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Urban Farm Workers:
A History of the Justice for Janitors Campaign as an Adaptive Response to Neoliberal
Restructuring and Union Decline

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

Stephanie K. Fairchild

Committee in charge:

Professor David G. Gutiérrez, Chair

Professor Luis Alvarez

Professor Ross H. Frank

Professor Mark Hendrickson

Professor Ruth Milkman

Professor Rebecca Jo Plant

2018

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Chair

University of California San Diego

2018

EPIGRAPH

Capitalism experiments where it sees the most vulnerable people. So whether it's farm workers, it's people of color, it's people in these kinds of jobs with part-timing, outsourcing. All these things were being experimented with and—as they succeeded in one industry and the other—it set the stage for “Now you do it to all workers.”

Stephen Lerner, speaking about economic shifts in the late twentieth century¹

¹ Stephen Lerner, conversation with author, August 17, 2016.

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VITA

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- 2015 Master of Arts, University of California San Diego
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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Urban Farm Workers:
A History of the Justice for Janitors Campaign as an Adaptive Response to Neoliberal
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by

Stephanie K. Fairchild

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California San Diego, 2018

Professor David G. Gutiérrez, Chair

In this dissertation, I explore the broad history of the Justice for Janitors campaign. I start with the origins of the campaign in a series of organizing and reform experiments at three different levels of the United States labor movement in the early 1980s, and I end with an exploration of the legacy of this campaign and an open source approach to unionism within both the U.S. and global labor movements in the 2010s. I place the campaign in the context of neoliberal restructuring and a much longer pattern of capitalist development and exploitation. In doing so, I demonstrate that the Justice for Janitors campaign was a response to two intertwined developments in the second half of the twentieth century. These are: (1) the intense exploitation and escalating inequality that U.S. workers experience amidst neoliberal restructuring and (2) the ongoing decline of union density in the United States, which predated but escalated amidst

neoliberal restructuring. I highlight, however, that the response that JfJ offered to these two developments was experimental, adaptive, and rife with tensions.

I argue that the experimental, adaptive nature of the campaign was Justice for Janitors' core source of strength and endurance. Campaign leaders and participants' commitment to experimentation and adaptation allowed Justice for Janitors to persevere in the face of immense external hostility, internal struggles, and failures. More than this, a commitment to experimentation and adaptation allowed campaign leaders and participants to capitalize on moments of success and to expand and escalate Justice for Janitors not just as a janitor organizing drive but as a powerful, intersectional struggle against the effects of neoliberal restructuring and union decline. This expansion and escalation, I argue, spurred significant reform throughout the SEIU and the United States labor movement as a whole. It also empowered and inspired a generation of workers and social movement activists to take a stand against growing socioeconomic polarization and inequality.

Introduction

How Janitors Became Urban Farm Workers

On November 17, 1991, Cesar Chavez spoke to an audience of two hundred and fifty people gathered in the Sacred Heart Church in San Jose, California. Helping to rally support for the janitors who cleaned the headquarters of the technology company Apple in San Jose, Chavez urged the audience to boycott Apple products and declared “Abajo con Apple” (Down with Apple). The Apple boycott Chavez called for was part of an escalation in the San Francisco Bay Area Justice for Janitors (JfJ) campaign against Apple. For nearly a year, janitors affiliated with the campaign had been fighting for union recognition and an end to the wage and hour violations, racial discrimination, sexual harassment, and unsafe working conditions they faced on the job. The janitors’ affiliation with the JfJ campaign meant that they had the strategic and financial resources of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) supporting their fight. They also had the help of a growing coalition of community supporters. And once Chavez entered the fray, the janitors also had the backing of a powerful Chicana and labor movement icon who lent the righteousness and historical significance of the United Farm Workers (UFW) movement to their struggle. Linking the Justice for Janitors campaign to the UFW, Chavez declared at the San Jose rally: “All the struggles are the same. Farmworkers and janitors... it’s the same cause.”¹

After Chavez’s death in 1993, Arturo S. Rodriguez, Chavez’s son-in-law and successor as president of the UFW, followed Chavez’s precedent in supporting Justice for Janitors as part of the farm workers’ cause. During the second national Justice for Janitors day on June 15,

¹ Brandon Bailey, “Chavez Calls for an Apple Boycott,” *The San Jose Mercury News*, November 18, 1991; Apple files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 5, Folder 3, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

1993, Rodriguez and a group of UFW activists joined with SEIU Local 1877 leaders and Bay Area janitors in a rally and civil disobedience action. After helping Apple janitors win union recognition as well as wage and working condition improvements the year earlier, Local 1877 expanded the Bay Area Justice for Janitors campaign to target several new high tech companies in Silicon Valley. Following in the steps of Apple janitors, janitors who cleaned the offices of Solectron and Oracle also demanded union recognition as well as better wages and working conditions. To demonstrate solidarity and help bring attention to their cause, Rodriguez and the UFW activists helped the janitors block a busy four-lane highway. After affirming to the janitors, “Your struggle is our struggle,” Rodriguez refused police requests to leave the highway. He was arrested alongside of Local 1877 President Mike Garcia and thirteen janitors, union organizers, and community supporters who also blocked the highway and refused police requests to leave.²

Chavez and Rodriguez were not the only labor leaders who championed Justice for Janitors and the farm workers’ struggle as one and the same. Several leaders and activists from inside the SEIU including Eliseo Medina, a former UFW organizer who later oversaw the San Diego Justice for Janitors campaign, did the same. Reflecting on the legacy of Cesar Chavez in an interview in 1997, Medina asserted: “The SEIU Justice for Janitors Campaign, it’s the farm workers movement all over again. It’s boycotts. It’s civil disobedience. It’s creative tactics. It’s organizational jujitsu, if you will. And it’s a movement of immigrants, of poor people. It’s the farm workers all over again, except these are urban farm workers now.”³

² John Enders, “Drumming up support for janitors: UFW chief arrested at janitors’ protest,” *Daily Breeze*, June 16, 1993; “Together, We Can Win,” *Building Service Update* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1993), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

³ Eliseo Medina quoted in George E. Schultze, “A Study of the Influence of the U.S. Catholic Church on Union Organizing and Community Organizing: A Historical Review, Los Angeles in the 1990s, & Future Relations” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1998), 267.

As Medina noted, a clear connection existed between the Justice for Janitors campaign and the farm workers movement. This connection is hardly surprising considering the role that former UFW activists played in the Justice for Janitors campaign. Besides Eliseo Medina, former UFW activists involved in the campaign ranged from Stephen Lerner who led the campaign for much of its history to organizers such as Mike Wilzoch, Sue Sachen, Mario Bustamante, and Jono Shaffer who helped build the campaign at the local level.

Although many of these individuals had been pushed out of the UFW, they had not lost their interest in helping organize poor, marginalized workers. Their entry into the SEIU, then, was not accidental. Explaining his reason for working for the SEIU, Eliseo Medina asserted, “The position at SEIU was an opportunity to come back to work with the kind of people I like to work with, people who are at the bottom.”⁴ These activists’ affinity for working with “people at the bottom” (and a pattern of recruiting each other) led them into the SEIU. Once in the SEIU, they discovered a remarkable similarity between workers in the janitorial industry, one of SEIU’s original core jurisdictions, and farm workers.⁵

~

⁴ Diane Lindquist, “Tilting at High-Rises: Union Leader Claims Janitors Get a Dirty Deal,” *The San Diego Union*, September 6, 1987.

⁵ In *Beyond the Fields*, author and activist Randy Shaw explores the activism and career paths of UFW “alumni” following the decline of the farm workers movement in the 1970s. He highlights the multitude of ways in which UFW alumni brought the tactics, strategies, and spirit of the UFW into late twentieth century and early twenty-first century progressive labor and social movement struggles. In Chapter 4, he specifically calls attention to the presence of UFW alumni in the Justice for Janitors campaign and touches upon the connections that these alumni made between farm workers and janitors in a case study of the 2006 University of Miami Justice for Janitors campaign. In this dissertation, I build upon Shaw’s pioneering work on the legacy of the UFW and also highlight connections between the farm workers movement and the Justice for Janitors campaign. I also build from sociologist Jake Rosenfeld’s chapter titled “Justice for Janitors?: Deunionization and Hispanic Economic Assimilation,” which juxtaposes the success of the Justice for Janitors campaign and legacy of the United Farm Workers with declining unionization rates amongst Latinx immigrants in the late twentieth century. Rosenfeld’s conclusions in this chapter provide a foundation for my core research questions articulated on page twelve. Randy Shaw, *Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, the UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Jake Rosenfeld, “Justice for Janitors?: Deunionization and Hispanic Economic Assimilation,” in *What Unions No Longer Do* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014): 131-158.

From its foundation as the Building Service Employees Union in 1921 up through the 1970s, the SEIU had developed a strong union presence in the janitorial industry and established good wages and working conditions for union janitors who cleaned office buildings in cities throughout the U.S. During the late twentieth century, however, the janitorial industry underwent a dramatic transformation. Up to this point, the industry was very localized and dispersed. Many building owners employed janitors directly, and the cleaning contractors that did exist were primarily local “mom-and-pop” operations. In the 1970s and 1980s, the industry became much more centralized and sophisticated. Regional, national, and even transnational contractors emerged and began to dominate the industry, which was growing amidst expanded suburban commercial development.

Gaining control of the industry, many of these contractors (often working together) launched a concerted assault on unionized janitors and drove down industry wages and working conditions in the early to mid-1980s. They engaged in double-breasting⁶ and sub-contracting to subvert existing union agreements. The growing number of Latinx immigrants in the United States facilitated these union subversion tactics. When contractors sought to expand their operations in the booming building industry, they were able to readily hire Latinx immigrant workers. As recently arrived and often undocumented, these immigrant workers were nonunion and easily exploited.

Unlike the unionized janitorial workforce, the expanding nonunion janitorial workforce received low wages, had little to no benefits, and often worked part-time. As the nonunion portion of the industry expanded, contractors demanded wage, benefit, and hour concessions

⁶ Double-breasting refers to the practice of a unionized company creating or acquiring a nonunion subsidiary. Through this practice, companies are able to operate outside of and underbid union contracts. Double-breasting thus allows companies to lower wage rates and increase labor flexibility. This practice first emerged in the construction industry but spread to other industries, such as the janitorial industry, in the 1970s and 1980s.

from existing union contracts. Bargaining from a weak position, many SEIU locals gave in to contractors' demands for concessions. Thus, while the overall union density of the janitorial industry rapidly declined, the wages and working conditions of the remaining union janitors in urban city cores declined as well.⁷

Changes within the Denver janitorial industry are illustrative of this widespread industry transformation.⁸ Although the Denver janitorial industry had never been entirely unionized, SEIU Local 105 in Denver had a strong union presence in the city during the mid to late twentieth century with union contracts covering a majority of the downtown office buildings through the late 1970s. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, Local 105's industry strength began to falter. The city of Denver experienced an office building boom during this period. As the demand for janitors rapidly increased with this boom, nonunion contractors hiring Latinx janitors for low wages gained a strong foothold in the industry. While Local 105's membership had historically been predominantly African American, the nonunion janitors working in Denver in the early 1980s were over ninety percent Latinx.⁹

Facing competition from nonunion contractors, Denver's union janitorial contractors started double-breasting and demanding concessions from Local 105. In 1982, Local 105

⁷ SEIU estimated that between 1964 and 1984, union density fell from approximately forty percent to sixteen percent in the commercial building cleaning industry. Building Service Division Board Meeting files, SEIU Secretary-Treasurer's Office: Richard Cordtz Records, Box 3, Folder 47, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Hank Albarelli files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 99, Folder 14, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

⁸ Although widespread, this industry transformation did not occur uniformly throughout the entire United States. A few major cities, specifically San Francisco, New York, and Chicago, remained bastions of union strength and high wages for janitors throughout the late 1980s and into the early 1990s. Nonetheless, nonunion janitorial work grew in the areas surrounding these strong union cores, portending future deunionization in these cities as well. Stephen Lerner, conversation with author, August 17, 2016; Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016.

⁹ Hank Albarelli files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 99, Folder 14, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Building Service Organizing files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 5, Folder 20, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Local 105 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folders 14, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

janitors working for American Building Maintenance (ABM) earned \$5.10 an hour and had six days of sick leave, up to three weeks of vacation time corresponding to seniority,¹⁰ and working condition protections guaranteed in their contract. When their contract opened for negotiation in 1983, however, ABM demanded that existing workers be paid between \$4.05 and \$4.15 an hour and that new workers be paid only \$3.90 an hour. Furthermore, the company demanded that all of the janitors' sick leave and vacation time be eliminated and replaced with five paid days of leave available only to workers with at least one year of seniority. Other Denver contractors demanded the same.¹¹

While demanding wage and benefit concessions, Denver cleaning contractors also subjected janitors to more difficult working conditions. Rather than hiring janitors for full six to eight hour shifts each night, contractors switched to hiring janitors for only three to four hour shifts. This move amounted to a new twist on an old tactic that workers called a "speedup." When the contractors cut janitors' paid hours in half, contractors did not similarly reduce the amount of office space that they expected janitors to clean each night nor did they increase the number of janitors they hired. Instead, they required janitors to dramatically increase the speed at which they cleaned. As the SEIU reported in 1986, the typical janitor in downtown Denver was responsible for cleaning 16,000 square feet each night. Citing an average family home in the western U.S. at this time as 1,280 square feet, the union calculated that Denver janitors cleaned the equivalent of 12.5 homes each night. Considering the average wage of \$4.10 an hour at that time, this meant that Denver janitors earned only \$1.31 for every "home" that they cleaned while working a four-hour shift.

¹⁰ Workers earned one week of vacation time after one year of employment with ABM, two weeks after two years of employment, and a maximum three weeks after seven years of employment.

¹¹ Local 105 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folders 15, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Estimated to comprise fifty-five percent of even unionized janitors in 1985, Denver's growing number of undocumented janitors faced an additional layer of exploitation on top of this general erosion of wages and working conditions. Contractors, working hand-in-hand with Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS), kept these workers in a constant state of marginalization, vulnerability, and fear. Contractors not only used the threat of firing workers and reporting them to INS to force undocumented janitors into enduring poor wages and working conditions, but they also at times followed through on these threats. An increased incidence of documentation sweeps and the subsequent discharge of undocumented workers in Denver in the early 1980s virtually guaranteed cleaning contractors a compliant, flexible workforce.

Although a potential source of assistance and recourse for exploited janitors, SEIU Local 105 was hardly a resource for Denver's undocumented janitors. Before 1985, Local 105 did not have even a single person on staff that spoke Spanish. Even though Local 105 was ill-prepared to help undocumented janitors in the early 1980s, however, key leaders in the SEIU were becoming aware of the exploitation of this rapidly growing segment of the U.S. workforce and began to take steps to address it. Reporting on the recent outbreak of problems that undocumented workers were facing in Denver (as well as in California and Texas), SEIU's building service director hypothesized in 1985: "my guess is that this is but the beginning of much larger things to come."¹²

The director's prediction rang true. The struggles that janitors in Denver and other areas of the U.S. faced in the mid-1980s were part and parcel of a much larger pattern of transformation, often referred to as neoliberal restructuring. Early signs of this restructuring

¹² Hank Albarelli files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 99, Folder 14, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Building Service Organizing files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 5, Folder 20, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

could be seen as early as the 1950s when manufacturing employment and union densities showed the first signs of what would be a decades-long decline. In the early 1970s, however, the reorganization of the economy accelerated as a response to the combined effects of the short-term shock of the Arab oil embargo and longer term trends that included declining American productivity, rising inflation, and a slowing economy. Amidst this neoliberal restructuring, both the United States and the larger global capitalist economy experienced increasing attempts to impose labor market flexibility marked by increased part-timing, outsourcing, and just-in-time production as well as decreased employer-provided benefits.

At the same time, immigrant workers came to play an increasingly central role in the economy, especially as it shifted away from manufacturing and toward the service sector. Although few recognized it at the time, the change in labor force could be seen in the rapid growth in both the foreign born and Latinx populations in the United States after 1970. Whereas the foreign born population of the United States had dipped to a historical low of 4.7 percent in 1970, it quickly rose to 6.2 percent in 1980 and reached nearly 8 percent by 1990. Over the same period, the Latinx population of the United States (most of it of Mexican origin) followed a similarly dramatic upward trajectory, growing from just 4.5 percent of the total U.S. population in 1970 to 6.4 percent in 1980 to 9 percent in 1990.¹³

The United States labor movement as a whole stagnated amidst industry transformations and declined amidst growing hostility from businesses during this period. The broad pattern of neoliberal restructuring eroded wage and benefit standards for existing work. At the same time,

¹³ See Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, *Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States, 1850 to 1990* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, Feb. 1999); U.S. Census Bureau, "Who's Hispanic in America," June 22, 2012, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/cspan/hispanic/2012.06.22_cspan_hispanics.pdf; and David G. Gutiérrez, "An Historic Overview of Latino Immigration and the Demographic Transformation of the United States," in *American Latinos and the Making of the United States: A Theme Study* (Washington D.C.: National Park Service and Organization of American Historians, 2013): 57-74.

it facilitated the expansion of low-wage, precarious work often performed by immigrants with equally precarious legal statuses. Income inequality grew, polarizing society between the elite and the masses.¹⁴

As part of this broad pattern of late twentieth century neoliberal restructuring, the transformation of the janitorial industry represented in many ways a new economic development with which workers and labor leaders alike were forced to contend. As suggested above, the levels of anti-union hostility and worker exploitation in the 1980s, especially undocumented worker exploitation, were unprecedented in the post-World War II period. In this way, any effort to address and ameliorate these industry developments represented a venture into uncharted territory.

At the same time, though, the transformation of the janitorial industry was not unfamiliar. This industry restructuring had much in common with a larger pattern of capitalist development. Specifically, the transformation of the janitorial industry, as well as neoliberal restructuring more broadly, fits within a long pattern of capitalist exploitation of vulnerable workers, and particularly poor workers of color. This was something that key SEIU leaders—particularly newly hired building service organizing director Stephen Lerner—recognized in 1986. When trying to come up with a plan to address the recent industry transformation in Denver detailed above, he recognized that Denver’s janitors had much in common with a previous generation of farm workers that he had helped organize with the UFW.

Both the farm workers that the UFW organized in the 1960s and 1970s and the growing number of unorganized janitors in the 1980s were primarily poor workers of color, and predominantly Latinxs. Furthermore, much of the mainstream labor movement ignored these

¹⁴ For a broad overview of neoliberal restructuring, see for example David Harvey *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

groups of workers and viewed them as unorganizable: the farm workers because of their exclusion from the National Labor Relations Act (NRLA) and the janitors because so many of them were undocumented. Additionally, both of these groups faced a particularly complex form of exploitation, whereby their exploitative wages and working conditions were not just determined by their immediate employers but also by other key industry players: supermarkets and consumers rather than just farmers in the case of farm workers and building owners and tenants rather than just cleaning contractors in the case of janitors. This industry complexity, on top of racialization and marginalization from the mainstream labor movement, left both farm workers and janitors in a highly vulnerable, easily exploited position.¹⁵

As evidenced by the well-known and celebrated history of the UFW, however, the farm workers experienced major organizing successes even from their position as marginalized, exploited workers. The successes of the UFW suggested to SEIU leaders that the same could be possible for the unorganized janitors. Working out of Local 105 in Denver in 1986, Lerner and a key group of newly hired Local 105 staff members including another former UFW organizer Mike Wilzoch started literally talking about Denver janitors as being “urban farm workers” in terms of their conditions. From this understanding of the issues that janitors faced, they helped launch a foundational organizing struggle. This organizing struggle—as I will detail in subsequent chapters—coalesced with other emerging janitor organizing struggles into a much larger campaign centered around a slogan coined in Denver: “Justice for Janitors.”¹⁶

¹⁵ For more information on the United Farm Workers movement, see: Marshall Ganz, *Why David Sometimes Wins: Leadership, Organization, and Strategy in the California Farm Worker Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Miriam Pawel, *The Union of their Dreams: Power, Hope, and Struggle in Cesar Chavez’s Farm Worker Movement* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2010); Frank Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (London: Verso, 2011); Matt Garcia, *From the Jaws of Victory: The Triumph and Tragedy of Cesar Chavez and the Farm Worker Movement* (Berkeley: University of California, 2012).

¹⁶ Stephen Lerner, conversation with author, August 17, 2016; Stuart Steers, “Talking Dirty,” *Westword*, September 11, 2003.

As the Justice for Janitors (JfJ) campaign developed, parallels between the farm workers and janitors' conditions appeared to translate into parallels between the success of the UFW and JfJ. Achieving key organizing victories, particularly in Los Angeles, the Justice for Janitors campaign was revered alongside the UFW as foundational to a growing immigrant labor movement. Writing about the Justice for Janitors campaign in 2000, for example, sociologist Ruth Milkman noted that the JfJ organizing victory in Los Angeles in 1990 "was the largest private sector immigrant organizing victory since the United Farm Workers' successes in the 1970s." She went on to assert: "It has since become the gold standard for immigrant organizing, not only in L.A. but nationally."¹⁷ Particularly around the turn of the twenty-first century, as Justice for Janitors occupied a central place in an intersection of the U.S. labor movement and a growing immigrant rights movement, the campaign seemed to be imbued with a hopeful, even revolutionary sense of potential. It seemed poised to continue the work that the UFW had started in the 1960s and 1970s and to help usher in a new era of Latinx visibility and empowerment in the United States.

Less than a decade later, however, the Justice for Janitors campaign in the United States had largely fallen apart. Amidst a drive for internal restructuring and reform, several top SEIU leaders abandoned the campaign in the mid to late 2000s. Without their support, forward organizing progress within the national Justice for Janitors campaign ground to a halt. Like the UFW, then, the Justice for Janitors campaign became more of a foundation and inspiration for, rather than an active part of, future organizing efforts in the U.S. labor movement.¹⁸

¹⁷ Ruth Milkman, "Immigrant Organizing and the New Labor Movement in Los Angeles," *Critical Sociology* 26, no. 1/2 (2000): 68.

¹⁸ Although I draw a comparison between the decline of the United Farm Workers and the Justice for Janitors campaign, I do not aim to suggest that the nature and magnitude of the internal turmoil within these two campaigns and their subsequent decline were the same. Following a dramatic upsurge of internal conflict in the late 1970s during which Cesar Chavez purged and alienated many campaign leaders and activists, the United Farm Workers movement not only failed to organize more farm worker but also failed to maintain its existing farm worker

The similarity, as well as direct connections, between the successes and decline of the United Farm Workers movement and the Justice for Janitors campaign prompts interesting questions: What lessons can the history of failed labor campaigns offer to the current and future labor movement in the United States? Can the U.S. labor movement build a lasting campaign that organizes and empowers the most marginalized, exploited workers in the economy? If so, how? These questions serve as the starting point for my dissertation.

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In this dissertation, I explore the broad history of the Justice for Janitors campaign. I start by exploring the origins of the campaign in a series of organizing and reform experiments at three different levels of the United States labor movement. I look at how these multilevel experiments intersected and coalesced to create the first officially named “Justice for Janitors” campaign in Denver in 1986. From this, I explore two different types of local JfJ campaigns that developed in the wake of initial organizing and contract negotiation success in Denver. Focusing on Atlanta and Washington D.C., I examine the intentional development and unintentional struggles of two JfJ campaigns in brand new locals with extensive support from the International level of the SEIU.¹⁹ I then juxtapose my analysis of the Atlanta and D.C. JfJ campaigns with an analysis of the concurrent development and success of two initially peripheral JfJ campaigns in

membership. The leadership structure of the movement imploded, and its base subsequently crumbled. In contrast, the SEIU did not experience such a dramatic leadership implosion or loss of membership. While many JfJ leaders were marginalized and pushed out of the union as key SEIU leaders failed to support their plans for continued national JfJ organizing, the union’s leadership remained generally stable. Additionally, the union’s existing janitor membership base remained strong. Even as significant JfJ organizing declined, the SEIU did not experience any sudden erosion in janitor membership. Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, May 5, 2018.

¹⁹ Although the vast majority of SEIU members are located in the United States, the SEIU does have a membership base in Canada. As such, the term “International” (rather than national) is used in combination with “local” to differentiate between the two levels of the SEIU. Up through the early 1980s, SEIU locals were largely autonomous. Nevertheless, the union also had a set of leaders who oversaw the union as a whole. These International level leaders typically worked out of SEIU’s headquarters in Washington D.C. Because the SEIU was also a member of the AFL-CIO, this major union federation can be understood as a third “federal” level of the union. Even more so than SEIU locals within the SEIU, however, the SEIU and other AFL-CIO members enjoyed autonomy within the federation and were members on a strictly voluntary basis.

San Diego and Los Angeles in the late 1980s. I expand my exploration of the Los Angeles campaign, highlighting a key victory within this campaign in 1990 that sparked a wave of Justice for Janitors expansion and spurred JfJ leaders' confidence in challenging old guard SEIU leaders.

I explore how Justice for Janitors expansion in the early 1990s created an impetus for reform within the SEIU and created conflict between JfJ leaders and top SEIU leaders. I also explore how Justice for Janitors endured and transformed as an increasingly bold campaign before struggling amidst some major local campaign setbacks in the mid-1990s. From this, I examine a controversial shift toward campaign consolidation and centralization in the late 1990s. I look at the ways in which JfJ leaders counterbalanced this shift with attention to local campaign development and paved the way for a surge of Justice for Janitors "Year 2000 campaign" action in conjunction with a broader wave of social movement activism at the turn of the twenty-first century.

After examining the promise and possibility of this surge of action with a detailed analysis of the Year 2000 campaign in Los Angeles, I explore a push for Justice for Janitors expansion and large-scale labor movement reform emerging from the SEIU in the early 2000s. I highlight the connections between this promising, yet controversial drive for reform and recent Justice for Janitors campaign developments. Ultimately, I reveal that the early 2000s drive for reform and the overarching move toward centralization and hierarchy within the SEIU left the JfJ campaign unstable. This paved the way for the decline of Justice for Janitors organizing in the United States in the mid to late 2000s. Rather than ending on this low point, however, I trace the adaptation and expansion of the JfJ campaign abroad and the influential legacy of the campaign in subsequent labor and social movement activism within the United States.

Throughout this history, I place the campaign in the context of both neoliberal restructuring and a much longer pattern of capitalist development and exploitation. In doing so, I demonstrate that the Justice for Janitors campaign was a response to two intertwined developments in the second half of the twentieth century. These are: (1) the intense exploitation and escalating inequality that U.S. workers experience amidst neoliberal restructuring and (2) the ongoing decline of union density in the United States, which predated but escalated amidst neoliberal restructuring. I highlight, however, that the response that JfJ offered to these two developments was experimental, adaptive, and rife with tensions. From the very beginning, the janitors' campaign was an amalgamation of several organizing and reform initiatives. It operated as both a local and national campaign and was subject to the interests, needs, and oversight of a range of individuals at the local and International levels of the SEIU. Furthermore, as the campaign developed and expanded in local arenas, it evolved in response to resources and opportunities available in different geographic and temporal settings and in response to leadership changes within the SEIU.

I argue that the experimental, adaptive nature of the campaign was Justice for Janitors' core source of strength and endurance. Campaign leaders and participants' commitment to experimentation and adaptation allowed Justice for Janitors to persevere in the face of immense external hostility, internal struggles, and failures. More than this, a commitment to experimentation and adaptation allowed campaign leaders and participants to capitalize on moments of success and to expand and escalate Justice for Janitors not just as a janitor organizing drive but as a powerful, intersectional struggle against the effects of neoliberal restructuring and union decline. This expansion and escalation, I argue, spurred significant reform throughout the SEIU and the United States labor movement as a whole. It also

empowered and inspired a generation of workers and social movement activists to take a stand against growing socioeconomic polarization and inequality.

In highlighting the adaptive nature of the campaign, I suggest that Justice for Janitors can be seen as a continuation of the United Farm Workers movement in a different industry setting. Like the UFW, Justice for Janitors brought visibility to and challenged elements of some of the most obvious excesses and inequalities of the constantly evolving capitalist system as well as the historic failures of the United States labor movement. Additionally, it offered a sense of transformative and even revolutionary hope at times.²⁰ Justice for Janitors offered this sense of hope because it welcomed undocumented Latinx workers into a mainstream union and seemed to provide a foundation for a broad mobilization of the growing number of precarious workers within and beyond the United States in the late twentieth century.

Unfortunately, also like the UFW, the Justice for Janitors campaign ultimately fell prey to excessive centralization and leadership autocracy. I trace the roots of the Justice for Janitors campaign's ultimate downfall to the internal tensions embedded within the campaign. Throughout the dissertation, I argue that a balanced, symbiotic relationship between both the International and local levels of the campaign—as well as between some of the narrower, more conservative elements of the campaign and some of the more expansive, progressive elements of the campaign—was key to the success of Justice for Janitors. I demonstrate, however, that the relationships between the levels and internal elements of the campaign were far from stable: the balance between the International and local levels of the campaign and between the more

²⁰ Following the class-centered approach that I take in this dissertation (and that I detail subsequently in this introduction), I use the terms revolutionary and radical to refer to hopes, ideologies, and actions oriented toward a fundamental transformation of the economic status quo in and beyond the United States. More specifically, I use these terms to refer to hopes, ideologies, and actions oriented toward replacing the exploitative capitalist system with a more equitable alternative. In contrast, I use the term conservative to describe ideologies and actions that are compatible with the existing capitalist system. While the former are more idealistic, the latter are more pragmatic.

conservative and progressive elements of the campaign shifted and became strained throughout the history of Justice for Janitors.

Up until the mid-2000s, the Justice for Janitors campaign had been able to adapt and endure through these shifts and moments of tension. A drive for Justice for Janitors expansion through centralization and leadership autocracy during the early 2000s, however, fundamentally disrupted the balance of power within the campaign and made Justice for Janitors unsustainable. The shift toward campaign consolidation and hierarchical leadership left the campaign vulnerable to the caprices of a small group of union leaders. When these leaders' interests in supporting Justice for Janitors declined, the campaign—which had endured through major failures as well as great triumphs for more than twenty years—fell apart.

In exploring the history of Justice for Janitors as an experimental, adaptive, and tension-riddled campaign, I focus considerable attention on the actions and decisions of top and mid-level leaders within the SEIU and on the development of the campaign as a whole. Nevertheless, I make a concerted effort to explore how the campaign emerged from and navigated particular local contexts. I also pay attention to workers as a driving force of the JfJ campaign while acknowledging the divisions and different ideological orientations within this group.

My account of Justice for Janitors is largely based on union archives and newspaper accounts of the campaign. Much of my archival material comes from the SEIU collections housed in the Walter P. Reuther Library at Wayne State University. More recently curated local collections, specifically the Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West collection housed at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) and Georgetown University's online collection "Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History," also proved to be valuable archival sources. In addition to using archival and newspaper accounts, I took

advantage of a variety of existing oral history and personal accounts of the campaign. Beyond using these existing accounts (many of which were recently recorded), I was also able to personally discuss the history of the campaign with a few of its leaders and participants.

I owe much of the inspiration and enthusiasm for my exploration of Justice for Janitors to existing scholarship on the campaign. This scholarship served as a driving force and important resource guiding my research. My dissertation, however, departs from much of this scholarship in several ways.

For example, my dissertation departs from this existing body of scholarship in that it provides an overarching account of the development, adaptation, and expansion of the Justice for Janitors campaign from the early 1980s through the early 2000s. The vast majority of the existing scholarship on Justice for Janitors was written about specific local JfJ campaigns while the campaign was ongoing. This scholarship provided exciting, cutting-edge analysis of Justice for Janitors that arguably helped build interest in and support for the campaign as it developed. At the same time, however, this scholarship tended to privilege the most successful and publicized local JfJ campaigns. The most comprehensive scholarship on the campaign—owing largely to the work of UCLA professors—is centered on Los Angeles.²¹ Several scholarly accounts of the long-running Washington D.C. campaign, the Bay Area campaign, and more

²¹ See, for example: Roger Waldinger et al. “Helots No More: A Case Study of the Justice for Janitors Campaign in Los Angeles,” in *Organizing to Win: New Research on Union Strategies*, ed. Kate Bronfenbrenner et al. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998): 102-109; Catherine L. Fisk, Daniel J.B. Mitchell, and Christopher L. Erickson, “Union Representation of Immigrant Janitors in Southern California: Economic and Legal Challenges,” in *Organizing Immigrants: The Challenge for Unions in Contemporary California*, ed. Ruth Milkman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 199-244; Christopher Erickson et al., “Justice for Janitors in Los Angeles: Lessons from Three Rounds of Negotiations,” *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 40, no. 3 (September 2002): 543-567; Edward W. Soja, *Seeking Spatial Justice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). USC graduate student Cynthia J. Cranford and UCLA graduate student Maria A. Gutierrez de Soldatenko also contributed to the scholarship on the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign. See for, example: Cynthia J. Cranford, “Gendered Resistance: Organizing Justice for Janitors in Los Angeles,” in *Challenging the Market: The Struggle to Regulate Work and Income* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004): 309-329 and Maria A. Gutierrez de Soldatenko, “Justice for Janitors Latinizing Los Angeles: Mobilizing Latina(o) Cultural Repertoire,” in *Latino Los Angeles: Transformations, Communities, and Activism*, ed. Enrique C. Ochoa and Gilda L. Ochoa (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2005): 225-245.

recent campaigns such as those in Miami and Houston also exist. Many of the smaller campaigns such as those in Denver and San Diego as well as the unsuccessful campaigns such as the Atlanta JfJ campaign, however, have received little to no attention. Furthermore, only a handful of existing studies address more than one local campaign and the interplay between them.²²

This dissertation aims to address this gap in the existing literature. With the benefit of added temporal distance from the campaign, I offer a more holistic account of Justice for Janitors, exploring the relationship between the campaign's successes and failures over time as well as the dynamic between the various local campaigns and the national campaign as a whole.

While filling this content-related gap in the existing literature on the Justice for Janitors campaign, I also offer an intervention into a broader body of scholarship on labor revitalization. Although union density in the United States began to decline as early as the 1950s, this decline escalated in the 1970s and 1980s while the total number of union members in the country also began to fall. This accelerating decline created a sense of crisis in the labor movement. At the same time, however, reform efforts and exciting new labor campaigns such as Justice for Janitors (motivated in large part by this growing sense of crisis) offered labor activists and scholars a

²² Notable studies that address more than one campaign include Preston O. Rudy's "Labor, Globalization and Urban Political Fields" and Fred B. Glass's "Justice for Janitors: Organizing Immigrant Workers," which analyze the Los Angeles, Bay Area, and Sacramento JfJ campaigns in relation to each other; Stephen Lerner, Jill Hurst, and Glenn Adler's "Fighting and Winning in the Outsourced Economy" which focuses on the University of Miami campaign but also includes information on previous local campaigns such as the Denver and Washington D.C. campaigns; and several recent works by Kyoung-Hee Yu, which use ethnographic observations of the Los Angeles, Washington D.C., Boston, and Houston JfJ accounts to analyze organizational change within unions. Preston O. Rudy, "Labor, Globalization and Urban Political Fields: A Comparison of Justice for Janitors in Three California Cities" (PhD diss., University of California Davis, 2003); Fred B. Glass, "Justice for Janitors: Organizing Immigrant Workers," in *From Mission to Microchip: A History of the California Labor Movement* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016): 398-413; Stephen Lerner, Jill Hurst, and Glenn Adler, "Fighting and Winning in the Outsourced Economy: Justice for Janitors at the University of Miami," in *The Gloves-off: Workplace Standards at the Bottom of America's Labor Market*, ed. Annette Bernhardt et al. (Champaign: Labor and Employment Relations Association, 2008), 243-268; Kyoung-Hee Yu, "Between Bureaucracy and Social Movements: Careers in the Justice for Janitors," (PhD diss., Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2008); Kyoung-Hee Yu, "Organizational Contexts for Union Renewal," *Relations Industrielles* 69, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 501-523.

sense of hope that recent union decline could be reversed. Reform efforts and new campaigns spurred scholars to generate a robust conversation about the promise and possibility of labor movement revitalization. In particular, scholars highlighted innovative elements of new campaigns and offered interpretations about which reform strategies (top-down or bottom-up) and which campaign tactics (mass demonstrations and movement building or hiring outside organizers and pressuring strategic targets) were key to labor revitalization.

Amidst a general hope and excitement for the future of the labor movement, a few scholars and labor activists such as Bill Fletcher Jr., Richard Hurd, and Paul Johnston raised important questions underlying the growing conversations and debates about labor revitalization in the late 1990s and 2000s. Rather than asking how the labor movement could revitalize, they asked in various forms what revitalization does and should mean. In doing so, they touched upon and at times even asked outright a central question that has been asked and answered much too infrequently in labor scholarship: What is the purpose of organized labor?²³ This question is at the root of several important lines of inquiry about what the relationship amongst workers and between workers, unions, and capital should and can be. For example: Is the purpose of organized labor to help a subset of workers gain a greater share of the fruits of their labor or is the purpose to be part of a broad social movement to reform capitalism? Should unions be understood as part of a social-democratic reform movement or as part of a revolutionary vanguard against capitalism? Should unions be national, international, or transnational, and what are the political implications of these different organizational structures for workers? Can unions

²³ See, for example: Bill Fletcher Jr. and Richard W. Hurd, “Beyond the Organizing Model: The Transformation Process in Local Unions,” in *Organizing to Win: New Research on Union Strategies*, ed. Kate Bronfenbrenner et al. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 37-53 and Paul Johnston, “Organize for What?: The Resurgence of Labor as a Citizenship Movement,” in *Rekindling the Movement: Labor’s Quest for Relevance in the 21st Century*, ed. Lowell Turner, Harry C. Katz, and Richard W. Hurd (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 27-58.

ultimately transcend other deeply rooted forms of inequality and asymmetry such as those based on race, gender, citizenship, culture, sexuality, and religion?

The lack of consideration of these lines of inquiry is a key limitation of scholarship on labor revitalization produced during the 1990s and early 2000s.²⁴ Due to the fact that much of the literature on the Justice for Janitors campaign fits within this broader category of scholarship, this limitation exists in many existing studies of JfJ as well. Existing scholarship on JfJ analyzes the campaign's strategies and tactics in depth. Furthermore, this scholarship explores the campaign's diverse actions and achievements ranging from organizing new workers, achieving new contracts, increasing visibility and respect for janitors, empowering Latinx leaders, and even serving as a foundation for a larger movement for social justice. However, the specific purpose and goals of the campaign are often unaddressed in existing scholarship.

An obvious exception to this is an early article on the campaign written by then SEIU Public Policy Analyst John Howley shortly before the campaign received national prominence. After acknowledging the experimental nature of the local JfJ campaigns, Howley asserted:

The objective of JfJ campaigns is to win decent wages and working conditions for building service workers. This cannot be done without a citywide bargaining structure such as a master or pattern agreement which allows standardization of the local labor market. The goal is to re-establish the arrangement whereby the local union can control through bargaining the terms and conditions that will prevail across the local labor market.²⁵

An article written one year later by Stephen Lerner offers additional insight from at least one of the campaign's leaders into the purpose of Justice for Janitors. Writing as the SEIU building

²⁴ More recently, labor activists and scholars have been exploring these lines of inquiry, particularly in relation to the rise of "Bargaining for the Common Good" campaigns in the 2010s. These labor campaigns explicitly seek, amongst other goals, to expand the scope of collective bargaining, create enduring alliances with community organizations, and challenge white supremacy. For more on these campaigns, see: Joseph A. McCartin, "Bargaining for the Common Good," *Dissent* 63, no. 2 (Spring 2016): 128-135 and Marilyn Sneiderman and Secky Fascione, "Going on Offense during Challenging Times," *New Labor Forum* 27, no. 1 (2018): 54-62.

²⁵ John Howley, "Justice for Janitors: The Challenge of Organizing In Contract Services," *Labor Research Review* 1, no. 15 (1990): 67.

service division organizing director and head of the JfJ campaign, Lerner emphasized the importance of organizing to increase union density, both in specific industries and nationally. He asserted: “For labor to succeed, we need to organize millions of workers. We need to organize and dominate industries and markets so we can negotiate good contracts.”²⁶

Together, the two articles from campaign insiders suggest that the immediate objective of the local JfJ campaigns (at least in the early 1990s) was to gain modest wage and working condition improvements for a specific group of workers while a larger goal inspiring Justice for Janitors as a national campaign was an increase in union density aimed at helping workers more broadly to achieve wage and working condition improvements through contracts. Far from innovative or revolutionary, these objectives and goals fit with a traditional, rather narrow conception of the role of the labor movement.

Attention to these clearly articulated narrow campaign objectives and goals, however, fell by the wayside amidst excitement over a surge of worker activism, growing immigrant visibility, and calls for social justice that emerged with the campaign and captured the public’s attention in the 1990s. Rather than presenting the campaign as an organizing struggle for union contracts, scholars offered assessments of JfJ that suggested the campaign was in effect if not also in intention part of a much broader, more revolutionary transformation of the U.S. labor movement. During this period, scholars explored the ways in which current labor movement struggles were rooted in historic union insularity and dependence on the National Labor Relations Board. Additionally, they started analyzing recent patterns in economic restructuring in earnest. Scholars studying Justice for Janitors started connecting the campaign to both these historic and more recent economic developments, suggesting that the campaign offered a solution to both the

²⁶ Stephen Lerner, “Let’s Get Moving: Labor’s survival depends on organizing industry-wide for justice and power,” *Labor Research Review* 1, no. 18 (1991): 6.

labor movement and workers' struggles. Many suggested that the Justice for Janitors campaign represented a new form of unionism—whether labeled “social movement unionism,” “social unionism,” or “social justice unionism”—that was both different from and more effective than narrow forms of business unionism that had predominated throughout the mid-twentieth century.²⁷

While rooted in careful research into the campaign, particularly local campaign successes in Los Angeles, this scholarship tended to privilege a positive, hopeful reading of the campaign's current and potential future impact on the labor movement. Geographic differences and internal tensions within the campaign, such as tensions between the articulated goals and the process of the campaign and between more pragmatic and more idealistic aspects of the campaign, were largely neglected.²⁸ At what seemed to be an important moment of possibility for widespread labor transformation, scholars left deeper questions related to the purpose of Justice for Janitors, and the labor movement more broadly, unanswered.

In the midst of growing internal controversy over SEIU's push for broad union restructuring and labor movement reform in the early 2000s, however, inconsistencies and tensions within the campaign received increased attention. A wave of critical scholarship exposed a narrow concern with organizing and, specifically, an autocratic, ends-justifies-the-means approach to organizing within the campaign. At this point, many scholars and labor

²⁷ Paul Johnston in *Success While Others Fail*, for example, describes JfJ as part of an emerging social movement unionism in the private sector; Jane Williams connects the campaign to what she terms social unionism in “Restructuring Labor's Identity;” and Tait connects the campaign to a larger push for social justice unionism within the AFL-CIO in the late 1980s. Paul Johnston, *Success While Others Fail: Social Movement Unionism and the Public Workplace* (Ithaca: IRL Press, 1994); Jane Williams, “Restructuring Labor's Identity: The Justice for Janitors Campaign in Washington D.C.” in *The Transformation of U.S. Unions: Voices, Visions, and Strategies from the Grassroots*, ed. Ray M. Tillman and Michael S. Cummings (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), 203-218; Vanessa Tait, *Poor Workers' Unions: Rebuilding Labor from Below* (Cambridge: South End Press, 2005).

²⁸ While these deeper tensions in the campaign were largely unaddressed, some scholars—particularly those with an interest in geography—explored a key tension between the local and national elements of the campaign. See, for example, Lydia A. Savage, “Geographies of Organizing: Justice for Janitors in Los Angeles,” in *Organizing the Landscape: Geographical Perspectives on Labor Unionism*, ed. Andrew Herod (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 225-252.

activists who had championed JfJ became disillusioned with the campaign and the SEIU. In the midst of this disillusionment, scholarship on the Justice for Janitors campaign in the U.S., much like the campaign itself, declined in the mid to late 2000s.²⁹

At the same time, though, a new hopeful body of scholarship related to the campaign began to develop. This emerging body of scholarship, written mostly by non-U.S. scholars, explores the recent development and successes of JfJ-inspired labor campaigns abroad. This scholarship firmly places these recent campaigns within broad patterns of neoliberal restructuring. It also explores key tensions within these new campaigns, particularly as they are both local struggles and elements of a larger global campaign.³⁰ While offering important analysis of this new evolution of the Justice for Janitors campaign, this scholarship prompts further questions about the history and purpose of both the original Justice for Janitors campaign in the United States and the purpose of the labor movement broadly, particularly in the midst of an expansion of neoliberal restructuring and escalating hostility to unions globally.

I build from this recent scholarship while also shifting focus backwards, to the history of the Justice for Janitors campaign in the United States. I explore different and evolving

²⁹ A few scholars, particularly Cynthia Cranford and Kyoung-Hee Yu who had conducted ethnographic research of local campaigns prior to the “civil war” in the SEIU and U.S. labor movement in the late 2000s, have continued publishing articles on the campaign since 2010. The recent undergraduate honors thesis of Georgetown student Alyssa Russell, however, shows continued interest in the JfJ campaign from a newer generation of scholars as well. Cynthia Cranford, “Gendered Projects of Solidarity: Workplace Organizing among Immigrant Women and Men,” *Gender, Work and Organization* 19, no. 2 (March 2012): 142-164; Kyoung-Hee Yu, “Organizational Contexts for Union Renewal,” *Relations Industrielles* 69, no. 3 (Summer 2014): 501-523; Alyssa Russell, “Cleaning Up the Service Sector: The Justice for Janitors Campaigns in Washington, D.C. and Atlanta, GA” (Undergraduate honors thesis: Georgetown University, 2017).

³⁰ See, for example: *Antipode* 38, no. 3 (June 2006); Jane Wills, “Making Class Politics Possible: Organizing Contract Cleaners in London,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32, no. 2 (June 2008): 305-323; Jason Foster and Bob Barnetson, “Justice for Janitors in Alberta: The Impact of Temporary Foreign Workers on an Organizing Campaign,” *Journal of Workplace Rights* 16, no. 1 (January 2011): 3-29; Jamie K. McCallum, *Global Unions, Local Power: The New Spirit of Transnational Labor Organizing* (Ithaca: IRL Press, 2013); Ad Knotter, “Justice for Janitors Goes Dutch. Precarious Labor and Trade Union Response in the Cleaning Industry (1988-2012): A Transnational History,” *International Review of Social History* 62, no. 1 (April 2017): 1-35.

conceptions of and disagreements about the purpose of the Justice for Janitors campaign amongst campaign leaders and participants. Doing so, I argue, is key to understanding both the past successes and failures of the campaign as well as the lessons that this campaign offers to the future labor movement.

I demonstrate that the tensions inherent in the campaign are intimately connected to differing opinions and a lack of clarity on what the purpose of the Justice for Janitors campaign was and what the purpose of the labor movement more generally is in the United States and global political economy. Was the purpose of the campaign for union organizers to improve conditions for an exploited group of janitors through union recognition agreements and small wage and benefit increases? Was the purpose of the campaign to build an inspiring movement of Latinx janitors? Or was the purpose of the campaign to provide a starting point for a multiracial, multinational, gender and citizenship-conscious workers' struggle against larger patterns of socioeconomic inequality inherent in the capitalist system?

Intertwined with these core questions about the purpose of the JfJ campaign are questions about the relationship between Justice for Janitors and the broader U.S. labor movement. How much autonomy did JfJ leaders have within the SEIU? To what extent were they confined to the oversight and interests of leaders within the SEIU or the AFL-CIO? Furthermore, did Justice for Janitors offer a replicable and transferrable solution to union density decline? Was the campaign sparking a fundamental shift in the labor movement through its racial, gender, and citizenship inclusiveness and calls for social justice? Was Justice for Janitors using progressive strategies as a means to achieve narrow organizing goals within the building service industry or was the campaign actually creating the foundation for a more radical struggle against neoliberal capitalism within and beyond the labor movement?

In teasing out different and evolving perspectives on these questions throughout the history of the campaign, I argue that a creative, adaptive process of working through internal disagreements was key to the development and successes of the campaign. I suggest that Justice for Janitors proved most successful and sustainable when leaders, organizers, and workers collectively acknowledged and attempted to work through their differences rather than when one group, particularly organizers and leaders, ignored internal campaign tensions or acted from their own perspective without considering that of others. To be more specific, I argue that Justice for Janitors proved most successful when:

1. Top union leaders welcomed, created space for, and provided resources for leftist organizers with experience outside of the mainstream labor movement and supported an expansion and evolution of the campaign as a consciousness-raising, intersectional workers' struggle rather than only promoting JfJ as a narrowly-defined labor campaign with conservative organizing strategies and goals;
2. Mid-level organizers paid attention to and valued the process of building the campaign as much as the campaign's goals, recognized and addressed local specificities while also focusing on national patterns in the political economy, and recognized the importance of worker and community member participation and leadership in the campaign;
3. Workers looked past their immediate concerns and differences to value both diversity and unity, worked together along with JfJ organizers and their communities to understand the intersection of the exploitations they experienced around their position within the economy, and collectively struggled for a more just and equitable future for *all* workers.

In making this argument, I approach the history of the Justice for Janitors campaign with a focus on class analysis. My argument rests on an understanding of class struggle as inherent in and central to capitalism. I consider attention to class struggle as key to understanding the history of the JfJ campaign as well as its place within U.S. labor history.

In adopting this class-centered approach, I draw from recent scholarship that explores neoliberal restructuring as a distinct class project. As neoliberal restructuring increasingly came under academic scrutiny around the turn of the century, scholars like David Harvey started exploring this economic transformation as more than just a shift in economic ideology and its results. These scholars argued that the rise of neoliberal restructuring stemmed from key economic, social, and political crises during the 1970s, which created a political opening for a significant reordering of class power within the United States. Taking advantage of this opening, the economic elite reasserted dominance and profitability after being circumscribed by State power during the New Deal and post-WWII era. As the elite reasserted dominance, an expanded, liberal State that had helped create a relative balance of power between capital and labor during the previous forty years gave way to a State that largely serves the interest of capital.

In addition to exploring this shift in class power, these scholars have made important critiques of the impact of this shift on global equality. They have connected the deregulation of the market and the rise of transnational corporations to increased wealth and profitability amongst the elite and increased hardship amongst the vast majority of the population—particularly people of color, women, and those in the global South. These groups pay the price of elite enrichment in the form of increased precarity: part-time rather than full-time work, lower wages, job insecurity, poorer and more hazardous working conditions, and little to no access to

public resources that could ameliorate increasing hardships. Scholars critiquing neoliberalism have also exposed how economic restructuring and social displacement both at “home” and abroad have produced extensive labor migration and growing populations of vulnerable workers in urban centers, particularly global cities, which offer hope for economic opportunity or at least survival. In doing so, these scholars have suggested that global cities serve as unique sites of demographic diversity but also growing class polarization between the elite few and the increasingly racialized, gendered, and politically marginalized masses.³¹

Working from this understanding of neoliberal restructuring, I adopt the perspective that any effort to truly ameliorate rising socioeconomic and political inequality must address the unequal balance of power between capital and labor. In this way, I ultimately argue that the purpose of the labor movement is to empower workers to struggle against capital. Union efforts to create mutually beneficial partnerships with businesses at best offer workers a temporary reprieve from the excesses of capital exploitation. At worst, they serve to lull unions into a false sense of complacency and leave workers vulnerable to exploitation going forward.

In taking this stance on the relationship between capital and labor, I draw from the work of scholars such as Nelson Lichtenstein who have offered a reinterpretation of the New Deal and post-WWII eras in labor history and have explored long-running patterns in capital hostility to labor. Countering previous popular and academic understandings of the New Deal and post-WWII eras as a period of mutual understanding and harmony between capital and labor, these scholars have demonstrated that this period was actually marked by extensive conflict between

³¹ See for example: Grace Chang, “Global Exchange: The World Bank, ‘Welfare Reform,’ and the Trade in Migrant Women,” in *Disposable Domestics: Immigrant Women Workers in the Global Economy* (Boston: South End Press, 2000), 115-144; Duménil Gerard and Dominique Lévy, *Capital Resurgent: Roots of the Neoliberal Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004); William I. Robinson, *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and State in a Transnational World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004); David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Dávila, Arlene M. *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos, and the Neoliberal City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2006).

businesses and unions.³² These scholars' analyses of this period serve to ground broader arguments about the constancy of class struggle during the twentieth century. They also serve to emphasize the importance of class analysis to historical scholarship—even during periods when class and class struggle virtually disappeared from common parlance in the United States.

In adopting an analytic framework centered on class, I draw specific inspiration from Bill Fletcher Jr. and Fernando Gapasin's analysis of problems within the U.S. labor movement in *Solidarity Divided*. In this book published in 2008, Fletcher and Gapasin suggest that late twentieth century union efforts to increase union density without fundamentally reforming the labor movement amount to a Sisyphean struggle. Specifically, they compare these organizing efforts to the act of refilling a tire with an irreparable leak. Refilling the tire offers a temporary solution but ultimately fails to address the underlying problem. And this underlying problem, Fletcher and Gapasin suggest, is organized labor's failure to recognize and address the inevitability of class struggle in the relationship between labor and capital. From this understanding of organized labor's escalating decline and weakness, they argue: "a Left, anticapitalist analysis and a reconstituted Left are essential for the renewal of labor and the reconstruction of trade unionism."³³ I take their argument to heart in my analysis of the history of the Justice for Janitors campaign and of the lessons that this campaign offers to the future of organized labor.

In my effort to provide a class-conscious analysis of the Justice for Janitors campaign, however, I do not rely on a simplistic, essentialist conception of class. Instead, I draw from

³² See, for example: Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); Sanford Jacoby, *Modern Manors: Welfare Capitalism Since the New Deal* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

³³ Bill Fletcher Jr. and Fernando Gapasin, *Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path Toward Social Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 214.

Evelyn Nakano Glenn's social constructionist theorization of class and its relationship with race, gender, and citizenship in *Unequal Freedom*.³⁴ I do not give primacy to class as an independent or all-important determinant of social relations. Instead, I treat class as a complex, shifting axis of social organization that is mutually constituted with and intimately connected to race, gender, and citizenship, which also operate as axes of social organization.

Throughout the dissertation, I explore the ways in which class, race, gender, and citizenship function as overlapping axes of oppression, subjecting particular groups of people such as poor undocumented women of color to intense exploitation. I also explore the ways in which the intersection of these axes can serve as a foundation for unity amongst a diverse group of people and especially a foundation for a unified struggle against capitalist exploitation. At the same time, though, I do not treat these categories as additive layers that create multiple, distinct levels of oppression within society. Instead, I demonstrate the ways in which these axes at times cut-across each other, dividing and polarizing poor workers along lines of race, gender, and citizenship. In doing so, I suggest that deep-seated patterns of racism, patriarchy, and chauvinism serve the interests of capital. As such, effective struggles against capitalist exploitation must also fundamentally address these other, intertwined systems of oppression. I reveal that a nuanced history of the Justice for Janitors campaign clearly demonstrates that attempts to unify and mobilize workers without also addressing tensions between workers related to race, gender, and citizenship prove unsuccessful in the long run if not also in the short run.

While building from a theorization of class as socially constructed and intertwined with race, gender, and citizenship, I also aim to raise questions about the relationship between class

³⁴ Glenn is hardly the first to theorize identity categories such as race, class, gender and citizenship as socially constructed. That said, Glenn effectively brings together several existing "streams" of social constructionist theory, which tended to deal with these axes of social organization in isolation, into an integrated framework in *Unequal Freedom*. Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

and social justice. While hardly a new concept, social justice seems to have gained newfound prominence as a unifying rallying cry and demand amongst a host of interconnected labor campaigns and social movement struggles amidst the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. As is suggested by the campaign's name alone, Justice for Janitors fits within this trend. Demands for justice, and social justice specifically, permeated the campaign. Furthermore, in the midst of JfJ success and larger reform efforts, the SEIU highlighted achieving social justice as integral to the union's mission.³⁵

Unsurprisingly, the term social justice concurrently gained newfound prominence in labor scholarship during this period. As suggested previously, some scholars described Justice for Janitors and other labor campaigns that seemed to offer an alternative to business unionism in the United States during the late twentieth century as "social justice unionism." Although this label for alternatives to business unionism has not widely replaced other labels such as "social movement unionism,"³⁶ I raise questions about the increased use of the term social justice in both the labor movement and labor scholarship. I draw a connection between the recent proliferation of demands for social justice and the virtual disappearance of the rhetoric of class and class struggle throughout U.S. society and even throughout the organized labor movement. I suggest that the rhetoric of social justice has emerged and proliferated as a pragmatic stand-in for the rhetoric of class and class struggle.

³⁵ The opening lines of the new mission statement that SEIU adopted in 1996 read as follows: "We are the Service Employees International Union, an organization of more than one million members united by the belief in the dignity and worth of workers and the services they provide and dedicate to improving the lives of workers and their families and creating a more just and humane society." Committee on the Future files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 136, Folder 1, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

³⁶ For more information on these labels, see Kim Scipes' "Social Movement Unionism or Social Justice Unionism?" which provides insight into different types of unionism and attempts to address confusion over terminology. In this article, Scipes advocates for the term "social justice unionism" to describe the form of unionism gaining prominence in North America in the 1990s. Additionally, he differentiates between this type of unionism and a qualitatively different form of unionism for which he reserves the label "social movement unionism." Kim Scipes, "Social Movement Unionism or Social Justice Unionism? Disentangling Theoretical Confusion within the Global Labor Movement," *Class, Race, and Corporate Power* 2, no. 3 (2014).

I reveal the ways in which social justice serves as a useful frame for union organizing and activism, specifically in unifying individuals across race, gender, citizenship, and even class differences. In fostering this unity, social justice struggles have worked to expose and ameliorate some of the most obvious, excessive forms of exploitation under neoliberal capitalism. At a certain level, then, social justice struggles can be understood as anti-capitalist. However, I also suggest how the absence of class rhetoric and a class-struggle framework in organized labor helps perpetuate the idea that capitalism is natural and immutable. Furthermore, in doing so, this absence limits the possibility of workers realizing a more truly equitable future. As such, I urge caution in defining labor struggles, like the Justice for Janitors campaign, as forms of social justice unionism and calling for social justice unionism as the solution to the decline of organized labor.³⁷

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Ultimately in providing my case study of the Justice for Janitors campaign in the following chapters, I aim to highlight two key threads running throughout the history of the labor movement in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (and beyond this, although for practical purposes my dissertation is temporally truncated). The first is a cyclical pattern of labor campaign development, success, and failure. The second is an underlying pattern of continuity and adaptation between labor campaigns. Exposing the first thread undeniably engenders feelings of pessimism for the future of organized labor. The second thread, however, comes with

³⁷ Although I raise questions about the use of the term “social justice unionism” amidst a general absence of class-consciousness and rhetoric, I do not intend to suggest that the term has only been used in scholarship that neglects class or that the term should not be used. In *Solidarity Divided*, Fletcher and Gapasin provide a thorough definition of what they label “social justice unionism.” Their definition, like their analysis of the labor movement in general, includes attention to class. With this definition, they assert that the labor movement *needs* (rather than already has) social justice unionism.

an important sense of hope and possibility, both for the present and future of the labor movement.

To be more specific, in exploring the relationship between the history of the Justice for Janitors campaign and that of the United Farm Workers, I expose a cyclical pattern whereby successful union struggles open up the door for more expansive, inspiring worker struggles against socioeconomic and political inequality, but then the momentum and promise of these struggles are hamstrung or coopted from within, leading ultimately to failure and disillusionment with organized labor. This pattern highlights the immense difficulty of building and sustaining a coalition of support for a broad workers movement—especially a radical workers movement that fundamentally targets the roots of socioeconomic and political inequality in the capitalist system. Such movements require workers to sacrifice opportunities to address their more immediate needs while struggling in hope for the possibility of a more truly equitable future. As the history of the Justice for Janitors campaign, the UFW movement, and various labor struggles before these illustrate, many workers have proven willing to make this sacrifice, especially in the wake of campaign success and in the presence of inspiring leaders—but many have not.

This cyclical pattern also highlights the unfortunate power of union leaders to coopt or quell radical possibility within the organized labor movement. Both the history of the United Farm Workers movement and the Justice for Janitors campaign include instances of union leaders taking workers' increased power and growing momentum from recent activism and organizing efforts and using this power and momentum to bargain on behalf of only a select group of workers for contract and legal assurances that do not challenge the existing system of capitalism. These assurances ultimately prove to be fragile and temporary, leaving both workers and the labor movement in a weak position in the long run. This pattern can likewise be traced

further backward. The history of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), of the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), and—since their merger—of the AFL-CIO is rife with instances of conservative compromises, cooptation, and outright suppression in the midst of radical agitation and activism. The failure of the Knights of Labor, the International Workers of the World, and the communist leadership within the CIO are cases in point.³⁸

As noted above, I follow in the footsteps of labor activists like Bill Fletcher Jr. and Fernando Gapasin in asserting that a class-conscious, anti-capitalist analysis of the labor movement and the renewal of a class-conscious, anti-capitalist Left within the labor movement are key to the future of organized labor's success. I argue that commitment to class struggle at all levels of the labor movement is key to breaking the cyclical pattern of campaign failures and shifting the tide of organized labor both within and beyond the United States. At the same time, I acknowledge that the assertion that all workers need to do is join together on the foundation of their mutual exploitation and overthrow capitalism is at best simplistic and at worst a pie-in-the-sky fantasy. In light of this, I point to the hope and promise of a second key thread woven throughout the history of organized labor.

As suggested previously, in exploring the history of the campaign, I argue that a process of learning and building from past failures and successes was central to Justice for Janitors. Key Justice for Janitors leaders and participants consciously developed the campaign not as an organizing or mobilizing model that could simply be dragged and dropped into new settings but as an experimental, adaptive response to escalating union decline and worker exploitation. At their best, these leaders and participants recognized that there is no silver bullet, one-size-fits-all, panacea solution to building and sustaining a workers movement. They constantly assessed and

³⁸ For a broad overview of the struggles and failures of progressive unionism and the solidification of business unionism in U.S. labor history, see Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss, "An Exceptionally Hostile Terrain," in *Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004): 34–77.

adapted campaign frames, strategies, tactics, and goals in response to lessons learned and changing resources and opportunities. They strove toward larger goals and more radical struggles in the midst of success while also not forgetting what made the campaign successful in the first place.

In doing so, they developed Justice for Janitors as an adaptation of the UFW and they facilitated the evolution and expansion of Justice for Janitors throughout the United States for twenty years. They also directly facilitated an expansion and adaptation of Justice for Janitors-inspired campaigns abroad and the development of a national-turned-global security worker organizing campaign within the SEIU. Furthermore, some of these leaders and participants also played a role in launching other early twenty-first century labor campaigns such as Our Walmart and Fight for \$15.

Valery Alzaga suggests that these leaders and participants' actions stem from an "open source" approach to the Justice for Janitors campaign and union organizing in general.³⁹ In doing so, she alludes to the collaborative, decentralized "open source" software development model. In this open source model, software engineers make their original source code freely available, allowing the general public to both use and modify the code. In an open source approach to unionism, to build on Alzaga's descriptor, labor activists make information about their campaigns readily available—often actively sharing it through networking and training. In doing so, they allow other activists and unions throughout the global labor movement to use and adapt existing campaign frames, strategies, and tactics with specific knowledge of their proven advantages and pitfalls.⁴⁰ Alzaga is a Change to Win (formerly SEIU) organizer who worked on

³⁹ See for example: Valery Alzaga, "Justice for Janitors campaign: open-sourcing labour conflicts against global neo-liberalism," *Open Democracy*, February 7, 2011.

⁴⁰ While the term "open source" has recently been used by SEIU organizers and a few scholars such as Jamie K. McCallum to describe an intentional approach to unionism centered on cross-union information sharing and

the Denver JfJ campaign, assisted the Los Angeles JfJ campaign, and advised unions in South Africa and Germany on security worker organizing and in the Netherlands on janitor organizing. In other words, she has had extensive, first-hand experience in helping to develop an open source approach to unionism within and beyond Justice for Janitors.

The SEIU's open source approach to unionism has a decidedly mixed record. For all of the campaign's successes and continued impact on the labor movement, Justice for Janitors fell apart amidst internal conflict in the SEIU and the broader labor movement in the early twenty-first century. Furthermore, open sourced adaptations of the JfJ campaign both in the United States and abroad have faced significant struggles. Nevertheless, I argue that this approach to unionism has incredible potential.

This approach to unionism emerges from the deep-seated and powerful collectivist roots of organized labor and builds upon a longer history of union cooperation, information sharing, and copying. Like the open source software model, this approach to unionism is also decidedly anti-capitalist. In this model, organizers like Alzaga openly share union knowledge with the express purpose of exposing and opposing broad patterns of capitalist, and particularly neoliberal, profiteering at the expense of workers. This model is also decidedly flexible. It thus addresses the immediate neoliberal context of the twenty-first century economy. And most

cooperation, labor scholars have previously identified patterns of unions learning from and consciously copying each other. These scholars, including Kim Voss and Theresa Sharpe, have used sociologist Paul J. DiMaggio and Walter W. Powell's concept of "mimetic isomorphism" to describe this process of copying and subsequent increased similarity between unions. The open source approach to unionism that I explore here thus coincides with what other scholars have described as mimetic isomorphism. In contrast, the "open source" approach to unionism that Alzaga refers to and that I described here differs significantly from the type of unionism centered heavily on using Internet technology that Richard B. Freeman and Joel Rogers call for in their 2002 article "Open Source Unionism: Beyond Exclusive Collective Bargaining." Jamie K. McCallum, *Global Unions, Local Power: The New Spirit of Transnational Labor Organizing* (Ithaca: IRL Press, 2013), 8; Kim Voss and Rachel Sherman, "Breaking the Iron Law of Oligarchy: Union Revitalization in the American Labor Movement," *American Journal of Sociology* 106, no. 2 (September 2000): 339; Richard B. Freeman and Joel Rogers, "Open Source Unionism: Beyond Exclusive Collective Bargaining," *WorkingUSA* 5, no. 4 (Spring 2002): 8-40.

importantly, it offers a pragmatic yet hopeful strategy to work toward and maybe eventually one day realize an alternative to capitalist inequality and exploitation in the future.

In the end, despite moments of hope, the Justice for Janitors campaign did not create a sustainable workers movement, halt the decline of organized labor, or fundamentally alter the balance of power between labor and capital. Instead, Justice for Janitors fell victim to an all-too-common cyclical of pattern of success and possibility but ultimate failure within the U.S. labor movement. Nevertheless, JfJ (especially understood in relation to the UFW campaign that came before it and the labor activism that it inspired) does provide an important source of hope for future struggle. This hope is rooted in the ad-hoc development and also conscientious recognition and deployment of an open source approach to unionism.

As Alzaga asserted nearly a decade after the national Justice for Janitors campaign came to a conclusion in the United States:

No logramos todavía como que entender cuales son los pasos para concretizar toda esa fuerza, toda esa acción, toda esa reacción a una cosa más proactiva. Entonces es un reto pero también es un momento extremadamente importante en términos de tecnología y como organizar y los instrumentos que también son del común y los que tenemos que usar en común.⁴¹ (We still don't successfully understand what the steps are to bring all of this force, all of this action, all of this reaction toward something more proactive. So, it is a challenge but it is also an extremely important moment in terms of technology, and how to organize, and the tools that also are communal and that we must use together.)

⁴¹ Valery Alzaga, "Valery Alzaga intervention," filmed at the L'internationale, European network of museums, and Fundación de los Comunes's "Abduction EU" meeting in Madrid, February 27-March 3, 2014, <https://vimeo.com/107060366>.

Chapter 1

The Roots of the Justice for Janitors Campaign:

Labor Leaders, Social Movement Activists, and Workers Experiment with Union Organizing and Reform Efforts (1980-1985)

In this chapter, I explore the roots of the Justice for Janitors (JfJ) campaign as an experimental response to union decline and neoliberal restructuring. I examine a series of organizing and union reform efforts to address an influx of undocumented workers, an escalation in antiunion hostility, and a rapid decrease in union membership in the United States janitorial industry in the early 1980s. I trace grassroots organizing initiatives from within SEIU locals in San Jose and Los Angeles; AFL-CIO affiliated organizing attempts in Houston through the SEIU's involvement in the Houston Organizing Project; and nationally supported union rebuilding efforts in an SEIU local in Denver. I demonstrate that these organizing and reform efforts intersected to provide the SEIU with a foundation to respond to the recent neoliberal restructuring of the janitorial industry.

I argue that a diverse group of union leaders, social movement activists, and workers found ways to challenge both the intense exploitation of janitors and the decline of union membership in the janitorial industry. Working together and building from each other's efforts, this diverse group collectively developed what would later prove to be a core organizing strategy of the Justice for Janitors campaign. This core organizing strategy had two components. One aspect of the strategy was to build an activist, engaged membership with ties to the local community. The other was to organize all janitors, regardless of their citizenship status, across

an entire geographic market at once through voluntary recognition rather than the traditional National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) election process.

This core strategy directly responded to the neoliberal restructuring of the janitorial industry and its effects. The strategy was rooted in an understanding of the increased complexity of the industry. More specifically, it was rooted in an understanding of the fact that building owners, and not just cleaning contractors, had power over janitors' wages and working conditions. The strategy was also rooted in an understanding that janitors wanted to organize and that existing union members could play an important role in this organizing. At the same time, though, the strategy also recognized that the union needed to facilitate member activism and provide an organizing strategy that could work. Neither existing union members nor unorganized janitors would be receptive to an organizing strategy that promised to leave them vulnerable to hostility and exploitation in an increasingly antiunion industry.

I argue that this core organizing strategy as well as the commitment of union leaders and organizers to experimenting and collaborating around this strategy is crucial to understanding the success and resonance of the Justice for Janitors campaign. The development of this organizing strategy is thus a key component of the history of the JfJ campaign. In other words, the history of the campaign begins much before the first utterances of the slogan "Justice for Janitors."

I also argue that the backstory to the JfJ campaign that I highlight in this chapter is significant for two additional reasons. Firstly, this backstory helps mitigate a long-standing pattern in which the actions and influence of people of color and women are downplayed, omitted, and unrecognized in historical narratives. Scholars and activists have typically identified JfJ as a top-down union campaign that began in the late 1980s under the direction of campaign "architect" Stephen Lerner. The JfJ backstory that I provide in this chapter disrupts

this rather simplistic narrative. While demonstrating the important role that white, male union leaders played in the background to the campaign, this backstory also sheds light on the foundational role that grassroots organizers of color and female activists had in the development of Justice for Janitors.

Secondly, this backstory illuminates the way in which the development of the Justice for Janitors campaign was deeply intertwined with the legacy of Chicax social and political movements and the eventual emergence and growth of a Latinx immigrant rights movement. As I demonstrate below, many of the organizers and activists who laid the foundation for the JfJ campaign had a background in Chicax movement activism. This background clearly influenced these individuals' decisions to become involved in the labor movement and to attempt to organize undocumented workers. It also directly influenced the organizing strategies and tactics that they used. Furthermore, many of the individuals who laid the groundwork for the campaign were part of an emerging Latinx immigrant rights movement. This nascent movement helped link the organizers and activists who experimented with organizing undocumented janitors. It provided them with inspiration and resources to defy deep-seated traditions of exclusivity and conservatism in the labor movement.

These movement connections demonstrate that Justice for Janitors cannot be understood as a stand-alone labor campaign. In many ways, the campaign emerged from some of the best elements of the Chicax movement while moving past some of its limitations. And in the process, the campaign provided an important testing ground and launch pad for future union reform and immigrant organizing. This backstory, then, is key to situating JfJ with a pattern of continuity and adaptation in twentieth century labor and social movement activism.

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As noted in the previous chapter, the Latinx population in the United States grew dramatically in the late twentieth century. Latinxs increased from 4.5 percent of the population in 1970 to 9 percent in 1990. Increased immigration, and especially undocumented immigration, from Mexico and Central America was a major contributor to this population growth.

This uptick in immigration stemmed from a combination of political and economic developments within the United States, Mexico, and Central America. Implemented in 1942 in the United States, the Bracero Program increased both authorized and unauthorized migration from Mexico to the United States. This program, which has been identified as a “precursor to neoliberal economic practices,” was eliminated in 1964. The following year, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (also known as the Hart Cellar Act) imposed a cap on immigration from within the Western Hemisphere to the United States for the first time. Rather than decreasing the Mexican immigrant population in the United States, however, these legislative changes disrupted historic patterns of back-and-forth migration across the U.S.–Mexico border. At the same time, the demand for cheap labor in the United States did not decline. This resulted in an increase in one-way, undocumented migration from Mexico to the United States in the late 1960s. Then, in the 1970s and 1980s, immigration from Central America increased as well. During these decades hundreds of thousands of Central Americans came to the U.S., both with and without documentation, to escape political unrest and violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua.¹

With limited economic opportunities, undocumented Latinx immigrants gained a foothold in many low-wage, service industries in the United States during the 1970s and 1980s.

¹ Daniel J. Tichenor, *Dividing Lines: The Politics of Immigration Control in America*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2002); David G. Gutiérrez, “An Historic Overview of Latino Immigration and the Demographic Transformation of the United States,” in *American Latinos and the Making of the United States: A Theme Study* (Washington D.C.: National Park Service and Organization of American Historians, 2013): 57-74.

As noted previously, the janitorial industry was one of these industries. During this period, many cleaning contractors purposively hired undocumented Latinx immigrants as cheap, exploitable workers who would clean for a fraction of the wages that the predominantly native-born African American and white union janitors earned.

As the number of undocumented workers in the janitorial industry (and many other service industries) increased, much of the mainstream labor movement regarded these workers with hostility. Many labor leaders and members recognized the threat to wage and working condition standards that these workers posed but considered them unorganizable. Beginning in the 1970s, however, a few mainstream unions started to challenge this perspective and attempted to organize undocumented immigrant workers. The ILGWU, for example, made headlines in 1975 when its union leaders publicly announced their intentions of organizing undocumented garment workers.² The SEIU did not make such a broad, public commitment to organizing undocumented workers in the 1970s. Nevertheless, SEIU leaders and organizers began experimenting with efforts to reach out to these workers on a local level in the janitorial industry in the early 1980s.

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A key pioneer in these early SEIU efforts to organize undocumented janitors was Mike Garcia in San Jose SEIU Local 77. Mike Garcia grew up in a working class family in Southern California and began working at age sixteen. One of his first jobs was working as a night janitor. As a janitor, he learned the difficulty of this work and witnessed the exploitation of low-skilled workers. After graduating high school, Garcia struggled to find a clear path in either college or the workforce until he met Professor Rudy Acuña and was introduced to the Chicano Studies

² Frank Del Olmo, “Illegal Aliens Target of Union Organizers: Garment Workers Break Labor Ranks, Blame Immigration and Hiring Policies,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 30, 1975.

program at California State University Northridge (CSUN). Under Acuña's mentorship, Garcia developed a strong interest in understanding and addressing the needs of the Chicano community. He earned his undergraduate degree and entered a master's program in social work at San Jose State. While he was pursuing his master's degree, Mike Garcia met many of the local labor activists in San Jose and decided to take a job that would provide him with an even more direct avenue to addressing community needs. He began working as a business agent at Local 77 in 1980 and, from this union staff position, began a concerted effort to build connections between the local and a growing undocumented janitorial workforce.³

In pursuing this work, Mike Garcia had more than just his work and education experiences from which to draw. He also had the resources of an active and diverse, albeit rather politically dysfunctional, local. While originally dominated by Italian Americans, Local 77 had a diverse janitorial membership that included Mexican, Filipino, and Portuguese workers as early as the 1960s. (Most janitor locals, in contrast, had primarily white and then African American membership up until the late 1970s and 1980s.) The local also had an active group of leftist workers who organized as the League of Revolutionary Workers. This leftist group helped mount a struggle against inefficiency and nepotism in Local 77 leadership in the early 1970s. As a result of this internal struggle, the International SEIU placed the local in trusteeship and helped introduce a new, more progressive slate of leaders to the local.⁴ Coming out of the trusteeship in 1979, Local 77 elected Charles Perkel to lead the local. Perkel was a union representative who had been active in the civil rights and anti-war movements as well as in the Communist Party

³ Nancy Cleeland, "Leader of the Revolutionary Pack: Mike Garcia And His Janitors' Union Are Breathing New Life Into the U.S. Labor Movement," *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 2000.

⁴ The power of the International SEIU leadership to trustee local unions was the one major limitation to SEIU locals' autonomy during this period. Although locals had a legal right to oppose a trusteeship, International leaders could quickly and easily depose local leaders within a trustee local and place a new, more compliant set of leaders within the local. As will be detailed in future chapters, trusteeships could be an effective tool to root out local corruption and encourage organizing-centered union reform and activism. Trusteeships also, however, represented a threat to union democracy.

before joining the organized labor movement. The leadership struggle in Local 77 thus paved the way for new, progressive leadership and provided an opening for Mike Garcia to join Local 77 staff.⁵

With Perkel's support, Mike Garcia began reaching out to undocumented immigrant janitors in San Jose. From his initial efforts, Garcia discovered that these workers were extremely vulnerable due to employers' constant threats of deportation. This vulnerability could not be ignored or easily addressed through traditional organizing strategies. Garcia also learned, however, that these workers' vulnerable status was not insurmountable. Being both patient and persistent, Garcia began developing a strategy for effectively organizing undocumented workers in 1980. The key elements of this strategy were: (1) reaching out to undocumented workers in their native language; (2) providing worker rights education and immigration counseling services to build a rapport between the union and the larger immigrant community;⁶ (3) targeting all of the buildings that had contracts with a particular nonunion contractor at once, rather than the traditional strategy of targeting one building at a time; and (4) making the exploitation of janitors and these targeted organizing drives public through community and media involvement. This experimental organizing strategy helped Mike Garcia and Local 77 address and ameliorate the intense exploitation of undocumented workers. By building a relationship with the larger immigrant community, targeting multiple buildings at once, and making the labor struggle a public issue, Local 77 built strength and power in numbers as well as public accountability for undocumented janitors.⁷

⁵ Local 77 files, 1980-1987, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 16, Folders 21-24, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Paul Johnston, "Custodians of the Valley" in *Success While Others Fail: Social Movement Unionism and the Public Workplace* (Ithaca: IRL Press, 1994), 146-174; Charles Perkel, "A Slice of Life: Our Change," *L'Chaim Weekly*, September 20, 1996.

⁶ As part of this strategy, Local 77 began training staff members to serve as immigration counselors.

⁷ "Exploitation of Undocumented Workers Worsens Conditions in SEIU Industries," *Leadership News Update*, October 1980 in SEIU Publications, Box 11, Folder 41, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban

The need for this new organizing strategy grew even more urgent in Local 77 as a result of a difficult contract negotiation in 1981. With a growing number of nonunion contractors emerging to take advantage of cheap immigrant labor, Local 77's bargaining power was weak. From this weakened position, the local conceded to a "new member advancement program" in contract bargaining with union firms in 1981. This program allowed unionized firms to pay newly hired janitors at lower rates for a four-year "apprenticeship" period.⁸

While this concession marked a significant failure for the local, Local 77 janitors did not give up. Instead, they worked to continue developing and implementing Garcia's new strategy—not just to organize undocumented immigrants but also to create greater power for all janitors. The local continued building ties with the surrounding community. Local leaders and members reached out to local churches, immigrant associations, local politicians and other local labor organizations. Through this outreach, Local 77 leaders and members helped frame janitors' struggles as a community issue rather than just a workplace issue. They sought to present Local 77 and the larger community as allies in a broad struggle against exploitation. Mike Garcia, in particular, helped develop this alliance with the local community through his participation in debates over the proposed Simpson-Mazzoli immigration bill.⁹ Taking a vocal stance against this bill, Garcia demonstrated Local 77's allegiance with the local immigrant community.

Affairs, Wayne State University; Richard Mines and Jeffrey Avina, "Immigrants and Labor Standards: The Case of California Janitors," in *US-Mexico Relations: Labor Market Interdependence* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 429-488.

⁸ Under this new membership advancement program, newly hired janitors were paid a percentage of more senior janitors' wages. In the first year, they were paid seventy percent of the wages. In the second year, they were paid eighty percent, and in the third they were paid ninety percent. Only in their fourth year did janitors earn full wages. As Richard Mines and Jeffrey Avina argued in "Immigrants and Labor Standards: The Case of California Janitors," this new member advancement program essentially created a two-tier wage system for San Jose union janitors.

⁹ This bill was eventually passed as the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986. The bill provided amnesty opportunities for undocumented immigrants who had migrated to the United States before 1982, but the bill also required employers to attest to the citizenship status of their employees and criminalized the hiring of undocumented workers.

While building strategic community support, the local launched “harassment campaigns” against nonunion contractors. The local used some traditional labor tactics in these campaigns, such as picketing and filing charges against the contractors with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). But Local 77 leaders also employed additional more innovative strategies to put pressure on the contractors. For example, Mike Garcia reached out directly to building managers that had contracts with nonunion cleaning companies as well as to managers that might be tempted to switch to nonunion cleaning companies. He urged them to offer fair wages and working conditions to janitors. The local reinforced Garcia’s direct outreach to building managers by orchestrating letter-writing campaigns to the managers. The local also held rallies at the buildings where managers used nonunion contractors. With these rallies, Local 77 janitors were able to capitalize on the ties that they had been building with the local community and publicize their labor struggle as an issue that affected the community as a whole. As Mike Garcia described at the time, “When Local 77 calls a rally to put heat on a situation, both the Labor and Latino Communities respond because the action is perceived as a social cause. This is power...”¹⁰ Ultimately, Local 77’s nascent harassment campaign strategy proved moderately effective. Local 77 managed to keep the growth of nonunion contractors in check and maintain a strong presence within the industry in the early 1980s. The local did not, however, succeed in organizing many new janitors during this period.¹¹

This struggle to organize new workers even at great effort was symptomatic of a growing disjuncture between the intention and effect of the National Labor Relations Act in the second half of the twentieth century. Passed in 1935, the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA)

¹⁰ Local 77 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 16, Folders 21, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

¹¹ Local 77 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 16, Folders 19 and 21, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

established a set of basic worker organizing rights and a system for collective bargaining between workers and employees. The act also established a government agency, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), to oversee the unionization and collective bargaining process. In the economic and political context of the 1930s and 1940s, the NLRA proved effective for many workers. In factory settings and even in the service economy, a relatively direct relationship existed between workers and their employers. As such, workers could easily identify their employers and demand protections and collective bargaining under the NLRA. Additionally, under the mostly pro-labor government of the New Deal coalition, the government-appointed National Labor Relations Board adjudicated collective bargaining fairly and upheld the protections of the NLRA. Beginning in the late 1950s, however, the efficacy of the NLRA for workers declined.

During the second half of the twentieth century, deindustrialization, the growth of contract service work, and the emergence of large transnational corporations created an economy in which the relationship between workers and employers was often much more complex. For example, as mentioned in the introduction, most building owners directly employed janitors in the first half of the twentieth century. In the second half of the century, however, building owners often hired cleaning contractors and thus only indirectly employed janitors. The NLRA only addresses the relationship between workers and their immediate employers. As such, when janitors in the 1970s sought to bargain with their employer, the NLRA only facilitated bargaining with the cleaning contractor, not the building owner. This created a situation where janitors could successfully negotiate a union contract with their cleaning contractor employer only to lose their job if the building owner did not want to pay the higher cost of a unionized contractor.

