WNYCOSH staff raised over \$18,000 from local unions to pursue the clinic idea and the state AFL-CIO assisted by arranging meetings of WNYCOSH with NYS Health Commissioner Axelrod. In 1986 the clinic applied for and received a \$171,000 local initiative grant from the

state legislature and it has since received over \$500,000 in grants from the state through its Occupational Health Clinic Network.

Most services provided by the clinic have gone to union members. Recently it provided services for "environmentally impacted" residents of the Forest Glen neighborhood in Niagara Falls NY., a good example of how a union sponsored and run program may directly assist the community.

Unfortunately, from the point of view of coalition building, the clinic has abolished its community advisory board, so it no longer maintains the appearance of a coalition beyond the unions. Further, its Board of Directors is all male and with one exception white. This suggests some problems as it reaches out to the new and often unorganized work force.

A Multipurpose Coalition: Citizen Action Citizen Action of New York is a different kind of example of a community/labor coalition. It is organized at the *state* level, with a local committee in Buffalo and other communities. The state board includes representatives of the United Auto Workers (UAW), Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Communication Workers of America (CWA) and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), and these unions provide financial and other supports at that level. Program agenda is set at the state level, with local committees developing activities in relation to that agenda. In addition to union support, Citizen Action raises funds through a local house-to-house canvassing system. The local board is comprised of individuals concerned with specific issues. They do not represent their local organizations, however, so this is a group coalition only in an informal sense. Local staff is paid by outside grants from such sources as the Campaign for Human Development (associated with the Roman Catholic Church), the Villiers Foundation and New York State (Department of Labor and legislative member items).

With carefully separated funding and organizational activities, Citizen Action focuses both on electoral politics *and* on a set of key issues including health care, housing, and recycling. In Buffalo it has worked on a series of election campaigns, including the mayoral campaigns of Wilbur Trammel and George Arthur (both defeated by current Mayor Griffin). Union relationships were critical in these campaigns, providing phone banks, limited funding and staff support, and the capacity to mobilize numbers.

Citizen Action locally has been quite effective in providing education on recycling and on health care for the elderly. In addition it has

been a key player in several local electoral campaigns, organized several prominent demonstrations, and provided significant solidarity support for Nurses United and CWA. Citizen Action provides staff support for such work, as well as skills and information brought from the state level. But it has had its difficulties. As one among a number of local organizations Citizen Action competes for the loyalty and support of its members. While it has the potential to serve as a (or even the) primary labor-community coalition in the city it has not achieved that level of prominence. One major struggle (found throughout union/community work) has been building ties to the minority communities. However, as the result of the work of black organizers on their staff, at times they have had considerable success with this. Of particular importance was the work of these organizers on the Trammel and Arthur campaigns, and the Jesse Jackson primary campaign.

A Failed Coalition: The Local Ownership Development Corporation
Attempts to build community-labor coalitions often fail. An example occurred in Buffalo in 1987. The New York State Center for Employee Ownership and Participation called together a group to consider forming a Local Ownership Development Corporation (a community development corporation which focuses on worker and other forms of community ownership in order to strengthen local control of capital). This working group was comprised of SUNY at Buffalo Law School faculty and students, several representatives from CRUCUL, state and local development officials, executives from the Cornell Extension, officials from the UAW and the Steelworkers and other academic, religious and business people.

The working group held a number of meetings. It met with local experts, evaluated a mass of material provided by the state and debated its proper role in promoting democratic worker ownership. While no local group was focussed on worker organization, it was not clear to some members of the group that such an approach would lead to useful results. Much discussion was devoted to the problem of resources: if the group were to incorporate, how would it be staffed and funded. All members of the group were busy in a variety of community affairs (as well as full-time jobs) and their organizations did not appear to have the necessary funds to support a new organization. The state representatives suggested a variety of possible funding sources, but indicated the state itself would not provide the needed dollars.

An ambitious statement of purpose was drafted, but after eight

months of discussion, the working group evaporated. It lost momentum largely around the resources problem. The state pushed hard for local responsibility, but provided no resources beyond consultation; local individuals and groups lacked the time and money.

Several lessons may be drawn from this experience. While the idea for an LODC was positive and met with approval from some community people, it came from the state. It spoke to a need which had not yet been identified at the local level. Secondly, the resource problem was critical. Creation and effective utilization of the LODC would require time, staff and funds. The local organizations, already short of those resources, could not promise them. Finally, disputes about goals and objectives were problematic for this group. Some members were not persuaded of the usefulness of an LODC, others saw it as a serious competitor for already limited resources. The structure and activity of an LODC were also not agreed upon. Without resolving these value conflicts it was impossible to proceed with the coalition building process.