Furthermore, janitors' ability to even organize and win a union contract with a cleaning contractor was diminished during this period. The fracturing of the New Deal coalition in the 1960s created an opening for the rise of anti-labor conservatism in the U.S. government, marked most famously by Reagan's firing of striking air traffic controllers in 1981. In the midst of this political climate, collective bargaining under the supervision of the government-appointed NLRB became less effective for workers. What had once been a relatively quick and fair organizing and bargaining process under the NLRB became a drawn-out, bureaucratic process that ended more often in favor of capital rather than labor. In the time that it took to organize under the NLRB, cleaning contractors could mount swift, effective antiunion campaigns amongst their workers, targeting janitors' immigration status and livelihood to quell union activity.

While Mike Garcia and Local 77 janitors struggled to make headway in organizing new workers, the opening of the local's master contract¹² in August of 1984 became a crucial test to their ability to at least prevent further union erosion. By 1984 over thirty percent of San Jose's union janitors were earning reduced wages as a result of Local 77's aforementioned concession to a new member advancement program in 1981. The city's cleaning contractors demanded even more concessions, such as higher premiums for health care benefits, in the 1984 contract negotiation. The janitors, however, wanted to refuse all givebacks and to eliminate the new member advancement program. With the cleaning contractors and janitors so far apart in their demands, negotiations dragged on for four months. At three different points, Local 77 President Charles Perkel offered a proposed settlement to janitors, urging them to settle rather than risk striking. All three times the janitors refused. Eventually, in mid-December, Perkel conceded to the janitors walking out on strike.

¹² A master contract, or master agreement, is a union contract negotiated through collective bargaining that applies to all of a local's unionized worksites and sets standard wage and working conditions for all unionized workers in an industry.

Drawing on the tactics that they had developed in the nonunion contractor harassment campaigns, the striking janitors framed their strike as a social cause. The janitors' main slogan on the picket lines during the strike was "Janitors demand respect!" While the strike was clearly rooted in their tangible economic demands such as the elimination of the new member program, the janitors highlighted the lack of respect and dignity that they experienced both in their low-wage jobs and at the hands of contractors constantly demanding concessions. The janitors displayed great militancy and dedication during the strike, rallying behind Mike Garcia's leadership. Nevertheless, having begun the strike less than two weeks before Christmas, the janitors faced extreme economic pressure to reach a settlement. After eight days on strike, they reached a settlement on management terms. The janitors won a small raise, but health care premiums increased and the new member advancement program remained.

In the wake of this settlement, Local 77 became embroiled in a leadership crisis in 1985. Disgruntled with Perkel's leadership, particularly his role in the failed contract negotiations, the Local 77 membership passed a nonconfidence vote against Perkel and demanded Mike Garcia as the new local president. Fearful of growing political strife and unrest in the local, the International SEIU placed Local 77 in trusteeship.

In assessing the local prior to trusteeship, SEIU Organizing Director Andy Stern wrote to SEIU President John Sweeney about Mike Garcia's recent leadership in the local. He asserted: "I should say Mike Garcia probably has the possibility to be the best Hispanic leader I've seen in SEIU, but we must test his loyalty."¹³ In other words, Stern clearly recognized the value of Garcia's leadership and the potential that Garcia could have within the union. At the same time, Stern clearly defined Garcia as an outsider who could not be fully trusted. Mike Garcia had

¹³ Local 77 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 16, Folders 20, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

refused to lead the membership's ouster of Perkel, but Stern was concerned that Garcia might "get greedy" and make a bid for the Local 77 presidency, which would further disrupt the local. Ultimately, Stern removed Garcia from the local and sent him to work with another local, Local 102 in San Diego, which was also struggling in the midst of a growing undocumented workforce. While his initial efforts in Local 77 clearly did not succeed as he had hoped, Garcia remained confident in his goal of organizing undocumented janitors and began setting the groundwork to continue developing his organizing strategy in Local 102.¹⁴

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Mike Garcia and Local 77's experiments with organizing undocumented workers and efforts to fight against industry changes were not a complete anomaly in the early 1980s. During the same period, Local 399 in Los Angeles also mounted a grassroots effort to organize undocumented janitors and build ties with the growing immigrant community. At the time, much of Local 399's African American janitorial membership viewed incoming immigrant janitors as scabs who needed to be pushed out of the industry rather than organized and incorporated into the union. Nevertheless, the local had a brief history of trying to organize undocumented immigrants in the hospital industry¹⁵ and thus had a few leaders and staff members who were open to organizing and even hiring undocumented workers.

One of these leaders was Local 399's Secretary-Treasurer Gloria Marigny. In 1981, Marigny hired a new organizer for the building service industry. This organizer, Ben Monterroso, was a recent undocumented immigrant from Guatemala who could more easily

¹⁴ Local 77 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 16, Folders 20, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Richard Mines and Jeffrey Avina, "Immigrants and Labor Standards: The Case of California Janitors," in *US-Mexico Relations: Labor Market Interdependence* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 429-488; Paul Johnston, "Custodians of the Valley" in *Success While Others Fail: Social Movement Unionism and the Public Workplace* (Ithaca: IRL Press, 1994), 146-174.

¹⁵ Frank Del Olmo, "\$1 Million Union Drive Aimed at Hospital Workers," *Los Angeles Times*, February 13, 1975.

communicate with and relate to the growing Latinx immigrant workforce than Local 399's existing staff.¹⁶ Even with his background, however, Monterroso struggled at times to connect with the Latinx workforce. As the number of janitors from Guatemala and El Salvador increased, tension between these Central American janitors and Mexican janitors grew. Monterroso received some unconventional help with this from a long-time African American union representative named Bill Gibson. For example, in one instance when Monterroso was struggling to deal with a fight that broke out between Central American and Mexican janitors, Bill Gibson unceremoniously asserted: "Cut out all this Guatemalan, Mexican, and Salvadoran shit. You're all a bunch of wetbacks as far as the white man is concerned."¹⁷ With comments such as this, Bill Gibson essentially urged janitors to understand their shared vulnerability rather than to focus on their nationalities as markers of difference and a point of contention. Gibson urged them to unite against the white contractors who were responsible for the poor wages and working conditions that *all* Latinx immigrant janitors experienced. This sort of informal worker education and emphasis on shared vulnerability would become a key part of the janitor organizing strategy that emerged from local efforts to form the foundation of the Justice for Janitors campaign.

As Gibson and Monterroso worked to educate and unify immigrant janitors against a common enemy, they discovered that Los Angeles immigrant janitors were easy organizing targets. News of their organizing efforts quickly spread through familial contacts, and Local 399 was soon receiving requests from immigrant janitors for help with organizing. Partnering with

¹⁶ For more on Monterroso's background, see Liz Goodwin, "The Faces of Amnesty: Six Immigrants' Stories," *Yahoo News*, February 13, 2013.

¹⁷ David Stilwell, conversation with the author, November 10, 2016.

these workers, Local 399 succeeded in mounting several organizing drives in the early 1980s, even winning a couple NLRB elections.¹⁸

While building ties with immigrant janitors at the workplace, Local 399 also developed ties to an emerging network of Mexican American, refugee, and immigrant rights organizations. This network was developing around increasingly pressing issues of undocumented worker rights and immigration law reform, which were clearly relevant to Local 399's struggles with Los Angeles' transforming janitorial workforce. Local 399 helped connect their members with the resources of this network. In 1984, for example, Local 399 held an "Immigrant Worker Harassment" seminar with speakers from the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF), the National Center for Immigrants' Rights, and the General American Refugee Center. Following the seminar, Local 399 published in the local's newspaper a comprehensive list of local organizations that offered free immigration-related assistance. The local also published an article on immigration law and what immigrant workers should do when approached by INS. Through efforts such as this, Local 399 began laying the groundwork for a mutually beneficial relationship between the union and the immigrant community of Los Angeles.¹⁹

Even with this important work being done amongst immigrant workers, however, Local 399 (much like Local 77 in San Jose) struggled to make headway in contract negotiations. Even when janitors won NLRB elections, they failed to achieve first contracts. Furthermore,

¹⁸ Although they did achieve some success in their organizing efforts, Local 399 union representatives struggled much like Mike Garcia in Local 77 to organize under the NLRB. Speaking retrospectively, then-Local 399 union representative Dave Stilwell described their early strategy of attempting to organize individual cleaning contractors through the NLRB as a "complete fool's errand." David Stilwell, conversation with the author, November 10, 2016.

¹⁹ "Underpaid maintenance workers at Mattel organize under Maintenance Division Banner" *Voice of Local 399* 5, no. 12 (December 1981); "Local 399 Gives Opportunity to Maintenance Workers" *Voice of Local 399* 6, no. 8 (August 1982); "Harassment of immigrant workers is subject of union legal seminar" and "Free Legal Assistance Available" *Voice of Local 399* 8, no. 8 (August 1984) in SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folders 9-10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

concession bargaining became the new status quo in the janitorial industry. Local 399 had a long history of industry power through the 1960s and 1970s, but the unchecked growth of nonunion contractors in an expanding real estate market left Local 399 in a weak position in the early 1980s. In backroom negotiations, Local 399's vice president tried to prevent a total decimation of the union's market share by agreeing to side deals that allowed unionized contractors to pay wages below what had been negotiated in the local's master contract. The logic behind these side deals was that they prevented unionized contractors from being pushed entirely out of the market: the side deals were designed to allow the union contractors to better compete with nonunion contractors and keep a foothold in the industry. Even while employing this side deal strategy, however, Local 399 continued to lose control of the industry. At the same time, the local lost the faith of the janitorial membership who understandably felt as though Local 399 leaders were selling them out.²⁰

This quandary of bargaining in the midst of industry transformation and growing anti-unionism was not unique to the California janitorial industry. Instead, it was part and parcel of the intense difficulty that unions faced amidst a broad shift toward neoliberal capitalism within the United States. As recent labor scholarship has documented, U.S. unions were forced into a rather insular, bureaucratic, firm-centered form of unionism often referred to as "business unionism" in the post-WWII era. Taking hold in the wake of the passage of the Taft Hartley Act in 1947, this depoliticized form of unionism led unions to focus on servicing existing members rather than on organizing new members or challenging the socioeconomic status quo. With business unionism deeply entrenched in the mainstream organized labor movement, union

²⁰ David Stilwell, conversation with the author, November 10, 2016; Richard Mines and Jeffrey Avina, "Immigrants and Labor Standards: The Case of California Janitors," in *US-Mexico Relations: Labor Market Interdependence* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 429-488.

membership declined throughout the second half of the twentieth century and left unions extremely vulnerable to neoliberal restructuring in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Unions that tried to fight back against this restructuring found themselves at an extreme disadvantage. As deindustrialization, outsourcing, subcontracting, and antiunion hostility became the norm throughout the country, unions everywhere faced similar challenges: they either agreed to givebacks and concessions or they risked employers downsizing, outsourcing, or otherwise shutting-down union work. The janitorial industry is a geographically fixed industry with work that cannot be moved overseas. Nevertheless, due to an “in-sourcing” of cheap, exploitable immigrant labor, SEIU’s janitor locals found themselves in the same conundrum as unions in organized labor’s traditional manufacturing industry strongholds during this period.²¹

Ultimately then, Local 77 and Local 399’s struggles to organize janitors and negotiate contracts in the early 1980s provide a glimpse into how a particular group of local leaders and workers dealt with large-scale socioeconomic transformations and an erosion of union power in the late twentieth century. The history of these locals in the 1980s demonstrates that some union leaders and workers worked to take advantage of grassroots resources and opportunities and fight against increased janitor exploitation in a rapidly changing building service industry. In this fight, these leaders and janitors developed new organizing strategies that defied the insularity and bureaucracy of the traditional organized labor movement. They welcomed undocumented immigrants, built ties with community organizations, framed organizing and contract struggles as a social cause, targeted nonunion contractors rather than individual buildings, and pressured contractors’ clients (building owners and managers). These tactics represented an experimental, nascent union response to neoliberal restructuring. Local 77 and Local 399 leaders and workers

²¹ For more information on the “postwar retreat” of organized labor in the midst of capital hostility in the second half of the twentieth century, see Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

started honing in on the complex, intersectional sources of janitor vulnerability and exploitation in the wake of industry restructuring. More importantly, they started developing a strategy to ameliorate this vulnerability and exploitation. At the same, however, Local 77 and Local 399's struggles in the early 1980s demonstrate the immense difficulty that janitor locals and all unions had to contend with during this period. Faced with limited resources as well as internal conflicts between and amongst workers and leaders, local efforts to fight against declining union membership, wages, and working conditions and against growing exploitation in the janitorial industry largely failed.

While Local 77 and Local 399 leaders and janitors were engaged in grassroots organizing and bargaining experiments, janitors in other areas of the country became part of union organizing and reform experiments initiated from above, both from the AFL-CIO and the International level of the SEIU. As will be detailed below, these janitor organizing and bargaining experiments had their own inefficiencies and obstacles preventing easy success. At the same time, though, local leaders and janitors engaged in these experiments had extensive financial and personnel resources that facilitated important strategic developments in an emerging union response to janitor vulnerability and exploitation. Ultimately, these top-down initiated experiments aligned with the grassroots initiative of local activists and militant janitors to lay additional groundwork for the development of Justice for Janitors.

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In late 1981, AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland announced the start of a new organizing drive: the Houston Organizing Project. This project, which rested on the joint funding and cooperation of several international unions in the AFL-CIO, was essentially designed to follow some of the job flight from the unionized Northeast into the "right-to-work" South. This project,

then, much like the grassroots organizing efforts in Local 77 and Local 399, emerged in response to broad socioeconomic transformations. For much of the twentieth century, the South had served an important role in capital flight from the industrialized and unionized Northeast. Previous union efforts to organize the South, most notably the CIO's Operation Dixie in the 1940s, had failed. Because of this, the South functioned as a right-to-work haven and experienced job growth in the late twentieth century. The city of Houston, in particular, had an economic boom in the 1970s and was being lauded as a "new Detroit." As jobs expanded in the city, the small percentage of unionized workers in the city declined even further. From his leadership position in the AFL-CIO, Lane Kirkland decided to spearhead an effort to do something about this: he helped organize the Houston Organizing Project (HOP). With a yearly budget of over a million dollars, this project marked a sizable attempt to establish a union foothold in the South and thus challenge both a long history of and recent escalation in union membership decline in the United States.²²

The SEIU was one of the unions that participated in the Houston Organizing Project by providing financial support as well as organizers. Most of the SEIU's involvement in the Houston Organizing Project centered on health care organizing; however, the union also hired and funded an organizer named Lencho Hernandez to unionize janitors in Houston. Hernandez had a strong background in labor organizing and Chicano movement activism. (His leadership efforts in a strike of Mexican furniture workers in the 1960s caught the attention and earned the support of Cesar Chavez).²³ Much like Cesar Chavez, though, Hernandez had a rather traditional labor view toward undocumented workers: he saw them as a threat to the wages and working

²² Wade Rathke, "Labor's Failure in the South," in *American Crisis, Southern Solutions: From where We Stand, Peril and Promise* (Montgomery: New South Books, 2008), 169-189; Scott Armstrong, "Rustlin' up new members proves slow for unions," *Christian Science Monitor*, October 5, 1982.

²³ For more on Lencho Hernandez see Paige Moore, "Lawrence Hernandez," courtesy of the VOCES Oral History Project, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin.

conditions of existing workers. To Hernandez, calling the INS seemed like a more reasonable strategy than looking for ways to organize undocumented immigrants. Under his leadership, janitor organizing in Houston made little headway. This changed, however, when Hernandez fortuitously met another individual who had a background in the Chicax movement and had recently moved to Houston: Sandra Spector, née Garza.²⁴

Upon meeting Hernandez and learning about his struggle to organize janitors, Sandra Spector offered to lend her support. Her first course of action involved reaching out to and building a relationship with the undocumented workers in downtown Houston. Spector's welcoming attitude toward these workers was a clear product of her rather unique background and experiences in the Chicax movement.

Spector grew up in South Texas and became aware of the struggles of Mexican Americans at a young age. She first became involved in the Chicax movement through her cousins who were farm workers that participated in the La Casita melon strike in Starr County, Texas in 1966. Her subsequent involvement in the Chicax movement, however, was somewhat limited when she married and had her first child. Her husband was an activist involved in the Texas La Raza Unida Party (LRUP), but like many of his counterparts in the movement, he did not support his wife as an activist. He believed her role was to stay home and take care of the baby. Spector, however, resisted this role and developed an influential relationship with Nita Gonzales, the daughter of Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales. (Corky Gonzales was a prominent Chicax movement activist, who founded and led the Colorado community organization Crusade for Justice.) With Nita Gonzales' help, Spector left her husband and moved to Colorado.

²⁴ Sandra Spector, interview by Kent Kirkton, Tom & Ethel Bradley Center, California State University Northridge, July 26, 2012 and January 24, 2013; Hank Albarelli files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 99, Folder 14, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

In Colorado, Spector started working on the Crusade for Justice's newspaper *El Gallo* and attending the organization's Escuela Tlateloco. At the Escuela, she had an opportunity to meet activists who had lived through the Tlateloco Massacre in Mexico City in 1968. Through these individuals, she was exposed to an internationalist and Marxist ideology that conflicted with the intense nationalism of some elements of the mainstream Chicana movement. Spector found an international, worker-oriented movement ideology both convincing and liberating in comparison to the hierarchical and often sexist Chicana nationalism in both LRUP and the Crusade for Justice. Seeking a more open environment, she left Colorado for New Mexico and began working for on another Chicana movement newspaper, *El Grito del Norte*, with Chicana feminist Elizabeth "Betita" Martinez. From New Mexico, she returned to Texas for a short period before becoming involved in coalition work supporting the American Indian Movement in Seattle.

In Seattle, Spector met Antonio Rodriguez, a Los Angeles lawyer and central member of the Centro de Acción Social Autónomo (CASA). Rodriguez recruited Spector to work for CASA in San Antonio. Originally founded as a social welfare organization in 1968, CASA developed and expanded as a legal resource center for Mexican American immigrants. In the 1970s and into the 1980s, CASA established autonomous affiliates in Colorado, Illinois, Texas, and Washington. In many ways, CASA was ahead of its time in its position on immigration. From the very beginning of the organization's history, CASA leaders argued that Latinxs in the United States should find common cause with immigrants from Latin America—regardless of their citizenship status. With this background, CASA was arguably the most progressive group advocating for the defense and organization of undocumented workers in the United States

during the 1970s and 1980s.²⁵ Fitting with her work in CASA, Sandra Spector also took a job with the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union organizing undocumented workers in San Antonio.

Through the ILGWU, Spector developed first-hand experience working with but also struggling against the mainstream organized labor movement. From her position in the union, Spector fought against the AFL-CIO's support for sanctions against employers who hired undocumented workers—much like Mike Garcia did in opposing the Simpson-Mazzoli Bill from within SEIU Local 77. After marrying her second husband, Carlos Spector Calderon, Sandra Spector left San Antonio for Houston. Her interest in organizing workers and countering the union status quo, however, did not go away. Her desire to continue her activism spurred her to help Lencho Hernandez with his work on the Houston Organizing Project.

Spector's rich activist background, and particularly her prior experience organizing undocumented workers, proved to be a great asset to Hernandez and the SEIU's role in the Houston Organizing Project. Taking initiative despite her lack of an official connection to the SEIU or HOP, Spector started reaching out to Houston's undocumented janitors through community organizing tactics: rather than approaching janitors at the workplace, she made house visits. In these house visits, she discovered a very divided workforce. She discovered conflict between janitors of different nationalities as well as related conflict over the fact that many male janitors viewed women only as sex objects. As Spector was trying to bring these workers together, she had to confront, for example, Mexican immigrant janitors saying, "Oh we don't want to work with the Salvadoreños. They used to come and steal our women," while

²⁵ For more on CASA and other key Chicana movement organizations such as the Crusade for Justice within the context of debates over immigration, see David G. Gutiérrez, "*Sin Fronteras?: Chicanos, Mexican Americans, and the Emergence of the Contemporary Mexican Immigration Debate, 1968–1978*," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 10, no. 4 (Summer 1991): 5–37.

Salvadoran janitors asserted, “We don’t like those stupid Mexicans.” Spector—who had her own history of confronting intersecting issues of nationalism and sexism—did not get discouraged in the face of this conflict. Instead, she patiently continued to meet with workers and educate them on the value of developing a united front against their shared economic exploitation. Eventually, Spector started to make headway.

As the likelihood of organizing these janitors became a real possibility, their vulnerability as undocumented workers subject to the INS weighed heavily on Spector. To address this issue, she turned to her husband, an attorney who worked for Texas Congressman Mickey Leland and was active in a local immigrant organization called the Union for the Defense and Education of Latinos (UDEL). Together, Spector and her husband came up with a plan to help protect Houston’s janitors. Following a strategic course of action for which CASA was known, they helped educate Houston’s immigrant workers in a “know your rights” campaign. They also sought to provide these immigrant workers with assurance that they would not be deported for union activity. To gain this assurance, Spector appealed directly to the SEIU. She asked the union to assume financial responsibility for the risk that the janitors would take by organizing: she asked that the union would promise to pay these workers’ bonds if they were detained by INS as part of their organizing efforts. The SEIU agreed.

With this assurance from the SEIU, the Houston janitor organizing drive gained in size and momentum. Spector and her husband enlisted help from other Chicana activist friends, Maria Jimenez and Eddie Canales, to develop the organizing drive. Together, they held know your rights classes with workers and made both house and workplace visits. As their relationships with workers deepened, they began focusing on a set of four downtown Houston buildings, the Allen Center buildings, which were cleaned by janitors who worked for American

Building Maintenance (ABM). While narrowing their organizing focus, the growing group of activist organizers continued to develop a holistic relationship with the local community. They offered immigrant rights education to the surrounding community and partnered with local food banks to help feed workers and their families as they dedicated more time to organizing.²⁶

Beyond developing a strong foundation of support in Houston, Spector also looked outward for additional sources of support. Building on her already rich ties to an activist community, Spector (along with Lencho Hernandez) requested support from the SEIU to attend an “Organizing Undocumented Workers” seminar held by the National Lawyers Guild in Los Angeles on May 18, 1985. Speakers at this seminar included Spector’s former CASA colleague Antonio Rodriguez and Local 399’s Ben Monterroso. This seminar, along with similar conclaves held elsewhere in the country in this period, indicates that an immigrant rights activist community was developing in the early to mid-1980s. This community emerged amidst an intersection of the labor movement, the Chicana movement, and a steady increase of the immigrant workforce in the United States. Spector ensured that she was a part of this community and thus had the opportunity to build on other activists’ organizing efforts and experiences.

Starting in the spring of 1985, Spector’s leadership and the growing strength and dedication of the Houston janitors she helped organize began to pay off. In May, the janitors at one of the four ABM buildings petitioned for an NLRB election for union representation. ABM launched an antiunion campaign in response. The company distributed flyers that noted SEIU President Sweeney’s annual salary of over \$100,000 and suggested that union organizers were only interested in organizing janitors because union dues helped pay their salaries. Despite this

²⁶ Sandra Spector, interview by Kent Kirkton, Tom & Ethel Bradley Center, California State University Northridge, July 26, 2012 and January 24, 2013.

antiunion propaganda, the janitors seeking unionization won the election by a clear margin: 50-17. This was a remarkable victory that reflected the hard work and dedication of Spector, her activist colleagues, and the community of workers that they helped unify.

Sandra Spector sought to build on the momentum of this win and worked with janitors to begin preparing for an election at another ABM building. Drawing on the resources of the local community, they began holding meetings in a local church when the weather grew too cold for outdoor gatherings. They also used local support to provide a boost of holiday spirit to workers near Christmas. With a borrowed costume and donated gifts, Carlos Spector dressed up as Santa Claus and made house visits with his wife, handing out presents to janitors' children. As Sandra Spector recalls, this was a truly memorable experience: she will never forget the awe and joy she saw on the children's faces as they received gifts from Santa. Soon after this event—only two days before Christmas—the janitors at a second ABM building won an NLRB election.

Unsurprisingly, ABM officials were unwilling to stand idly by in the face of this assault on their nonunion operating profits. The company filed objections with the NLRB in an effort to invalidate the representation elections that the janitors had won. As this objection process dragged on (in a pattern typical for the NLRB), ABM turned to a speedier solution to crush the building power and momentum of the union.²⁷

At 11:30 pm on January 23, 1986, Antonio Gallo, a Salvadoran janitor who had taken a leadership role in the organizing drive, called Sandra Spector in a panic: the INS was raiding the two unionized ABM buildings. Spector rushed to the buildings along with her husband and

²⁷ Hank Albarelli files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 99, Folder 14; Hank Albarelli files, 1986 SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 102, Folder 12, Walter P. Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Sandra Spector, interview by Kent Kirkton, Tom & Ethel Bradley Center, California State University Northridge, July 26, 2012 and January 24, 2013.

Eddie Canales. When they arrived, they saw INS agents loading workers into several trucks. They shouted at workers to remember their rights and tried to find access into the buildings where several workers were still hiding. Soon INS officials threatened to have them arrested as well. Knowing that the detained janitors would need their help, the Spectors and Canales left the worksite and started gearing up to fight the workers' deportation. By the time the INS left the buildings, they had detained sixty-nine workers: fifty Mexican citizens, eighteen Salvadoran citizens, and one Honduran citizen.

Sandra Spector's first action was to call the SEIU. She asked the union to follow through on the promise to pay the janitors' bonds. The SEIU, however, was reticent to follow through, calling attention to the high cost of paying bail for such a large number of workers. Spector, however, was unwilling to accept anything less than the union's full support. She and her husband started reaching out to all of their ties in the legal community and enlisting their help in pressuring SEIU. With lawyers calling union leaders and threatening to hold press conferences to expose their broken promise to help protect janitors, the SEIU finally agreed to pay the janitors' bonds. By this point, forty of the originally detained workers, all from Mexico, decided to sign voluntary deportation papers. They were bused the next day to the Mexican border (and likely to attempt crossing back into the United States soon). The rest of the workers refused voluntary deportation. For the Salvadoran workers in particular, deportation to their war-torn home country posed a distinct threat to their lives. The SEIU posted bail for these janitors at a cost of nearly \$1,000 per person. With their bail posted, these workers were able to return home while their legal cases against deportation were processed.²⁸

²⁸ Sandra Spector, interview by Kent Kirkton, Tom & Ethel Bradley Center, California State University Northridge, July 26, 2012 and January 24, 2013; Kim Cobb, "Labor leaders call INS roundup 'union-busting' scheme," *Houston Chronicle*, January 26, 1986; "When the Boss Called La Migra," *Service Employee* 45, no. 6 (April/May 1986) in

Even though the union provided this help to the detained immigrants, the raid created a huge blow to the excitement and momentum that was building amongst Houston janitors. Sandra Spector and the janitors, however, did not give up. They filed charges against ABM for instigating the raid as a clear antiunion, legal violation of the janitors' organizing rights. (The INS publicly confirmed that the raid tip had come from an ABM official.) While this case was ongoing, the janitors received news that the NLRB had dismissed ABM's complaints against the initial NLRB representation elections and certified SEIU as the bargaining representative of janitors at two of the four Allen Center buildings. Even with this legal victory, though, fear of reprisal against organizing remained high amongst the downtown Houston immigrant community.

To effectively fight against this fear and rebuild momentum, Sandra Spector needed time and resources. She received neither. The overarching Houston Organizing Project was largely defunct by 1986: economic downturn in the city and jurisdictional battles between participating unions rendered most of the organizing efforts virtually impossible.²⁹ As support for HOP dwindled, the SEIU also stepped back from the project. At the recommendation of SEIU building service leader Gus Bevona, organizing and negotiating efforts for ABM janitors in Houston were placed on "the back burner." With a lack of support, the organizing drive completely fell apart.³⁰

SEIU Publications, Box 20, Folder 1, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

²⁹ Wade Rathke, "Labor's Failure in the South," in *American Crisis, Southern Solutions: From where We Stand, Peril and Promise* (Montgomery: New South Books, 2008), 169-189.

³⁰ Hank Albarelli files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 102, Folder 12, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Andy Stern Organizing and Field Services files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 104, Folder 2, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Sandra Spector, interview by Kent Kirkton, Tom & Ethel Bradley Center, California State University Northridge, July 26, 2012 and January 24, 2013.

While participating in the AFL-CIO's Houston Organizing Project in the early 1980s, the SEIU also launched its own organizing experiment in the building service industry. This experiment was part of a broad union reorganization effort under SEIU President John Sweeney. As I will demonstrate below, the grassroots organizing efforts in SEIU locals and the Houston Organizing Project influenced and helped pave the way for this janitor organizing experiment implemented from the International level of the SEIU. This top-down experiment thus was able to build on lessons learned in previous organizing experiments while benefiting from resources that these earlier experiments lacked. This SEIU organizing experiment ultimately served as the launch pad for the officially named Justice for Janitors campaign.

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As discussed in the introduction, unionization rates in the building service industry dropped throughout the late 1970s. By the end of the decade, the building service membership of the SEIU—the original “heart and soul” or “backbone” of the union that was known as the Building Service Employees International Union (BSEIU) until 1968—was not only shrinking as a portion of the overall industry workforce but also shrinking numerically in many locals as well. As this trend threatened to decimate SEIU membership, a leadership transition at the top of the SEIU provided an opportunity for a response to this decline. In 1980, George Hardy stepped down from the SEIU presidency with a call to his fellow SEIU leaders to “reinvigorate” organizing efforts in the building service industry. Incoming SEIU President John Sweeney took Hardy's appeal to heart and began implementing a broad plan to reorganize and activate the union. A key element of this reorganization plan involved the creation of a division structure within the union to help centralize and coordinate local union action.³¹

³¹ “Tough New Challenges in Building Service,” *SEIU Leadership News Update*, May/June 1980, SEIU Publications, Box 11, Folder 41, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State

To prepare for the creation of the building service division, John Sweeney appointed an advisory committee of existing building service local leaders and a building service coordinator at the International level of the union. The membership of the advisory committee, which met for the first time in 1981, was predominantly white and entirely male. Not a single member of the committee was female or Latinx. This reflected a clear disparity between the increasingly female and Latinx janitorial workforce and the union leadership, which remained overwhelmingly white and male. For the position of building service coordinator, however, Sweeney appointed Max Richardson, a Spanish-speaking Mexican American with a long history of union activism.

Under Richardson's direction, the building service advisory committee met for the first time in 1981 and began addressing the transformation of the janitorial industry and possible solutions to union decline. To facilitate these discussions, each committee member was provided with an informational "kit." Included in this kit was an article on Mike Garcia's pioneering strategies for effectively organizing undocumented janitors in San Jose Local 77. The inclusion of this article in the information kit suggests that some of the grassroots organizing efforts developing in SEIU locals, such as Local 77, had a contributory influence in the development of a centralized janitor organizing drive within the SEIU.³²

This initial meeting spurred a wealth of other preparatory actions for the development of the building service division. A team of SEIU research analysts built upon initial research

University; 17th International Convention Service Employees International Union, AFL-CIO, CLC, Official Proceedings, SEIU Publications, Box 2, Folder 1; 18th International Convention Service Employees International Union, AFL-CIO, CLC, Official Proceedings, SEIU Publications, Box 2, Folder 2, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

³² "F.Y.I." *SEIU Leadership News Update*, May/June 1981, SEIU Publications, Box 11, Folder 42, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Local 102 records, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 22, Folder 2, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Building Service Advisory Committee Meeting records, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 109, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

completed for the advisory committee meeting in 1981 in order to create a clear picture of the economic interworking of the building service industry. These analysts' industry research was complemented by the results of a survey of twenty-seven locals with members who worked in the building service industry. While industry and union information was being collected, the building service advisory committee met once more in 1983, and the Western Conference of the SEIU held a special Building Service Conference meeting during the same year. In 1984, the building service division was finally created. John Sweeney appointed Hank Albarelli, a law school graduate who had worked for the Carter administration, as building service division organizing director.

Starting in 1984, Hank Albarelli began working with SEIU research analysts and local unions to analyze the causes of union decline in the building service industry. In a memo to SEIU Organizing Director Andy Stern in December 1984, Albarelli reported on his initial discoveries. In the memo, he described key changes in the janitorial industry that occurred in the midst of widespread neoliberal restructuring. He described, for example, a shift from small, local cleaning companies to sophisticated regional, national and even transnational cleaning companies; an increasingly hostile, antiunion business climate; and growth in double-breasting, subcontracting, and exploitation of immigrant workers. After describing these industry changes, however, Albarelli asserted:

Virtually none of these problems afflicting building service locals already covered should be seen as insurmountable when viewed through the spectrum of a well planned, coordinated organizing program. For the most part, it can be stated that many of the problems we are presently confronting in building services can be laid to factors unrelated to these external problems outlined above.

Following this, Albarelli proceeded to provide examples of some of the multitude of "internal problems" in SEIU building service locals. These included locals' failure to take action against

antiunion contractor strategies, to hire bilingual staff, to perform internal audits, to request help, and to cooperate and coordinate with other locals. To Albarelli then, industry transformations were having an impact on building service locals; however, failures to respond to these transformations were the most pressing issue. He believed that with effective organizing plans SEIU locals could fight against union membership decline.³³

Albarelli's candid assessment of locals' internal problems reveals that important conversations about union failure and the need for reform were occurring at the top-levels of the SEIU in late 1984 and early 1985. The problems that Albarelli addressed were essentially the same as those that key organizers and leaders at the local level—such as Mike Garcia, Ben Monterroso, and Sandra Spector—were already confronting. As such, Albarelli's assessment was hardly pioneering. At the same time, though, drawing from his position of power in the union, Albarelli was able to use this critical assessment to highlight the need for systematic reform centered on organizing.³⁴

After highlighting this need for reform, Albarelli began working with individual locals to address internal failures and boost organizing at the local level. One of the locals that caught Albarelli's attention early on was Denver Local 105. As suggested in the introduction, the late 1970s and early 1980s brought clear changes to the building service industry in Denver. The city experienced a building boom, an influx of nonunion Korean contractors, and a rapid shift from an African American to a Latinx immigrant workforce. In the midst of these changes, Local 105 failed to fight back, largely due to leadership and staff insufficiencies and inefficiencies. The

³³ Building Service Organizing files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 5, Folder 20, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Hank Albarelli files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 99, Folder 14, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

³⁴ Andy Stern Organizing and Field Services files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 102, Folder 5, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

local president was politically engaged in local labor and women's organization, but she did not translate this activism into organizing new workers or building community support for the local. Furthermore, the amount of time and effort she had to devote to the local was limited: in addition to working as Local 105's president, she worked a second job delivering pizza to supplement her income. The local's secretary-treasurer and essentially sole building service representative was interested in organizing but struggled between servicing existing members and finding resources to organize. By the time Albarelli visited in October 1984, the local was operating at a deficit of \$3,000 a month and still did not have a single Spanish-speaking staff member even as the janitorial workforce had become ninety percent Spanish-speaking. Furthermore, to try to keep hold of a shrinking number of union contracts, the local's secretary-treasurer had agreed to huge wage cuts for the limited number of increasingly disgruntled union janitors that remained in the local.

Albarelli's visit to Local 105 essentially revealed a local in crisis. To address this crisis, Albarelli made a series of recommendations in a report to President Sweeney. He noted that the city of Denver had a new Latinx mayor and a shifting political current but that Local 105 was ill prepared to take advantage of building Latinx community power in the city. To begin changing this, he recommended above all else that the local hire a politically savvy, bilingual organizer/research specialist. Additionally, he recommended a serious examination and reform of the local's current state of affairs—including leadership efficiency, staff interaction, membership servicing, and use of union resources.

Local 105 members embraced these recommendations, but the leadership struggled to implement them. In 1985, the local's executive board voluntarily agreed to place the local under the "guardianship" of the International union for one year. This guardianship, essentially a self-

imposed trusteeship, provided a critical opportunity for Albarelli and the newly formed building service division to test strategies for changing the tide of union decline in the building service industry.³⁵

Under this period of guardianship, International SEIU staff helped Local 105 hire three new local staff members in 1985. Although not Latinx, the first of these new staff members—Laurie Bretz—was fluent in Spanish and had spent several years working in Honduran refugee camps with the National Council of Churches. Bretz quickly helped boost communication between Local 105 and the janitorial workforce. Additionally, she helped develop a generative line of communication with Sandra Spector and Lencho Hernandez in Houston. Talking with these organizers over the phone and even attending the aforementioned National Lawyers Guild seminar on Organizing Undocumented Workers with them, Bretz began laying the groundwork for an effective organizing program amongst Denver’s immigrant workforce.

Bretz’s initial organizing efforts received a boost in the form of Angel Mendez-Soto. Like Bretz, Mendez-Soto was bilingual, and he also brought to the local a rich history of engagement with Chicanx culture. He was a central member of Su Teatro, a Chicanx theatre group that developed out of an El Teatro Campesino-inspired theatre class at the University of Denver in 1971.³⁶ Joining Local 105 in November of 1985, Mendez-Soto helped produce a bilingual local newsletter to keep members informed and helped organize events, such as a holiday party that featured a Su Teatro performance, to develop new levels of member engagement. Shortly after Mendez-Soto joined Local 105, Roy Hong, who had a history of

³⁵ Local 105 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folders 14-16, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

³⁶ El Teatro Campesino was the theatre troupe that Luis Valdez formed as part of the United Farm Workers movement in 1965. The troupe performers were farm workers who acted out short skits based on their life experiences. The skits mixed humor and entertainment with efforts to educate the public and raise awareness about the farm worker cause. For more on Su Teatro, see suteatro.org/

organizing in the Korean community in San Francisco, joined the staff as well. After requesting help from San Francisco Local 87,³⁷ Albarelli recruited Hong to come to Denver Local 105 to help address the growth in Korean contractors in Denver. Altogether, these new staff members brought new hope for developing an effective organizing program in Local 105.³⁸

Ultimately, Albarelli's influence in Local 105 during the voluntary guardianship demonstrates how International staff could be a huge resource to locals in responding to industry restructuring and union decline. Albarelli helped local leaders understand their current failures and inefficiencies amidst a changing industry and understand the need for reform. More importantly, he helped connect Local 105 to experienced local organizers and activists who were knowledgeable about and integrated in important community groups. These organizers and activists served as "bridge builders"³⁹ between the union and the workers and communities much like Mike Garcia in San Jose, Ben Monterroso in Los Angeles, and Sandra Spector in Houston did. In a way then, Albarelli served as a bridge builder himself. He helped interface and create a mutually beneficial relationship between the International and local level of the union.

³⁷ Along with old-guard-dominated locals in Boston, Chicago, and New York, San Francisco Local 87 was one of the few SEIU locals to maintain a significant membership base amidst industry restructuring in the 1980s and 1990s. In contrast to the old-guard-dominated locals in the Midwest and on the East Coast, however, Local 87 had a more diverse membership during this period. Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, August 19, 2011 and May 6, 2016; "A Union with Heart in San Francisco," *Building Service Update* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1990), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

³⁸ "Local 105 Reporter," SEIU Publications, Box 45, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Hank Albarelli files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 99, Folder 14, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

³⁹ In their edited volume *Building Bridges*, Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello use the term bridge builder to refer specifically to individuals who helped link and build coalitions between unions and grassroots community groups. They note, "Those who play the role of 'bridge-builders' often turn out to have been personally active in several different movements, serving as crucial links in an emerging network." I build from their concept of bridge builders while also expanding the concept to apply to individuals who served as a bridge between the International and local levels of the union. In the case of my research, then, Hank Albarelli was an important bridge builder between the international and local levels of the SEIU while Mike Garcia, Ben Monterroso, Sandra Spector, Angel Mendez-Soto, etc. were important labor-community bridge builders at the local level. Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, *Building Bridges: The Emerging Grassroots Coalition of Labor and community* (New York: Monthly Press Review, 1990).

These bridge builders, and the information sharing network that they formed, are key to understanding the robust response to neoliberal restructuring that emerged from within the SEIU building service division in the early 1980s. Working together, these individuals helped evolve isolated local struggles into a broad, multilevel union struggle. This multilevel struggle held the promise of doing more than just addressing union membership decline. It held the promise of transforming local unions from increasingly irrelevant, inaccessible resources for a dwindling group of union members to strong organizations that provided workers across an entire industry with a means to address the vulnerability and exploitation that they experienced amidst neoliberal restructuring of the janitorial industry

While Albarelli helped link the resources of the International level of union with individual SEIU locals in the early to mid-1980s, he also became interested in linking local reform and organizing struggles together beyond existing informal network ties between organizers. He became interested in the possibility of developing a coordinated union struggle that could match the power of large cleaning contractors in a way that isolated local struggles could not. As such, while he was working on providing direct assistance to struggling locals, he also worked on developing a pilot project in transnational janitor organizing.

Albarelli's research into the janitorial industry brought to his attention two up-and-coming trans-Atlantic cleaning companies. These UK-based companies, the Hawley Group and Pritchard Services, were in the process of acquiring and consolidating small contractors in several cities throughout the U.S. building service marketplace. Albarelli worked with SEIU researchers to develop a comprehensive report of these acquisitions and consolidation. He also reached out to the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), which had two million

members in Great Britain and Ireland. With the help of the TGWU, Albarelli believed that the SEIU could launch a pioneering, trans-Atlantic janitor organizing campaign.

This transnational campaign plan suggests the enormous potential of the response to neoliberal restructuring that was emerging from within the SEIU's building service division in the early to mid-1980s. This response went beyond helping janitors mitigate the effects of neoliberal restructuring. Deeply rooted in an understanding of the shifting scale of the industry, this campaign had the potential to challenge the neoliberal restructuring of the industry itself. By uniting janitors not just across the U.S. but also across the world, this campaign could fundamentally shift the balance of power between transnational cleaning contractors and janitors. The potential of this campaign, however, was dependent on the coordinated cooperation of SEIU locals. In seeking this cooperation, Albarelli ran into difficulty.⁴⁰

While he had found space to implement some organizing reform on a local level such as in Local 105, Albarelli found that other locals were much less welcome to any sort of interference from the International. The most vociferous resistance to interference came from large locals in the Northeast, particularly New York Local 32B-32J, Chicago Local 25, and Boston Local 254. These locals were the last remaining bastions of union strength in the building service industry. Run by powerful union bosses, these locals had managed to keep janitor wage and union rates high through the late 1970s and early 1980s. Feeling immune to industry transformations, the bosses that led these locals—Gus Bevona in New York, Gene Moats in Chicago, and Ed Sullivan in Boston—did not want to change the way that they did

⁴⁰ While Albarelli's plans for a trans-Atlantic janitor organizing campaign did not come to fruition in the 1980s, the eventual development of a JfJ-inspired Justice for Cleaners campaign in London in coordination with the Transport and General Workers Union around 2005 can be seen as a fulfillment of Albarelli's original plans for trans-Atlantic janitor organizing. For more on the Justice for Cleaners campaign, see the concluding chapter of this dissertation.

business. They did not want to risk the remaining power of their locals for the possibility of creating national or transnational janitor organizing campaigns.

Alluding to the size and strength but also increasingly anachronistic nature of these locals, a younger generation of reform minded leaders within the SEIU started referring to them as “dinosaur” locals. These locals were intimidating and powerful, but their base of power—originally built on mob connections, political patronage, and corruption—was becoming increasingly outdated. Although these locals had managed to resist industry restructuring longer than others, the threat of extinction loomed, particularly as they refused to adapt to industry changes.

Although individuals within the SEIU foresaw problems with these locals’ way of doing business, the leaders of these locals had considerable power within the SEIU. Former SEIU President George Hardy often said that if Gus Bevona’s Local 32B-32J stopped paying per capita membership tax for just one month, the entire International union would be forced to shut down. President John Sweeney’s Secretary-Treasurer Richard Cordtz confirmed the accuracy of this statement even after Hardy left office. With the SEIU ultimately financially beholden to the dinosaur locals, the newly created building service division suffered a push-and-pull struggle between the “old guard” and the “new guard” in 1985.

This simmering struggle had the potential to derail any large-scale, union-led response to the deepening challenges that janitors faced. President John Sweeney’s effective mediation, however, kept the possibility of a broad response to janitorial industry changes alive. As a former janitor whose first union leadership position was at Local 32B-32J, John Sweeney was in many ways part of the old guard. At the same time, though, Sweeney’s bold reorganization plan for the union provided strong evidence that he was open to change and innovation. Furthermore,

he was committed to leading the SEIU in making these changes. From this position, Sweeney worked to convince members of the old guard to concede to some reform in the division. In other words, Sweeney also served as a sort of intergenerational bridge builder within the union.

Sweeney's efforts at mediation or building a bridge between new and old guard leaders were aided by an SEIU white paper titled the "State of the Union in Building Services." A team of research analysts working for the International produced this white paper in August of 1985. The paper provided a succinct analysis of the ongoing transformation of the building service industry and a clear, fact-based declaration of the union's failure to respond to this transformation. Essentially, this paper made the need for at least some sort of transformation in SEIU building service locals undeniable.⁴¹

The SEIU's building service division emerged from this push-and-pull struggle in late 1985 with the launch of a promising "Rebuilding Campaign." On some levels, the program was deceptively conservative: it was rhetorically directed at helping to rebuild union strength by adding members rather than reforming the internal problems of failing building service locals. But in other ways, the program's six strategic objectives were rooted in a perceptive and comprehensive understanding of the current failures and inefficiencies of organized labor to respond to neoliberal restructuring. These objectives, then, fundamentally challenged the status quo in building service locals. This campaign called for locals to: (1) stop working like "insurance agencies" for dues-paying members and instead create an active, engaged membership that understood the importance of organizing; (2) develop bilingual union materials, welcome ethnic diversity in membership and staff, and create education and community outreach

⁴¹ Leadership Conferences files, SEIU Secretary-Treasurers Office: Richard Cordtz Records, Box 1, Folder 69, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Stephen Lerner, conversation with author, August 17, 2016; Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016; Dave Stilwell, conversation with author, December 10, 2016; David Chu, "David Chu (Part 1)," Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University.

programs in order to organize the new, increasingly immigrant janitorial workforce; (3) avoid difficult building-by-building organizing and instead target entire cleaning contractors or building ownership and financing on a regional or national scale; (4) apply research-driven corporate campaign strategies to know where and how to leverage pressure against national and transnational firms as well as their financial interests; (5) generate public support through a nation-wide coordinated social movement framing of janitors' struggles; and (6) dedicate the resources necessary to achieve the first five objectives.⁴²

The SEIU's Rebuilding Campaign provides strong evidence of the extent to which SEIU leaders had come to understand the immense intersectional challenges that the union faced in the late twentieth century. SEIU leaders had come to understand that the insularity and bureaucracy of business unionism, the rigidity and increasing irrelevance of U.S. labor law, and the recent shifts in immigration patterns and industry restructuring were threatening not only the vitality but also the sheer existence of the union. Amidst these long-running and more recent developments, the ability of the union to affect the balance of power between labor and capital on any scale had been fundamentally compromised. The Rebuilding Campaign demonstrates that many SEIU leaders recognized this and committed to addressing the challenges that the union faced in an innovative way. And perhaps most importantly in the short-term, the Rebuilding Campaign demonstrates that SEIU leaders committed to providing the resources necessary to address these challenges on a broad scale.

This commitment laid the groundwork for a new phase of SEIU experimentation and adaptation to meet these challenges. In this phase, SEIU leaders, workers, and their supporters had the benefit of a clearly articulated organizing strategy as well as the resources to put this

⁴² Building Service Division Convention files, SEIU Secretary-Treasurer's Office: Richard Cordtz Records, Box 3, Folder 47, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

strategy into action. As I detail in the following chapter, this was the phase of experimentation and adaptation in which the first so-called Justice for Janitors campaign emerged.

Chapter 2

An Experimental Organizing Strategy Coalesces:

The Official Start of the Justice for Janitors Campaign (1986-1987)

In this chapter, I examine the coalescence of SEIU's experimental organizing and reform efforts into the Justice for Janitors campaign between 1986 and 1987. I explore the first major local SEIU Rebuilding Campaign, which was a defensive struggle against a janitor lockout in Pittsburgh. Then, I explore the evolution of the Rebuilding Campaign into a forward-looking organizing struggle under the banner of a new campaign slogan—"Justice for Janitors campaign"—in Denver. In exploring these labor struggles, I show how Justice for Janitors started as an unconventional and rather nebulous campaign that brought a diverse group of union leaders, organizers, and workers as well as community and institutional resources together.

I argue that campaign leaders, participants, and supporters joined together around a mutual dissatisfaction with the status quo of the janitorial industry in the mid-1980s. Working together and building from the organizing and reform efforts discussed in Chapter 1, this group challenged the effects of neoliberal restructuring (if not neoliberal restructuring itself) in the janitorial industry. They resisted concession bargaining and won tangible improvements in janitor wages and working conditions. They spurred member activism and fought against membership decline. And they confronted the unrivaled power and antiunion hostility of business owners and managers. In doing so, they also defied the tradition of business unionism in the United States labor movement.

I demonstrate, however, that Justice for Janitors leaders and participants found themselves facing an intensely difficult, uphill battle in challenging the status quo of the

janitorial industry. These leaders and participants had an innovative organizing strategy that was the product of years of experimentation and adaptation, and they had extensive institutional resources at their disposal. Yet they still found themselves in a mismatched struggle against the power of building owners, managers, and contractors during a period marked by extreme antiunion hostility and labor law obsolescence. In this environment, the stakes of the campaign were high but any achievements on the union's part were tenuous.

Hostility from building owners, managers, and contractors, however, was not the only challenge that campaign leaders and participants faced. They also faced internal conflict that threatened the strength and sustainability of the campaign. Despite their seeming unity behind a collective demand for social justice, campaign leaders, participants, and supporters had different understandings of the purpose of the campaign and its role within the broader labor movement. This imbued Justice for Janitors with a host of internal tensions that limited and qualified the campaign's initial successes and threatened the cohesion and sustainability of the campaign going forward. I argue that these tensions, embedded in the campaign from the very beginning, are key to understanding the subsequent history and especially the successes and failures of Justice for Janitors.

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The first opportunity to put SEIU leaders' commitment of International resources in the new Rebuilding Campaign to the test emerged in Pittsburgh Local 29 in 1985. Like Local 105 in Denver, Local 29 faced serious problems in the early 1980s. During this period, Local 29 lost nearly a fifth of its total membership. Unlike Local 105, however, Local 29 had not been forced to confront a dramatic shift in the building service workforce. While the janitor workforce in Sun Belt cities like Denver became increasingly Latinx and undocumented, the Pittsburgh

workforce remained predominantly white and African American. Despite this relatively stable workforce in Pittsburgh, Local 29 faced many of the same industry changes that affected unions throughout the country during this period. Amidst a national increase in hostility toward unions and decrease in union membership, the number of nonunion contractors in the Pittsburgh janitorial industry grew and eroded Local 29's industry market share.

While these nonunion contractors grew in size and strength, a group of union cleaning contractors and building managers in Pittsburgh decided to band together and demand contract concessions from Local 29 in order to compete with nonunion contractors. In 1982, these union cleaning contractors and building managers formed the Office Building Association of Pittsburgh (OBAP). And as part of the OBAP, they collectively demanded that Local 29 leaders reopen the local's contracts and agree to wage reductions for union janitors. The OBAP alleged that their union contractor and building manager members would be pushed out of the industry entirely if concessions were not made. Local 29 leaders gave in to pressure from the OBAP. Through back room deals, Local 29 agreed to major contract concessions that cut the wages and benefits of the shrinking number of unionized janitors in Pittsburgh.¹

While Local 29 perceived this concession bargaining as a lesser of two evils, the wage and benefit cuts intensified the economic struggles that Pittsburgh's janitors were experiencing during this period of industry restructuring. Facing intense job insecurity and now wage and benefit cuts, many of Pittsburgh's union janitors were understandably angry with Local 29. The local had failed to organize new members and prevent the growth of nonunion contractors. And

¹ Andy Stern Organizing and Field Services files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 102, Folder 5, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Local 29 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 6, Folder 9, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

now that the union was in a weak bargaining position, Local 29 leaders conceded to contract concessions.

Letters from Local 29 members to International SEIU leaders illustrate these members' acute dissatisfaction with how their local was being run. One letter in particular, dated December 21, 1983, demonstrates the frustration of Pittsburgh janitors who faced a combination of eroding wages and union complacency during this period. In this letter, a Local 29 member described the pittance wages that he earned as a janitor in Pittsburgh. After accounting for transportation expenses to work, taxes, and union dues of \$13 a month, the member calculated that his current real wages were only \$2.20 an hour. The member asserted:

At least the company can't ask for concessions, unless they want us to work for free...After hours of thought, I firmly believe that the company and the union leaders are working together to benefit each others [sic] bank account. Why not disband the union? I could use the \$13 a month. Who in the hell works for \$2.20 an hour (in the U.S.A) and no benefits and is forced to pay union dues? ...This whole matter STINKS.²

As this member described in his letter, he had tried to get help from his Local 29 representatives to do something to fight concession bargaining. The representative, however, told him that there was nothing he could do. In late 1985, however, the SEIU building service division proved that this was untrue: there was something that the union could do.

During the winter of 1985, International SEIU leaders in the building service division took an interest in contract negotiations between the Office Building Association of Pittsburgh (OBAP) and Local 29. These leaders' interest in Local 29's contract negotiations was likely rooted in more than the local's recent membership decline and concession bargaining. (As this chapter and previous chapters suggest, these developments as well as corresponding member dissatisfaction were hardly unique to Pittsburgh). The SEIU leaders were likely particularly

² Local 29 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 6, Folder 9, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

interested in Local 29 because of Pittsburgh's location in the Northeast. The rapidly declining unionization in Local 29 demonstrated that even locals in cities with a strong union history and a lack of recent Latinx immigrants were failing to keep a unionized building service market. Thus, Pittsburgh represented the clear threat that the SEIU's current status quo of concession bargaining and failure to organize new members posed to even the last bastions of union strength in cities like Boston, Chicago, and New York. At the same time, Local 29's proximity to these last bastions of union strength provided a useful foundation for a response to this threat. In other words, Local 29's contract bargaining in 1985 seemed to provide a practical starting point for testing out the SEIU's newly formulated Rebuilding Campaign.

This contract bargaining pitted Local 29 against the cleaning contractors and building managers in the OBAP. The OBAP entered the negotiations demanding large concessions. Pointing to the growth of nonunion firms and the dwindling union market share, the OBAP demanded a fifteen percent cut to janitors' wages and a cut to janitors' benefits. They demanded that janitors pay an extra \$38 a month for their insurance program. In total, these concession demands would reduce hourly labor costs in union buildings by over \$2 an hour per janitor. With the support of International SEIU leaders from the building service division, Local 29 negotiators refused to give in to this demand and settle on the OBAP's terms. Before long, negotiations were at a standstill. As neither side proved willing to concede in the negotiations, the OBAP decided to essentially call the union's bluff, to try to prove that Local 29 did not have the strength to back up their tough negotiations outside of the bargaining room.

On November 11, 1985, over four hundred union janitors in Pittsburgh showed up to work only to find that they were not permitted to enter the buildings that they normally cleaned. In a dramatic show of force, the OBAP locked out these janitors. While potentially devastating

to Pittsburgh janitors and Local 29, the lockout provided an opening for the SEIU building service division to test out the effectiveness of some of the Rebuilding Campaign's more innovative elements. In particular, the lockout provided an opportunity for new guard SEIU leaders to potentially demonstrate the value of using International resources to support and coordinate local union battles in the janitorial industry.

Under Building Service Organizing Director Hank Albarelli's leadership, the SEIU sent a team of International staff to help Local 29 support the janitors who had been locked out. Two key members of this team were Charles Perkel, the former Local 77 president who had worked with Mike Garcia in developing experimental organizing efforts in San Jose, and an up-and-coming lawyer named Reuben Guttman, who had previously worked for the SEIU in providing assistance to striking nursing home workers in Texas. With the help of International staff such as Perkel and Guttman, Local 29 janitors mounted an effective, multidimensional Rebuilding Campaign. This campaign ultimately provided these janitors with unprecedented power to challenge the OBAP.³

One of the most important dimensions of this campaign was centered on developing community support. The janitors worked on earning community support and sympathy by making both their struggle against the OBAP and their dedication to this struggle visible. Even on the weekends and in the harsh winter weather, the janitors marched every day in front of the buildings that they had cleaned prior to the lockout. While on the picket line, janitors caught the attention of local media and helped develop a moral, social justice framing of their struggle.

Janitors told their personal stories of economic hardship and described themselves as "custodians

³ Building Service Division Board Meeting files, SEIU Secretary-Treasurer's Office: Richard Cordtz Records, Box 3, Folder 43, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Don Hopey, "Janitors Urged to Return to Jobs," *The Pittsburgh Press*, January 2, 1986; Charles O. Rice, "No Knockout," *The Pittsburgh Catholic*, January 31, 1986; Reuben Guttman, "The Summer and Winter of Yesteryear," *American Constitution Society blog*, July 21, 2015.

of justice.” Union staff helped support this framing of the janitors’ struggle. When speaking to a news reporter, Charles Perkel asserted that the janitors’ struggle was part of an “ongoing struggle for social justice” that began under Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. during the Civil Rights movement. Like a janitor who described the OBAP’s actions as “a step twenty years in the past,” Perkel clearly connected the lockout to the injustice and inequality that led people of color to organize and fight against the status quo of legal and social inequality in the 1950s and 1960s.⁴

Other staff members helped develop a social justice frame for the lockout even beyond this Civil Rights era connection. Reuben Guttman, for example, explained the rationale behind the campaign by pointing to the disparity between the wealth of the people who owned buildings and the poverty of those who cleaned them. In speaking with a reporter, he noted that the eighteen downtown buildings associated with the OBAP enjoyed rental income of \$1.45 billion in 1985. That same year, the combined wages of the hundreds of janitors who cleaned these buildings amounted to only a couple million dollars. Thus, he presented building owners as greedy individuals who were unwilling to pay janitors a just share of their profits. Local 29 janitors and SEIU staff also enlisted the help of a key figure from the religious community, Monsignor Charles O. Rice, in publicly presenting the janitors’ struggle as a social justice issue. Because of Monsignor Rice’s long history of supporting social movement campaigns, his public support for the janitors lent further legitimacy to the justice of their struggle.⁵

While pursuing this community-based strategy, the team of International staff supporting the Pittsburgh janitors also mounted a legal strategy to put additional pressure on the OBAP.

⁴ Building Service Division Board Meeting files, SEIU Secretary-Treasurer’s Office: Richard Cordtz Records, Box 3, Folder 43, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Tom Hritz, “This janitor’s hardly average,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, November 22, 1985; Kimberly Farris “Cutbacks Anger SEIU; Dispute Carried to D.C.” *New Pittsburgh Courier*, December 28, 1985.

⁵ Don Hopey, “Locked-out SEIU workers seem ready for long haul,” *Pittsburgh Press*, December 22, 1985; Charles Owen Rice Papers, University of Pittsburgh.

Under Guttman's direction, Local 29 filed a case with Pennsylvania's Office of Employment Security to prove that the four hundred Pittsburgh janitors had been locked out of their jobs and thus were legally entitled to unemployment compensation. About a month into the lockout, Local 29 won the case, and the janitors began receiving unemployment checks. These checks amounted to even less than the low wages janitors had been earning prior to the lockout. Nevertheless, they helped provide crucial financial support to sustain the janitors, who had been relying on member and community donations and International support.⁶ Guttman sought to continue building on this initial legal victory, but he found himself increasingly frustrated with U.S. labor law. This labor law, he realized, seemed to do more to protect business interests than labor interests.⁷

While struggling to mount a large legal battle, the union proved more effective at building internal labor support for the janitors' struggle. As mentioned above, many old guard SEIU leaders were contrary to the interference of reform-minded new guard union leaders in their locals. Despite this opposition to reform, some of the old guard proved willing to follow the strategy of the Rebuilding Campaign and help leverage labor support for the lockout. Local 32B-32J President Gus Bevona, for example, led New York janitors who worked for the cleaning contractors involved in the lockout in a walkout from their jobs. This action was built on local coordination and cooperation. And it essentially allowed union janitors to counter the OBAP's show of force with their own show of force. The SEIU demonstrated that even though

⁶ Secretary-Treasurer Richard Cordtz noted in a speech to at the 1986 Building Service Division Convention that the Pittsburgh lockout cost the international alone over \$100,000. Building Service Division Convention files, SEIU Secretary-Treasurer's Office: Richard Cordtz Records, Box 3, Folder 47, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

⁷ Building Service Division Convention files, SEIU Secretary-Treasurer's Office: Richard Cordtz Records, Box 3, Folder 47, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Reuben Guttman, "The Summer and Winter of Yesteryear" *American Constitution Society blog*, July 21, 2015

Pittsburgh Local 29 was in a relatively weak bargaining position with the cleaning contractors in the OBAP, the local had the support of the much more powerful Local 32B-32J in New York.

In addition to leveraging the support of other SEIU janitors against cleaning contractors, this emerging Rebuilding Campaign struggle also leveraged the support of other workers against building owners connected to the lockout. During the lockout, Pittsburgh janitors reached out to groups of workers that had the ability to impact the daily operation of the downtown office buildings. The janitors, for example, reached out to the companies that rented office space within the buildings. Many of the individuals who worked for these companies witnessed the janitors' dedication each day on the picket line. They proved readily willing to lend their support to the janitors' cause. These workers wrote letters to building owners urging them to rehire janitors at fair wages and brought coffee and food to janitors on the picket line. Sometimes these office building workers even marched in solidarity with the janitors.

This strategy of targeting the companies that rented office space within the buildings proved advantageous even beyond getting office workers involved in the campaign. The main tenant company in one of the locked out buildings was U.S. Steel. Based on this connection, SEIU leaders reached out the United Steelworkers and asked for their support. The United Steelworkers union, which had likewise faced dramatic industry shifts in its recent history, decided to support the janitors. While United Steelworkers leaders helped put pressure on Pittsburgh building owners to settle on the janitors' terms, United Steelworkers members joined janitors on the picket line.

Pressure on contractors and building owners reached a tipping point during the tenth week of the lockout. By this point, Pittsburgh's Mayor Richard Caliguiri had taken interest in the lockout after witnessing Pittsburgh janitors' resolve to continue picketing even as the winter

temperatures dropped below freezing. He approached both the OBAP and union leaders, and he inserted himself as a mediator. With Caliguiri joining a host of workers and community leaders in seeking to resolve the lockout, the OBAP finally began to negotiate seriously with Local 29. As a result of these negotiations, Local 29 janitors agreed to a new contract and returned to work after nearly three months of being locked out.

Local 29 and the entire SEIU building service division celebrated the resolution of the lockout as a “key victory.” This victory was seen as a crucial defensive win that lent legitimacy and momentum to the Rebuilding Campaign. An article published in the SEIU’s monthly newspaper *Service Employee*, for example, declared that Local 29 janitors’ refusal of OBAP concession demands “marked the beginning of a new era for building service unions.” To celebrate and help push forward this new era, the SEIU building service division created a video on the lockout titled “No Givebacks: The Story of the Fighting Janitors of Pittsburgh.” In addition to showing this video at a building service division conference, division leaders also distributed it to SEIU locals throughout the U.S. where many other janitors were facing exploitative employers and difficult negotiations.⁸

In the end, the Pittsburgh lockout served as an important source of inspiration and hope that an alternative to the status quo of janitor exploitation amidst widespread union decline and neoliberal restructuring was possible. With the support of leaders and lawyers brought in from the International staff, many of the Local 29 janitors were empowered through the Rebuilding Campaign. The campaign even helped develop important rank-and-file leaders in the local. (One of these rank-and-file leaders, Billy Joe Jordan, was made the star of the lockout video.)

⁸ Don Hopey, “Locked-out SEIU workers seem ready for long haul,” *Pittsburgh Press*, December 22, 1985; “A Key Victory in Pittsburgh: After two-month lockout big companies cave in” *Service Employee* 45, no. 5 (March 1986) and “Pittsburgh Battle Goes on the Screen” *Service Employee* 45, no. 6 (April/May 1986), SEIU Publications, Box 20, Folder 1, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Additionally, beyond this local impact, the Rebuilding Campaign offered inspiration to the broader building service division of the SEIU. The well-publicized lockout proved that Rebuilding Campaign strategies were capable of uniting and leveraging a critical mass of community and labor support to shift the balance of power in the industry away from building owners and cleaning contractors and toward workers and the union.

At the same time, however, a close examination of the contract that the Local 29 janitors signed at the end of the lockout as well as building managers' actions in the wake of the contract point to limitations in the lockout "victory." Despite union publicity to the contrary, the contract that Local 29 achieved in the wake of the lockout was hardly an unqualified success. It included a three-year wage freeze and slight reduction in benefits for existing janitors as well as a lower wage rate for new hires. Furthermore, in the wake of this rather limited contract achievement, Local 29 faced immediate pushback from building owners. Less than two weeks after Local 29 signed the contract, a prominent downtown building owner, Mellon Bank, hired a new nonunion cleaning contractor to clean two of its office buildings (and thus replace the union cleaning contractor that had signed the post-lockout contract). This sent a clear message to Local 29 that the resolution of the lockout was more of a starting point in an escalating conflict with Pittsburgh building owners and managers than a successful end point.

Essentially, the Pittsburgh Rebuilding Campaign proved capable of spurring local union activism and helping janitors fight concession bargaining in one particular negotiation, but it did little to stem the seemingly inexorable tide of neoliberal restructuring. Amidst this restructuring, building owners and managers clearly had the upper hand. As nonunion cleaning contractors proliferated and subcontracting and underbidding became the industry norm, building owners and managers could effectively sidestep any defensive contract victories that janitors achieved.

As the broader Rebuilding Campaign program agenda suggests, leaders and activists within the SEIU recognized this limitation of defensive struggles and were committed to building a larger, offensive struggle against industry restructuring and its effects in Pittsburgh. Unfortunately, unaddressed internal issues within Local 29 threatened to derail any attempt to convert the momentum of the lockout struggle into an external organizing campaign. More than this, these internal issues highlighted a fundamental weakness in the Pittsburgh Rebuilding Campaign strategy

While providing the resources to facilitate newfound member activism and leadership, the Rebuilding Campaign did not effectively deal with the existing leadership inefficiencies and union culture that were responsible for the weak bargaining position of the local in the first place. While working with the local during the lockout, SEIU leaders such as President John Sweeney witnessed first hand what he called the “serious shortcomings” of the existing Local 29 leadership. To address these shortcomings, Sweeney helped orchestrate a shift in local leadership. On his recommendation, the Local 29 executive board hired the local’s attorney, who had shown promise during the lockout, as a new executive director of the local. This leadership change certainly had the potential to inspire local reform and set Local 29 on a firm foot to continue building a base of member support to challenge industry restructuring and its effects. However, this leadership change ultimately proved insufficient.

In the wake of this leadership change, International SEIU leaders did not spend time or resources to continue building bridges between the International Rebuilding Campaign, local union leaders, and janitors. International SEIU staff working on the Rebuilding Campaign did not entirely abandon the campaign after the lockout was resolved. In fact, several staff members including Reuben Guttman mounted a legal defense of the post-lockout contract. They filed

charges with the NLRB against the building managers, alleging that the managers had wrongfully fired union contractors.⁹ The International staff members, however, pursued this legal strategy in isolation of any direct coordination or interaction with Local 29. This left many Local 29 leaders and members feeling abandoned by the International. Wanting to continue fighting against janitor exploitation but lacking assistance from the International, these leaders and members turned to traditional bargaining and organizing strategies. Without communicating with the International staff, the Local 29 leaders started negotiating directly with cleaning contractors and prepared for NLRB elections to organize janitors, even though they knew this NLRB-based organizing would likely fail. With the local leadership and International Rebuilding staff at odds, the Pittsburgh janitors' fight against building owner and manager union hostility became a slow, tension-ridden battle.¹⁰

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Although internal conflict created an obstacle to building on the momentum of the lockout in Pittsburgh, the SEIU building service division did not abandon hope in the Rebuilding Campaign altogether. The division continued to have the full support of John Sweeney who believed that the Rebuilding Campaign was capable of much more than the qualified, defensive win in Pittsburgh. The division also had the added benefit of a new building service organizing director. Following the lockout, Sweeney promoted Hank Albarelli as the overarching building service division director. To fill Albarelli's former position, Andy Stern hired Stephen Lerner as the new building service organizing director.¹¹

⁹ To be more specific, the SEIU's NLRB charges alleged that Mellon Bank was a joint employer of the janitors (along with the actual cleaning contractor) and thus bound to uphold the recently signed Local 29 contract.

¹⁰ Don Hopy, "Court denies janitors' bid to regain jobs" *Pittsburgh Press*, November 18, 1986; Local 29 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 6, Folder 9-14, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

¹¹ Andy Stern Organizing and Field Services files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 102, Folder 5, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Stephen Lerner, who had started his labor career with the farm workers and later worked for the ILGWU, had extensive experience in organizing exploited workers. Through his earlier organizing experiences, Lerner had discovered the limitations of traditional organizing strategies and the importance of finding and targeting the sources of worker exploitation beyond workers' immediate employers. He had discovered that traditional organizing strategies did little to help workers achieve long-lasting wage and benefit improvements. Lerner's approach to organizing, therefore, intersected with the Rebuilding Campaign strategies of organizing on a large scale, targeting building owners and managers rather than just contractors, and leveraging both union and community support for workers. Upon accepting the building service organizing director position at SEIU, he was ready to implement and push these strategies forward.

Even with Sweeney and Stern's support, though, Lerner had to confront the existing conflicts and tensions within the building service division. He made little headway with the division's old guard leaders, one of whom declared that Lerner did not "look big enough to be a building service organizer" upon meeting him, or with Local 29 leadership. Faced with these difficulties, Lerner decided to pursue organizing under the Rebuilding Campaign in a place where he could essentially bypass a battle with existing leadership. He focused his efforts on Denver Local 105, which was still under the voluntary guardianship of International SEIU staff and had proven open to reform.¹²

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In Denver, Stephen Lerner began working with the local staff members (Laurie Bretz, Angel Mendez-Soto, and Roy Hong) who had recently been hired through Hank Albarelli's efforts to address organizing failures in Local 105. Together, they began approaching janitors in

¹² "Stephen Lerner (29 April 2013)," Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University; Stephen Lerner, conversation with author, August 17, 2016.

downtown Denver's high-rise buildings about developing an organizing campaign. In this initial organizing outreach, they discovered unsurprisingly that the janitors that they approached did not want to be involved in an organizing drive because of the risks that such a campaign would entail. These janitors had first-hand knowledge of their vulnerability in the building service industry. They knew that even if a group of janitors managed to gain union representation, building owners could easily hire a new nonunion cleaning contractor and thereby put them out of work.

Taking this issue of worker vulnerability seriously, Lerner and the Local 105 organizing staff began developing a plan that the workers would support. They came up with a bold plan to target all of the thirty-eight high-rise office buildings in downtown Denver at once. Rather than relying on NLRB elections, this plan would rest on building owners and contractors voluntarily recognizing the union as janitors' representative. In many ways, the plan called for promising adaptations of strategies that had already been developed in the building service division.

The idea of moving past a building-by-building organizing strategy had already emerged within the union. As mentioned above, for example, Mike Garcia in San Jose had experimented with the strategy of putting pressure on all of the nonunion buildings cleaned by a particular contractor at once. Garcia and Local 77 janitors were not very successful organizing under this strategy, which still relied on NLRB elections. Nevertheless, their broad pressure strategy did prove successful in keeping nonunion contractors at bay. Organizing on a broad scale without relying on the NLRB, then, seemed to be a potentially valuable adaptation of the strategy Garcia implemented.

Additionally, one of the six aforementioned elements of the Rebuilding Campaign was to target entire cleaning contractors or even the national scope of building ownership and financing

in janitor organizing drives. Because the first Rebuilding Campaign effort emerged from the defensive opportunity of the lockout in Pittsburgh, a wide organizing scope was not part of the campaign strategy for this event. Starting with an offensive, citywide organizing strategy, the Denver plan provided an opportunity for a more complete implementation of the Rebuilding Campaign strategy. This complete strategy, unlike what was implemented in Pittsburgh, had the potential to take janitor wages and working conditions out of competition. As such, this strategy had the potential to eliminate nonunion contractors' constant downward pull on a city's building service industry and thereby produce lasting contract victories for janitors.

After developing this plan, Lerner and the Local 105 staff returned to the downtown Denver janitors they had originally approached about organizing. These janitors, the very same janitors who had resisted their initial outreach, supported the new plan. Lerner knew, however, that such a bold plan would require much more than the support of a small group of Denver's downtown janitors. As such, he and his team developed a detailed organizing plan to unite a critical mass of worker and community support behind the organizing drive.

In developing this plan, Lerner and his team adopted many of the Rebuilding Campaign strategies that had proven successful in Pittsburgh such as adopting a social justice frame, gaining worker and community support, and leveraging this support to put national pressure on contractors and building owners. Additionally, because of the strong Latinx demographic in the Denver building service industry, Lerner and the Local 105 staff also drew from the lessons of earlier efforts to organize undocumented immigrant janitors particularly in Houston. With input from Sandra Spector, the Denver plan included specific immigrant rights-based organizing strategies within the broad framework of the Rebuilding Campaign strategy.

While working within the framework of the Rebuilding Campaign, Lerner and the Denver janitor-organizing group did not adopt the “Rebuilding Campaign” label for this organizing drive. Instead, they chose a new label: “Justice for Janitors.” Under the banner of Justice for Janitors, they set out not just to rebuild Local 105 but also to “build a **movement** of Latino janitors.”¹³

To help build this movement, Lerner recruited additional leadership. Most notably, he hired Susan Sachen, a fellow UFW veteran, to help lead the Justice for Janitors campaign. Under Lerner and Sachen’s direction, an expanding JfJ group first focused on leveraging existing rank-and-file strength in Local 105 to build a broad base of worker support. In the kickoff event for the campaign, the JfJ group held a citywide meeting for Local 105 janitors. At this meeting, the group explained Justice for Janitors as an exciting campaign that would help organize nonunion janitors and thus offer greater protection and higher wages to union janitors. Most of these janitors had personally experienced the consequences of a lack of organizing. They had watched their wages drop from an average of \$5.10 an hour to \$4 an hour while most nonunion janitors worked for between \$3.35 and \$3.65 an hour. As such, this message about the campaign’s value resonated with them.¹⁴

While educating these janitors on the campaign’s value, the JfJ group also made specific requests that facilitated their direct involvement in the campaign. They asked janitors to provide any contacts that they had with janitors in nonunion buildings, assigned everyone a set of floors in their building with the task of convincing at least twenty other union members to sign a

¹³ Local 105, 1986-1987, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folder 17-18, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Stephen Lerner, conversation with author, August 17, 2016.

¹⁴ “Rank-and-file activists sign up ‘new workforce’ in Denver” *Leadership News Update* (October/November 1986), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Local 105 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folder 17, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

“Justice Pledge,” and urged everyone to sign up on a list of other jobs that included leafleting and keeping records of union members in each building. From this starting point, the JfJ group identified, trained, and hired a few key rank-and-file janitors as organizers.

With an expanding group of organizers, the JfJ group developed a rigorous system for organizing janitors. They divided the city into quadrants and the local’s JfJ group into four smaller groups. Each group was assigned to a quadrant and tasked with organizing janitors in the quadrant through worksite visits, lunch meetings, and house visits each day. Each group member also reported on his or her daily work. To keep track of the organizing progress, the JfJ group also created charts for each building. These charts listed not only all of the union and nonunion janitors in each building but also designating who had signed the “Justice Pledge” and who was particularly active in the workforce. With this systematic approach, the JfJ group helped organize worker committees at each of the buildings and create a strong foundation of worker support for the campaign.

Building janitor support, however, was only one half of the organizing plan. While outreach to janitors was ongoing, the JfJ group also began building relationships and developing support amongst the larger Denver community. Due to the demographic composition of Denver janitors, the JfJ group focused in particular on establishing connections with the local Latinx community. The group reached out, for example, to Ernesto Vigil, a Denver resident with a rich history of activism and leadership in the Chicax movement. With Vigil’s support and assistance, the JfJ group began building a strong base of support amongst local Latinx organizations, politicians, and clergy.¹⁵

¹⁵ Local 105 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folder 17-8, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

After making connections and building initial support amongst both janitors and the community, the JfJ group organized large actions to capture the public spotlight and develop even more support. Rather than relying on traditional pickets with standard signs, for example, the janitors organized large marches carrying hand drawn signs featuring messages such as “Mucho Trabajo, Poco Dinero” and “We’re Janitors Not Slaves.” Additionally, the JfJ group staged performances in the style of farm worker theatre in front of nonunion buildings. Many of the group members’ experience in the UFW and particularly Angel Mendez-Soto’s membership in Su Teatro proved to be a great asset in developing and performing these bilingual skits.

While participating in street theatre and marches, hundreds of Denver janitors took an active stand against the invisibility and vulnerability that they experienced on a daily basis. In the process, they discovered that they had the power to make building owners and contractors afraid—a clear role-reversal for these janitors and a disruption of the typical balance of power between janitors and their employees amidst neoliberal industry restructuring. Building owners and contractors, however, did not stand idly by as janitors’ power increased. Luckily, Lerner and the JfJ group had prepared for this.

Lerner, who was familiar with ABM’s backlash against undocumented janitors in Houston, was acutely aware of the vulnerability that Denver’s janitors and particularly the city’s undocumented janitors faced from building owners and contractors. Protecting janitors against backlash was thus an important element of his original organizing plan for the Denver campaign. The first line of defense against backlash was the campaign’s strategy of making the janitors’ struggle visible and building public support for the janitors. As Lerner articulated in his organizing plans for Denver, the campaign was designed to create a climate that would deter building owners and cleaning contractor from trying to exploit workers’ undocumented status by

using the INS to halt the organizing drive. Nevertheless, Lerner knew that an antiunion INS raid was still well within the realm of possibility. To address this potential issue, the JfJ group also developed a secondary strategy to make sure that the union and workers were prepared if the INS targeted janitors involved in the organizing drive. The group hired an immigration lawyer, passed out JfJ leaflets that included information about undocumented worker rights, and held training sessions specifically for undocumented workers.¹⁶

This preparatory work was put to the test on June 15, 1986 when the INS raided one of the high rises in downtown Denver and arrested a group of twenty-two janitors, which including an entire worker committee for the JfJ campaign. Unlike in Houston, where Sandra Spector had to struggle for SEIU support for detained janitors, in Denver the JfJ group quickly took action in defense of the janitors. While providing immediate legal support for the detained janitors, the JfJ group mobilized labor and community support to prevent further raids from occurring. Calling attention to the raid as an employer tool to exploit workers, a “Community Coalition for Justice for Janitors” held a large march and rally on August 1 to publicly support undocumented janitors and the Justice for Janitors campaign. Members of the Communication Workers of America (CWA), the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), and the Denver Area Labor Federation all marched in support with the janitors. Additionally, the Denver Archdiocese prepared a written statement of support.

This outpouring of labor and community support for the detained janitors helped negate the climate of fear that the INS raid created around the organizing drive. Ultimately, then, the

¹⁶ “Rank-and-file activists sign up ‘new workforce’ in Denver” *Leadership News Update* (October/November 1986), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Local 105 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folder 17, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

INS raid did not have any long-lasting negative impact on the campaign. With the benefit of strategic preparation and union resources, the raid became a clear symbol of janitor exploitation and a rallying point for further action.¹⁷

In the months following the raid, the JfJ campaign gained momentum through a combination of strategic research and thoughtfully orchestrated actions. With the help of SEIU researchers, the JfJ group developed a white paper on the Denver building service industry. Much like the aforementioned “State of the Union in Building Services” paper that SEIU researchers had released the year before, this white paper was designed to counter popular misconceptions and generate a reaction. The paper presented facts to counter the idea that the real estate industry was financially struggling and the idea that building owners could not afford to pay janitors higher wages. The paper demonstrated, essentially, that janitors’ current low wages and lack of health benefits were a result of real estate developers and building owners’ greedy demand for higher profits, rather than just the product of industry forces.

The paper ended with a call to action: it urged the city of Denver to join together in supporting the janitors’ simple demand for “a living wage and basic health benefits.” This call to action served as the starting point of a “Justice for Janitors week” in the city. SEIU President John Sweeney flew into Denver to participate in this week of action, joining janitors in a robust slate of activities that included a press conference, a prayer breakfast, a radio call-in show, and several meetings with local labor and community leaders as well as big marches and rallies.¹⁸

¹⁷ “Solidarity Rally Demands Higher Wages for Janitors” *People’s Daily World*, August 13, 1986 in Local 105 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folder 17, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Stephen Lerner, conversation with author, August 17, 2016.

¹⁸ Hank Albarelli files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 102, Folder 12, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Local 105 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folder 17, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

In the wake of this week of action, the JfJ campaign shifted into a new phase. Contract negotiations for Denver's existing unionized janitors were scheduled to open in December of 1986, and the JfJ group planned to use these scheduled negotiations as an opportunity to negotiate a citywide master agreement for janitors. In preparation for these contract negotiations, the JfJ group expanded and escalated strategies to put pressure on building owners and contractors. Working directly with International SEIU staff and leaders, the Denver JfJ group shifted from developing a wide base of support to putting concentrated labor pressure on a few key targets.

One of these targets was the real estate development company Galbreath. This company, which owned one of the downtown Denver buildings, also owned one of the Pittsburgh buildings involved in the lockout and had connections to California and Ohio. In targeting this company, the JfJ group was able to strategically build from the Pittsburgh lockout and mount national pressure against the company.¹⁹

While developing concentrated labor pressure against specific industry targets, the JfJ group also worked to develop sustained community support for the campaign. To do so, the group experimented with a wide range of tactics and actions. Some of these actions were carefully designed and orchestrated to emphasize the JfJ campaign as an important social justice cause. In a nod to the civil rights tradition, the JfJ group staged civil disobedience-oriented actions such as a "Clean-In" in one of the buildings. In organizing these actions, the JfJ group specifically enlisted the participation of Latinx janitors as well as religious and community

¹⁹ Local 105 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folder 17, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Building Service Division Board Meeting files, SEIU Secretary-Treasurer's Office: Richard Cordtz Records, Box 3, Folder 43, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

leaders. Their participation, Lerner reasoned, would help highlight the campaign as a struggle for racial justice and build public outrage against building owners and managers.

Other actions were less clearly connected to a broad social justice framing of the campaign but still important in generating public attention. Noticeable amongst these actions were a demonstration that ended in one of the JfJ group members dressed as Santa Claus being arrested and an action where JfJ group members delivered live chickens to building managers who refused meetings with the union.²⁰ While seemingly disparate, all of the JfJ tactics ultimately centered on leveraging pressure against building owners and contractors to voluntarily recognize the union.

This pressure-leveraging strategy paid off. In December of 1986, the JfJ group negotiated a building service contract covering over seventy percent of downtown Denver janitors. This contract more than doubled the number of union janitors in the city and set wages at a minimum of \$5.10 an hour. This increased wage meant a raise of at least ninety cents an hour for union janitors and a fifty percent raise for many of the previously nonunion janitors in the city. Additionally, the contract protected and even increased janitors' benefits. The contract provided janitors with additional holiday time and premium pay for certain types of work. The contract also guaranteed janitors at least twenty hours of work per week and protected janitors from speedups.²¹ Much more so than the Pittsburgh contract, then, this Denver contract was a major tangible victory for janitors. As such, the contract served as a valuable proof of concept for an evolving "Justice for Janitors" campaign strategy.

²⁰ Local 105 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folder 17, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; 19th International Convention: Report to the Building Service Division 1988, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 144, Folder 3, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

²¹ "Getting Even in Denver: New contract brings justice to 1,000 janitors," *Service Employee* 46, no 3. (January/February 1987), SEIU Publications, Box 20, Folder 2, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Despite the success of this contract achievement, however, Local 105—much like Local 29 after the lockout—suffered from increased internal conflict in the wake of contract negotiation. While campaign leaders, staff, and janitors were pleased with the result of the campaign, not everyone was happy with the campaign methodology. In particular, some Local 105 staff and members involved in the campaign were not pleased with what they perceived as Lerner and Sachen’s calculated, almost cold prioritization of goal-oriented organizing above all else.

For example, Ernesto Vigil, who took a community liaison position with Local 105 to support the Justice for Janitors campaign, expressed concerns with Lerner and Sachen’s campaign leadership in a letter to Local 105’s president in December of 1986. In the letter, he critiqued Lerner and Sachen’s treatment of “minority” janitors and community members as strategic pawns without regard for the broader needs or potential of these individuals. He criticized Lerner and Sachen’s casual conversations about purposefully getting “minority women busted” during campaign events without concern for how this strategy might impact police relationships with the Latinx community in Denver. He also criticized Lerner and Sachen for not including rank-and-file leaders in campaign staff meetings and for leading some of these rank-and-file leaders to believe that the union would hire them when the union did not have the resources to do so. Finally, he also criticized Lerner for not following through on promises of broader involvement in immigration issues in the Latinx community.

Complaints from other Local 105 staff members and janitors echoed Vigil’s critiques. A janitor and local staff member, for example, submitted a joint grievance, declaring, “Sue sechan [sic] treated us like a dog, she always talk [sic] down to us. She would not let us participate in

meetings that concerned us.” Another janitor and staff member filed a grievance stating, “Sue and Steve Learner [sic] treated me like a second class citizen, they always talk down to me.”²²

In combination, these complaints and grievances highlight a critical issue underlying the seeming success of the emerging JfJ campaign. JfJ participants were not willing to overlook leaders’ lack of sensitivity to issues of democracy and race in the process of the campaign even though they ultimately gained a contract with significant wage and benefit improvements. In other words, some of the participants did not believe that the campaign results justified the means of achieving these results. Their criticism of the campaign process signaled a rift within Justice for Janitors. The campaign’s top leaders, primarily white staff from the International, were on one side while Latinx Local 105 staff and janitors were on the other side. This rift posed a clear threat to the stability of the JfJ campaign in Local 105.

While stemming directly from disagreement over some of the strategies and tactics of the Denver campaign, this rift should also be understood as a reflection of something deeper: this rift was a reflection of the lack of consensus amongst campaign leaders and participants on what the purpose of the Justice for Janitors campaign was. Was the purpose of the campaign to organize janitors and gain modest wage and benefit improvements for these janitors? Or was the purpose of the campaign to empower poor workers of color and challenge the historic marginalization of these individuals both at the workplace and within the organized labor movement? If the former was true, then the narrow, goals-focused tactics of campaign leaders such as Stephen Lerner and Sue Sacher seemed justified. If the latter was true, however, then these tactics appear somewhat flawed and insufficient.

²² Local 105 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folder 18, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

In many ways, the experimental, nebulous nature of the JfJ campaign was a key asset. It allowed individuals at all levels of the labor movement and throughout local communities to join together in support of a common demand for justice. At the same time, the fact that campaign participants had different understandings of the deeper purpose and goals of Justice for Janitors created tension within the campaign. As I will demonstrate in future chapters, tension between far-reaching, progressive visions and plans for the campaign and more narrow, conservative visions and plans for the campaign would prove to be a constant source of conflict and controversy within the history of Justice for Janitors.

While Lerner and Sachen's leadership strategies and tactics sparked conflict within the Denver JfJ campaign, they also generated issues within Local 105 more broadly. While Lerner and Sachen sought to build support for the campaign amongst existing building service members and the janitorial workforce, they did not spend a lot of time developing support for the campaign within Local 105 as a whole. Thus, as the JfJ campaign developed, existing Local 105 leaders and health care members were left largely uninformed and uninvolved in the campaign. These leaders and members understandably grew resentful of the union resources being funneled into the campaign while the rest of the local struggled with basic day-to-day operations.

Much like the rift within the Denver JfJ campaign, this conflict within Local 105 can be understood as a reflection of a deeper tension. This conflict can be understood as stemming from different understandings of the purpose of the SEIU and the labor movement generally. Was the purpose of the labor movement to service its existing union members? Or was the purpose of the labor movement to build power for workers by organizing new members? If the purpose was to build power through organizing, did individual unions such as the SEIU have a responsibility to pursue organizing drives in several industries at once in order to help build power for all of its

members? Or did unions have a responsibility to take advantage of strategic opportunities and channel union resources into potentially winning break-through victories in one industry? Much like (and deeply intertwined with) the disagreements over the purpose of the JfJ campaign, conflict rooted in different understandings of the purpose of the labor movement would plague the SEIU throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Ultimately, the conflict emerging within the Denver JfJ campaign and between the JfJ campaign and the rest of Local 105 reached a breaking point in January of 1987. Under the added weight of a thousand new janitor members, the crumbling foundation of Local 105 effectively collapsed. Only a month after the citywide janitor contract was signed, President John Sweeney deemed Local 105 leaders incapable of dealing with the growing conflict within the local on their own. In January 1987, Sweeney transitioned Local 105 from a voluntary guardianship into a mandatory trusteeship.²³

This trusteeship proved extremely beneficial to the local's current and future members. President Sweeney appointed Mike Garcia as Deputy Trustee of the local. In this temporary leadership role, Garcia oversaw the expansion of a strong Latinx leadership and staff base within the local. He oversaw, for example, the recruitment of Eddie Canales, who had worked with Sandra Spector in organizing undocumented janitors in Houston, to Denver Local 105. Additionally, he oversaw the hiring of rank-and-file workers, including a janitor named Rosario Rodriguez, as new Local 105 building service representatives within the first three months of trusteeship.²⁴ With the benefit of this strong leadership and staff support, Local 105 was able to maintain and expand the Denver Justice for Janitors campaign in the wake of the trusteeship.

²³ Local 105 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folder 18, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University

²⁴ "The Union Leader," SEIU Publications, Box 45, Folder 9, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

While proving beneficial to the continued success of Justice for Janitors in Denver, the Local 105 trusteeship was a clear manifestation of limitations and underlying issues within the emerging Justice for Janitors campaign. The trusteeship was a sign that the campaign was not self-sufficient or sustainable. While helping address membership decline within Local 105, the JfJ campaign actually contributed to internal conflict and organizational paralysis within the local. The trusteeship, then, undoubtedly signaled that the JfJ campaign was not an easy cure-all for all of the labor movement's late twentieth century woes. Furthermore, the Local 105 trusteeship signaled a potential issue with the balance of power between the International and local levels of the union within the Justice for Janitors campaign.

The Local 105 trusteeship established a potentially dangerous precedent within the campaign. It set a precedent that, in the midst of local conflict, the International would assert control. Rather than giving local leaders the space to address internal struggles (and potentially fail) on their own, International SEIU leaders took control and brought in new leaders to address the local's internal struggles. The trusteeship, then, signaled that the Justice for Janitors campaign was not entirely democratic.

Regardless of this controversy, the Local 105 trusteeship (and its implications) did little to dampen popular support and enthusiasm for the emerging JfJ campaign. As news of the campaign's role in organizing janitors and achieving a strong contract traveled, other SEIU locals experimented with implementing Justice for Janitors strategies. And in the midst of this growing support for the campaign, Stephen Lerner worked with SEIU President John Sweeney to dedicate even more union resources to developing and expanding this campaign. By the time the conflict in Local 105 had been resolved and the trusteeship lifted, Lerner was already in the

process of launching official Justice for Janitors campaigns in two new cities. By 1988, the Justice for Janitors campaign was on track to becoming a national phenomenon.²⁵

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As I have demonstrated in these first two chapters, the Justice for Janitors campaign developed out of a hodge-podge combination of union organizing and reform experiments between 1980 and 1986. Some of these experiments were implemented from below, and some were implemented from above. They all emerged from an eclectic combination of individual, institutional, and community threats, opportunities, and resources. In tracing the development and intersections of these organizing experiments at different levels of the labor movement, I have sought to provide a more complete—albeit also messier, more complex, and ambiguous—origin story for the Justice for Janitors campaign.

This origin story allows for an understanding of the Justice for Janitors campaign as a developing response to both deeply rooted patterns of union membership decline and more recent patterns of neoliberal restructuring in the janitorial industry as well as the larger United States economy at the end of the twentieth century. The individuals, groups, and institutions involved in the experiments that contributed to the development of this specific campaign did not all set out to explicitly challenge union decline and neoliberal restructuring. Some individuals—such as Mike Garcia and Sandra Spector—sought to address the immediate, local exploitation that undocumented janitors experienced on the ground level. Others—such as Hank Albarelli and Stephen Lerner—were interested in addressing broad patterns of union leadership failure and organizing inefficiency. At the same time, leaders in the AFL-CIO and SEIU sought to address the long-term danger that membership decline posed to the future of their institutions. While in

²⁵ Local 105 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 24, Folder 1, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Stephen Lerner, conversation with author, August 17, 2016.

pursuit of different goals, these individuals' efforts intersected and overlapped. The Justice for Janitors campaign emerged from this intersection and provided an opportunity for a powerful coalition of individuals and organizations to address the complex, intersectional sources of janitor vulnerability and exploitation in the 1980s.

As Chapters 1 and 2 demonstrate, however, this coalition was messy and imperfect from the start. The Justice for Janitors campaign did not emerge from Denver in 1986 as a decisive and sustainable success. Nevertheless, the campaign emerged from a pattern of dedication to fighting against the status quo in one sector of the labor movement. Furthermore, despite the shortcomings in the vision and long-term strategy devised by JfJ leadership, the campaign emerged from a pattern of commitment, perseverance, and adaptation in the face of obstacles and failure. In what follows, I demonstrate how the Justice for Janitors campaign continued to develop and evolve from these patterns in the late 1980s and into the 1990s. Centering my analysis on campaign developments in Washington D.C., Atlanta, Los Angeles, and San Diego in Chapters 3 and 4, I highlight the struggles and successes of the expansion of Justice for Janitors into a powerful national campaign that combined labor movement traditions with a broader social movement vision.

Chapter 3

Justice for Janitors in Washington D.C. and Atlanta:

The First Steps Toward the Development of a (Trans)National JfJ Campaign (1987-1990)

In this chapter, I explore the expansion and adaptation of the Justice for Janitors campaign in the late 1980s. I reveal that SEIU building service division leaders capitalized on the much-publicized (if also slightly exaggerated) success of the Denver Justice for Janitors campaign in 1986 and 1987. As “Justice for Janitors” gained popularity as a rallying cry throughout SEIU locals, building service organizing director Stephen Lerner worked with a group of staff at the International level of the union to continue developing and evolving the Rebuilding Campaign under the new JfJ campaign label. The members of this emerging International JfJ group demonstrated a commitment to making the most of the piecemeal resources and limited political space between old guard leaders that they had at their disposal. At the same time, the group also demonstrated a desire to avoid the internal conflict and tension that had emerged in the wake of the Pittsburgh and Denver campaigns.

International JfJ group members were clearly aware of the fact that Justice for Janitors in its current form was imperfect, and they committed to strengthening the campaign through further experimentation and adaption. In the spirit of expanding but also improving the campaign, they launched a new, national Justice for Janitors campaign centered in two brand new building service locals: Washington D.C. Local 525 and Atlanta Local 679. As I demonstrate in this chapter, the expansion and adaptation of the campaign in Washington D.C. and Atlanta held great promise initially but ultimately faced major struggles.

I argue that, in this phase of adaptation and expansion, Justice for Janitors continued to develop as a response to both recent union struggles amidst neoliberal restructuring and the roots of a longer history of union decline. In this phase, JfJ leaders made a bold move to “open up” a Southern city to union organizing. With this, they challenged the recent decision of SEIU old guard leaders to deprioritize costly janitor organizing in the South in Houston. At the same time, they also challenged the much longer history of union inactivity and weakness in the South.

While defying patterns of union hesitance in the South, this expansion further marked JfJ as an alternative to the historic insularity and racial exclusivity of the U.S. labor movement. The demographic of workers in Atlanta and D.C. was different from that of workers in the initial Justice for Janitors campaign in Denver. While Justice for Janitors in Denver created an opportunity for Latinx immigrant janitors to bring visibility to the exploitation that they experienced, the expansion of the campaign in Atlanta and Washington D.C. allowed native-born black janitors to shed light on the exploitation that they experienced in the industry as well. The expansion of the JfJ campaign thus helped janitors connect the exploitation of people of color in the janitorial industry to a much longer pattern of intersectional racial and economic exploitation in United States history. Beyond this, the expansion of the campaign to D.C. and Atlanta opened up the possibility for the emergence and growth of Justice for Janitors as a multiracial, multiregional workers’ struggle against ongoing and escalating intersectional racial, economic, and gender inequality amidst neoliberal restructuring.

Despite the initial promise of this phase of JfJ expansion and adaptation, however, the campaigns in both Washington D.C. and Atlanta faltered amidst a combination of intense antiunion hostility from building owners, struggles to build a local base of support, a mistaken reliance on prominent national allies for campaign support, and a lack of assistance from old

guard SEIU leaders. I suggest that JfJ leaders' attempt to sidestep internal conflict and build the D.C. and Atlanta JfJ campaigns in brand new locals unfortunately intersected with high worker turnover to make building and sustaining a base of rank-and-file support for the campaign much more difficult than it had been in Denver. While struggling to build rank-and-file support, these JfJ leaders and local organizers embraced newfound opportunities to use International SEIU resources and connections to build national and even international support for the campaign amongst labor and Democratic Party allies. While this effort to build and leverage national support created important opportunities for Justice for Janitors to develop and gain prominence as a national—even transnational—organizing campaign, JfJ leaders' faith in prominent political allies proved to be naïve. At critical moments within the campaign, some of these “allies” ultimately proved committed to the neoliberal status quo and unwilling to take any risk in supporting janitors. At the same time, old guard building service leaders in the SEIU similarly proved committed to an extremely insular, conservative form of business unionism and refused to take any risks in supporting janitors outside of their immediate jurisdictions. In the end, the intentional expansion of the JfJ campaign in brand new locals in D.C. and Atlanta did not prove successful in simultaneously expanding Justice for Janitors and avoiding local union conflict. Instead, this phase of campaign adaptation and expansion ultimately raised further questions about the sustainability of the campaign going forward.

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As I suggested above, Stephen Lerner and his growing team of International JfJ staff started laying the groundwork for an expansion of the Justice for Janitors campaign even while they were still in the midst of developing the JfJ campaign in Denver in 1986 and 1987. Due to a long history and celebration of local autonomy within the SEIU, many local SEIU leaders were

resistant to becoming involved in the Justice for Janitors campaign. They did not want International staff intervening in what they saw as their jurisdiction. Working around this resistance, Lerner and fellow International JfJ group members found political space in locals that were already open to International involvement in their local affairs: they started laying the groundwork for an expansion of the JfJ campaign in locals that were currently under trusteeship or that had already started participating in the SEIU's Rebuilding Campaign or another International SEIU-sponsored organizing drive.

During 1986, for example, International building service division staff involved in the newly developing JfJ campaign worked with staff in San Jose Local 77, Washington D.C. Local 82, San Diego Local 102, Los Angeles Local 399, and the Atlanta portion of Local 579 on industry research and the start of janitor organizing initiatives. Locals 77, 82, and 102 were all currently under trusteeship. Local 399 was currently involved in International union-staffed and funded organizing drives amongst hospital workers, and Local 579 was involved in a broader International union staffed and funded organizing drive amongst low-wage workers throughout Georgia.¹

Because of their ongoing trusteeships and organizing efforts, these locals already had staff members who had been placed in the local by the International and were on the International's payroll. These staff members, as well as a few other progressive leaders and staff members in the locals, were open to working with Lerner and the International JfJ group to research the janitorial industries in their cities and assess the feasibility of launching janitor organizing drives. These staff members, in other words, served as bridge builders who helped

¹ Local Union files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Boxes 16-52, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Stephen Lerner files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 103, Folder 6, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Andy Stern files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 104, Folder 2, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

break down traditional International–local tensions within the SEIU and facilitate an expansion of the JfJ campaign. With the help of these bridge builders, the International JfJ group was already prepared to expand Justice for Janitors into other locals once the local JfJ group working in Denver Local 105 helped janitors organize and provided a proof of concept for the campaign in the form of a first contract.

In Washington D.C., for example, an organizer named Jay Hessey served as an early bridge builder for the campaign and laid the foundation for an expansion of Justice for Janitors to D.C. while the Denver campaign was ongoing. Hessey, who had previously done a brief stint organizing hotel workers in New Orleans as an SEIU organizer, was offered an opportunity to continue working as an SEIU organizer doing Rebuilding Campaign work in the currently trustee Local 82.² Hessey accepted and started organizing janitors under the Service Contract Act (SCA) in 1986.³ As SCA organizing proved generative, Hessey worked in coordination with Stephen Lerner to begin implementing some of the Denver Justice for Janitors campaign strategies in Washington D.C.

In late 1986, Hessey started outreach to janitors in commercial office buildings. He started mapping the broader janitorial industry in D.C. and exploring the feasibility of a citywide organizing drive. Additionally, in late 1986 and early 1987, Hessey started immigration and organizer training projects in Local 82. Through the immigration project, Local 82 provided

² Jay Hessey, interview by Pernell Vinson, *Where We Come From, Who We Are: Service Workers Oral History Project*, SEIU Local 82, November 1995.

³ The Service Contract Act (SCA) was originally enacted in 1965 to create wage and benefit protections for the employees of private contractors that provide services to the federal government. In the early 1980s, however, members of the Reagan administration proposed changes to the SCA—including an exemption of janitors. SEIU President John Sweeney spoke out against these changes and helped mobilize labor support in protection of the act. At the same time, leaders in the SEIU building service division embraced organizing under the SCA as a key strategy in the division’s emerging Rebuilding Campaign. Drew Von Bergen, “Officials of two major unions today assailed Reagan administration,” UPI Newstrack, November 4, 1981; 19th International Convention: Report to the Building Service Division, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 144, Folder 3, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

information and services related to the recently passed Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in order to build ties with the growing number of Latinx immigrant workers in D.C. Through the organizer training project, Hessey helped train rank-and-file janitors from Washington D.C. and other SEIU locals to organize nonunion janitors.⁴

In Atlanta, the work of organizers Robert Sarason and Linda Riggins laid the foundation for further Justice for Janitors campaign expansion. Both Sarason and Riggins started working out of Local 579 on a statewide Georgia organizing drive in coordination with the AFL-CIO's "One on One" organizing project in 1985.⁵ Even before Sarason and Riggins started working in Local 579, however, Atlanta caught Building Service Director Hank Albarelli's attention as a site for janitor organizing. (Atlanta was one of the cities where the up-and-coming transnational cleaning company called the Hawley Group operated. As discussed in Chapter 1, Albarelli developed a plan for targeting this company in a trans-Atlantic janitor organizing drive in 1984.) Albarelli's interest in janitor organizing in Atlanta provided an opportunity for an intersection of the Rebuilding Campaign with the broader Georgia organizing drive. In the fall of 1986, Sarason and Riggins led a successful organizing drive of janitors at the Atlanta airport. This initial janitor organizing effort provided the foundation for other Rebuilding Campaign work in Local 579. In early 1987, for example, Lerner hired a new organizer, Nancy Lenk, to work in

⁴ Local 82 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 19, Folder 2, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Stephen Lerner files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 103, Folder 6, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "Janitors are training in Washington to organize others back home," *Building Service Division Update* 1, no. 1 (Summer 1987), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

⁵ AFL-CIO: Evolution of Work files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 159, Folder 5, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "SEIU is Jumping in Georgia," *Service Employee* 45, no. 6 (July/August 1986), SEIU Publications, Box 20, Folder 1, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Local 579 on organizing janitors under the Service Contract Act like Hessey had been doing in Local 82.⁶

In this preparation to expand the JfJ campaign into new locals as well as in dealing with the aftermath of Denver's qualified success, however, International JfJ leaders and organizers encountered significant difficulties within the locals. Even when some local leaders and staff were supportive of janitor organizing in concept, they did not actually support the organizing in practice. In Atlanta, for example, International staff found existing Local 579 leaders to be unhelpful in janitor organizing. (Local 579 President Herman Lewis wasn't even living in Atlanta at the time.) In other locals, leaders were more directly supportive of janitor organizing, but they resisted giving International JfJ staff complete control over janitor organizing within their jurisdiction. In Washington D.C. Local 82, for example, Local 82 President Arline Neal supported janitor organizing but resisted giving complete control over organizing to International staff. Furthermore, many of the existing black members of Local 82 were openly hostile to organizing the growing number of Latinx immigrant janitors in Washington D.C. These Local 82 members perceived incoming Latinx janitors as a threat to their wages and job security rather than as potential allies in an organizing campaign.⁷

In other words, despite significant effort, International organizers like Jay Hessey in D.C. and Robert Sarason and Linda Riggins in Atlanta struggled to surmount the host of internal obstacles that stood in the way of launching Justice for Janitors campaigns in their locals. While working to build bridges between the International JfJ group and their locals, these organizers

⁶ Hank Albarelli files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 102, Folder 12, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Stephen Lerner files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 104, Folder 25, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

⁷ Local 82 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Boxes 19, Folder 2, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

struggled to find the solid ground of mutual understanding to support such bridges. They found that International JfJ leaders and local union leaders and members had different understandings of what the proper form and function of the union should be. As such, creating unified support within their locals for a resource-intensive and risky janitor organizing drive seemed nearly impossible.

The International JfJ organizers stationed throughout locals during this period were thus confronted with a two-front battle in their efforts to continue building a janitor organizing campaign: a battle with cleaning contractors and building owners and a battle with local leaders and members. As they increasingly faced this two-front battle, the International JfJ group explored a strategy to bypass resistant local leaders and staff by effectively cutting them out of new organizing efforts: the group explored the possibility of organizing janitors in brand new building service organizing locals.

In the summer of 1987, the International JfJ group found a way to make this possibility a reality. International JfJ leaders focused their efforts on two places that were strategic organizing targets for an expansion of the JfJ campaign and, arguably more importantly, that were most open to the creation of new organizing-focused SEIU locals. These leaders focused their JfJ expansion efforts on Washington D.C. and Atlanta.

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In many ways, Washington D.C. and Atlanta were not obvious sites for an expansion of the Justice for Janitors campaign. Although locals in these cities were clearly struggling amidst union decline and neoliberal restructuring, Washington D.C. and Atlanta were not obvious sites for an expansion of the Justice for Janitors campaign because many of the features of the janitorial industry and the political environment in these two places differed from those in

Denver where the JfJ campaign had already found success. Washington D.C., for example, had significantly more office buildings than downtown Denver. Unlike many cities, Washington D.C. had strict height restrictions for office buildings. The combination of these height restrictions and demand for office space in the district resulted in a large number of short buildings in D.C. While downtown Denver had approximately forty office buildings in the mid-1980s, downtown D.C. had hundreds.⁸ This meant that a district-wide organizing drive in Washington D.C. would require many more organizers or at least much more coordination and effort than a citywide drive in Denver. While not as large as Washington D.C., Atlanta had the added complication of being a city in the South, a region which was known for intense anti-unionism. While organizers in D.C. would have to contend with more office buildings, organizers in Atlanta would be forced to contend with a more politically hostile environment to organized labor.

Additionally, the demographic of workers who cleaned office buildings in both Atlanta and D.C. differed significantly from the demographic of workers who cleaned office buildings in Denver. While the majority of janitors in Denver were Latinx immigrant workers, the majority of janitors in both D.C. and Atlanta in the mid-1980s were native-born black workers. Considering the central role that Chicanx and up-and-coming Latinx immigrant rights movement activists played in the Justice for Janitors campaign in Denver, the janitorial industries in Washington D.C. and Atlanta did not present obvious opportunities for a straightforward expansion of the JfJ campaign.⁹

⁸ “David Chu (Part 2),” Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University.

⁹ In contrast, cities such as Los Angeles or San Diego, which already had a predominantly Latinx janitorial workforce in the mid-1980s, seemed like more logical sites for an expansion of the Justice for Janitors campaign in the wake of success in Denver.

Furthermore, as suggested above, the racial composition of the Washington D.C. janitorial workforce was starting to transform. During the mid to late 1980s, the Latinx population of the district increased dramatically. According to U.S. census data, for example, the “Hispanic origin” population of Washington D.C. nearly doubled from 2.8 percent in 1980 to 5.4 percent in 1990.¹⁰ Amidst this general growth of the Latinx population in the district, Latinx workers gained a foothold in the janitorial industry, as cleaning contractors readily hired Latinx immigrant workers as a source of cheap, easily exploitable labor. Deeply intertwined with a broad shift toward low wages and no benefits, part-timing, and speedups in the janitorial industry, this demographic shift polarized black and Latinx workers and made any efforts to organize janitors in the district all the more difficult.

Nevertheless, both Atlanta and Washington D.C. proved appealing to JfJ campaign leaders because they offered an opportunity for these leaders to directly intervene in local janitorial markets without the hassle of working within existing locals. In Washington D.C., International JfJ leaders had the benefit of a union precedent for chartering new locals in the district for organizing drives. In the late 1960s, International SEIU staff oversaw the creation of Local 536 in Washington D.C. to organize government workers.¹¹ Furthermore, the fact that Local 82 was under trusteeship during this period signaled that extant Local 82 leaders did not have the strength or resources to resist JfJ leaders’ plans to follow this precedent and charter a new janitor organizing local within an industry that had previously been under their jurisdiction.

Unlike Local 82, Local 579 was not in trusteeship and did not have a history of conceding to new SEIU locals within its jurisdiction. However, there was a massive incongruity

¹⁰ Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, “Historical Census Statistics On Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For Large Cities And Other Urban Places In The United States,” Working Paper No. 76 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, February 2005).

¹¹ Jay Hessey, interview by Pernel Vinson, *Where We Come From, Who We Are: Service Workers Oral History Project*, SEIU Local 82, November 1995.

between the scope of Local 579's jurisdiction and actual presence in any janitorial markets within this jurisdiction: Local 579 was technically responsible for the janitorial industry in Atlanta (as well as various other industries throughout parts of Georgia and South Carolina), but the local had no real presence within the city. This lack of union presence in Atlanta served as grounds for International JfJ staff to argue that a new building service local was needed in Atlanta.¹²

While most obviously appealing for the opportunities that they provided to create new JfJ-focused locals, Atlanta and D.C. can also be understood as potentially valuable sites for an expansion of the JfJ campaign for other reasons. Washington D.C., for example, had the added advantage of being the site of the SEIU's International headquarters.¹³ With top SEIU leaders and International staff already in place in Washington D.C., the International JfJ group could exert influence over a janitor organizing drive in D.C. much more easily than in other cities. While lacking proximity to SEIU headquarters, Atlanta was increasingly celebrated as an economically booming city of a modern and progressive "New South" and had been chosen as the site of the upcoming Democratic National Convention (DNC) in 1988. JfJ leader Stephen Lerner saw the city's progressive reputation and upcoming role as the DNC host as effective pressure points that could be exploited in a janitor organizing drive.

Beyond this (and somewhat counter-intuitively), both Washington D.C. and Atlanta can be understood as valuable sites for JfJ expansion because of the aforementioned features of these places that would make janitor organizing difficult. The size of the D.C. janitorial industry, for example, presented a clear organizing challenge; however, an effective JfJ organizing drive in

¹² Andy Stern files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 104, Folder 2, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

¹³ "David Chu (Part 2)," Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University.

D.C. would prove that the success of Justice for Janitors was not necessarily contingent on the size of the industry being organized. Similarly, the strong antiunion climate in the South may have presented a similarly daunting obstacle to organizing in Atlanta, but a JfJ victory in a Southern city would prove the strength of the JfJ campaign. Furthermore, a successful organizing drive amongst black and Latinx workers in these two cities could lay the foundation for Justice for Janitors to become much more expansive multiracial and multicultural social movement that united workers across lines of race and citizenship status.

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Committing to both the challenges and opportunities that Washington D.C. and Atlanta provided for the campaign, International JfJ leaders negotiated the creation of a new janitor-organizing focused local in each of these cities in 1987. In June of 1987, for example, the International JfJ group worked with SEIU President John Sweeney, SEIU Organizing Director Andy Stern, and Local 82 leaders to officially create Local 525 as a janitor organizing local in Washington D.C. Only a few months later, JfJ staff worked with International SEIU Vice President Stodghill and Local 579 leaders to split Local 579 into three separate locals, one of which would focus only on organizing building service workers in Atlanta. At Stodghill's recommendation, Local 579 members voted to approve this split in late October 1987. After this vote of approval, President Sweeney officially approved the creation of Atlanta Local 679 only a few weeks later.¹⁴

These newly chartered locals functioned as new bases of operation for the International organizers who were already laying the foundation for JfJ campaigns in these areas. In D.C., for

¹⁴ Local 525 files, SEIU Secretary-Treasurer's Office: Richard Cordtz Records, Box 11, Folder 21, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Local 579 files, SEIU Secretary-Treasurer's Office: Richard Cordtz Records, Box 11, Folder 57, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

example, Jay Hessey transferred from Local 82 and became the de facto leader of Local 525. In Atlanta, Linda Riggins, Robert Sarason, and Nancy Lenk started working out of Local 679, and Riggins officially took control of the newly chartered local as Local 679 President. With the freedom to do so without interference from existing local leaders, these organizers barreled forward with efforts to build Justice for Janitors campaigns in their respective cities using much of the same strategies that JfJ organizers had used in Denver.

Much like organizers had done in Denver, for example, organizers in Local 525 and Local 679 worked to develop a base of worker and community support for Justice for Janitors campaigns. Because they were working out of brand new locals, however, these organizers had fewer local resources to develop this base of support. In Denver, JfJ organizers were able to build a base of rank-and-file worker support for the campaign from the existing Local 105 membership. Furthermore, connections between these workers as well as local JfJ organizers like Angel Mendez-Soto and the local community provided the Denver campaign with a strong base of community support. Having just been created, however, Local 525 and Local 679 had virtually no existing members. Additionally, the leaders and organizers of these new locals, as suggested above, were not native to the local D.C. and Atlanta communities. Instead, they were hired on the basis of previous organizing work for the SEIU. This put them at a clear disadvantage in developing a strong local foundation of support for the campaign.

Without natural ties to local workers and community members, JfJ organizers in D.C. and Atlanta leaned on the resources and connections of the International union to build both worker and community support for their respective campaigns. Both Local 679 and Local 525 brought on new organizers with support from SEIU leaders. In D.C., Stephen Lerner helped hire an additional organizer to join Jay Hessey in his outreach efforts to D.C. janitors. In Atlanta, Local

679 hired professional wrestler-turned-labor-organizer Claude “Thunderbolt” Patterson as a full-time Local 679 organizer with the support of the International. Having wrestled in Georgia during his career, Patterson helped Local 679 make inroads amongst janitors who recognized him from his wrestling days.

These initial worker outreach efforts proved even more successful than JfJ organizers expected. In July of 1987, Stephen Lerner wrote a positive report to President Sweeney about the first few weeks of worker outreach in Local 525 and Local 679. He noted that Local 525 staff showed “great progress” in developing worker contacts in office buildings and even getting workers to sign union cards. Additionally, he noted that organizers in Local 679 were having a “surprisingly good response” from workers and making headway with union cards as well. In his report to Sweeney, though, Lerner did express some concern about the feasibility of developing long-term rank-and-file support for the D.C. JfJ campaign.¹⁵ The part-time nature of the work as well as the already discernable shift from a predominantly black to an increasingly Latinx workforce in D.C. led to significant turnover amongst janitors. This would prove to make D.C. organizers’ efforts to build a strong foundation for a lengthy organizing drive extremely difficult. Similarly, the extensiveness of part-timing and the antiunion environment of the South would prove to make developing a lasting base of local support difficult in Atlanta as well.

Facing a difficult battle in building and especially maintaining worker support, JfJ organizers in Atlanta and D.C. focused on building a secondary source of support for their respective JfJ campaigns amongst community allies. In this outreach effort, much like in their worker outreach efforts, JfJ organizers relied on the connections and resources of the

¹⁵ Hal Lamar, “Patterson Organizes Janitors,” *Atlanta Inquirer*, October 1, 1988; Andy Stern files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 105, Folder 17, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Stephen Lerner files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 104, Folder 25, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

International union. With help from the International, Local 679 organizers in Atlanta gained an official endorsement from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Local 679 organizers also enlisted the support of Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young and Georgia Congressman and Civil Rights leader John Lewis. Andrew Young expressed public support for JfJ in the early stages of the campaign, and John Lewis not only endorsed the campaign but also held a community breakfast to build additional community support for Justice for Janitors in Atlanta.¹⁶

Working with staff at the SEIU headquarters, Local 525 organizers also sought and gained the support of prominent community allies. They enlisted the support of well known “labor priest” Monsignor George Higgins for the D.C. Justice for Janitors campaign. Although not particularly connected to Washington D.C., Monsignor Higgins—like many of the activists who became involved in the JfJ campaign—had been active in supporting the United Farm Workers movement in the 1960s and early 1970s and thus made for a logical and valuable ally for a budding JfJ campaign. Msgr. Higgins wrote a widely published article in support of the D.C. JfJ campaign and personally enlisted additional support for the campaign amongst the Catholic clergy. Local 525 organizers also enlisted the support of Jesse Jackson and his National Rainbow Coalition with support from the SEIU. The National Rainbow Coalition endorsed the campaign, and Jesse Jackson wrote letters to D.C. building owners, encouraging them to support Justice for Janitors.¹⁷

While building support from prominent religious and political allies, Local 525 organizers also attempted to build support for the JfJ campaign amongst the local African

¹⁶ Justice for Janitors Atlanta files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 6, Folder 30, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

¹⁷ Local 525 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 49, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; “Justice’ campaign bursts on scene in D.C., Atlanta,” *Building Service Division Update* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1987), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

American community in D.C. Much of the religious and political leadership in Washington D.C. in the late 1980s was deeply embedded in the district's African American community, which made this community a valuable ally for the campaign. JfJ organizers' efforts to build this alliance, however, did not prove fruitful. Many of D.C.'s local churches had ties with local business owners who resisted JfJ. At the same time, the growing number of Latinx immigrant janitors in D.C. made the campaign seem less relevant to both local African American religious and political leaders.¹⁸

Despite struggles to integrate into the local African American community in D.C., JfJ organizers and workers involved in both the emerging Atlanta and D.C. JfJ campaigns framed their organizing campaigns as struggles against a deep-seated pattern of racial as well as economic injustice against African Americans throughout U.S. history. In Atlanta, JfJ organizers and janitors drew direct parallels between the exploitation and mistreatment of African American janitors in the 1980s to the exploitation and mistreatment of African American workers in previous decades and even centuries. Early in the campaign, for example, a group of Atlanta janitors called attention to a new rule at their workplace that required them to enter the building that they cleaned through the back door rather than the front door. Some of the older janitors at this workplace emphasized the similarity between the new rule and Jim Crow laws, such as the laws requiring that black people sit at the back of buses, that they had personally been subject to in the past. One of the janitors, Cora Walker, even went so far as to declare: "It felt like we were going back to the days of slavery... Like we were backward, like we couldn't be seen."¹⁹

¹⁸ "Jay Hessey (April 29)," Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University; "Bill Ragen (Part 2)," Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University.

¹⁹ "Back Door Affront in Atlanta," *Service Employees Union* (January/February 1988): 4-5; Justice for Janitors Atlanta files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 6, Folder 30, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Atlanta's JfJ organizers helped publicize these janitors' critique of the new rule as yet another example of the exploitation and denigration of African Americans in a long history of racial injustice in the United States. Their efforts quickly paid off: the rule was quickly eliminated and the janitors were once again allowed to enter the building through the front door.

In Washington D.C., JfJ leaders and organizers similarly made references to slavery to critique current practices in the janitorial industry. Stephen Lerner, for example, referenced the institution of slavery in order to critique the currently popular free-market rationalization for low wages in the janitorial industry. In reference to the current D.C. janitorial industry, he asserted in an interview: "There's a basic moral issue here. Why should incredibly rich and powerful people have people cleaning up after them who literally do not have enough money to eat? If the building owners want to argue, 'Well the market allows us to do this,' well I guess the slavery market allowed slavery."²⁰ With this statement, Lerner suggested that moral issues of humanity, dignity, and a basic living wage should not be pushed aside regardless of the market viability of an economic system. And quite pointedly, he linked wealthy building owners' efforts to justify poverty wages for janitors with a possible justification of slavery.

In drawing parallels between current and historic exploitation and denigration of African American workers in the United States, JfJ organizers and workers in both Atlanta and D.C. established a strong racial justice frame for the Justice for Janitors campaigns in these cities. As suggested above, this frame proved to be a strategic tool for JfJ participants to criticize current wages and practices in the janitorial industry. Beyond having immediate utility in building public support to challenge current industry conditions, however, this frame provided a starting point for Justice for Janitors to evolve as more than a simple struggle to organize janitors and

²⁰ Jon Cohen, "Down and Dirty," *Washington City Paper* 9, no. 20, May 19-25, 1989 in Local 525 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 49, Folder 9, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

help them win moderate wage and working condition improvements. It provided a starting point for Justice for Janitors to develop as a struggle that targeted the systemic oppression of poor people of color that was deeply intertwined with and facilitated the rise of neoliberal restructuring. In other words, it provided a means for Justice for Janitors to develop not just as a response to recent industry changes and union membership decline but also as a struggle against the deep roots of these current issues that the organized labor movement faced.

This potential for Justice for Janitors to develop as more than just a janitor-organizing campaign was particularly salient in light of the development of the JfJ campaign as a “movement” of Latinx janitors in Denver. In the late 1980s, JfJ organizers were not yet articulating direct connections between the oppression of Latinx and African American workers across the country. Nevertheless, the emergence of JfJ as a struggle of both Latinx and black workers during this period paved the way for this campaign to develop as a powerful multiracial workers’ struggle against intersectional racial and economic injustice.

While suggesting the potential of JfJ to develop as a broad struggle against racial injustice, JfJ organizers and workers’ parallel efforts to develop a racial justice frame for the Atlanta and D.C. campaigns also point to a more immediate development within Justice for Janitors. Their parallel efforts suggest that Justice for Janitors was evolving as a coordinated and unified national campaign. From the very beginning, the Justice for Janitors campaign in Denver emerged as part of a larger, national plan for rebuilding union density in the janitorial industry. At the same time, though, the Denver campaign was largely a standalone effort. The development of simultaneous campaigns in Washington D.C. and Atlanta, however, provided an opportunity for Justice for Janitors to evolve from a national campaign strategy implemented within a specific locale to an actual national campaign. Working together, JfJ leaders and

organizers in both Washington D.C. and Atlanta fully embraced this campaign development opportunity.

During the fall and winter of 1987, JfJ organizers and janitors in both Atlanta and D.C. started transitioning from a preparation phase that centered on worker and community outreach and industry research to the next phase of the campaign. In this transition, janitors in Atlanta and D.C. adopted a nearly identical set of seven campaign demands. The first of these, which differed slightly between Atlanta and D.C., was a specific wage demand: janitors in D.C. demanded a wage rate of \$6.50 an hour while janitors in Atlanta demanded a wage rate of \$5.25 an hour.²¹ The rest of the demands were exactly the same. In addition to their specific wage demands, janitors in both cities demanded justice as well as dignity and respect at work, safe working conditions, work breaks, and a range of benefits including paid vacations and sick leave, health insurance, and a seniority policy.²²

In addition to adopting unified campaign demands, organizers and janitors in the two cities also started directly participating in each other's campaigns. When the janitors in Local 525 held their Justice for Janitors founding convention in October 1987, for example, a group of JfJ organizers and janitors from Atlanta traveled more than six hundred miles on a bus to show their support and share stories of their struggles. When the Atlanta janitors held their convention

²¹ This wage demand disparity stemmed from differences in existing wage rates between janitors in Washington D.C. and Atlanta. While nonunion janitors in D.C. typically earned \$4.75 an hour in 1987, nonunion janitors in Atlanta typically earned \$3.50 an hour at this time. As such, even though they had different wage goals, the D.C. and Atlanta JfJ groups both demanded a raise of \$1.75 an hour. "A Tale of Two Cities: Poverty Amidst Plenty in D.C.'s Office Buildings," in Local 525 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 49, Folder 6, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "A Tale of Two Cities," *Service Employees Union* (March/April 1988): 16-19.

²² Justice for Janitors Atlanta files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 6, Folder 30, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "'Justice' campaign bursts on scene in D.C., Atlanta," *Building Service Division Update* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1987), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Rene Sanchez, "Justice for Janitors Swept Up in Union Drive," *Washington Post*, November 15, 1987.

two months later in December 1987, Washington D.C. organizers and janitors returned the favor.²³

This national coordination and solidarity between Atlanta and D.C. was emerging as a key resource and potential source of strength for the two campaigns. As suggested above, difficulty in establishing strong ties with local workers and community members was a tradeoff that International JfJ leaders made in exchange for greater independence and autonomy in expanding the JfJ campaign in brand new locals. As these JfJ leaders worked together, however, building a strong national campaign on the foundation of International resources and coordination seemed to offer an easier alternative strategy than the more challenging work of building a strong base of local support for the campaign in D.C. and Atlanta. In contrast to the strategy of building and relying on local support, though, this alternative strategy of focusing on national campaign coordination and cross-campaign solidarity had not yet been proven effective. The strength and durability of this developing strategy was quickly put to the test as JfJ organizers and janitors launched organizing drives and demonstrations against key building owners in D.C. and Atlanta.

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While joining together to expose economic and racial injustice and launch united organizing drives, JfJ organizers and janitors in both Washington D.C. and Atlanta received strong pushback from building owners and managers. In their early campaign actions, JfJ organizers in Atlanta targeted a large business development called the Peachtree Center and the owner of this center, architect and real estate developer John Portman. They targeted the Peachtree Center and Portman as obvious examples of the economic polarization and injustice

²³ Justice for Janitors Atlanta files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 6, Folder 30, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

that permeated the janitorial industry and larger economy. The janitors who cleaned the office buildings in the Peachtree Center were only offered part-time hours and an average wage of \$3.50 an hour for a yearly income of less than \$4,000 while Portman's companies earned a collective revenue of \$400 million in 1987.²⁴ In targeting the Peachtree Center and Portman, JfJ organizers and janitors called attention to the injustice of this economic disparity and hoped to pressure Portman to use his power and wealth to address the injustice. Portman and the managers of the Peachtree Center, however, actively fought against the JfJ campaign.

In late September of 1987, managers at the Peachtree Center obtained a temporary thirty-day injunction to prevent JfJ staff from organizing members at the Peachtree Center. While the attorneys for the Peachtree management company alleged that JfJ organizers caused disruptions in order to obtain this injunction, JfJ organizers countered that these allegations were unsubstantiated and driven by antiunion hostility. The comments of one of the management company's spokesmen suggested that the organizers were correct. The spokesman asserted: "To the best of my knowledge, there was nothing disruptive [about the JfJ organizers' actions]... Getting the injunction was simply for the convenience of the tenants and the people using our common areas."²⁵ Two months later, the Peachtree management attorneys once again succeeded in obtaining an injunction against JfJ organizers. In this more expansive injunction, JfJ participants were barred from congregating in groups larger than six people and shouting on the sidewalks in front of the Peachtree Center. They were also barred from using megaphones anywhere within a 150-foot radius of the center.

²⁴ Justice for Janitors Atlanta files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 6, Folder 33, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

²⁵ Lisa Crowe and W. Stevens Rick, "Union Works to Organize Peachtree Center janitors" *The Atlanta Constitution*, September 25, 1987, in Justice for Janitors Atlanta files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 6, Folder 30, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Facing this legal counterattack from the Peachtree Center management company, JfJ organizers in Atlanta attempted to pressure John Portman to intervene and support the janitors' organizing drive and JfJ demands. The organizers enlisted Jesse Jackson to write a letter to Portman, encouraging him to help resolve the dispute between the janitors and Peachtree management "through negotiation rather than litigation." Even at Jackson's insistence, however, Portman refused to intervene on behalf of the janitors. He refused to sign the campaign's "pledge for justice" or issue a memorandum in support of the janitors' organizing drive, all the while citing National Labor Relations Act provisions to justify his inaction. He asserted that issuing a memo in support of the campaign would circumvent the "democratic process" of employees voting for union representation under the NLRA.²⁶ While defending the democracy of NLRA election procedures, Portman undoubtedly knew that the NLRA was becoming an increasingly ineffective resource for janitors and workers throughout all industries seeking unionization in the United States. Portman's defense of the NLRA, then, was essentially a defense of the antiunion status quo.

JfJ organizers faced an even stronger pushback from building owners in Washington D.C. Like in Atlanta, JfJ organizers in D.C. chose strategic building owners to target in the early stages of their campaign. They targeted, for example, four key members of the D.C. real estate elite: Laszlo Tauber, Conrad Cafritz, Oliver Carr, and Mortimer Zuckerman. In their initial targeting of these specific building owners, the JfJ organizers and janitors sparked a distinct counterattack. Facing pressure, D.C.'s building owners and managers joined together through an

²⁶ Justice for Janitors Atlanta files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 6, Folder 30-31, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Local 679 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 57, Folder 6, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

existing industry association, the Apartment and Office Building Association (AOBA), to resist the JfJ organizing drive.

In November of 1987, members of the AOBA Board of Directors met and agreed to launch a united counterattack to the JfJ campaign. They retained new attorneys—including former NLRB attorney Allen G. Siegel—and sent a request for a \$500 contribution to the AOBA “Legal Defense Fund-Union” from all of the building owner and management company members of the association. In subsequent months, the AOBA publicized the JfJ campaign as an undemocratic labor campaign replete with intimidating and violent tactics.²⁷

This pushback in both Atlanta and Washington D.C. reveals the difficulty of the organizing battles that JfJ organizers and janitors faced in the late 1980s. Through the Justice for Janitors campaign, union organizers and janitors collectively and strategically exposed obvious but often hidden forms of economic inequality and injustice. And they demanded what amounted to a very moderate, financially feasible solution to this injustice: union recognition and modest wage and benefit improvements. Rather than conceding to these moderate demands, building owners and managers chose to defend their position and undermine unionization efforts. They had the advantage of labor law obsolescence, an increasingly antiunion environment amidst neoliberal restructuring, and immense financial and legal resources at their disposal. And they proved committed to using these advantages to prevent janitors from gaining a fair wage and the protection of union representation.

JfJ organizers and janitors in Washington D.C. and Atlanta, however, refused to back down. When confronted with evidence that building owners and managers would not voluntarily accede to their demands, they redoubled their efforts. As the campaigns progressed into 1988,

²⁷ Local 525 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 49, Folder 6-7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

JfJ organizers and janitors in D.C. and Atlanta continued to organize and hold demonstrations against targeted building owners and managers. Additionally, they intensified their efforts to build partnerships with a diverse group of both labor and social movement allies. Following an established pattern, this alliance building helped develop and strengthen JfJ as a nationally coordinated campaign against broad patterns of intersectional socioeconomic injustice.

As part of this effort, JfJ leaders organized the first of what would be many nationally coordinated, multicity Justice for Janitors events. In a conference call in March of 1988, SEIU organizers in Washington D.C., Atlanta, and several other cities developed a plan for a “Vigil for Justice.” In preparation for this event, JfJ organizers chose a building in each of twelve different cities throughout the country. Next, they enlisted the support of SEIU representatives and janitors at targeted buildings in each of these cities to participate in a 24-hour vigil scheduled to end at noon on the Christian holiday Maundy Thursday. While the union reps and janitors had freedom in planning events for this vigil, they agreed to make the upcoming Easter and Passover holidays a central symbolic element of their actions. They also agreed to a unified demand that building owners take moral responsibility for the wages and working conditions of janitors.

JfJ organizers’ plans and preparation for the vigil paid off. Starting at noon on March 30, 1988, SEIU organizers and janitors in Washington D.C. and Atlanta as well as Denver, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Portland, San Diego, San Francisco, and San Jose launched simultaneous actions. They participated in overnight prayer vigils, creative demonstrations (such as a hunt for the “eggs of justice” led by janitor Althea Yelverton dressed in a bunny costume in D.C), and acts of civil disobedience that led to arrests in several cities.²⁸

²⁸ “Easter rallies, vigils, arrests demand ‘Justice for Janitors,’” *Building Service Division Update 2*, no 2 (Spring 1988), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Justice for Janitors Clippings, SEIU Public Relations Records, Box 2, Folder 9, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

This multicity action was an important event in the evolution of Justice for Janitors. Through the Vigil for Justice, organizers and janitors in D.C. and Atlanta orchestrated the largest demonstration of janitors' collective power in the campaign thus far. They started moving beyond their initial focus on coordinating a national campaign out of two brand-new locals and started developing a broad network of campaign activism using the resources of existing SEIU locals. This evolution of the campaign was explicitly designed to better match the power of building owners whose financial interests often spanned state borders with an effective countervailing union force.

Amidst neoliberal restructuring, cleaning companies consolidated across city, state, and even national boundaries, and the power and resources of the wealthy elite grew. At the same time, the organized labor movement on the whole remained tied to local labor markets and was weak from decades of union density erosion. Justice for Janitors, however, was emerging as an alternative to this: it was emerging as a response to both decades of union decline and recent patterns of neoliberal restructuring. This campaign defied union complacency amidst antiunion hostility and sought to organize thousands of new union members. Furthermore, this campaign was evolving as a means to unite and channel the collective power of thousands of poor, marginalized janitors into a national labor campaign that even powerful building owners could not ignore.

While building JfJ as a nationally coordinated labor campaign, JfJ organizers and janitors in D.C. and Atlanta also made an effort to build support for the campaign through joint actions and alliances with social movement organizations in the spring of 1988. Shortly before the Vigil for Justice, for example, Washington D.C. organizers and janitors organized a joint demonstration with the D.C. chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW). On

March 23, JfJ and NOW activists held a press conference and rally at one of the buildings in downtown D.C. where female janitors had suffered sexual harassment from one of their cleaning company supervisors. They called specific attention to the injustice of the sexual harassment that these D.C. janitors suffered—an injustice on top of what they already suffered working for minimum wages and no benefits on a little respected job. In doing so, the demonstration participants shed light on another intersectional element of the exploitation and marginalization that many janitors faced. While enduring economic vulnerability and often racialization and discrimination as people of color, female janitors were vulnerable to an additional form of discrimination and exploitation from their male supervisors, employers, and in some cases their co-workers. While attention to issues of intersecting racial and economic justice were more prominent during this phase of the campaign, this demonstration helped connect the struggle for Justice for Janitors to a struggle against deep-set patterns of gender inequality. At the demonstration, participants broadly demanded an end to the sexual harassment not just of janitors but also of all women.²⁹ In doing so, then, they embedded the JfJ campaign within a much larger feminist struggle against female exploitation and for female empowerment.

In Atlanta, JfJ organizers and janitors organized a Justice for Janitors event in coordination with Jobs with Justice and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). With the help of top SEIU officials including President Sweeney, JfJ organizers worked with Jobs for Justice and the SCLC to plan a massive 1,500-mile pilgrimage from the site of Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination in Memphis to his birthplace in Atlanta. The pilgrimage started on April 5, 1988—one day after the twentieth anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.’s death—and ended on April 30 with a large Justice for Janitors rally. Through this pilgrimage,

²⁹ “Stop sexual harrassment of DC janitors now!” Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University.

participants from a wide range of labor and civil rights organizations came together to bring attention to the specific goals of the Justice for Janitors campaign. Additionally, they exemplified and promoted unity and solidarity between the overarching civil rights and labor movements. They demonstrated that these two movements had overlapping struggles and that activists from both movements could work together to bring greater public attention to their mutual efforts.³⁰

With actions such as these, JfJ organizers took a progressive step beyond some of their initial community outreach efforts. Rather than just looking for community leaders to support their campaign, JfJ organizers created a foundation for a reciprocal relationship of support and solidarity with other labor and social movement organizations. To a large extent, these relationships were constructed from above by SEIU leaders and organizers rather than formed at a grassroots level by janitors working in coordination with other local activists. Nevertheless, these actions helped build collective power for the janitors and promoted the Justice for Janitors campaign as a key element within a broader, intersectional struggle against the overlapping forms of injustice commonly experienced by low-wage workers, women, and people of color.

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From these broad intersectional JfJ events in the spring, JfJ organizers transitioned to an even more expansive and intensive set of campaign actions. In the summer and fall of 1988, JfJ organizers, once again working with top SEIU leaders, orchestrated three major JfJ actions: a protest against John Portman at the Democratic National Convention in July, a protest against the World Bank in August and September, and a boycott of John Portman in November. Through these three actions, Justice for Janitors continued to develop as a national campaign.

³⁰ Jobs with Justice files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 117, Folder 55, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; “South Rallies for Jobs with Justice,” *Service Employees Union* (May/June 1988): 7.

Additionally, through these actions, Justice for Janitors started to evolve into a transnational (or at least international) struggle that exposed the true reach and complexity of service workers' precarious position in the late twentieth century.

As suggested above, JfJ organizers had long considered the scheduled location of the 1988 Democratic National Convention (DNC) in Atlanta as an opportunity for the campaign. As the DNC neared, JfJ organizers working with top SEIU leaders started making specific plans to use this event to bring national attention to Justice for Janitors. They started making plans to put the weight of the entire Democratic political establishment behind their effort to force John Portman to concede to the Atlanta janitors' demands.

Portman was a natural target for a protest at the DNC because of his close involvement with the event. Several of the pre-convention and convention events were scheduled to take place at Portman-owned buildings. Furthermore, Portman was making inroads into Democratic Party politics in the lead up to the convention. At the time, the Portman Companies were exploring opportunities to expand in Washington D.C. and even internationally.³¹ As such, John Portman had a vested interest in promoting his companies and building political capital, and he appeared to choose the DNC as a prime opportunity to do so. In the weeks before the convention, he sponsored a pre-convention brunch and even hosted the Democratic Party Chairman and two hundred Democratic Party trustees at a charity dinner at his home.

As an article in the *Wall Street Journal* at the time suggested, Portman's entrée into Democratic politics was part of an influx of large donations and elite influence in the Democratic Party at the time. Before mentioning the DNC party at Portman's home, the article noted: "Fat cats are back, more numerous and playing a bigger role than ever in Democratic politics. The

³¹ James Schulman, "The Portman Companies Roll Out Red Carpet for Democratic Convention," *Presenting the Season* (Summer 1988) in Justice for Janitors Clippings, SEIU Public Relations Records, Box 2, Folder 9, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

party has never been so flush with money, or so mobbed with big givers.”³² The new, larger role for big donors within the party marked a shift away from the arguably more traditional, populist roots of the Democratic Party. This shift, in turn, can be understood as part of the larger shift toward neoliberalism both within and beyond the United States. As I discuss in the introduction chapter of this dissertation, the socioeconomic and political shocks of the 1970s created an opening for the economic elite to assert their dominance and profitability. In reasserting their dominance and profitability, these elite embraced an expanded role and exercised greater influence within party politics and the State in the late twentieth century.

While members of the wealthy elite like John Portman were becoming increasingly important figures within Democratic Party politics in Atlanta in 1988, the SEIU had historically enjoyed a close relationship with the Democratic Party. The union had long been a political ally and source of financial support for the party. The central role that SEIU leaders and members played in the DNC in 1988 reflected this. Fifty-nine SEIU members were chosen as delegates to the DNC; another fourteen were chosen as alternates, and nine more members were appointed to the DNC’s platform, rules, and credentials committees. Additionally, both President John Sweeney and the SEIU’s legislative director Geri Palast were actually appointed to the Democratic National Committee in 1988.³³ Following the core JfJ strategy of targeting and leveraging sources of power, JfJ organizers worked with Sweeney in July of 1988 to use the SEIU’s historic alliance and close ties with the Democratic Party to put pressure on Portman. In a way, then, JfJ organizers sought to leverage the historic ties between the Democratic Party and

³² Brooks Jackson, “Democrats’ Coffers Fill Up As Fat Cats Seek Bigger Role in Party,” *Wall Street Journal*, July 9, 1988.

³³ “Directing the troops in Atlanta,” and “Appointed to the DNC,” *Building Service Division Update* 2, no. 3 (Fall 1988), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

organized labor against the more recent ties between the party and wealthy elite amidst neoliberal restructuring.

Initially, this strategy seemed generative. As President Sweeney and JfJ organizers and janitors threatened to picket all DNC events connected with John Portman, Democratic politicians grew concerned that Justice for Janitors would virtually shut down the convention. In an attempt to avoid this, Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young hosted a mediation session at his own home between JfJ organizers and Portman representatives starting on July 7. This mediation session, however, broke down after four days on July 10 with little progress made.³⁴

After the mediation attempt failed, JfJ organizers focused on publicizing their picketing plans and reaching out to politicians to urge them to honor the picket lines. One of their picket targets was the Portman-owned Marriot Marquis hotel, which the television network ABC had chosen as the site for daily “Good Morning America” broadcasts on the convention. Shortly before the start of the convention, ABC decided to switch their filming location to a different hotel.³⁵ This move suggested that the JfJ organizers’ strategy of targeting Portman through the DNC was proving to be effective. Individuals and organizations connected to the DNC were willing to cut ties with Portman rather than risk the logistical nightmare that could arise from picketing.

Unfortunately for the Justice for Janitors campaign, however, the perceived threat of Democratic Party leaders refusing to cross picket lines proved unfounded. On July 17, the day before the official start of the convention, JfJ organizers and janitors organized a picket around the Portman-owned building where a pre-convention brunch for Democratic Party leaders and

³⁴ Jim Galloway, “Talks Between Janitors Union, Developer Break Off in a ‘Stalemate,’” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 11, 1988.

³⁵ Jim Galloway and Bert Roughton Jr. “Picketing Forces Hotel Switch For ‘Good Morning America,’” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 16, 1988.

reporters was scheduled to take place. Several prominent politicians—including U.S. Representative and Civil Rights leader John Lewis—ignored the picket and attended the brunch. Furthermore, other prominent politicians such as Mayor Young and DNC chairman Paul Kirk publicly voiced their intentions to cross the janitors’ picket later that evening at the Portman-hosted charity dinner. In doing so, these political leaders clearly signaled that the convention would proceed as planned, regardless of janitor picketing. On a deeper level, they signaled that their allegiance to the labor movement had grown weak and was now easily abandoned in favor of a new, more lucrative source of financial support: big donors like John Portman.

Faced with this situation, President John Sweeney decided at the last-minute to stop the janitors’ picket at the charity dinner. Sweeney received a phone call from DNC Paul Kirk, who assured him that Portman would negotiate in good faith with the janitors at the conclusion of the convention if the janitors stopped picketing. Sweeney declared Kirk’s assurances a “victory” for the janitors and called off the picket.³⁶

Rather than accepting Kirk’s assurances and calling off the picket, John Sweeney and JfJ participants could have easily done the opposite: they could have used Democratic Party leaders’ decisions to cross the pickets as an opportunity to expose the illegitimacy of these leaders’ pro-labor reputations. In doing so, however, Sweeney and JfJ participants would be forced to publicize the fact that the Democratic Party was not fully committed to Justice for Janitors. In other words, they would have to publicly admit that their initial reliance on the Democratic Party to pressure Portman was misplaced. Furthermore, if SEIU leaders were to expose the hypocrisy of the Democratic Party, they would threaten what was left of the union’s relationship with the party. When faced with these choices, John Sweeney made an executive decision to preserve

³⁶ “Young Will Defy Janitors Union And Cross Picket Line Sunday From Staff Reports,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 17, 1988; Bert Roughton Jr. “Janitors Shelve Plans for Demonstrations,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 18, 1988.

what was left of the SEIU's relationship with the Democratic Party. His acceptance of Kirk's promise of good faith bargaining after the convention, then, served as a premise for both Democratic Party leaders and SEIU leaders to avoid potential embarrassment and conflict.

After Sweeney called off the picket on Sunday, JfJ organizers reached out to Portman on Monday morning about scheduling negotiations at the conclusion of the convention. When they did so, they discovered that Paul Kirk's assurances to Sweeney had been groundless. Portman representatives informed JfJ organizers that they had no intention of negotiating later in the week. At this point, with President Sweeney's support, JfJ organizers and janitors decided to resume their plans to picket Portman-related convention events.

On July 19, the janitors picketed a reception for Senators Bob Graham and Jay Rockefeller at the Marriot Marquis, keeping many senators away from the event. On July 20, the janitors held another large demonstration at the Marriot Marquis. Several prominent labor leaders including the presidents of four AFL-CIO labor federations participated in the demonstration.³⁷ These actions, as well as the visible presence of JfJ supporters wearing bright red Justice for Janitors t-shirts at the convention, brought newfound public recognition to the janitors and their organizing campaign. Although JfJ organizers were already working on making Justice for Janitors a national campaign, the Democratic National Convention protests truly earned the janitors the national spotlight for the first time.

Despite this achievement, the Democratic National Convention protest was hardly a resounding success for the campaign. Prominent Democratic politicians' willingness to cross picket lines and President Sweeney's temporary acquiescence to Democratic Party pressure to call off the janitors' picket sent a clear message to John Portman. These actions sent the message

³⁷ Bert Roughton Jr. "Janitors Union, Saying Portman Reneged on Talks, Pickets Event for 2 - Senators," *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 20, 1988; Local 525 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Boxes 49, Folder 6, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

that the Justice for Janitors campaign did not pose a credible threat to the business practices of his company—in particular, the practice of maximizing profits by hiring cleaning contractors that paid janitors less than a living wage.³⁸

Nevertheless, the mixed outcome of the DNC protest did not put any immediate damper on the Justice for Janitors campaign. Only a few weeks after the convention, JfJ organizers in Washington D.C. launched a second major series of actions. Once again working in coordination with top SEIU leaders, they launched a protest against the World Bank.

In the summer of 1988, the World Bank represented a strategic target for the Justice for Janitors campaign for several reasons. The first and most obvious reason was the poverty of the janitors who cleaned the World Bank headquarters in Washington D.C. During this time period, the World Bank contracted with the private company General Maintenance to provide cleaning services at the organization’s headquarters. General Maintenance provided janitors only part-time hours and paid them the minimum wage. This meant that the average yearly income for World Bank janitors was about \$6,000 a year, just below the federal poverty threshold for a single person and much below the federal poverty threshold for a family of two or more, unless the janitors could manage to find and work a second part-time job.³⁹ With poverty level wages, many of the janitors cleaning the World Bank were forced to rely on public assistance to make ends meet. Twenty-four-year-old World Bank janitor Denise Speed, for example, lived in a government-subsidized apartment and qualified for food stamps. Before she found that housing opportunity, she had even lived in a homeless shelter for a few months, all while working at the World Bank.

³⁸ Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016.

³⁹ In 1988, the average poverty threshold for a single person was \$6,022. The average poverty thresholds for a family of two, three, and four person families in 1988 were \$7,704, \$9,435, and \$12,092, respectively. U.S. Census Bureau, “Poverty thresholds by Size of Family and Number of Children,” updated August 11, 2017, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/income-poverty/historical-poverty-thresholds.html>

The World Bank janitors' economic struggles were all the more pronounced in relation to the purported goals of the organization housed in the building that they cleaned. While contracting a company that paid below-poverty-level wages to janitors in the U.S., the World Bank claimed to be a "central force" in a global fight against poverty. While World Bank janitors earned about \$6,000 in 1987, the World Bank made more than a billion dollars in profits in 1987 in supposed pursuit of this global anti-poverty fight.

This contradiction seemed tragically ironic for some of the World Bank janitors such as Maria Elena Flores. Flores had recently fled from poverty and war in El Salvador. But even after making it to the United States and getting a job cleaning the World Bank—the very organization supposedly working to address poverty in countries like El Salvador—she found herself still living in poverty. The ironic contradiction between the World Bank's anti-poverty goals and the poverty of the World Bank janitors presented an opportunity for JfJ organizers to pressure the World Bank into switching to a union contractor that paid higher wages and offered more security to janitors. At the same time, this contradiction also presented JfJ organizers with an opportunity to continue developing Justice for Janitors in the national and even international spotlight. Because of the international prominence of the World Bank, JfJ organizers could use a protest against this organization as a means to capture the public spotlight and build national as well as international allies for the campaign.

As their first step toward capturing public attention and putting pressure on the World Bank, JfJ organizers and janitors in D.C. created a mock country called "Janitorville" outside of the World Bank headquarters from August 1 to August 5. They distributed Janitorville "tourist visas" to top World Bank officials including World Bank President Barber Conable. These visas included a note that read as follows:

We have set up ‘Janitorville,’ our own country. Maybe we can get better treatment from the World Bank as a Third World country than as janitors who clean here daily.

Like many Third World Countries, tourism is our major industry. This special tourist visa is your invitation to visit us in Janitorville.

President Conable never used his visa to visit Janitorville. However, several World Bank staffers joined union supporters including musician and former janitor Harry Belafonte and curious onlookers in visiting Janitorville. These visitors watched and participated as janitors held daily rallies and demonstrations outside World Bank headquarters.⁴⁰

These Janitorville rallies and demonstrations proved quite eventful, particularly in light of General Maintenance and World Bank efforts to sabotage them. During one of the demonstrations, a General Maintenance supervisor locked World Bank janitors in a basement to prevent them from participating. On top of this, the World Bank’s Security Director directly threatened one of the janitors for participating in union activities. During the rallies and demonstrations, eight people were also arrested in acts of civil disobedience.

Despite the seeming newsworthy quality of these events, however, the initial World Bank protest generated little more than local attention.⁴¹ Nevertheless, a tepid media response did not deter JfJ organizers. After deconstructing the mock Janitorville country, Jay Hessey helped orchestrate five additional protest demonstrations targeting the World Bank in August, including a rally in coordination with the 25th anniversary March on Washington on August 27, 1988. At the same time, Stephen Lerner and Hessey worked with SEIU President John Sweeney to generate transnational labor and political pressure on the World Bank. Within the United States, JfJ organizers met with members of the Congressional committee that was currently reviewing a

⁴⁰ Margie Snider, “Fighting Poverty at the World Bank: Janitors Protest ‘Working Poor’ Conditions,” *Service Employees Union* (December 1988/January 1989): 9-11.

⁴¹ Local 525 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Boxes 49, Folder 9, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

World Bank request for an increase of \$70 million in funding from the U.S. government. They urged committee members to think twice before supporting an organization that treated janitors as “second-class citizens.” At the same time, President Sweeney reached out to international labor leaders to put pressure on the World Bank within their home countries. Specifically, he reached out to other members of an international federation of unions representing service workers known as the FIET.⁴² Sweeney urged fellow FIET leaders to call, send letters, and meet with World Bank leaders in their countries. (This outreach effort coincided with the formation of a property service division within the FIET, and Sweeney’s election as president of this division, in November of 1988).⁴³

As the World Bank made no signs of conceding to pressure in August, JfJ organizers looked to the World Bank’s upcoming annual meeting, which was scheduled to take place in late September 1988 in West Germany, as an opportunity to continue exerting pressure on the organization. In the weeks leading up to this conference, JfJ researchers created a report titled “Hidden Poverty at the World Bank.” This report, much like earlier protest actions, targeted the contradictory and controversial actions of the World Bank. At the same time, this report, which was released in conjunction with a JfJ press conference on the World Bank, demonstrated that campaign leaders and researchers were starting to espouse an even more intense critique of the World Bank.

Up to this point, JfJ organizers and janitors’ criticism of the World Bank was centered on an assertion that the organization should not contribute to poverty at home while purporting to

⁴² FIET is an abbreviation of the French name for the federation, *Fédération internationale des employés, techniciens et cadres*. The longer English-language name of the federation is the International Federation of Commercial, Clerical, Professional, and Technical Employees.

⁴³ Local 525 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Boxes 49, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; “World Bank fights poor, Not poverty,” and “FIET takes up World Bank fight,” *Building Service Division Update* 2, no. 3 (Fall 1988), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

fight poverty abroad. As World Bank janitor Denise Speed asserted, “I have nothing against the World Bank sending money to underdeveloped countries. But I think justice should start at home.”⁴⁴ The initial JfJ critique of the World Bank, then, centered only on the World Bank’s treatment of janitors in the U.S. and not the organization’s action abroad.

In this “Hidden Poverty” report, however, JfJ organizers and researchers called the World Bank’s policies and actions abroad into question as well. They noted growing controversy over the World Bank’s relatively new policy of providing structural adjustment programs to countries and requiring them to pay their debts regardless of the social costs. Through this report, the JfJ organizers and researchers also called attention to the wealth and tax-exempt status of the World Bank and the fact that the individuals and financial institutions supporting the World Bank were the same individuals and institutions that benefited financially from the organization. Furthermore, they noted an emerging concern with the environmental costs of the World Bank’s promotion of development. Essentially, in this report, JfJ organizers and researchers voiced a concern that the World Bank’s treatment of janitors was not just an anomaly or divergence from the organization’s general practice but rather part and parcel of an unjust economic system that the World Bank was promoting. Although not identified directly in the report, this economic system was neoliberalism.

Ultimately, then, the D.C. Justice for Janitors struggle against the World Bank spurred the campaign to continue developing as a response to neoliberal restructuring. In the case of the escalating World Bank campaign, Justice for Janitors was doing more than just challenging the effects of this restructuring that included low wages, job insecurity, and an erosion in benefits and union membership within the U.S. janitorial industry. The campaign was also challenging

⁴⁴ Margie Snider, “Fighting Poverty at the World Bank: Janitors Protest ‘Working Poor’ Conditions,” *Service Employees Union* (December 1988/Jan 1989): 9-11.

another insidious effect of this restructuring: the forced implementation of free market policies in developing countries and, in the wake of this, increased poverty and displacement for people within these countries

This report, and the underlying critique of neoliberal structural adjustment programs within it, aligned the Justice for Janitors campaign with a larger emerging social movement struggle against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). As the “Hidden Poverty” report noted, JfJ organizers and janitors were not the only individuals calling the World Bank into question: public protests against the World Bank were scheduled in conjunction with upcoming World Bank meetings in West Berlin starting on September 27.⁴⁵ These protests and subsequent protests against World Bank and IMF meetings represented the early stages of what would eventually become a fully-fledged alter-globalization or Global Justice movement at the turn of the twenty-first century.⁴⁶

JfJ organizers, working in conjunction with President Sweeney and other top international labor leaders, arranged to have JfJ supporters join in the larger World Bank protest in West Berlin. They arranged, for example, to have the president of the FIET’s parent global labor federation, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), speak with World Bank President Barber Conable about JfJ during the days leading up to the World Bank meeting in West Berlin. They also arranged to have West German union and political activists hand out JfJ leaflets during the meeting in an act of transnational labor solidarity.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Justice for Janitors Rally files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Boxes 118, Folder 28, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

⁴⁶ For more subsequent intersections of the Justice for Janitors campaign and the global justice movement, see Chapter 10.

⁴⁷ Local 525 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Boxes 49, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; “FIET takes up World Bank fight,” *Building Service Division Update* 2, no. 3 (Fall 1988), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

As JfJ organizers escalated coordinated protest actions across geographic space in the World Bank fight in September of 1988, they also made plans to do the same in the John Portman fight. Having already created channels for communication and solidarity with the FIET in the World Bank struggle, JfJ organizers reached out to FIET members for support in the Atlanta janitors' struggle against Portman. The JfJ organizers focused in particular on developing pressure against Portman in Denmark because Portman was currently serving as Denmark's honorary consul in Atlanta. Danish unions proved quite receptive to JfJ requests through the FIET and helped JfJ organizers call Portman's international reputation as well as his reputation in the city of Atlanta into question.⁴⁸

After initial outreach to international labor organizations, JfJ organizers made plans to leverage growing support for the struggle against Portman in a single protest action. In early October 1988, John Sweeney announced that the Justice for Janitors campaign would be orchestrating a massive "Bring John Portman to Justice" day on November 17, 1988. With this day of action, JfJ organizers planned to take coordinated action in the JfJ campaign one step further. Having successfully organized a national day of action for the campaign with the "Vigil for Justice" in March of 1988, JfJ organizers started coordinating a transnational day of action against John Portman with protests in twenty-five cities spanning six countries.⁴⁹

Shortly after SEIU President Sweeney announced plans for this coordinated day of action, John Portman raised the stakes of the campaign. On October 13, 1988, John Portman—through his Peachtree Center Management—sued the SEIU and Local 679. The lawsuit alleged that the SEIU and Local 679 had committed illegal secondary actions against Portman in

⁴⁸ Local 679 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 57, Folder 6, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Justice for Janitors Clippings, SEIU Public Relations Records, Box 2, Folder 8, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

⁴⁹ "Atlanta Janitors' Fight Spawns Nat'l Boycott," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 6, 1988.

connection with the Democratic National Convention. And the lawsuit demanded a minimum financial settlement of \$435,000 to pay for damages from these secondary actions.⁵⁰

This lawsuit created an extra layer of difficulty for the Bring John Portman to Justice day. After Portman filed this suit, JfJ organizers distributed a detailed list of instructions for all participants in the transnational day of action. These instructions included warnings not to leaflet in groups larger than four, not to block building entrances, and not to shout or use obscenities. JfJ organizers wanted to ensure that they were not providing any further fuel for Portman's lawsuit against the union; they sought to prevent any further accusations of JfJ violations of labor law.⁵¹

While encouraging JfJ organizers to be more cautious with Bring Portman to Justice actions, the lawsuit also likely created an added sense of motivation and urgency for JfJ organizers. If the organizers could successfully build and leverage enough pressure against Portman, they would be able to negotiate with Portman on their own terms. In other words, if they could put enough pressure on Portman, he could be forced to concede to providing better wages and working conditions for the janitors cleaning his buildings *and* to dropping the lawsuit.

With the added pressure of the lawsuit, JfJ organizers successfully coordinated an impressive display of labor solidarity on November 17, 1988. SEIU locals orchestrated actions in nineteen cities in the U.S. and two cities in Canada. In several cities, SEIU activists targeted Portman-owned buildings. In San Francisco, for example, union members from several SEIU locals and other supportive labor organizations worked in coordination to hold a rally and march to the Portman Hotel. In other cities, SEIU activists targeted companies that had financed

⁵⁰ Local 679 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 57, Folder 6, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

⁵¹ Boycott files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 5, Folder 18, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Portman projects. In Toronto, for example, SEIU activists leafleted the Canadian Imperial Bank, which had a history of providing financial support to Portman. Outside of the U.S. and Canada, other supportive labor organizations orchestrated additional actions in Bonn, Germany; Brussels, Belgium; Copenhagen, Denmark; and London, England. Like the protest actions in many U.S. cities, these actions aimed to dissuade investors from providing financial backing to support Portman until he provided fair wages and working conditions to the janitors cleaning his buildings. (The action in Copenhagen also specifically aimed to revoke Portman's status as Denmark's honorary consul to Atlanta).

This Bring Portman to Justice day generated media attention both within the United States and abroad and helped put additional labor pressure on John Portman. Shortly after November 17, for example, the AFL-CIO decided to add John Portman Companies to the federation's national boycott list.⁵² Nevertheless, the effectiveness of this pressure-leveraging event—and of the Justice for Janitors campaign in general—was significantly hamstrung by old guard building service leaders operating out of SEIU locals in the Midwest and Northeast. Although “dinosaur” SEIU building service locals in Chicago and New York offered lip service support for the JfJ campaign and organized small-scale protests in conjunction with the Bring Portman to Justice event on November 17, the old guard leaders of these locals—particularly Local 32B-32J President Gus Bevona—refused to risk their locals' relationships with cleaning contractors and put the full-weight of the union's remaining janitorial industry strength behind the Justice for Janitors campaign. These leaders prioritized the immediate interests of their local union members and their own selfish interests in retaining union power over that of unorganized

⁵² Justice for Janitors Clippings, SEIU Public Relations Records, Box 2, Folder 8, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; “Striking Back at the Empire,” *Service Employees Union* (Feb/March 1989): 6.

janitors in Atlanta and Washington D.C. And in doing so, they significantly undermined the development and emerging strength of Justice for Janitors as a national campaign.⁵³

Although the true impact of old guard leaders' lack of support for the Atlanta Portman campaign cannot be known, what is clear is that the Bring John Portman to Justice event failed to convince John Portman to support Justice for Janitors. In the wake of this campaign action, Portman showed no signs of conceding to Justice for Janitors. Instead, he continued aggressively pursuing his lawsuit.

Portman's pursuit of the lawsuit created a legal and logistical nightmare for JfJ organizers. The struggle surrounding JfJ organizing director Stephen Lerner's deposition is a case in point. As part of the suit, Lerner was required to show up for a court-ordered deposition in a Washington D.C. office building. Although he traveled to campaign events in Atlanta, Lerner was based in Washington D.C. at SEIU's headquarters, so his deposition was scheduled to take place in D.C. Due to recent developments in the D.C. JfJ campaign, however, Lerner could not legally enter the office building where his deposition was scheduled to take place. As a counterattack to the Washington D.C. JfJ campaign in June of 1988, D.C. building owners had banned JfJ organizers from the premises of their buildings and threatened to arrest any organizers who violated this ban. This ban, in combination with the Portman deposition, created quite the legal conundrum: Lerner was simultaneously legally required to enter a D.C. office building while legally required to stay out of the very same building. As Lerner recalls, the D.C. building owners' lawyers battled to one-up Portman's lawyers, neither group wanting to concede to the

⁵³ Stephen Lerner, email correspondence with author, March 19, 2018; Stephen Lerner, internal building service division analysis (unpublished manuscript in author's possession, 1994).

other. Eventually, the Washington D.C. building owners conceded to give Lerner temporary permission to enter the chosen office building for his deposition.⁵⁴

While costly for the Portman company and the D.C. building owners' lawyers, this legal battle and the larger Portman lawsuit was also a huge drain on the JfJ campaign's time and financial resources. With the help of an entire team of SEIU lawyers, JfJ organizers pursued counter legal action against Portman but made little headway. As the legal battle dragged on, JfJ organizers struggled to maintain both rank-and-file and community support for the campaign.

Faced with dwindling internal resources and external support, JfJ organizers decided to switch the focus of the Atlanta campaign in 1989 to a potentially easier target: Southern Services Incorporated (SSI). SSI was a national cleaning company that had contracts in various areas of the U.S. Northeast and South in the late 1980s. Up until 1987, SSI's presence in Atlanta was relatively limited, but the advent of the Justice for Janitors campaign actually facilitated a rapid expansion of this cleaning company's share of the Atlanta janitorial industry. Because SSI had a black president, Fred Burke, many Atlanta building owners decided to award contracts to SSI in 1988 and 1989 in order to insulate themselves from the Justice for Janitors campaign. SSI was a nonunion contractor, but building owners reasoned that a cleaning contractor with a black president would be an unlikely target for JfJ organizers and their supporters in Atlanta's black community. By late 1989, SSI employed roughly two-thirds of the janitors in downtown Atlanta.⁵⁵

With local community support for the campaign dwindling in any case, JfJ organizers decided to defy building owners' expectations and target SSI. If they could organize this cleaning contractor, JfJ organizers would gain majority control of the downtown janitorial

⁵⁴ Stephen Lerner, conversation with author, August 17, 2016.

⁵⁵ Justice for Janitors Atlanta files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 6, Folder 34, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

industry in Atlanta. In other words, an organizing struggle targeted at SSI offered a “Hail-Mary” attempt to revive the Atlanta campaign and build the industry power necessary to win the legal battle against Portman.

Unsurprisingly, this SSI campaign proved to be extremely difficult. SSI President Fred Burke hired an experienced antiunion law firm and used his racial background to allege that the JfJ campaign against SSI was harming black businesses in Atlanta. JfJ organizers emphasized the fact that SSI’s parent company had a white president and ties to South Africa (which was still under apartheid) in order to counter this allegation. But the JfJ organizers proved to have insufficient support to force Burke to voluntarily recognize Local 679 as the union representative for SSI janitors in 1989.

Rather than trying to continue fighting against SSI in a drawn-out struggle like the Portman fight had become, JfJ organizers decided to revert to a traditional organizing strategy. They attempted to organize SSI janitors through an NLRB election in February of 1990. As JfJ organizer Rob Schuler articulated in an SSI organizing plan memo, he and other organizers did not entirely abandon the Justice for Janitors campaign strategy in preparing for an NLRB election for SSI janitors. The JfJ organizers continued their efforts to build worker and community excitement for the JfJ campaign. They continued to enlist the support of political, religious, and labor allies and to use creative tactics. At one point, for example, JfJ organizers handed out portable audiotape players that contained a tape with a pre-recorded pro-Justice for Janitors campaign message from Jesse Jackson. Instead of using these creative tactics and support from allies to build a public pressure campaign against SSI President Burke, however, the JfJ organizers used these tactics to build support for a “Vote Yes” campaign amongst SSI janitors.

Despite a surge of worker outreach and mobilization efforts, the Vote Yes campaign proved unsuccessful. A majority of SSI janitors had signed union cards by December of 1989. But by February of 1990—after two months of janitor turnover and an antiunion campaign from SSI—janitor support for Local 679 had eroded. Facing the likelihood of an election loss, the JfJ organizers filed unfair labor practices charges against SSI with the NLRB on February 14 and called off the election.

The loss of rank-and-file janitor support, on top of the languishing legal struggle against Portman, represented a huge blow to JfJ organizers in Atlanta. The loss undoubtedly confirmed the near impossibility of organizing janitors through traditional organizing strategies. It also made JfJ organizers question their decision to attempt an NLRB election in the first place.⁵⁶ To make matters worse, while JfJ organizers in Atlanta seemed to be sliding backwards rather than making any progress, JfJ organizers also faced struggles in the Washington D.C. campaign.

In the immediate aftermath of the World Bank protests in the fall of 1988, the D.C. Justice for Janitors campaign seemed to be making some headway. At the request of JfJ organizers, the National Labor Relations Board issued a complaint against the cleaning company General Maintenance for locking World Bank janitors in the basement during the Janitorville protests. Excitement from this small victory was soon bolstered by an even larger sign of campaign success. In the fall of 1989, after facing months of growing public scrutiny due to the JfJ campaign, the World Bank decided to provide additional funds for cleaning services and accept bids for a new cleaning contractor for the D.C. headquarters. JfJ organizers hailed this as a major achievement. With a renewed sense of hope and momentum, these organizers once again enlisted the support of national and international labor allies to encourage the World Bank

⁵⁶ Justice for Janitors Atlanta files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 6, Folder 31-34, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

to choose a union contractor to replace General Maintenance. Their hopeful efforts, however, did not generate the desired results.

Although World Bank leaders followed through on their promise to provide funding for better wages and benefits for janitors, they refused to choose a unionized cleaning company. In late February of 1990, less than two weeks after the Atlanta JfJ campaign failure against SSI, the World Bank leaders re-awarded the organization's cleaning contract to nonunion General Maintenance. They did so even though several unionized companies submitted bids that were virtually identical to General Maintenance's bid.⁵⁷ Ultimately, then, the campaign proved successful in helping a limited group of janitors achieve better wage and working conditions at the World Bank. At the same time, though, the campaign failed to make progress in organizing janitors and building union power to leverage against other building owners and cleaning companies in D.C.