UNION-COMMUNITY RELATIONS: PROBLEMS AND ISSUES

These examples of union impact certainly do not exhaust all the cases which could be discussed. With respect to social infrastructure, a more thorough consideration of contracts and of labor-management relations is required. And there are or have been other coalitions which should be considered including the Clean Air Coalition (supporting the federal Clean Air Act), Citizens for a Better Buffalo (a one-election coalition), the Jesse Jackson primary election campaign organizations, Jobs or Income Now and others. However, the evidence gathered thus far is enough to identify some problems and to make several concrete proposals.

Four general problems in community-union relations appear in the discussion above. First, there is a continuing difficulty finding resources. Community work suffers from a chronic shortage of funds and staff. The AFL-CIO Council is not well funded, and the coalitions barely survive. One common approach to this problem has been to turn to the state (at whatever level) for funding. The Labor-Management Committee, Citizen Action, WYNCOSH and CEJ all seek government support for their programs. A more systematic response to this problem is necessary.

A second and related problem is the "episodic" quality of coalition work. Coalitions and programs come and go, often overlapping activities and supporters. This is especially a problem for electoral coalitions outside the Democratic Party. Corporate political power, and the state,

are well entrenched; union-community structures are tentative and uncertain. Some way to institutionalize these relationships should be pursued.

Third, the relation of unions to women and minorities is raised by any study of labor in Buffalo. Because these groups will constitute a majority of the future work force, share interests with the union movement, and because the unions desperately need stronger public support, unions must reach out to them more effectively.

Finally, the community coalitions suffer from the absence of a mass base. The "L" in CRUCUL stood for Leaders, and the choice to remain a leadership group was self-conscious. But creation of a larger base in the community is now necessary. Public opinion continues to hold unions—and their political partners—in relatively low esteem.³⁸ A broader and deeper base, which would include both organized and unorganized workers, would bring increased political power to unions and to the communities in which they are located.

Clearly these four issues are interrelated. A larger base would bring greater resources, it could only be created if women and minorities were leaders and members, and greater numbers could provide the momentum to help sustain coalition work over time.

The creation and maintenance of a coalition is difficult. In addition to the four general problems discussed above, several factors, including histories of mutual suspicion, direct conflicts of interest and conflicts between unions or within the community make coalition building a complex struggle.

Community groups are often suspicious of union intentions. Unions and their contributions are not well understood in the community and they are often seen as simply one more self-interested bureaucracy. Minority groups and women correctly perceive that the leadership of the union movement is predominantly white male; they also know of the historical racism and sexism found within unions. On the other hand, unions know that their potential and their constraints are often not understood by the general public. Many local residents blame unions, rather than management, for job losses and for attendant difficulties dur-

38. Analysis of public attitudes towards unions in Buffalo is impressionistic because of the lack of systematic public opinion data on the subject. This would be a useful topic for further research. Recent Roper polls identify a gradual improvement in public opinion towards unions nationally. See *Support for Unions Growing*, 19 *INTERFACE* at 10 (Summer 1990). *Interface* is the quarterly newsletter of the Department for Professional Employees, AFL-CIO, Washington, DC.

ing strikes. They are often quite willing to cross picket lines and to condemn rather than cooperate with striking workers.

Apart from these difficulties, there are direct conflicts between community groups and unions. For example, while churches are important in union coalition work, they are also employers who may resist unions. An example of such conflict occurred when the privately owned Georgian Court Nursing Home was sold in May 1990 to Niagara Lutheran Home Inc., a joint venture of Lutheran churches. The new owners immediately released fifty-seven workers, members of the Buffalo and Western New York Hospital and Nursing Home Council, and withdrew recognition from the union. An elaborate union challenge ultimately led the home to recognize the union in September and to make arrangements for the fired workers. By early Spring 1991 the hospital and union were nearing agreement on a new contract. This situation, despite its happy ending, is a reminder that church groups are not necessarily pro-union and may indeed oppose unions in their own workplaces. In another case, Buffalo Mercy Hospital went to great lengths to defeat a CWA organizing drive. After an NLRB decision against the hospital, and strong responses from Roman Catholic clergy and community groups, a new election was held and the union won overwhelmingly. An additional victory, but also further warning about potential conflict between union and community. Beyond the question of employment, unions and community groups may clash on a variety of specific actions and issues. Affirmative action, pay equity³⁹ and even foreign policy⁴⁰ may divide local activists from local unions.