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These compounding failures in February of 1990 created an undeniable low-point for the Justice for Janitors campaign. After experiencing unexpected organizing success in Denver in late 1986, Stephen Lerner and an emerging group of International JfJ staff developed a plan to continue building and evolving the Justice for Janitors campaign. They laid the groundwork for janitors not just across an entire city but also across the United States and throughout the world to join with labor and community allies in a collective struggle against powerful building owners and managers. In other words, these JfJ leaders organizers started developing a large-scale

⁵⁷ Local 525 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Boxes 49, Folder 8-9, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "Local Scores in World Bank Series," *Building Service Update* 3, no. 3 (Fall 1989), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "Waiting for Answers from the World Bank," *Building Service Update* 4, no. 2 (Spring 1990), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; FIET Delegation to IMF and World Bank files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 122, Folder 44, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

response to both historic patterns of labor movement decline and recent patterns of neoliberal restructuring. As demonstrated above, the Justice for Janitors campaign was still immediately focused on gaining new union members and moderate wage and benefit improvements for janitors. At the same time, though, the campaign started exposing and targeting the deeply rooted, intersecting sources of the exploitation and marginalization that janitors experienced not just as poor workers but also generally as people of color, as women, and as immigrants. In doing so, Justice for Janitors offered a potential platform to unite a diverse group of people in a powerful collective struggle in the late 1980s.

The potential platform for collective struggle that Justice for Janitors provided during this period, however, was weak. Between 1987 and 1989, JfJ organizers in D.C. and Atlanta organized remarkable national and even transnational demonstrations of coordinated labor and community solidarity. But as of 1990, JfJ leaders and organizers had failed to build a sustainable base of support for this emerging transnational campaign or win any significant organizing victories in either Atlanta or Washington D.C. At this point, the campaign seemed doomed to failure. At the same time, however, International JfJ leaders received an unexpected boost of hope, momentum, and inspiration for a crucial campaign adaptation. This boost came from a group of janitors on the opposite side of the United States.

Chapter 4

Justice for Janitors in Los Angeles and San Diego:

The Development and Unexpected Success of Peripheral Campaigns (1987-1989)

As suggested briefly in the previous chapter, Washington D.C. and Atlanta were not the only sites of Justice for Janitors activism in the late 1980s. After struggling through internal conflict, organizers and janitors in Local 105 continued to develop the Justice for Janitors campaign in Denver through the late 1980s. At the same time, other SEIU locals developed their own Justice for Janitors organizing drives out of existing Rebuilding Campaign research and organizing attempts as well as from the inspiration of the Denver JfJ campaign. In contrast to the JfJ campaigns in Washington D.C. and Atlanta, these campaigns did not benefit from an abundance of resources and attention from International JfJ staff.

While helping to expand janitor organizing, most of these locally driven campaigns remained small-scale and outside of the national spotlight. The San Diego Justice for Janitors campaign, which emerged from Local 102, is a prime example. The Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign, however, defied this pattern. While developing as a peripheral JfJ campaign within Local 399, the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign eventually captured the public's imagination and became central to national Justice for Janitors campaign strategy.

In this chapter, I explore the early history of the San Diego and Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaigns. I trace the development of these campaigns from their initial emergence in 1987 to the successful negotiation of master agreements covering a majority of janitors in downtown San Diego and downtown Los Angeles in 1988 and 1989, respectively. I highlight how these two peripheral local campaigns more closely resembled the original JfJ campaign in

Denver than the campaigns in Washington D.C. and Atlanta. In these locals, leaders and organizers partnered with existing union members and built ties with local communities in an effort to organize a predominantly undocumented Latinx janitorial workforce. While these local campaigns struggled through antiunion hostility, local union conflict, and limited resources, they ultimately proved successful in organizing extremely precarious workers and challenging some of the effects of neoliberal restructuring and union decline in San Diego and Los Angeles.

I argue that the success of these campaigns provided a crucial boost of hope and momentum for Justice for Janitors amidst campaign struggles in Washington D.C. and Atlanta. The San Diego and Los Angeles campaigns proved that the success of the Denver campaign was not an anomaly. Furthermore, they proved that the Justice for Janitors campaign was scalable, that it could challenge neoliberal restructuring and union decline in both a small city and a major global city. Additionally, I argue that the success of these campaigns highlighted the importance of rank-and-file workers and local community supporters to the campaign. I argue that these campaigns' success, in combination with the struggles of the D.C. and Atlanta campaigns, led International JfJ leaders to rethink their decision to build JfJ campaigns in brand new locals and to focus their attention on supporting promising, rank-and-file and community-centered campaigns. The juxtaposition of San Diego and Los Angeles success and Atlanta and D.C. failure, in other words, helped generally pave the way for the adaptation and expansion of Justice for Janitors as a collaborative partnership between the national union, local unions, and local communities. This campaign adaptation and expansion, in turn, paved the way for a major breakthrough success in Los Angeles, which is the subject of Chapter 5.

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Although different in many respects, most notably size, the janitorial industries in San Diego and Los Angeles underwent similar transformations in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Fitting with a broad national pattern discussed in previous chapters, the janitorial industries in these two cities experienced an influx of nonunion cleaning contractors amidst a boom in suburban office building and an increasingly antiunion national climate. An abundant supply of Latinx immigrant workers in these cities also facilitated this nonunion cleaning contractor influx. Although Latinx immigration to the United States as a whole increased during this period, the close proximity of Los Angeles and San Diego to Mexico meant that these cities in particular experienced Latinx population growth. Between 1980 and 1985, the estimated Latinx proportions of the Los Angeles and San Diego metropolitan areas increased by 32.3 percent and 30.7 percent, retrospectively.¹ In both of these areas, nonunion cleaning contractors readily hired Latinx immigrant and especially undocumented immigrant workers as an easily exploitable and expendable workforce. In San Diego, cleaning contractors even hired Tijuana residents who crossed the border daily to clean office buildings.²

As nonunion cleaning contractors paying immigrant janitors below-poverty-level wages gained a foothold in these cities, they posed a distinct threat to Los Angeles Local 399 and San Diego Local 102's existing union membership. Unfortunately, but not unsurprisingly, both of these locals failed to mitigate this threat. The intense antiunion hostility of the janitorial industries in these cities as well as varying degrees of leadership traditionalism, ineptitude, and

¹ The estimated Latinx population of the Los Angeles metropolitan area increased from approximately 2,766,000 in 1980 to 3,660,000 in 1985. During the same period, the estimated Latinx population of the San Diego metropolitan area increased from 274,000 to 358,000. The estimated Latinx proportion of the total Los Angeles metropolitan area increased from 24.1 percent to 28.3 percent between 1980 and 1985 while the estimated Latinx proportion of the total San Diego metropolitan area increased from 14.7 percent to 16.6 percent during the same period. David L. Word, *Population Estimates by Race and Hispanic Origin for States, Metropolitan Areas, and Selected Countries, 1980 to 1985* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1989), 66.

² H.G. Reza, "City's 'Invisible' Workers Seek Better Pay: Union Says Aliens Who Clean Downtown Buildings at Night Exploited," *Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 1987.

misconduct in these locals facilitated an acute erosion of the janitorial membership in Local 399 and Local 102 the early 1980s.

At the height of its industry power in 1977, Los Angeles Local 399 had approximately 5,000 janitor members. About half of these members were covered under a standard downtown contract and the other half were covered under a standard suburban agreement with lower wages and benefits. As the industry transformed in the late 1970s and early 1980s, however, Local 399's membership and control over the Los Angeles janitorial industry, especially the rapidly expanding suburban market, began to decline.

As noted in Chapter 1, a few of the leaders and organizers in Local 399 who witnessed this industry transformation made an effort to fight against membership erosion in the early 1980s. At the time, Local 399 leaders were primarily focused on organizing hospital workers, so the building service division of the local received little attention and organizing efforts. Local 399's Secretary-Treasurer, however, did hire a new organizer, Ben Monterroso, for the building service division. Monterroso joined veteran African American Local 399 union representative Bill Gibson in attempting to organize the city's growing number of immigrant workers and reduce existing Local 399 janitors' hostility to these workers. But with limited union resources and little support from either Local 399 leadership or membership, their organizing efforts failed. Trends toward the deunionization of the Los Angeles janitorial industry were thus left unchecked. By 1983, Local 399's janitor membership had dropped to 2,000—a sixty percent drop in only five years. At this point, Local 399 still maintained a relatively strong presence amongst janitors in downtown Los Angeles. The suburban market, however, had become almost entirely nonunion.

As Local 399's membership shrunk and became isolated to downtown Los Angeles, the wage differential between union and nonunion janitors grew. This wage differential, in turn, created a huge threat to the local's remaining janitorial membership. By 1982, after years of steady improvements, the janitors covered by Local 399's downtown standard agreement earned more than \$12 an hour in wages and benefits. The starting rate in the suburbs at the same time was about \$4 an hour. This meant that union cleaning companies were paying triple the labor cost and simply could not compete with the growing number of nonunion companies that started making inroads into downtown Los Angeles.

In an attempt to hold on to the local's dwindling membership, Local 399 Vice President Dick Davis felt compelled to turn to concession bargaining. As an attempt to prevent union companies from being driven out of business entirely, Davis agreed to contract "carve-outs." These carve-outs were side agreements that brought some janitors previously covered under the local's downtown standard contract into a contract with lower wage and benefit standards. As a result of these carve-outs, Local 399's janitorial membership did not drop any further between 1983 and 1985. However, the number of janitors covered by the local's downtown standard contract did drop. In 1983, approximately 1,800 of Local 399's 2,000 janitor members worked for the wage and benefit rates of this contract. By 1985, only about 100 of the local's 2,000 members still worked for the downtown standard contract wage and benefit rates.

While preventing a complete erosion of Local 399's janitor membership, Davis's concession bargaining created a huge rift between the janitor members and leadership of the local. Local 399's members who had not been consulted about the move toward concession bargaining were outraged. They considered Davis a sell-out who abandoned their interests in favor of the interests of the cleaning companies. As members' distrust and animosity for Davis

grew, Local 399 became even less capable of fighting back against union erosion in the mid-1980s.³

While Local 399 leaders' actions contributed to union decline and earned the ire of Los Angeles janitors, San Diego janitors had even more cause for complaint in the early 1980s. Although the San Diego janitorial industry was relatively small, Local 102 had a strong presence in the industry through the late 1970s. In 1980, the local represented approximately eighty-five percent of the city's janitorial workforce. Much like in Los Angeles, however, restructuring of the janitorial industry in San Diego in the early 1980s caused a sharp decline in Local 102's membership. By 1985, Local 102 represented less than ten percent of the San Diego janitorial industry. Even discounting the almost entirely nonunion suburban market, Local 102 only represented about a quarter of the janitors who cleaned office buildings in downtown San Diego in 1985. A significant decline in the average janitor wage in the city accompanied this union decline. When the union had a strong presence in the late 1970s, janitors typically earned between \$5 and \$6 an hour. By 1985, however, the average wage in the city was reduced to \$3.35 an hour.⁴

Neoliberal restructuring, including the growth of nonunion contractors and the practice of hiring undocumented immigrant part-time workers, did much to facilitate this wage and union density erosion. These industry changes offered building owners and managers a much cheaper alternative to union work. Neoliberal restructuring, however, was not the only factor behind the

³ Richard Mines and Jeffrey Avina: "Immigrants and Labor Standards: The Case of California Janitors," in *US-Mexico Relations: Labor Market Interdependence* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); David Stilwell, conversation with the author, November 10, 2016; Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016.

⁴ "San Diego: organizing an organizing campaign," *Building Service Division Update* 1, no. 1 (Summer 1987), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Building Service Division Board Meeting records, SEIU Secretary-Treasurer's Office: Richard Cordtz Records, Box 5, Folder 86, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

sudden erosion in Local 102's janitorial membership and janitor wages in San Diego.

Leadership infighting and mismanagement in Local 102 also played a role.

A contested local leadership election in December of 1981 sparked an internal crisis within Local 102. This contested election, which pitted the local's twenty-year incumbent secretary-treasurer against an outside challenger, created chaos within the local and became the basis for International union representatives to investigate the leadership and day-to-day function of Local 102. These representatives determined that Local 102 leaders were incapable of resolving the "chaos" within the local on their own and placed Local 102 in trusteeship.⁵ Lasting much longer than the initially projected six months, this trusteeship was officially terminated with the election of new Local 102 leadership in May of 1983.

While Local 102 was offered somewhat of a fresh start with this trusteeship termination in 1983, the newly elected leadership struggled amidst growing antiunion hostility throughout San Diego. In addition to facing the growth of nonunion contractors and an undocumented workforce in the janitorial industry, Local 102 leaders faced similar changes in their "amusement division" which covered racetrack, fair, and stadium workers in San Diego. In 1983, for example, the leadership board members in charge of the Del Mar Fair voted to move away from their prevailing practice of hiring temporary workers for the fair from union membership rolls and offering wage rates corresponding to the wage scales of unionized racetrack workers. Rather than hiring union members for an average of \$12.19 an hour, they voted to hire any willing workers for \$8.28 an hour.⁶

⁵ Robert Montemayor, "Union Vote Up in the Air After Flight," *Los Angeles Times*, December 12, 1981; "San Diego," *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 1982.

⁶ David Smollar, "Wage Cuts Could Spur Del Mar Fair Disruptions, Unions Warn," *Los Angeles Times*, December 30, 1983.

While part and parcel of a much larger antiunion assault, this board decision helped spur Local 102 into action. Joining together with other local unions affected by this decision, Local 102's leadership sought to resist this assault on two fronts. The leadership helped launch a boycott of the Del Mar Fair in an effort to convince the fair board to revert to old hiring and wage practices. Local 102's leadership also sought to cut off the fair board's access to a ready supply of workers who would be willing to work for less than union wages at the fair. As the local's boycott of the fair gained publicity in early 1984, Local 102's Secretary-Treasurer Richard Fowler enlisted the support of local politicians in investigating the hiring practices of the Del Mar Fair. Calling attention to the presence of monolingual Spanish-speakers amongst the Del Mar Fair workers, Fowler asked a local congressman to investigate the fair for legal violations in relation to the hiring of "illegal aliens."⁷

Local 102's efforts to reverse the fair board's antiunion assault ultimately proved futile: both total and paid attendance to the Del Mar Fair in the summer of 1984 surpassed previous years' records.⁸ More than this, though, Local 102's efforts to take a stand against this antiunion assault left the local in a weaker state than before. This was because the boycott was both labor and resource intensive: it drained the union's funds and distracted local leaders and representatives' attention from other concerns.

For example, as several San Diego janitors later testified in a trusteeship hearing, Secretary-Treasurer Fowler failed to provide sufficient leadership for the janitorial division during this period. Janitors testified that he failed to show up to handle member grievances and complaints after indicating that he would and that he failed to involve rank-and-file members in

⁷ Local 102 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folder 1, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

⁸ David Smollar, "Del Mar Fair Has Record 709,712 Attendance, Despite Union Boycott," *Los Angeles Times*, July 3, 1984.

contract negotiation. In light of this, some janitors took up the task of bargaining and attempting to resist wage and hour reduction on their own. Other janitors, though, were unable to even do this. As one janitor noted, he was not even aware of the fact that the union contract he had been working under expired until after the fact.

While failing to provide assistance to union members in the janitorial division as a whole during the boycott, Local 102 leaders even more directly neglected and alienated Spanish-speaking janitors. As suggested above, Local 102 leaders clearly associated the presence of Spanish-speaking workers with “illegal” hiring practices and sought to protect high paying union jobs for native, English-speaking union members. Such reactionary nativism was hardly out of the ordinary for the U.S. labor movement during this period. Nevertheless, this xenophobia alienated existing Spanish-speaking janitor members in Local 102 and the vast majority of the local’s potential future union members in the janitorial industry.⁹

While feeding into the neglect and alienation of janitors, Local 102’s fair boycott also contributed to financial struggles within the local. As Secretary-Treasurer Fowler reported to SEIU President John Sweeney, the Fair Board’s refusal to hire union workers and the boycott came at the cost of \$21,000 in lost union dues alone. The financial strain of the boycott, however, was not the sole cause of Local 102’s financial struggles. As would later be revealed in trusteeship investigation and hearings in 1985, Local 102 leaders and staff had a history of intentionally miscalculating and underpaying dues to the International union dating back to the previous trusteeship period in 1983. On top of this, Local 102 leaders (and their family members) were found to be misusing union credit cards. In combination with declining union dues from industry restructuring, this financial corruption left Local 102 in a financially

⁹ Local 102 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folder 2, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

untenable situation. By 1985, Local 102 was underpaying union dues to the International by about \$2,000 a month and, on top of this, operating at a cash deficit of \$1,000 a month.¹⁰

While the true extent of Local 102's financial turmoil was yet to be exposed, the local's neglect of the janitorial industry caught the attention of International leaders involved in the nascent building service division Rebuilding Campaign. In early 1985, the International Building Service Coordinator Max Richardson was dispatched to Local 102 to help the local jump start a Rebuilding Campaign. (Shortly thereafter another union representative was also dispatched to help the Local 102 leadership improve their management of the local as a whole.) While at Local 102, Richardson helped create an organizing plan for the San Diego janitorial industry. Having set up Local 102 on a course to organize janitors, he then returned to other International duties. Richardson returned to Local 102 in April, however, to check up on the progress of the local's janitor organizing. When he did, he found that Local 102 had not made any organizing progress but rather had done quite the opposite: the local allowed significant additional union erosion to occur unchecked.

At the start of 1985, Local 102 had six remaining contracts covering downtown San Diego janitors. In April, Local 102 allowed four of these six contracts to expire without any negotiations taking place. This acute neglect of the janitorial division (as well as the general financial mismanagement of the local) in spite of assistance from the International served as grounds for trusteeship. Only about two years since the last trusteeship was lifted, Local 102 was once again placed under the direct control of the International.¹¹

¹⁰ Local 102 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folder 2, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

¹¹ Local 102 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folders 2 and 5, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

This trusteeship provided International building service division leaders with a more direct entry point into the local. Rather than dispatching temporary help and having to rely on Local 102 leadership to implement a Rebuilding Campaign, International leaders brought new leaders and organizers into the local to start pursuing a Rebuilding Campaign amongst San Diego janitors.

The International representative overseeing the trusteeship first brought in Mike Garcia, whose experimental efforts with organizing undocumented janitors in San Jose had served as an inspiration for the Rebuilding Campaign. As noted in Chapter 1, Garcia left San Jose Local 77 amidst a brewing internal leadership crisis and trusteeship. International leaders recognized Garcia's strong leadership potential but questioned his loyalty to the union. Garcia's transfer to Local 102, then, provided him with an opportunity to demonstrate his loyalty and value to the union. More than this, the transfer gave Mike Garcia an opportunity to become one of the most dynamic and important bridge builders in the history of the Justice for Janitors campaign.

Upon arriving at Local 102 in 1985, Garcia set to work in the janitorial division. Joining forces with a local representative and community organizer named Mike Nava, Garcia reached out to Local 102's existing janitor members including Spanish-speaking members who had been especially neglected by previous Local 102 leadership. He filed grievances on behalf of members, helped develop an effective steward system within the downtown office buildings, and oversaw the formation of a rank-and-file advisory committee to re-negotiate the four recently expired janitor contracts. (This advisory committee reflected a very diverse cross-section of the janitorial workforce, including both African American and Latinx janitors.) Broadly speaking, Garcia worked to regain the trust and respect of the existing janitor union members in San Diego. At the same time, Garcia and Nava also started organizing drives amongst nonunion janitors.

While still pursuing organizing under the NLRB election system, Garcia and Nava directly reached out to Latinx immigrant janitors. They created Spanish-language flyers, for example, that detailed the potential benefits of unionization and assured janitors: “SU ESTADO LEGAL NO IMPORTA” (Your legal status does not matter).¹²

While Garcia and Nava made some headway with NLRB organizing in 1985, they received a major boost from additional leadership and a new organizing strategy in 1986 and 1987. During this period, International leaders recruited former UFW organizer and board member Eliseo Medina to transition Local 102 out of trusteeship and become the local’s new president. Medina, in turn, recruited another former farm worker organizer Sabino Lopez to help Garcia and Nava organize janitors.¹³ Together, Lopez, Garcia, and Nava—under Medina’s leadership—took inspiration from their previous labor and community organizing as well as the recent success of the Justice for Janitors Denver campaign. Rather than focusing on just worksite and janitor outreach and NLRB organizing, they decided to pursue a citywide janitor organizing campaign that was deeply rooted in the local community.

Following the strategy pursued in the Denver Justice for Janitors campaign, Local 102’s new leadership and organizers started building this organizing drive through industry research and community outreach. On the research front, they received direct assistance from the International. With help from building service organizing director Stephen Lerner and International researchers, the emerging janitor organizing group within Local 102 uncovered evidence that two of the major cleaning companies, Calhoun Maintenance and North American

¹² Local 102 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folder 5, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

¹³ Andy Stern organizing and field services files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 102, Folder 4, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Local 102 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folder 5, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Sabino Lopez, interview, Peoples Oral History Project Monterey County, <http://www.peoplesoralhistoryprojectmc.org/>

Maintenance, that operated in San Diego were violating labor laws. They discovered that Calhoun Maintenance, which had a contract with the San Diego Unified Port District to clean the airport, was not paying all of the airport janitors the required minimum wage or benefits delineated in the contract. And they discovered that North American Maintenance was requiring janitors who cleaned the Wells Fargo Bank building to work for free during a mandatory two-day training period and withholding their paychecks for the first month. If they quit during the first month, they received no compensation. While seeking to reorganize the entire downtown janitorial market, Local 102 organizers decided to target their initial organizing efforts at building owners who used these contractors.

Seeking to circumvent NLRB organizing by pressuring building owners into card check recognition like Local 105 organizers had done in Denver's Justice for Janitors campaign, Local 102 also invested significant effort into building ties with the local community and creating public support for their nascent organizing campaign. Local 102's Eliseo Medina, along with Mike Garcia and Sabino Lopez, quickly made progress on this front. Although not San Diego natives, these individuals all had extensive experience with community organizing and ties to the Latinx immigrant community. They reached out to a variety of community leaders and organizations including college professors, churches, and the Chicano Federation of San Diego County. In only a few months, they had more than fifty endorsements from the local community. Beyond just offering lip service support to Local 102's janitor organizing efforts, many of these local community endorsers offered more direct support: they wrote letters, signed petitions, and even participated in organizing demonstrations.¹⁴

¹⁴ Stephen Lerner files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 104, Folder 25, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "San Diego: organizing an organizing campaign," *Building Service Division Update* 1, no. 1 (Summer 1987), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "Hidden giants' at the bargaining

While enlisting community support for janitor organizing, Local 102 also lent its support to an emerging community initiative to assist undocumented immigrants in San Diego. Under Medina's direction, Local 102 joined fifteen other local organizations in founding the San Diego Immigration Law Coalition in March of 1987. This new organization worked to dispel potential fears surrounding the recently passed Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) and to provide low-cost counseling to help undocumented immigrants who qualified for IRCA's legalization program gain amnesty.¹⁵ While not directly tied to Local 102's janitor organizing drive, this sort of community involvement helped establish the local as a prominent supporter of the Latinx immigrant community and create a relationship of mutual support between Local 102 and the immigrant community. This sort of relationship, in turn, provided a strong base of support for Local 102's organizing drive amongst San Diego's almost entirely immigrant janitorial workforce.

By spring of 1987, Local 102's new janitor organizing campaign was well underway. Local 102 had started targeting labor and community pressure against North American Maintenance for withholding pay for janitors at the Wells Fargo building. At the same time, the local started organizing demonstrations against Calhoun Maintenance at the airport and even filed a lawsuit against the contractor. This lawsuit demanded financial restitution for the airport janitors who were being underpaid and the reinstatement of two janitors who were fired amidst the initial organizing demonstrations at the airport. With this lawsuit as pressure, Calhoun started negotiating a settlement with Local 102 President Medina in May of 1987. The cleaning contractor agreed to remain neutral in Local 102's organizing drive and to jointly supervise an election with Local 102 to recognize the local as the janitors' representative. Without

table," *Building Service Division Update* 1, no. 1 (Summer 1987), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

¹⁵ John McLaren, "Coalition here will help aliens on legalization," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, March 17, 1987.

interference from Calhoun, the airport janitors voted in favor of union representation, bringing approximately seventy new janitors into Local 102.¹⁶

Shortly after this initial organizing victory, Local 102 escalated their organizing struggle and officially adopted the “Justice for Janitors” campaign label. On May 12, the local’s new leaders and organizers and a group of about one hundred rank-and-file and community supporters held a rally in downtown San Diego to publicize the local’s developing Justice for Janitors campaign. The rally was originally planned in part as an opportunity to continue exerting pressure on North American Maintenance. The local planned to announce a lawsuit against the cleaning contractor during this rally, but ultimately did not have to do so. With merely the threat of an impending lawsuit, North American Maintenance agreed on the eve of the rally to enter into negotiations with Local 102 for a contract that would cover the fifty janitors who cleaned the Wells Fargo and Central Savings buildings in San Diego.

With North American Maintenance conceding to union and community pressure, Local 102 chose to target another cleaning contractor, DID Building Service. (In the week leading up to the rally, DID allegedly fired two janitors who expressed an interest in joining Local 102). While focusing on a new specific organizing target, though, Local 102’s first official Justice for Janitors rally was aimed at a wide audience. As President Medina articulated at the rally, Local 102 was clearly sending a message to San Diego’s cleaning contractors and building owners: “Janitors are not second-class citizens, and they will no longer tolerate being treated as if they were.”¹⁷

¹⁶ Stephen Lerner files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 104, Folder 25, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Local 102 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folder 5, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

¹⁷ Diane Lindquist, “Union starts ‘Justice for Janitors’ drive,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, May 13, 1987.

Even with two quick initial victories, Local 102 still faced an uphill battle in reorganizing the downtown janitorial workforce. The local still had to actually negotiate new contracts with Calhoun and North American Maintenance. Furthermore, even after Local 102 added roughly one hundred and twenty new janitor members, more than a hundred downtown janitors and several thousand janitors in the greater San Diego area remained unorganized. Although downtown San Diego was small in comparison to many cities' downtown areas, Local 102's emerging JfJ group was forced to contend with years of local union leaders' neglect of the industry compounded with a complete transformation of the industry amidst neoliberal restructuring. Overcoming this neglect and challenging the growing ubiquity of nonunion contractors, low wages, and poor working conditions was a monumental task.

Nevertheless, at this point in the spring of 1987, Local 102's efforts to build a strong local foundation for a janitor organizing drive were proving worthwhile. This organizing drive, now sharing the name of Local 105's organizing campaign in Denver, was shaping up to be a small but nonetheless significant adaptation and expansion of the emerging Justice for Janitors campaign. San Diego, however, was not the only site where the groundwork for an expansion of Justice for Janitors was being laid. At the same time, Local 399 was also in the process of building a JfJ-style organizing drive.

As suggested above, Local 399 was in a poor position to begin a janitor organizing drive in the early 1980s. The local's janitorial membership had sharply declined and the local vice president's effort to stave further erosion with concession bargaining only angered existing janitor members. Much like Local 102, though, Local 399 caught the attention of International building service division staff working on the Rebuilding Campaign. In 1986, Stephen Lerner

and International researcher David Chu started exploring Los Angeles as a possible site for a Rebuilding Campaign.

Their initial research into the local janitorial industry revealed that the size of Los Angeles did not lend itself to a citywide organizing campaign like what was being pursued in the Denver Justice for Janitors campaign. The expansive, sprawling geography of Los Angeles meant that any attempt to organize all of the city's janitors at once would be virtually impossible. Lerner acknowledged this impracticality of a citywide organizing drive in Los Angeles to President Sweeney and Organizing Director Andy Stern in a memo in January of 1987. At the same time, though, Lerner articulated a plan to continue pursuing the possibility of organizing in Los Angeles. He proposed to continue industry research with the specific goal of identifying a geographic submarket within the city as an organizing target. Rather than attempting to organize all of the janitors in Los Angeles at once, they could try organizing all of the janitors in a particular region within the city and then use this region as a base to expand organizing into other parts of the city.¹⁸

While conducting initial industry research and developing a tentative organizing strategy, Lerner and Chu also assessed the feasibility of building such a campaign out of Local 399. They discovered that Local 399's vice president, who was also the local's building service division director, was openly hostile to working with the International on a janitor organizing drive. But they also discovered that Local 399's president Jim Zellers and an International organizer named Cecile Richards, who was currently working out of Local 399 on a convalescent home organizing drive, were supportive of janitor organizing. With support from the International,

¹⁸ Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 2, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

President Zellers hired Cecile Richards to oversee the start of a janitor organizing drive in Local 399.¹⁹

In March of 1987, Richards outlined a plan for this organizing drive. As her plan reveals, the Denver Justice for Janitors campaign served as the inspiration for both the name and core organizing strategy of this drive. Under the title “Justice for Janitors, Los Angeles,” Richards articulated a plan to adapt (rather than directly copy) Denver Local 105’s organizing strategy. In this adapted plan, Local 399’s Justice for Janitors campaign would target all of the janitors in a particular “cluster” of buildings in Los Angeles and demand union recognition directly from cleaning companies. To pursue this recognition, the campaign would rely on a rank-and-file organizing committee and a combination of direct action, community pressure, and media attention aimed at building owners as well as cleaning contractors.

To lay the groundwork for such an organizing drive, Richards oversaw a pre-organizing phase of the campaign that centered on three key actions that paralleled those that Local 105 had pursued in Denver and that Local 102 was currently pursuing in San Diego. These actions were industry research, membership outreach, and community outreach. While the industry research would help Local 399 better understand the political and financial power in the janitorial industry and choose a strategic building “cluster” as the campaign’s initial organizing target, the member and community outreach would ensure that Local 399 would have a strong base of workers and community allies to support the campaign’s initial organizing efforts.

Cecile Richards enlisted the support of existing Local 399 staff in this pre-organizing phase. Under her direction, for example, a building service representative named David Stilwell continued conducting industry research with assistance from International researcher David Chu.

¹⁹ David Stilwell, conversation with the author, November 10, 2016; Andy Stern files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 104, Folder 2, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Stilwell also helped start community outreach with the assistance of Local 399 Business Representative Manuel Magana and Political Director Woody Fleming. Manuel Magana was one of Local 399's few longtime Chicana union representatives and Woody Fleming was president of the Los Angeles branch of the A. Philip Randolph Institute in addition to Local 399's political director. Because of their backgrounds and respective ties to the Chicana and African American communities, these individuals helped lay the groundwork for a strong grassroots component to the Los Angeles JfJ campaign. Under Richards' direction, Erick Porras—a newly hired building service organizer who had become a janitor after immigrating to Los Angeles from Guatemala—started initial member outreach work.²⁰

While using the existing resources of Local 399, Richards also looked outside of Local 399 for additional personnel support for the JfJ campaign. Working in coordination with International JfJ leaders, Richards hired a full-time JfJ researcher, Julia Aha, in April and a full-time JfJ organizer, Jono Shaffer, in June. Julia Aha immediately started industry research in Los Angeles, but Shaffer first traveled to Washington D.C. to train under Jay Hessey for six weeks. (At this point, Richards was on maternity leave and unable to immediately train Shaffer. Hessey, in contrast, was immediately available and engaged in Justice for Janitors organizing preparation in D.C.)

By July of 1987, Local 399 was on the verge of being ready to officially launch the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign. Cecile Richards had returned from maternity leave, and Shaffer had returned from his training in Washington D.C. Additionally, Jim Zellers, working in coordination with International JfJ staff, had brokered an agreement with Local 399's vice

²⁰ Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 2, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, August 19, 2011 and May 6, 2016.

president and building service director to give the International control over the emerging Local 399 Justice for Janitors group. Under this agreement, Cecile Richards, Julia Aha, Jono Shaffer, and Erick Porras would operate as a semi-independent group within Local 399. In other words, they would be free to work under the supportive oversight of Stephen Lerner and away from the hostility of Local 399's vice president.²¹ Shortly after helping the Local 399 group gain this independence, however, Lerner and other members of the International JfJ staff decided to shift their attention away from the West Coast.

By this point, Lerner and International JfJ staff had already made significant inroads into San Diego and Los Angeles and had helped lay the foundation for Justice for Janitors campaigns in these cities. They had also done the same in a few other West Coast cities including Seattle, San Jose, and San Francisco, although to a lesser extent.²² But rather than continuing to assist the development of these West Coast JfJ campaigns, Lerner and his fellow International building service division leaders decided to put the full weight of the International division behind organizing drives in Washington D.C. and Atlanta. As discussed in Chapter 3, these leaders wanted to develop JfJ drives in brand new locals and Washington D.C. and Atlanta offered prime opportunities to do so.

These International leaders' decision to shift International JfJ resources away from the West Coast left the newly developed JfJ organizing groups in Local 102 and Local 399 with a choice. These groups could abandon or scale back their JfJ organizing campaigns or they could

²¹ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, August 12, 2011 and August 19, 2011; Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 2, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

²² Stephen Lerner files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 104, Folder 25, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 2, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

continue pushing forward and build their campaigns even without extensive support from the International. The JfJ organizing groups in both Local 102 and Local 399 chose the latter.

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Local 102 and Local 399's JfJ campaigns were in two very different places in the summer of 1987 when local leaders decided to continue pursuing the campaign even without extensive International resources. The San Diego JfJ group in Local 102, as illustrated above, had already made significant progress in developing a strong local base of support for the campaign and had even made some progress in organizing janitors. Local 399, in contrast, was still in the development phase, having yet to choose an initial organizing target and publicly launch the campaign. Furthermore, due to the sheer size disparity between San Diego and Los Angeles, Local 399 had a much larger task ahead in terms of reorganizing its local janitor jurisdiction. These differences factored heavily into progress disparities between these two locals' JfJ organizing drives in the late 1980s. Nevertheless, during this period, both of these campaigns made headway in organizing janitors. Notably, the success of both of these campaigns was rooted in the efforts of the Local 102 and Local 399 JfJ groups to continue developing and expanding rank-and-file and local community support for janitor organizing.

When International JfJ leaders decided to focus their attention on the Washington D.C. and Atlanta campaigns, San Diego Local 102's JfJ group was engaged in an intense struggle with DID Maintenance and the Home Federal Savings and Loan Association (Home Federal), which contracted with DID to clean two downtown San Diego office buildings. As noted above, the union started targeting DID Maintenance in May of 1987 after the company fired two workers who expressed an interest in joining Local 102. Unlike North American Maintenance and the Wells Fargo building owners who quickly conceded to JfJ demands, DID Maintenance did not

cave to the union and public pressure in May. In fact, the company appeared to do quite the opposite. The company appeared to target union activists and exploit their citizenship vulnerability to create a culture of fear and break the momentum of the JfJ organizing drive.

The situation of DID janitors Gabriel and Carmen Soto in June of 1987 is a case in point. After completing his cleaning work and leaving the Home Federal building as usual one night in June, Gabriel Soto was stopped and arrested by Border Patrol agents. As Soto recalls, he told the Border Patrol officers that he had been living in San Diego for nearly ten years and had already started the application process for amnesty. The Border Patrol agents, however, insisted that Soto was lying and actually a Tijuana resident. Continuing to refuse these allegations and requesting a lawyer, Soto was not immediately deported, but he was transported about 700 miles away and held in the El Paso detention center. (Border Patrol agents reported that the closer El Centro deportation center in San Diego was full). In a few days, his wife Carmen Soto was able to raise \$2,000 to post bond and an extra \$150 to pay for Gabriel to fly home from El Paso. In the meantime, however, DID fired both Carmen and Gabriel for missing work. Gabriel also lost his second daytime job working in a sausage factory.²³

Fortunately, due to the union, the Sotos did not remain out of their janitorial jobs for long. Local 102's President Eliseo Medina and JfJ organizers quickly took action in response to DID maintenance's firing of Carmen and Gabriel Soto. They filed a complaint with the NLRB, alleging that the Sotos as well as three other DID janitors were illegally fired. Additionally, they worked to publicize DID's antiunion behavior and rally public pressure to convince Home Federal to intervene with DID on behalf of the janitors. As part of this publicity effort, Local 102's JfJ group organized a cleverly themed protest demonstration on July 1. Calling the day a

²³ H.G. Reza, "City's 'Invisible' Workers Seek Better Pay: Union Says Aliens Who Clean Downtown Buildings at Night Exploited" *Los Angeles Times*, July 13, 1987; Patrick McDonnell, "Critics Claim Border Patrol Agents Ignore Amnesty Directives," *Los Angeles Times*, August 24, 1987;

“mop and broom day to sweep out injustice in downtown buildings,” Local 102’s JfJ group and supporters demonstrated in front of the Home Federal building. They also brought a petition signed by over one thousand people, seeking to present it to the chairman of the board of Home Federal. Three Local 102 leaders including Eliseo Medina were arrested for attempting to enter the Home Federal building and prevent customers from entering the building during the demonstration. Home Federal officials refused to meet with the protestors, suggesting that the State Labor Commission and NLRB were the proper channels for protest.²⁴

As suggested in previous chapters, the NLRB had lost much of its potency and effectiveness as a resource for unions amidst late twentieth century neoliberal restructuring. Rather than helping workers organize, the NLRB was increasingly becoming a weapon that employers could wield to slow down, sideline, or otherwise stop union organizing efforts. In July of 1987, however, Local 102 received an unexpected boost from the NLRB. The NLRB ruled that DID maintenance’s firing of Gabriel and Carmen Soto as well as the three other janitors in May and June was illegal. In the wake of this ruling and growing public pressure, DID agreed on July 13 to rehire the five workers and negotiate with Local 102 to resolve their conflict over the JfJ organizing drive.²⁵

Rather than stopping with this victory, however, Local 102 leaders worked to expose some of the deeper injustices that facilitated DID’s illegal union-busting activities in the first place. On July 17, for example, Eliseo Medina joined a host of local immigrant advocate groups in holding a press conference to expose issues with the Border Patrol’s recent actions. Eliseo Medina called specific attention to the fact that Gabriel Soto was arrested and detained by the Border Patrol even though he had recently started the amnesty process under IRCA and had

²⁴ John Furey, “Three arrested during protest of janitors’ firings at downtown buildings,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, July 2, 1987.

²⁵ Bill Calahan, “Union, employers resume janitor talks,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, July 15, 1987.

proof in the form of an amnesty-application card from Catholic Community Services. Other press conference participants shared additional stories of immigrants suffering injustice at the hands of the Border Patrol. They recounted instances, for example, of the Border Patrol secretly tracking immigrants leaving legalization information sessions at the Chicano Federation, destroying amnesty-related documents, and manipulating dates on voluntary deportation paperwork.²⁶ Together, these stories suggested that the Border Patrol was undermining the legalization provision of IRCA.

Soto's detainment, then, was hardly an isolated incident or merely a product of union-busting efforts. It was part of a much larger pattern of abuse against San Diego's immigrant community. Although this press conference did not generate any immediate results like Local 102's actions against DID and Home Federal, it demonstrated Local 102's commitment to the immigrant community. Furthermore, the press conference demonstrated the local's commitment to addressing the systemic racial and citizenship-based injustice that surrounded the more specific exploitation that janitors experienced at the workplace.

While Local 102's leaders exposed deeper patterns of injustice underlying janitor mistreatment, the local's JfJ group continued working to help DID janitors gain union recognition and address the more straightforward and specific injustice they experienced in the form of poor wages and working conditions. This did not prove to be an easy task. As the San Diego JfJ group sought to help DID janitors gain union recognition, DID employed a host of antiunion tactics—ranging from intimidation to bribery—to quell the janitors' support for the

²⁶ Joe Gandelman, "Harassment in amnesty cases alleged," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, July 18, 1987.

union. Nevertheless, the DID janitors ultimately proved their commitment to unionization and won recognition from DID against all odds in September of 1987.²⁷

These janitors' organizing victory undeniably proved the strength and endurance of the Justice for Janitors campaign that Local 102 had been building for less than a year. More than this, this victory marked an important progress point toward the JfJ group's goal of reorganizing all of downtown San Diego. With the unionization of the DID janitors who cleaned the two Home Federal-owned buildings in September, Local 102 regained majority representation in the janitorial industry. As Medina reported, Local 102 had organized more than a hundred janitors who cleaned office buildings by October of 1987. Adding these newly organized janitors to Local 102's approximately seventy existing downtown janitor members meant that Local 102 now represented more than half of downtown San Diego's two-hundred and forty janitors. Furthermore, the local's downtown representation was even stronger in terms of buildings organized. By this point, Local 102 represented janitors in twelve of the downtown's nineteen office buildings.²⁸ The DID victory, then, paved the way for Local 102 to negotiate a master agreement for downtown San Diego.

In March of 1988, the San Diego JfJ group successfully negotiated this master agreement with six major cleaning contractors that covered a majority of the janitors who cleaned office buildings in downtown San Diego. The master agreement guaranteed janitors a minimum hourly wage of \$4.50 an hour (prevailing wages had been between \$3.35 and \$3.80 an hour), eight paid holidays, six paid days of sick leave after six months, and two weeks of vacation after one year. These guarantees did not match the extremely high goals, such as a minimum wage of \$5.35 an

²⁷ Local 102 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

²⁸ John McLaren, "Janitors' union shaping up: Aggressive boss pushes justice campaign," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, October 16, 1987.

hour and full-family health benefits, that the janitors had originally set as their contract demands in a public bargaining meeting in October of 1987. Nevertheless, the agreement represented a sizable wage and benefit improvement for downtown San Diego's janitors.²⁹

More than this, this master agreement offered proof that a group of dedicated local activists could successfully implement the Justice for Janitors campaign on their own. Even without significant financial and personnel resources from the International, the San Diego JfJ group successfully reorganized downtown San Diego. Succeeding without the level of International support that the original Denver JfJ campaign received (and that the Atlanta and D.C. campaigns were currently receiving), the San Diego JfJ campaign decisively proved the strength and value of a strong rank-and-file and community base of support for the campaign. With this solid base of support, the San Diego JfJ group increased Local 102's representation in the industry by about four hundred janitors.³⁰ And the group did not stop with this achievement.

Even in the midst of bargaining their first master agreement, JfJ activists in San Diego expanded the scope of their organizing goals. While making efforts to organize the few remaining nonunion downtown janitors, the San Diego JfJ group started exploring opportunities to expand the campaign to the unorganized suburbs of greater San Diego. As Eliseo Medina asserted in explanation of this, "The conditions are the same everywhere, with minimum wage and no benefits. Even after we have organized the downtown, we cannot survive as an island among a sea of unorganized workers. We must be strong in the entire area if there is to be true

²⁹ "Cinco de Mayo' spirit wins San Diego pact," *Building Service Division Update* 2, no. 2 (Spring 1988), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Local 102 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 23, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

³⁰ "San Diego: A Local Union Mounts Its Own Justice Campaign," Report to the Building Service Division, June 1988, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 144, Folder 3, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

justice for these workers.”³¹ Understanding the ubiquity of substandard wages and the intensity of antiunion hostility throughout the industry, the San Diego JfJ activists recognized that they could not rest on their laurels. If they wanted to protect the achievements that they had made, they would have to continue organizing and expanding the campaign.

In addition to continuing to expand the JfJ campaign throughout San Diego, the Local 102 JfJ group also offered its assistance in expanding and supporting the national Justice for Janitors campaign throughout the rest of 1988. During this period, San Diego JfJ activists participated in the two major national JfJ actions organized in support of the Atlanta and D.C. campaigns. As part of the twenty-four hour Vigil for Justice on March 30-31, the San Diego JfJ activists combined civil disobedience and protest actions with cultural celebration. Targeting one of the few remaining nonunion downtown buildings, a group of about forty janitors and supporters marched into the Security Pacific Plaza demanding justice for the janitors who cleaned the building. Later, after seven of the demonstrators were arrested for trespassing, the janitors and JfJ supporters maintained their protest for the full twenty-four hour period—picketing, eating menudo, and listening to guitar music into the early hours of the morning in front of the building. Then on November 17, as part of the Bring John Portman to Justice boycott, the San Diego JfJ group organized a rally targeting the San Diego Imperial Bank Building, which was Portman-owned. In addition to participating in these Atlanta and Washington D.C. focused actions, the San Diego JfJ campaign also offered assistance to the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign during this period.³²

³¹ “San Diego: organizing an organizing campaign,” *Building Service Division Update* 1, no. 1 (Summer 1987), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

³² “Easter rallies, vigils, arrests demand ‘Justice for Janitors,’” *Building Service Division Update* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1988), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; “Janitors Seek Justice,” Justice for Janitors Clippings, SEIU Public Relations Records, Box 2, Folder 8, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Local 102 files, SEIU

As mentioned above, activists within Los Angeles Local 399 much like those in San Diego Local 102 committed to building a JfJ campaign even without assistance from the International in the summer of 1987. These activists, however, found themselves confronting a much larger struggle than the Local 102 JfJ group faced in San Diego. While the San Diego JfJ activists made quick work of reorganizing Local 102's downtown jurisdiction and achieved a master agreement in less than a year, the Los Angeles JfJ organizing drive took much longer. Nevertheless, with a strong base of rank-and-file and community supporters within Los Angeles as well as a wider network of support that included Local 102, the Los Angeles JfJ campaign ultimately confirmed what the San Diego JfJ campaign had suggested: that a Justice for Janitors campaign with a strong base of rank-and-file and local community support was capable of defying the intense antiunion hostility and escalation of union erosion that occurred amidst neoliberal restructuring.

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As International JfJ leaders shifted their focus away from the West Coast and toward Atlanta and D.C. in the summer of 1987, the still-developing Los Angeles JfJ group kept focus on accomplishing the original pre-organizing goals that Local 399 JfJ coordinator Cecile Richard had set in her campaign plan: research, member representation, and community outreach. At this point, campaign researcher Julia Aha had already started mapping the Los Angeles janitorial industry through research at the Hall of Records in Norwalk. Starting in July, organizers Jono Shaffer and Erick Porras started a more direct research approach downtown. Sometimes pretending to be students or workers looking for jobs, they went from building to building to fill in gaps in the research. For each building, they tried to gain detailed information about the

owner, the property manager, the cleaning contractor, and the workers. This information allowed them to work with Aha in developing a comprehensive map of who had power in the Los Angeles real estate and cleaning industry and where they could most effectively target powerful individuals and companies in the city.

While doing this in-person research downtown during the day, Shaffer and Porras also began to reach out to existing Local 399 janitor members at night. Although Local 399 had lost much of its share of the janitorial industry, the local still had contracts covering workers in several of the downtown buildings. Initially, these workers viewed Shaffer and Porras with deep skepticism. These workers still enjoyed higher wages than nonunion janitors, but they were constantly under threat of losing their jobs and facing work speedups. Additionally, these remaining union janitors were aware of Local 399's recent history of concession bargaining, which seemed to contribute to rather than halt union erosion. While these janitors were initially disillusioned with the union, Shaffer and Porras took the time to meet with them and explain the goals and process of the JfJ campaign. In doing so, they helped change these janitors' perspectives on the union, build bridges between the existing janitorial union workforce and Local 399, and create a strong base of rank-and-file support for the Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles.

This internal member organizing had a strong influence on the official launch of the Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles. After about a month of direct research and member outreach, the Local 399 JfJ group decided to choose the Southern California Gas Company as their first campaign target. The Gas Company had a long history of using union janitors in Los Angeles, but the company switched to a nonunion contractor in June of 1987. With this shift, twenty union janitors lost their jobs, which had paid \$7.42 an hour and benefits

including a pension, health plan, and sick leave options. Their replacements were paid only \$4.50 an hour with no benefits.³³

As they prepared for their first action against the Gas Company, the JfJ group focused on framing the campaign as a community struggle and enlisting the support of community leaders. They started by reaching out to local religious leaders because, as Jono Shaffer recalled, “that’s what the farm workers did.”³⁴ Their initial efforts won the JfJ campaign two important early allies: Reverend Philip Lance and Father Luis Olivares. As an Episcopal minister, Philip Lance helped the JfJ group better understand and navigate the Los Angeles power structure. As Local 399 staffer Dave Stilwell describes it, the Episcopal Church was one of the prime institutions of the political elite in the city. (USC was the other.) While Lance provided inroads into the city’s elite power structure, Father Olivares helped generate support for the campaign in the Latinx community. A veteran of the UFW movement, Olivares had recently become an outspoken supporter of the Sanctuary movement in Los Angeles. Despite government opposition and even some opposition from fellow religious leaders, Father Olivares declared La Placita church (Los Angeles’ original Catholic parish church) a safe-haven for Central American refugees in 1985. Because of this action, Olivares was respected as an important authority in the Latinx community, particularly in the immigrant community. His support for the janitors helped align the JfJ campaign with a growing immigrant rights struggle.³⁵

³³ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, August 19, 2011; “Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Labor-Management Relations of the Committee on Education and Labor House of Representatives: One Hundredth Congress Second Session,” House of Representatives, Serial No. 100-83, Washington D.C. (1988), US Government Printing Office, http://njlaw.rutgers.edu/collections/gdoc/hearings/8/88603065/88603065_1.pdf.

³⁴ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, August 19, 2011.

³⁵ David Stilwell, conversation with the author, November 10, 2016; Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016; Hector Tobar, “Father Luis Olivares, Voice for the Poor, Dies of AIDS,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 20, 1993.

While building support for the campaign through local religious allies, the JfJ group also organized a festive “Justice for Janitors Bash” at the Local 399 headquarters on August 22, 1987. This bash was open to union and nonunion janitors and their families. It featured free food and beverages, a mariachi band, a raffle (with a television grand prize), a piñata, and a clown blowing up Justice for Janitors balloons. More than one hundred and fifty people attended. This big turnout was a huge surprise to other Local 399 leaders. From their recent experience in the Los Angeles labor movement, they considered getting more than a hundred people to show up to a union event an impossible feat—even with the promise of free beer. The large turnout for the bash, then, suggested that the Justice for Janitors campaign in L.A. was disrupting patterns of union member disillusionment and disengagement. The campaign offered an alternative to the status quo of business unionism, and workers responded enthusiastically.³⁶

Less than two weeks after the bash, the JfJ group organized the first major Justice for Janitors event. On September 3, 1987, more than two hundred people participated in a march from Local 399 to the Gas Company headquarters. At the headquarters, the marchers held a rally and demanded that the Gas Company reinstate the union contractor and bring back fair wages. Many of the event participants were Local 399 janitors, but members of Local 399’s senior club and even members from four other local unions also participated.

While this first demonstration showed that the JfJ group was already making headway in building Justice for Janitors as a large labor and community struggle in Los Angeles, the demonstration was much less successful in terms of pressuring the Gas Company to switch to a

³⁶ Janitors’ Bash files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 14, Folder 6, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Rose Hodges files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 43, Folder 10, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, August 19, 2011.

union contractor. Instead, the demonstration started what would prove to be an intense struggle between the Gas Company and the JfJ group. After this first major protest, the Gas Company switched cleaning contractors again. The new cleaning contractor, a nonunion contractor called Advanced Building Maintenance, retained all of the existing janitors but still provided low wages and no benefits. In response to this action, the Local 399 JfJ group decided to pursue a two-pronged, legal and public protest approach to continue exerting pressure on the Gas Company.

On the legal front, the JfJ group filed charges with the NLRB against the Gas Company, alleging that the company was a joint employer of the janitors and therefore had violated labor law in switching to a nonunion contractor. On the public protest front, the JfJ group drew inspiration from the Civil Rights and farm workers movements and orchestrated creative demonstrations targeting the Gas Company. In October of 1987, for example, they organized another march to the Gas Company headquarters, but this time, rather than just rallying outside of the building, the campaign leaders and janitors entered the company's service center. They entered the service center under the pretense of paying their gas bills but then caused a logjam by attempting to pay their bills with pennies. The Gas Company threatened the participants with arrest. The janitors left, but four Local 399 staff members refused to leave and were arrested.³⁷

The Gas Company responded to these actions with fierce resistance. As a janitor supervisor later testified, the Gas Company owners expressed dissatisfaction with the JfJ demonstrations and directed their current cleaning contractor, Advanced Building Maintenance, to terminate all of the janitors who cleaned the building. When the janitor supervisor raised an objection to this, he was instructed to fire the Spanish-speaking janitors. This action not only

³⁷ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, August 19, 2011; Miguel Garcia, "Empleados de Gas Protestan Ante Rebaja 50 Por Ciento de Sueldos," *Noticias del Mundo*, October 15, 1987.

reflected the extreme union-avoidance efforts that companies embraced during this period of neoliberal restructuring, but also the extreme vulnerability of Latinx janitors. Perceived as a vulnerable workforce without the confidence and resources to resist, Latinx janitors were often subject to the most intense discrimination and exploitation as cleaning contractors sought cheap, nonunion labor. Unlike most Latinx janitors who faced this discrimination and exploitation during this period, though, the Gas Company janitors had the confidence and resources to fight back.

With the assurance of the Justice for Janitors strategy, leaders and janitors continued with their dual legal and public protest organizing approach in the face of this resistance. They filed another NLRB charge against the Gas Company as well as a charge against the nonunion cleaning contractor for firing the Spanish-speaking janitors.³⁸ At the same time, they embraced holiday themed protests that had become an emblematic feature of Justice for Janitors in Denver. On Halloween, for example, the JfJ group organized a “Trick or Treat for Justice” demonstration. At this demonstration, janitors along with their children dressed up in costumes and marched in front of the Gas Company building. A few weeks later, the JfJ group enlisted the support of a local grocery store and Los Angeles City Councilman Richard Alatorre in organizing a Thanksgiving themed demonstration. During this demonstration, Councilman Alatorre declared his support for Justice for Janitors and handed out donated turkeys to Gas Company janitors. Also as part of this demonstration, Jono Shaffer dressed in a giant turkey costume and named Gas Company President Jonel Hill “Turkey of the Year.”³⁹

³⁸ “Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Labor-Management Relations of the Committee on Education and Labor House of Representatives: One Hundredth Congress Second Session,” House of Representatives, Serial No. 100-83, Washington D.C. (1988), US Government Printing Office, http://njlw.rutgers.edu/collections/gdoc/hearings/8/88603065/88603065_1.pdf.

³⁹ “Local 399 Brings ‘Justice for Janitors’ to Los Angeles” *Voice of Local 399* 11, no. 8 (December 1987 and Jan 1988), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado*, Ahí

The JfJ group made little headway against the Gas Company with these initial actions. In January of 1988, the NLRB ruled that the Gas Company was not a joint employer of the janitors who cleaned the company headquarters. The NLRB did rule in favor of the JfJ group that the Gas Company's cleaning contractor Advanced had unjustly fired its Spanish-speaking janitors for their union activities. The Gas Company, however, easily sidestepped any association with this complaint. The company terminated the contract with Advanced and hired a completely new janitorial staff.⁴⁰ This Gas Company action clearly highlights the difficulty that the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors group (as well as any union group attempting to organize contracted work) faced in attempting to organize janitors. Even though the JfJ group was able to get legal confirmation that Advanced was illegally targeting and discriminating against Spanish-speaking janitors, the JfJ group was essentially unable to do anything to truly benefit these janitors because of the lack of legal pressure on the Gas Company. In fact, the NLRB ruling against Advanced without a similar ruling against the Gas Company only resulted in the rest of Advance janitors losing their jobs as well. This confirmed that the Gas Company was the true source of power and influence over the janitors' wages and working conditions. Furthermore, it confirmed the validity and importance of the JfJ strategy of targeting the companies that hire the cleaning contractors rather than just the cleaning contractors.

While a likely source of frustration and discouragement for the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign, the Gas Company's actions had the opposite of their intended effect. Rather than deterring the Los Angeles janitors, the prolonged struggle at the Gas Company created a

Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, August 19, 2011.

⁴⁰ "Hearings Before the Subcommittee on Labor-Management Relations of the Committee on Education and Labor House of Representatives: One Hundredth Congress Second Session," House of Representatives, Serial No. 100-83, Washington D.C. (1988), US Government Printing Office, http://njlaw.rutgers.edu/collections/gdoc/hearings/8/88603065/88603065_1.pdf.

foundation for an expansion and escalation of the campaign. Through the Gas Company, many of the Los Angeles union janitors embraced the Justice for Janitors struggle as their own.

Although many of these janitors previously had (and maybe still harbored) negative opinions of Local 399, the Gas Company fight provided an opportunity for the JfJ leaders to start changing these janitors' opinions of unions and gain their trust; it provided an opportunity for these leaders to build a strong relationship with the janitors based on their mutual commitment to and support for the organizing struggle. Through the Gas Company fight, the JfJ campaign leaders proved their commitment to personally backing the janitors and helping build additional religious and political support for their struggle against injustice. In turn, the janitors proved their ability to generate excitement and capture public attention by working together with the campaign leaders. Working together, a core group of union janitors joined Local 399 JfJ leaders in expanding the campaign to a new target in early 1988. While the defensive struggle against the Gas Company was still ongoing, they launched the campaign's first offensive organizing drive.

In this first organizing drive, the Los Angeles JfJ group targeted Century Cleaning. As the group's industry research revealed, Century Cleaning was one of the big three nonunion cleaning companies in Los Angeles in the late 1980s: the company had contracts at several prominent buildings in downtown Los Angeles. These high-profile buildings increased the likelihood of a struggle against Century capturing public attention.

With Century as their chosen target, organizers Jono Shaffer and Erick Porras started reaching out to Century janitors. Because these workers did not have existing ties to Local 399, this was no easy task. Shaffer and Porras initially tried to approach Century janitors on their way to and from work but made little headway, so they decided to embrace a more creative strategy. Shortly before the end of the standard business day and the start of the janitors' workday, Shaffer

and Porras entered buildings where Century janitors worked and rode the elevator to the top floor of the building. Then, they waited and sometimes hid in a bathroom until the janitors started cleaning. At this point, out of the sight of supervisors and the public, they approached the janitors. Despite some initial suspicion, many of the Century janitors proved willing to provide Shaffer and Porras with their names and contact information.⁴¹

Shaffer and Porras, in turn, used this contact information to conduct house visits. In making these house visits, Shaffer and Porras relied heavily on the support of the rank-and-file janitors who had become JfJ supporters through the Gas Company struggle. Rather than going to the janitors' houses alone, Shaffer and Porras brought union janitors with them. They found that the nonunion janitors who were skeptical of union organizers were willing to listen to—and, more importantly, take seriously—other janitors. The union janitors gave nonunion janitors hope that an alternative to their low wages and poor working conditions was possible through the union. These house visits, then, provided early proof that the JfJ group's initial efforts to build a base of rank-and-file support for the JfJ campaign amongst Los Angeles' remaining union janitors were worthwhile. The base of union janitor support lent a sense of legitimacy to the campaign and proved key to outreach amongst unorganized janitors.

As union janitors proved helpful in the initial nonunion janitor organizing, Jono Shaffer made a concerted effort to continue building Justice for Janitors as a rank-and-file movement rather than a top-down union campaign. One of the primary ways that he did this was through new leader recruitment. While functioning himself as a bridge builder between the International and Local 399 in developing the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign, Shaffer recruited additional leaders to help bridge the divide between the predominantly white and male JfJ

⁴¹ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, August 19, 2011.

campaign leadership and the predominantly female and Latinx janitor workforce in Los Angeles. Two of these bridge builders that Shaffer recruited in the midst of the Century organizing efforts were Berta Northey and Rocio Saenz.

Berta Northey was one of the janitors who went on house visits with Shaffer. She was originally from Nicaragua and had been working as a union janitor in Los Angeles for more than fifteen years. In his initial outreach to union janitors in 1987, Shaffer recognized Northey as a natural leader amongst the janitors in her building. Furthermore, he found Northey to be an effective organizer during the house visits with Century janitors. On the way to one of the house visits, Shaffer urged Northey to take a leadership role in the union and become a shop steward. Initially, Northey was very reluctant. While she liked working with Shaffer and “La Flaca” (her nickname for Cecile Richards), she still associated the union with corruption and complacency and vowed to never set foot in Local 399. After several months of persistence, however, Shaffer convinced Northey to become a Local 399 shop steward. Shortly, thereafter, he hired her as a full-time organizer.⁴²

Around the same time, Shaffer also recruited Rocio Saenz. Saenz, who was originally from Mexico City, came to the United States in the mid-1980s with the intention of studying immigrant workers for three months. These three months soon turned into six and then into twelve. Eventually, Saenz decided to stay in the U.S. To support her studies, she became what she was studying: an immigrant worker. Working a series of low paying jobs, Saenz experienced first-hand some of the various forms of discrimination that immigrant and particularly female immigrant workers face. She experienced, for example, being denied overtime pay and being sexually harassed by a manager. Knowing from her experience growing

⁴² Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, September 15, 2011 and October 28, 2011.

up in Mexico that union work was better than nonunion work, Saenz turned to a local garment workers union for help finding a better job. Although they needed some convincing, leaders of the local agreed to hire Saenz, and she started what would become a long career in the U.S. labor movement. In 1988, Shaffer recruited Saenz to join the Local 399 JfJ group as an organizer. Although Saenz was not a janitor, she had first-hand experience of the difficulty of working in Los Angeles as an undocumented Latina immigrant. Like Northey, then, Saenz helped make the JfJ campaign in Los Angeles much less of a struggle of white union organizers on behalf of female and immigrant janitors and more of a struggle of janitors, women, and immigrants on behalf of janitors, women, and immigrants.⁴³

With an expanding and increasingly diverse group of organizers, the JfJ group pursued a series of actions throughout 1988 to simultaneously put pressure on Century Cleaning and empower janitors. One set of actions was behind the scenes. In the preparation phase of the campaign, the Local 399's JfJ research team had discovered that Century Cleaning appeared to be the nonunion counterpart to a union contractor called Western Cleaning, which had double-breasted to stay competitive.⁴⁴ As double-breasting became common throughout the janitorial industry amidst neoliberal restructuring, many double-breasted cleaning companies developed sophisticated structures to avoid any allegations of illegal union subversion and impropriety. Western and Century Cleaning, however, did not. The same individual owned both companies—and made no effort to hide this fact. Furthermore, the JfJ organizers found that if they called either the Western or Century Cleaning office, the staff at one could directly transfer them to the

⁴³ Dave Gardetta, "True Grit: Clocking Time with Janitors Organizer Rocio Saenz," *L.A. Weekly* 15 (1993): 16-26; Ana Radelat, "A Call to Action: Labor leadership's faces are increasingly Hispanic," *Hispanic Trends* (Winter 2004): 40.

⁴⁴ In theory, as long as a double-breasted company's union operations and nonunion operations are sufficiently separate or operate in different areas, there is no legal issue. The practice of double-breasting is illegal, however, as a union subversion tactic.

other. Seeing a chance at building a legal case against the two companies, the JfJ organizers started a daily project of making calls and being transferred between the two. They also talked with Century janitors about their work history and supervisors to gather additional evidence of the close connection between Century and Western.⁴⁵

While pursuing this behind-the-scenes legal strategy, the JfJ organizers also worked with the janitors to orchestrate large public demonstrations targeted at buildings with Century janitors. One of their prime targets was the Wells Fargo building in downtown Los Angeles. A Century supervisor at the Wells Fargo building fired a janitor named Gladys Monge who had taken an active role in supporting the JfJ campaign and organizing her colleagues. In response, the Local 399 JfJ group chose to target the Wells Fargo building as part of the aforementioned national twenty-four hour “Vigil for Justice” event in coordination with Atlanta and Washington D.C. Between March 30 and 31, a group of about five hundred Los Angeles janitors and JfJ supporters joined together to protest Wells Fargo and Century Cleaning through twenty-four hours of creative actions.

A key element of this demonstration involved a pop cultural framing of the janitors’ struggle. At the time, the Wells Fargo building was known as the “LA Law” building because producers of the recent hit television series *LA Law* used footage of the building to represent the exterior of the fictitious law firm in the show. Using this cultural association, the Local 399 JfJ group began referring to the Wells Fargo building as the “LA Lawless” building. With this new nickname for the building, the JfJ group juxtaposed idealized Hollywood images of Los Angeles with the difficult reality of illegal discrimination that real people were experiencing in the Wells Fargo building and the city of Los Angeles more broadly. Furthermore, the JfJ group called for

⁴⁵ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, September 15, 2011.

an end to this extreme disparity between the publicized ideal of Los Angeles and the reality of Los Angeles for nonunion janitors. Throughout the demonstration, janitors carried signs asserting that they deserved health insurance and decent wages as well as respect and dignity. They also wielded a banner that specifically demanded “Justicia para el Trabajador Indocumentado / Justice for the Undocumented Worker.”

While juxtaposing their mistreatment with the wealth and idealism of Hollywood at this event, the janitors also juxtaposed their mistreatment at the hands of contractors with the support and protection that they received from the union. At one point during the event, Gladys Monge spoke to her fellow janitors and their supporters at the demonstration about the assistance that she received from Local 399 after being unjustly terminated from her cleaning job at Wells Fargo. When Monge was fired, the Local 399 JfJ group filed an NLRB case in an attempt to get her rightfully reinstated. Knowing that NLRB cases were slow and difficult, however, the JfJ organizers used Local 399’s remaining relationships with union contractors in downtown L.A. to get janitors who had been fired for union activity like Gladys Monge other jobs while their NLRB cases for reinstatement were ongoing. In doing so, the JfJ organizers provided an important sense of security to janitors. JfJ organizers showed janitors that, if they were willing to risk their job security for the JfJ campaign, the union would find a way to make sure that they and their families did not go hungry.⁴⁶

In addition to hearing from fellow workers like Monge, the janitors also heard from a range of other supporters. The head of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, Bill Robertson, addressed the janitors and emphasized the validity of their struggle. He called their current less than \$4 dollar an hour wage “repulsive.” Reverend Philip Lance led the janitors in

⁴⁶ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, September 15, 2011.

an Easter prayer and then joined a group of janitors, JfJ staffers, and other supports in a sit-in at the Wells Fargo lobby. Lance, along with President Jim Zellers and several JfJ staff, refused to leave until they were arrested and escorted out of the building.⁴⁷

Ultimately, public demonstrations such as this one allowed janitors to publicly fight against their exploitation as low-wage workers, as service workers, and as immigrant workers. They captured the attention of the Los Angeles public and shed light on the importance of the work that they did each night. They asserted themselves as an important—albeit often invisible and unrecognized—part of the day-to-day functioning and well-recognized success of the city of Los Angeles. On the basis of this, they demanded to be fairly compensated and treated with dignity. In taking this stand after months of JfJ campaign preparation, these janitors enjoyed an unprecedented level of support and solidarity from local labor and community leaders. Not only did the janitors gain a sense of confidence and security through their collective work, but they also gained a confidence and a sense of security knowing that they had a network of allies acting with them.

These public demonstrations proved to be transformational for many of the JfJ supporters as well as the janitors, but in an opposite way. While empowering for janitors, these demonstrations created situations in which JfJ supporters were sometimes exposed to a level of powerlessness they had never experienced before. Reverend Philip Lance's experience getting arrested during the Wells Fargo sit-in is a case in point. One of the arresting officers was overtly hostile and disparaging to Reverend Lance. The officer remarked that a priest getting arrested

⁴⁷ “Justice for Janitors’ Campaign Has New Target,” *Voice of Local 399* 12, no 4. (April 1988), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; “The ‘Justice for Janitors Campaign’ Continues...” *Voice of Local 399* 12, no 4. (April 1988), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Henry Weinstein, “Janitors Stage Vigil as Part of National Protest,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 31, 1998; “24-hour vigil at Wells Fargo,” Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 14, Folder 14, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

was disgusting. Finding the officer's comment ridiculous, Lance reminded the officer that it was Maundy Thursday and that Jesus had been arrested on Maundy Thursday. Threateningly, the officer retorted, "Yeah, and they nailed him up on Friday." In this moment and the few hours he spent in jail afterward, Reverend Lance's sense of security and freedom were stripped away. As he recalls, the experience left quite an impression on him. After facing only a few hours in jail, he could not imagine how people dealt with such a sense of powerlessness and insecurity for a longer period of time. Already committed to supporting the JfJ campaign, Reverend Lance came away from the arrest with added motivation to support the janitors' cause.⁴⁸

While public demonstrations such as the Vigil for Justice empowered janitors and motivated allies in early 1988, the Los Angeles JfJ Founding Convention provided janitors with an extra boost of confidence and momentum in June of 1988. Rather than serving as a kick-off to the campaign like the founding conventions in D.C. and Atlanta were, the L.A. Founding Convention proved to be a powerful demonstration of the network of support that the Local 399 JfJ group and janitors had collectively built for the campaign.

The convention program featured a diverse range of labor, political, and religious leaders. In addition to Local 399 leaders, the convention speakers included Local 102 President Eliseo Medina, who was able to share encouraging stories of the San Diego JfJ group's recent success in signing a master agreement. SEIU's current International Secretary-Treasurer Richard Cordtz was another prominent labor leader who spoke at the convention. His participation in the convention demonstrated that the Los Angeles JfJ campaign, although not the primary focus of the International JfJ leaders, still had the support of the International union behind it. Beyond

⁴⁸ Philip Lance, conversation with author, August 10, 2016; Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016.

these labor leaders, the convention speakers also included Democratic Senator Art Torres and Father Luis Olivares.

The primary focus of the convention program, however, was the janitors. A group of janitors presented the goals of Justice for Janitors campaign to all of the convention attendees. These goals, arranged in Spanish to produce the acronym “A.R.R.I.B.A.,” included unionization for all janitors, a one dollar raise to janitors’ hourly wage, better working conditions, health insurance, a paid sick leave policy, and respect on the job. After presenting these goals, the janitors took an oath to action. With community leaders pledging their support, the janitors committed to making the campaign goals a reality.⁴⁹

While serving as an opportunity for janitors to assert their commitment to the JfJ campaign, the founding convention helped provide the janitors with the assurance that their commitment for the campaign would not be futile. The janitors, particularly those who had already been fired for their union activism, knew that they faced an intensely difficult, uphill battle with the Justice for Janitors campaign. But they also knew that they were not alone in this struggle. This was particularly significant for many of the janitors, like Oscar Mejia, who came to the U.S. after fleeing poverty and conflict in Central America.

When he first heard about the Justice for Janitors campaign, Oscar Mejia was very reluctant to get involved. His union activism in El Salvador in the early 1980s made him a target in the Salvadoran civil war. In 1984, after paramilitary death squads killed the head of his union, Mejia fled to safety in the United States. Once in the U.S., Mejia did not initially want to put his

⁴⁹ “La Convención, Justicia por los Conserjes, Junio 11, 1988” *Voice of Local 399* 12, No 7. (July 1988), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; “Justice for Janitors: Convention Agenda,” SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 3, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Justice for Janitors Convention files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 14, Folder 10, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

job security and safety at risk again by getting involved in another union. But his motivation for taking action grew as he struggled to make ends meet and watched his supervisor attempt to pit recently hired Latinx janitors and veteran black janitors against each other. After a few months of watching the JfJ campaign take shape, Mejia decided to get involved. His participation in this campaign and particularly the founding convention imbued him with a newfound sense of confidence. In talking with another convention attendee, Mejia asserted: “In El Salvador when I was in the unions, the death squads killed most of our organizers and even Archbishop Romero. Here we have Father Olivares and political leaders on our side and at least we have the right to speak. We are unified and our victory is just a matter of time.”⁵⁰

Mejia’s confidence was not misplaced. In the months following the founding convention, the JfJ campaign experienced a series of small but hugely inspirational successes. The first of these successes involved Wells Fargo janitor Gladys Monge. After months of facing constant JfJ protests in the spring and summer of 1988, some of the tenants at the Wells Fargo building pressured Century Cleaning to rehire Monge. By August of 1988, Monge was reinstated with full back pay. While this success really only benefited one janitor, it provided proof that the janitors’ pressure tactics aimed at building owners and tenants as well as cleaning contractors were effective.

A few months later, the janitors were offered further proof. In late 1988, California Plaza, one of the prominent buildings that contracted with Century Cleaning, decided to terminate their existing contract and switch to a contract with unionized Western Cleaning. Following an agreement already worked out with the JfJ organizers, Western hired all of the janitors who were already employed at California Plaza to continue cleaning the building. This

⁵⁰ Greg Goldin, “Arriba: The New Surge in Latino Union Organizing,” *Service Employees Union* (June/July 1989): 24-28; Eric Mann, “Janitors Toil in Limbo Behind Downtown’s Glitter,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 1988.

meant that the contractor switch actually created more union jobs rather than just forcing nonunion janitors out of work. This was a monumental achievement for the campaign. Although they still had dozens if not hundreds of buildings to go, the janitors proved for the first time that they could “flip” a building from nonunion to union and increase the number of union janitors downtown. With the California Plaza victory, Los Angeles JfJ group members took their first concrete step toward organizing all of Los Angeles’ nonunion janitors.⁵¹

It is important to note the Los Angeles campaign experienced these successes while the JfJ campaigns in Washington D.C. and Atlanta continued to face setbacks. As noted in Chapter 3, the summer and fall of 1988 marked an intense moment of activism for the D.C. and Atlanta campaigns. In a strategic effort to develop JfJ as a powerful national and even transnational movement, International SEIU staff focused an abundance of time, energy, and money into these campaigns. Meanwhile, the Los Angeles JfJ staff jokingly called themselves “Cinder L.A.” Although they received some financial and personnel assistance from the International, the Los Angeles JfJ organizers represented the “ragtag” sister in the fairytale Cinderella story while the D.C. and Atlanta campaigns were depicted as the “fairer sisters.”⁵² As in the Cinderella story, the Los Angeles organizers somewhat ironically seemed poised to succeed while their fairer sisters in D.C. and Atlanta struggled. While the D.C. and Atlanta campaigns produced little tangible results other than a wave of legal challenges, the Los Angeles campaign won important momentum-boosting successes. These inspirational successes offered important proof of the validity of the Justice for Janitors strategy. More than this, though, these successes in

⁵¹ “Gladys Monge Wins Back Pay,” *Voice of Local 399* 12, No 8. (August 1988), Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 7, Folder 4, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, September 15, 2011.

⁵² Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, May 6, 2016; Dave Gardetta, “True Grit: Clocking Time with Janitors Organizer Rocio Saenz,” *L.A. Weekly* 15 (1993): 16-26.

combination with the struggles in Atlanta and D.C. offered proof of the validity of a particular adaptation of this campaign strategy. These successes demonstrated the immense power of Justice for Janitors campaign strategy when it was grounded in the commitment and support of rank-and-file activists as well as union organizers.

As L.A. janitor Oscar Mejia's aforementioned experience suggests, building a base of rank-and-file support for an organizing campaign was not an easy task. Many of the Los Angeles immigrant janitors had strong activist backgrounds and experience with labor organizing, but they were reluctant to fight back. Many of these workers had experienced intense hardship before coming to the United States. Once in the U.S. they found themselves subject to different but nonetheless unjust hardship and exploitation. Understandably, these workers did not want to take risks that would compromise their already precarious socioeconomic and legal status in the country—that is, until Local 399 JfJ organizers provided them with a plan and modicum of protection.

With limited resources in the face of the overwhelming power of building owners and contractors, Local 399 leaders and organizers could not halt or reverse deep-seated patterns of union decline and neoliberal restructuring on their own. The local's decline and organizing failures in the 1970s and 1980s proved this. Nevertheless, the combination of Local 399's limited resources and the collective strength and power of Los Angeles' janitors was formidable.⁵³ United behind a rank-and-file-focused adaptation of the Justice for Janitors organizing strategy, the Local 399 JfJ group was proving capable of challenging the effects of neoliberal restructuring and union decline, at least on a small scale.

⁵³ "Los Angeles: Justice for Janitors moves to a new location," *Building Service Division Update* 3, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 1989), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

In the midst of this success, however, growing internal conflict in Local 399 threatened to derail the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign. In early 1989, a group of Local 399 staff members started looking into the possibility of developing a staff union. Although the Local 399 JfJ group largely operated independently of the rest of the staff, some of the JfJ organizers heard about the staffers' interest in organizing and offered their help. When Local 399's vice president and secretary-treasurer (who were already suspicious of and hostile to the JfJ group as outsiders) heard about this, they told Local 399 President Jim Zellers that the JfJ organizers were causing trouble and needed to be stopped. At their insistence, Zellers cut off support for the JfJ group. On January 17, 1989, Zellers requested a withdrawal of Local 399's entire strike fund, a total of over \$185,000, for use in a hotel worker contract campaign. The next day, he wrote a letter to John Sweeney, declaring the local "incapable" of funding the JfJ campaign and meeting the terms of the International's JfJ subsidy to the local.

Zellers efforts to pull the plug on the campaign generated a swift reaction from JfJ leaders in the local and at the International. At Local 399, Cecile Richards fought with Zellers to keep the campaign going. Richards was planning on leaving Local 399 and the JfJ campaign shortly to help her mother Ann Richards run for the governorship in Texas, but she did not want to see the campaign end. At the same time, International campaign leaders Andy Stern and Stephen Lerner met with Zellers in an effort to keep the campaign going. Ultimately, they worked out a solution. As Jono Shaffer recalls, Stern and Lerner called the Local 399 JfJ organizers together and informed that they had bad news and good news. The bad news was that

the Los Angeles JfJ staff members were all being fired from Local 399. The good news was that the International was hiring them so that they could continue with the campaign.⁵⁴

In many ways, this incident confirmed that Stern and Lerner's reticence to continue building JfJ campaigns from within existing union locals was justified. The internal "blowup" in Local 399 was the very sort of campaign-crushing conflict that International JfJ leaders had been trying to avoid by founding the D.C. and Atlanta campaigns in new locals. Nevertheless, Stern and Lerner recognized the growing promise of the Los Angeles campaign. And in early 1989, they proved willing to provide the resources necessary to keep the campaign going when Local 399 would not.

The Los Angeles JfJ group quickly proved that Stern and Lerner's investment of International resources was worthwhile. In the spring of 1989, the group reached an important milestone in their organizing effort. When the JfJ group first started organizing in 1987, Local 399 represented about fifteen to twenty percent of the janitors who cleaned in downtown Los Angeles. By flipping buildings and exerting pressure on Century Cleaning, the JfJ organizers and janitors managed to more than double the number of janitors under union contract in less than two years. The trend continued. By the spring of 1989, Local 399 represented fifty-five percent of the janitors who cleaned downtown Los Angeles. While an important achievement in and of itself, this organizing success provided the janitors with an important opportunity. For the first time in more than a decade, the janitors were now in position to negotiate a master agreement for Los Angeles. The janitors readily took advantage of this opportunity and won a master agreement that was a success on several levels.

⁵⁴ Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016; Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 5, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

On the most basic level, the agreement was successful because it met many of the “A.R.R.I.B.A.” goals that the janitors had articulated at their founding convention. The new master agreement set a starting wage of \$5 per hour (seventy-five cents above the current minimum wage) for the union janitors downtown. Under the terms of the agreement, this starting wage would increase to \$5.50 per hour by the end of the three-year contract. The contract also guaranteed the janitors a contribution of ten cents per hour to a pension plan, at least eight holidays per year, and a sick leave policy that allowed janitors to cash out unused sick leave days at fifty percent of their normal daily rate. Finally, the contract provided the janitors with a health insurance plan starting in 1991.

Beyond these tangible wage and benefit improvements, though, the contract was also a success because janitors actually participated in the process of negotiation. Michael Baratz, the SEIU’s Director of Negotiations, came to Local 399 to help oversee the master agreement negotiation process. But rather than negotiating the contract by himself, he acted as a spokesperson for a Justice for Janitors negotiating committee. This committee included Jono Shaffer, Erick Porras, and a diverse group of rank-and-file janitors. Female and male janitors; immigrant and native-born janitors; and Latinx, black, and white janitors were all represented on the committee.⁵⁵ Their participation in the negotiation process put a decisive end to the pattern of closed-door negotiations between only contractors and top union leaders in Local 399. Furthermore, their joint participation reflected the early success of the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign as a diverse but unified struggle *of* janitors in partnership with union leaders rather than a struggle of union leaders *on behalf of* janitors. In participating in the negotiating

⁵⁵ Although the Los Angeles janitorial workforce became predominantly Latinx in the 1980s, a small percentage of the workforce remained black. Additionally the workforce contained some non-Latinx white immigrants such as Radmila Radich, who became a janitor in Los Angeles after emigrating from Yugoslavia. “Radmila Radich is Heroine,” *Voice of Local 399* 12, no 7. (July 1988), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

process, rank-and-file janitors enjoyed an unprecedented opportunity to (1) exercise power over their wages and working conditions and (2) contribute to a powerful, worker-centered, participatory form of unionism within the Los Angeles janitorial industry.

This master agreement was a success on a third level because it provided a foundation for a strategic expansion of the Justice for Janitors organizing drive in Southern California.

Although the wage and benefit provisions of the agreement technically only covered union janitors downtown, the master agreement also included a “trigger agreement” that applied to all of Los Angeles County. As part of this agreement, the union contractors and janitors divided L.A. County into fourteen geographic zones based on office building market clusters. The union contractors guaranteed JfJ organizers access to janitor employees in each of these geographic zones. In return, the JfJ organizers guaranteed the union contractors that they would not start wage and benefit negotiations for the janitors in any particular zone until a majority of the janitors in that zone had won union recognition. (Majority union representation in a zone, in other words, would “trigger” contract negotiations).⁵⁶

This trigger agreement was clearly designed to address the difficulties of organizing and bargaining amidst the growing antiunion hostility and pressure in the janitorial industry during this period. As discussed above, union organizing and bargaining in a predominantly nonunion industry often proved counterproductive. Even if a group of janitors could organize and bargain a strong union contract, building owners could easily switch to a nonunion contractor to avoid paying union wage and benefit rates. In other words, in an effort to gain better economic

⁵⁶ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, September 15, 2011 and October 28, 2011; “Downtown Janitors Win Big Contract Settlement,” *Voice of Local 399* 13, no. 3 (March 1989), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; “Local 399 sets L.A. standard agreement,” *Building Service Division Update* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1989), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

security by organizing for a strong union contract, janitors often lost their jobs and found themselves in an even more vulnerable economic position than before. However, in Los Angeles, the trigger agreement offered a solution to the janitors' seemingly futile situation. Under this agreement, janitors agreed to hold off on bargaining for wage and benefit improvements until union contractors were not at risk of being driven out of a particular office building market. While a temporary sacrifice for newly organized janitors, the trigger agreement created a structured plan for future contract negotiations (based on successful organizing) and sustainable wage and benefit improvements. In other words, the trigger agreement provided janitors with a potential pathway out of their precarious economic situation and a tool to potentially challenge neoliberal restructuring in their industry on a broad scale.

A short while after negotiating this strategic master agreement, the Los Angeles JfJ group achieved another major accomplishment. With the help of International SEIU staff, they convinced Century Cleaning to operate as a union contractor. Although Century Cleaning had fiercely resisted the Justice for Janitors campaign for more than a year, in the end the contractor proved unable to withstand the JfJ group's dual public and legal pressure strategy. The JfJ group's public demonstrations targeted at building owners who contracted with Century caused the contractor to lose business in early 1989. Then, in the spring of 1989, the JfJ group's legal efforts eventually led a judge to rule that Century Cleaning was under the same ownership as Western Cleaning and thus was subject to the same union agreements as Western. Facing a further loss of business and up to \$12 million in back pay and benefits for illegal double-breasting, Century Cleaning decided to settle with Local 399.⁵⁷ Thus, in the wake of

⁵⁷ "L.A. firm facing penalty in millions," *Building Service Division Update* 3, no. 2 (Summer 1989), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, Donde

successfully negotiating a downtown master agreement, the Los Angeles JfJ group won their second major success. They successfully flipped an entire cleaning contractor from nonunion to union.

These successes provided the Los Angeles organizers and janitors with a boost of confidence and momentum at an important time of transition for the campaign. Effective May 1, 1989 Cecile Richards resigned from Local 399 to work on her mother's gubernatorial campaign in Texas. Local 399 did not hire a new organizing director to replace Richards. Furthermore, International JfJ leaders did not approve the use of additional International resources to hire a new organizing director for the Los Angeles campaign. To fill the hole that Richards left, Lerner designated Bill Ragen, one of the current JfJ organizers, as the new organizing director of the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign. (Although Ragen was a more recent addition to the JfJ group than organizers like Jono Shaffer and Rocio Saenz, Lerner chose Ragen because he had several more years of experience in the labor movement than the other L.A. organizers.)⁵⁸

Despite Ragen's new title, however, the Justice for Janitors group moved forward as a collective.⁵⁹ In a way, then, Richards's departure provided an opportunity for the Los Angeles campaign to continue evolving in a direction opposite to that of the Justice for Janitors campaigns in Atlanta and D.C. While the Atlanta and D.C. campaigns lost the little rank-and-file support they initially had and became increasingly hierarchical over time, the Los Angeles campaign moved forward in late 1989 as a much more democratic partnership between a group of JfJ organizers and a growing group of rank-and-file janitors.

Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, September 15, 2011.

⁵⁸ "399 Staff Changes," *Voice of Local 399* 13, no. 5 (May 1989), Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 7, Folder 4, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016.

⁵⁹ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, October 28, 2011.

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Ultimately, the success of the San Diego and Los Angeles JfJ campaigns between 1987 and 1989 stand in sharp contrast to the struggles and setbacks of the Washington D.C. and Atlanta campaigns during this period. Although the Los Angeles campaign took longer to develop and make significant headway in organizing nonunion janitors than the San Diego campaign, both of these campaigns achieved what the Atlanta and D.C. campaigns were not able to do in the same amount of time. Both the San Diego and Los Angeles campaigns proved capable of achieving the immediate, tangible markers of Justice for Janitors success: they regained majority representation in downtown areas, countering both long-running patterns of union decline and the recent escalation of this decline amidst neoliberal restructuring. They also won small but nonetheless significant tangible wage and benefit improvements for janitors. Beyond this, though, both of these campaigns challenged underlying, deeper systems and patterns of oppression and inequality.

With its close proximity to the border, the San Diego JfJ campaign targeted and exposed a larger pattern of exploitation of undocumented workers. JfJ organizers and janitors in San Diego showed that State agents such as the Border Patrol were complicit in and at times even directly facilitated antiunion employers' efforts to maintain undocumented migrants as a cheap, complacent workforce. In this way, they expanded and evolved their specific organizing struggle as a struggle against the systemic denigration and abuse of undocumented workers in the United States.

While also cognizant of broad patterns of abuse of undocumented workers, the Los Angeles JfJ campaign started targeting and exposing the growing socioeconomic polarization and bifurcation of the late twentieth century global city. The Los Angeles JfJ group highlighted

the contrast between the celebrated, glamorized visions of Los Angeles as a center of culture and business and the often-hidden reality of Los Angeles as the home and workplace of low-wage workers who struggled to make a subsistence living. The JfJ organizers and janitors made an effort to rupture the illusion of Los Angeles' idealism. And they demanded that everyone who contributed to Los Angeles' prosperity—even the undocumented janitors who cleaned office buildings at night—deserved decent wages, health insurance, and dignity and respect at the workplace.

The actions and achievements of the San Diego and Los Angeles JfJ groups clearly highlight the complexity of Justice for Janitors as a campaign with a rather amorphous set of goals. While struggling for and meeting tangible markers of success (master contracts) in a struggle to combat union decline, these campaigns also struggled against much larger patterns and systems of abuse and inequality. I argue that this highlights how the Justice for Janitors campaign developed to challenge neoliberal restructuring. While predating neoliberal restructuring, union decline escalated and was deeply intertwined with the growth of precarious workers—particularly amongst the undocumented, people of color, and women—that occurred during neoliberal restructuring. Furthermore, it was deeply intertwined with a general polarization of society between the wealthy elite, who were attempting to reassert power in a broad range of industries and political settings, and the masses. In challenging union decline, JfJ organizers and janitors found themselves facing this larger socioeconomic reality. And in Los Angeles and San Diego, JfJ organizers and janitors did not shy away from struggling against the injustice of this reality as part of their struggle to organize janitors.

Furthermore, the actions and achievements of the San Diego and Los Angeles campaigns show the complexity of Justice for Janitors as an experimental and adaptive organizing strategy.

While emerging out of Rebuilding Campaign efforts, these campaigns originally developed under the expectation that they would receive extensive personnel and financial support from the International. In the face of International leaders' shifting priorities, though, both of these campaigns proved capable of adapting to limited resources and developing as strong, rank-and-file campaigns embedded in a local community.

As suggested above, this adaptation of the campaign proved quite successful and led International leaders to start rethinking the adaptation of the campaign that they pursued in Atlanta and D.C. Although the internal struggles within Los Angeles Local 399 showed that building a new organizing campaign out of an existing local union was not easy, the promising early success of the campaign suggested that dealing with this internal struggle was worth the effort. As I will suggest in the following chapter, the International's support for the Los Angeles campaign in the midst of this internal struggle in 1989 would prove to be the starting point of another evolution of the Justice for Janitors campaign: it marked the starting point of the evolution of Justice for Janitors as a powerful combination of International and local union resources and an engaged, activist community.

Chapter 5

The Tipping Point to National Campaign Success:

Justice for Janitors Evolves and Wins as a Partnership of Local Strength and International Assistance in Los Angeles (1989-1990)

In this chapter, I narrow my focus to explore a key period in the evolution of the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign. I trace the trajectory of the campaign in the immediate wake of the Los Angeles JfJ group's successful negotiation of a master agreement covering a slight majority of the janitors in downtown Los Angeles in 1989. More specifically, I explore the Los Angeles JfJ group's efforts to continue building the campaign by organizing the janitors who worked for a major transnational cleaning contractor called International Service Systems (ISS), first in downtown Los Angeles and then in nearby Century City. I demonstrate that Local 399 JfJ organizers and janitors developed this ISS organizing drive using much of the same strategy and tactics that they had used to get to the master agreement. In this phase of their campaign, however, Local 399's JfJ organizers and janitors enjoyed much greater levels of support from the International, as top JfJ-leaders started shifting their attention away from the struggling Atlanta and D.C. campaigns.

By providing support for the Los Angeles JfJ campaign, the JfJ leaders brought International union resources and a global strategy together with the powerful resources that the Los Angeles campaign had been developing: an organized, increasingly militant group of rank-and-file janitors and a grassroots network of community allies. The result of this combination of International and local JfJ forces was outstanding. In what campaign leaders would later describe as the crucial "tipping point" of Justice for Janitors, Los Angeles janitors called

attention to the often invisible injustice they experienced at work and proved the legitimacy of their struggle in the midst of a highly visible instance of police brutality. Seemingly overnight, these janitors created a surge of national attention and excitement for the Justice for Janitors campaign. And in doing so, these janitors created a burst of momentum for the national Justice for Janitors campaign at a crucial moment.

In exploring this development and success of the Los Angeles JfJ campaign, I once again highlight the importance of a local base of union and community support, particularly Latinx immigrant community support, to the success of Justice for Janitors. I argue that such a base of support was foundational to the Los Angeles ISS organizing drive. With the support of the union and local Latinx immigrant community, an extremely vulnerable group of janitors were empowered to take on and ultimately win a David-and-Goliath-like fight against an extremely powerful cleaning contractor.

At the same time, I do not aim to ignore the unintended negative consequences of the success of the campaign in Los Angeles and the concurrent abandonment of the Atlanta Justice for Janitors campaign. After emphasizing the much-celebrated success of the Los Angeles campaign in 1990, I briefly detail the controversial conclusion of the Atlanta campaign, which ended with allegations that the SEIU leaders discriminated against their black employees and exploited poor black workers for the financial gain of the union. By analyzing developments in Atlanta, I suggest that the success of the Los Angeles campaign in combination with the failures and controversies of the Atlanta organizing effort solidified the public association of the Justice for Janitors campaign with Latinx immigrants. As I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, this association would continually prove generative for both the JfJ campaign and the emerging immigrant rights movement in and beyond the United States. However, public perception of the

growing link between the campaign and Latinx immigrant workers and lingering concerns with the SEIU's support for black workers had the effect of dampening some of the more ambitious goals for a fundamentally multiracial, multicultural union that JfJ organizers had initially envisioned.

As noted previously, International JfJ organizers originally hoped to forge a campaign that would unify black and brown service workers across lines of race, culture, and citizenship status. The success of the campaign in Los Angeles and termination of the campaign in Atlanta, however, shifted International JfJ organizers' focus back to Latinx janitors. At the same time, the conflict with former Local 679 employees over the termination of the Atlanta campaign raised important concerns about the commitment of the SEIU to helping address the socioeconomic and racial injustice that poor black workers faced. Many black union leaders and members started to see JfJ as a campaign that helped Latinx immigrant workers while ignoring the plight of black workers at the same time that the relative economic position of black workers continued to decline.

Ultimately, the results of the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign's struggle against ISS were bittersweet. The success of this organizing drive provided a critical boost of hope and momentum to the national campaign. Without the Los Angeles campaign, the national campaign might not have endured through the local struggles and failures of Atlanta and D.C. Emerging as a definitive success in contrast to the Atlanta and D.C. campaigns, the Los Angeles JfJ campaign fundamentally shaped the future development and expansion of the Justice for Janitors campaign nationwide. The campaign became a huge inspiration to janitors throughout the U.S. and spurred a wave of local-focused JfJ campaign rebuilding and growth, which will be discussed in the following chapter. At the same time, though, the Los Angeles campaign unintentionally helped

to brand Justice for Janitors as a culturally specific struggle and thus foreclosed at least some of the possibility of developing a more complex and diverse multiracial labor struggle.

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As noted in the previous chapter, the Los Angeles JfJ group was at a key transition point in 1989. During this year, the Los Angeles JfJ group underwent some internal restructuring. Helping avoid internal conflict and the potential termination of the campaign, International JfJ leaders removed the Los Angeles JfJ organizers' financial ties to Local 399 and placed them on the International union payroll. Shortly thereafter, Cecile Richards, the Los Angeles JfJ group's organizing director, left Los Angeles to work on her mother's political campaign in Texas, and Bill Ragen became the new official leader of the group. In the midst of these internal changes, the Los Angeles JfJ organizers and janitors won two monumental victories: they negotiated a master agreement and successfully convinced one of the city's three major nonunion cleaning contractors, Century Cleaning, to become a union contractor. While these successes suggested the strength of the JfJ group amidst these changes, these successes were largely the product of the group's previous two years of work. The strength and sustainability of the Los Angeles JfJ campaign in the wake of recent leadership shifts, then, was yet to be proven. This proof would eventually come from campaign's next major organizing struggle.

After flipping Century Cleaning from nonunion to union, the JfJ group had two remaining major nonunion contractors to choose from as they looked to expand their organizing drive: Bradford and International Service Systems (ISS). Bradford appeared as a strong organizing target because this cleaning company, much like Century Cleaning, was the product of double-breasting. Bradford was the nonunion subsidiary of a union cleaning company called American Building Maintenance (ABM). Like Century Cleaning did for Western Cleaning,

Bradford provided ABM with the ability to subvert its existing union agreements and hire janitors for wages and benefits below union standards. In targeting Bradford/ABM, then, the Los Angeles JfJ group could use a legal and public pressure strategy much like they did in targeting Century Cleaning. Unlike the relationship between Century and Western, however, the relationship between Bradford and ABM was less obvious. The JfJ group, then, would likely have a much harder time proving Bradford to be an illegal nonunion subsidiary of ABM. Furthermore, targeting Bradford/ABM came with the risk of causing conflict within the larger SEIU building service division.

At the start of the JfJ campaign, ABM was the largest union janitorial company in the United States. The company employed over 28,000 janitors in cities across the U.S. and had union contracts with all of SEIU's remaining "dinosaur" building service locals in the mid to late 1980s.¹ Theoretically, this situation meant that the Los Angeles JfJ group could enlist the support of these other SEIU locals in putting pressure on Bradford/ABM to operate as a union contractor in Los Angeles. At the same time, however, this situation meant that the Los Angeles JfJ group risked angering ABM and endangering other SEIU locals' union contracts by targeting Bradford/ABM. The old guard leaders of the dinosaur locals were hostile to the Justice for Janitors campaign to begin with, and an organizing campaign against ABM had the potential to make them even more hostile. Rather than risking the ire of the old guard at this point in the campaign, the Los Angeles JfJ group, in close coordination with International JfJ leaders like Lerner, decided to focus on ISS.²

¹ "Contract Cleaners: The myth of the low profit margin," *Building Service Division Update* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1987), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University

² Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, October 28, 2011; Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Although not a double-breasted corporate entity like Bradford, ISS had a complex relationship to Local 399. In the early 1980s, ISS had operated as a union contractor in Los Angeles and was a signatory to Local 399's master agreement at the time. In 1984, ISS left Los Angeles because of the company's inability to generate a profit as a union cleaning contractor. In 1988, however, ISS acquired Doral, a Los Angeles nonunion cleaning contractor. ISS used this acquisition as a means to return to the Los Angeles janitorial industry as a nonunion contractor.³ ISS's recent history, then, fit with a general pattern of deunionization and union-avoidance amidst the restructuring of the janitorial industry in the late twentieth century. As a union contractor, ISS was forced out of the Los Angeles janitorial market in the early 1980s. The company was unable to compete with the cheap wages and forced speedups of newly emerging nonunion contractors. And after being forced out, ISS seemed to chose a course of action based on the old adage: "If you can't beat them, join them." Using the acquisition of a nonunion contractor as a union avoidance technique much like double-breasting, ISS returned to Los Angeles ready to engage in the constant underbidding and downward spiral of wages and working conditions that characterized nonunion janitorial work

After returning to Los Angeles, ISS caught the attention of the JfJ group in early 1989. As part of their Century Cleaning organizing drive at the time, the JfJ group had successfully convinced the building managers at the International Towers in downtown L.A. to terminate their contract with Century and hire a new cleaning contractor. The International Towers managers hired ISS to replace Century Cleaning. At this point, the JfJ organizers approached ISS about following through on their original contract agreement with Local 399 from the early 1980s and agreeing to union representation for the International Towers janitors. ISS refused the

³ Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

JfJ organizers' initial effort at outreach. Instead, ISS executives asserted their intentions to operate as a nonunion contractor in Los Angeles.⁴

The Los Angeles JfJ group used ISS's affront to the JfJ campaign at the International Towers as an opportunity to launch a campaign against the cleaning contractor. On May 2, a group of JfJ organizers and janitors organized a large demonstration targeting ISS at the International Towers. They organized this demonstration in coordination with the Communication Workers of America (CWA) triennial convention, which was being held in Los Angeles. Several Justice for Janitors leaders, including Stephen Lerner and Eliseo Medina, had worked for the CWA prior to SEIU in the early 1980s. On the basis of this natural connection between the CWA and Justice for Janitors, the CWA had already participated in several joint actions with the JfJ campaign. In April of 1988, for example, the CWA participated in the Atlanta Justice for Janitors pilgrimage from Memphis to Atlanta (discussed in Chapter 3).⁵ Building from their existing ties to the JfJ campaign, delegates to the CWA convention showed their support for the Los Angeles janitors, joining them in picketing and handing out leaflets targeting ISS in front of the International Towers.⁶

This first demonstration generated a swift backlash from ISS. ISS filed a lawsuit against Local 399, requesting an injunction from any Justice for Janitors organizing efforts. In seeking this injunction, ISS cited an agreement that Local 399 had made with the cleaning company Doral, which was now part of ISS. As part of a private settlement with Doral in 1986, Local 399

⁴ “Justice for Janitors’ Campaign Turns Up the Heat,” *Voice of Local 399* 13, no. 5 (May 1989), Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 7, Folder 4, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

⁵ “Justice for Janitors campaign at Denver Tech Center continues,” *Local 105 Service Employees News* (September 1988), SEIU Publications, Box 45, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Jobs with Justice files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 117, Folder 55, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

⁶ “Justice for Janitors’ Campaign Turns Up the Heat,” *Voice of Local 399* 13, no. 5 (May 1989), Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 7, Folder 4, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

had agreed not to organize Doral janitors for a period of five years. ISS believed that this Doral agreement should apply to ISS as a whole. And ISS leaders started a legal battle to enforce it. In response to this lawsuit against Local 399, the Los Angeles JfJ group filed a countersuit against ISS, demanding that the cleaning contractor honor its original union contract agreement with Local 399.

As correspondence between SEIU building service organizing director Stephen Lerner and SEIU President John Sweeney reveals, Lerner was closely monitoring and invested in the quickly escalating organizing drive against ISS in Los Angeles. In memos addressed to President Sweeney in June of 1989, Lerner insisted that the Los Angeles JfJ campaign had strong local support and was showing great signs of success. He also noted, however, that the organizing drive against ISS was shaping up to be a critical struggle for the Los Angeles campaign. Although ISS only employed about one hundred and thirty janitors who cleaned buildings in downtown L.A., the cleaning company employed more than a thousand janitors who cleaned buildings in other areas of Los Angeles County. Organizing ISS, then, was crucial to the Los Angeles JfJ group's plans to expand the campaign beyond downtown. In addition, ISS had contracts throughout the country and was fighting the Justice for Janitors campaign in Atlanta and D.C. Ultimately, then, the struggle against ISS in Los Angeles emerged as an opportunity (1) to capitalize on recent organizing success in Southern California and (2) to shift the tide of the national Justice for Janitors campaign. Lerner wanted to ensure that the ISS struggle in Los Angeles became a breakthrough Justice for Janitors success rather than becoming a protracted, costly struggle like the battle against Portman in Atlanta.⁷

⁷ Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Recognizing the importance of the struggle against ISS, Lerner and Sweeney helped the Los Angeles JfJ group launch a pressure campaign against ISS. One level of this pressure campaign focused on ISS's CEO, Poul Andreassen. ISS was a transnational cleaning company with a hundred thousand employees in fourteen countries throughout Europe and North and South America. The company was based in Denmark, where Andreassen had a strong reputation as a progressive business leader. Based on his reputation, Andreassen was appointed to a national commission that advised the Danish government on industrial policy. One of the other members of the industrial commission was Hans Jensen. Jensen was the vice president of the Danish labor union Landsorganisationen (LO), which like the SEIU, was a member of the aforementioned international labor federation FIET and its newly formed service industries division. SEIU President Sweeney's existing relationship with the LO through the FIET created an opportunity for the SEIU to invite Hans Jensen and another LO leader Kjeld Akjaer to visit Los Angeles and learn about the Justice for Janitors struggle against ISS.⁸

Jensen and Akjaer traveled to Los Angeles in July of 1989. They first met with the Los Angeles JfJ group and then went to visit one of the ISS janitors who cleaned the International Towers. Jensen and Akjaer learned first-hand from this janitor about the economic hardship that ISS's low wages created for janitors in the U.S. The janitor told them that with the wages she earned from ISS, she could only afford the rent for a two-room apartment by splitting it with five other Salvadoran immigrant workers. After visiting this janitor's apartment, Jensen and Akjaer then visited her workplace. When they got to International Towers, Jensen and Akjaer told JfJ organizer Jono Shaffer, who was accompanying them, that they wanted to meet with the building owner. Shaffer tried to warn them that they would be thrown out of the building if they tried to

⁸ Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folders 5 and 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

do so. Jensen and Akjaer, however, did not take Shaffer's warning seriously and insisted on meeting with the building owner. Shaffer took them into the building and up to the building manager's office. When Jensen and Akjaer introduced themselves, the building manager immediately yelled at them and threatened to have them and the JfJ organizers and janitors accompanying them arrested if they did not leave. This incident shocked Jensen and Akjaer and nearly caused their translator to faint. Coming from Denmark, they could not believe it possible that union leaders would be treated with such hostility. The upshot of this shocking experience was that it inspired Jensen and Akjaer to commit to helping the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign. After witnessing the results of the janitors' meager wages and even experiencing some of the intense hostility that these janitors endured, they assured the JfJ organizers and ISS janitors that they would use their power and influence in Denmark to put pressure on ISS CEO Poul Andreassen and support Justice for Janitors.⁹

The ensuing pressure campaign against Andreassen was only one part of the JfJ campaign against ISS. In addition to applying international labor pressure against Andreassen in Denmark, the Los Angeles JfJ group simultaneously sought to build local grassroots support against ISS in Los Angeles. Consequently, throughout the summer and fall of 1989, the JfJ group organized a series of marches, rallies, and pickets to build pressure against ISS.

The Los Angeles organizers and janitors benefited from the support of the International in some of these demonstrations. In August of 1989, for example, President Sweeney participated in a Justice for Janitors press conference and demonstration in Los Angeles and enlisted AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland to participate as well. The Los Angeles JfJ group

⁹ Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folders 5 and 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, October 28, 2011.

organized this press conference and protest as part of a major public relations effort to build widespread support for Justice for Janitors in the Los Angeles community. The group used the press conference to release a new study on the Los Angeles building service industry. This study highlighted a quote from Mayor Tom Bradley's recent inaugural address: "Los Angeles cannot permanently exist as two cities—one amazingly prosperous, the other increasingly poorer in substance and in hope." The study explored the disparity between janitors on the one hand and wealthy real estate owners and office building tenants on the other as emblematic of the divide between these two cities within Los Angeles. Furthermore, the study presented the fight for Justice for Janitors as a key element of a much-needed broader struggle for a united, equitable Los Angeles. In other words, the study suggested that in fighting for Justice for Janitors, the people of Los Angeles would be fighting for greater justice for themselves.

In a march following the press conference, the Los Angeles janitors displayed signs that declared "L.A. Should Work for Everyone." This declaration, which came from the title of the new study, became an important unifying slogan and rallying cry for the campaign. Ultimately, then, the Los Angeles JfJ group benefited from increased attention and support from the SEIU in their struggle against ISS. Rather than relying exclusively on this International support, however, the Los Angeles organizers and janitors helped channel this support into their effort to build a formidable rank-and-file janitor and community struggle against the cleaning contractor.¹⁰

¹⁰ "Justice for Janitors' Families," *California AFL-CIO News* 32, no. 31 (August 4, 1989): 1,4; Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, November 1, 2011; "From the Basement to the Boardroom: Los Angeles Should Work for Everyone," Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 7, Folder 16, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

Even with the benefit of International support, the task of pushing the ISS organizing drive forward proved to be daunting. Throughout the summer and fall of 1989, ISS made a concerted effort to crush local support and momentum for the Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles. The company hired an antiunion consultant and embarked on a carefully crafted union-busting drive. While carefully avoiding anything illegal, the antiunion consultant met with ISS janitors and attempted to dissuade them from trying to organize. When janitors refused to be dissuaded, ISS resorted to more severe intimidation tactics. One of these tactics was to check the janitors' immigration status. A vast majority of ISS janitors were undocumented, so ISS was able to fire janitors and claim their immigration status as the reason. Even if the JfJ organizers could prove that ISS had actually fired the janitors because of their union activism, they could not legally get the janitors reinstated because they were undocumented.¹¹ This union-busting drive, however, proved insufficient to break the strong foundation of rank-and-file support that the JfJ organizers had built over the last two years of the campaign. Much like the Gas Company's intense anti-JfJ campaign hostility in 1987, ISS's union-busting drive ended up serving as added motivation for the Los Angeles JfJ organizers and janitors rather than causing them to lose faith.

In late 1989, the Los Angeles JfJ group decided to expand the fight against ISS. Up to this point, all of the Justice for Janitors organizing efforts and demonstrations were focused on downtown Los Angeles. The fight against ISS, however, provided an opportunity to develop the campaign beyond downtown. As mentioned above, ISS janitors cleaned buildings throughout Los Angeles County. A huge concentration of ISS janitors worked in Century City—a business district to the west of downtown Los Angeles. As the Los Angeles JfJ group enlisted community

¹¹ Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

support and generated publicity in their fight against ISS, many of the ISS janitors who worked in Century City reached out to the JfJ group. These janitors requested help from JfJ organizers and downtown janitors in organizing against ISS as well.

Expanding into Century City certainly came with risks and not all of the JfJ organizers were initially supportive. Jono Shaffer, for example, argued to his fellow JfJ organizers that they should not shift focus away from downtown when downtown was still only half organized. After some debate, though, the campaign leaders collectively decided to dedicate some of their time and effort into putting additional pressure on ISS in Century City. A majority of the JfJ organizers continued focusing on organizing workers and demonstrations downtown, but two organizers, Rocio Saenz and Berta Northey, started organizing in Century City.

Saenz and Northey's initial efforts in Century City quickly proved worthwhile. They found that the ISS janitors were extremely committed to organizing and willing to take risks to do so. With help from an emerging group of rank-and-file leaders in Century City, Saenz and Northey introduced a new tactic into the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors repertoire: the one-day strike.¹²

Working with a militant rank-and-file leader named Pablo Valiente, the JfJ organizers came up with a plan to have all of the ISS janitors in one of the Century City buildings stop working during their lunch break (which was at 10 o'clock pm) and inform their supervisor that they were striking over unfair labor practices. Although walking off of their jobs was an unfamiliar and even frightening experience, the janitors followed the plan. They left their building and went to Local 399 headquarters. Five hours later, at 3 o'clock am, the JfJ organizers sent a fax to ISS, informing the company that the janitors would return to work the

¹² As Jono Shaffer notes in his oral history, the Los Angeles organizers got the idea of doing a one-day strike from another JfJ organizer, Jon Barton, who was leading the development of a JfJ campaign in the Bay Area.

next night.¹³ After going home for a few hours rest, the janitors returned to their building and joined the JfJ organizers and other janitors in picketing their building. They passed out flyers to tenants, informing them that they were on strike because of ISS's unfair labor practices. At the end of the day, though, they stopped the strike as promised and entered the building to start their normal shift.

The one-day strike proved to be an effective tactic because it allowed the janitors to clearly express their dissatisfaction with ISS and put pressure on ISS to operate as a union contractor. Furthermore, the one-day strike allowed janitors to do this while only giving up about four hours' pay. In other words, the opportunity cost of participating in a one-day strike was very low. After seeing the first group of ISS janitors successfully return to work after a one-night strike, other ISS janitors throughout Century City and downtown decided to do the same. Between December of 1989 and March of 1990, the JfJ group organized one-night strikes at nearly every single ISS building in Century City and downtown.¹⁴

Additionally, the JfJ group organized several sizable daytime protests that brought hundreds of janitors and JfJ supporters together. In December 1989, for example, the JfJ organizers and janitors organized a two-part demonstration that took place in Century City and downtown Los Angeles and featured Jono Shaffer dressed as Santa Claus, handing out gloves to janitors. In April 1990, the JfJ group organized an Easter-themed protest in which Reverend Philip Lance led a Good Friday mass to call attention to the religious injustice of janitor exploitation. These actions provided an opportunity for janitors' families, friends, and other

¹³ U.S. labor law barred employers from permanently replacing workers who engaged in unfair labor practice (ULP) strikes. The JfJ organizers, however, did not want to take chances in giving ISS time to find even temporary replacements for the janitors, so they quickly informed ISS that the janitors would return to work the next day.

¹⁴ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, October 28, 2011 and November 1, 2011.

social movement activists to participate in the campaign.¹⁵ These actions, then, were attempts to solidify the struggle against ISS as a community struggle.

Rank-and-file energy and enthusiasm grew amidst these large demonstrations and the series of one-night strikes. By spring of 1990, many of the ISS janitors started telling the JfJ organizers that they wanted to escalate their actions against ISS. Rather than continuing to organize one-night strikes at individual buildings, they wanted to collectively walk off their jobs in a full-blown economic strike. Unlike the one-day unfair labor practice (ULP) strikes, an economic strike entailed much greater risk for the janitors. By walking off their jobs in an economic strike, the janitors risked being permanently replaced. This was a risk that the ISS janitors could not take lightly.

Although ISS janitors like other nonunion janitors were poorly paid, they depended on their jobs to be able to support themselves and their families. Ana Flores, for example, was a janitor and single mother who depended on her job with ISS to support her five children. Flores feared losing her job and thus her ability to support her children. Nevertheless, she proved willing to risk the little economic security that she did have—her current job with ISS—in order to fight with her fellow janitors for union recognition. In the spring of 1990, Flores joined ISS janitors in authorizing a strike with a resounding vote of 113-0.¹⁶

As the Los Angeles janitors and JfJ organizers prepared for a strike, International JfJ leaders committed to helping them. By this point, International JfJ leaders' top-down efforts to

¹⁵ "Local 399's Justice for Janitors Campaign to Organize ISS Continues in Century City" *Voice of Local 399* 14, no. 4 (April 1990), Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 7, Folder 4, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

¹⁶ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, October 28, 2011 and November 1, 2011; Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Bob Baker, "Most Century City Janitors Decide to Walk Off Job," *Los Angeles Times* May 31, 1990.

force ISS to settle in Los Angeles had stalled. Their efforts to leverage pressure from the Danish labor movement against ISS CEO Andreassen initially seemed successful. Andreassen agreed to meet with President Sweeney, International JfJ leaders, and Henrik Slipslager who was the president of the U.S. division of ISS in February of 1990. At the meeting, Andreassen and Slipslager expressed a desire to work with SEIU and other union contractors in reaching a mutually beneficial settlement. After the meeting, though, Andreassen and Slipslager did not follow through on any of their proposed plans to actually reach such a settlement. With their confidence in ISS leaders dwindling, International JfJ leaders focused instead on contributing to the Los Angeles janitors' local efforts. They developed a plan to support the Los Angeles janitors in using a strike to pressure ISS into settling.¹⁷

In April and May of 1990, both the Los Angeles JfJ group and the International JfJ group dedicated their time and energy to building support for the upcoming strike. The Los Angeles JfJ organizers reached out to their local labor and social justice allies, particularly in the immigrant rights movement. Additionally, they reached out to key labor and political leaders in Los Angeles, including City Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky, Mayor Tom Bradley, and the head of the L.A. County Federation of Labor Bill Robertson. International JfJ staff worked with President Sweeney to reach out to these local leaders as well, encouraging them to support the Los Angeles janitors in their upcoming strike. International JfJ staff and President Sweeney also helped Local 399 reach out to a wide range of potential national and even transnational supporters. They contacted other SEIU building service local leaders, including New York Local 32B-32J President Gus Bevona, about possibly holding solidarity actions during the strike. They also used contacts with the FIET to explore the possibility of coordinating solidarity

¹⁷ Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 8, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

actions between the Los Angeles ISS janitors and janitors who worked for ISS in other countries.¹⁸ These joint preparations would prove to be extremely valuable. They laid the foundation for the ISS strike to be a formidable demonstration of ground level activism and dedication, reinforced with the support of powerful labor and political leaders.

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On May 29, 1990, a group of about one hundred and twenty ISS janitors in Century City all walked off the job, starting the strike. The next morning, these janitors showed up in Century City to join JfJ organizers and other janitors in making sure that their strike caught the attention of the Los Angeles community. Hinting at the JfJ group's strategy for informing the public about the strike, Jono Shaffer recalled, "It just so happened that that day on May 30 a number of cars seemed to have car trouble on the main arteries leading into Century City on both directions, which caused massive traffic tie-ups for miles and miles."¹⁹ The Los Angeles JfJ organizers and janitors made the most of this "happenstance" traffic tie up. They displayed giant hand-painted strike banners along the side of the road, informing all of the Century City commuters stuck in traffic about the strike.

The Los Angeles JfJ organizers had intended this first day of action to generate publicity and segue into an expansion of the strike. They planned for the ISS janitors in downtown Los Angeles to walk off their jobs the following nights and join the Century City ISS janitors on strike. What they did not plan for or expect, however, was a spontaneous expansion of the strike into other areas of Los Angeles.

¹⁸ Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University

¹⁹ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, November 1, 2011.

At the start of the strike, JfJ organizers and janitors set up a sort of home base for the strike on a grassy hill outside of Century Plaza Towers.²⁰ This became known as the central meeting-point for all of the striking janitors each morning and the launch point for demonstrations. After the first day of the strike, ISS janitors from all over Los Angeles County started showing up to this hill in Century City. These individuals—from areas like Woodland Hills, mid-Wilshire, and Beverly Hills—had heard about the strike either from friends and family members or even just from the media. Even though they had not had any direct contact with JfJ organizers, they decided to join the strike. They walked off their jobs and informed the JfJ organizers at the strike home base in Century City that they were ready to demonstrate.²¹

This rank-and-file support and enthusiasm for the strike gave the JfJ organizers an opportunity to coordinate a series of bold demonstrations in Century City. The first of these demonstrations was a “Trash-In” on June 1. Around midday on June 1, all of the striking ISS janitors joined JfJ organizers (including Stephen Lerner who was visiting from the SEIU headquarters in D.C.) and more than a hundred community supporters for a rally at the strike headquarters. These community supporters primarily included other labor movement and immigrant rights activists. Many of the janitors and their supporters were equipped with drums, noisemakers, and “L.A. Should Work For Everyone” signs. Others carried full black trash bags and bright orange stickers. After the rally, the janitors and their supporters proceeded to create a mass disruption throughout the nearby Century City offices. They marched in and out of office

²⁰ The Century Plaza Towers or “Twin Towers” at 2029 and 2049 Century Park East sat on top of one of the world’s largest underground parking garages. A large portion of the people who worked in Century City parked in this garage, making the Century Plaza Towers a prime spot for a central, highly visible strike headquarters.

²¹ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, November 1, 2011; “399 Justice for Janitors Campaign Strikes Century City” *Voice of Local 399* 14, no. 6 (June 1990), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

lobbies, blocked revolving office doors with trash bags, and left along their path an orange trail of stickers that read, “Who will clean your offices?”

In doing so, the demonstrators made sure that they caught the attention of Century City shoppers and office workers. They also, less intentionally, caught the attention of the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). A group of fifteen LAPD officers showed up at the “Trash-In” and ordered the demonstrators to disperse. The janitors and their supporters, however, outnumbered the officers more than 25 to 1. Knowing they had the upper hand, the demonstrators continued protesting into the afternoon.

With this first major demonstration, the janitors and their allies broke through the traditional division of the “two cities” of Century City. During the day, Century City was typically a pristine, peaceful center for business and recreation. It was a site of wealth and luxury. The janitors and their allies disrupted this side of Century City, exposing the reality of the poverty and hardship of Century City for service workers. As Stephen Lerner remarked, Century City was an “isolated, very elite community.” The Trash-In, however, proved that even in such a city “you can’t wall off poor people and people of color.”²² Challenging both the growth of socioeconomic inequality and its increasing invisibility in this neoliberal global city, the ISS janitors started making their faces visible and their voices heard throughout Los Angeles and beyond.

In the wake of this first event, both ISS and the LAPD worked to ensure that janitors could not cause such a disruption in the future. ISS claimed that the demonstrators at the Trash-In had harassed building tenants and security guards, trespassed on private property, and violated an injunction that the company had previously obtained to limit JfJ activities at the Century Plaza Towers. ISS lawyers prepared to take Local 399 to court on the basis of this alleged injunction

²² Vicki Torres, “Talking Trash: Strike Supporters Sweep Through Century City,” *Los Angeles Times* June 2, 1990.

violation. At the same time, LAPD prepared themselves for future demonstrations. To ensure that the department's police officers would no longer be so outnumbered and unable to contain a demonstration, LAPD set up a mobile command post in Century City.²³

Facing hostility from both ISS and the LAPD, the Los Angeles JfJ group came up with clever strategies to continue causing disruptions and making their presence known without violating any laws. One of these strategies involved taking advantage of the "happy hour" specials at the cafes and bars inside the Century City office buildings. As part of these specials, the cafes and bars offered free food to attract business people to buy drinks. After picketing all morning, the janitors and JfJ organizers showed up to the happy hours. Rather than ordering alcoholic drinks as was expected at the happy hours, they ordered inexpensive sodas and ice teas and then proceeded to eat all of the free food. Without doing anything illegal, they clearly made themselves visible and disrupted the elite business environment of the office buildings.²⁴

While generally avoiding illegal activities, however, the striking janitors and JfJ organizers did not let the threat of police hostility limit their actions. Instead, with help from supportive Local 399 and International SEIU leaders, they confronted this threat directly. On June 7, for example, Local 399 President Jim Zellers called a press conference in which he pointedly criticized the LAPD for setting up a mobile command post in Century City. As hundreds of LAPD officers in full riot gear looked on, he asserted, "This is the most secure area right now in all of Los Angeles. Imagine this kind of commitment to ending the drugs and

²³ Vicki Torres, "Talking Trash: Strike Supporters Sweep Through Century City" *Los Angeles Times* June 2, 1990; "399 Justice for Janitors Campaign Strikes Century City" *Voice of Local 399* 14, no. 6 (June 1990), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

²⁴ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, November 1, 2011.

violence in some of our neighborhoods. The police have their priorities mixed up badly.”²⁵

Following the press conference, Zellers joined twelve janitors and JfJ organizers in an act of civil disobedience. In direct defiance of the LAPD, they blocked entrances to the office buildings and were arrested on the spot. President Sweeney also lent his support in confronting police hostility to the striking janitors. On June 7, he sent a mailgram to Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley, demanding that Bradley use his power to protect the janitors’ legal right to strike and to stop the LAPD’s “campaign of harassment and intimidation” against the janitors.²⁶

In further defiance of police hostility, the Los Angeles JfJ group geared up for a second major demonstration against ISS in Century City on June 15. They planned a rally and march from a park in nearby Beverly Hills into Century City. Like the first event on June 1, the JfJ organizers and janitors wanted this event to be a display of community solidarity for the strike. They wanted this event, however, to be bigger. They set a goal of getting a thousand people to show up to the demonstration.

Up to this point, the JfJ organizers and janitors already had a committed group of community supporters. Dozens of prominent Los Angeles labor, political, and religious leaders had signed a “Pledge for Justice,” committing to fight against anyone who denied basic rights to the janitors. Furthermore, hundreds of students, workers, and immigrant activists had participated in Los Angeles JfJ events in the past. In preparation for the June 15 event, the L.A. JfJ organizers and janitors made a concerted effort to get all of these supporters to turn out at once. They made phone calls, visited meetings, and passed out flyers. Additionally, they relied on the supportive efforts of some of their strongest community allies. In preparation for the June

²⁵ Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

²⁶ “399 Justice for Janitors Campaign Strikes Century City” *Voice of Local 399* 14, no. 6 (June 1990), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

15 rally and march, for example, the Los Angeles One-Stop immigration center²⁷ held a fundraiser for ISS janitors and rallied participants for the demonstration from the local Latinx immigrant community.²⁸

While janitors and their supporters prepared for a local display of community solidarity, International JfJ organizers worked with SEIU leaders to plan a two-part, national solidarity action in support of the L.A. janitors on June 15. The first part of this solidarity action was a national Trash-In. During the Los Angeles Trash-In on June 1, ISS janitors physically deposited bags of trash in Century City office building. Sponsoring a second national Trash-In, JfJ organizers and President Sweeney asked janitors and office workers across the country to mail trash to JMB Realty, the building management company that contracted with ISS in several Century City office buildings. The organizers distributed brown paper bags already printed with JMB Chairman Judd Malkin's address and a message explaining that JMB had \$30 billion in assets but contracted with a cleaning company that paid janitors low wages, provided no benefits, and often violated labor law. These bags provided workers throughout the country with an easy opportunity to act in solidarity with the Los Angeles janitors and put pressure on JMB to stop contracting with ISS until ISS settled with the janitors.²⁹

International JfJ organizers also enlisted the support of SEIU locals for a second, more direct solidarity action targeting JMB. Working with supportive local leaders and organizers,

²⁷ One-Stop was a service and advocacy organization for California immigrants. Originally founded in the early 1970s, One-Stop became a critical resource for Latinx immigrants trying to understand and gain legalization under the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) of 1986. Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016.

²⁸ Justice for Janitors Los Angeles files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 6, Folder 36, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahi Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, November 1, 2011; Andy Banks, "The Power and Promise of Community Unionism," *Labor Research Review* 1, no. 9 (1991): 17-31.

²⁹ Justice for Janitors Publications and Pamphlets, SEIU: Public Relations Records, Box 2, Folder 13, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "399 Justice for Janitors Campaign Strikes Century City" *Voice of Local 399* 14, no. 6 (June 1990), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

and sometimes even traveling to provide their own leadership, International JfJ organizers started making plans for janitor demonstrations in half a dozen cities across the country. Designed to reinforce the national mail Trash-In, these coordinated demonstrations were scheduled to target JMB offices or JMB-managed buildings in each of the cities.

The International JfJ organizers' efforts paid off. On June 15, JMB Chairman Judd Malkin received hundreds of bags of trash. Furthermore, janitors and SEIU leaders in Chicago, Washington D.C., Atlanta, Philadelphia, Seattle, and San Francisco targeted JMB in local demonstrations. These demonstrations ranged from an eight-person group of organizers and janitors that leafleted in Atlanta to a close to fifty-person group of janitors and union supporters that garnered extensive television coverage in San Francisco.³⁰ But while these national actions successfully generated pressure against JMB, they ultimately proved secondary to the local JfJ demonstration in Century City.

On the afternoon of June 15, more than four hundred janitors, JfJ organizers, and supporters—including several prominent labor, religious, and political leaders—showed up at Roxbury Park in Beverly Hills ready to demonstrate. They first participated in a spirited rally where Jono Shaffer led janitors and supporters in bilingual call and response chants. Hundreds of janitors waved signs, shook homemade noisemakers, and shouted their support as Shaffer called out: “An injury to one!...An injury to all!...Un daño contra uno!...Un daño contra todos.” After this rally, the marchers departed the park and began following a route down Olympic Boulevard into Century City that LAPD had approved in advance.

When the demonstrators attempted to turn onto Century Park East as planned, however, they were met with a wall of about one hundred LAPD officers in full riot gear. Jono Shaffer,

³⁰ Tom Balanoff files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 107, Folder 15, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

who was at the front of the march, questioned the police blockade. He asserted that the janitors had a legal right to march on the sidewalk and questioned the police officers as to why they were not allowing janitors to walk along the sidewalk like other Century City pedestrians. Rather than responding, the officers ordered—only in English—for the marchers to disperse within thirty seconds. The marchers, who had started chanting “El pueblo unido jamás será vencido” (The people united will never be defeated), did not immediately disperse. Many likely did not hear or understand the order; others prepared to continue marching or sit down in defiance of the order with the expectation of being arrested.

Their expectations of peaceful civil disobedience, however, were quickly shattered. Shortly after issuing the dispersal order, the LAPD officers pulled out their batons and started clubbing the demonstrators. As demonstrators were clubbed and scrambled to get away, some LAPD officers marched forward, pursuing those who tried to escape.³¹

Within a brief period of time, what had begun as a peaceful march turned into a mass of chaos and violence. For many demonstrators, this outbreak of violence was shocking. As one demonstrator later remarked, the street suddenly resembled a scene in Bucharest, which was the most recent site of anti-communist revolution in Eastern Europe.³² For other demonstrators, who had lived through the violence and terror of recent conflict in Central America, the incident was more familiar. This was the case for Maria Guardado. Originally from El Salvador, Guardado had been a labor and political activist in her home country during the 1960s and 1970s. She helped organize farm workers, wrote revolutionary poetry, and worked with a variety of left-

³¹Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 9, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, November 1, 2011; Jono Shaffer, “Justice for Janitors Century City Police Attack,” YouTube video, 1:14, June 9, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4bGdXIQ8OLY>.

³²“399 Justice for Janitors Campaign Strikes Century City” *Voice of Local 399* 14, no. 6 (June 1990), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University

wing political organizations in El Salvador. This activism made her a target in the Salvadoran civil war. In 1980, a paramilitary death squad abducted and brutally tortured her for three days and then left her for dead. After narrowly surviving, Guardado fled to Mexico and then entered the United States as a refugee. Once in the U.S., Guardado continued her activism. While primarily involved in the Sanctuary movement, she lent her support to the Justice for Janitors campaign and participated in the June 15 march. While participating in this march, Guardado was beaten to the ground by an LAPD officer.³³ For her, the experience of being beaten for standing up for poor workers and justice was tragically familiar. What was still shocking even for Central American refugees about the incident, however, was the fact that this violence was not just targeted at poor Latinxs. As one demonstrator remarked: “It was just like El Salvador, except even white people were being beaten.”³⁴

In addition to wielding their clubs against white and Latinx demonstrators alike, the LAPD officers wielded their clubs without regard for age. Some of the demonstrators at the front of the march were elderly, and some had their children with them. While standing together in solidarity, both the young and the old were beaten to the ground. JfJ organizer Rocio Saenz helped several of the janitors with their children run to safety in the park where the march had started. A group of Beverly Hills police officers on motorcycles approached these janitors fleeing to Roxbury Park, which was just outside of LAPD jurisdiction and tried to offer first aid and call ambulances for those with injuries. Having recently been beaten by police, the terrified demonstrators tried to flee again. The police were only able to begin providing people with much needed assistance after assuring them that they were Beverly Hills police and not LAPD.

³³ Mike Davis, “Failure to Disperse: The L.A. Police Riot,” *Against the Current* (September/October 1990): 4. For more on the life of Maria Guardado, see *Testimony: The Maria Guardado Story*, directed by Randy Vasquez (2001).

³⁴ Dave Gardetta, “True Grit: Clocking Time with Janitors Organizer Rocio Saenz,” *L.A. Weekly* 15 (1993): 16-26.

Other demonstrators' efforts to get to safety, however, were unsuccessful. One group of marchers, for example, sought refuge in a nearby parking garage only to be followed, beaten, and then arrested by LAPD officers. One demonstrator vividly recalled being repeatedly beaten by a police officer and then arrested while trying to escape in the parking garage elevator. After being arrested, he was forced to stand for two hours waiting to be transported. As he waited, unsightly contusions started to appear on his body. Another arrested demonstrator that was standing nearby had a broken wrist that swelled up around his zip-tie handcuffs.³⁵

The police officers' decision to prioritize the incarceration of janitors rather than ensuring that their medical needs were met had devastating consequences for one janitor in particular: Ana Veliz. Veliz, who had immigrated to the United States from El Salvador only two years prior, was participating in the strike so that she could provide a better life for her family. Between her husband's earnings as a gardener, her janitor wages, and income from the boarders that they shared their one bedroom apartment with, she and her husband managed to send about \$400 a month back to El Salvador to support their six children and Veliz's mother. Rather than just providing support for her family in El Salvador, Veliz wanted to be able to save some money and eventually reunite her family in the United States. With this motivation, Veliz took her place amongst other janitors at the front of the march on June 15. By participating in the campaign, Veliz knew that she was risking her job and the little economic security she had in hopes for better wages and the reunification of her family. What Veliz did not know, however, was that she was also risking the life of her unborn child. During the march, Veliz, who was three months pregnant, was clubbed repeatedly on the back and then arrested. While in jail, she complained

³⁵ Dave Gardetta, "True Grit: Clocking Time with Janitors Organizer Rocio Saenz," *L.A. Weekly* 15 (1993): 16-26; Harry Brighthouse, "Justice for Janitors Day," *Washington Monthly*, June 16, 2015; Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, November 1, 2011.

about pain but was only offered pills. Four days later at a county hospital, she found out that she had miscarried.

Altogether forty-two demonstrators were arrested and over sixty injured at the June 15 march. With this outcome, the march could have easily discouraged and demoralized the janitors and their supporters. The demonstrators, however, were resolute in their support for the Justice for Janitors cause. Even Ana Veliz, who paid dearly for her participation in the march, maintained her dedication to the JfJ cause. When reflecting on the incident, she asserted: “I never thought they would beat us. I would never have been near the front if I had thought so. But to earn \$4.25 an hour is not fair. What I did, I didn’t do without thought. I’m proud to have a union.”³⁶ While certainly not expecting to have sacrificed so much, Veliz’s belief in the fairness of the janitors’ struggle for higher wages did not waver.

Instead of deterring janitors, the June 15 incident actually served to bolster many of the janitors’ dedication to the strike. This was because the incident demonstrated that the JfJ struggle for higher wages was part of an even bigger struggle for justice. In describing the incident, one of the janitors highlighted how the police’s mistreatment of the demonstrators mirrored the discrimination that janitors faced in the workplace. He asserted: “Before I used to see a lot of discrimination at work. Then I saw it in the way the police treated us.”³⁷ For this janitor, the June 15 incident provided clear evidence that he and his fellow janitors were not just fighting against a cleaning contractor for higher wages; they were also fighting against systematic discrimination and inequality that poor people, and especially poor women and poor

³⁶ Bob Baker, “The Sacrifice Behind the Labor Day Speeches,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 1, 1990; “399 Justice for Janitors Campaign Strikes Century City” *Voice of Local 399* 14, no. 6 (June 1990), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

³⁷ “ISS Signs 399’s Master Building Service Agreement,” *Voice of Local 399* 14, no. 7 (July 1990), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Latinx immigrants, experienced in a city otherwise known for wealth and opportunity. By emphasizing the righteousness of this fight, the janitors, JfJ organizers, and supporters converted the June 15 incident into powerful leverage against ISS.

The June 15 demonstration in Century City quickly caught public attention even without JfJ intervention. News cameramen had caught the day's events on tape and started broadcasting footage of the incident almost immediately. These first broadcasts, however, reported on the incident as a riot that occurred when protestors became unruly. To help correct this narrative of the incident, Conway Collis, Chairman of the State Equalization Board, called the Los Angeles Channel 9 news and answered questions in a live interview. As a local politician who had participated in the demonstration and had been clubbed by LAPD officers as a result, Collis provided reputable testimony. He helped shift the public narrative of the incident to stories of LAPD officers suddenly and violently taking away demonstrators' right to march. This narrative combined with footage of young and old, female and male demonstrators being shoved and clubbed to the ground made sensational news and generated widespread public support for the janitors.³⁸

As broad public sympathy for the janitors began to emerge, International JfJ leaders and supportive staff members worked to ensure that this public attention and support was effectively targeted into action and change. To do this, they mobilized on two fronts: one against LAPD and one against ISS and JMB. After being notified of the incident, International JfJ leaders sent a team of International SEIU lawyers to work with Local 399's lawyers in generating a response to

³⁸ "399's Report Card on LA Politicos," *Voice of Local 399* 14, no. 7 (July 1990), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Stephen Lerner and Jono Shaffer, "25 Years Later: Lessons from the Organizers of Justice for Janitors," *TalkPoverty.org*, June 16, 2015.

the LAPD violence. In only two days, they filed a \$10 million lawsuit against LAPD on behalf of the injured janitors.

While the lawyers prepared a legal response to the police, public relations and communications specialists from the International started working with the Los Angeles JfJ group to compile footage of the incident and create an emotionally resonating video. By Monday morning, June 18, a copy of this video was on the desk of Mayor Tom Bradley. By Tuesday morning, copies of the video were on the desks of ISS President Henrik Slipsager and JMB Chairman Judd Malkin. Mayor Bradley responded quickly, ordering a Police Commission investigation into the June 15 violence. ISS and JMB, however, required additional pressure to take action.

To put additional pressure on these companies, the Los Angeles JfJ group and International JfJ organizers enlisted the help of SEIU leaders and prominent JfJ supporters. They enlisted the support of SEIU President John Sweeney, Local 399 President Jim Zellers, and even Local 32B-32J President Gus Bevona to put pressure on Henrik Slipsager. These SEIU leaders met with Slipsager and implored him to agree to sign the Los Angeles janitors' master agreement. Bevona, who had a good relationship with ISS in New York, threatened an expansion of the strike to New York if ISS did not settle with the Los Angeles janitors. Other SEIU leaders including SEIU International Vice President Eugene Moats joined JfJ organizers in putting pressure on JMB executives at their headquarters in Chicago.³⁹

A wide range of labor leaders and union members outside of the SEIU offered their support in pressuring ISS and JMB as well. In the wake of the incident, for example, AFL-CIO

³⁹ Western Conference files, SEIU Secretary-Treasurer's Office: Richard Cordtz Records, Box 5, Folder 118, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "Justice for Janitors at L.A.," *California AFL-CIO News* 35, no. 25 (June 29, 1990): 1,3; Bob Baker, "Tentative Accord OKd to End Janitors,' Strike" *Los Angeles Times*, June 26, 1990.

President Lane Kirkland and local union presidents throughout the United States made phone calls and sent mailgrams to ISS and JMB. Labor leaders outside of the U.S., also lent their support. Philip Jennings of the FIET, for example, sent letters to ISS and coordinated with John Sweeney on how to most effectively put pressure on ISS CEO Poul Andreasson. Hans Jensen, who had previously visited Los Angeles to build solidarity against ISS, also coordinated with Sweeney to put pressure on the cleaning contractor once again. He made calls to top ISS executives and arranged a meeting with other top Danish labor leaders and an ISS manager. Letters of support for janitors sent to ISS from other labor leaders around the globe, including the National Secretary of the Transport and General Workers Union in the United Kingdom, also reinforced pressure against ISS.⁴⁰

Community supporters helped match this targeted pressure against ISS and JMB with pressure on LAPD and Los Angeles political leaders. Two prominent Los Angeles Latinx leaders, Antonio H. Rodriguez and Gloria J. Romero, for example, wrote an article on behalf of the janitors. In this article, published a week after the June 15 march in the *Los Angeles Times*, they asserted: “Had the crackdown occurred in the Soviet Union, China or in a pre-Chamorro Nicaragua, everyone from President Bush to Police Chief Darryl Gates would have condemned it. But it occurred in Los Angeles. So our elected officials remain silent lest they incur the wrath of Gates and the powerful police Establishment.” With this, Rodriguez and Romero both likened the actions of the LAPD to well-known dictatorships and criticized public officials’ lack of response to the incident. They argued that racism and “contempt for poor people” played a role in the LAPD violence, and they suggested that political leaders were unwilling to speak out as

⁴⁰ Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 8-10. Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Western Conference files, SEIU Secretary-Treasurer’s Office: Richard Cordtz Records, Box 5, Folder 118, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

police defended the interests of powerful business leaders in Los Angeles. In this way, they called attention to janitors' powerlessness against socioeconomic and political injustice in Los Angeles. They also called for an end to this injustice. They demanded a swift investigation into police actions and criminal prosecution against officers who violated janitors' rights. They also demanded that the Police Commission work to create policy that would prevent further incidences of police violence and brutality.⁴¹ While Mayor Bradley agreed to a police investigation, Rodriguez and Romero's call for swift justice and preventative policy remained unanswered. Less than one year later, LAPD officers were once again caught on videotape beating a person of color—Rodney King.

While the more expansive demand for police reform would prove unsuccessful, the growing JfJ pressure against ISS and JMB did prove to be successful. On June 24, 1990, ISS agreed to settle with Local 399 and the Century City janitors. As part of this settlement, ISS executives agreed to drop all charges against JfJ organizers, janitors, and supporters in exchange for Local 399 dropping all charges against ISS. Additionally, ISS agreed to sign the Los Angeles janitorial master agreement. Through this agreement, ISS janitors received an immediate pay raise to \$5.20 an hour, which meant a fifteen percent increase from the previous average wage of \$4.50 an hour. They also received guaranteed health insurance as well as additional vacation time and sick pay starting in April of 1991.

The ISS janitors considered this a huge achievement and successful resolution of the strike. When asked about the strike, for example, ISS janitors Lorenzo Pedrosa and Reina Orellana both emphasized the value and significance of the raises that they gained. Pedrosa noted that he had been barely able to make a living on his previous wages. With the new raise,

⁴¹ Antonio H. Rodriguez and Gloria J. Romero, "Corporate America's Security-Guards-in-Blue," *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1990.

however, he would be able to support himself and send a little bit of money to his wife and child, fulfilling his reason for migrating to the U.S. in the first place. While Pedrosa's comment illustrated the tangible value of the raise for janitors and their families, Orellana's comment emphasized a less tangible but nonetheless significant benefit of the raise. She asserted, "I've worked for ISS for four years. I never got a raise except when California raised the minimum wage. Since we joined the union, for the first time in my life, I'm proud of what I do, how I feel at work."⁴² As Orellana's words demonstrate, the settlement and specifically the raise provided a huge boost in confidence and pride for many of the Century City janitors. For many of these janitors, who had struggled through economic hardship and discrimination often in more than one country, winning a raise validated their continued struggle and provided proof that an alternative was possible.

While Pedrosa and Orellana commented on the raise, other janitors such as Estela Méndez emphasized the health insurance aspect of the settlement. As a single mother with three young children, Méndez noted the significance of health insurance to the well-being of her family. She asserted: "The insurance is very important to me. It is very hard for someone without health insurance to take care of young children. It will make a big difference as to whether my sons will grow up strong." In addition to noting the specific importance of health insurance, though, Méndez—like Orellana—also emphasized the broad significance of this settlement for the janitors' confidence. She declared, "At first, everyone said ISS was too big,

⁴² "ISS Signs 399's Master Building Service Agreement," *Voice of Local 399* 14, no. 7 (July 1990), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

that we couldn't win. But we won and everyone knows that ISS has to treat people with respect. I'm very proud of what we did."⁴³

To celebrate this feeling of pride and achievement, the janitors joined with JfJ organizers and supporters in a massive victory celebration on June 29. Prior to the settlement on June 24, the Los Angeles JfJ group made plans for a massive march and rally on the two-week anniversary of the June 15 incident. Through this march and rally, janitors planned to visibly demonstrate their resolve to continue the strike and their refusal to cower in the face of police violence. Their need for such a demonstration, however, was eliminated when ISS agreed to settle.

Rather than cancelling the demonstration, the JfJ group converted it into a victory celebration and reaffirmation of janitors' rights to be seen and participate in a peaceful demonstration. Over eight hundred janitors showed up for the demonstration, countering any remaining stereotypes of the docility of immigrant workers or the powerlessness of the poor. Furthermore, top labor and political leaders as well as activists from dozens of unions as well as social and political organizations joined these janitors in a massive display of solidarity. Participants in the demonstration ranged, for example, from SEIU President John Sweeney and Local 399 President Jim Zellers to Mayor Tom Bradley and L.A. City Council member Zev Yaroslavsky to anti-war activist Ron Kovic. Together, they demonstrated that that the June 24 contract settlement with ISS was much more than a single victory in a union campaign. It was part of a burgeoning, intersectional movement for justice.⁴⁴

⁴³ "ISS Signs 399's Master Building Service Agreement," *Voice of Local 399* 14, no. 7 (July 1990), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

⁴⁴ Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 8, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "ISS Signs 399's Master Building Service Agreement," *Voice of Local 399* 14, no 7 (July 1990), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 11, Walter P. Reuther

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Unfortunately, the Los Angeles janitors' victory against ISS was not a cure-all success for the Justice for Janitors campaign. Only days after helping orchestrate the successful settlement with ISS in Los Angeles, International JfJ leaders orchestrated a much different settlement with John Portman in Atlanta. These International leaders had already mostly abandoned hope for the Atlanta Justice for Janitors campaign. After the failed NLRB election attempt to organize SSI janitors in Atlanta (discussed in Chapter 3), International JfJ staff eliminated Local 679's International organizing subsidy. The Portman settlement, however, served as the last nail in the coffin for the Atlanta campaign. In this settlement, the JfJ leaders conceded to have the AFL-CIO remove John Portman from the national boycott list. They also conceded to cease all JfJ actions targeting Portman in Atlanta and refrain from any attempts to target Portman with any organizing activities or publicity campaigns in Atlanta—as well as in Los Angeles and San Francisco—for a period of two years. In exchange, Portman agreed to drop his \$435,000 lawsuit against the SEIU and Local 679.

While Los Angeles janitors and their supporters celebrated a monumental victory in late June, Atlanta JfJ organizers and their small group of remaining supporters fought the International JfJ leaders' resignation that the Atlanta campaign had failed. By this point, Local 679 leaders and organizers had already started protesting the elimination of their JfJ organizing subsidy in April of 1990. As International leaders settled with Portman, the Local 679 leaders and organizers escalated their protest using the little remaining power that they had: they refused to sign and implement the concession-driven Portman settlement. In response, President

Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "Justice for Janitors at L.A." *California AFL-CIO News* 33, no. 25 (June 29, 1990): 1,3.

Sweeney put Local 679 in trusteeship and had a new temporary leader sign and implement the settlement.⁴⁵

Ultimately, then, the Los Angeles victory did nothing to change the fate of the Atlanta JfJ campaign. Even as the Los Angeles campaign provided newfound hope and excitement for the Justice for Janitors campaign as a whole, International JfJ leaders decided that the cost and risk of continuing the campaign in Atlanta with the Portman lawsuit looming had become too great. As the Los Angeles janitors triumphantly celebrated winning a David-and-Goliath-like struggle against ISS, the International leaders abandoned the David-and-Goliath-like struggle against Portman in Atlanta. And when a small but determined group of local leaders and organizers tried to keep the campaign alive, the International leaders invoked a trusteeship to essentially crush this local resistance from above.

The International's actions toward Local 679 in eliminating Local 679's JfJ subsidy and then trusteeing the local can be understood as extremely judicious and beneficial for the SEIU and the strength and vitality of Justice for Janitors as a national campaign. The Portman lawsuit posed a legitimate financial threat to the JfJ campaign and SEIU. By June of 1990, Portman's lawyers had reportedly spent more than one million dollars on attorney's fees in this lawsuit and did not show any signs of letting up. Rather than continuing to sink SEIU resources into defending against the lawsuit, International JfJ leaders decided that the union's resources and particularly the Justice for Janitors campaign's resources could be better used elsewhere. Rather than throwing hundreds of thousands of dollars into a lawsuit that could ultimately cost SEIU hundreds of thousands of more dollars if they lost, they settled with Portman and protected their ability to continue supporting Justice for Janitors in Los Angeles and elsewhere.

⁴⁵ Local 679 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 57, Folder 6, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

At the same time, the International JfJ leaders' actions toward Atlanta can also be understood as an affront to local union democracy and a violation of the commitment to Local 679 and Atlanta janitors that these leaders had made in starting the Atlanta JfJ drive. This is precisely how the small, but committed group of local JfJ leaders and organizers in Local 679 understood the International leaders' actions. These individuals protested the fact that International leaders terminated Local 679's JfJ subsidy and negotiated the Portman settlement behind closed doors without their input. These JfJ leaders and organizers asserted that the International had made a commitment to them, and more importantly to Atlanta's janitors, in creating Local 679 and launching the Atlanta Justice for Janitors campaign in 1987. The termination of the campaign from above, then, was a violation of this commitment. This action seemed to suggest that the International leaders were willing to allow Atlanta janitors to risk their livelihoods in building an organizing drive but were ultimately not willing to risk the union's resources in continuing this struggle. When a group of three Atlanta JfJ leaders raised these concerns and attempted to prevent the International from ending the Atlanta campaign and implementing the Portman settlement, they were suspended from Local 679 during the trusteeship and subsequently laid off.

In many ways, the termination of these local JfJ leaders' employment seemed to confirm their concerns with the authenticity of International SEIU leaders' commitment to the Atlanta janitors and, more broadly, to the ideals of socioeconomic and racial justice. With this added grievance, they embraced a core element the Justice for Janitors strategy and launched a public pressure campaign against International SEIU leaders. In a detailed flyer, they questioned the true goals of the Justice for Janitors campaign and presented a picture of the SEIU as a manipulative, discriminatory, and racist organization that was only concerned with its bottom

line and that preyed on poor workers and people of color. These local JfJ leaders asserted: “SEIU has fooled many minority workers into thinking that they are concerned about janitors receiving better wages, dignity and respect, health insurance and paid holidays, as well as representation...It is appalling to know that SEIU continues to take money from workers as well as minorities only to undermine the janitors they were attempting to organize in Atlanta, as well as their black employees who worked for them.”⁴⁶ At the bottom of the flyer, they urged concerned community members to call President Sweeney and express concern with the SEIU’s actions toward Atlanta janitors and Local 679 employees.

In addition to creating this flyer, the former Local 679 employees also reached out to local black politicians and community organizations. They enlisted the help of state representative and civil rights activist Tyrone Brooks and the Concerned Black Clergy, for example. While the Concerned Black Clergy agreed to investigate the Local 679 leaders and organizers’ charges against the SEIU, Brooks wrote a letter to President Sweeney expressing his unwillingness to continue supporting pro-union activity until Sweeney came to Atlanta to address the charges of racial discrimination against him.

Escalating in the spring and summer of 1991, this grassroots pressure campaign against the SEIU initially generated a wave of public concern and media attention. Much like the Atlanta JfJ campaign, though, this pressure campaign ended behind closed doors in a legal settlement. In response to the local JfJ leaders’ public pressure campaign, SEIU leaders firmly denied all allegations of racism and wrongdoing. Furthermore, they brought their own accusations against these individuals, alleging that they had defamed the SEIU and unfairly intervened in the affairs of the International and Local 679. With the possibility of expensive

⁴⁶ Local 679 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 57, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

lawsuits against them, the three former Local 679 employees agreed to cease their public pressure campaign and forgo any possibly wrongful termination lawsuits against the SEIU in exchange for a financial settlement.⁴⁷

I argue that this controversial conclusion to the Atlanta campaign, which was quickly swept out of the public eye, needs to be acknowledged and understood. The conclusion of the Atlanta campaign is an important part of the history of Justice for Janitors: it not only significantly impacted the lives of Atlanta janitors and local JfJ organizers, but it also ultimately had an enduring impact on the trajectory of the national JfJ campaign. Although unintentionally so, the controversial termination of the Atlanta campaign foreclosed opportunities for the development of Justice for Janitors as an explicitly multiracial, multicultural organizing struggle in the early 1990s.

As suggested above, the Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles (as well as in other Southwest cities like San Diego) was intentionally racially inclusive. Local 399's first JfJ negotiating committee, for example, included black, white, and Latinx janitors. By the time of the Century City strike in 1990, however, the Los Angeles janitorial market was almost entirely Latinx. Furthermore, the Latinx immigrant community had become a powerful and enthusiastic source of public support for the campaign. This solidified a public association of the JfJ campaign with the Latinx community at the same time that the conflict between black Local 679 leaders and organizers and white International SEIU leaders generated accusations of anti-black racism within the campaign. This combination of a positive public association of JfJ with the Latinx community and a negative public association of JfJ with the black community unintentionally exacerbated existing black-Latinx tensions within the janitorial industry and

⁴⁷ The local's former president received a financial settlement of \$26,000 and two of the local's former organizers received financial settlements of \$14,000 each. Local 679 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 57, Folder 6-7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

SEIU, as well as within the labor movement and society broadly. Rather than helping to cut across racial and cultural lines that divided and pitted poor workers against each other in the neoliberal era, Justice for Janitors unfortunately appeared to magnify and intensify these divisions in 1990. As I will suggest in future chapters, these divisions and unresolved racial tensions continued to plague the Justice for Janitors campaign throughout the 1990s.

While acknowledging the unintended negative consequences of the public association of the JfJ campaign with Latinx immigrants, I argue that the Los Angeles victory against ISS should still be recognized and celebrated as a huge success. This victory essentially kept the Justice for Janitors campaign alive amidst a string of campaign struggles and failures in Atlanta and Washington D.C. The victory was extremely inspirational and motivational for JfJ organizers and janitors in Los Angeles. It bolstered their determination to continue expanding the JfJ campaign and fighting to organize the rest of Los Angeles County. Furthermore, it served to provide a critical affirmation to International JfJ organizers and top SEIU leaders that all of the money, time, and energy that they were putting into the Justice for Janitors campaign could generate results on a large scale.

As an important affirmation of the JfJ campaign, the Los Angeles ISS victory helped shape future developments within the national Justice for Janitors campaign. As Stephen Lerner acknowledged in a debrief of the ISS strike, the L.A. campaign's success "did not happen in a vacuum." A whole range of industry conditions, actions, and reactions in Los Angeles as well as supportive national and international activities came together to ultimately produce the ISS settlement. The ISS victory, in other words, could not be easily reproduced either in Los Angeles or in other cities. Nevertheless, the ISS victory led Lerner to critically reflect on the key elements of the Los Angeles JfJ campaign that produced this success. After detailing more than

twenty factors that all contributed to the ISS victory, Lerner wrote a succinct summary in his debrief:

We won this campaign because we successfully identified and used numerous sources of power we had. We spent the money, resources and institutional credibility necessary to win. We took advantage of the work we had done in previous years. / Most importantly - we built a movement among workers, labor and Latino groups. We built an excitement and momentum around fighting for Justice for Janitors that continued to grow as time passed. We became the symbol for the anger of Latinos in L.A. This was not a strike about just more money. Among Latinos, the strike symbolized their daily fight against racism and poverty.⁴⁸

Following this summary, he proceeded to outline a list of plans to build on the success of the ISS victory. These plans included proposals to involve additional SEIU locals in future campaign activities and to continue coalition building in the Latinx community.

Essentially, in combination with the campaign struggles in Washington D.C. and Atlanta and campaign success in San Diego, the Los Angeles ISS victory confirmed the importance of rank-and-file janitor and Latinx community support for the success of Justice for Janitors. With this proof, International JfJ leaders like Stephen Lerner committed to developing a similar base of support for the campaign in other cities. They committed to using the resources of the International in partnership with local Latinx communities to develop and expand Justice for Janitors as a bold and exciting intersectional labor and community struggle against the overlapping injustices that poor Latinx workers faced amidst neoliberal restructuring and a much longer pattern of capitalist exploitation.

⁴⁸ Justice for Janitors Los Angeles files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 6, Folder 37, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Chapter 6

Applying the Lessons from Los Angeles:

Justice for Janitors Flourishes and Expands as a National Network of Strong Local Campaigns
(1990-1992)

In this chapter, I trace the development of the Justice for Janitors campaign in the wake of the Los Angeles janitors' monumental victory against ISS in 1990. First, I explore how the Los Angeles JfJ group drew from the momentum and success of the ISS victory to launch another major organizing campaign against Bradford, the last major nonunion cleaning contractor in the city. Next, I explore how International JfJ leaders utilized the momentum and lessons of the ISS victory in Los Angeles to continue developing and expanding the Justice for Janitors campaign as a national network of local campaign nodes, each with their own base of rank-and-file and community support. I highlight JfJ leaders' creation of a suburban JfJ organizing project in the Northeast and Midwest, their efforts to strengthen the Washington D.C. JfJ campaign, and their assistance to Bay Area Local 1877's major JfJ organizing drive against the technology company Apple.

In tracing this campaign development, I reveal the ways in which the ISS victory marked an important turning point in the national Justice for Janitors campaign. This victory boosted JfJ leaders' confidence and led them to push against SEIU's old guard building service division leadership. Up to this point, JfJ leaders had avoided taking actions that might ruffle these old guard leaders and their allegiance to a very narrow, conservative form of business unionism. In the wake of the ISS victory, however, JfJ leaders started prioritizing janitor organizing and campaign expansion over maintaining peace with the old guard. These JfJ leaders were not

content to continue tip-toeing around the old guard and allowing valuable membership strength and union resources to remain tied up in keeping old guard leaders in power while the majority of janitors suffered. They wanted the Justice for Janitors campaign to be front and center within the SEIU, the core focus of the entire building service division.

The ISS victory also marked a major turning point in the campaign because it showed JfJ leaders that the Justice for Janitors campaign was capable of winning David-and-Goliath organizing struggles—specifically when the campaign combined a strong base of rank-and-file and community support with the resources of the International union. I argue that Justice for Janitors leaders took an important lesson from the ISS victory about the importance of local-International cooperation and ran with it. In doing so, they set other local Justice for Janitors campaigns like the Bay Area JfJ campaign up for success. The Apple campaign, which closely resembled the Los Angeles JfJ organizing drives against ISS and Bradford, also ended in victory. This victory helped confirm that the power of the JfJ campaign stemmed from a combination of local and International strength.

Ultimately, I suggest that the continued success of the campaign amidst expansion laid the groundwork for Justice for Janitors to leave a lasting mark on the SEIU and on the larger U.S. and even global labor movement. As Justice for Janitors emerged as a national organizing strategy with a track record of success, the campaign inspired JfJ leaders to confront the remaining power of the SEIU old guard and to push for organizing on a scale that would require a complete transformation of the SEIU from the inside out. Additionally, as the campaign inspired and united a diverse and ever-expanding group of janitors and allies, Justice for Janitors appeared to evolve as more than just a campaign to organize and win contract improvements for janitors. I argue that as the campaign developed and expanded during this period so too did the

campaign's potential to unite a growing number of workers in a powerful collective struggle against the patterns of exploitation and inequality embedded within neoliberal capitalism

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Even though the Los Angeles JfJ organizers and janitors won a hugely inspiring victory against ISS in June of 1990, this victory did not allow them a reprieve from their struggle with building owners and cleaning contractors in Los Angeles. As the Los Angeles JfJ group made headway against ISS, the last of the remaining large nonunion contractors in Los Angeles emerged as a direct threat to the campaign's forward progress. This contractor, Bradford, underbid union contractors and provided Los Angeles building owners and managers with an opportunity to keep janitor wages low.¹

As suggested in the previous chapter, the Los Angeles janitors' struggle against ISS, particularly their strength and resilience in the face of police brutality, garnered a lot of publicity and public support for the Los Angeles janitors and the Justice for Janitors cause. The ISS struggle seemed to suggest that the JfJ campaign was gaining strength and making headway against the deunionization and worker exploitation that went hand-in-hand with neoliberal restructuring in the Los Angeles janitorial industry. Los Angeles building owner and managers' actions in the midst of the ISS struggle, however, highlights the limits of the campaign's strength in opposition to neoliberal restructuring. As public support for janitor unionization grew, Los Angeles building owners and managers continued to contract with Bradford. Furthermore, some building owners and managers even switched from recently unionized contractors to Bradford, directly undermining the progress that the JfJ group had already made in Los Angeles. These building owners and managers' actions demonstrate the pervasiveness and obstinacy of the

¹ "Justice Campaign at Bradford Heats Up" *Voice of Local 399* 14, no. 11 (November 1990), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 11; Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

market-driven economic behavior that JfJ organizers and janitors were trying to fight. Even as they won tangible achievements in terms of newly organized janitors and signed contracts, JfJ organizers and janitors still found themselves facing extensive antiunion hostility and contractor underbidding within the industry.

While frustrating to the Los Angeles JfJ group, the building owners and managers' actions reaffirmed the importance of the citywide scope of the core JfJ organizing strategy. Their actions demonstrated that the Los Angeles JfJ organizers and janitors could not rest on their laurels. If they wanted to preserve the organizing and contract achievements that they had made thus far, they would have to continue organizing and work to take wages and working conditions out of competition throughout the entire Los Angeles janitorial market. In other words, they would have to organize Bradford.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Los Angeles organizers had initially shied away from targeting Bradford because the company was the nonunion affiliate of ABM, which had union contracts with the “dinosaur” building service locals in the SEIU. The dinosaur building service locals—most notably New York Local 32B-32J, Chicago Local 25, and Boston Local 254—had endured as the last remnants of the SEIU's original strength in the janitorial industry prior to neoliberal restructuring. These locals had also endured as the local fiefdoms of powerful old guard building service leadership. While the threat of neoliberal restructuring and broad patterns of union decline continued to grow, these old guard leaders remained committed to a very traditional, reciprocal form of business unionism. These leaders offered janitors the security of a union contract and membership services such as grievance arbitration. In exchange,

they demanded janitors' unwavering loyalty, not just to the local union but also to themselves.²

While this form of unionism did nothing to halt the growth of nonunion contractors and the rapid expansion of a low-wage janitorial market in the suburbs of these cities, it did manage to preserve union contracts with relatively high wages and benefits for a core group of loyal janitors in downtown New York, Chicago, and Boston. The old guard leaders' business unionism, in other words, existed in sharp contrast with the organizing-centered form of unionism that JfJ leaders, organizers, and participants developed through the course of the late 1980s.

Up until 1990, these two oppositional forms of unionism co-existed with little overt conflict within the SEIU's building service division. SEIU President John Sweeney supported the Justice for Janitors campaign as a necessary response to industry changes and growing deunionization. At the same time, he recognized the fact that old guard leaders, who did not support the campaign, had power and influence within the union. (New York Local 32B-32J President Gus Bevona was the chairman of SEIU's building service division, Chicago Local 25 President Eugene Moats was vice-chair, and Boston Local 254 President Ed Sullivan was a prominent board member. Furthermore, the International union depended on the membership dues from these presidents' sizable locals.) Much like the members of Local 32B-32J, Local 25, and Local 254, President Sweeney respected these leaders' power and influence and was reluctant to challenge them, even with reason to do so. In the midst of this situation, an unwritten rule seemed to emerge whereby Justice for Janitors received financial and personnel support from the International (and even lip-service support from the old guard) as long as the campaign did not interfere with the old guard leaders and their local jurisdictions.

² As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, these leaders received exorbitant salaries and had histories of misusing union funds and resources. This poor leadership was far from hidden, but members still supported these old guard leaders, voting to keep them in power within the union locals.

Up until 1990, International and local JfJ leaders respected this unwritten rule. As suggested previously, however, developments within the Los Angeles campaign in 1990 called JfJ leaders' respect for this rule into question. To protect their existing achievements and work toward their goal of a citywide master agreement in Los Angeles, the Los Angeles janitors would have to take on Bradford and potentially interfere with the old guard leaders' relationships with ABM. While aware of the threat that backlash from the old guard posed to the campaign, JfJ leaders ultimately decided to support the Los Angeles janitors in pursuing a campaign against Bradford that targeted ABM. Wasting no time and using the momentum of the ISS campaign as an advantage, the Los Angeles JfJ group announced the start of an organizing drive against Bradford at the victory celebration for the ISS campaign.

It is important to note that JfJ leaders did have some sense of assurance that their support for a JfJ campaign against Bradford and ABM would not generate a harsh backlash from the old guard. As noted in the previous chapter, Local 32B-32J President Gus Bevona supported the Los Angeles ISS campaign, threatening that New York janitors would strike against ISS if the contractor did not settle with the Los Angeles janitors. According to Los Angeles organizer Jono Shaffer, Bevona's lip-service support came late in the ISS organizing drive and was likely not a deciding factor in convincing ISS to settle with the Los Angeles janitors. Nevertheless, Bevona sought to take credit for the victory and publicized his role in helping the Los Angeles janitors defeat ISS. Rather than resisting Bevona's effort to take credit for the campaign victory, JfJ leaders and organizers embraced it. They recognized that Bevona could not easily resist an expansion of the JfJ campaign in Los Angeles—even if it risked his relationship with ABM—after publicly declaring himself as a key Justice for Janitors supporter.³

³ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, December 2, 2011.

With a sense of security against old guard backlash, International JfJ leaders worked with the Los Angeles JfJ group to implement a bold, new campaign tactic for the struggle against Bradford. They organized a multicity janitor tour. This tour illustrates the way in which the Los Angeles JfJ campaign was adapting and gaining strength as a powerful combination of the resources and strengths of the International union and the resources and strengths of a committed group of rank-and-file activists. This tour depended on International financial resources and coordination assistance, but it ultimately centered on the participation and personal stories of rank-and-file Los Angeles janitors.

As part of this tour, Los Angeles organizer Jono Shaffer traveled with three janitors—Jesus Perez, Elba Molina, and Victorina Hernandez—as well as Hernandez’s two young children to seven different cities along the West Coast. At each of these cities, the janitors provided powerful, first-hand testimony about the Bradford campaign and the often hidden exploitation that occurred in the janitorial industry. More than this, their personal testimonies helped expose and explain the complex ways in which the contracting system and union-avoidance tactics that were common during neoliberal restructuring created this exploitation.

Victorina Hernandez, for example, was able provide testimony about the low wages, poor working conditions, and antiunion hostility that janitors were forced to endure under Bradford. Despite having worked for Bradford for two years, Hernandez earned only \$4.50 an hour and did not receive any sick leave, paid vacation time, or health insurance. These low wages and lack of benefits made Hernandez’s efforts to provide for her two young sons difficult. Wanting to provide more, Hernandez became active in the JfJ campaign. But she was soon fired for her union activism. On the JfJ tour with her two sons by her side, Hernandez raised awareness about

Bradford janitors' motives for participating in the Bradford campaign and the backlash that they received as a result.

Unlike Hernandez, Elba Molina was not a Bradford janitor. Nevertheless, she was able to shed light on the importance of the organizing drive against Bradford. Molina, who was a recent immigrant from El Salvador, was one of the hundreds of ISS janitors who risked their livelihoods and safety in the June 15, 1990 march through Century City. Molina's inspiration for participating in the JfJ campaign, like that of Hernandez, was to be able to provide for herself and her two children. The JfJ victory against ISS gave her with hope that she would be able to better provide for her family, but these hopes proved short-lived. Two months after the ISS victory, the managers of the building that Molina cleaned began contracting with Bradford. Molina lost her job as a result. Ultimately, then, Molina's situation offered proof that the ISS victory, while a huge achievement, was far from the end of the campaign. As long as nonunion contractors like Bradford existed, the Los Angeles janitors' achievements hung in the balance.

Jesus Perez, the third janitor on the tour, served as a foil to Hernandez and Molina. Perez was an ABM janitor who earned \$6.50 an hour and received benefits. In participating in this tour, Perez offered proof of an alternative to the low wages and lack of benefits typical in the industry. Perez also helped target specific pressure against ABM as the parent company of Bradford. As Perez's situation suggested, ABM was clearly capable of paying union wages and benefits to janitors. But this double-breasted contractor also supported union subversion and janitor exploitation through Bradford. By joining in the Bradford campaign, union janitors like Perez were not just helping nonunion janitors struggle for better wages and working conditions; they were also taking a stand against the practice of double-breasting, which contributed to these low wages and poor working conditions. While Perez had good wages and working conditions

at the moment, union subversion practices like double-breasting could easily put him in a position of vulnerability similar to Hernandez and Molina.⁴

While providing an opportunity for the Los Angeles janitors to share their stories and build support for the Bradford campaign, the national tour did more than this. It also provided an opportunity for SEIU leaders and janitors in each of the cities they visited to act in solidarity with the Los Angeles janitors and put pressure on ABM throughout the West Coast. At each of the stops along the tour, Shaffer and the Los Angeles janitors joined local SEIU leaders and janitors in public demonstrations and actions targeting ABM.

The tour's stop in San Francisco proved particularly successful in putting pressure on ABM. In this city, the site of ABM headquarters, Shaffer and the janitors joined SEIU Local 87 members in launching a protest directly targeting the president of ABM. A group of janitors and union supporters showed up outside of the president's luxury apartment complex, marching with banners and banging drums early in the morning. They then entered the apartment lobby and demanded to speak with the president. Contrary to the demonstrators' expectations, the lobby security guard did not throw them out. Instead, he used the apartment intercom system to call the ABM president and relay the janitors' demand. The ABM president agreed to come to the lobby, and he listened to the Los Angeles janitors tell their stories about the injustice they suffered because of his company.