Conflicts and factionalism among unions do not make organizing with communities any easier. In a recent dispute concerning a local market two major unions took opposite positions, thus making alliances with community groups difficult. Differing candidate endorsements (for example the Police Union endorsing Bush for President) may also confuse local groups. Of course conflicts among community groups, for example on school issues or taxes, cause similar difficulties for unions.

The above complexities are expected and understood by union and community organizers. Successful cooperation is possible. "Unions can

39. Hallock, *Pay Equity Outcomes in the Public Service: Resolving Competing Interests*, 18 POL'Y STUD. J. 421 (Winter 1989-90).

40. The foreign policy struggle is discussed in D. CANTOR & J. SCHOR, *TUNNEL VISION: LABOR, THE WORLD ECONOMY, AND CENTRAL AMERICA* (1987).

build alliances with advocacy groups," as Ann Withorn demonstrates.⁴¹ A number of successful cases are explored in Brecher and Costello's *Building Bridges*.⁴² One area of success in recent years in Buffalo has been in cooperative conferences and programs. Unionists and community groups have joined together to explore mutual concerns relating to the environment, economic development, conversion from a military to a non military economy and the quality of community life in the city. This collection of articles is the result of one such conference. These conferences have helped activists to identify common concerns and to begin building shared agendas for action.

PROPOSALS FOR UNIONS IN BUFFALO

No one can identify *the* correct strategy and tactics for unions today. "Principled differences and just plain confusion exist as to what is to be done,"⁴³ and, as Weiler argues, "it is easier to diagnose defects in contemporary unionism than to design a more effective version."⁴⁴ There are, as Moody asserts, no tactical panaceas so we need "every tactic and combination of tactics within the reach of our imaginations and resources."⁴⁵ The proposals below, then, are intended not as the answer to improving union-community relations in Buffalo, but rather as a contribution to an on-going and critical political process engaging both union and community activists.

1. *Develop community coalitions which reach out to the new work-force.* Demographic research indicates the next work force will be comprised heavily of women and minorities.⁴⁶ White males will be a clear minority of new entrants. If unions are to be meaningful as political and economic actors they must recruit new members in this work force. One place to begin is in organizing with community groups involved in issues identified as important by women and minorities. Issues such as family leave policy, housing, adequacy of social services, job training and skills improvement, affirmative action/pay equity and others attract coalitions to

41. A. WITHORN, *SERVING THE PEOPLE: SOCIAL SERVICES AND SOCIAL CHANGE* 186; see generally 183-88.

42. *BUILDING BRIDGES*, *supra* note 25.

43. Tabb, *supra* note 11, at 259.

44. P. WEILER, *supra* note 4, at 81.

45. Moody in *BUILDING BRIDGES*, *supra* note 25, at 226-27.

46. L. F. BOUVIER & V. M. BRIGGS, JR., *THE POPULATION AND LABOR FORCE OF NEW YORK: 1990-2050* (Washington, DC: Population Reference Bureau, 1988). See also W. JOHNSTON, *WORKFORCE 2000: WORK AND WORKERS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY* (1987) and a newspaper report on 1990 Census results, Vobejda, *Jump in Asians, Hispanics changing face of U.S., Census Shows*, *The Buffalo News*, March, 11, 1991, at A9.

which labor may contribute. Electoral work will be important in this area as well—including the difficult and risky task of registering the poor.

2. *Reexamine the role of public sector unions.* More attention should be given to the potential for public sector unions to build coalitions with local clients and groups supporting local clients. While this work is difficult, it will be very rewarding in terms of building support for unions in disenfranchised communities. Public sector unionists already have deep ties to the local community, if only because as social workers, teachers, health care workers, police and others they are expected to respond to social crises. The role of the public sector may be decisive with respect to women and minorities, who are better represented among the members of public rather than private sector unions.⁴⁷ Public sector unions are often at the forefront on issues of social justice and equity and they more frequently include women and minorities within their leadership.⁴⁸ Thus, public sector unions can play a primary role in building coalitions with communities of the less-well-represented.⁴⁹

3. *Promote the idea of coalition building to local unions and members.* Some members and officials in unions are not persuaded that coalition building is in the self-interest of unions. More information, discussion and even training would be helpful. UAW now has national-level explicit training on coalition building for rank and file workers and community leaders. Word from participants from outside of UAW suggests considerable success in encouraging cooperation across gender and race lines, surely two of the most difficult lines in organizing. Unions might well distribute copies of Brecher and Costello's *Building Bridges*, as well as this symposium issue of the *Buffalo Law Review* to local leaders, and also create local committees focussed on coalition building.