A long-time union supporter, the ABM president admitted that he found the janitors' situation terrible and wished that he could do something about it. As JfJ organizer Jono Shaffer

⁴ "Justice Campaign at Bradford Heats Up" *Voice of Local 399* 14, no. 11 (November 1990), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 11; Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 10, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "Los Angeles: Hot on the Trail," *Building Service Update* 4, no. 4 (Fall/Winter 1990), Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 7, Folder 5, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

humorously recalls, the ABM president's receptivity to the campaign, more than any antiunion backlash, created a "stop-us-in-our-tracks" moment for the Los Angeles janitors. While expecting to be thrown out by lobby security, the janitors actually met with the ABM president and recorded him on videotape saying that he supported the JfJ cause.

This was a decisive moment in the Bradford campaign. Although Bradford had been launching a fierce antiunion attack against Justice for Janitors in Los Angeles, the company was ultimately beholden to its parent company ABM. When the ABM president professed his support for Bradford janitors, the Los Angeles JfJ group and International JfJ leaders' confidence in their pressure strategy against ABM grew. After the national tour, the Los Angeles JfJ group focused on continuing to publicly target Bradford as a double-breasted ABM company through demonstrations in Los Angeles. At the same time, International organizers focused on building a legal case against ABM for double-breasting. After a few months, Bradford's resistance fell apart. On February 25, 1991, Bradford voluntarily recognized Local 399 as the union representative of the approximately one thousand Bradford janitors in the city. Furthermore, the company signed the citywide janitor master agreement, which was simultaneously extended through 1995.

Through this master agreement, Bradford janitors won huge wage improvements (from \$4.25 an hour to \$6.80 an hour by 1995) and a host of benefit improvements including health insurance and paid holidays. This victory for Bradford janitors also entailed a victory for the rest of the unionized janitors in LA. In negotiating the master agreement extension, the JfJ group also won a twenty-four percent wage increase over the course of three years and health insurance benefit improvements for all of the other janitors already covered under the contract. At this

moment in early 1990, approximately 7,500 janitors in Los Angeles were unionized. This meant that in only three years the Los Angeles JfJ campaign had organized more than 5,500 janitors.⁵

While this organizing victory marked a major achievement for the Los Angeles JfJ campaign, the successful conclusion of the Bradford organizing drive did not mean that the JfJ group's job was done. Even after the Los Angeles organizers and janitors had organized the three major nonunion contractors in Los Angeles, there were still many smaller nonunion contractors to organize. Furthermore, janitors outside of downtown Los Angeles and Century were almost entirely unorganized.

The remaining nonunion contractors in Los Angeles were local Southern California-based cleaning companies. Because these companies did not have national operations, they were not vulnerable to a national pressure campaign like Century Cleaning, ISS, and Bradford had been. In order to continue making progress toward a completely union janitorial industry in Los Angeles, then, the Los Angeles JfJ group had to build entirely local-focused organizing campaigns against these contractors.⁶ While hardly an easy task, the Los Angeles JfJ organizers and janitors were in a strong position. They had a strong base of rank-and-file and community support and had previously proven their organizing capability without assistance from the International. Confident in the continued success of the Los Angeles campaign, International JfJ leaders shifted their focus to a new major goal after bolstering the success of the Los Angeles campaign: expanding successful Justice for Janitors organizing elsewhere.

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⁵ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, December 2, 2011; Tom Balanoff files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 107, Folder 15, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "A Citywide Celebration: Bradford Comes to Terms," *Building Service Update* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1991), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

⁶ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, December 2, 2011.

Reflecting the adaptive nature of the campaign, International JfJ leaders used much different criteria when choosing sites for an expansion of Justice for Janitors campaign activism in 1990 after the success of the Los Angeles campaign than they did in 1986 following the success of the Denver campaign. As suggested in previous chapters, in 1986 JfJ leaders focused on choosing sites where they could build JfJ campaigns out of brand new locals and stay far away from the dinosaur building service locals. The JfJ leaders did not want to struggle through trying to reform existing locals, and they especially did not want to face hostility from old guard leaders as they sought to develop nascent JfJ campaigns. Following the Los Angeles victories in 1990 and 1991, however, JfJ leaders' perspectives had changed. Both of the L.A. JfJ group's recent victories demonstrated the value of having a strong rank-and-file foundation for the campaign. And the Bradford campaign specifically reflected a successful expansion the JfJ campaign that encroached upon the old guard building service leaders. Emboldened by the success of the Bradford struggle, JfJ leaders started focusing on developing Justice for Janitors campaigns in the Midwest and Northeast in the early 1990s.

In many ways similar to Los Angeles, several cities in the Midwest and Northeast already had some of the preparatory work for Justice for Janitors campaigns done by the time they caught the attention of JfJ leaders in the early 1990s. Like Los Angeles, these cities had caught the attention of SEIU building service division staff working on the Rebuilding Campaign that had served as one of many early influences on the JfJ campaign. While once strong centers of union strength in the janitorial industry, SEIU locals in cities like Cleveland, Philadelphia, and Detroit struggled amidst a combination of internal conflict and inefficiency and neoliberal industry restructuring in the 1980s. With some assistance from SEIU building service staff in 1986 and 1987, however, locals in these cities made some progress in conducting industry

research and taking a stand against deunionization and concession bargaining in their jurisdictions. Some of the locals even launched their own organizing drives in the mid to late 1980s, taking inspiration from the Rebuilding Campaign and, more specifically, the Denver Justice for Janitors campaign. Local 47, for example, launched an organizing campaign around the slogan “Cleveland’s Coming Back” in 1986 and Philadelphia Local 36 started an organizing campaign under the banner of “Justice for Janitors” in 1987.⁷

While achieving some success, these local campaigns remained outside of the public spotlight—and the core interest of JfJ leaders—throughout the late 1980s. Following the Bradford victory, however, JfJ leaders decided to focus on developing a “suburban project” in the Northeast and Midwest. This suburban project built from the organizing and activism foundation that locals like Cleveland Local 47 and Philadelphia Local 36 had already created. It also involved brand new JfJ campaigns in nearby locals like Connecticut Local 531, Syracuse Local 200B, and Milwaukee Local 150. Working in coordination with JfJ leaders, these locals started organizing the thousands of janitors in the Midwest and Northeast who worked in the rapidly expanding suburban markets surrounding the SEIU’s last bastions of union janitorial strength in New York, Chicago, and Boston. In sharp contrast to the downtown janitors who benefited from the old guards’ conservative business unionism, these suburban janitors had been left vulnerable to the exploitative system of contracting and the downward spiral of wages and working conditions that developed in the suburban markets amidst neoliberal restructuring.⁸

⁷ Andy Stern files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 102, Folder 5, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Hank Albarelli files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 102, Folder 12, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; “Philly’s militance moves management,” *Building Service Update* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1987), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

⁸ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, December 2, 2011; “Around the Locals,” *Building Service Update* 4, no. 4 (Fall/Winter 1990), Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 7, Folder 5, UCLA Library Special

This suburban project, as the name suggests, did not directly interfere with old guard leaders' core downtown spheres of influence in New York, Chicago, and Boston. The project did, however, represent a further encroachment on these leaders' jurisdictions. In many ways, this suburban project brought national attention to the issues inherent in the old guard leaders' conservative, reciprocal form of business unionism. By bringing attention to the thousands of exploited janitors in the suburban markets surrounding downtown New York, Chicago, and Boston, this project exposed the fact that the old guard leaders' strategy of only keeping wages, benefits, and working conditions strong for existing downtown members left other janitors without the resources to resist exploitation at the hands of nonunion contractors.

More than just calling attention to this issue, the suburban project also represented an important step toward ameliorating this issue. Rather than steering clear of these old guard leaders for fear of hostility and backlash, JfJ leaders started prioritizing the expansion and development of a strong national Justice for Janitors campaign over concerns for internal union politics. They moved past assisting janitors in situations that they perceived as ideal—in other words, situations that seemed most likely to succeed and would not ruffle the feathers of the old guard. With this, Justice for Janitors shifted away from being an experiment that was only tested out in areas that existing SEIU leaders did not care about. And in the process, the campaign took center stage within the SEIU.

By this point, International JfJ leaders and local JfJ groups had proven that Justice for Janitors was a strategic alternative to the old guards' conservative form of unionism. Going forward, however, these JfJ leaders and supporters developed Justice for Janitors as more than a

Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Tom Balanoff files, SEIU Executive Office; John Sweeney Records, Box 107, Folder 15, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

strategic alternative. They developed Justice for Janitors as the crucial, necessary priority for the entire SEIU building service division.

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While pursuing the suburban JfJ project and pushing up against the old guards' jurisdiction, International JfJ leaders did not lose sight of the aspects of the Justice for Janitors campaign that had allowed them to reach this point of strength and expansion. Thus, while expanding the campaign into the Midwest and Northeast, International JfJ leaders also partnered with locals with existing JfJ campaigns to build local strength and organizing drives inspired by the Los Angeles campaign. The two existing campaigns that the International worked with extensively in 1991 and 1992 were the Washington D.C. and the Bay Area JfJ campaigns.

In Washington D.C., International JfJ leaders worked with local organizers to help build rank-and-file and local community support for Local 525's existing Justice for Janitors campaign. As illustrated in Chapter 3, this D.C. campaign had a history of bold national and transnational actions, but JfJ organizers in D.C. struggled to maintain local support for the campaign. International JfJ organizers were concerned with a lack of local support early in the development of the D.C. campaign. The struggles of the D.C. campaign in the late 1980s, particularly in contrast to the success of the Los Angeles campaign, confirmed that a lack of rank-and-file and community participation in the campaign was a critical problem that needed to be addressed.

To address this problem and build internal strength and stability for the D.C. JfJ campaign, International JfJ leaders encouraged and helped oversee the merger of Local 525 into

Local 82 in 1991.⁹ This merger was not a quick or easy process. Furthermore, in some ways it exacerbated the ethno-racial tensions that made organizing in Washington D.C. especially difficult. While Local 82 historically had a very strong African American membership base and leadership, the newly organized Local 525 was comprised primarily of Latinx janitors. The merger clearly provided an opportunity for black and Latinx workers, who often perceived each other as competitors in the workplace, to join forces. At the same time, though, the merger did not automatically solve the underlying tensions between these two groups of workers. As Local 82 President Mary Martin noted, many of these workers denied the fact that divisions and tensions existed between black and Latinx workers. And Local 82 leaders and staff were so busy dealing with the actual merger that they did not take the time to directly address and work through these underlying tensions with Local 82 membership at the time of the merger in 1991.¹⁰

Although not creating a quick fix to racial tensions between D.C. workers, the merger did, however, give the D.C. Justice for Janitors campaign more direct access to an existing base of union supporters in the district.¹¹ Furthermore, in the wake of the merger, JfJ organizers in Washington D.C. did make a conscious effort to take some steps toward addressing divisions and hostility between black and Latinx janitors. With the support of International JfJ leaders, for example, local JfJ organizers in Washington D.C. recruited both African American and Latinx organizers, some directly from the rank and file, for the campaign in the early 1990s.¹² These

⁹ Local 82 was the original SEIU local in Washington D.C. JfJ leaders had initially avoided this local in launching the D.C. JfJ campaign in 1987 in order to avoid the difficulty of having to negotiate with existing local leaders and work through existing conflicts and inefficiencies within the local.

¹⁰ Julia Teresa Quiroz, *Together in Our Differences: How Newcomers and Established Residents are Rebuilding American Communities* (Washington, D.C.: National Immigration Forum, 1995).

¹¹ Local 82 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 9, Folder 4, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University;

¹² JfJ organizers recruited organizers Jaime Contreras and Dania Herring from the rank and file. They also recruited Valarie Long who had been working on the JfJ campaign in Atlanta. Long, in turn, recruited Maria Naranjo who had previously been working for the AFL-CIO's Organizing Institute (OI). Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University.

new organizers helped build important bridges between the JfJ campaign and both the African American and Latinx communities in Washington D.C. In this way, they helped build both a strong base of worker and community support for the campaign and create a foundation for a greater sense of mutuality and solidarity between African American and Latinx janitors.

In contrast to the D.C. Justice for Janitors campaign, the JfJ campaign in the Bay Area already had a strong base of local support in the early 1990s. The roots of this Bay Area campaign, much like those of many local JfJ campaigns, stretched back to the SEIU's Rebuilding Campaign and even earlier. As noted in Chapter 1, San Jose Local 77 had been the site of grassroots undocumented worker organizing efforts and a janitor strike against contract concessions in the early to mid-1980s. While these efforts proved inspirational to the Rebuilding Campaign and later Justice for Janitors campaign, the strike exacerbated tensions between some of the more radical Local 77 members and Local 77's then-President Charles Perkel. These tensions ultimately led International SEIU leaders to put Local 77 into trusteeship and to transfer organizer Mike Garcia, who had helped pioneer the undocumented worker outreach efforts, to San Diego Local 102. In the midst of the trusteeship, Local 77 as well as nearby Local 18 caught the attention of International building service division leaders. While also exploring Los Angeles and San Diego as potential sites for JfJ expansion in 1986 and early 1987 as discussed in Chapter 4, building service organizing director Stephen Lerner oversaw the exploration of Local 18 and Local 77 as potential sites for an expansion of the Justice for Janitors campaign. He transferred two of the Denver JfJ organizers, Sue Sachen and Roy Hong, to the Bay Area and set them to work on laying the groundwork for a janitor organizing drive in the area.

In May of 1987, the Bay Area appeared as a strong contender for a Justice for Janitors campaign. Sachen and Hong set in motion plans to merge Local 18 and Local 77 into a new

local and launch a JfJ organizing drive from this new local. Tensions between Local 18 and Local 77 leaders and members, however, made this merger process slow and cumbersome. In the meantime, International JfJ leaders focused their attention instead on Washington D.C. and Atlanta for JfJ expansions in the summer of 1987. In early 1989, however, Local 18 and Local 77 finally merged, resulting in Local 1877. At this point in the trajectory of the national campaign, JfJ leaders were starting to realize the importance of strong bases of rank-and-file and community support for the campaign and the error of relying too much on International support. With this awareness, International JfJ leaders helped set Local 1877's new Justice for Janitors organizing campaign up for success: they oversaw the transfer of Mike Garcia back to the Bay Area to be Local 1877's new president.¹³

Prior to leaving Local 77 in 1985, Mike Garcia had developed a loyal base of rank-and-file support through his welcoming attitude toward undocumented workers and his efforts to organize janitors to rebuild union strength rather than give in to concession bargaining. He also had developed extensive community connections, particularly to the local Latinx community in San Jose. As he noted in a report to Local 77 trustees in 1985, Garcia developed connections with local churches, community organizations, politicians, and other labor movement organizations during the early 1980s. He helped make sure that the local community perceived the concerns of Local 77 workers as a social cause and supported their organizing actions. Even though the early organizing efforts that Garcia helped launch in Local 77 in the early 1980s were not very fruitful, his work in building a strong base of worker and community support was quite successful.

¹³ Local 77 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 16, Folder 21-2, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Because of this, Garcia already had a host of community contacts and a positive reputation amongst local union members when he returned to the San Jose area in 1989 to work with the newly merged Local 1877. Furthermore, Garcia had been honing his skills in building rank-and-file and community support for Justice for Janitors organizing in both San Diego and Denver between 1986 and 1988. With the benefit of this previous experience, Garcia was able to quickly integrate into Local 1877 and help build a strong base of local support for the Bay Area Justice for Janitors campaign.¹⁴

While helping provide the Bay Area JfJ campaign with a strong base of local support through Mike Garcia, International JfJ leaders knew from the recent JfJ campaign in Los Angeles that this was not the only key element of a successful Justice for Janitors campaign. Following the lessons learned from the Los Angeles successes, JfJ leaders also focused on providing International assistance to the budding Bay Area JfJ campaign. In 1991, they provided important International support for Local 1877's first major organizing drive. In doing so, JfJ leaders helped Local 1877 build a powerful organizing drive that combined the activism and determination of rank-and-file janitors and community supporters in the Bay Area with the resources and strength of the International union.

The Bay Area JfJ group launched this first major organizing drive in January of 1991. The target of the drive was the technology company Apple. In initial industry research and organizing outreach, the newly developed Bay Area JfJ group discovered that the janitors who cleaned the Apple headquarters were being exploited. These janitors' direct employer, Shine Maintenance, had been violating federal wage and hour standards, failing to comply with the

¹⁴ Local 77 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 16, Folder 21, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Nancy Cleeland, "Leader of the Revolutionary Pack: Mike Garcia And His Janitors' Union Are Breathing New Life Into the U.S. Labor Movement" *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 2000.

California Division of Occupational Safety and Health, and sexually harassing janitors. While this information could have led the Bay Area JfJ group to target Shine Maintenance in their organizing drive, they focused the drive on Apple.¹⁵

This decision to target Apple rather than Shine rested on the market-based logic of the core JfJ organizing strategy. By focusing on Apple, the JfJ group put pressure on the individuals who (1) had the economic resources to ensure that janitors were provided fair wages and working conditions and (2) had the power to ensure that any janitor organizing progress would not be immediately eroded. If the Bay Area JfJ group only targeted Shine and won union representation, Apple could easily replace Shine and contract with a new cleaning company. If Apple agreed to unionization, however, the company could not immediately replace a recently unionized cleaning contractor with a nonunion one.

Beyond this, though, the Bay Area JfJ group chose to target Apple in this first organizing drive because of Apple's reputation as a cutting-edge technology company that was a force for good within society. Created in 1976, Apple quickly became a major producer of personal computers. As the company grew, Apple cofounder Steve Jobs and Apple CEO John Sculley welcomed the public spotlight.¹⁶ They touted the company as an industry leader that brought visionary products to schools and to the public, thereby driving innovation and education forward. They also emphasized Apple's commitment to promoting workplace diversity, offering good employee benefits, and fostering innovative employee-management relations. As they promoted Apple as a progressive and imaginative company, Apple gained a loyal base of customers and even fans.

¹⁵ Apple files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 5, Folder 3, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

¹⁶ Brenton R. Schlender, "Celebrity Chief: Shedding His Shyness, John Sculley Promotes Apple—and Himself," *Wall Street Journal* August 18, 1988.

In many ways, Apple seemed to be the ideal product of a combination of technical innovation and free enterprise. The company was created by two college dropouts and quickly became a publicly celebrated industry leader with massive profitability. The company, in other words, suggested that idealized notions of the American Dream were alive and well in the late twentieth century. The Bay Area JfJ group's discoveries about the wages and working conditions of the janitors who cleaned Apple headquarters, however, pointed to a darker underside of this American Dream and, in particular, of the type of business practices that characterized neoliberalism.

The JfJ group's discoveries highlighted the fact that the publicized, celebrated economic success of the few often came at the expense of others. This was the dark underside of the neoliberal era. The elite few became rich while taking advantage of business practices that exploited poor workers—typically female workers, workers of color, and non-citizen workers—outside of the public eye. In the specific case that the Bay Area JfJ group's research documented, Apple maximized its profitability by contracting with a cleaning company that exploited janitors. While Apple executives made millions, the predominantly Latinx janitors who cleaned their offices received extremely low, even illegally low wages, faced unsafe working conditions, and were subject to sexual harassment. This situation was a perfect example of the exploitative workings of neoliberal business practices and a perfect reflection of the growing polarization of society amidst neoliberal restructuring. This specific evidence of Apple profiting at the expense of poor workers also called Apple's other business practices into question, specifically the manufacturing of Apple products abroad. If the janitors who cleaned Apple buildings were paid poverty wages and forced to endure unsafe and hostile working conditions, did the workers who manufactured Apple products fare any better?

In targeting Apple, the Bay Area JfJ group was able to use Apple's progressive reputation as a pressure point. In a creative reference to the company's name, the JfJ group focused on exposing the "rotten core" beneath the company's positive public image.¹⁷ At one level, this JfJ strategy of exposing the hidden injustice of Apple's cleaning contractor and the hypocrisy of its public image can be seen as strategic means to helping Apple janitors gain union representation, better wages, and better working conditions. According to the logic of this strategy, Apple would have to concede to using a union cleaning contractor in order to protect the company's positive public image.

At a deeper level, though, this JfJ strategy demonstrates the ways in which the Justice for Janitors campaign seemed to do more than just provide a strategic means to ameliorate the immediate exploitation of a specific group of janitors. In exposing and specifically targeting the inequalities embedded within neoliberal capitalism, Justice for Janitors fostered public, and specifically working class consciousness, around a demand for justice. In a way, then, the campaign provided a foundation for a larger, more radical struggle, not just against some of obvious injustices of neoliberal restructuring in the janitorial industry, but against the system of neoliberal capitalism itself.

To put the strategy of exposing the hypocrisy of Apple's reputation to work, the Bay Area JfJ group orchestrated a series of public actions in early 1991. In one of the first major actions in January, the Bay Area JfJ group organized a large protest at Apple's computer trade show, MacWorld Exposition, which was held in San Francisco. Janitors marched with signs in front of the exposition venue and then unrolled a large union banner while Apple CEO John Sculley gave a speech. As the local media reported, this action was successful in generating

¹⁷ Apple files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 5, Folder 3, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

public support for the organizing campaign—particularly the support of “hackers, former hippies and computer nerds who make up Apple's loyal following.”¹⁸ Although Apple’s most devoted followers did not necessarily have much in common with Latinx janitors who cleaned Apple headquarters, these Apple fans were swayed by the JfJ campaign’s message and supported fair treatment for Apple janitors.

Shortly after targeting the MacWorld Expo, the Bay Area JfJ group coordinated a clever disruption of Apple’s annual shareholders meeting held at the company headquarters in Cupertino. A group of about forty janitors showed up at the meeting carrying banners reading “Shiny Apple With a Rotten Core.” In the prior weeks, these janitors, with financial assistance from the union, had purchased shares of Apple stock. As shareholders, they were entitled to attend the meeting and ask Apple CEO John Sculley questions. Apple staff tried to steer the focus of the meeting away from the janitors, but one janitor named Juan Ruelas was reluctantly afforded the opportunity to ask a question. Ruelas, who regularly cleaned the very room where the shareholders meeting was being held, asked Sculley a question in Spanish. A Local 1877 organizer translated his question into English: “Why is Apple using a cleaning contractor that treats us so badly?” Sculley dismissively replied that the janitors’ issues had “nothing to do with Apple.”¹⁹ Sculley’s comment notwithstanding, this demonstration publicized the fact that Ruelas’s situation and that of his fellow janitors was a result of Apple’s actions. Much like the MacWorld demonstration, this action publicly associated Apple with janitor injustice and called the tech-company’s progressive reputation into question.

¹⁸ Michelle Levander, “Janitors Speak Up: Custodians Target Non-Union Firms,” *San Jose Mercury News*, January 12, 1991.

¹⁹ “Silicon Valley: A Dispute Over Double Standards,” *Building Service Update* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1991), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Michelle Levander and Ron Wolf, “Janitors Picket Apple: Protest Disrupts Annual Meeting,” *San Jose Mercury News*, January 31, 1991.

While making progress in building public pressure against Apple, the Bay Area JfJ group suffered what could easily have been a fatal blow to the campaign. In May of 1991, Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) audited Shine Maintenance. The audit revealed that more than one hundred of Shine's one hundred and seventy employees did not have proper immigration documents. Shine gave these janitors the ultimatum of producing valid documents or being fired. Nearly overnight, a majority of Shine janitors lost their jobs.

Although an undeniable blow to janitor morale, the audit did not stop the janitors' campaign against Apple. Instead, this audit ultimately provided fuel for their public pressure strategy. The Bay Area JfJ group publicized the audit as antiunion backlash that attempted to keep the janitors from gaining the fair wages and safe working conditions that they deserved. Although the INS would not release the source of the tip that prompted the audit, JfJ organizers pointed to the significance of the timing of the audit in the midst of the organizing drive targeting Apple. Furthermore, they pointed out a recent pattern in INS raids in the Bay Area. In the previous six months, the INS had raided three other janitorial companies in Santa Clara County. All three were union. As JfJ organizers asserted, this was much more than a mere coincidence.²⁰

Instead, this pattern of raids was a reflection of companies taking advantage of immigration policy in order to maintain poor wages and unsafe working conditions in the building service industry. Under this business practice, poor immigrant workers lost even the limited economic security that they had while the rich, predominantly white business elite profited. Much like Apple's effort to avoid taking responsibility for the wages and working conditions of the janitors who cleaned the Apple buildings, this practice of instigating INS raids on union or unionizing contractors was part of the exploitative neoliberal system. Calling

²⁰ Linda Goldston, "INS Audit of Janitorial Firm Protested," *San Jose Mercury News*, May 6, 1991; Carole Rafferty, "It's a Dirty Business," *San Jose Mercury News West Magazine*, September 12, 1993.

attention to this exploitative practice as yet another injustice against janitors, the JfJ group added weight to their critique of the disingenuousness of Apple's progressive reputation. And more than this, they brought additional public attention to the often hidden and complex but undeniably powerful and pervasive business practices that allowed companies to protect their profitability at the expense of poor immigrant workers.

While broadly publicizing the injustice of the INS raid against Apple janitors, the Bay Area JfJ group also specifically focused in the spring and summer of 1991 on organizing a strong coalition of local allies who could help the janitors achieve justice. The Bay Area JfJ group reached out to local churches and community organizations. The group explained how current immigration law weakened the janitors' ability to win labor protections on their own and asked local activists to step in and provide the critical support that the janitors needed. By June of 1991, twenty-five religious, labor, Latinx, women's, and community organizations had partnered with Local 1877 in forming the "Cleaning Up Silicon Valley" coalition.

Members of this coalition organized a range of JfJ events from demonstrations outside of Apple headquarters to a public hearing on high tech employers' exploitation of immigrant janitors. At this public hearing, a group of about fifteen janitors offered testimony of the struggles they faced to an audience of three hundred people that included city council members, county supervisors, local mayors, and even a member of Congress.²¹ Through these events, the Cleaning Up Silicon Valley coalition began shifting the balance of power between the janitors and Apple. The janitors still lacked protections and power under current U.S. immigration and labor law. But they now had the attention and support of an increasing large group of local individuals and organizations with immense collective power.

²¹ Linda Goldston, "INS Audit of Janitorial Firm Protested," *San Jose Mercury News*, May 6, 1991; "Voices of the Working Poor: Tales from Silicon Valley," *Building Service Update* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1991), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

As the Bay Area JfJ group focused on building local support for the campaign, International JfJ leaders helped coordinate national and international support for the Apple campaign. Building on connections and a network of support developed in the Los Angeles campaign, JfJ leaders coordinated massive displays of labor solidarity for the Bay Area janitors in the fall of 1991. On August 19, 1991, for example, JfJ leaders organized a large march and rally in coordination with the FIET's World Congress. Over a thousand people including delegates from hundreds of locals from around the world participated in the march and listened to a powerful group of labor and political leaders including FIET General Secretary Philip Jennings, AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland, and San Francisco Mayor Art Agnos speak at the rally.²²

This march and rally were a powerful display of the combined local and global strength of the Bay Area Justice for Janitors campaign. They highlight the fact that this local campaign was evolving to closely resemble the JfJ campaign in Los Angeles. Much like in Los Angeles, strong local campaign leaders in Local 1877 first focused on cultivating a strong base of rank-and-file and community support for the JfJ campaign. Having built this base of support, the Bay Area JfJ group mounted a strong campaign against Apple that was able to endure even in the midst of intense antiunion backlash. The Bay Area JfJ group also welcomed support and assistance from the International. They embraced the opportunity to create national and even global pressure against Apple, much as the Los Angeles JfJ group had done against ISS. In a way, then, the development of a national and international component to the Bay Area Apple campaign highlights the fact that JfJ leaders recognized the successful elements of the Los Angeles JfJ campaign and modeled subsequent campaigns around these elements.

²² "A Rally for Valley Janitors: International Solidarity," *Building Service Update* 5, no. 3 (Fall 1991), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

More than this, though, this march and rally highlight the way in which the extremely public success of the ISS victory helped pave the way for a much larger, more powerful international Justice for Janitors campaign. As noted in previous chapters, International SEIU leaders had helped coordinate international support and solidarity for early Justice for Janitors actions, such as the Boycott John Portman event centered in Atlanta and the World Bank protest centered in Washington D.C. This international support and solidarity, however, was cultivated on the basis of the SEIU leaders' existing relationships with international labor leaders and unions and was often small scale.

The very public JfJ victory against ISS ushered in a new phase in the development of the campaign. In the wake of this victory, Justice for Janitors had no trouble in drawing a massive display of local, national, and international labor and political power. The size of the march and rally and the participation of powerful political and labor leaders suggests that JfJ was now seen not only as a worthy cause but also a worthy cause grounded in a strategy that had proven successful. The public success of the ISS victory, in other words, seemed to foster labor and political interest and confidence in the campaign. This interest and confidence translated into a massive coalition of JfJ supporters throughout the globe.

While still very much a local-focused labor campaign aimed at improving the economic security of select groups of janitors within the United States, the Justice for Janitors campaign was evolving as an increasingly powerful global struggle. In this global struggle, U.S. janitors had a massive coalition of allies to help them achieve union recognition and fair wages and working conditions. More than this, though, the janitors had newfound opportunities and resources to expose and struggle against the larger system of neoliberal capitalism that janitor exploitation was embedded within.

Subsequent events in the Apple campaign highlight the newfound global support that the Justice for Janitors campaign enjoyed in the wake of the ISS victory. In October of 1991, FIET members meeting in Geneva, Switzerland pledged to put pressure on Apple's international operations, and Canadian janitors in SEIU Local 204 leafleted the MacWorld exposition being held in Toronto. Additionally, SEIU locals in seventeen cities throughout the U.S. participated in a day of mass leafleting against Apple while the Bay Area JfJ group held a rally outside of Apple headquarters. This coordinated day of action specifically targeted Apple's role in educating youth. The janitors and their supporters raised an issue with the fact that school districts throughout the United States bought Apple computers. They asserted that Apple disadvantaged janitors' children by paying poverty level wages. From this, they reasoned that school districts, as public entities with an interest in the well-being and success of America's children, should not patronize Apple.²³

These events paved the way for a dramatic JfJ event and call for action in November 1991. In this month, the Bay Area JfJ group worked with International JfJ organizers to simultaneously launch a national boycott and hunger strike against Apple. International JfJ organizers bought a full-page *New York Times* advertisement titled "A Message from the Big Apple to the Bad Apple" calling for a boycott of Apple products. The ad contained a section that readers could cut out and mail to Apple CEO John Sculley, pledging: "I'm going to do my best to avoid buying Apple products until you do the right thing and employ a union contractor to clean your headquarters and plant." On the same day that this ad ran in the *New York Times*, the Bay Area JfJ group organized a large rally to kick off the start of the hunger strike. A group of

²³ "Ads, Hunger Strikes, and a Big MacWorld Attack" and "The World Spreads Around the World," *Building Service Update* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1991), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Kathleen Sullivan, "Latina Janitors Press Apple: Use of non service said to hurt schoolchildren," *San Francisco Examiner*, October 31, 1991.

two hundred people—including UFW co-founder Dolores Huerta—rallied outside of Apple headquarters to show their support for Local 1877 President Mike Garcia and the six janitors who were participating in the hunger strike.²⁴ Over the course of the weeklong hunger strike, dozens of supporters fasted for one day in solidarity with the janitors. At the direct request of one of the Bay Area organizers, Cesar Chavez even came to demonstrate his solidarity and speak in support of the janitors’ struggle against Apple.²⁵

At a rally in a church near Apple headquarters, Chavez emphasized the connection between the United Farm Workers movement and the Justice for Janitors campaign. He told listeners that janitors and farmworkers were part of “the same cause.” He also urged listeners to boycott Apple and make sure that their children’s schools did the same.²⁶ This boycott—like the famous UFW grape boycotts—provided an opportunity for consumers throughout the U.S. and even the world to help put an end to the exploitation of a group of predominantly Latinx workers.

As Mike Garcia recalls, the combination of the hunger strike, boycott, and UFW founders’ very public intervention finally broke Apple’s resolve. In December, Apple awarded a new contract to Shine Building Maintenance. Initially, this action appeared to represent a major failure for the campaign because the Bay Area JfJ group had been pushing Apple to switch to a union contractor. This action, however, ultimately set the stage for an even better turn of events for the janitors: the unionization of Shine.

The new contract that Apple signed with Shine included a financial allowance for a wage increase and for employer-covered family health insurance for the janitors who cleaned Apple headquarters. This signaled to Local 1877 that Apple was feeling pressure from the JfJ

²⁴ Carole Rafferty, “It’s a Dirty Business,” *San Jose Mercury News West Magazine*, September 12, 1993.

²⁵ Lisa Hoyos Tweten discusses meeting Cesar Chavez and asking him to participate in the Local 1877 hunger strike against Apple in “The Flame of Inspiration: A labor organizer says Cesar Chavez had stature because he was a liberator of exploited people,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 1993.

²⁶ Brandon Bailey, “Cesar Chavez Calls for an Apple Boycott,” *San Jose Mercury News*, November 18, 1991.

campaign and was interested in resolving tensions with the union. This signal was confirmed in early 1992 when Apple CEO John Sculley publicly admitted the company's moral responsibility to ensuring that the janitors cleaning Apple buildings received fair wages and treatment. With Apple supporting janitors and providing a fair contract to Shine, Local 1877 entered into negotiations with Shine to resolve legal disputes and negotiate a union agreement. In February 1992, Shine formally recognized Local 1877 as the representative for all of its employees.²⁷

The Apple campaign thus proved to be a huge victory for Shine janitors. After facing antiunion hostility and backlash for more than a year, these janitors won union representation along with better wages and working conditions. Their victory, in turn, helped inspire and motivate other Bay Area janitors to join the JfJ campaign and take on new organizing struggles.²⁸ The Apple campaign, however, was a significant victory beyond the benefits it provided to Shine janitors or even the inspiration that it provided to other Bay Area janitors. The Apple campaign was an important success for the national Justice for Janitors campaign. While Los Angeles ISS victory provided a critical boost of momentum and confidence to the national campaign in 1990, the Apple campaign demonstrated that the strategic lessons learned from Los Angeles could be effectively applied elsewhere.

As noted previously, the Apple campaign closely paralleled the Los Angeles ISS campaign. Like the L.A. JfJ group, the Bay Area group made janitor participation a central element of organizing actions and empowered janitors to take ownership of the campaign. With janitors and organizers working as partners, the Bay Area JfJ group launched a public pressure

²⁷ Carole Rafferty, "It's a Dirty Business," *San Jose Mercury News West Magazine*, September 12, 1993; "Shining Glory," *Building Service Update* 6, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 1992), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

²⁸ For a detailed, ethnographic study of subsequent Silicon Valley janitor organizing efforts that offers important insight into the successes but also struggles of the Bay Area JfJ campaign in the midst of neoliberal restructuring see Christian Zolniski, "The Subcontracting of Mexican Janitors in the High-Tech Industry," in *Janitors, Street Vendors, and Activists: The Lives of Mexican Immigrants in Silicon Valley* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006): 46-72.

campaign against a specific target that exemplified the unjust polarization of wealth and power in the janitorial industry—and in the economy as a whole. As part of this public pressure campaign, the Bay Area JfJ group worked with local community organizations and with International JfJ leaders and staff to build a network of support for the janitors. This network of support helped janitors defy the odds in gaining union representation in a neoliberal environment. Essentially, an organizing strategy rooted in exposing the injustice of neoliberalism and cultivating local and global support for a targeted organizing drive proved successful in helping Shine janitors win union representation in a David and Goliath-like battle in the Bay Area, much like this organizing strategy had proven successful in helping ISS janitors organize against the odds in Los Angeles. The Apple campaign thus provided another important boost of confidence and momentum to the Justice for Janitors campaign as a whole. This campaign demonstrated that the organizing success of Los Angeles could in fact be reproduced in other cities.

Although the Apple campaign was the biggest and most public JfJ success in the early 1990s, JfJ groups in other cities also won confidence and momentum-boosting victories during this period. Several of the recently launched JfJ campaigns in the Midwest and Northeast, for example, started making headway in organizing drives. The JfJ group focused on organizing in the suburbs of northern New Jersey, for example, won several injunctions against the major nonunion cleaning contractor in the region and convinced six building owners to stop contracting with this contractor by 1992. Around the same time, the JfJ group working on organizing in the suburbs of Detroit negotiated an agreement that brought union recognition to nine hundred janitors working for a total of four different cleaning contractors. Although making slower progress, the JfJ group in Connecticut also experienced organizing success in 1992. In April

1992, for example, the Connecticut JfJ group helped win union recognition for about a hundred ISS janitors.²⁹

In combination with the Bay Area JfJ victory, these victories provided additional confidence-boosting momentum to the campaign. They suggested that JfJ groups in a diverse selection of locals throughout the United States were capable of following in the footsteps of Los Angeles' success. Like the Los Angeles JfJ group, they made small but nonetheless significant progress in challenging the effects of neoliberal restructuring and union decline in the janitorial industry. Even as neoliberal restructuring continued and building owners and managers continued to seek to maximize their profits at the expense of poor janitors, the JfJ groups mounted strong local campaigns bolstered with International assistance. These campaigns ultimately seemed capable of taking wages and working conditions out of competition across geographic markets.

Additionally, though, they seemed capable of much more: as these campaigns targeted powerful companies and exposed the deep roots of injustice within neoliberal restructuring, they seemed capable of and even oriented toward fostering widespread worker consciousness. Rather than just helping janitors win better wages and working conditions, these campaigns seemed to be on track to unite a diverse coalition of workers and community allies in a broad struggle against the injustice of neoliberal capitalism. As I will demonstrate in the following chapter, this potentially more transformative, even radical aspect of the campaign continued to evolve and develop in the early to mid-1990s.

²⁹ "Around the Locals," *Building Service Update* 6, no. 1 (Spring/Winter 1992), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "Around the Locals," *Building Service Update* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1992), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Chapter 7

Local Campaign Escalation and International Demands for Reform:

Justice for Janitors Evolves and Pushes Boundaries as an Intersectional Global Campaign (1992-1994)

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which the Justice for Janitors campaign—and the potential impact of this campaign on the larger labor movement—continued to evolve as the campaign grew in the early to mid-1990s. I focus on campaign developments in Los Angeles in the wake of the 1992 L.A. Uprising to highlight this evolution on a local level, and I also trace this JfJ evolution on a national scale through the development of national Justice for Janitors days in 1992 and 1993. I reveal that some JfJ groups seemed to move beyond their original focus on janitor organizing and toward broader concerns for worker empowerment and collective action targeting large patterns of worker exploitation and marginalization amidst neoliberal restructuring rather than just specific instances of injustice in the janitorial industry. In doing so, these JfJ groups became part of an intersectional struggle against socioeconomic injustice. I argue that this intersectional evolution of Justice for Janitors activism in the early 1990s points to the campaign's ability to foster working class consciousness and, more importantly, channel this consciousness into unified action.

I also explore Justice for Janitors-inspired reform within the SEIU during this period. I reveal that the public success of the campaign in the early 1990s led JfJ leaders and other SEIU leaders to begin implementing policy and program changes that were designed to promote organizing and foster both membership and leadership diversity within the entire union. While taking decisive steps to foster diversity and a concern for organizing within the SEIU, these

reform efforts fell short of transforming the SEIU in the spirit of the Justice for Janitors campaign. I highlight the fact that key JfJ leaders were not satisfied with the limitations of these initial reform efforts. These leaders were not content to have the Justice for Janitors campaign remain an anomaly within the SEIU in terms of its inclusivity, its rank-and-file orientation, and its focus on organizing. As such, they continued to push for reform that would transform the SEIU to better match the structure and focus of the JfJ campaign. In exploring this push for JfJ-inspired reform, I suggest that the JfJ campaign's organizing and contract victories became more than campaign achievements: they became a means for a core group of SEIU leaders to justify a fundamental reorientation of a mainstream labor union.

At the same time, I also demonstrate that JfJ leaders' push for reform exposed ambiguities and tensions within the Justice for Janitors campaign. I highlight how this push for reform led to conflict between SEIU leaders and ultimately led prominent JfJ leader Stephen Lerner to leave the campaign. The drive for reform exposed disagreements between these leaders over the true purpose of the JfJ campaign and exposed the limitations of the campaign's independence and security within the SEIU. Having made great strides in expanding the campaign and encroaching on old guard leaders' jurisdictions, JfJ leaders clearly pushed up against and ultimately found the boundaries of President Sweeney's support for the Justice for Janitors campaign during this period. When forced to choose between complete support for an expansion of the JfJ campaign and avoiding a major power struggle with old guard leaders, Sweeney ultimately chose the latter. I argue that this highlights the fact that JfJ leaders and participants continued to find themselves in an uphill battle not only against the effects of neoliberal restructuring but also against the legacies of insularity, corruption, and complacency in the mainstream U.S. labor movement.

After tracing this reform-driven conflict and its potentially disastrous implications for the future of the JfJ campaign, I explore the somewhat surprising subsequent development, adaptation, and evolution of the JfJ campaign in Lerner's absence. I focus on the Bay Area and Los Angeles JfJ leaders' decision to expand the JfJ campaign across industry lines to new groups of low-wage workers in 1993 and 1994. I assert that their decision to adapt and expand the campaign in this way follows from and fits with the evolution and increasing radical potential of the JfJ campaign discussed in the first part of the chapter. I also argue that this strategy of campaign expansion highlights the continued value of the experimental, adaptive nature of the Justice for Janitors campaign. Well-practiced in experimenting with new organizing strategies and tactics and adapting to changing resources and opportunities, JfJ leaders took the challenges of Lerner's absence and the geographic limitations that the old guard posed to campaign expansion in stride. Lastly, I argue that the adaptation and expansion of the campaign in Lerner's absence highlights the importance of a strong local base of support for the campaign. Strong local JfJ campaigns allowed Justice for Janitors to endure in the absence of one of its original leaders and to continue evolving as a broad workers' struggle that targeted patterns of injustice embedded within neoliberal restructuring and pushed against the boundaries (and historic failures) of narrow forms of business unionism within the U.S. labor movement.

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While the Bay Area JfJ campaign and newly created JfJ suburban project in the Northeast and Midwest won important organizing victories by following in the footsteps of the Los Angeles campaign in the early 1990s, the Los Angeles JfJ group remained at the cutting-edge of campaign success and development. After organizing Bradford in February of 1991, Los Angeles JfJ organizers started expanding their organizing efforts into the Westside of Los

Angeles County. At the same time, Los Angeles janitors displayed remarkable dedication and self-sufficiency in organizing their fellow workers and winning union representation with only minimal assistance from JfJ organizers.¹ While significant markers of JfJ development, this geographic expansion and growing self-sufficiency were far from the only major developments in the Los Angeles JfJ campaign in the early to mid-1990s. During this period, the Los Angeles JfJ group became involved in a large surge of labor and social movement activism within the city of Los Angeles. In the process, the Los Angeles JfJ campaign became deeply intertwined with and embedded in a communitywide struggle for justice for all of residents of Los Angeles—not just janitors.

After benefiting from the support and solidarity of a host of students, social movement activists, and union members in their fight against ISS in 1990, Los Angeles JfJ organizers and janitors embraced opportunities to repay their supporters in kind. In 1991 and 1992, for example, the JfJ organizers and janitors joined several anti-war demonstrations, provided support to a student-led struggle for Chicana studies at UCLA, and participated in and provided resources for the Orange County drywall workers' strike.² Through these efforts, the JfJ

¹ In 1991, for example, a group of activist JfJ janitors formed a rank-and-file "Mesa Directiva" (Board of Directors) for the Los Angeles campaign. This Mesa Directiva organized English-language classes at Local 399, created a new janitor newsletter to help disseminate JfJ information, and led trainings to develop organizing and representation skills amongst more janitors. Additionally, between 1991 and 1993, a group of Los Angeles janitors working for Diversified Maintenance Service (DMS) organized with only minimal assistance from JfJ organizers, who were focused on organizing janitors working for two different cleaning contractors at the time. "Concilios de Servicio de Edificios Acompletan su Primera Etapa de Proyectos," *Voice of Local 399* 15, no. 6 (November/December 1991), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 12, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "La Mesa Ejecutive del 399 Apoya la Organizacion de Trabajadores por el Departamento de Servicios de Edificios," *Voice of Local 399* 17, no. 1 (February/March 1993), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 12, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "Local 399's Victory Over DMS Brings 500 New Members to Union" *Voice of Local 399* 18, no. 1 (May 1994), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 12, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahi Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, 2 December 2011.

² Patt Morrison, "Protesters Hold Die-In, Say 'Have a Nice Day,'" *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1990; Carlos Mora, *Latinos in the West: The Student Movement and Academic Labor in Los Angeles* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2007); "Justice for Janitors Joins UCLA Rally," *Daily Bruin*, May 13, 1993; Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016; "By Supporting the Drywallers, 'Justice for Janitors' Repaid an

organizers and janitors helped solidify relationships based on mutual support with local labor, student, and social movement organizations. While building these relationships, the JfJ group also became a central, driving force within a broad struggle for an equitable Los Angeles that emerged in the wake of the Rodney King beating and L.A. Uprising in 1992.

The Rodney King beating was a tragic reminder for many of the Los Angeles janitors of the injustice that they had experienced in their own lives. The janitors who participated in the June 15, 1990 Century City march had personally experienced violence at the hands of Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD). The Los Angeles Police Commissioner investigated the June 15 Century City incident and concluded that LAPD officers had been “overzealous” in responding to the janitors’ march through Century City. The Rodney King beating and verdict, however, suggested to the janitors that the Police Commissioner’s investigation had not generated any real reform in the police department. The Rodney King beating and verdict, in other words, suggested that the Los Angeles criminal justice system would continue to protect the police over poor people of color.

The Los Angeles JfJ organizers and janitors lent their weight to the initial wave of protest after the Rodney King beating. They brought public attention to their lawsuit against LAPD for the Century City incident in June of 1990. They also participated in a public hearing organized by the Christopher Commission, which was created to investigate the structure and operation of the Los Angeles Police Department after the Rodney King beating.

After a jury failed to convict the LAPD officers who beat Rodney King, a second wave of protest—marked most prominently by several days of rioting—emerged. Rather than shying away from this wave of protest, Los Angeles JfJ organizers and janitors positioned themselves at

Old Debt,” *Carpenter* (November/December 1992), Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 13, Folder 2, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

the center of the conflict. The Los Angeles JfJ group organized the first march through the city after the Rodney King verdict was announced. They also organized a delegation of janitors to help clean up damage created during the rioting.³

After these initial actions in the wake of social unrest, the Los Angeles JfJ group spearheaded a broad-based effort to expose and address the roots of the Los Angeles Uprising. Most obviously, the uprising was rooted in frustrations with racial injustice and police brutality. The JfJ group, however, focused on exposing the economic underpinning of this frustration and social unrest in late April and early May of 1992. JfJ organizers and janitors emphasized economic polarization along lines of race as the cause of the unrest.

With this emphasis on the roots of the unrest, the Los Angeles JfJ group worked with a broad coalition of allies to demand greater economic justice for poor people of color in Los Angeles. The group joined a host of other labor and community organizations in attending and offering testimony at a California Industrial Welfare Commission hearing in May of 1992. Together, these groups urged the commission to raise California's minimum wage, which had stagnated at \$4.25 an hour for four years, in order to prevent future social unrest. Shortly thereafter, the Los Angeles JfJ group spearheaded a coalition-based protest movement against Rebuild L.A.

Rebuild L.A. was the product of a joint city-business response to the L.A. Uprising. After the uprising, Los Angeles mayor Tom Bradley enlisted the help of business executive Peter Ueberroth, who had organized the privately funded Los Angeles Olympic Games in 1984, in leading an "extra-governmental task force" to rebuild the city. Ueberroth accepted and created

³ Bob Baker, "Suit Filed Over Violent End to Janitors' Protest," *Los Angeles Times*, June 15, 1991; "Rising Up in the City," *Building Service Update* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1992), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016.

Rebuild L.A.⁴ Several major corporations—such as Toyota, General Motors, and Hughes Aircraft—provided millions of dollars in corporate goodwill to Rebuild L.A. to help finance job creation and job training programs designed to strengthen the city’s economy.

On the surface, Rebuild LA appeared to be a potentially positive economic force within Los Angeles. Los Angeles JfJ organizers and janitors, however, were quick to expose the hypocrisy and limitations of Rebuild L.A, much like the Bay Area JfJ group had exposed the hypocrisy of Apple’s positive public reputation. They called attention to the fact that the businesses funding Rebuild L.A. paid pittance wages to many of their own workers, including janitors. Furthermore, they called attention to the fact that the new jobs being created through Rebuild L.A. were minimum wage, dead-end jobs. In this way, Rebuild L.A. was actually just perpetuating and further solidifying the economic divide between the business elite and poor workers of color in the city.⁵ Rebuild L.A., in other words, fit within the larger national pattern of neoliberal economic restructuring. On a broad scale, this restructuring directed profits upward while hollowing out workers’ job opportunities and their social security protections. Far from ameliorating class-based frustrations and tensions within cities, this neoliberal restructuring only exacerbated them.

Building from their extensive experience in struggling against the effects of neoliberal restructuring in the janitorial industry, Los Angeles JfJ organizers and janitors organized and participated in several coalition-based actions against Rebuild L.A. In August of 1992, for example, janitors attended and spoke at a community forum in the largely Latinx Pico-Union neighborhood. This community forum, sponsored by the well-known immigrant rights

⁴ Frank Clifford and John Schwada, “Ueberroth Will Direct City Rebuilding Effort,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1992.

⁵ Henry Weinstein, “Janitors Lash Out at Rebuild L.A.” *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 1992; James Zellers, “Third World Wages Won’t Rebuild L.A.,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 28, 1993; Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016.

organizations El Rescate and CARECEN, gave Los Angeles' Latinx residents an opportunity to voice issues with Rebuild L.A. and discuss the patterns and structures of economic inequality that needed to be addressed in rebuilding efforts.⁶ While helping to expose issues with Rebuild L.A. and long-running patterns of racially-charged economic inequality in Los Angeles, the Los Angeles JfJ group also provided inspiration for a series of coordinated, national Justice for Janitors protest actions that exposed even larger patterns of intersectional race and class-based inequality.

During the SEIU Western Conference in June of 1992, a group of local and International JfJ leaders came up with an idea to organize a national day of action centered on the theme of unmasking the sources of urban poverty and particularly racialized urban poverty.⁷ The L.A. Uprising had recently highlighted issues with racialized urban poverty and social unrest in Los Angeles, but—as JfJ leaders knew—these were hardly issues unique to Los Angeles. In fact, only a year earlier, a wave of social unrest erupted in Washington D.C. after being sparked by an incident in which an African American Washington D.C. Metropolitan Police Officer shot a Salvadoran immigrant.⁸ As Los Angeles JfJ organizers and janitors discovered the power of organizing around systemic racial and economic inequality in Los Angeles, JfJ groups throughout the rest of the country decided to work together to do the same on a national level.

After a few months of planning, thousands of janitors from more than a dozen local JfJ groups participated in a national Justice for Janitors day of action on October 8, 1992. This national JfJ day bore a lot of similarity to the very first nationally coordinated JfJ action, the

⁶ Alicia Di Rado and Greg Krikorian, “Seeking a Share of Rebuilding,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 2, 1992; Internal Documents, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 6, Folder 12, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016.

⁷ “The Truth About the Working Poor,” *Building Service Update* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1992), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

⁸ “A City of Anger and Discontent,” *Building Service Update* 6, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 1992), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

1988 Easter-themed “Vigil for Justice” discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. Like the Vigil for Justice, this day of action had a theme, but it was not focused on any particular national organizing target. While some of the JfJ groups worked together to plan protest actions against the Toyota Motor Company (which was financing Rebuild L.A.), the groups were free to organize protest actions on whatever targets they deemed appropriate for their local campaigns. As such, this national day of action provided a means for the JfJ campaigns to generate activism and excitement for their specific local organizing drives. At the same time, the day of action also provided these groups with an opportunity to collectively publicize the Justice for Janitors campaign and, more specifically, the campaign’s commitment to addressing national and even global patterns of socioeconomic injustice.

While the event was described as a national Justice for Janitors day, some local JfJ groups did not limit their actions to the janitorial industry or to national boundaries. They coordinated their actions with other groups of exploited workers both within and beyond the United States. For example, the Los Angeles JfJ group worked with a group of Salvadoran union members, who were part of the left-oriented *Federación de Asociaciones y Sindicatos Independientes de El Salvador (FEASIES)*, in planning a national Justice for Janitors day action against Toyota. While the Los Angeles janitors’ grievances against Toyota stemmed specifically from the company’s support for Rebuild L.A., FEASIES members in El Salvador likewise had grievances against Toyota as a company that profited at the expense of poor Latinx workers. As such, FEASIES members were willing to partner with the Los Angeles janitors in targeting Toyota.

On October 8, 1992, Los Angeles JfJ organizers and janitors held a large protest and prayer vigil at the Toyota headquarters in Los Angeles. At the same time, a group of FEASIES

members handed out leaflets and hung a banner declaring “En Estados Unidos y En El Salvador Toyota Explota Al Trabajador” (In the United States and in El Salvador, Toyota Exploits the Worker) outside of a Toyota plant in El Salvador. With this action then, the Los Angeles janitors acted in solidarity both with other SEIU janitors protesting simultaneously in cities throughout the U.S. and with FEASIES workers protesting simultaneously in El Salvador.⁹

Proving to be a major success in generating local action and national publicity, the first national JfJ day spurred a second national JfJ day on June 15, 1993. As part of this day of action, the Bay Area JfJ group coordinated their protest action with the United Farm Workers (UFW). The group organized a large rally and civil disobedience action targeting two technology companies, Solectron and Oracle, as “Enemies of Justice” on this day. A group of UFW activists including UFW President Arturo S. Rodriguez joined the rally and civil disobedience. Although the farm workers did not have any specific grievances against these tech companies, they embraced the janitors’ protest as an opportunity to call attention to the similarity between farm workers and janitors’ struggles for justice and the need for labor law reform.¹⁰

In many ways, then, these national JfJ days (and the several other national JfJ days organized subsequently) can be seen as part of an important evolution and escalation of the organizing strategy and even goals of the Justice for Janitors campaign. In each city, janitors faced specific grievances and cases of exploitation on a daily basis in their lives. At the same time, though, these localized issues were clearly part of a global economy that systematically

⁹ “Janitors Unmask the ‘Enemies of Justice,’” *Building Service Update* 6, no. 3 (Fall/Winter 1992), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Local 399 flyers, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 6, Folder 16, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Early 1990s miscellaneous photos, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 14, Folder 2, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

¹⁰ “Together, We Can Win,” *Building Service Update* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1993), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; John Enders, “Drumming up support for janitors: UFW chief arrested at janitors’ protest,” *Daily Breeze*, June 16, 1993.

exploited poor workers, female workers, immigrant workers, and workers of color. While confronting local struggles with the campaign in specific cities, janitors were also fighting against the much larger neoliberal economic system that created and exploited vulnerable workers. The national JfJ days provided an effective way for the janitors to struggle against the effects of this neoliberal economic system on a local level while also working in coordination as part of a collective global struggle against the increasing exploitation and abuse of workers under neoliberal capitalism. Through these national days of action, the local JfJ campaigns functioned as independent but linked nodes of activism within a network of allies that extended across industry lines and national borders.

This network created a foundation for unified labor movement activism. It also, I argue, created a foundation for radical socioeconomic struggle. In explicitly linking together workers on the basis of their shared exploitation as workers—and especially poor, female, immigrant workers and workers of color—in an economy that enriched the elite few, this network fostered working class consciousness. More than this, this network helped channel working class consciousness and frustrations into action. Amidst the national days of action in 1992 and 1993, the Justice for Janitors campaign seemed poised to be a central driving force in an increasingly influential and powerful surge of global labor movement activism—activism that at its best seemed capable of evolving into an intersectional workers’ struggle against neoliberal capitalism.¹¹

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¹¹ The Justice for Janitors campaign was not alone in driving a surge of coalition-based labor movement activism during this period. Jobs for Justice, for example, also promoted coalition-building and coordinated actions throughout the U.S. labor movement during this period. In May of 1993, Jobs for Justice coordinated a massive, multi-city protest against the National Labor Relations Board to highlight the need for national labor law reform. JfJ organizers and janitors from several SEIU locals joined hundreds of labor activists and workers from other unions in participating in this protest. “A coast-to-coast call for labor law reform,” *Building Service Update* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1993), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

While spurring global labor movement activism and a sense of radical possibility within the labor movement, the Justice for Janitors campaign also inspired internal reform within the SEIU in the early 1990s. As discussed in Chapter 1, the Justice for Janitors campaign was the product of overlapping reform efforts at the local and International level of the SEIU in the mid-1980s. In other words, a reform-impetus preceded the Justice for Janitors campaign in the SEIU. During the early 1990s, however, the Justice for Janitors campaign helped motivate and facilitate further reform within the SEIU. More specifically, the JfJ campaign helped push the SEIU as a whole toward a more inclusive, organizing-centered form of unionism.

During the early 1990s, for example, SEIU President Sweeney promoted a new membership growth strategy inspired by the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign. At the 1988 SEIU convention, Sweeney announced a membership growth goal for the union. In defiance of ongoing union membership decline in the U.S. labor movement, he set a goal of growing the SEIU's membership by 150,000 in order to bring the union's total membership to one million members by the 1992 convention. By 1990, the SEIU was on track to meet this goal. But the lion's share of recent membership growth had come from affiliation agreements with existing union members. In adding new members, then, the SEIU was not really fighting membership decline in the labor movement. Although the number of SEIU members grew, this membership growth was not a reflection of successful union organizing. Starting in June of 1990, however, President Sweeney made an effort to change this.

During this month, Sweeney attended the Los Angeles janitors' victory celebration against ISS and told the janitors that their struggle set "a great example" for the union. Following this victory celebration, Sweeney started promoting the Los Angeles JfJ campaign as an example that the rest of the union should follow. While attending regional conferences in

1990, for example, Sweeney asserted: “We need to be the union that builds organizing and bargaining militancy on its unique multicultural bedrock. We’ll be the union of the 1990s only if we are a union that encourages participation by rank-and-file members and development of leadership from the bottom up.”¹² With this declaration, Sweeney essentially urged SEIU leaders to adopt and implement the organizing strategy that had helped the Los Angeles JfJ campaign grow. Rather than relying on union affiliations and mergers to boost SEIU’s membership figures, he urged union leaders to welcome diverse workers into the union and actively partner with these workers in growing the union from the ground level.

Two committees within the SEIU, the Immigration Committee and the Pre-Convention Planning Committee, further promoted JfJ-inspired reform during this period. In preparation for the 1992 SEIU convention, the members of these two committees met to discuss current SEIU policies and practices and create recommendations for improvements. The members of the Immigration Committee and Pre-Convention Planning Committee included several local SEIU leaders involved in the Justice for Janitors campaign. While these members provided a strong foundation of information about the JfJ campaign to their fellow members, the committees also met with other JfJ leaders and janitor activists while developing their recommendations. After months of work, both the Immigration and Pre-Convention Planning Committees submitted recommendations aimed at implementing reform that Justice for Janitors leaders had already embraced at a local level.¹³

¹² “Full Partners in Organizing,” *Building Service Update* 4, no. 3 (Summer 1990), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

¹³ “20th International Convention: Pre-Convention Committee Report”, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 147, Folder 27, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; “20th International Convention: Report of Immigration Committee to Executive Board,” SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 147, Folder 14, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, 2 December 2011.

The Immigration Committee, for example, recommended that the International establish a formal program to build ties between the SEIU and immigrant workers. Taking this recommendation, Sweeney oversaw the establishment of an SEIU Immigration Program in 1992. Under the direction of a bilingual Latina coordinator, this program worked as a clearinghouse that helped connect SEIU locals with grant funding to support a range of immigration-related programs such as English-language, citizenship, and immigrant rights classes.¹⁴

The Pre-Convention Planning Committee recommended that the International support leadership development programs and organizing efforts similar to what JfJ organizers had been doing at a local level. Following these recommendations, President Sweeney formally established an “Affirmative Action Plan” to hire and promote women and people of color within the SEIU staff. Additionally, SEIU leaders organized new Regional Women’s Conferences starting in 1993. At these conferences, which featured free childcare, female leaders and rank-and-file activists from local unions participated in trainings on the subjects of organizing and leadership as well as politics and “women’s issues.” Additionally in 1993, the SEIU Executive Board approved the creation of a new organizing newsletter titled *Everyone an Organizer* to foster organizing and particularly the use of rank-and-file organizers in SEIU locals.¹⁵

As these recommendations and reform efforts suggest, Justice for Janitors had a direct impact on policies and programs at all levels of the SEIU in the 1990s. Beginning as an experimental reform effort in the mid to late 1980s, the JfJ campaign had grown into a well-publicized, celebrated labor struggle with a network of allies spanning the globe. This struggle

¹⁴ “It’s an immigrant’s right to know,” *Building Service Update* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1993), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

¹⁵ “Taking Affirmative Action,” *Building Service Update* 6, no. 2 (Summer 1992), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; “Union women, union leaders,” *Building Service Update* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1993), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; “On tap: Newsletter and award program,” *Building Service Update* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1993), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

was proving capable of transforming the lives of thousands of janitors across the United States, and it was also proving capable of transforming the policies and practices of a near million-member union in the 1990s.

In a way, these internal reform efforts, like the national JfJ days, highlight the ways in which the Justice for Janitors campaign was helping to create a foundation for broad working class activism. These internal reforms were designed to bring more people of color, more immigrants, and more women into the union and to empower these historically marginalized individuals as organizers and leaders. At their most basic level, these reforms marked a growing commitment amongst SEIU leaders to making organizing a union priority and to welcoming all workers, regardless of their race, gender, or citizenship status, to join and be active participants in the union. Beyond this, though, these reforms created an opportunity for the SEIU to inspire and motivate a larger wave of labor movement reform: they created an opportunity for the SEIU to help push the mainstream labor movement away from its historic insularity and conservative orientation.

These reforms, however, hardly marked a decisive shift toward labor radicalism. Much like the JfJ campaign as a whole, these reforms were not orchestrated with the intention of fostering a collective worker struggle to fundamentally alter the existing economic system. Instead, they were designed to grow and strengthen the SEIU as an organization capable of helping workers gain better wages, working conditions, and economic security within the existing capitalist system. The reforms were oriented toward shifting the balance of power between workers and employers, rather than fundamentally altering the core relationship between workers and employers. Nevertheless, these reforms provided a means for greater working class consciousness and activism and thus a potential foundation for labor radicalism.

As Justice for Janitors leaders witnessed these initial JfJ-inspired reforms, they worked to capitalize on top SEIU leaders' apparent support for the campaign and willingness to enact change within the union. Between 1992 and 1993, several Justice for Janitors leaders sought to push forward additional JfJ-inspired reform efforts within the SEIU. From his position on a newly created SEIU Latino Caucus, for example, Mike Garcia urged President Sweeney to devote greater attention to Latinxs within the union. In 1992, the Latino Caucus sent a letter to Sweeney that pointed out the disparity between the SEIU's increasingly Latinx membership and the union's static, white leadership. Calling out an "element of racism" in the International union, the Latino Caucus asked for support for Latinx leadership development and specifically asked for support for a Latinx conference within the union to help address the needs of Latinx union members. While Sweeney oversaw the establishment of women's conferences starting in 1993, plans for a Latinx conference never came to fruition. Rather than giving up, Mike Garcia continued to send letters to President Sweeney and to demand greater resources and opportunities for Latinx members and leaders within the SEIU.¹⁶

While Mike Garcia sought more International support for Latinxs in the SEIU, Stephen Lerner sought Sweeney's assistance in eliminating the remaining internal leadership obstacles to further expansion of the Justice for Janitors campaign. As suggested above, JfJ leaders had succeeded in wresting limited old guard leadership support for or at least acquiescence to the Justice for Janitors campaign in the early 1990s. These old guard leaders, however, stood firm in opposition to the expansion of the campaign into their immediate jurisdictions. They firmly

¹⁶ Local 1877 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 66, Folder 6, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

opposed any encroachment on their local sphere of power and influence, and they firmly opposed committing the resources of their locals to organizing.¹⁷

Local 32B-32J President Gus Bevona's actions in the early 1990s are illustrative of this opposition to the JfJ campaign and the spirit of reform that this campaign inspired. At this time, while janitors around the country were struggling to achieve fair wages and working conditions, Bevona oversaw the construction of a massive tower to serve as Local 32B-32J's new headquarters in New York. At the top of the tower, Bevona had a 3,000-square-foot penthouse office suite built for himself. This suite featured two large terraces overlooking lower Manhattan, marble-tiled bathrooms, saunas, walk-in closets, a kitchen and dining area, a built-in rosewood entertainment center, and high-tech electronic security system. The new local headquarters and especially Bevona's penthouse office, in other words, were a quintessential manifestation of opulence, greed, and corruption within the labor movement.

These were the elements of the labor movement that Justice for Janitors leaders rejected and struggled against in creating and expanding the JfJ campaign. As JfJ leaders wanted more union resources channeled into organizing efforts and leadership development amongst low-wage workers, Gus Bevona spent hundreds of thousands of union dollars on a state-of-the-art building with a luxurious penthouse suite. Furthermore, Bevona and his family members happily accepted hundreds of thousands of union dollars each year in salaries. In 1990, for example—while Century City janitors earned less than \$10,000 a year and were beaten in the streets—Bevona received a total annual salary of over \$360,000 from the union. The same year, his wife

¹⁷ Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016.

received nearly \$54,000 for her work as an administrative assistant for the union, and his brother received over \$78,000 for his work as a district chairman for the union.¹⁸

Bevona had many loyal followers even amongst low-wage workers. Under his leadership, New York janitors continued to earn disproportionately high wages in comparison with the national average in the early 1990s. At the same time, though, Bevona's ballooning salary and lavish spending combined with growing Justice for Janitors publicity to sow the seeds of dissent within the local. In 1992, Carlos Guzman, a long-time 32B-32J member and office building porter, decided to run against Bevona for the local presidency. Bevona launched a full-scale intimidation attack on Guzman. Bevona spent nearly \$20,000 to hire private security to tail Guzman, and he directed a Local 32B-32J lawyer to pressure Guzman into rescinding his candidacy. In the wake of this attack, Guzman lost the election. (After a lengthy lawsuit trial against the union, however, Guzman won \$100,000 as compensation for the emotional damages of Bevona's intimidation attack).¹⁹

In the midst of these signs of growing corruption and authoritarianism, Lerner asked Sweeney to take a more forceful stand against the old guard. Lerner wanted to use the resources and membership power of New York, Chicago, and Boston to expand the Justice for Janitors campaign. He wanted to use union resources to put more pressure on building owners rather than watching it line the pockets of a few union bosses. Sweeney, however, was unwilling to force the old guard leaders to either support the JfJ campaign or leave the union. Although his efforts to create space for reform with the union were critical to the creation of Justice for

¹⁸ Alan Finder, "Reclusive Building Union Chief Earned \$412,000 in 1989," *Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 1991; Maggie Haberman, "Inside Ousted Union Big's 'High' Life," *New York Post*, February 9, 1999; Steven Greenhouse, "Ex-Union Chief's Private Palace," *New York Times*, February 9, 1999.

¹⁹ Maggie Haberman, "Doorman-Union Boss Is Out After Iron-Fisted Reign" *New York Post*, February 2, 1999; Selwyn Raab, "Thorn to Union's Leader is Awarded Damages," *New York Times*, August 9, 1995.

Janitors, Sweeney was not willing (or at least not yet ready) to provoke a potentially dramatic fight with the old guard in order to expand the Justice for Janitors campaign.

Lerner, on the other hand, was committed to his belief that the future of the Justice for Janitors campaign depended on the participation of the New York, Chicago, and Boston building service locals. He refused to accept more “business as usual” from the old guard, putting him in direct opposition to President Sweeney. After a big fight with Sweeney in 1993, Lerner left the Justice for Janitors campaign and the SEIU entirely.²⁰

Ultimately, then, JfJ-inspired reform created an opportunity for the SEIU as a whole to organize, unite, and empower workers who had historically been excluded and marginalized in the mainstream labor movement. While spurring broad working class activism, the Justice for Janitors campaign opened the door for an important transformation of the mainstream labor movement from within. At the same time, though, initial progress in transforming the SEIU into a more diverse, organizing-centered union inspired JfJ leaders to push for more reform.

In a sense, these JfJ leaders were following the same strategy that had produced big successes in the Justice for Janitors campaign. Time and again in the history of the Justice for Janitors campaign to date, JfJ leaders did not pause to rest on the laurels of small organizing victories. Instead, they partnered with janitors in leveraging the support and momentum that they had developed from initial campaign victories into launching new, bigger organizing drives. In pushing President Sweeney for more reform, JfJ leaders were essentially working to capitalize on initial reform successes and further transform the SEIU into an effective base of support for the Justice for Janitors campaign and for all workers, especially poor workers who were further marginalized on account of their race, gender, or citizenship status. Unfortunately, these JfJ leaders’ efforts did not prove successful in terms of spurring additional reform. Instead, they

²⁰ Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016.

created an additional obstacle for the campaign. While at an all-time high in terms of worker participation and organizing progress, the Justice for Janitors campaign lost a key strategic leader.

Lerner's confrontation with Sweeney and departure from the SEIU, however, did not stop the growing momentum of the campaign. When faced with obstacles to expanding the JfJ campaign geographically in the jurisdiction of old guard leaders, local JfJ leaders promoted a different type of expansion of the campaign. Building on an existing trend in the campaign, they pursued an intersectional expansion of the Justice for Janitors campaign to other groups of marginalized, low-wage workers.

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When Lerner left the SEIU, local Justice for Janitors campaigns were at varying stages in terms of organizing janitors and taking janitor wages and working conditions out of competition across geographic markets. While off to promising starts in building organizing drives, the suburban project JfJ campaigns were still in the early stages of working toward majority union representation in their areas of focus in the Northeast and Midwest. After merging into Local 82 and focusing on building rank-and-file support, the Washington D.C. JfJ campaign finally started making headway in negotiating union contracts with D.C. cleaning companies in 1993. Even as in the midst of this progress, however, the D.C. JfJ group still had a lot of organizing work to do in the district.²¹ The Bay Area and Los Angeles campaigns, in contrast, had reached a level of maturity by this point.

²¹ "Sweeping through the suburbs," *Building Service Update* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1993), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "What it takes to win," *Building Service Update* 7, no. 3 (Fall/Winter 1993), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

By late 1993, the Bay Area JfJ group had organized most of the nonunion cleaning contractors in Silicon Valley and the Los Angeles JfJ group had organized most of the nonunion contractors in Los Angeles County. At this point, the Bay Area and Los Angeles JfJ groups had to make a decision. They could either try expanding the geographic breadth of their organizing drives or try expanding the depth of their organizing drives within their original geographic areas of focus. In other words, they could begin organizing janitors in new locations (i.e. Orange County in the case of the Los Angeles JfJ group) or they could begin organizing other groups of workers (i.e. non-janitors) where they had already been organizing.

In many ways, geographic expansion seemed like the obvious choice. As the name of the campaign suggests, Justice for Janitors was created as a janitor organizing drive. The Bay Area and Los Angeles JfJ groups had extensive experience building and winning janitor organizing drives within Silicon Valley and Los Angeles County, respectively, and they could easily apply this experience to organizing janitors in a wider area of focus. By 1993, however, many local JfJ groups, particularly those in the Bay Area and Los Angeles, had become very active in coalition-based actions that involved a wide range of workers. These JfJ groups created local labor and social movement alliances to support their organizing drives. Furthermore, as suggested previously in this chapter, they became embedded in a broad network of labor activism through national Justice for Janitors days. Following in line with this trend toward coalition-based activism, JfJ organizers and janitors in both the Bay Area and Los Angeles decided to expand their campaigns through new organizing within their existing geographic area of focus: they decided to pursue experimental organizing drives amongst new groups of workers.

This adaptation of the campaign was significant on several levels. On a basic level, this adaptation offered a potential workaround to the geographic limitations that old guard leaders

imposed on the campaign. Because of their location in the Midwest and Northeast, the old guard leaders did not create any immediate obstacles to the Bay Area and Los Angeles JfJ groups' geographic expansion. These old guard leaders, however, did represent formidable obstacles to continued geographic expansion of the JfJ campaign in the Midwest and Northeast. If a strategy of expanding the depth of the JfJ campaign amongst non-janitors proved successful in the West Coast JfJ campaigns, it could potentially be applied to Midwest and Northeast campaigns to allow local JfJ groups to continue building their campaigns without directly infringing on old guard leaders' jurisdictions.

On a deeper level, this adaptation of the campaign, much like the other developments of the campaign during this period, suggested that Justice for Janitors was evolving beyond the initial rather narrow goals and purpose that JfJ leaders had initially articulated for the campaign. This adaptation of the campaign offered decisive proof that Justice for Janitors could no longer be identified as a campaign that was just about organizing janitors and winning contracts. At the very least, it was about building a dense base of worker and union power within a geographic region. More than this, though—as suggested below—it was also about overcoming historic industry and race-based divisions between workers and providing a means for a powerful collective struggle against the intertwined socioeconomic injustices of neoliberal capitalism.

Pursuing an adaptation and expansion of the JfJ campaign beyond janitors, the Bay Area JfJ group created the Campaign for Justice in 1994. This coalition-based campaign was conceptualized as an extension of the Justice for Janitors campaign strategy to other service and even manufacturing industries in Silicon Valley. It was designed to organize a wide swath of low-wage workers in Silicon Valley. To support such a large organizing project, the Bay Area JfJ group enlisted the support of the existing Cleaning Up Silicon Valley coalition that formed in

alliance with janitors during the Apple Campaign. The JfJ group also partnered with three other labor organizations in creating the Campaign for Justice. JfJ organizers and janitors partnered with organizers and union members in the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE), and the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU). From the very start, then, the Campaign for Justice brought multiple labor unions and community allies together. The campaign crossed common labor and social movement divisions while also seeking to unite workers across industry lines in a single campaign.

The Campaign for Justice targeted landscaping workers in its first organizing drive. Although the proportion of men in the landscaping industry was higher than in the janitorial industry, landscaping workers were similar to janitors in many ways. Like janitors, landscaping workers in the Silicon Valley were predominantly Latinx. Furthermore, like janitors, these workers were exploited in an industry dominated by contracting. Rather than working directly for the businesses to which they provided services, landscaping workers were employees of landscaping companies. These companies bid for contracts with businesses, driving workers' wages and working conditions lower. The dominance of the contracting system in the landscaping industry, therefore, provided an opportunity for a rather straightforward application of the Justice for Janitors organizing strategy to the landscaping industry. Starting in early 1994, the Campaign for Justice coalition started implementing this strategy. The coalition focused on building support for the campaign amongst workers, doing industry research, avoiding NLRB

elections, putting pressure on businesses that contracted with landscaping companies, and involving the community in public protest actions.²²

With this strategy, the Campaign for Justice created the foundation for a wave of activism and movement building amongst unions and low-wage workers in Silicon Valley. By joining together, the SEIU, Teamsters, HERE and ACTWU looked past immediate jurisdictional conflicts and inter-union tension over membership growth. These unions pursued the broad, collective goal of building a stronger, more active, and more inclusive labor movement for the future. This collective pursuit provided a means for workers in Silicon Valley to help reverse the long-standing and on-going decline of the labor movement. It also provided a means for Silicon Valley workers to rise-up against neoliberal restructuring, especially the recent explosion of exploitative contracting that pitted low-wage workers against each other.

While the Bay Area JfJ group launched the Campaign for Justice, Jono Shaffer within the Los Angeles JfJ group developed a plan to start an organizing campaign amongst private security officers.²³ Shaffer conceptualized this organizing campaign—Guards United Around Respect and Dignity in Los Angeles or GUARD L.A.—as a subset of the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign.²⁴ Although security officers were in a different industry from janitors, the private security industry could be seen as a subset of the commercial real estate industry much like the janitorial industry. Also like the janitorial industry (and the landscaping industry), the security industry featured contracting. Security officers worked for independent security companies, and

²² Local 1877 press pack, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 13, Folder 1, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Sherri Eng, “Bid to Organize Landscaping Workers Falters,” *San Jose Mercury News*, December 12, 1994.

²³ To be more specific, Shaffer’s original organizing plan was to organize “security guards” in Los Angeles. As he recalled later, however, Shaffer realized once he began working with security guards that they actually preferred to be called “security officers.” I use this preferred term here.

²⁴ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, January 24, 2012; Security Guard files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 3, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

office building owners and managers contracted with these companies to provide security services for the office buildings. Thus, while security officers and janitors worked for different companies, they typically worked for contractors that had the same clients. In organizing security officers, then, the Los Angeles JfJ group would be able to build upon and leverage the existing relationships with Los Angeles building owners and managers that they had developed through janitor organizing. Furthermore, the JfJ group would be able to put additional pressure on these owners and managers with a broader-base of worker support that included both security officers and janitors.

In many ways, GUARD L.A. was not as expansive as the Campaign for Justice in Silicon Valley. The Campaign for Justice was a multi-union project designed to eventually unite multiple groups of workers in several service and manufacturing industries in a unified struggle against contracting. GUARD L.A., in contrast, was designed to utilize much of the existing resources and base of support from the Los Angeles JfJ campaign in organizing one additional group of workers within the commercial office industry. Nevertheless, GUARD L.A. was an expansive campaign in the sense that it was designed as an extension of the Justice for Janitors campaign to a much different demographic of workers. While the landscaping workers targeted in the Silicon Valley Campaign for Justice were largely Latinx immigrants much like the predominant California janitorial workforce, security officers in Los Angeles were predominantly African American.

As Jono Shaffer has recalled retrospectively, he did not explicitly design an organizing plan for security officers because of the demographics of the workforce. Nevertheless, the fact that security officers were mostly native-born, black, citizen workers was an important motivating reason for his plan to target security officers in an expansion of Justice for Janitors.

As suggested in previous chapters, the Justice for Janitors campaign intersected with and became increasingly synonymous with a budding Latinx immigrant rights movement and a history of Latinx labor activism in the U.S. Up through the late 1980s, however, the Justice for Janitors campaign involved African American workers as well as Latinx immigrant workers. The JfJ campaigns in Atlanta and D.C. in the mid to late 1980s had the potential to define Justice for Janitors as a racially diverse national organizing campaign. The struggles and failures of the Atlanta and D.C. campaigns during the late 1980s, however, solidified a public perception that the Justice for Janitors campaign was an organizing drive that only involved—and thus only benefited—Latinx immigrant workers. This added to existing tensions between black and Latinx workers in the janitorial industry and the larger labor movement. GUARD L.A., in contrast, provided an opportunity to ease these tensions and unite black and Latinx workers together against the economic exploitation that both groups faced.²⁵

According to Jono Shaffer’s initial plans for organizing security officers, GUARD L.A. was designed to unite black and brown workers against “white power brokers” in the real estate industry. The organizing campaign was designed to draw attention to the fact that the predominantly white elite profited while fostering competition and hostility between black and Latinx workers, only promoting token diversity, and only giving lip service to the issues of poverty and injustice in communities of color.²⁶ Fighting against the common economic trend of pitting poor workers of color against each other, GUARD L.A. would explicitly address the intersection of race and poverty in order to bring African American and Latinx workers together in a collective struggle against a common enemy. GUARD L.A., then, had the potential to

²⁵ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, January 24, 2012.

²⁶ Security Guard files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 3, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

address deep-seated tensions between the African American and Latinx communities and to create a foundation for the emergence of a powerful, multiracial struggle against economic exploitation in Los Angeles.

While creating plans to organize African American security officers, however, the Los Angeles JfJ group continued to be a supportive ally of the immigrant rights movement in Los Angeles. In fact, a piece of anti-immigrant legislation in California made immigrant rights a key priority for the Los Angeles JfJ group in 1994. Thus while developing plans to extend JfJ as a multiracial organizing drive, the Los Angeles JfJ group continued to expand the Justice for Janitors campaign in coordination with the immigrant rights movement.

Amidst a broad wave of anti-immigrant hostility in the United States, a struggle over immigrant rights developed in California in 1994. The center of this struggle was Proposition 187. A Republican member of the California State Assembly initially introduced Proposition 187 as an initiative to “save” California from the costs of providing public services to undocumented immigrant families. The initiative, dubbed the “Save Our State” or SOS plan by supporters, gained enough signatures to appear on the ballot during the 1994 election. Because of strong public support for the initiative, some SEIU leaders questioned if they should risk public support for the union by taking a stand against the proposition. Refusing to cower to public pressure, the Los Angeles JfJ group along with many religious, community, and labor-allies mounted a strong campaign against this proposition in the months leading up to the election.

The Los Angeles JfJ group organized and participated in massive marches and rallies to demonstrate their opposition to the proposition. The largest of the marches, on October 16, brought between 70,000 and 100,000 people into the streets of Los Angeles in a dramatic display

of solidarity with the city's undocumented population. In addition to participating in these public displays, JfJ activists also offered more direct forms of assistance to the anti-Prop 187 effort. They withdrew \$25,000 from Local 399's strike fund to contribute to an emerging anti-Prop 187 campaign and organized phone banks to urge Californians to vote against the proposition.²⁷

The Bay Area JfJ group also took an active role in the fight against Proposition 187. Local 1877's President Mike Garcia, in particular, became a vocal leader in the struggle against Prop 187. He joined Bay Area organizers and janitors in publicly denouncing and protesting Proposition 187. Together, they called attention to Proposition 187 as a racist legal assault on a vulnerable group of people who economically contributed to the United States and only wanted a better future for themselves and their children.²⁸

Although creating an unprecedented surge of immigrant rights mobilization, anti-Proposition 187 efforts suffered from internal controversy over issue framing and ultimately proved unsuccessful in generating a favorable outcome in the November 1994 election.

Proposition 187 passed with a nearly twenty percent margin of the popular vote.²⁹ This defeat,

²⁷ Jim Zellers, "Elect Brown, Defeat 187," *Voice of Local 399* 18, no. 3 (October/November 1994), Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 34, Folder 4, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 14, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; *Labor Looks at Mexico*, SEIU International Affairs Records, Box 3, Folder 47, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

²⁸ Mike Garcia, "Deport Immigrants? Let's Deport Pete Wilson," *San Jose Mercury News*, August 9, 1994; Ken McLaughlin, "Prop 187: Immigrants Face 'Ugly Time,'" *San Jose Mercury News*, October 18, 1994;

²⁹ Some leaders in the anti-Proposition 187 mobilization advocated for a conservative, political framing of the issue. They advocated working hand-in-hand with the Democratic Party in targeting the proposition primarily through electoral politics and cautioned against an association of the anti-Prop 187 campaign with Mexican nationalism. Other leaders promoted taking the struggle to the streets, engaging people in public protest against the proposition, and welcoming displays of Mexican flags alongside American flags during protests. See for example: Patrick J. McDonnell and Robert J. Lopez, "L.A. March Against Prop. 187 Draws 70,000," *Los Angeles Times*, October 17, 1994; Michael Novik, "As California Gets Hysterical, Immigrants Get Organized," *Third Force* 2, no. 5 (December 1994): 10; "Passage of Proposition 187 Sets Up Bitter Social Battle," *Wall Street Journal*, November 10, 1994.

however, did not stop anti-Prop 187 activists. The Los Angeles JfJ group members are a case in point.