4. *Seek new community resources, especially by improving labor ties to colleges and universities.* In this era business has an intimate connection to higher education. University-community relations are, in fact, often

47. Goldman, *Women in the Public Sector*, 6 THE ILLINOIS PUB. EMPLOYEE REL. REP. 4 (1989).

48. A discussion of one example of such recruitment, which makes clear the importance of union resources for effective local organizing, is found in Hurd & Rose, *Progressive Union Organizing: The SEIU Justice for Janitors Campaign*, 21 REV. OF RADICAL POL. ECON. 70 (1989).

49. For a very valuable discussion of public sector unions see Paul Johnston's doctoral dissertation, *The Politics of Public Work: A Comparative Study of Labor Relations in the Public Sector* (U.M.I. Dissertation Information Service, Ann Arbor Michigan, 1990. Order Number 8916718). Also consult R. FREEMAN & C. ICHNIOWSKI, *WHEN PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS UNIONIZE* (1986), N. RICCUCCI, *WOMEN MINORITIES AND THE PUBLIC SECTOR* (1990) and Scheuerman, *Politics and the Public Sector: Strategies for Public Sector Unions*, 18 POL'Y STUD. J. 433 (Winter 1989-90).

defined simply in terms of how colleges and businesses can cooperate.⁵⁰ Data collection and analysis, business incubators, business development programs and high tech institutes are all Buffalo examples of universities serving business. Labor needs but does not receive similar service.⁵¹

With declining resources and increasing demands on resources unions need to pursue this assistance, for research, training and mobilizing support.⁵² Union-oriented research and writing does not require formal connection to a university. A national think tank related to unions, The Economic Policy Institute, is having positive effects through research and publication. The Midwest Center for Labor Research provides another model. It works locally (in Chicago) and regionally with unions on a variety of projects, and publishes the widely respected *Labor Research Review*. It also provided the original home for FIRR.

Formal connections to higher education are also important. Labor already has an invaluable higher education resource in the New York State School of Industrial and Labor Relations (NYSSILR) extension in Buffalo. NYSSILR, administered through Cornell University, has played a special role in union-community relations for the past two decades, thanks largely to the leadership of three individuals, Jeannette Watkins, Lou Jean Fleron and Susan Woods. Its Buffalo Labor Studies Program links unions to communities in several ways. It provides courses and training programs for individual unionists and for union locals. These courses provide skills which enable union workers to better serve both their unions and their communities and they also provide a

50. For analysis and proposals concerning business and higher education see P. DOYLE, PETER & C. BRISSON, *PARTNERS IN GROWTH: BUSINESS-HIGHER EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES* (1985) (Northeast-Midwest Institute: The Center for Regional Policy) and SRI INTERNATIONAL, *THE HIGHER EDUCATION-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CONNECTION* (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 1986).

51. When union organizer Kim Fellner (currently Executive Director of the National Writers Union) began in union work in Pennsylvania in 1974 she found "the ties between organized labor and the academic community had been largely severed." Fellner, *An Uneasy Marriage in the House of Labor*, 2 *THE AMERICAN PROSPECT* 93, 96 (Summer 1990). This problem continues, although there are today a number of labor education centers around the United States which work to bridge the gap. The University and College Labor Education Association brings these centers together and publishes the *Labor Studies Journal* and *Labor Studies Forum*. For an example of a successful collaboration between organized labor and a public university see Gooding & Reeve, *Coalition Building for Community-based Labor Education*, 18 *POL'Y STUD. J.* 452 (Winter 1989-90). The national AFL-CIO Department of Economic Research is aware of the need to bring the academic community and trade unionists together. It has published three numbers of *Workplace Topics*, an occasional publication which brings academic papers of interest to the attention of unionists. Its most recent issue focused on grievance arbitration procedure.

52. Deutsch, *Unions and Higher Education: Meeting Policy Challenges for the 1990s*, 18 *POL'Y STUD. J.* 443 (Winter 1989-90).

forum for communication among members of different unions. Labor studies also serves an information and communication function concerning key work and community issues. Full and part time labor studies staff serve on a number of local boards, helping to keep a labor perspective in the debate on public questions.

A second NYSSILR program, the Institute for Industry Studies, was established in 1986. It meets a need for worker, union and management education on specific industries or sectors of the economy. It already has a national reputation for its auto industry program.

This may be the appropriate time for a new group to come together to expand local labor's relationship to post-secondary education. It could facilitate a more equitable sharing of educational resources than is currently the case, and it could communicate labor's interests and needs to the higher education community. Cooperation with the State University would be facilitated by the fact that SUNY's workforce is unionized. Labor solidarity could be called upon to ease collaboration.