In December of 1994, Los Angeles JfJ organizers and janitors organized their upcoming contract campaign as part of a continuing struggle against Proposition 187. In planning a demonstration to kick off the contract campaign, for example, the Los Angeles JfJ group joined forces with the Four Winds Student Movement and organized a joint march in support of Justice for Janitors and against Proposition 187. More than two thousand people—including janitors, organizers, students, religious leaders, and politicians—all participated in this combined action.³⁰

Ultimately, then, both the Bay Area and Los Angeles JfJ groups drove a multifaceted expansion of the Justice for Janitors campaign in 1994. They made plans to expand the Justice for Janitors campaign to other groups of low-wage workers, creating a growing foundation for multi-industry and multiracial labor movement activism. They also continued to be an active force in the immigrant rights movement. In doing so, these groups continued to frame the Justice for Janitors campaign as more than just a labor campaign. They framed the campaign as part of a broader social movement struggle against overlapping sources of social and economic injustice that poor workers of color experienced both on and off the job. This framing, much like the Bay Area and Los Angeles JfJ groups' more specific organizing plans to target new groups of workers, provided a foundation for Justice for Janitors to continue evolving. This framing provided a foundation for Justice for Janitors to continue moving beyond some of the campaign's original goals of taking wages and working conditions out of competition in a geographic market and toward a powerful worker struggle against intersecting sources of worker marginalization and exploitation.

³⁰ Local 399 press pack, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 13, Folder 1, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

Even JfJ groups that had a lot of janitor organizing left to do in their immediate jurisdictions helped provide a foundation for the Justice for Janitors campaign to evolve as a broadly framed struggle against the deeper roots of neoliberal restructuring and union decline during this period. In 1994, the D.C. JfJ group, for example, created a foundation for the JfJ campaign to develop within a broad workers' struggle against overlapping political and socioeconomic injustice in the district. The D.C. JfJ group did so by framing the local JfJ campaign around the injustice of D.C. property tax policy.

This framing strategy was not new to D.C. JfJ organizers. Initial JfJ research into the D.C. real estate industry uncovered the fact that the Washington D.C. government often gave commercial property owners in the district large reductions in their property taxes. Starting in late 1989, JfJ organizers brought attention to these property tax reductions as part and parcel of socioeconomic and political inequality in D.C. As these organizers described, the tax reductions allowed wealthy and politically powerful building owners to maximize their profits. Furthermore, these tax reductions unfairly shifted the tax burden onto residential property owners. Fitting with larger patterns of neoliberal restructuring, the majority suffered while the few benefited.

The D.C. JfJ group's initial efforts to expose the injustice of these tax reductions and organize D.C. residents to support property tax reform fell by the wayside amidst the campaign's difficult World Bank organizing drive and the subsequent merger of Local 525 into Local 82. Nevertheless, after a period of internal rebuilding, the D.C. JfJ group once again started bringing attention to the injustice of current property tax policy in Washington D.C. With a much stronger base of rank-and-file supporters and organizers, the D.C. JfJ group launched a broad, two-pronged public pressure campaign centered on the D.C. tax policy in 1994.

For the first part of this public pressure campaign, the group created a property tax reform ballot measure. This reform measure was designed to limit the government's ability to reduce commercial property owners' taxes and therefore increase tax money for public services. In other words, it was designed to benefit the majority of D.C. residents while holding wealthy property owners accountable to paying their fair share of taxes. As the second part of the public pressure campaign, the D.C. JfJ group started organizing demonstrations targeting prominent D.C. real estate developer Oliver Carr. These demonstrations targeted Carr as a prime representative of the wealthy D.C. elite who benefited from unjust property tax policy while the majority of people in the district struggled economically. As such, the demonstrations provided an opportunity for janitors and a diverse group of allies to take to the streets and demand greater political and economic justice through tax reform.³¹ Like the Bay Area and Los Angeles JfJ groups, then, the D.C. JfJ group created an opportunity for a coalition-based expansion and evolution of the campaign in 1994.

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Ultimately, the early to mid-1990s were an exciting period of Justice for Janitors growth. During this period, local JfJ groups used momentum from recent organizing success to launch new organizing drives and spearhead coalition-based struggles for worker justice on a citywide, national, and even global scale. In the process, these local groups not only expanded but also transformed the Justice for Janitors campaign. Through the particular forms of expansion that local JfJ groups pursued in 1993 and 1994, the Justice for Janitors campaign continued to evolve and escalate as a struggle against the deep-seated roots of union decline and neoliberal restructuring. JfJ groups joined with diverse groups of workers across industry and national

³¹ Maryann Haggerty, "Union Seeks Vote on D.C.'s System of Taxing Offices," *Washington Post*, June 23, 1994; Peter Kaplan, "The Union Versus Oliver Carr," *Washington Business Journal*, August 26, 1994.

boundaries, and they called public attention to broad patterns of worker exploitation embedded in current business practices.

While helping drive the campaign forward and outward, JfJ leaders also channeled the growing power and momentum of the campaign inward. They pushed for internal reforms within the SEIU. Unsatisfied with continued elements of racism, corruption, and complacency within the SEIU, these leaders were not satisfied with initial reform progress. They demanded the type of reform that would require a fundamental shift in the leadership of the SEIU and a unified commitment to building an inclusive, rank-and-file centered union that organized and empowered workers.

In the midst of this expansion and push for reform, Justice for Janitors seemed poised to drive or at least serve as a foundation for a major transformation of the labor movement. Up to this point, the campaign had made clear, tangible progress in defying recent patterns of union decline and ameliorating a small number of the obvious injustices of neoliberal restructuring. While the significance of these tangible achievements should not be swept aside, the apparent potential of the campaign to achieve something much greater cannot be ignored. Amidst campaign developments in the early 1990s, Justice for Janitors seemed to offer union leaders and workers a means to build a new, more inclusive and potentially radical labor movement in the shell of the old one and to collectively struggle against the system of neoliberal capitalism itself.

Unfortunately, these campaign developments and their implications brought ambiguities and internal tensions within Justice for Janitors to the surface. Specifically, they highlighted ambiguities and tensions in what SEIU leaders and JfJ leaders and participants understood as the purpose and goal of Justice for Janitors. From the very early experimental development of the campaign, Justice for Janitors included a radical element. Many of the campaign's core leaders

and organizers embraced leftist ideology. Additionally, the core JfJ organizing strategy seemed poised to build worker consciousness and anti-capitalist sentiment. While explicitly seeking to organize janitors and to take wages and working conditions out of competition across a geographic market, the JfJ campaign revolved around the public exposure of the often hidden inner-workings of neoliberal capitalism. While seeking relatively narrow immediate goals, JfJ groups shed light on the fact that the current economic system polarized society between the elite few and the masses. More than this, JfJ groups shed light on the fact that the current economic system explicitly profited through the exploitation and marginalization of poor workers, workers of color, female workers, and non-citizen workers. In exposing this pattern of exploitation, the Justice for Janitors campaign fostered working class consciousness and collective action.

As the campaign expanded and JfJ groups really embraced the campaign as a means for collective, intersectional worker activism, questions about the goals and true purpose of the campaign emerged. Was the campaign still ultimately focused on improving the wages and working conditions of service workers and increasing the size and strength of the union within the system of neoliberal capitalism? Or was the campaign evolving into a more transformative, potentially radical struggle with the goal of fundamentally transforming both the labor movement and the capitalist system? Or even yet, had some JfJ leaders always envisioned a transformation of the labor movement and capitalist system as the deeper purpose and ultimate goal of the campaign?

While complete answers to these questions are elusive, it is clear that at least some SEIU leaders and JfJ leaders had different understandings of what the goals and purpose of the campaign were in the early 1990s. While JfJ leaders like Mike Garcia and Stephen Lerner pushed for expansive internal union reform modeled from the progressive elements of the Justice

for Janitors campaign, President John Sweeney did not see this reform as a necessary element of the JfJ campaign—at least at the moment. These different understandings of the purpose and timing of the campaign, in turn, exposed further tensions and ambiguities within the Justice for Janitors campaign.

Specifically, disagreements over the purpose and timing of the campaign exposed the tenuous relationship between this campaign and the rest of the union. To a large extent, JfJ leaders were granted autonomy within the union through the late 1980s and into the early 1990s. President Sweeney ensured that JfJ leaders had the resources and independence to organize beyond the hostile oversight of conservative union leaders within the building service division and local unions. However, International JfJ leaders were still ultimately beholden to President Sweeney's oversight and decisions. President Sweeney's lack of support for a continued rapid expansion and adaptation of the campaign against the old guard leaders exposed clear limitations to the freedom and independence of the JfJ campaign within the SEIU. And as suggested above, these limits were a clear source of frustration for JfJ leaders and caused Stephen Lerner to leave the SEIU (at least temporarily).³²

Because of the increasing self-sufficiency and local strength of JfJ groups, however, the limitations to President Sweeney's support for Justice for Janitors and also the loss of Lerner's leadership did not deter or even slow down local JfJ groups. Still confident in the JfJ campaign and apparently committed to adapting and evolving this campaign into a broad struggle against worker injustice, local JfJ leaders and janitors experimented with expanding and diversifying the campaign across industry lines at the local level during Lerner's absence. Their actions in this situation highlight the way in which the Justice for Janitors campaign continued to be an experimental, adaptive campaign. Nearly twenty years after first taking shape, Justice for

³² As is discussed in Chapter 10, Stephen Lerner returned to the SEIU and Justice for Janitors campaign in 1999.

Janitors continued to evolve and transform in the face of changing resources and opportunities. Additionally, the ability of the JfJ groups to continue expanding in the midst of Lerner's absence highlights the continued importance of strong local support for the campaign. Because of the strength of its local leaders and the commitment of janitors and community supporters, the Justice for Janitors campaign survived a critical loss in International support and leadership. And more than surviving during this period, the Justice for Janitors campaign continued to push the boundaries of traditional labor movement activism and create a sense that a unified workers' struggle against neoliberal capitalism was possible.

Chapter 8

Local Campaign Trouble and Turmoil in the Wake of Success:

Justice for Janitors Suffers from Local Setbacks (1994-1997)

In this chapter, I explore a series of local struggles and setbacks that wracked the Justice for Janitors campaign in the mid-1990s. I demonstrate that the success, momentum, and sense of possibility emerging from local Justice for Janitors groups in the early to mid-1990s did not last. As I discussed in the previous chapter, local JfJ groups worked to continue expanding and adapting Justice for Janitors, not just as a drive to organize janitors and win contracts but also as a drive to foster union reform and broad working class action against overlapping patterns of socioeconomic injustice during the early 1990s. This local push for campaign expansion and evolution, however, gave way to internal conflict that exposed cracks in the base of support for these local campaigns. Over the course of this chapter, I highlight three major instances of local JfJ campaigns experiencing internal conflict in the midst of drives to build on recent JfJ success and continue expanding, diversifying, and escalating the campaign. Specifically, I focus on the development and ramifications of struggles and internal disagreements within Bay Area Local 1877, Los Angeles Local 399, and Washington D.C. Local 82.

I argue that struggles within these local campaigns illustrate the immense difficulty of sustaining a labor campaign, particularly one that was expanding in scope and increasingly oriented toward unifying and empowering workers to challenge the political and socioeconomic status quo of the neoliberal order, in the late twentieth century. Beyond this, though, I argue that these local struggles—much like the conflicts amongst top SEIU and JfJ leaders discussed in Chapter 7—both stemmed from and magnified tensions embedded within the Justice for Janitors

campaign. I demonstrate that these conflicts were rooted in the fact that not all local community allies, local SEIU members, or even janitors shared the same perspective on what the purpose and scope of the Justice for Janitors campaign should and could be. As the Justice for Janitors campaign developed and expanded in the early 1990s, some local campaign allies began to question their support for an increasingly bold and far-reaching campaign. Additionally, some of the janitors who had initially participated in Justice for Janitors felt left behind as the campaign expanded to new areas and groups of workers. At the same time, other local union members felt left out as the campaign helped improve the situation of workers other than themselves.

After recently helping to expand and evolve the JfJ campaign amidst conflict between top SEIU and JfJ leaders, local JfJ groups demonstrated that they were not immune to the same type of tensions that pitted JfJ leaders against President Sweeney and led Stephen Lerner to leave the SEIU. Time and again throughout the history of the campaign, a strong base of rank-and-file and community support proved to be a major asset and source of success for the Justice for Janitors campaign. The fractures that emerged within the local base of support within three prominent JfJ campaigns, however, illustrate that grassroots union strength—and especially intersectional community and union strength—is (1) difficult to sustain and, as such, (2) does not provide any guarantee of campaign success.

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One of the first major JfJ setbacks amidst campaign expansion in the mid-1990s emerged in the Bay Area. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Bay Area JfJ group was on the cutting edge of campaign expansion and evolution along with the Los Angeles JfJ group during this period. After organizing all of the major janitor contractors in the Silicon Valley, the Bay Area JfJ group launched a coalition-based Campaign for Justice to organize a much broader

group of low-wage workers in the Bay Area. Rather than just an extension of the SEIU's JfJ campaign, the Campaign for Justice was a joint organizing drive supported by four labor unions and a group of social movement organization allies. The Campaign for Justice participants committed to applying the Justice for Janitors strategy to other contract-dominated industries in the Bay Area. And they chose the landscaping industry for their first organizing drive.

The Campaign for Justice got off to a promising start in early 1994. Each of the participating unions—SEIU, HERE, Teamsters, and ACTWU—allotted financial resources as well as researchers and organizers to the campaign. These researchers and organizers worked under the direction of a campaign strategy committee that included representatives from each union. The committee also included community representatives from local social movement organizations. One of the strategy committee members, for example, was Jorge Gonzalez who was head of a local immigrant rights organization called Raza Sí.

Under the direction of this strategy committee, a coalition of union researchers, organizers, and community allies started mapping power relations within the landscaping industry, choosing strategic targets for public pressure campaigns, and reaching out to workers. Their initial efforts proved generative. In particular, door-to-door outreach efforts produced a lot of rank-and-file interest in the campaign.

Working with Campaign for Justice organizers, groups of rank-and-file landscaping workers who decided to join the campaign first attempted to appeal directly to their landscaping contractor employers, asking the contractors to agree to union representation. When these direct appeals did not succeed, the landscaping workers participated in demonstrations designed to leverage public pressure and pressure from client companies on the landscaping contractors. They pushed lawnmowers in marches through the streets of Silicon Valley and held disruptive

rallies outside of businesses that contracted with nonunion landscaping companies. In the process, the Campaign for Justice generated a lot of public attention and worker excitement.

At the same time, the Campaign for Justice also unsurprisingly generated backlash from landscaping contractors. During this period of neoliberal restructuring, landscaping contractors like cleaning contractors faced a competitive system of underbidding and thus pressure to maintain low wages. In order to continue maintaining these low wages in the midst of the Campaign for Justice, landscaping contractors used a host of union subversion techniques at their disposal. They fired workers who took an active role in the Campaign for Justice organizing drive. They also filed NLRB charges against the campaign, alleging that the campaign's demonstrations targeting the landscaping client companies constituted illegal secondary boycott activity.¹

Faced with this hostility from the landscaping contractors, internal support for the Campaign for Justice started crumbling after less than a year of organizing activity. While the Bay Area JfJ group was well-versed in pushing through contractor hostility and legal threats, the other unions participating in the Campaign for Justice were not as experienced in the backlash that came with such an overt challenge to the neoliberal economic status quo. This backlash caused Campaign for Justice participants to doubt their decision to dedicate so much of their time, energy, and resources to the campaign. In doing so, this backlash exposed tension around what participants saw as the goals and purpose of the Campaign for Justice.

While the Bay Area JfJ group appeared committed to pursuing this bold evolution of the JfJ campaign even if the campaign did not generate quick organizing victories, the other union

¹ Local 1877 press pack, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 13, Folder 1, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; David Bacon, "Organizing Silicon Valley: Unions Begin the Biggest Job of All," January 19, 1994, <http://dbacon.igc.org/Unions/25SilValleyOrg.html>; David Bacon, "New Obstacles and New Tactics," in *Organizing in Silicon Valley's High Tech Workers* <http://dbacon.igc.org/Unions/04hitec6.html>.

participants appeared reticent to continue supporting a campaign that did not generate immediate, tangible results. For the Bay Area JfJ group, the ongoing unification and empowerment of low-wage workers and the promise of future tangible campaign victories were enough to justify their support for the campaign. For the other union participants, this was not enough. They wanted immediate organizing results that the Campaign for Justice did not produce. As such, these unions started withdrawing their support for the Campaign for Justice. Once the Teamsters, HERE, and ACTWU withdrew their support, the Campaign for Justice essentially fell apart. Although the Bay Area JfJ group initially attempted to keep the landscaping organizing drive alive, the organizing drive collapsed from the combination of dwindling campaign resources and growing landscaper hostility in late 1994.²

The failure of the Campaign for Justice was a major blow to the momentum and growth of the Bay Area Justice for Janitors campaign. Instead of generating additional excitement and support for the Justice for Janitors strategy, the Campaign for Justice suggested that the potential of the campaign to continue expanding and evolving into a massive coalition-based, cross-industry struggle against patterns of injustice was not limitless. Instead, this potential was bound by the very real logistical issue of sustaining a coalition in the midst of antiunion backlash. The failure of the Campaign for Justice, in other words, suggested that an expansion of the Justice for Janitors campaign beyond the janitorial industry and beyond the SEIU was not possible—or was at the very least improbable—at the moment.

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² Local 1877 press pack, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 13, Folder 1, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Sherri Eng, “Bid to Organize Landscaping Workers Falters,” *San Jose Mercury News*, December 12, 1994; David Bacon, “New Obstacles and New Tactics,” in *Organizing in Silicon Valley’s High Tech Workers* <http://dbacon.igc.org/Unions/04hitec6.htm>.

Shortly after the Bay Area JfJ group suffered a major defeat in the form of the failure of the Campaign for Justice, the Los Angeles JfJ group suffered an even greater setback. In 1995, the Los Angeles JfJ campaign was at a highpoint of campaign expansion and activity—much like the Bay Area JfJ campaign had been in 1994. In this year, Local 399’s existing master agreement for the Los Angeles janitorial industry expired. The Los Angeles JfJ group embraced this contract expiration as an opportunity to negotiate a new agreement with better wages and benefits for Los Angeles janitors. They also embraced the fight for a better contract as an opportunity to continue framing and building Justice for Janitors as a broad, intersectional struggle for socioeconomic and political justice in Los Angeles.

As briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, the Los Angeles JfJ group launched this contract fight in late 1994 with a joint Justice for Janitors and anti-Proposition 187 demonstration. Later in the contract campaign, the JfJ group also organized a contract demonstration in coordination with International Women’s Day on March 8, 1995. During this demonstration, a group of approximately one thousand Justice for Janitors supporters and feminist allies gathered in Westwood, Los Angeles. Together, they commemorated the historic struggles of female unionists against sweatshop working conditions and poverty-level wages on March 8, 1908. And they collectively publicized the JfJ contract campaign as a similar struggle for female empowerment against workplace injustice in the present. More than thirty of these demonstrators sat down at the intersection of Wilshire and Westwood boulevards and linked arms to block traffic for two hours.

Through this demonstration, as well as the initial contract campaign kickoff action, the Los Angeles JfJ group clearly framed the contract campaign as more than just a simple fight for wage and benefit contract improvements. The group framed this campaign as part of an

intersectional struggle for the collective empowerment of three often overlapping marginalized groups in Los Angeles: immigrants, women, and low-wage workers. And while promoting this frame, the JfJ group helped bring the marginalization and exploitation that individuals in these groups faced into the public spotlight. The JfJ group provided a platform for these individuals to display their collective power and articulate their collective demand for justice to a wide audience.

While framing the contract campaign as part of larger immigrant rights and feminist struggles, the Los Angeles JfJ group also promoted the contract campaign as a struggle for all workers who lacked health care in Los Angeles. As part of the contract campaign, the Los Angeles JfJ group claimed that the Los Angeles business community was forcing the county government to subsidize the health care costs of Los Angeles workers by refusing to offer employer-funded health care. On the basis of this reality, the JfJ group urged the county government to pressure businesses to provide health care to their employees.

This aspect of the contract campaign was hardly a radical demand for universal health care. The JfJ group did not question the idea that health care should be privatized and contingent upon employment. Nevertheless, this pressure campaign to force Los Angeles employers into providing health care did suggest that the county government had a duty to intervene on behalf of low-wage workers who were not provided benefits. This pressure campaign also exposed the fact that the government's safety net provisions for workers had been hollowed out and were insufficient amidst neoliberal restructuring and union decline. And arguably most importantly, this pressure campaign proved successful in generating tangible results.

The JfJ group's claims about employers passing off health care costs prompted the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors to order a Department of Health Services investigation. While the

Board of Supervisors did not have the authority to legally require all L.A. businesses to provide health insurance, the board did have significant political influence in the city. The board's investigation thus put political pressure on the local business community to provide health care to workers.³

With this political pressure in play, the Los Angeles JfJ group negotiated a new master agreement that provided Los Angeles janitors with health care. This new master agreement was a qualified success. It was a five-year contract with extensive backloading. Nevertheless, as a result of this contract, the cleaning contractor signatories agreed to provide family health insurance for all the janitors covered in the agreement by the year 2000. More than this, they also agreed to pay all of the janitors covered in the agreement a minimum of \$6.80 an hour. (This represented a more than fifty percent raise for many janitors). Los Angeles Local 399's janitors overwhelmingly ratified this contract agreement and celebrated it as a success.⁴

This successful contract campaign had significance even beyond the specific contract achievements that the janitors celebrated. This contract campaign marked a culminating moment in the expansion and diffusion of a local Justice for Janitors campaign that increasingly intersected with diverse social and political struggles. The theme of the 1995 contract campaign was "One Industry, One Union, One Contract." With this contract campaign, however, JfJ leaders and participants did more than create unity amongst janitors and within the building service industry. They built a campaign that increasingly existed at the center of a mass

³ Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 14, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Press Packs, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 13, Folder 2, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; José Luis Sierra, "Ordenan estudio al Dpto. de Salud que favorece a empleados de la limpieza," *La Opinión*, March 22, 1995.

⁴ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, 2 December 2011 and May 6, 2016; Eric Mann, "Perspective on Labor: Janitors Win a Measure of Justice," *Los Angeles Times*, April 11, 1995.

mobilization of people against the socioeconomic and political status quo in the city of Los Angeles.

Whether specifically protesting citizenship-based discrimination, gender inequality, or corporate greed, JfJ activists called attention to the multi-dimensional but intersecting sources of worker vulnerability and insecurity in a number of service industries in the late twentieth century. Furthermore, with an expanding network of labor and community allies, the Justice for Janitors activists made headway in slowly but surely gaining newfound socioeconomic and political power and security for low-wage service workers, for people of color, for women, and for the undocumented. And as discussed in the previous chapter, the Los Angeles JfJ group had plans to continue expanding Justice for Janitors through GUARD L.A. to unite workers across industry and ethno-racial barriers. This expansion held the promise of breaking down the barriers that divided low-wage workers and fostering a powerful surge of working class consciousness and collective action. Unfortunately, this drive to continue expanding and evolving the JfJ campaign in Los Angeles—much like in the Bay Area—came with risks.

Only two months after the Los Angeles JfJ group negotiated the 1995 contract, Local 399 and the Los Angeles JfJ campaign were torn apart by internal conflict. The immediate impetus for this explosion of internal conflict was a leadership election in Local 399. Throughout the local's previous eighteen years of history under President Zellers, Local 399 elections had been rather routine and uneventful.⁵ More often than not, incumbents ran unopposed or new candidates with President Zeller's endorsements were easily elected. In a dramatic turn of events, however, a group of dissidents known as the Multiracial Alliance ran a slate of twenty-

⁵ See, for example: "Union leadership re-elected for third three-year term," *Voice of Local 399* 7, no. 5 (May 1983), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 9, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University and "Local 399 History," *Voice of Local 399* 15, no. 1 (January/February 1991), SEIU Publications, Box 62, Folder 12, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

one candidates in the local's election on June 8, 1995. These candidates ran for all but two of the leadership positions in Local 399. (The Multiracial Alliance did not run candidates against incumbent President Jim Zellers or First Vice President Doris Boyd-Snyder). The dissident slate of candidates was resoundingly successful. Every single Multiracial Alliance candidate was elected.⁶

While a shocking turn of events for Local 399's former leaders, the Multiracial Alliance's dramatic success did not emerge without warning. Instead, the Multiracial Alliance's success was rooted in the growing dissatisfaction of two dissident groups that had been developing within Local 399 for several years. The first of these dissident groups was made up of hospital workers. The second was made up of janitors.

When the JfJ campaign first started in Los Angeles, the hospital division in Local 399 was in a much better position than the janitorial division. This was largely due to the strength of the California-based health care company Kaiser Permanente in Los Angeles. During the 1970s and early 1980s, Kaiser controlled a majority share of the health care industry in California and willingly operated as a union company. As such, Kaiser helped set industry standards in wages and working conditions that facilitated Local 399's bargaining in the health care industry. Beginning in the late 1980s, however, Kaiser's competitors started to gain ground and pose a threat to Kaiser's industry dominance. At the same time, the United States was experiencing a general economic downturn. This industry shift led Kaiser to drive a hard bargain with Local 399 for the first time in 1990.

⁶ Merger/Split records, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 6, Folder 14, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Andrea Carney, "What is happening in Local 399, SEIU?" *Impact: The Rank & File Newsletter* (September 1996): 3-5.

Local 399 hospital workers proved eager to resist Kaiser's hard bargain and fight for a strong contract. On the eve of their contract expiration in 1990, the hospital workers voted to go out on strike and reject a three-year contract offer that included only small raises. After walking out on strike in April of 1990, the hospital workers found themselves sorely disappointed in the support (or lack thereof) that they received from Local 399. During this strike, the JfJ campaign against ISS was escalating. This campaign consumed virtually all of Local 399's financial resources and the majority of the time and energy of the local's leaders and building service members. As such, the striking Kaiser workers received no financial support from Local 399 and only limited, inconsistent support from local leaders and members on the picket line.

On the eighth day of the strike, Kaiser presented the hospital workers with another offer that was virtually unchanged from the earlier offer and essentially urged them to concede to the company's superior bargaining position. As some Kaiser workers alleged, Local 399 urged the workers to settle and ratify the new contract or else risk being fired. Facing pressure from both Kaiser and the union, Kaiser workers ratified the new contract on April 9 despite their dissatisfaction with the agreement. While this contract ratification "resolved" the strike, dissatisfaction amongst Local 399 hospital workers grew. These workers were angry about the lack of support they received from Local 399, especially considering the fact that this local was pouring massive amounts of time, effort, and money into the JfJ campaign. They saw the JfJ campaign as unfairly usurping union resources when they too wanted to take a stand against concession bargaining and union erosion. To express their dissatisfaction, a group of Kaiser workers joined together and wrote a complaint letter to both Local 399 President Jim Zellers and SEIU President John Sweeny in November 1990.⁷

⁷ "Kaiser Pact Rejected; Strike Set for Monday," *Los Angeles Times*, March 31, 1990; Bob Baker, "Striking Kaiser Workers OK Pact in a Turnabout," *The Los Angeles Times*, April 10, 1990; Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew

Local 399 hospital workers' dissatisfaction grew during the next round of contract negotiations with Kaiser. Despite earning record profits in 1992, Kaiser demanded that the workers accept \$11.9 million in benefit cuts in the 1993 contract. The hospital workers rejected this offer. For more than three months, they continued fighting for a better contract, organizing a series of sixteen grievance strikes against Kaiser. Eventually, they received and accepted an improved contract offer that did not include any benefit concessions.

Although the hospital workers successfully rejected concession bargaining, many of the workers were frustrated by the slow pace and lack of support that they received from the union during their struggle against Kaiser. In the wake of the 1993 contract campaign, an activist group of hospital workers started organizing around this frustration. Members of this group were dissatisfied with Local 399 leaders' continued prioritization of the JfJ campaign over support for the hospital division. They wanted greater union-supported activism and militancy in the hospital division to match JfJ-driven developments within the janitorial division. And they were unwilling to wait for the current Local 399 leadership to agree to their demands.

Rather than merely expressing their dissatisfaction to Local 399 President Zellers and SEIU President Sweeney like the spurned Local 399 hospital workers did in 1990, these workers decided to take a different approach in 1993. They decided that if they were not going to receive the current leadership's support for greater activism and militancy in the hospital division, they would change the leadership. Calling themselves the "Change '95" coalition, they began preparing to run a slate of candidates in Local 399's upcoming leadership election.⁸

Gomez, Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, May 6, 2016; Local 399 files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 45, Folder 5, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

⁸ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, May 6, 2016; Andrea

Like Change '95, the second dissident group within Local 399 was also dissatisfied with the local's current leadership and the current trajectory of the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign. But the dissatisfaction of this second group of dissidents, who were known as the Reformistas, stemmed from different grievances. While members of Change '95 wanted to expand militancy and activism modeled on the JfJ campaign to the hospital division of the local, the Reformistas wanted to slow the expansion of the JfJ-driven activism and militancy within the janitorial division.

Most of the Reformistas were janitors who worked in downtown Los Angeles and had been members of Local 399 even prior to the start of the Justice for Janitors campaign. These janitors were some of the first participants in and beneficiaries of the campaign. They worked under the direction of JfJ organizers Cecile Richards and Jono Shaffer to bring newfound activism and militancy to the janitorial industry in downtown Los Angeles in 1987. In return for their efforts, they received newfound attention from Local 399 organizers and representatives. They also achieved newfound security along with some wage and benefit improvements through the first master agreement signed under the Los Angeles JfJ campaign in 1988. In other words, their initial support for the Justice for Janitors campaign produced rather immediate tangible benefits. They had a quid-pro-quo relationship to the campaign

This sort of relationship to the campaign, however, was unsustainable. In the wake of the first master contract agreement, the focus of the JfJ campaign shifted from downtown to peripheral areas of "greater Los Angeles." In this expansion phase, JfJ leaders became less concerned with the wages and working conditions of janitors within core areas of Los Angeles and prioritized union resources toward organizing new members. This shift in priority was

Carney, "I declined to join the staff" in *The New Rank and File* ed. Staughton Lynd and Alice Lynd (Ithaca: IRL Press, 2000), 210-220.

inevitable within the campaign. The Justice for Janitors campaign's core organizing strategy revolved around leveraging existing union power to organize new janitors and to build the industry power necessary to take janitor wages and working conditions out of competition across geographic markets. The campaign depended, therefore, on the participation of existing union members who understood this strategy and valued the promise of greater collective janitor power in the future over the immediate benefits that an alternative use of union funds could produce. Specifically, the campaign required these union members to forgo the immediate (and temporary) benefits of a more traditional form of business unionism that would use local resources only to protect the wages and working conditions of existing union members and provide contract grievance services to these members.

The majority of janitors within Local 399—especially those organized as part of the JfJ campaign—understood this core JfJ strategy and were willing to forgo the fleeting, immediate benefits of a more traditional business unionism strategy. As such, they continually supported and helped drive forward an expansion and escalation of the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign. Some of the original JfJ supporters, who were already Local 399 members prior to the advent of the campaign, however, did not fully understand and value this strategy. As JfJ organizer Jono Shaffer recalled, the expansion and shift of JfJ from downtown to other areas of Los Angeles left many of the original downtown janitors asking: “Where’d everybody go?”⁹ While initially experiencing the excitement of the campaign where they worked, the downtown janitors felt increasingly isolated from the activism of the campaign as well as its benefits. In the process, they started reconsidering their support for the campaign.

⁹ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, May 6, 2016.

These janitors' dissatisfaction with the trajectory of the Justice for Janitors campaign only grew as the campaign expanded and evolved in the early to mid-1990s. As noted in the previous chapter, Justice for Janitors seemed to evolve during this period as a campaign that valued collective worker empowerment and difficult, long-term struggles against overlapping injustices as much if not more than tangible contract achievements and goals for an expanding group of janitors. In the midst of this evolution, the immediate interests and concerns of the downtown Local 399 janitors seemed all the more incompatible with the Justice for Janitors campaign. While initially questioning their support for the expansion of the JfJ campaign, these janitors started positioning themselves as a unified and vocal opposition to the current Local 399 leaders and organizers who supported the continued expansion and evolution of the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign.

These janitors' opposition to the campaign gained traction amongst other groups of janitors who had more specific grievances with Local 399 leaders. The dissatisfied downtown janitors found strong support, for example, amongst a group of janitors who were upset that Local 399 leaders fired one of the local's long-time business representatives in the division. This business representative, a Guatemalan immigrant and former janitor, had many loyal family members and friends working as janitors in Los Angeles. Many of these family members and friends developed a deep anger toward the Local 399 leaders responsible for the business representative's termination (even though Local 399 leaders had cause for the termination).

Disgruntled downtown janitors also found support amongst a group of unemployed janitors who were unhappy with Local 399's experimental temporary worker program. First implemented through the 1992 master janitorial agreement, this temporary worker program required union cleaning contractors to first use janitors registered with the union before bringing

in new workers. While Local 399 janitors supported this program conceptually, many unemployed janitors grew dissatisfied with Local 399 when union staff struggled to implement this program with sufficient ease and transparency. Joining together, these disgruntled janitors began calling themselves the Reformistas and demanding change within the local.¹⁰

The Reformistas' calls for Local 399 reform provided a unique opportunity for cross-division coalition building within the local. Change '95 leaders saw the Reformistas as a valuable ally. They began reaching out to Reformista janitors and even participating in solidarity actions with the janitorial division.¹¹ With a growing cross-division rapport and mutual dissatisfaction with current local leaders, Change '95 and the Reformistas united and formed the Multiracial Alliance. This alliance, as noted above, backed the slate of candidates that proved victorious in Local 399's leadership election in July of 1995.

Even after winning the vast majority of leadership positions, however, the Multiracial Alliance did not emerge from the 1995 election with the power or even a clear mandate to impose changes to Local 399. Because the Multiracial Alliance did not run a candidate against President Jim Zellers, the election created a split in the executive power of the local. Additionally, while winning a majority of the votes cast in the local election, the Multiracial Alliance did not necessarily enjoy the support of a majority of the local's membership. Only eleven percent of the Local 399 membership voted in the election.¹² Thus, the Multiracial Alliance's electoral victories can be seen as a product of a lack of voter turnout as much as anything else.

¹⁰ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, May 6, 2016.

¹¹ Change '95 leader Yolanda Rios, for example, participated in the JfJ contract campaign and International Women's Day action on March 8. Vicky Gomelsky, "36 women arrested at rally for contract," *The Outlook*, March 9, 1995.

¹² Viren Moret miscellaneous files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 35, Folder 3, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

Despite the fragility of their power, the newly elected Multiracial Alliance leaders quickly took action to begin a sweeping reform of the local. Likely due to the unique coalition composition of the Alliance, the reform efforts that they resolved to enact were rather inconsistent. Some of the resolutions were clearly aimed at increasing democracy and transparency within the union. The Multiracial Alliance, for example, resolved to leave the door between the union's lobby and inner offices open during business hours. This door, as JfJ organizer Jono Shaffer described, had long been both a physical barrier and symbol of division between the local's leadership and the rank and file. The Multiracial Alliance's resolution, then, provided an avenue for greater interaction and cooperation between rank-and-file members and Local 399 leaders. The Multiracial Alliance also resolved to make all of the local's monthly financial reports available to the membership. This resolution likewise provided an opportunity for greater openness and cooperation between the rank and file and local leaders.

Some of the other resolutions, however, were rooted in the specific interests of Multiracial Alliance members rather than broad goals of democratic reform. For example, the Multiracial Alliance committed to firing twelve of Local 399's staff members. Many of the staff members slated for termination were active, well-liked leaders in the Justice for Janitors campaign. The Multiracial Alliance sought to replace these staff members with its own members. When the Multiracial Alliance attempted to implement this and other seemingly anti-democratic resolutions, the group faced fierce resistance from President Zellers, Local 399 staff, and members of the union's rank and file. Before long, the split leadership reached a deadlock that paralyzed the local.

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The Washington D.C. JfJ campaign provides yet another example of a local JfJ campaign that faltered amidst a high point of campaign activism and expansion. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the D.C. JfJ group launched an exciting, broadly framed struggle against overlapping political and economic inequality in Washington D.C in 1994. One element of this struggle involved a legal initiative designed to require D.C. property owners to pay their fair share of property taxes. The second element involved a bold pressure campaign against wealthy real estate developer Oliver Carr. When the D.C. JfJ organizers and janitors just barely failed to generate enough public support to get the property tax reform initiative on the ballot in the fall of 1994, they focused all of their energy and resources into the pressure campaign against Oliver Carr.

To capture the public attention and put pressure on Carr, the JfJ group organized a series of bold traffic disruptions in late 1994 and 1995. Using the clever slogan “D.C. has Carr Trouble,” the group first orchestrated a major traffic block during a week of actions in December of 1994. On December 8, a group of JfJ organizers and janitors managed to block all of the incoming Interstate 395 lanes on the 14th Street Bridge from Arlington, Virginia to Washington D.C. for about forty-five minutes.¹³ A few months later, the JfJ group orchestrated several more major traffic-blocking actions. On May 20, 1995, a group of JfJ organizers, janitors, and community supporters once again created a traffic jam on the 14th Street Bridge. The next day, an even larger group participated in a massive demonstration to block the intersection of 17th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW. A total of six hundred and fifty people including JfJ activists and allies who traveled to D.C. from cities such as Detroit and New York, participated

¹³ Maryann Haggerty, “Protest of Carr Companies Blocks Bridge; 38 arrested,” *Washington Post*, December 9, 1994.

and blocked traffic during the evening rush hour for about fifteen minutes.¹⁴ An even bigger traffic disruption, however, soon overshadowed these actions.

During a week of action starting on September 18, 1995, the Washington D.C. JfJ group pulled off what was arguably the most disruptive single Justice for Janitors action to date. After extensive planning, the D.C. JfJ group managed to block all of the lanes on the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Bridge and set up a classroom in the middle of Interstate 66. To make this happen, JfJ organizers and janitors drove a school bus, a van painted to look like a school bus, two U-Haul trucks, and a caravan of cars full of people and classroom props onto the bridge. In a coordinated moment around 8 o'clock in the morning, JfJ organizer Mauricio Vasquez, who was driving the school bus, pulled across the majority of the bridge. The driver of the van followed suit, blocking the remaining traffic. After throwing the keys to their vehicles over the bridge, they joined the rest of the D.C. JfJ group in setting up classroom props and waving banners declaring "Save DC / Oliver Carr Must Pay!" Their aim was to visually call attention to the threat that tax breaks to Oliver Carr and other Washington D.C. elite posed to the education system. In setting up the classroom, the JfJ protestors created an opportunity for powerful storytelling images of the Washington D.C. police dismantling a classroom and arresting low-wage janitors who were only trying to protect the future well-being of their children.¹⁵

This well-planned action proved overwhelmingly successful in generating a massive disruption that caught media and public attention. Police took more than an hour to remove all of the classroom props, arrest the thirty-four protestors who refused to leave the bridge, and finally remove the van and school bus. Transportation authorities estimated that the action

¹⁴ Brian Reilly, "Protesters snarl 14th Street Bridge: Backup goes into Arlington," *Washington Times*, March 21, 1995; Wendy Melillo, "150 Arrested in Downtown D.C. Protest: 650 Union Activists, Supporters Block Commuter Traffic for 2nd Day," *Washington Post*, March 22, 1995.

¹⁵ "Lisa Fithian (Bridge Blocking)" *Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History*, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University.

disrupted more than 100,000 commuters and bystanders. And more than just disrupting the morning of a huge number of people, this action specifically disrupted the morning of many of Washington D.C.'s political elite. Health and Human Services Secretary Donna E. Shalala, for example, was amongst the many frustrated passengers who decided to just leave their cars behind and walk into the district rather than waiting for traffic flow to resume.¹⁶

While successful in generating attention, however, this dramatic action also sparked significant public and legal debate over the legitimacy of escalating JfJ actions. While the JfJ campaign in D.C. had a growing base of supporters, the Roosevelt Bridge-blocking action earned the campaign the ire of many people who worked and lived in D.C. Some D.C. residents even went so far as to dub JfJ participants “traffic terrorists” and write to the media and politicians in order to express their criticism of JfJ tactics. In the midst of this public backlash against the JfJ group, House of Representatives member Thomas M. Davis called a subcommittee hearing on the Justice for Janitors campaign’s traffic disruption tactics in early October 1995. At this hearing, subcommittee members debated increasing penalties for bridge and traffic blocking actions. (Under current law, each of the protestors was only charged a \$50 fine for blocking traffic). While this formal legal debate was underway, a couple of local lawyers advocated that district residents take action into their own hands. Writing to *The Washington Post*, these lawyers advocated suing the JfJ protestors in a massive civil action lawsuit for falsely imprisoning commuters in their cars during the action. While a civil action lawsuit never materialized, Washington D.C. legislators soon made bridge-blocking a felony offense.¹⁷

¹⁶ Marianne Kyriakos, “Roosevelt Bridge Blocked in Protest of D.C. Budget,” *Washington Post*, September 21, 1995.

¹⁷ Charles W. Hall, “Rush-Hour Protest Assailed: Rep Davis Urges D.C. to Stiffen Penalties on ‘Traffic Terrorism,’” *Washington Post*, October 7, 1995; Ron Shaffer, “Dr. Gridlock: A Whip to Tame Traffic Terrorists,” *Washington Post*, November 9, 1995; “Lisa Fithian (Bridge Blocking)” Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University.

While D.C. residents and politicians debated the legitimacy of the JfJ actions, these actions also became a central element of debate amongst top U.S. labor leaders. During 1995, in the midst of the D.C. JfJ group's pressure campaign against Oliver Carr, SEIU President John Sweeney made a bid for the AFL-CIO presidency in what would become the first contested election for this position. In this election, Sweeney ran against Thomas Donahue, a long-time friend and fellow unionist. To differentiate himself from Donahue, Sweeney ran on a platform of Justice for Janitors-oriented labor reform. Associating Donahue with the ineffective status quo of business unionism within the labor movement, Sweeney asserted his dedication to rejuvenating the labor movement by promoting organizing as well as membership and leadership diversity. Sweeney's leadership role in the Justice for Janitors campaign lent important legitimacy to his platform.¹⁸

At the same time, however, newly emerging controversy over recent JfJ tactics in D.C. threatened the success of Sweeney's presidential bid. In a debate with Sweeney, Donahue referenced the JfJ bridge-blocking tactic in a critique of escalating labor militancy. He asserted that unions should be building bridges rather than blocking them. In other words, he asserted that unions should foster positive worker and employer relationships rather than creating antagonism. Sweeney did not hesitate in rejecting this critique and emphasizing his support for the JfJ campaign. After acknowledging that he supported building bridges between workers and employers when possible, Sweeney declared that he believed in blocking bridges whenever employers and communities refused to acknowledge the needs of the working families that the

¹⁸ See, for example: Stuart Silverstein, "Union Chief Has Bold Plans in Bid to Lead AFL-CIO," *Los Angeles Times*, July 17, 1995.

labor movement represented. Shortly after making this declaration, Sweeney was elected AFL-CIO president.¹⁹

In many ways, Sweeney's election demonstrated the far-reaching impact and significance of the escalating and evolving Justice for Janitors campaign during the mid-1990s. Even though Sweeney, as discussed in Chapter 7, had been reluctant to push members of the SEIU old guard into accepting the JfJ campaign in 1993, he clearly recognized the value of the campaign and was interested in implementing reform throughout the labor movement. A key element of his candidacy for the AFL-CIO presidency, for example, was his call for greater leadership diversity within the AFL-CIO. Although he chose Richard Trumka—another white male—as his running mate for secretary-treasurer, Sweeney recruited Linda Chavez-Thompson to run on his ticket for a new position: executive vice-president. Linda Chavez-Thompson's candidacy was successful, and she became the first female and first person of color to hold a top executive position in the AFL-CIO. Chavez-Thompson was not the only individual adding to leadership diversity. Upon being elected, Sweeney expanded the executive council of the labor federation from 35 to 54 members. Nearly half of the new council members were either women or people of color.²⁰ Beyond expanding leadership diversity, Sweeney also made a commitment to spending \$20 million a year, which was about thirty percent of the AFL-CIO's annual budget, on organizing.²¹

As Sweeney made headway in supporting diversity and organizing at the top-level of the labor movement, progressive local unionist activists—particularly those involved in the JfJ campaign—received a boost in morale. Sweeney's election and reform efforts provided an

¹⁹ Steven Greenhouse, "Man in the News: John Joseph Sweeney; New Fire for Labor," *New York Times*, October 26, 1995.

²⁰ Sweeney did receive criticism from some labor leaders and activists who considered Sweeney's creation of new leadership positions to increase diversity more as a sign of tokenism rather than true leadership diversity and reform. Stuart Silverstein, "Working Within Two Cultures; Many see Linda Chavez-Thompson's election to No. 3 post at AFL-CIO as inspired choice," *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1995.

²¹ Stuart Silverstein, "Sweeney, a 'New Voice,' Is Voted AFL-CIO Chief," *Los Angeles Times*, October 26, 1995.

important affirmation that broad reform and change within the labor movement was possible. His election and reform efforts suggested that people struggling against conservative forms of business unionism and against economic inequality at the ground level were not fighting an impossible battle.²² This was particularly important for the Washington D.C. JfJ campaign, which was continually facing vociferous resistance from building owners, cleaning contractors, and by 1995 even many members of the general public.

With this boost of morale from the top of the labor movement, the D.C. JfJ group continued escalating their broad struggle for greater economic equality in Washington D.C. In 1996, JfJ organizers and janitors once again revived their property tax reform initiative. And this time, they proved successful. In the summer of 1996, the JfJ group generated enough support to get the initiative put on the ballot.²³ This legal effort was only one element of the JfJ group's activism in the fall of 1996, however. In October 1996, D.C. janitors joined together to demand a citywide janitor contract. Although the JfJ group had succeeded in organizing a slight majority of the janitors in D.C., the group had not yet negotiated a master agreement for D.C. janitors. In October of 1996, the D.C. janitors sought to change this. And when the cleaning contractors refused to give into their demands, the janitors walked off of their jobs in a citywide janitor strike.²⁴

While building support for the citywide strike and the property tax reform initiative, D.C. JfJ group members also lent their support to the immigrant rights movement. On October 12, 1996, for example, D.C. janitors and JfJ organizers participated in the massive Latino March on

²² Frank Swoboda, "The State of the Unions," *Washington Post*, September 2, 1996.

²³ Vernon Loeb, "Union Puts Assessment Issue on Ballot," *Washington Post*, October 31, 1996.

²⁴ Frank Swoboda, "D.C. Janitors Say They're Ready to Strike at Midnight," *Washington Post*, September 30, 1996; Michael Powell, "Making a Clean Sweep of Mt. Pleasant Streets: Janitors Thank Residents for Support During Strike," *Washington Post*, June 15, 1997.

Washington.²⁵ As part of this march, the D.C. JfJ group publicly connected their fight against economic inequality in Washington D.C. to a national struggle against the political, social, and economic inequality that Latinx immigrants experienced throughout the United States.

On the whole, these actions suggest that the D.C. JfJ group was following the course of campaign expansion and evolution that the Bay Area and Los Angeles JfJ groups had taken a few years earlier. Although still seeking their first master janitor agreement, the Washington D.C. JfJ group had become a powerful socioeconomic force and source of action within the district. From this position of strength, D.C. JfJ organizers and janitors escalated their actions and took great risks to continue organizing with the goal of taking wages and working conditions out of competition throughout the district's janitorial industry. More than this, though, these organizers and janitors also continued to promote Justice for Janitors as more than just a janitor organizing drive. They publicized the campaign as part of a much broader struggle against overlapping injustices within Washington D.C., specifically, and the United States, more broadly. And while publicizing their janitor organizing drive in this way, these JfJ organizers and janitors also committed their time, energy, and financial resources to taking actions in support of this larger struggle against injustice. They promoted a tax initiative designed to benefit a majority of D.C. residents and participated in the Latino March on Washington, which was designed as a call to action to improve the treatment of all Latinx immigrants in the United States.

Ultimately, then, the D.C. JfJ organizers and janitors contributed to and embedded themselves within a broad surge of action against the often intersecting and overlapping injustices that characterized the increasingly neoliberal era. They exposed the ways in which the

²⁵ March for Immigrants Rights photos, Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University.

marginalization and exploitation that a diverse group of individuals faced overlapped and had common roots. In doing so, they fostered greater working class consciousness and provided a means for workers to join together across lines of citizenship, race, gender, and even traditional narrow conceptions of the working class. In a way, then, they helped empower workers to take action to achieve a more equitable future—a future in which the economic and political elite wouldn't be allowed to continue profiting at the expense of the masses.

In November of 1996, the D.C. organizers and janitors enjoyed a key victory that helped validate their ongoing efforts to escalate and transform the Justice for Janitors campaign into a broader struggle for justice. In this month, their property tax initiative passed. Seven years after the D.C. JfJ group started bringing public attention to the fact that D.C. tax policy benefited wealthy real estate owners at the expense of the poor, the JfJ group finally won a legal victory to reform this policy.²⁶

While their property tax reform initiative proved successful in November, the D.C. janitors did not achieve quick success with their citywide strike for a master agreement. Nevertheless, the janitors remained united and committed to the strike even through the winter cold and holiday season in late 1996. With local community members rallying behind them, the janitors made immediate financial sacrifices, holding out for the promise of greater industry power and economic security.²⁷

At a seeming highpoint of campaign success, enthusiasm, and activism, however, the D.C. JfJ campaign started to crumble internally. After remaining united and committed to the citywide strike for five months, many of the D.C. janitors started to lose their resolve to continue

²⁶ “D.C. Tax Measure Raises Concerns,” *Washington Post*, March 4, 1997.

²⁷ Frank Swoboda, “D.C. Janitors Say They’re Ready to Strike at Midnight,” *Washington Post*, September 30, 1996; Michael Powell, “Making a Clean Sweep of Mt. Pleasant Streets: Janitors Thank Residents for Support During Strike,” *Washington Post*, June 15, 1997.

striking. In March of 1997, the D.C. janitors voted—in a split decision of 103 to 39—to end the strike and accept a contract that fell short of their initial demand for a citywide master agreement. JfJ organizers asserted that the contract settlement did not mark an end to the D.C. JfJ campaign and the goal of achieving a master agreement.²⁸ But the settlement did represent a setback. With this settlement, a majority of the striking D.C. janitors chose to return to their jobs and accept small wage and benefit improvements for themselves rather than holding out for a master contract that would help organize and win better wages and benefits for the remaining nonunion janitors in the district.

These D.C. janitors' actions to end the strike short of a complete victory bear similarity to the actions of the Reformista janitors within Local 399. The D.C. janitors clearly had an added impetus for rethinking their complete commitment to the Justice for Janitors campaign. After already starting from a position of economic insecurity, these janitors faced acute economic hardship after being out on strike for five months. At a basic level, though, these D.C. janitors—much like the Local 399 Reformistas—ultimately decided that the potentially huge payoff of a successful Justice for Janitors campaign was not worth the sacrifice to their immediate needs and well-being. Both the D.C. janitors who voted to accept the 1997 contract settlement and the Local 399 Reformista janitors were more interested in satisfying their short-term concerns with their current wages and working conditions than holding out for greater collective janitor power in the future. This prioritization of short-term interests over long-term goals was completely understandable considering the economic exploitation and insecurity that these janitors were forced to endure on a daily basis. At the same time, though, this prioritization of short-term interests fractured the Justice for Janitors campaign's local base of support and therefore threatened the campaign's sustainability and future success.

²⁸ Frank Swoboda, "Janitors Approve Contract, End 5-Month Strike," *Washington Post*, March 8, 1997.

Also paralleling the internal conflict that ruptured in Local 399 in 1995, conflict emerged within Local 82 around a second source of contention related to the Justice for Janitors campaign during this period. As discussed in Chapter 6, the D.C. Justice for Janitors campaign, which originally operated out of Local 525, merged into Local 82 in the early 1990s. This merger was designed to provide a broader base of membership and financial support for the Justice for Janitors campaign. And arguably, the merger did so. In the wake of this merger, the Justice for Janitors campaign gained strength and made newfound organizing progress. Unfortunately, this merger also sowed the seeds for conflict within Local 82.

Created specifically for the JfJ campaign, Local 525 only had a janitorial division. The complete prioritization of the local's resources to the JfJ campaign, then, was not a source of contention in Local 525. Local 82, however, was an amalgamated local with several divisions including a public sector division, hospital division, and janitorial division. Within this larger local, the prioritization and funding of the Justice for Janitors campaign became a source of conflict. Like the hospital worker members of the Multiracial Alliance in Local 399, many of Local 82's existing union members outside of the janitorial division felt isolated from and left out of the Justice for Janitors campaign.

Furthermore, tensions between Local 82 divisions over the Justice for Janitors campaign intersected with racial tensions within the local—tensions that, as mentioned in Chapter 6, were left largely unaddressed when Local 525 merged into Local 82. Most of Local 82's members prior to the merger were African American. Many of these African American Local 82 members saw the Justice for Janitors campaign as a labor campaign that only benefited Latinx janitors. They grew dissatisfied with the use of union resources to support the JfJ campaign when African American workers were also struggling economically in the district. Rather than continuing to

watch as their union dues were used to organize Latinx janitors, many of the Local 82 members wanted to see their dues spent on member servicing. Much like the contract settlement that many of the D.C. janitors voted for in 1997, this member servicing would provide them with an immediate benefit.²⁹

Ultimately, then, dissatisfaction with the Justice for Janitors campaign emerged on two fronts in Local 82, just like it had in Local 399. While some of the janitors who were initially supportive of the JfJ campaign started questioning the value of continuing to sacrifice in order to expand the campaign for the benefit of other janitors, other union members outside of the janitorial division questioned the value of their union dues contributing to the campaign and benefiting workers other than themselves. This dissatisfaction with the D.C. JfJ campaign threatened to erupt into a major conflict in Local 82 much like dissatisfaction with the Los Angeles JfJ campaign had erupted in a major conflict in Local 399.

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Each of these three instances of conflict, crumbling support, and failure for local JfJ campaigns point to the extreme difficulty of sustaining a labor campaign amidst the rise of the neoliberal era in the late twentieth century. By the mid-1990s, the Justice for Janitors campaign had made great strides in organizing and winning tangible wage and benefit improvements for janitors and in generating a sense of excitement and hope for an alternative to the status quo of both conservative business unionism within the labor movement and the growing polarization of society between the wealthy elite and the masses more broadly. Nevertheless, these

²⁹ Final Report from the Committee on the Future with Comments and Options Papers, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 136, Folder 7, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; “Jaime Contreras (Unionism)” Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University; “Bill Ragen, Lisa Fithian and Mary Anne Hohenstein (29 April)” Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University.

achievements and this campaign progress were hardly a guarantee of future success. Even as the campaign appeared to gain ground and momentum, JfJ groups constantly faced extreme hostility and opposition from the contractors that they sought to organize and the contractor clients that they pressured to intervene on workers' behalf. This external hostility made continued organizing and campaign progress a constant, difficult struggle. At the same time, this external hostility to the campaign put pressure on and magnified fault lines and points of tension within the local JfJ groups.

Explored together, the local JfJ struggles in the Bay Area, Los Angeles, and Washington D.C. point to a pattern of escalating internal tensions at the local level as Justice for Janitors expanded and faced increasing external hostility. These struggles suggest the limitations of the JfJ campaign's ability to continue growing and evolving as a campaign that united diverse groups of workers together in a large-scale struggle against the intersectional injustices of neoliberal capitalism. Throughout the early development of the campaign, local JfJ groups had proven to be a major source of Justice for Janitors strength and endurance. These groups were created and expanded through the hard work and dedication of workers, who experienced the exploitation and vulnerability of union decline and neoliberal restructuring on a daily basis, and key union bridge builders, who helped foster unity between different groups of workers and between workers and International union leaders. United around a common dissatisfaction with the status quo and a common demand for justice, these local JfJ groups had proven capable of withstanding extreme anti-union backlash and enduring in the face of conflict amongst International SEIU leaders. As the campaign continued to grow and escalate, however, the very same tensions and ambiguities surrounding both the purpose and process of the Justice for Janitors campaign that plagued International SEIU leaders also plagued local JfJ groups.

As the expansion and escalation of the campaign required workers and allies involved in the campaign as well as all union members in locals that had JfJ campaigns to continue sacrificing their time, energy, and immediate economic well-being for increasingly far-reaching, even radical goals, the foundation for local JfJ groups cracked and ultimately crumbled. While some members of local JfJ groups wanted to continue rapidly pushing the campaign forward and seemed to set their sights on building a massive, intersectional workers' struggle capable of confronting the power of the neoliberal elite, other members of these groups and the larger pool of union members who tacitly supported the JfJ campaign started questioning their continual sacrifice for a struggle that seemed increasingly far-removed from their immediate interests and needs. As illustrated in this chapter, this internal doubt caused the Bay Area Campaign for Justice to fall apart and, more dramatically, sewed the seeds for major internal conflict and local paralysis in Los Angeles Local 399 and Washington D.C. Local 82.

While suggesting the limitations of the JfJ campaign, however, these local JfJ struggles did not destroy the Justice for Janitors campaign. While assuredly marking a low-point within the history of the campaign, these local campaign struggles helped spur yet another wave of Justice for Janitors campaign adaptation and evolution. As I will discuss in the following chapter, JfJ leaders and newly elected SEIU President Andy Stern did not let these local struggles completely derail the campaign. Instead, they responded to these local struggles with a drive for campaign consolidation and centralization. While hardly resolving internal tensions embedded within the campaign, this move toward consolidation and centralization helped the Justice for Janitors campaign endure in the wake of local struggles. It also helped Justice for Janitors adapt to and boldly challenge yet another wave of neoliberal restructuring within the janitorial industry.

Chapter 9

Overcoming Local Strife and Responding to Industry Changes:

Justice for Janitors Adapts and Evolves as a Response to Neoliberal Restructuring...Despite Growing Internal Tensions (1996-1998)

In this chapter, I explore a major phase of Justice for Janitors evolution—a shift toward campaign consolidation and centralization—that occurred in the mid to late 1990s. I reveal that this evolution occurred in the wake of and in response to the local JfJ struggles detailed in Chapter 8 as well as a new phase of neoliberal restructuring that occurred in the janitorial industry and global economy more generally. I begin by exploring local JfJ leaders' efforts to respond to the Bay Area JfJ group's failed Campaign for Justice and to Los Angeles Local 399's internal conflict and paralysis following the election of the Multiracial Alliance slate in 1995. I demonstrate that responses to both of these local struggles led to JfJ campaign consolidation and local mergers which, in turn, created the foundation for an expanded Local 1877 to lead a unified Justice for Janitors campaign across California. I also explore the concurrent efforts of local JfJ groups throughout the United States to unify their contract negotiation efforts and align their contract expiration dates in the mid to late 1990s.

I assess the possibilities but also tensions inherent in this mostly grassroots push for campaign consolidation and unity, particularly in light of concurrent cleaning contractor and building ownership consolidation. I connect these industry changes to neoliberal restructuring, and especially the growing financialization of the global economy. As such, I argue that this campaign consolidation and centralization illustrates how the Justice for Janitors campaign continued to adapt and evolve in response to neoliberal restructuring during this period. As the

power of cleaning contractors and building owners grew, local JfJ groups worked to build worker solidarity and unity on a scale capable of resisting this power and continuing to organize janitors and fight against worker exploitation. At the same time, I point to the ways in which this campaign consolidation actually magnified some of the tensions inherent in the JfJ campaign. While serving as an obvious immediate solution to local struggles and industry restructuring, this phase of JfJ evolution did not address underlying questions and concerns about the true purpose of Justice for Janitors and actually intensified tensions over the form and process of the campaign. In particular, this phase of evolution magnified tensions over the role of democracy and rank-and-file control within the campaign.

In the second half of the chapter, I explore the role that newly elected SEIU President Andy Stern played in facilitating greater consolidation and centralization of the Justice for Janitors campaign. I highlight how his willingness to confront and push out old guard leaders laid the foundation for Justice for Janitors to expand and evolve as a truly nationwide janitor organizing drive. At the same time, I emphasize how his intervention into the Washington D.C. JfJ campaign in 1997 highlights the risks of growing campaign consolidation and centralization.

Stepping into the D.C. campaign, Stern shifted the focus of the campaign away from confrontational rank-and-file and community action and toward backroom, conciliatory negotiations with cleaning contractors and building owners. While compatible in many ways with core JfJ organizing strategy, his actions denigrated and shifted the Justice for Janitors campaign away from the grassroots energy and militancy that had made the campaign such an inspiring success in the early 1990s. As an increasingly centralized and consolidated campaign, the Justice for Janitors campaign was increasingly vulnerable to oversight from top SEIU leaders such as Andy Stern. Stern's intervention, thus, suggested that the Justice for Janitors campaign

was on track to evolve not just as an increasingly centralized and consolidated campaign but also as an increasingly conservative, top-down campaign under his control.

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The failure of the Silicon Valley Campaign for Justice in 1995 could have easily ended the Bay Area Justice for Janitors campaign. Having already organized both large and small cleaning contractors in Local 1877's immediate jurisdiction, the Bay Area JfJ group did not have any obvious organizing targets for a continuation of the campaign as an organizing drive in the janitorial industry. Under the leadership of veteran JfJ leader Mike Garcia, however, the Bay Area JfJ group did not give up on the Justice for Janitors campaign. Instead, the group found a unique and unconventional opportunity to continue expanding the Justice for Janitors campaign outside of Local 1877's traditional geographic jurisdiction. As the Campaign for Justice fell apart, members of the Bay Area JfJ group expanded their organizing efforts to Sacramento.

Amidst a surge of grassroots support for the JfJ campaign following the Los Angeles ISS victory in 1990, SEIU Local 22 in Sacramento decided to participate in the Justice for Janitors campaign. After years of inaction and declining membership, leaders and members of Local 22 started participating in solidarity actions with the Los Angeles JfJ campaign against Bradford in 1990. Leaders in the local also developed a plan to launch their own janitor organizing drive in Sacramento. When the president of Local 22 requested funds from the International to support this organizing drive, however, her request was denied. (As suggested in previous chapters, the International focused on providing JfJ resources to bolster existing local JfJ campaigns and to support an expansion of the campaign through a suburban project in the Midwest and Northeast in the early 1990s.) Without support from the International, Local 22 leaders and members struggled to build a JfJ campaign on their own. By 1994, four years after Local 22 started

participating in the JfJ campaign, the local represented only twenty percent of the janitors in the city.

While a source of frustration for Local 22, the lack of JfJ organizing success in Sacramento provided an opportunity for the Bay Area JfJ group. While struggling to expand the JfJ campaign amongst landscaping workers through the Campaign for Justice, Bay Area JfJ group members looked to Sacramento as an opportunity to continue their efforts to expand the JfJ campaign while returning to their original janitorial industry focus. With support from Local 22 leaders and members, the Bay Area JfJ group sent a group of ten organizers to Sacramento to launch an expansion of the Bay Area JfJ campaign in Sacramento. At the same time, Local 1877 President Mike Garcia started negotiating the merger of Local 22's existing janitor members into Local 1877.¹

Building a Sacramento JfJ campaign did not prove to be an easy task, even for JfJ organizers with extensive experience organizing in the Bay Area. The newly transferred Bay Area JfJ organizers initially planned on using the political and economic allies that they had cultivated in the Bay Area JfJ campaign to quickly build a successful Sacramento JfJ campaign. But they found that what they had achieved in the Bay Area did not easily translate to Sacramento. Nevertheless, after several years of hard work and struggle to build a strong local campaign from the ground up, the Sacramento JfJ group ultimately won a major victory against the largest nonunion contractor in Sacramento.² And in the meantime, Local 1877 President

¹ "Branching Out," *Building Service Update* 5, no. 4 (Winter 1991), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "The Silicon Valley Solution" *Building Service Update* 8, no. 4 (Fall/Winter 1994), United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 7, Folder 5, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Cathleen Ferraro, "Union Bids to Organize Janitors," *Sacramento Bee*, March 3, 1995; Preston O. Rudy, "Labor, Globalization and Urban Political Fields: A Comparison of Justice for Janitors in Three California Cities" (PhD. diss, University of California Davis, 2003).

² Preston O. Rudy provides a comprehensive account of the Sacramento Justice for Janitors campaign during the late 1990s in his dissertation "Labor, Globalization and Urban Political Fields." For more information on this campaign,

Mike Garcia successfully negotiated the transfer of Local 22's janitorial membership and the rest of Local 22's private sector membership into Local 1877.

This JfJ expansion and merger ultimately proved very beneficial to Local 22 janitors, who had been unable to sustain a JfJ campaign on their own. The arrival of Bay Area JfJ organizers provided these janitors with the assistance they needed to take a stand against the neoliberal industry restructuring and union decline that had eroded their wages, working conditions, and job security. And the merger into Local 1877 provided Local 22 janitors with access to a large, active local union—notably, a local union that had proven capable of helping janitors struggle for greater economic security and win.

At the same time, this campaign expansion and merger proved beneficial to the Bay Area JfJ group in many ways. The expansion to Sacramento provided Bay Area JfJ organizers with a critical opportunity to continue building the JfJ campaign when their initial efforts to expand the campaign across industry lines in the Bay Area with the Campaign for Justice failed. Although building a Sacramento JfJ campaign did not prove to be quick or easy, this new campaign once again imbued the Bay Area JfJ group with a sense of momentum and excitement. Furthermore, this campaign and the Local 22 merger opened the door for an expanded Local 1877 to build a unified front of JfJ power across Northern California.

Unfortunately, however, this JfJ expansion and merger also planted seeds for new forms of internal tension within Local 1877. The Sacramento JfJ campaign usurped a lot of Local 1877 organizers and leaders' time and was very taxing on the local's finances. As the Sacramento JfJ organizers struggled to get their new JfJ campaign off the ground, the Bay Area janitors'

and particularly the JfJ organizers' struggle within Sacramento's parochial political field, see Preston O. Rudy, "Labor, Globalization and Urban Political Fields: A Comparison of Justice for Janitors in Three California Cities" (PhD. diss, University of California Davis, 2003).

organizing and contract bargaining efforts largely fell by the wayside.³ Thus, while Sacramento janitors received an immediate benefit from this campaign expansion and merger, Bay Area janitors seemed to get the short end of the stick. They were left to hope that their immediate sacrifice in support of the organization of Sacramento janitors would ultimately result in stronger wages and industry security for all Northern California janitors.

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While overseeing the merger of Local 22 union members into Local 1877 and the consolidation of a broad Northern California JfJ campaign, Local 1877 President Mike Garcia also played an important role in the resolution of the internal crisis in Los Angeles Local 399. As noted in Chapter 8, conflict between the Multiracial Alliance and an oppositional faction led by President Jim Zellers paralyzed Local 399 in 1995. As the executive and financial power was split between these two factions, the day-to-day operations of Local 399 ground to a halt. Seeing no way to resolve this deadlock on their own, both the Multiracial Alliance and President Jim Zellers appealed to the International union for assistance. International SEIU leaders met with both factions and attempted to help them resolve their conflict. When this initial mediation effort failed, Mike Garcia—who had a long history of resolving tensions and building bridges between opposing groups within SEIU locals in the history of the JfJ campaign—stepped into the conflict at President Sweeney’s request. Garcia’s initial attempts at mediation, however, also proved unsuccessful.⁴

³ Catherine L. Fisk, Daniel J.B. Mitchell, and Christopher L. Erickson, “Union Representation of Immigrant Janitors in Southern California: Economic and Legal Challenges,” in *Organizing Immigrants: The Challenge for Unions in Contemporary California*, ed. Ruth Milkman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 199-244.

⁴ Merger/Split files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 6, Folder 14, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Viren Moret miscellaneous files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 35, Folder 3, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo*:

With internal mediation efforts failing, Multiracial Alliance members publicized their conflict with Local 399's old leadership. They staged a hunger strike and spoke with reporters about their grievances, carefully framing their struggle as a struggle for diversity and democracy. During the hunger strike, Multiracial Alliance members demanded "White Hands Out" of the union and told reporters about the old leadership's demeaning attitude toward the newly elected leaders. One of the hunger strikers, for example, asserted, "[The old leadership] shut the door on us. They say the leadership we elected isn't capable of doing the job. They treat us like ignorant peasants."⁵ The Multiracial Alliance's hunger strike and framing strategy effectively put negative public pressure on President Jim Zellers and other Local 399 leaders and members who opposed the Multiracial Alliance. At the same time, though, the Multiracial Alliance's actions only spurred more anger and resistance from the opposition group that President Zellers led.

In the midst of publicly escalating tensions and failed internal mediation, President Sweeney appointed an International advisor to oversee a series of hearings about the conflict. These hearings confirmed that the internal conflict was both immediately paralyzing to the local's daily operations and posed a significant threat to the local's long-term stability and influence in the both the janitorial and health care industries. Furthermore, the hearings exposed an escalating financial crisis within the local that pre-dated the leadership conflict. Between debt to the International union and excessive expenditures, Local 399's debt for the first half of 1995 alone was nearly \$400,000. Under current operations, this debt was projected to double by the end of the year. As these issues came to light, the International hearing advisor recommended that President Sweeney place the local in trusteeship. On September 14, 1995, President

Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, May 6, 2016.

⁵ Sonia Nazario, "Hunger Strike Marks Union's Split Labor," *Los Angeles Times*, August 8, 1995.

Sweeney placed Local 399 in trusteeship under the direction of Local 1877 President Mike Garcia.⁶

Many reporters, labor activists, and scholars have interpreted the trusteeship of Local 399 as a blow to local democracy and to the Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles.⁷ This interpretation, however, largely rested on an incomplete understanding of the conflict that emerged in Local 399. The Multiracial Alliance publicly projected the conflict as a straightforward struggle between a group of diverse, rank-and-file union members who wanted democratic reform and a group of conservative, white labor leaders who did not want to lose control. In reality, though, the conflict was much more complex.

Some members of the Multiracial Alliance wanted greater democracy and rank-and-file control over Local 399. In particular, the hospital members of the Multiracial Alliance wanted to build rank-and-file activism and leadership in the hospital division to match JfJ-driven changes in the janitorial division. Other members of the Multiracial Alliance, however, wanted reform that actually threatened democracy and existing rank-and-file leadership in the janitorial division. Opposition to the Multiracial Alliance, then, did not necessarily signal a desire to quell a grassroots demand for reform within the local.

I argue that the conflict that emerged within Local 399 can be more accurately understood as a rupture in Local 399 support for the JfJ campaign. Although oppositional in many ways, both factions of the Multiracial Alliance started to take exception with Local 399

⁶ Merger/Split files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 6, Folder 14, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Viren Moret miscellaneous files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 35, Folder 3, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

⁷ See, for example: David Bacon, "Immigrant Workers Fight to Run Local 399," September 16, 1995, <http://dbacon.igc.org/Imigrants/01Loc399.html>; Frank Del Olmo, "Empowerment Has Its Problems: The sudden prominence of the service workers' union belies the trouble the old guard has with its base of minorities and women," *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1995; Ruth Milkman, *LA Story: Immigrant Workers and the Future of the U.S. Labor Movement* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006), 159-160.

leaders' use of union resources to support the JfJ campaign. Like the Bay Area unions who withdrew support for the Campaign for Justice when it did not generate immediate results, Multiracial Alliance members started taking exception to the use of their union dues to support the Justice for Janitors campaign. Rather than supporting a campaign that most directly benefited newly organized and nonunion janitors, members of the Multiracial Alliance wanted to see their union dues support their own immediate labor issues and interests.

This more nuanced understanding of the conflict in Local 399 necessitates an alternate interpretation of the Local 399 trusteeship. Although the trusteeship removed local leaders, the trusteeship was not imposed hastily or without due process. John Sweeney only implemented the trusteeship after several mediation efforts failed and Local 399 leaders and members had an opportunity to participate in trusteeship hearings. Furthermore, at the trusteeship hearings, leaders from the Multiracial Alliance and President Zellers all declared their support for trusteeship. The trusteeship, then, was hardly an assault on union democracy.

While the trusteeship was not an assault on union democracy, the internal conflict within Local 399 prior to the trusteeship had been damaging to the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign. In an initial attempt to resolve the internal conflict, JfJ organizer Jono Shaffer left Local 399. The Reformista faction of the Multiracial Alliance explicitly called for Shaffer, who was neither Latinx nor from the rank and file, to be removed from the local. As Shaffer recalled, this demand for his removal was personally hurtful considering his proven dedication to the campaign. Nevertheless, Shaffer supported the process of developing Latinx, rank-and-file leadership within the campaign and willingly left the local.⁸ His absence, however, along with the deadlock in union finances and the struggle over staff positions caused organizing and

⁸ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, May 6, 2016.

activism within the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign to grind to a halt in the spring of 1995.

Furthermore, the internal conflict in Local 399 presented an opportunity for building managers and owners to exploit. The Los Angeles JfJ group's lack of resources and lack unity to fight back provided building owners and managers with a prime opportunity to switch to nonunion contractors. The conflict in Local 399, then, not only threatened the continued development of the campaign but also the campaign's existing strength and achievements. Because the conflict was so damaging to the campaign, the trusteeship actually provided an opportunity to protect the Justice for Janitors campaign.

While the trusteeship immediately helped stabilize Local 399 and the Justice for Janitors campaign, the trusteeship was only a temporary solution. During the course of the trusteeship, trustee Mike Garcia and Local 399 janitors started considering a more long-term solution to building stability and strength for the janitorial division and the JfJ campaign. They started considering merging the janitorial division of Local 399 into Local 1877.

Not all Local 399 members were supportive of the merger. Members of the Multiracial Alliance, for example, expressed their opposition in a letter to newly elected SEIU President Andy Stern in November of 1996. They asserted that the membership size and the diversity of Local 399 were key to the local's strength and, as such, the split and merger would harm the local. Furthermore, they specifically argued that the merger would take away an important "internal role-model" for the hospital division. They suggested that Local 399's Kaiser members could more easily create future organizing drives amongst other nonunion health care workers if the JfJ campaign stayed within the local. Regardless of this opposition, however, a majority of Local 399 janitors voted in support of the merger. In March of 1997, less than a year after the

janitorial division of Local 22 in Sacramento merged with Local 1877, the janitorial division of Local 399 formally merged with Local 1877 as well.⁹

This merger addressed some of the sources of the internal conflict that had torn apart Local 399. By splitting the janitorial division from the hospital division in Local 399, the merger eliminated the competition and conflict over funding and organizing that occurred between the two divisions when Local 399 was an amalgamated local. The merger also placed the Los Angeles janitors under the leadership of Mike Garcia who was both Latinx and had briefly worked as a janitor before becoming a union leader. The merger, then, helped eliminate conflict over diversity and rank-and-file representation in leadership for the janitors.

While addressing these sources of conflict, however, the merger actually created a greater potential for internal conflict over the use of union resources to support Justice for Janitors as an expansive, forward-looking organizing drive. As noted previously, some Local 399 janitors wanted to use union funds to improve the wages and working conditions of existing members rather than to only organize new workers. Their opposition to funding JfJ expansion was a major contributing factor to the internal conflict that tore the Local 399 apart. By merging into Local 1877, Los Angeles janitors became wedded to an even more expansive Justice for Janitors campaign. Under Mike Garcia's leadership, Local 1877 was firmly committed to prioritizing local funding for Justice for Janitors expansion. More than this, the Justice for Janitors campaign that Local 1877 supported increasingly revolved around broad goals of worker empowerment

⁹ "SEIU Hearing and Merger," Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 5, Folder 24, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Merger/Split files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 6, Folder 14, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Mike Garcia, "Solidarity & Dedication Key to Local 1877's Accomplishments" *SEIU Local 1877 News* (Spring 1997), Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 7, Folder 6, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Local 1877 conference files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 7, Folder 12, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

and collective action not just throughout one geographic market but across multiple geographic markets. The merger, then, required the Los Angeles janitors to support Justice for Janitors organizing drives that did not provide them with any immediate benefits and seemed even more isolated from their day-to-day working lives. Rather than just supporting organizing drives in the outlying areas of Los Angeles County, the Los Angeles janitors would now be supporting with their union dues organizing drives amongst janitors as far away as Sacramento.

Ultimately, then, the merger came with both advantages and disadvantages for the Los Angeles janitors. On the one hand, the merger provided the Los Angeles janitors with a new opportunity for mutually beneficial coordination and cooperation with other California janitors. As part of a single statewide local, Sacramento, Bay Area, and Los Angeles janitors could unite and wield their collective power more easily than before. On the other hand, the merger required the already organized Los Angeles janitors to continue sacrificing alternate uses of their union dues in favor of organizing new janitors and the promise of eventually achieving the collective strength capable of improving wages and working conditions for all California janitors in the future.

While increasing rather than decreasing the potential for internal conflict, the merger also raised questions about democratic, rank-and-file influence and control over the Justice for Janitors campaign. Within the newly expanded Local 1877, janitors separated by extensive geographic distance became committed to a single Justice for Janitors campaign under the leadership of a single local president. As such, the merger distanced janitors, at least individually, from the sources of decision-making and power within the campaign and the local in general. By placing the janitors within a large statewide local, the merger did not reduce the likelihood of internal conflict, but it did reduce the likelihood that a small oppositional faction of

janitors like the Reformistas in the Local 399 could disrupt the campaign in the future. Thus, while offering the promise of collective janitor empowerment, the merger represented a potential threat to rank-and-file leadership in the Justice for Janitors campaign and to union democracy more broadly.

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While struggling to address local union conflicts and failures in the mid-1990s, local JfJ leaders were also forced to confront an escalation of neoliberal restructuring within the janitorial industry. The timing and nature of this industry restructuring suggest that the pattern of JfJ consolidation and local mergers developing in California did not develop only in response to local Justice for Janitors struggles. Instead, this trend toward JfJ consolidation and centralization was also rooted in a larger phase of Justice for Janitors evolution in response to ongoing neoliberal restructuring.

As suggested in previous chapters, changes within the janitorial industry were hardly something new in the late twentieth century. As part of the broad economic shift that has come to be known as neoliberal restructuring, contracting and subcontracting became standard throughout the janitorial industry. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, many cleaning companies grew in size and expanded geographically, often through acquisitions of other cleaning contractors. Instead of having a direct employment relationship with the owners and managers of the buildings that they cleaned, janitors increasingly worked for large cleaning companies that had contracts with multiple building owners and managers. Under this contracting system, large cleaning companies minimized their expenses and allowed building owners and managers to profit while eliminating janitors' benefits, drastically cutting their wages, and reducing their hours while simultaneously increasing the amount of space they were

required to clean. In other words—fitting with a much larger pattern of neoliberal restructuring throughout the U.S. economy at the time—this contracting system allowed the economic elite in the real estate industry to profit at the expense of low-wage janitors.

During the mid to late 1990s, the existing trend of cleaning contractor growth and consolidation intensified. Patterns of mergers and buyouts amongst cleaning contractors became more prominent, resulting in a number of extremely large cleaning contractors. These cleaning contractors started not only to dominate the janitorial industry throughout the United States but also the janitorial industry on a global scale. At the same time, building ownership was likewise consolidated and increasingly dominated by a smaller number of major players. This occurred amidst the rapid growth of real estate investment trusts (REITs) in the 1990s.¹⁰

For the vast majority of the twentieth century, office building ownership throughout the United States was individualized and localized. Dozens of different individuals and corporations owned buildings in each major city throughout the U.S. There was certainly some overlap between building owners across U.S. cities in the mid to late twentieth century. Prominent Atlanta architect and developer John Portman (discussed in Chapter 2), for example, owned buildings in Atlanta, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Detroit in the 1970s.¹¹ On the whole, though, building ownership typically varied city by city. The proliferation of REITs in the 1990s, however, consolidated and concentrated building ownership across the U.S. During this period, a few major REITs acquired office buildings throughout the United States to expand their

¹⁰ On a basic level, real estate investment trusts are trusts that hold income-producing real estate assets. REITs were created as a result of a 1960 law that allowed distributed earnings from real estate investment trusts to be excluded from corporate income tax. This law, in other words, allowed REIT investors to enjoy the financial benefits of a diversified investment while only being taxed as though they had invested directly in real estate. REITs, then, were designed to provide a tax advantage to small investors who pooled their resources. Su Han Chan, John Erickson, and Ko Wang, *Real Estate Investment Trusts: Structure, Performance, and Investment Opportunities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹¹ Art Seidenbaum, “The Portman Prescription,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 18, 1976.

investment portfolios. The number of office building owners, in other words, shrank while the influence of large REITs over local real estate markets grew.¹²

This growing dominance of REITs in the real estate industry was part and parcel of the financialization of the U.S. economy in the 1990s. This financialization was a key element of neoliberal restructuring. As the industrial sector of the U.S. economy continued to decline in the 1980s and 1990s, the financial sector of the economy gained prominence. The rise of the financial sector, like neoliberal restructuring in general, was made possible through deregulation. In partnership with economic elite, the State increasingly rolled back New Deal regulations and supported economic liberalization during this period. Also like neoliberal restructuring in general, the financialization of the economy concentrated both power and wealth in the hands of the few while contributing to a broad polarization of society.

The impact of REITs on the janitorial industry illustrates how this broad economic trend played out in a specific context. The consolidation of building ownership within REITs shifted the balance of power within the janitorial industry away from janitors and toward powerful corporations. With the primary purpose of maximizing investors' profits, REITs had little concern for the wages and working conditions of the janitors who cleaned their real estate assets on a daily basis. Furthermore, local janitor organizing struggles could not easily sway these major corporate entities.

Ultimately, then, continued neoliberal restructuring posed a major threat to the continued success of the Justice for Janitors campaign. As cleaning contractors and REITs grew in size and strength, they became increasingly resilient to local pressure. At the same time, though, the simultaneous consolidation and expansion of cleaning contractors and building ownership also

¹² Campaign 2000 files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 26, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

provided janitors with a new opportunity. Amidst these industry changes, janitors throughout the United States (and even abroad) were more likely to be working for the same major cleaning contractors in buildings owned by the same major REITs. If they could join forces, these janitors had an opportunity to mount a massive, national (or transnational) pressure campaign against key cleaning contractors and REITs.

I argue that local JfJ leaders recognized this opportunity and worked to lay the foundation for a more unified national Justice for Janitors campaign in the mid-1990s. They did this through a coordinated effort to align janitors' contract expiration dates across the country. While individual JfJ groups primarily focused on their own local organizing and bargaining goals between 1995 and 1996, local JfJ leaders organized and participated in a series of meetings to set a common contract expiration date goal for all upcoming janitor contract negotiations. Working around the five-year master janitorial agreement that Local 399 had negotiated in 1995, local JfJ leaders agreed to make a contract expiration date in 2000 a key bargaining goal.¹³ In doing so, they created a foundation for an unprecedented, national wave of coordinated contract campaigns in 2000.

At this time, old guard leaders in the SEIU building service division still existed as formidable obstacles to the expansion and development of Justice for Janitors as a truly nationwide campaign. Although local JfJ leaders agreed to align janitor contract expiration dates in 2000, their power and authority within the SEIU and even within the SEIU building service division was limited: they could not force all local SEIU leaders to agree to contract alignment. Nevertheless, these local JfJ leaders had a history of working together and coordinating their

¹³ Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016; David Bacon, "Janitors Gear Up for a New Contract," *Long Beach Press-Telegram*, March 31, 1997; Campaign 2000 files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 26, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

actions for national Justice for Janitors days each year. And in doing so, they had a history of helping to unite diverse groups of janitors across the United States in a joint struggle. Working from this history and in close partnership with janitors, JfJ leaders proved capable of aligning more than a dozen janitorial contract expiration dates in the late 1990s. Some janitors, such those in the Bay Area and in Denver, even willingly went out on strike during contract negotiations in order to achieve a 2000 expiration date.¹⁴ In taking action toward a unified contract expiration date, these janitors helped ensure that major transnational cleaning contractors and building owners would face a formidable front of collective power in the year 2000.