5. *Create a union-community solidarity committee.* An on-going solidarity committee, tied to community groups, would be another fine resource for labor. It could bring community groups into labor solidarity struggles and match that by adding labor support to community struggles. It would be a further way to build continuing relationships, beneficial to both union and community. Negotiation over the creation of such a committee, its members, structures and activities, would itself be an exercise in community building.

TOWARD BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES

Buffalo needs its unions, and the unions require a supportive Buffalo. As Gordon Clark argues, in the past "unions tended to protect communities in the north and central regions of the US" so ". . . collapse of an effective union movement" would leave "local incomes, employment, and jobs . . . directly at risk."⁵³ But if communities need unions, "the future of the American labor movement is bound up in its communities"⁵⁴ as local labor relations environments become critical to economic development. Coalitions between unions and community simply make sense for the future of both.

Labor unions have been a key source of support for community

53. G.L. CLARK, *UNIONS AND COMMUNITIES UNDER SEIGE: AMERICAN COMMUNITIES AND THE CRISIS OF ORGANIZED LABOR* at 250 (1989).

54. *Id.* at 66.

building in Buffalo. Under threat today they remain a primary organized force which could become "the focus of direction and mobilization" for new approaches to Buffalo's problems. For this to occur, writes Professor David Perry, "The agenda for labor is to organize *off* the job as much if not more than on the job."⁵⁵ The benefits to labor and to the community could be great. As Brecher reminds us, "[a]n alliance of labor and community movements potentially represents the overwhelming majority of the population—a majority which is today largely excluded from political and social decision making but which if mobilized would represent an enormous social force."⁵⁶ Such a force could renew communities and unions and, indeed, the democratic process itself.

Social infrastructure and coalitional activities need not be mutually exclusive. Looking to the future of Buffalo it is possible that a continuing economic crisis will blur the traditional American separation of the politics of work and the politics of community. The demands of the new economy require more not less expertise and involvement by unions in economic decision making. Many in the labor movement and elsewhere support a democratization of the economy which could bring new political possibilities for unions.⁵⁷ Pension fund investment strategies, various forms of worker ownership, union membership on corporate boards, expanded worker shop-floor decision making power all provide an opportunity for expanded union impact on established institutions. For such democratization to be meaningful, ties to the rank and file must be strong. And greater participation in economic decision making must be balanced by strong ties to communities if unions are to be seen as representing more than a single special interest.

Economic difficulties can help to break down the workplace/ community distinction in other ways. Plant closings cost jobs, but they also hurt the community more generally through lost taxes, purchases and charitable contributions combined with rising welfare costs due to increases in a variety of ills associated with unemployment.⁵⁸ In his recent

55. Perry, *The Politics of Dependency in Deindustrializing America: The Case of Buffalo*, New York, in *THE CAPITALIST CITY* 113, 133 (M. Smith & J. Feagin, eds. 1987). A close look at the political economy of Buffalo, with a clear sense of a future role for labor.

56. Brecher and Costello, *Preface*, in *BUILDING BRIDGES*, *supra* note 25, at 10.

57. See Krimerman & Lindenfield, *Contemporary Workplace Democracy in the United States: Taking Stock of an Emerging Movement*, 11 *SOCIALISM AND DEMOCRACY* 109 (1990).

58. For tests of hypotheses concerning the personal costs of plant closings see Hamilton, Broman, Hofman & Fenner, *Hard Times and Vulnerable People: Initial Effects of Plant Closing on Autoworker's Mental Health*, 31 *J. HEALTH & SOC. BEHAV.* 123 (June 1990). Also see 44 *J. OF SOC. ISSUES* (1988) for a collection of eleven articles on the psychological effects of unemployment.

study of working class culture, Rick Fantasia makes the point that "political and conceptual links between power relations in the workplace and outside it"⁵⁹ are often created as community, religious and labor organizations join together to struggle against plant closings. Instead of seeing each other as separate interest groups, those working in coalition begin to understand that their interests intersect, that they have common problems and common enemies and common goals. The creation of shared understandings and the breakdown of perceived difference can lead to cooperation well beyond the particulars of a single plant closing. But, as Fantasia makes clear, ". . .there is nothing inevitable or automatic about this conceptual breakdown of the work/community dichotomy."⁶⁰ Blurring the boundaries may be one route to renewing the worker's voice in American society.

59. R. FANTASIA, *CULTURES OF SOLIDARITY: CONSCIOUSNESS, ACTION AND CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN WORKERS* 218 (1988).

60. *Id.* at 219.