I also argue that this push for contract alignment and bargaining unity amidst neoliberal restructuring helps illuminate the particular course of action that JfJ leaders like Mike Garcia took in response to local JfJ struggles in the Bay Area and Los Angeles. As JfJ leaders were already in the process of working together to build a more nationally coordinated and unified Justice for Janitors campaign through bargaining, the act of consolidating local JfJ campaigns and merging SEIU locals had two clear advantages. The consolidation and mergers, as noted in the first part of this chapter, prevented local campaign struggles in the Bay Area and Los Angeles from derailing and threatening the JfJ campaigns in these two areas. More than this, though, the consolidation and mergers also provided an opportunity for JfJ leaders to experiment with building a more unified national Justice for Janitors campaign on a deeper, more fundamental level.

As a result of consolidations and mergers, the local JfJ groups in California would no longer just be working together and coordinating their efforts as nodes in a national campaign network. Instead, these groups would be pooling resources and working together directly, under

¹⁴ David Bacon, "Janitors Gear Up for a New Contract," *Long Beach Press-Telegram*, March 31, 1997.

the leadership of a single SEIU local. In a way then, campaign consolidation and mergers provided JfJ leaders with an opportunity to attempt to mirror the changes occurring within the janitorial industry. In mirroring these changes, JfJ leaders worked to build the collective power necessary to continue organizing janitors and pushing the momentum of the Justice for Janitors campaign forward in the late 1990s.

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While local JfJ groups worked behind the scenes to align janitor contract expiration dates in the mid to late 1990s, leadership changes at the top of the SEIU opened doors for a much more public evolution of the Justice for Janitors campaign during this period. As mentioned in the previous chapter, SEIU President John Sweeney successfully ran for the AFL-CIO presidency in 1995. As he took his new leadership position at the AFL-CIO in December of 1995, Sweeney decided to resign as president of the SEIU and leave the remainder of his four-year term, which was slated to end in April of 1996, open for a new president. With Sweeney's support, SEIU leaders elected Richard Cordtz to fulfill the rest of this four-year term. Cordtz had served under Sweeney as SEIU's secretary-treasurer and had over fifty years of experience in the labor movement, so he was a natural successor to Sweeney in many ways. However, some SEIU leaders saw Cordtz, who was over seventy years old when elected SEIU president, as a representation of the negative stereotype of union leaders as conservative old white men, a stereotype that was increasingly associated with labor movement decline and failure. Andy Stern, who had directed the SEIU's Organizing and Field Services Department under Sweeney starting in 1984 and had helped direct the Justice for Janitors campaign, was one of the SEIU leaders who viewed Cordtz in this light.

While he supported Cordtz immediately succeeding Sweeney as president in December 1995, Stern made a bid to run against Cordtz for the SEIU presidency in April of 1996. Calling his slate the “New Voices for SEIU,” Stern chose SEIU’s current secretary-treasurer Betty Bednarczyk as his running mate for secretary-treasurer and a racially diverse group of candidates including Eliseo Medina as his running mates for vice-president positions. Matching with this diverse group of running mates, Stern pledged to follow the lead that Sweeney had established during his presidency and to continue pushing for progressive policies and reform within the union. Cordtz took a much different approach. He chose New York Local 32B-32J president (and notorious old guard leader) Gus Bevona as his running mate for the secretary-treasurer position. And when Stern asked to take a leave of absence from the union to focus on his candidacy, Cordtz fired him. Despite his initial show of force against Stern, however, Cordtz soon realized that Stern had the support of other SEIU leaders and decided to drop out of the election. Without opposition, Stern was elected as the new SEIU president in April of 1996.¹⁵

Stern’s victory, and more generally the victory of the New Voices for SEIU slate of candidates, signaled an important shift in the power dynamics at the top of the SEIU. As suggested in previous chapters, John Sweeney had been a pioneer for progressive reform—especially reform in support of organizing and leadership diversity—within the SEIU. At the same time, though, Sweeney had been reticent to overtly challenge and create a major conflict with old guard SEIU leaders who opposed organizing and leadership change. In pursuing reform during his presidency, Sweeney stopped short of taking action to force the old guard leaders to either reform or leave the union. Stern, however, did not shy away from challenging the old

¹⁵ David R. Sands, “Insurgent organizer eyes union presidency,” *Washington Times*, March 8, 1996; Donald Warshaw, “Service union faces fierce leadership fight,” *Star-Ledger*, March 8, 1996; “Service Employees Union President Ends Reelection Bid; Battle Averted,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 1996; Glenn Burkins, “Andy Stern seems shoo-in to lead aggressive service-employees union,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 15, 1996.

guard leaders like Sweeney had done. Having already faced off against old guard leaders Richard Cordtz and Gus Bevona in the election, Stern seemed to make it his mission to confront the old guard and remove these last major obstacles to reform within the SEIU. One of Stern's first major actions as SEIU president is prime evidence of this. Shortly after becoming president, Stern placed SEIU Local 25 in Chicago in trusteeship and removed the local's two prominent old guard leaders, Eugene Moats and Richard Malkowski.

Throughout the early 1990s, Local 25 had been a prime example of what JfJ leader Stephen Lerner described as SEIU's dinosaur building service locals. Rather than looking for ways to organize new workers as the janitorial industry in Chicago transformed and rapidly expanded amidst neoliberal restructuring, Moats and Malkowski kept their focus inwards. Leading the local in accordance with a form of unionism that wavered between conservative business unionism and outright corruption, Moats and Malkowski channeled union dues into servicing existing members, maintaining their leadership control, and financially rewarding themselves and their family members.

In contrast to Moats and Malkowski, however, Local 25's Vice President John Dwyer took a different stance on ongoing developments in the janitorial industry. Dwyer welcomed an SEIU organizer named Rob Schuler, who had worked on the Atlanta JfJ campaign before it failed in 1990, into Local 25. Schuler launched a Chicago Justice for Janitors organizing drive as part of the JfJ suburban project in 1995.¹⁶ This JfJ organizing drive was largely a product of International JfJ leader and staff efforts and steered clear of directly interfering with Moats and Malkowski's core jurisdiction in downtown Chicago. While avoiding direct interference with the old guard, however, this JfJ organizing drive appeared to help spur opposition to Moats and

¹⁶ Amy Carr, "Suburban janitors hoping campaign provides changes," *Daily Herald*, June 25, 1995.

Malkowski's leadership. The organizing drive showed Local 25 leaders and members that an alternative form of unionism was possible in Chicago.

Amidst these changes, conflict over rumors and allegations of Moats and Malkowski's corruption and financial mismanagement of the local grew. By February of 1996, this conflict ruptured into a major internal power struggle. In this month, a group of dissidents including Vice President John Dwyer and six other Local 25 leaders and staff members filed charges against Moats and Malkowski with the International. They protested the extravagant combined yearly salary of \$267,000 that Moats received for being president of Local 25 and one of SEIU's International vice presidents. (Because Moats was over seventy years old, he also collected pension money from Local 25. The dissident group estimated that with this pension, Moats' actual annual income was over \$500,000.) They also protested nepotism in the local, pointing to the fact that nine of Moats and Malkowski's relatives worked for Local 25 and the local's health services affiliate. In response to these charges, Moats and Malkowski promptly fired all seven of Local 25's dissident leaders and staff members.¹⁷

The fired dissidents reached out to then-SEIU President Richard Cordtz, asking him to impose a trusteeship and remove Moats and Malkowski from power. Cordtz, who as mentioned above was clearly aligned with SEIU's old guard leadership, did not take action against Moats and Malkowski. Upon taking control of the SEIU in April 1996, however, Stern did take action. He appointed an investigator to assess the management of Local 25 and allegations of corruption. This assessment confirmed the validity of the dissidents' allegations against Moats and Malkowski and uncovered evidence of remarkable financial mismanagement and internal corruption in Local 25. The assessment revealed, for example, that Moats had misappropriated

¹⁷ Raymond R. Coffey, "Union Chiefs Cleaning Up, Foes Charge," *Chicago Sun-Times*, February 1, 1996; Raymond R. Coffey, "7 Union Local Officials Fired Over Dispute With President," *Chicago Sun-Times*, February 3, 1996.

\$25,000 from local union funds to help his daughter adopt two children from Poland.

Furthermore, while taking union funds for personal use, Moats had imposed a special dues collection on the local's predominantly low-wage workers in order to help pay off the local's debt of \$470,000 to the International. With this evidence as justification, Stern put Local 25 in trusteeship and installed trustees to help put Local 25 on a new course toward financial solvency.¹⁸

President Stern's intervention into Local 25 can be easily understood as a major victory for democratic reform against corruption within the SEIU. His intervention can also be understood as a major step toward removing the formidable obstacle to an expansion of the Justice for Janitors campaign that SEIU's old guard leaders represented. This step toward removing the old guard obstacle to JfJ expansion was especially important considering recent changes in the janitorial and real estate industry as well as the global economy more generally. Throughout the 1990s, old guard leaders had been major obstacles to an expansion of Justice for Janitors and the development of a more unified and truly national JfJ campaign. With these leaders gone, janitors throughout the U.S.—including in Chicago, New York, and Boston—could work to take janitor wages and working conditions out of competition not just in individual cities but also throughout the country. From this perspective, Stern's intervention into Local 25 represented a major boon with huge potential benefits for the future of the Justice for Janitors campaign. By removing Moats and Malkowski from Local 25 and opening the local up to new more progressive leaders, Stern laid the foundation for the development of a unified national Justice for Janitors campaign that seemed capable of matching the geographic reach and power of consolidated cleaning contractors and building owners.

¹⁸ Raymond R. Coffey, "Janitors Local Members Hope for House-Cleaning," *Chicago Sun-Times*, April 26, 1996; Lisa Holton, "Union ousts local chief," *Chicago Sun-Times*, August 9, 1996; J. Linn Allen, "Two Labor Kingpins Toppled: Moats Leaves Janitors Post Very Quietly," *Chicago Tribune*, August 9, 1996.

Viewed from another perspective, however, Stern's intervention into Local 25 represented an affront to a strong tradition of local independence within the SEIU. This tradition of local independence had clearly allowed local leadership corruption to develop and flourish within the SEIU. At the same time, this tradition also provided a potentially important counterbalance to excessive power at the International level of the union. Following his intervention into Local 25, Stern continued to intervene in local union affairs, even when leadership corruption was not an issue. His intervention into a conflict-ridden Washington D.C. Local 82 in 1997 is a prime case in point. This intervention, on the heels of his intervention in Local 25, raised questions about the balance of power between the SEIU president and SEIU locals.

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As noted in Chapter 8, Washington D.C. Local 82 was struggling amidst internal conflict in 1997. This conflict emerged in the wake of Washington D.C. janitors' split decision to accept a contract settlement that fell short of a citywide master agreement and in the midst of growing racial tension within Local 82. As Local 82 faced this campaign defeat and escalating racial tension, SEIU President Andy Stern intervened. Declaring a "cease fire" between JfJ organizers and janitors on the one side and cleaning contractors and building owners on the other in May 1997, Stern called off all Justice for Janitors actions in Washington D.C. and promoted a new course of action for the campaign. As local activism ground to a halt, he started meeting directly with business executives in the real estate and janitorial industry.

Two months after calling off JfJ actions in the district, Stern placed Local 82 in trusteeship. His decision to trustee Local 82 stemmed from rising tensions within the local. Even after Stern had halted JfJ activism, conflict between Local 82 leaders and members who

wanted to use union resources on organizing and those who wanted to use union resources on member servicing continued to grow. Like in Local 399, this conflict split the local's leadership and started interfering with the day-to-day functioning of the local. Rather than waiting for a more overt and public struggle to emerge like in Local 399, Stern preemptively removed the top leaders of Local 82 and appointed a trustee to take control of the local.¹⁹ Like Local 1877 President Mike Garcia's interventions in Sacramento and Los Angeles, Stern's intervention in Local 82 can be understood as the effort of a union leader to address and ameliorate local conflict and therefore support the continued expansion of the JfJ campaign at the local level.

At the same time, however, Stern's actions marked a major shift in the tenor of the Justice for Janitors campaign. Up to this point, local JfJ groups had largely succeeded in organizing janitors and developing the campaign through direct action and confrontation with cleaning contractors and building owners and managers on the ground level. As noted in previous chapters, top SEIU leaders offered assistance to local JfJ groups and helped reinforce their organizing efforts through diplomacy and mediation with other union leaders and business executives. Regardless of this assistance, however, ground-level action became a central element of Justice for Janitors as it developed—especially in the wake of initial campaign struggles in Atlanta and Washington D.C. Stern's actions in calling off ground-level action in the D.C. JfJ campaign, therefore, seemed to mark a major deviation from the current trajectory of the campaign.

After placing Local 82 in trusteeship, Stern continued to personally meet with building owners and contractors in Washington D.C. in an attempt to reach a mutually beneficial partnership between these business executives and Local 82. As Rit Thompson, one of the

¹⁹ Frank Swoboda, "Service Union Places Local Janitors Unit In Receivership, Citing Leadership Split," *Washington Post*, August 22, 1997.

cleaning contractor executives who met with him recalls, Stern asserted that the D.C. JfJ group's bridge blocking actions had been a source of embarrassment for him. Distancing himself from the militant history of the campaign, Stern presented the union as a pragmatic ally that could help the cleaning contractors maintain business efficiency. He emphasized that the cleaning contractors could have a more stable and efficient workforce if they offered janitors long-term union contracts with modest wage improvements.²⁰ In this way, businesses stood to benefit from voluntarily recognizing Local 82 as the D.C. janitors' representative and providing these janitors with small-scale wage and benefit improvements: they would have a more committed and experienced workforce.

Stern's direct appeals to the cleaning contractors ultimately proved successful. After about a year of negotiations, the cleaning contractors that provided janitorial services to seventy percent of the commercial office buildings in D.C. agreed to sign a master janitorial agreement with Local 82. This agreement, which Local 82 janitors ratified in June 1998, doubled the number of union janitors in the city (from about two thousand to four thousand), brought wages to a minimum of \$8 an hour by the year 2003, and provided health insurance and retirement benefits to full-time workers.²¹ In other words, this agreement represented an organizing and bargaining achievement even beyond what the D.C. janitors initially fought for in their 1996 citywide strike.

Stern's top-down intervention into the D.C. JfJ campaign and Local 82 can thus be understood as hugely beneficial to the campaign. While internal support for the JfJ campaign in

²⁰ "Rit Thompson (Background)," Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University; "Rit Thompson (Civil Disobedience and DC Economy)," Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University; "Rit Thompson (Settlement)," Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University.

²¹ Frank Swoboda and Maryann Haggerty, "Janitors Approve Contract: Agreement Ends Lengthy Conflict," *Washington Post*, June 21, 1998.

Local 82 started collapsing, Stern took action to achieve one of the major goals of the D.C. JfJ campaign and resolve internal conflict in Local 82. He prevented internal conflict from derailing the campaign and helped two thousand janitors gain union recognition as well as wage and benefit improvements.

While Stern's intervention can be understood as beneficial to the campaign in this way, his intervention—and the apparent success of this intervention—seemed to boost his confidence in leading the Justice for Janitors campaign in a more conservative direction. In the wake of the contract settlement, cleaning contractors and building owners celebrated Stern's mediation efforts as a better, more “responsible” form of union action. And they celebrated the contract that stemmed from Stern's action as a “historic step forward” that made conflict with the union a thing of the past. Stern confirmed this positive framing of his intervention in contrast to the JfJ group's previous, more confrontational approach to organizing. He described his intervention as part of a “maturing process” for the campaign and asserted, “For a while we got so overwhelmed with the tactics we were using that we forgot the mission.”²² In making this claim, Stern not only seemed to suggest that his mediation efforts represented a better alternative to the JfJ group's confrontational actions but also that his mediation efforts were more true to the core goals of the Justice for Janitors campaign. From one perspective, Stern's assertion is valid.

As I have demonstrated in Chapters 1 and 2 of this dissertation, Justice for Janitors was created as a rather nebulous campaign that emerged from a host of experimental organizing and reform efforts. As such, the campaign was not created with a single clear set of goals or mandate. Nevertheless, campaign leaders such as Stephen Lerner presented Justice for Janitors, at least at the beginning, as a drive to negotiate citywide master janitorial agreements. Stern's

²² Frank Swoboda and Maryann Haggerty, “Janitors Approve Contract: Agreement Ends Lengthy Conflict,” *Washington Post*, June 21, 1998.

actions, then, and the contract settlement that followed did achieve this central goal and fulfill the “mission” of the campaign.

As I have emphasized in Chapters 7 and 8, however, the goals and mission of the Justice for Janitors campaign seemed to shift as the campaign expanded and developed in the early 1990s. While originally focused on organizing janitors and winning tangible contract achievements, Justice for Janitors seemed to evolve as part of an intersectional struggle against overlapping forms of injustice amidst neoliberal restructuring. Worker empowerment and solidarity—across lines of race, gender, and citizenship—seemed to become as much of the mission of the campaign as organizing janitors and negotiating contracts. Considering this evolution of the campaign, Stern’s actions seemed to mark a sharp break away from the recent trajectory of the campaign as much as a return to its central mission.

I argue that Stern’s actions and his framing of the campaign—on the heels of his recent intervention into SEIU Local 25 in Chicago—set the Justice for Janitors campaign on a different evolutionary course. On this course, the Justice for Janitors campaign started to evolve as an increasingly top-down campaign centered on closed-door negotiations between powerful (and predominantly white and male) individuals rather than on the “street-heat” action of a much more diverse group of low-wage workers and their allies. Unlike the evolution of the JfJ campaign to date, this new evolution did not promote working class consciousness and empowerment. It also did not come with hope for fostering working class radicalism and helping workers join together to fight against the overlapping class, race, citizenship, and gender-based injustices that were part and parcel of the system of neoliberal capitalism. Instead, this evolution led the JfJ campaign to conform to and even reinforce this economic system, in which the elite few wielded all of the power and the masses were left vulnerable to exploitation at their hands.

Regardless of what I present as the negative implications and future ramifications of Stern's actions, the way in which he framed his actions to the media were problematic in a more immediate and concrete way. The celebration of Stern's mediation efforts and denigration of the JfJ group's history of confrontational actions in the media presented the public with a false or at least incomplete picture of the roots of the successful Washington D.C. contract settlement. As local JfJ leaders involved in the D.C. campaign have emphasized, Stern's mediation efforts would not have been successful without the recent history of Justice for Janitors confrontational, ground level activism.

When asked retrospectively about Stern's role in the success of the D.C. campaign, for example, D.C. JfJ leader Bill Ragen brought up the fact that Stern was not the first SEIU President who attempted to appeal directly to the cleaning contractors. He noted that at the start of the D.C. campaign in the late 1980s, then-SEIU President Sweeney (along with Stephen Lerner) appealed directly to the cleaning contractors, asking them to voluntarily agree to the unionization of janitors. Ragen asserted that he did not think Stern's appeals succeeded while Sweeney's failed because Andy Stern was more charming than John Sweeney. Instead, he asserted that Stern's "charm offensive" worked because the D.C. JfJ group had been "really uncharming for a really long time."²³

Through their history of activism and especially their actions targeting Oliver Carr and tax injustice in the early to mid-1990s, JfJ organizers and janitors had clearly proven that they were capable of causing major disruptions to cleaning contractors' daily operations and even to the day-to-day lives of the hundreds of thousands of people who worked in the district. These organizers and janitors' proven threat to "business as usual" in the real estate and janitorial

²³ "Bill Ragen, Lisa Fithian, and Mary Anne Hohenstein (29 April 2013)," Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University.

industries put a lot of pressure on the cleaning contractors to accept Stern's mediation attempts and agree to a contract settlement. For these cleaning contractors, avoiding a resumption of disruptive JfJ actions in the district was worth the cost of providing union recognition as well as sizable wage and benefit improvement to thousands of D.C. janitors.

The aforementioned reflections of cleaning contractor executive Rit Thompson confirm Ragen's emphasis on the importance of confrontational JfJ actions in laying the foundation for the contract settlement. Thompson clearly did not respect the D.C. JfJ group's confrontational, direct actions. He referred to them as the "ugly part" of the campaign, in contrast to Stern's mediation efforts. Nevertheless, when reflecting on the timing of Stern's mediation efforts, Thompson noted that many of the building owners in D.C. at the time were looking for a way to resolve the escalating conflict between the Justice for Janitors campaign and the cleaning contractors. Thompson noted that he sought counsel with these building owners in negotiating with Stern and was able to agree to a settlement that these owners, his clients, supported.²⁴ Even though he did not directly admit that the D.C. JfJ group's confrontational approach laid the groundwork for him to negotiate with Stern, then, Thompson did suggest that the confrontational nature of the campaign up to this point had influenced the D.C. building owners and contributed to the contract settlement. Stern's mediation efforts, then, worked as a complement to—rather than a replacement for—more confrontational, ground level JfJ tactics.

The fact that Stern did not acknowledge this complementary nature of the tactics can be seen as part of an effort to continue "charming" the cleaning contractors and building on the mutually beneficial relationship that they had established through the cleaning contract. Stern's failure to acknowledge the importance of the D.C. JfJ group's confrontational actions, however,

²⁴ "Rit Thompson (Settlement)," Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University.

can also be seen as evidence of the fact that Stern did not fully appreciate the importance of this local group's actions in laying the groundwork for his mediation to be successful. As I will demonstrate below, Stern's subsequent actions seem to confirm that the latter was true, that he did not appreciate the importance of local, street-heat activism to the campaign.

Ultimately, then, I argue that Stern seemed to lose sight of the elements that made JfJ successful in his attempt to continue developing and expanding the campaign. He seemed to lose sight of the fact that local campaign strength, marked by rank-and-file leadership and community participation, was crucial to the campaign—even when it came with internal conflict and was difficult to sustain. Up to this point, JfJ groups had made great progress in taking lessons from the successful Los Angeles campaign and growing and adapting their local campaigns in the face of great successes as well as setbacks. Unfortunately, however, in the midst of a wave of internal conflict in local JfJ groups, Stern seemed to set the campaign on a course for failure.

Chapter 10

Campaign Consolidation and Centralization Meets Local Rebuilding and Mobilization:

The Development and Dualism of the Justice for Janitors Year 2000 Campaign (1997-2000)

In this chapter, I trace the development of plans for the coordinated wave of national Justice for Janitors contract campaigns—which came to be known as the Year 2000 or Y2K campaign—at the turn of the century. I demonstrate that plans and preparation for this Y2K campaign reflect the existence of two major strains within the national Justice for Janitors campaign during this period. I reveal that some of the plans for this Y2K campaign closely resembled the actions that SEIU President Andy Stern had recently taken in Washington D.C. when he engaged in backroom contract negotiations with D.C. cleaning contractors and building owners. These Y2K campaign plans, which were developed in coordination between President Stern and top building service division leaders, suggested that Justice for Janitors was on track to continue developing as a more conservative, hierarchical campaign in which top SEIU leaders negotiated on behalf of janitors behind closed doors. I also reveal, however, that some of the other plans for the Year 2000 campaign clearly defied this trend toward conservatism and hierarchy.

To do so, I explore the ways in which local JfJ leaders and staff embraced the Year 2000 campaign as an opportunity to rebuild their locals' internal strength and capacity for action. I focus in particular on preparation for the Year 2000 campaign in Local 1877 in Los Angeles. I highlight internal efforts to address deep-seated gender tensions within the local campaign as well as efforts to build a powerful network of allies throughout the Los Angeles political and labor community in preparation for Y2K. After focusing on Los Angeles, I also briefly touch on

newfound activism and preparation for the Y2K campaign in the formerly old guard-dominated Local 32B-32J.

In exploring the dualistic, top-down and grassroots elements of the Y2K campaign, I emphasize once again that tensions within the Justice for Janitors campaign did not resolve themselves as the campaign developed and evolved. Instead these tensions grew and became even more acute. Nevertheless, I suggest that the potential for these tensions to erupt into conflict was quelled—at least temporarily—by initial Y2K campaign developments. I reveal that the top-down elements of the Y2K campaign failed to generate results. This paved the way for President Stern to support local JfJ groups in taking the central role in the campaign. In highlighting this turn of events, I demonstrate that the strength and resilience of local JfJ groups once again proved crucial to Justice for Janitors success and sustainability. While top-down efforts at the International functioned as a complement to local activism, top-down efforts did not prove to be a viable replacement for local JfJ activism in the Y2K campaign.

In the last section of this chapter, I explore the connections between the Justice for Janitors campaign and broad labor and social movement developments in the late 1990s. To be more specific, I explore major developments in the labor, immigrant rights, and global justice movements during this period. I suggest that Justice for Janitors was a pioneer in challenging the acute vulnerability and exploitation of immigrant workers in the United States as well as the interconnected vulnerability and exploitation of workers broadly amidst neoliberal restructuring. As JfJ actions and other progressive social and labor movement demonstrations exposed this injustice, the immigrant rights and global justice movements gained momentum.

I argue that this growing social movement momentum contributed to a broad social and political environment that seemed ripe for social movement action and transformation in 2000.

Ultimately, I suggest that the Justice for Janitors Y2K campaign was primed to take advantage of this environment and seeming moment of possibility. Because of the efforts of local JfJ groups in preparation for the Y2K campaign, the Justice for Janitors campaign appeared ready to once again generate a wave of worker activism capable of capturing the public's attention and challenging broad patterns of injustice amidst neoliberal restructuring and union decline at the advent of the twenty-first century.

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As discussed in the previous chapter, in the mid-1990s, local JfJ leaders started laying the groundwork for a coordinated wave of Justice for Janitors contract bargaining in 2000. In the wake of the Los Angeles 1995 contract negotiation, these leaders collectively committed to making contract expiration dates in 2000 a major bargaining goal in their upcoming contract negotiation efforts. These leaders' power to develop a coordinated national Justice for Janitors campaign, however, was ultimately circumscribed in the mid to late 1990s by the remaining power of old guard leaders in the division. These old guard leaders stood as obstacles to a complete unification of the resources of the SEIU building service division behind a coordinated wave of JfJ contract negotiation. Nevertheless, local JfJ leaders in partnership with each other and local janitors managed to have a major influence on upcoming contract expiration dates. Due in large part to their efforts, fifteen janitorial contracts across the United States were slated to expire between January and December of 2000.¹

Because local JfJ groups had already started developing a workaround to the old guard obstacle to a more formal nationwide JfJ campaign, SEIU President Andy Stern's concurrent actions in the mid to late 1990s created an interesting situation for the Justice for Janitors

¹ Campaign 2000 files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 26, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

campaign. As noted in the previous chapter, Stern intervened in Chicago Local 25 and pushed corrupt old guard leaders out of the local. He also intervened in Washington D.C. Local 82 and took a dominant role in the local's Justice for Janitors campaign. On the one hand, Stern's intervention and top-down actions created an opportunity for a powerful intersection of grassroots efforts and International support and resources for the campaign in the lead-up to 2000. In pushing out old guard leaders, Stern created new space for Justice for Janitors expansion in the Northeast. Additionally, he freed up local resources that could be used to support Justice for Janitors. (New progressive leaders in Local 25 could use the financial and personnel resources of the local to support the national JfJ campaign and work to inspire a strong base of rank-and-file and community support for a local JfJ campaign in the city as well.) On the other hand, Stern's top-down actions also threatened to subsume existing local JfJ groups' recent grassroots efforts. As Stern's intervention into the Washington D.C. JfJ campaign illustrates, Stern did not shy away from usurping ongoing local JfJ actions, changing the confrontational spirit of a local campaign, or taking full credit for subsequent campaign success.

Preparations for this coordinated wave of JfJ contract negotiation in the late 1990s suggested that both of these two potential results of Stern's actions seemed possible. In many ways, Stern's actions allowed two oppositional campaign strains to exist and develop in tension with one another. His actions paved the way for top SEIU leaders to take a more prominent role in the campaign and promote top-down, conciliatory contract negotiation as the key to JfJ success going forward. His actions also, however, paved the way for local JfJ groups to rebuild their strength and capacity to generate an exciting, confrontational surge of grassroots campaign action to carry the campaign forward.

While his negotiations for the Washington D.C. JfJ master agreement were still ongoing, President Stern called together all of the SEIU's top building service division leadership in November of 1997 to develop plans for the upcoming coordinated contract expirations.² Over the course of this and subsequent meetings, they created plans for a fully-fledged, national Justice for Janitors campaign centered on contract bargaining in 2000. Although first titled Campaign 2000, this campaign quickly became known as the Year 2000 (Y2K) campaign.

While developing the initial proposal for the Y2K campaign, Stern and top building service leaders created a new national contract negotiation committee within the Justice for Janitors campaign and made plans to meet (as this committee) with national and regional cleaning contractors. Through these meetings, they planned to “open a dialogue” and “promote a partnership” with the national and regional cleaning contractors. They planned, essentially, to attempt to convince all major cleaning contractors to agree to basic Justice for Janitors contract demands³ and avoid a contract negotiation fight.

A clear logic exists behind these Y2K campaign plans, particularly in the context of the ongoing restructuring of the janitorial industry. The cooperative negotiation strategy took advantage of the recent escalation in cleaning contractor consolidation. Prior to this consolidation, direct negotiations between a national JfJ negotiation committee and cleaning

² As will be discussed in more depth later in this section, this building service division leadership included local JfJ leaders like Local 1877 President Mike Garcia and Local 82 Executive Director Jay Hessey as well as old guard leaders like Local 32B-32J President Gus Bevona. Campaign 2000 files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 26, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

³ These basic contract demands included the right to honor other union picket lines, provisions for contractor neutrality and card check recognition (as opposed to NLRB elections) in future organizing efforts, COPE check-off (which allowed union members to authorize an automatic deduction from their wages to support the SEIU's Committee on Political Education), expedited grievance procedures, union liaisons, steward protections, contributions to the SEIU's National Industry Pension Fund, joint union and contractor funds for member and steward training, and a contract expiration date between March and June of 2003. This last bargaining goal would conceivably lay the foundation for another wave of national contract negotiations in 2003. Campaign 2000 files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 26, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

contractors would not have been very feasible. As cleaning contractor consolidation increased, however, a national negotiation committee could meet with a core group of major cleaning contractors in a relatively short amount of time. Furthermore, this strategy of preemptive negotiations had the potential of allowing both the International and local JfJ groups to avoid the difficulty and cost of launching a national contract campaign centered on direct action. The focus on cooperative negotiation with cleaning contractors, in other words, could prevent local JfJ campaigns from becoming bogged down in expensive, protracted ground level contract campaigns.

While arguably strategic, these Y2K campaign plans clearly fit with the controversial evolution of the JfJ campaign that Stern oversaw in Washington D.C. The new national negotiation committee, as well as the national Y2K steering committee that Stern and top building service leaders created to oversee the campaign, made the Justice for Janitors campaign much more hierarchical and centralized. These new committees shifted the focus of campaign action from the local level to the national level. They also consolidated decision-making power within the campaign. They transferred decision-making power from a diverse group of local JfJ groups to a smaller, more organized group of national campaign leaders. Through the Y2K campaign, in other words, Justice for Janitors became less of a national network of independent and locally grounded campaigns and more of a unified, structured national campaign under the leadership of a small group of powerful individuals.

More than this, though, the Y2K campaign plans for national contract negotiation seemed to confirm that the JfJ campaign had a new official process and rather narrow set of goals. This process centered on conciliatory, backroom negotiations between powerful business executives and powerful labor leaders. And the goals were limited to tangible contract achievements. This

process and these goals threatened to foreclose opportunities for widespread worker empowerment through the rank-and-file campaign participation and leadership that had become a central feature of Justice for Janitors in the early 1990s.

Ultimately, however, the plans for the Y2K campaign were not limited to national contract negotiations. While the Y2K proposal detailed plans for national negotiations and efforts to create partnerships with contractors, the proposal also noted that locals would join forces with low-wage and immigrant rights movements and drive a “visible and grass roots Justice for Janitors movement in as many cities as possible.”⁴ This component of the proposal suggests that local JfJ leaders—while ready and willing to create a more centralized and hierarchical JfJ campaign and engage in cooperative negotiations—also proved committed to preserving a local, grassroots component of the campaign. Rather than putting all of their hopes in preemptive negotiations and labor-management partnerships, local JfJ leaders planned to pressure cleaning contractors and building owners through direct action and alliance building at the local level. Seemingly well aware of the rich history of JfJ as a campaign that combined International and local efforts, they committed to fostering worker organizing and activism and to engaging in social movements and politics as part of the Year 2000 campaign.

In other words, these leaders embraced the Y2K campaign as an opportunity and impetus to rebuild and grow the JfJ campaigns in their locals. As these JfJ leaders worked with President Stern to prepare for national campaign negotiation, they also worked with local JfJ staff and janitors to develop a solid base of local support for direct action as part of the Y2K campaign. Between 1998 and 1999, they oversaw a wave of local leadership development, local alliance building, and plans for an exciting, confrontational surge of street level action in 2000.

⁴ Campaign 2000 files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 26, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

Developments within Local 1877 in Los Angeles during this period provide clear evidence of this local level preparation for a grassroots component to the Y2K campaign. Working in coordination, Local 1877 staff and janitors embraced a popular education approach to preparing for the Y2K campaign and created new rank-and-file janitor committees in the local. In the process, they helped rebuild an existing base of rank-and-file support and a network of allies for the Los Angeles JfJ campaign. Even beyond this, though, they worked through existing internal tensions within the local campaign and helped build strong ties with an up-and-coming group of Latinx political leaders to support the continued development of the campaign.

One of the important rank-and-file committees that Los Angeles Local 1877 staff created in preparation for the upcoming national contract negotiation campaign was the Y2K leadership committee. In creating this committee, Local 1877 leaders and staff worked to make sure that the janitors had a strong understanding of and a sense of ownership in the Justice for Janitors campaign. As suggested in previous chapters, the Los Angeles JfJ campaign had an important history as a grassroots-oriented JfJ campaign with extensive rank-and-file leadership. But the campaign suffered internal conflict and crisis in 1995, which disrupted its grassroots development. Although some of the Los Angeles janitors had a long history of involvement in the campaign, most of the janitor members of Local 1877 in the late-1990s only had about five or six years of experience in the union. For these members, the internal struggle in Local 399 in 1995, rather than the much-celebrated 1990 victory over ISS in Century City, was the dominant event in their history with the union. Although these janitors did not have a personal history of exciting engagement in the JfJ campaign, Local 1877 staff believed that these janitors could become valuable participants in the Y2K campaign.

To develop support for the campaign amongst newer janitors, Local 1877 staff organized existing rank-and-file JfJ leaders into the Y2K leadership committee and used popular education techniques to teach janitors about power relations within the janitorial industry. According to Local 1877 staff member Stephanie Arellano, she and other Local 1877 leaders and staff believed that janitors needed to understand these industry relations—and the goal of the Y2K campaign within these relations—in order to be invested in the campaign. Because of the complexity of power relations within the janitorial industry, Local 1877 staff and Y2K committee members followed the UFW’s earlier example by using role-play and creating games to help janitors develop an understanding of Justice for Janitors within the janitorial industry.

One particularly useful game that they developed was based on the board game Monopoly. In this version, janitors playing the game were assigned different characters: some were designated “very, very rich” people, some rich people, some middle class people, some pension funds, some real estate investment trusts (REITs), and some investment managers. A Y2K committee member explained each of these character identities to the janitors, and gave the janitors a set amount of money based on their identity. At this point, the janitors were given an opportunity to “play the market” as their character. Through this educational yet entertaining exercise, janitors learned about the complex economic underpinnings of the janitorial industry. They also were able to share their newfound understanding of the industry with other janitors.⁵

In developing this collaborative exercise, Local 1877 staff created an opportunity for a mutually beneficial partnership with the janitors. While the staff shared their knowledge of the big-picture operation of the janitorial industry through the Monopoly game, janitors in turn provided staff with detailed information about the industry. During initial information sharing

⁵ Stephanie Arellano, “Year 2000 Justice for Janitors Campaign: Reflections of a Union Organizer,” in *Teaching for Change: Popular Education and the Labor Movement* (Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2002), 62-71.

with staff, some of the Y2K committee members came up with an idea to create a large, collaborative map of all of the building owners in the city. The Y2K committee members created a map of all of the buildings and then encouraged their fellow janitors to find their buildings on the map and fill in information about the owners. This map helped both staff and janitors understand who the dominant building owners in Los Angeles were. Additionally, the map served to facilitate rank-and-file participation in the development of Year 2000 campaign strategy.

While making and discussing the map, members of the rank and file came up with elements of a geographic strategy for organizing and bargaining in preparation for the Y2K campaign. Working with Local 1877 staff, janitors divided the city into geographic areas. For each geographic area, the janitors chose strategic “anchor buildings” to target in upcoming contract negotiations. Because of the sheer size and sprawling nature of Los Angeles, the janitors could not conceivably target all buildings in contract negotiation demonstrations. In the face of this limitation, the janitors decided to concentrate on a few buildings in each region. The janitors chose these buildings based on their ownership, essentially creating a plan to leverage maximum pressure against key building owners and to force these owners to support the janitors in their contract struggle.

In developing this geographic strategy, the janitors also formed rank-and-file “action teams” known as a PEGAs (Poderosos Equipos Geográficos de Acción) for each of the geographic regions of the city that they mapped out. In the months leading up to the start of the Year 2000 campaign, the PEGAs served as a platform for the janitors to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of union support in their geographic areas. On the basis of these discussions, the

PEGAs started organizing new janitors and strategically increasing union density in preparation for upcoming contract negotiations.⁶

The popular education approach to the development of Year 2000 campaign did more than facilitate membership engagement in the campaign: it also facilitated greater attention to issues of gender in the campaign. Since the start of Justice for Janitors in Los Angeles, a few prominent female janitors embraced an active leadership role in the campaign. And in their leadership, these female janitors negotiated and resisted gender inequalities. They brought their children and grandchildren to demonstrations and called attention to the negative impact that their low wages, poor working conditions, and lack of benefits and job security had on their families. In the process, they made themselves visible not only as janitors but as caregivers who struggled to perform the work of social reproduction while also performing paid labor. The Los Angeles JfJ demonstration in coordination with International Women's Day in 1995 (discussed in Chapter 8) marked a highpoint of female participation and visibility in the campaign up to this point.

Despite women's important contributions, however, men dominated the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors rank-and-file leadership in the early stages of the campaign. Persistent gendered divisions of work, both the work of social reproduction and union work, prevented many female janitors from becoming or being recognized as formal campaign leaders. Thus, while many women demanded recognition as workers and caregivers who deserved fair wages just like their male counterparts, underlying gender inequalities in the union and in society more generally remained unaddressed.

⁶ Stephanie Arellano, "Year 2000 Justice for Janitors Campaign: Reflections of a Union Organizer," in *Teaching for Change: Popular Education and the Labor Movement* (Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2002), 62-71; Aida Barragan, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, August 15, 2014.

In the lead up to the Year 2000 campaign, however, Local 1877 staff once again embraced popular education techniques and worked with Y2K committee members to facilitate greater gender consciousness and equality within the campaign. For example, during one of the Y2K committee's training and planning sessions, staff members initiated a conversation around the question "Who are the people of Justice for Janitors?" As staff member Stephanie Arellano recalls, initial responses included references to participants' ethnic identities: "We're Latinos, we're Central Americans, we're Salvadoreños, Nicaragüenses..." At one point, however, one of the female Y2K members asserted, "We're mostly women."⁷ Male members of the Y2K committee resisted this characterization of JfJ participants, but female members held their ground. This disagreement turned into an eight-hour debate about gender in the Justice for Janitors campaign.

The debate (and the staff members' popular education strategy in initiating the debate) proved to be extremely generative. By the end of the debate, the Y2K committee had created an affirmative action plan for the formation of a local negotiation committee that would represent janitors in the upcoming contract negotiations. Committee members agreed to ensure that women and men were represented equally on the negotiation committee. This brought more female janitors into formal campaign leadership positions and marked a huge shift away from existing leadership trends. (The negotiation committee for the 1995 contract campaign had been eighty percent male.)⁸

At the same time, this initial debate and affirmative action plan for the negotiation committee helped empower female leaders more broadly within and beyond the campaign. With

⁷ Stephanie Arellano, "Year 2000 Justice for Janitors Campaign: Reflections of a Union Organizer," in *Teaching for Change: Popular Education and the Labor Movement* (Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2002), 62-71.

⁸ Cynthia J. Cranford, "'It's Time to Leave Machismo Behind!': Challenging Gender Inequality in an Immigrant Union," *Gender and Society* 21, no. 3 (June 2007): 409-438.

staff members helping provide them with the space and the tools to challenge gender inequalities, female janitors not only demanded leadership positions alongside of men but also articulated their superior qualifications for leadership and the significance of their leadership beyond the campaign. As sociologist Cynthia Cranford notes in her article “Constructing Union Motherhood,” female janitors participating in Year 2000 campaign preparation in Los Angeles began to assert that they made better leaders due to their roles as mothers and caregivers. They asserted that, as individuals who performed these roles in addition to their paid labor as janitors, they had a better understanding of the issues at stake in the Year 2000 campaign and thus better ideas about how to address these issues. As mothers and caregivers, for example, they had a better understanding of the importance of maintaining family health care provisions in their next master janitorial agreement.

In addition to emphasizing their superior leadership qualifications, female janitors also emphasized the broad significance of their leadership in challenging existing social and cultural gender relations. As Cranford describes from her direct observation and conversations with Local 1877 members, female janitors explained their campaign participation and leadership as a political act. Through greater engagement and leadership in the campaign, they defied stereotypical notions that a woman’s place (and particularly a Latina’s place) was in the home or in general subservience to men. Female janitors’ actions within the Y2K campaign were thus important even beyond the campaign. By asserting themselves as strong leaders, these janitors not only resisted gender inequality within the union but also politicized and empowered themselves to resist gender inequality in society more broadly.⁹

⁹ Cynthia J. Cranford, “Constructing Union Motherhood: Gender and Social Reproduction in the Los Angeles ‘Justice for Janitors’ Movement,” *Qualitative Sociology* 30, no. 4 (December 2007): 361-381.

While the Y2K committee and popular education approach to campaign preparation helped address deep-seated gender biases both within and beyond the Justice for Janitors campaign, they also helped address deep-seated divisions between member organizing and member servicing within the labor movement (at least in the context of Local 1877). As part of their preparatory work for the upcoming contract campaign, Local 1877 staff worked with Y2K committee members to train a broad cohort of rank-and-file janitors on member servicing. As suggested by the internal crisis in Local 399 in 1995, the trade-off between organizing and member servicing was a key source of member dissatisfaction within the Justice for Janitors campaign. When JfJ leaders shifted resources away from member servicing in order to support organizing, some janitors felt left behind and isolated from the campaign. In preparing for the Y2K campaign, Local 1877 staff members wanted to continue prioritizing organizing and bargaining over member servicing, but they also wanted to ensure that they had the continued support of janitors. Local 1877 staff looked to the Y2K committee as a solution to this issue. They worked with Y2K committee members to train rank-and-file “worksites leaders” to address member grievances, ensure contract enforcement, and mobilize members to participate in the union. This training provided janitors with member servicing support and also freed Local 1877 staff to focus all of their time and efforts on the organizing and contract bargaining components of the Year 2000 campaign.¹⁰

In addition to creating the Y2K leadership committee, Local 1877 staff also created a new political committee in preparation for the Year 2000 campaign. Like the Y2K leadership committee, the political committee played a critical role in mobilizing rank-and-file janitors in

¹⁰ Aida Barragan, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, August 15, 2014; Stephanie Arellano, “Year 2000 Justice for Janitors Campaign: Reflections of a Union Organizer,” in *Teaching for Change: Popular Education and the Labor Movement* (Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Labor Research and Education, 2002): 62-71.

support of the campaign. It also ended up winning Local 1877 a reputation as a political powerhouse in Los Angeles and helping develop a strong base of political allies for Local 1877.

Initially, Local 1877 leaders planned to develop political allies for the Y2K campaign by donating union funds to support local politicians. This plan fit within a typical pattern of behavior that defined the labor movement's engagement in politics in the second half of the twentieth century. During this period, unions typically maintained a rather hands-off, money-centered relationship to politics. Unions raised funds to donate to politicians, and politicians in turn pledged to keep union interests in mind as they engaged in legislative activities. Unfortunately, however, union donations often did little to actually keep politicians accountable to labor interests. Politicians benefited from union support, while unions got little in return.

While most Local 1877 leaders proposed to build political support according to this flawed but nonetheless prominent strategy, one leader opposed this plan and in the process helped spur a different political strategy for Local 1877. When Local 1877 leaders met in 1998 to discuss how much money the local should give to politicians to build political support for the Y2K campaign, Reina Schmitz boldly spoke up to voice her opposition to this method of building political support. As she recalls, she told the other Local 1877 leaders, "We don't give money. We ask for money... But we walk."¹¹

Reina Schmitz was a long-time JfJ organizer whose history in the campaign dated back to the early 1990s. In her assertion "we walk," Schmitz referred to a history of Los Angeles janitors and organizers like herself building support amongst local politicians on a grassroots level. When they had extremely limited financial resources at the start of the campaign, Los Angeles JfJ group members built political support for the campaign by physically showing up to

¹¹ Valeria Godines, "Union a growing force: Justice for Janitors has expanded its activities to include lobbying for other benefits and services for Latinos and immigrants," *The Orange County Register*, November 11, 2002.

political events and walking precincts to encourage people to support janitors by voting a certain way on particular electoral issues. These JfJ group members had already proven that there was an alternative to buying political support. And Schmitz advocated continuing to embrace this alternative, grassroots strategy even though the Los Angeles janitors now had much greater political resources as part of the statewide Local 1877. Following this meeting, Local 1877 leaders still decided to provide financial support to local politicians, but they also supported Schmitz in her call to develop grassroots political support for the Y2K campaign without donations. Along with other Local 1877 organizers, Schmitz worked with rank-and-file political committee leaders in 1998 to train janitors to walk precincts and participate directly through street-level actions in winning political allies.

The primary elections in June of 1998 provided the first opportunity to test the efficacy of this grassroots political strategy. The results were overwhelmingly positive. In the weeks before the election, Local 1877 staff and janitors, in partnership with the L.A. County Federation of Labor, turned out in droves to help support pro-labor and pro-immigrant rights political candidates and defeat Proposition 226, which was designed to limit the use of union dues for political purposes. As comments from those who participated reveal, the canvassing of Los Angeles neighborhoods to build support for political allies and opposition to Proposition 226 was a valuable, empowering experience. It provided janitors who were unable to participate in politics through more traditional means (primarily voting) because of their citizenship status an opportunity to voice their demands and actively influence politics. At the same time, the strategy also helped generate tangible political results, most notably the defeat of Proposition 226.

In the face of this success, Local 1877 leaders committed to continuing and expanding grassroots political action. Mike Garcia hired Roxana Rivera, who had joined Local 1877's

Sacramento JfJ organizing drive after being active in the anti-Proposition 187 campaign, for a new political coordinator position in Local 1877. Rivera, in turn, oversaw the development of a statewide political action program within the local. As part of this political action program, Local 1877 janitors turned out in record numbers to get out the vote in the November 1998 election. In the process, they contributed to an emerging groundswell of Latinx political power in California and became known as a valuable ally in the political community.¹²

Ultimately, then, the initial national plans for the Y2K campaign inspired a wave of local JfJ campaign development and janitor activism within Local 1877. Believing that janitor participation was crucial to any Justice for Janitors campaign, Local 1877 leaders and staff partnered with janitors to build a distinctly grassroots component of the Y2K campaign in Los Angeles. Their efforts not only proved successful in building a base of local support for the Y2K campaign but also in addressing issues, such as gender bias and concern for member servicing, that had been obstacles to the development of the Justice for Janitors campaign previously. As 2000 and the start of contract negotiations neared, Los Angeles janitors were well-prepared to take action and fight for a better contract if such a fight proved necessary.

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As these developments within Local 1877 suggest, the Y2K campaign was shaping up to be an amalgamation of both top-down national components and grassroots local components. These different components clearly existed in tension with one another. As suggested previously, the national bargaining component of the Y2K campaign increased hierarchy and centralization within Justice for Janitors and prioritized narrow contract goals above all else in

¹² “‘This is only the beginning’: Union Political Action Pays Off During June Primaries,” *SEIU Local 1877 Activist* (Summer 1998), Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 7, Folder 6, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Beth Shuster, “Labor Gains Strength as It Flexes Political Muscle,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 1999.

the campaign. In contrast, the local components of the campaign maintained a wide base of local support for the campaign and prioritized worker equity and empowerment through dialogue and action as a key part of contract negotiation preparation. At the local level, then, the *process* of the campaign was just as valuable if not more valuable than the end result of the negotiations. While these campaign components were oppositional, they ultimately proved to work in combination to set the stage for a powerful display of Justice for Janitors action and power in 2000. Developments within New York Local 32B-32J in 1999 illustrate this somewhat surprising compatibility of the top-down and grassroots preparations for the Y2K campaign.

As suggested previously, President Stern's intervention into Chicago Local 25 suggested that he, unlike former SEIU President Sweeney, was not willing to tolerate the obstinacy and corruption of old guard leaders. His intervention into Local 25 can thus be understood as a sort of warning for the remaining old guard leaders in the building service division: with Stern in charge, continued opposition to reform resulted in trusteeship. Initial Y2K campaign plans suggested that New York Local 32B-32J President Gus Bevona might have heeded this warning. Bevona, who wielded extensive building service industry power as head of a 55,000 member local, was included in the national negotiation committee for the Y2K campaign. His presence on this campaign suggested that he had agreed to lend his support to the coordinated contract bargaining under the banner of the Justice for Janitors campaign. Despite this promising sign of support for JfJ, Bevona ultimately continued operating Local 32B-32J in opposition to the Justice for Janitors campaign. Even after Stern had shown his willingness to push out old guard leaders, Bevona continued to refuse reform. In response, Stern negotiated Bevona's departure from Local 32B-32J and placed the local in trusteeship.

Bevona's departure was far from a resounding victory for union democracy against corruption. To avoid a public fight, Stern allowed Bevona to "retire" from the New York local with \$1.5 million in severance and unused vacation compensation. For many of the Local 32B-32J members who vehemently opposed Bevona and his corruption, his retirement (and compensation) only added insult to decades of injury. Nevertheless, Bevona's departure helped foster newfound Justice for Janitors activism and Y2K preparation on the ground level in downtown New York.¹³

After putting Local 32B-32J in trusteeship, Stern installed Tom Balanoff—a long-time International SEIU staff member and JfJ supporter—to serve as the Local 32B-32J trustee. Shortly after assuming this new leadership position, Balanoff oversaw a surge of worker mobilization and activism in Local 32B-32J in preparation for the Y2K campaign. In April of 1999, for example, Balanoff helped organize a large janitor demonstration to start putting pressure on New York cleaning contractors and involve janitors in the Y2K campaign. During this demonstration, thousands of Local 32B-32J members took to the streets to protest the growth of nonunion cleaning contractors in the city and demand living wages for all janitors.

Participating in this demonstration was a novel and powerful experience for many Local 32B-32J members. Having long been part of an insular, member servicing-focused local, these union members had little experience with mobilizing in the streets, particularly in demand for broad goals like a living wage. Despite their lack of experience with such actions, Local 32B-32J members were enthusiastic participants. One member Louis Suarez, for example, described the event as a totally new but very rewarding experience. He asserted: "I think it's the best thing

¹³ Steven Greenhouse, "Chief of Building Workers' Union Leaves With \$1.5 Million," *New York Times*, February 3, 1999.

that has happened and I'm proud to be a part of it.”¹⁴ Following this first major event, Local 32B-32J janitors took to the streets in several other major demonstrations in 1999.¹⁵ As Y2K contract negotiations approached, New York janitors proved ready and willing to support the national Y2K campaign on the ground level. Essentially, then, Stern’s intervention in Local 32B-32J, while controversial in terms of union democracy, gave many New York janitors exciting new opportunities to join together and participate in a surge of local activism in preparation for the Y2K campaign.

As local, action-oriented preparations for the Y2K campaign expanded and gained momentum, the national negotiations component of the campaign was proving much less successful. The national bargaining committee was not able to convince major cleaning contractors to preemptively agree to sign contracts that met the established Y2K campaign goals. Thus, as 2000 drew near, the need for coordinated local Y2K action on the ground level became increasingly apparent. If the national negotiation committee could not convince cleaning contractors through cooperative negotiations, local JfJ groups would have to convince them through much more confrontational, street-heat actions.

In the face of this need, SEIU President Andy Stern provided a valuable leadership resource for local JfJ groups in the final hour of Year 2000 campaign preparations. With the majority of the old guard leadership removed from the union, Stern recruited Stephen Lerner—the original Justice for Janitors organizing director—to return to the SEIU.¹⁶ Under Lerner’s

¹⁴ Fred Gaboury, “Thousands tell NYC bosses: It’s a new day!” *People’s Weekly World*, April 17, 1999.

¹⁵ See, for example: Emily Gest and Tom Robbins, “Wall Street Trashing US – Cleaners,” *New York Daily News*, June 16, 1999.

¹⁶ With Gene Moats, Richard Malkowski, and Gus Bevona pushed out of Locals 25 and 32B-32J, the only major remaining bastion of building service old guard leadership was Local 254, which was under Ed Sullivan’s leadership, in Boston. As will be detailed in the subsequent chapter, Stern eventually intervened into Local 254 amidst growing evidence of Sullivan’s leadership failures, and removed Sullivan from the union as well. Even with Sullivan still in power in the late 1990s, however, Stern had already clearly taken a stand against the old guard and essentially removed the main source of contention that drove Stephen Lerner out of the SEIU in the early 1990s.

leadership, local JfJ leaders changed and adapted the original Y2K campaigns in preparation for a major surge of JfJ action to win tangible contract improvements. At the same time, they also importantly laid a foundation for future union and worker empowerment and collective action.

When Lerner returned to the SEIU in late 1999, he met with local JfJ leaders to catch up on their ongoing preparatory work for the Year 2000 campaign and to develop a concrete plan for the campaign going forward. In developing this plan, Lerner and the local JfJ leaders ended up creating a new strategy for the Y2K campaign. As part of this new strategy, International and local JfJ leaders would focus their energy and resources on coordinating local JfJ action and pressure tactics rather than national negotiations with business executives. Also as part of this strategy, JfJ leaders moved away from their original goal of helping all JfJ groups win basic Y2K contract demands. Instead, they created a plan to focus the support of International and local solidarity on winning “breakthrough” contract victories in a few key locals.

Under this new plan, all locals involved in the campaign would still demand the basic contract goals of the Y2K campaign. But they would also work together under the direction of the International to help a few locals fight for more monumental goals. These targeted locals would be chosen for their commitment to fighting for major demands—such as organizing rights for new groups of janitors, large wage increases, health insurance, and full time work—and their willingness to go on strike if necessary to win these demands.¹⁷ In many ways following a strategy that Lerner helped establish in the Justice for Janitors campaign in the late 1980s and early 1990s, this new Y2K campaign plan was designed to leverage the excitement and momentum of the campaign to win major struggles that improved janitors’ ability to organize

With this source of contention gone, Lerner willingly returned to the union and his plans for an ever expanding and evolving Justice for Janitors campaign.

¹⁷ National Coordination files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 17, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

and negotiate in the future. With this new plan in place, 2000 promised to be an exciting year of bold, forward-looking Justice for Janitors activism.

Ultimately, the late 1990s proved to be an interesting period of adaptation and evolution for the Justice for Janitors campaign. Leadership changes at the top of the SEIU provided the Justice for Janitors campaign with a strong but somewhat controversial ally in the form of newly elected President Stern. Stern's removal of old guard leaders paved the way for an exciting wave of local Justice for Janitors rebuilding and activism in preparation for the Y2K campaign. At the same time, however, Stern's intervention into local union affairs imbued the Justice for Janitors campaign with a new level of centralization and hierarchy. Campaign consolidations in California under Local 1877 first drove this shift to Justice for Janitors centralization and hierarchy. But under Stern's leadership in the late 1990s, this shift toward centralization and hierarchy escalated significantly.

While technically compatible with the original goals and strategy of the JfJ campaign, newfound centralization and hierarchy allowed Stern to usurp the potential for more radical activism at the local level of the campaign and focus Justice for Janitors on conciliatory tactics and narrow contract goals. Nevertheless, as I have shown through my emphasis on grassroots preparation for the Y2K campaign, local Justice for Janitors groups served as an important countervailing force to Stern and the form of campaign evolution that he promoted from above. While Stern led the campaign away from rank-and-file participation and confrontational local street-heat actions, local JfJ groups continued building Justice for Janitors as a campaign that centered on an active and informed local base of support. This grassroots campaign development clearly existed in tension with Stern's focus on the national level of the campaign. While Stern facilitated negotiations between powerful union and business leaders to achieve

narrow contract goals on behalf of janitors, local JfJ organizers and janitors collectively worked to educate, unite, and otherwise collectively empower themselves and their allies to struggle not just for better contracts also but against deep-seated patterns of gender inequality, union inaction, and political complacency.

Despite existing in tension, this top-down and bottom-up campaign development proved compatible—at least temporarily—in the lead up to the year 2000. As preemptive national negotiations fell through, Stern actually supported the local-level JfJ actions and recruited Stephen Lerner to direct a coordinated surge of local Y2K action. This surge of JfJ action, in turn, intersected with concurrent labor and social movement developments to make the advent of the twenty-first century a powerful moment of possibility in an emerging global movement against neoliberal restructuring and its effects.

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While Stephen Lerner's return to the SEIU and last minute preparations for coordinated contract campaign actions set the stage for a promising surge of local JfJ action, other concurrent events within the larger United States labor movement suggested that the turn of the century was generally poised to be an exciting period of labor activism. During the fall of 1999, prominent U.S. labor leaders embraced opportunities to publicly support and act in solidarity with the immigrant rights and global justice movements. These labor leaders, many of whom had a history of involvement in Justice for Janitors, publicly distanced the U.S. labor movement from a long history of insularity and conservative business unionism. In the process, they created a powerful sense of hope that widespread socioeconomic and political transformation was possible in the twenty-first century.

In October of 1999, for example, AFL-CIO leaders embraced an opportunity to align the U.S. labor movement with the immigrant rights movement. During this month, AFL-CIO leaders at the federation's twenty-third constitutional convention considered a resolution on immigration reform.¹⁸ This resolution called for a repeal of employer sanctions, opposition to cooperation between INS and government institutions, and an end to the Social Security Administration's practice of sending "no match" letters¹⁹ to employers. The resolution also called for the creation of a new amnesty program that would allow undocumented immigrants to regularize their status, an expedited and affordable citizenship process, and a shift of funding from immigration enforcement to worker rights and labor standards enforcement.²⁰

This resolution, in other words, targeted key elements of current immigration legislation and business practice that made immigrant workers and especially undocumented immigrant workers an easily exploitable low-wage workforce in the United States. The resolution aimed to give these vulnerable immigrant workers the resources to protect and empower themselves. The resolution, then, like many of the more progressive Justice for Janitors demonstrations, was not about creating a quick fix to union decline. Instead, the resolution targeted some of the underlying causes of union decline and helped lay the groundwork for a more inclusive, powerful, and larger labor movement in the future.

When the immigration reform resolution was put up for discussion, AFL-CIO Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson, SEIU Vice President Eliseo Medina, and UFW President

¹⁸ Both the California Labor Federation and the Central Labor Council of Alameda County submitted this resolution, which was titled "Defending the Rights of Immigrant Workers and the Right to Organize," for consideration at the convention.

¹⁹ These letters informed employers if the name and Social Security number of any of their employees did not match a combination in Social Security Administration database records. Although these letters made no explicit statement about an employee's immigration status, they prompted some employers to illegally discipline or fire workers. "Building Understanding—Creating Change: A Report on the AFL-CIO Forums on Immigrant Workers' Rights," United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 7, Folder 17, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

²⁰ *AFL-CIO 1999 Convention Proceedings* (Washington D.C.: AFL-CIO, 1999).

Arturo S. Rodriguez spoke in support. Drawing from their own personal connection to issues of immigration and speaking on behalf of thousands of immigrant workers in the United States labor movement, these Latinx labor leaders championed the resolution. They suggested that this resolution would not only benefit immigrant workers but also create the foundation for a stronger, more powerful labor movement for all workers. With these leaders' support and no opposition, the resolution was officially recommended to the AFL-CIO's Executive Council for adoption.²¹

The recommendation of this resolution marked an important moment in a shift in the U.S. labor movement's attitude toward immigrants and the global economy. Up to this point, the AFL-CIO and many of its local affiliates had a long history of supporting the interests of U.S. capital over those of workers, particularly nonwhite and noncitizen workers, both within the United States and abroad.²² Beginning primarily in the late 1970s and 1980s, however, various labor organizations within the AFL-CIO began taking a stance that opposed their parent federation's attitude toward immigrant workers. As illustrated throughout previous chapters, the SEIU was an important pioneer in welcoming immigrant workers into the mainstream labor movement through the Justice for Janitors campaign. Through the Justice for Janitors campaign and other progressive labor organizing drives in the late twentieth century, immigrant workers increasingly proved themselves as valuable union members and leaders.

After years—even decades—of struggling for inclusion and representation at the local and International level of the labor movement, immigrants and immigrant allies started gaining

²¹ Nancy Cleeland, "Unions Questioning Sanctions Against Employers Over Hiring," *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1999; *AFL-CIO 1999 Convention Proceedings* (Washington D.C.: AFL-CIO, 1999).

²² For more information on the history of the AFL-CIO's relationship to immigrant workers and the international labor movement, see for example: Héctor L. Delgado, "Immigrant Nation: Organizing America's Newest Workers," *New Labor Forum* 7 (Fall 2000): 28-39, and Jorge A. Bustamante, "The AFL-CIO Makes the Right Call This Time," *Los Angeles Times*, February 25, 2000.

newfound power and influence at the top levels of the labor movement in the late 1990s. Linda Chavez-Thompson, Eliseo Medina, and Arturo S. Rodriguez exemplify this. From new positions of authority, these leaders decided to take a risk. They decided to use their power and influence to demand a complete transformation of the AFL-CIO's formal policy on immigration and open the door for a more inclusive, immigrant-friendly labor movement going forward. And the AFL-CIO convention's recommendation on immigrant rights suggested that their risk had a chance of paying off.

While some AFL-CIO leaders took an important step in building labor movement support for the immigrant rights struggle in October, others also took an important step toward building labor movement support for a broad global justice movement a little over a month later. On November 30, 1999, tens of thousands of union leaders and activists including AFL-CIO President John Sweeney joined with a diverse group of global justice activists in the streets of Seattle to protest the scheduled World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference. Working in coordination, they blocked the opening day of the conference and proved that diverse groups of people—each with their own particular reason for protesting the WTO²³—could come together in opposition to the injustices that this financial institution created. More significantly, they proved that disrupting the WTO, and thus maybe even the system of neoliberal globalization that this institution supported, was possible.

As an intersectional protest against neoliberal globalization, this WTO protest in 1999 was not an entirely novel event. For more than a decade, social movement and labor activists had protested various elements of the emerging socioeconomic and political order that came to be known as neoliberal globalization. In fact, as I have argued throughout this dissertation, the

²³ See for example: "WTO Summit: Protest in Seattle; Who They Are, What They Want," *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 1999.

Justice for Janitors campaign should be broadly understood as a response to neoliberal restructuring as well as union decline. Furthermore, as I have shown in previous chapters, JfJ groups went beyond responding to the immediate effects of neoliberal restructuring in isolated, local settings. These groups also joined together and partnered with labor and community allies to protest broad patterns of injustice amidst neoliberal restructuring. As discussed in Chapter 3, for example, JfJ activists coordinated their campaign against John Portman with a global justice-oriented protest against the World Bank in 1988.

Regardless of this history, the U.S. labor movement as a whole had a much more conservative orientation and had not been active in the emerging global justice movement. Because of this, the 1999 WTO Protest—also called the Battle of Seattle—stood out as a moment when the mainstream labor movement under AFL-CIO President John Sweeney joined forces with social movement activists. When they came together, diffuse elements of an emerging critique of neoliberal globalization coalesced in the United States. This coalescence lent structure, legitimacy, and excitement to an emerging global justice movement.

In the aftermath of the protest, participants and observers commented on the significance of the event. JfJ organizer Lisa Fithian, for example, noted that this event stood out within her long history of involvement in activist causes. She asserted, “I’ve never seen the kind of civilian uprising we saw in Seattle. It was a festival of resistance, consciously organized by people from all around the country.”²⁴ To many, though, what stood out about the Battle of Seattle was not just the fact that people came together across geographic space to participate but also the fact that people came together across traditional social divides. In an article titled “Teamsters and Turtles,” for example, labor scholars Steve Fraser and Nelson Lichtenstein emphasized this

²⁴ “‘This is What Democracy Looks Like:’ Notes From Seattle’s Front Lines,” *Against the Current* 11, no. 6 (February 28, 2000): 3.

aspect of the protest. They noted that the Battle of Seattle helped break down traditional “parochial identities.” And in the process, the protest really for the first time turned hopes and abstract plans for a broad alliance against “corporate depredations and government indifference” into a reality.²⁵

Even as the Battle of Seattle deservedly generated a wave of excitement, however, some activists qualified the significance of the protest. Long-time Chicana activist Elizabeth “Betita” Martinez, for example, noted that an important issue was left out of the extensive media coverage of the protest. In her article, “WTO: Where was the Color in Seattle?” she pointed out that the vast majority of the Seattle protesters were white, even though people of color were the “main victims” of the World Trade Organization both in the United States and abroad. Martinez asserted that the Battle of Seattle was a promising sign of an emerging “international movement against imperialist globalization.” But she also asserted that grassroots education and mobilization were needed to involve people of color in the future. Their participation, she suggested, was necessary to realize the true potential of the global justice movement.²⁶

Essentially, the Battle of Seattle was imperfect. But it offered a useful starting point for the emergence of an increasingly inclusive, intersectional, and powerful global justice movement.

Ultimately, then, as the advent of the twenty-first century approached, the U.S. labor leaders and activists increasingly stepped outside of the traditional bounds of union policy and action. Defying a pattern of acquiescence to and even support for the rise of neoliberal globalization, the mainstream labor movement—embodied in the AFL-CIO—began lending its support to an emerging wave of social movement activism that called the socioeconomic and political status quo into question. And in the process, the labor movement offered newfound

²⁵ Steven Fraser and Nelson Lichtenstein, “Teamsters And Turtles,” *New Labor Forum* 6, (June 30, 2000): 23-29.

²⁶ Elizabeth Martinez, “The WTO: Where Was the Color in Seattle?” *Colorlines* 3, no. 1 (April 30, 2000): 11-12.

hope to thousands if not millions of individuals that an alternative to the injustice that they experienced and witnessed on a daily basis was possible.

As I will demonstrate in the following chapter, a surge of Year 2000 campaign street-heat action centered in Los Angeles fanned the flames of this sense of hope. After laying the groundwork for the Year 2000 campaign for more than two years, the Los Angeles JfJ group drew from and contributed to the larger wave of intersectional social and labor movement activism at the turn of the century. In doing so, the Los Angeles JfJ group once again brought the Justice for Janitors campaign into the public spotlight and became a major source of inspiration for other workers and for future generations of union activists both within and beyond Los Angeles.

Chapter 11

Inspirational Organizing in a Moment of Possibility:

The Year 2000 Campaign in Los Angeles (2000)

In this chapter, I provide a detailed exploration of the Justice for Janitors Year 2000 (Y2K) campaign in Los Angeles. I examine the Los Angeles janitors' initial show of strength in the midst of their first phase of contract negotiations with cleaning companies and note their preparations to go on strike as the cleaning companies demanded major contract concessions. I then explore the janitors' three-week strike in depth, emphasizing how the janitors' extensive preparation in building a strong base of rank-and-file support, cultivating a network of allies, and articulating a demand for justice that resonated broadly was key to the success of the strike.

In exploring this Y2K campaign, I highlight the fact that the Justice for Janitors campaign took advantage of the promising social and political environment at the advent of the twenty-first century. Participants in the Y2K campaign welcomed new allies and embraced the sense of possibility for widespread socioeconomic transformation during this period. With this, I suggest that the unique, experimental and adaptive nature of the Justice for Janitors campaign yet again proved valuable. Taking advantage of newfound resources and opportunities, the JfJ Year 2000 campaign altered the balance of power between poor, typically invisible and vulnerable janitors and the political and economic elite. In doing so, the Y2K campaign provided a powerful visible demonstration of the fact that an alternative to the polarization and inequality of society under neoliberal capitalism was possible. Amidst a favorable social and political environment, the Y2K campaign sparked a newfound sense of radical possibility within Justice for Janitors despite the campaign's avoidance of the rhetoric of class struggle.

At the same time, though, I argue that the Y2K campaign was not just a happenstance development amidst new national and even global support for the immigrant rights and global justice movements. As previous chapters and my detailed exploration of the Los Angeles Y2K campaign in this chapter illustrate, the Y2K campaign emerged from a deep history of Justice for Janitors actions and evolution. This campaign was made possible by two years of ground level preparations and the remarkable hard work and determination of the Los Angeles janitors, JfJ staff and leaders, and the network of allies that they had painstakingly helped build.

In highlighting this aspect of the campaign, I ultimately suggest that the labor movement cannot wait for moments of possibility. These moments—when widespread socioeconomic and political transformation seems possible—are real, but they are also fleeting. Labor activists and unions more broadly need to put in the time and effort to be prepared for these moments and thus be able to take advantage of them. They also need to be able to endure beyond these moments of possibility.

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As a broad feeling of hope and excitement permeated the U.S. labor movement, Stephen Lerner and other JfJ leaders focused on choosing locals to be the focal points of the Y2K campaign's coordinated wave of contract negotiation actions. Their first choice was Los Angeles Local 1877. As illustrated in Chapter 10, this local had already displayed a strong commitment to the Year 2000 campaign. Throughout 1998 and 1999, Local 1877 staff and janitors worked together on a robust program of membership training and grassroots political alliance building in preparation for the campaign. Furthermore, the local had already secured the basic Y2K national contract goals in their previous master janitorial agreement. This provided a strong foundation for the Los Angeles janitors to demand more expansive goals in 2000. Ready

and willing to fight for a “breakthrough” victory, the Los Angeles janitors committed to make two bold demands in their upcoming contract negotiations: a demand for access and employer neutrality to organize 1,200 janitors in Orange County and a demand for a raise of \$3 an hour over a period of three years.¹ As Los Angeles janitors made this commitment, Y2K leaders and janitors around the United States committed to helping them achieve these bold demands.

As I will detail subsequently, the Los Angeles janitors ultimately fell far short of achieving the two bold demands that they initially set as their bargaining goals. Their Y2K contract negotiation drive, however, was far from a failure. Building from the rich history of JfJ action in the city and recent Y2K preparations, Los Angeles janitors joined forces with a powerful network of local and global allies and framed their contract struggle around a demand for justice. In a moment that seemed ripe for socioeconomic and political transformation, the Los Angeles janitors took to the streets of Los Angeles and sparked an outpouring of intersectional activism and solidarity. In the process, these janitors dramatically shifted the balance of socioeconomic and political power in the city of Los Angeles. And they irrefutably proved that an alternative to their precarious existence—their socioeconomic and political invisibility and exploitation—was possible.

On February 3, 2000, Local 1877’s contract bargaining began. On this day, the local’s bargaining committee, which consisted of twenty-five rank-and-file janitors, sat down with union staff and representatives of eighteen cleaning contractors to begin negotiating a new contract. While the bargaining committee met privately with cleaning contractor representatives, a much larger group of janitors and supporters publicized the start of bargaining with bold demonstrations. On this first day of contract negotiations, a group of about two thousand janitors

¹ The average wage of Los Angeles Local 1877 janitors in early 2000 was \$6.80. This meant that Los Angeles janitors were demanding a nearly forty-five percent increase in wages. Nancy Cleeland, “Talks to Begin on Master Contract for 8,000 Janitors,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 2000.

and supporters marched from Local 1877's headquarters in downtown Los Angeles to Pershing Square. Through this march, the Los Angeles janitors made it clear to contractors and the public that they were well-organized, well-supported, and ready to back up their bold negotiation room demands with actions in the streets.

The march was a particularly strong demonstration of the support that the Los Angeles janitors had from political allies. At the march and subsequent rally at Pershing Square, several prominent Los Angeles political figures showed up to publicly demonstrate their support for the janitors and their bargaining demands. Some of these politicians such as L.A. County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky and L.A. City Councilmember Jackie Goldberg were longtime JfJ supporters. Others, however, were part of an up-and-coming, increasingly powerful group of Latinx politicians that Local 1877 had recently helped elect. These politicians included, for example, Richard Alarcon, who had been elected to the California State Senate in 1998; Alex Padilla, who had been elected to the L.A. City Council in 1999; and Antonio Villaraigosa, who had been chosen to serve as the Speaker of the California State Assembly in 1998 and was beginning a campaign for Mayor of Los Angeles. Having provided direct, street-level support for these candidates in previous years, Local 1877 janitors were now benefiting from these politicians' reciprocal support.

While Local 1877 janitors and their political allies marched and rallied in downtown Los Angeles on February 3, janitors in other cities throughout the U.S. also held demonstrations. On this day, San Diego, Hartford, Chicago, Denver, New York, and Pittsburgh janitors all participated in Y2K campaign actions. These actions provided these janitors with an opportunity to publicize their own upcoming contract struggles, but they functioned as a national display of solidarity and support for the Los Angeles janitors. Following the Y2K strategy that Lerner

helped create a few months earlier, janitors throughout the U.S. offered their assistance in making the Los Angeles contract negotiations a national event.

While Local 1877's contract negotiation kickoff event proved successful in generating support and capturing public attention, the bargaining committee's initial session proved less promising. Although the bargaining committee was well prepared and ready to fight for far-reaching goals, so too were the cleaning contractors prepared and ready to make their own far-reaching demands. Fitting with the general antiunion environment of an increasingly neoliberal era, the cleaning contractors did not give in to the janitors' initial demands and show of strength. Instead, they demanded contract concessions. When the Local 1877 negotiation committee demanded a contract with the breakthrough wage increase and Orange County organizing goals, the cleaning contractors countered with a proposal to eliminate the janitors' family health insurance benefits (which many Local 1877 janitors had only recently acquired)² and to freeze current janitor wage rates for the duration of a five-year contract. This wide gap between the janitors' demands and the cleaning contractors' proposed offerings suggested that the janitors—even with a mass of supporters behind them—were in for difficult, protracted negotiations in the coming weeks.³

Despite this difficult start to bargaining, Local 1877 janitors as well as millions of other immigrant workers found themselves in an increasingly supportive labor and political environment. On February 16, 2000, less than two weeks after the kickoff of the janitors' contract negotiations, the AFL-CIO Executive Council unanimously voted to adopt a resolution

² Under the provisions of the back-loaded 1995 contract, janitors in the San Fernando Valley, South Bay and Glendale areas of Los Angeles did not gain family health insurance until January 2000. Nancy Cleeland, "5,000 Janitors to Get Health Benefits in January," *Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 1999.

³ Roberto I. Manzano, "Janitors March at Warner Center in Demonstration for Pay Increase," *Los Angeles Times*, February 11, 2000; Aida Barragan, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, August 15, 2014; Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016.

on immigration reform. The resolution, which emerged from the aforementioned AFL-CIO constitutional convention immigration resolution recommendation only few months prior, marked a huge shift in the labor federation's immigration policy.⁴ As such, the resolution even came as a surprise to some of the local labor federations and leaders who had been pushing for the change. While these organizations and individuals had worked to promote a shift in AFL-CIO policy, they had not expected such a prompt and decisive resolution.⁵

Regardless of any surprise, though, this new resolution engendered positive responses from the growing number of immigrant members and leaders in the AFL-CIO as well as their allies in the immigrant rights community. As immigrant rights leader (and new SEIU staff member⁶) Juan Jose Gutierrez reported, a crowd of both veteran and up-and-coming labor and immigrant rights activists attended the press conference that the AFL-CIO held in Los Angeles to announce the resolution. Bert Corona, Eliseo Medina, Mike Garcia, Maria Elena Durazo, and representatives of CARECEN, CHIRLA, the UCLA Center for Labor Studies, and the Catholic Church, for example, were all in attendance. While coming from different backgrounds and

⁴ The resolution called for a general amnesty program for all undocumented immigrants currently living in the country and the provision of immediate legal status to Central Americans and Haitians who were denied refugee status in the 1980s and early 1990s, to the 350,000 immigrants denied amnesty under IRCA due to alleged INS failures, and to the 10,000 Liberian refugees who came to the U.S. to flee the civil war in their home country. The resolution also called for a repeal of the employer sanctions system, protection for undocumented immigrants who report labor violations and unionize, reestablishment of "safety net" protections and benefits that were taken away in 1996 anti-immigrant legislation, and the creation of job training and rights education programs for new immigrants. Additionally, the resolution opposed any expansion of guest worker programs. "Building Understanding—Creating Change: A Report on the AFL-CIO Forums on Immigrant Workers' Rights," United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 7, Folder 17, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

⁵ Nancy Cleeland, "AFL-CIO Calls for Amnesty for Illegal U.S. Workers," *Los Angeles Times*, February 17, 2000.

⁶ Eliseo Medina recruited Juan Jose Gutierrez to work for the SEIU in 2000. Gutierrez, who had a long history of working in solidarity with the JfJ campaign in Los Angeles through the One-Stop immigration center, worked on the Los Angeles Year 2000 campaign as an SEIU staff member. Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016.

different organizations, these individuals were “united” and “deeply satisfied” with the new AFL-CIO immigration resolution.⁷

For these and other pro-immigrant leaders, this policy resolution was a long overdue recognition of and response to the important contribution that immigrant workers made to the labor movement. Referencing the federation’s previous immigration policy, AFL-CIO Vice President Linda Chavez-Thompson asserted, “We [immigrants] were great foot soldiers, but we weren’t appreciated... The movement itself has changed so much since then. Now you see the faces of immigrants everywhere.”⁸ Throughout the long history of the federation and particularly the previous decade, immigrant workers provided an important membership backbone and mobilizing force within the U.S. labor movement. With the new immigration policy resolution, the AFL-CIO finally offered substantial support for legal protections and opportunities for these workers in return. With this AFL-CIO policy resolution, then, Local 1877 janitors were able to reap the rewards of the dedication and resilience that they and thousands of other immigrant labor activists had shown. The resolution imbued these janitors, as well as the larger labor and immigrant community, with a newfound sense of excitement and momentum.

While this historic policy resolution helped publicize and legitimize immigrants as valuable members of the labor community, Local 1877 janitors worked to do the same for women during their contract negotiation struggle. On March 8, 2000, International Women’s Day, Local 1877 janitors and JfJ supporters joined tens of thousands of women representing more than two hundred organizations in more than sixty countries in a Global Women’s Strike that called for a recognition of the value of “all women’s work and all women’s lives.”

⁷ Juan Jose Gutierrez, “Ha llegado el momento: Amnistía general para los indocumentados,” *La Opinión*, February 21, 2000.

⁸ Nancy Cleeland, “AFL-CIO Calls for Amnesty for Illegal U.S. Workers,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 17, 2000.

Following a morning press conference to kick off the event, more than two thousand janitors and JfJ supporters participated in a massive “strike” demonstration. In this demonstration, they marched behind a giant papier-mâché puppet—representing “the mother of all janitors”—and blocked traffic on Wilshire and Westwood boulevards for about an hour. Thirty-four women were arrested. The arrestees included many janitors, including Sandra Barrios who was part of the current Local 1877 contract bargaining committee, as well as prominent JfJ supporters such as California State Assemblywoman Gloria Romero. Later in the evening, these women were given “Woman Warrior” awards to acknowledge and celebrate their civil disobedience.⁹

Local 1877 janitors’ participation in the Global Women’s Strike served a dual purpose. Firstly, their participation helped generate public awareness and understanding about the Los Angeles janitors’ contract struggle. By participating in this massive event, Local 1877 janitors helped publicize the Year 2000 contract campaign in Los Angeles and throughout the world. Secondly, the Los Angeles janitors’ participation helped generate public awareness and understanding about broad patterns of injustice that millions of women around the globe struggled with on a daily basis. With this Global Women’s Strike event, the Los Angeles janitors framed their struggle not just as part of a nationwide JfJ contract campaign but also as part of an intersectional, global struggle in opposition to the devaluation and vulnerability that low-wage workers, immigrants, and women all experienced.

Even as the Local 1877 janitors engaged in massive intersectional demonstrations and brought public attention to their cause, the bargaining committee struggled to make headway in the contract negotiation sessions. In the face of continued demands for concession bargaining,

⁹ “Los Angeles (California): Women’s Festival of Resistance,” Global Women’s Strike, 2000, Internet Archive Wayback Machine, https://web.archive.org/web/20000816154725/http://womenstrike8m.server101.com/Report8_march_2000.htm#USA; Dave Melendi, “Lawmaker Arrested During Rally,” *San Gabriel Valley Tribune*, March 10, 2000.

the Local 1877 bargaining committee stopped pushing for organizing rights for Orange County janitors and decided to focus entirely on winning the breakthrough goal of a \$3 per hour wage increase over a three-year contract. Even after agreeing to this compromise, though, the bargaining team faced strong opposition from cleaning contractors. The end of March 2000 and the Los Angeles janitors' existing contract expiration date approached with little negotiation progress.

Faced with this lack of negotiation progress, Local 1877 leaders and janitors pursued two courses of action. They continued to coordinate with labor and community allies and organize bold public demonstrations, hoping to convince cleaning contractors to concede to their demands. At the same time, they also launched a new phase of preparation for the Year 2000 campaign: they began to prepare for the possibility of a strike. To be more specific, Local 1877 leaders and janitors worked to solidify a rank-and-file support structure and a network of labor, community, and political allies to support a strike, in case a strike proved necessary to win their contract demands.

In late March, Local 1877's Y2K political geographic action teams (PEGAs) elected rank-and-file captains to help provide leadership in the case of a strike. The PEGAs also helped organize and staff rank-and-file committees that would take care of the basic yet critical logistical elements of a strike if the need arose. They formed committees, for example, to communicate with the police and press about strike actions, to provide food for striking janitors, and to distribute strike benefits.

While developing this internal support structure, Local 1877 leaders and janitors also prepared for a strike in coordination with their existing network of allies. In late March, they enlisted the support of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor by requesting a strike

sanction. Even before the janitors' existing contract expired, members of the L.A. County Federation of Labor's executive council voted to approve Local 1877's strike sanction. They also put the cleaning contractors involved in Local 1877's contract negotiation on the federation's "Do Not Patronize List." Additionally, the federation's executive secretary-treasurer Miguel Contreras sent notice of these actions to several other labor organizations that were also members of the federation: Operating Engineers 501, LA/Orange County Building Trades Council, Teamsters Joint Council 42, and Elevator Constructors Local 18.¹⁰ These labor organizations all had members that either worked in or had the potential to work in the buildings that Local 1877 janitors cleaned. As such, Contreras' notice to these organizations created a foundation for their solidarity and support for Local 1877 in the case of a strike.

Additionally, Local 1877 enlisted the support of other SEIU janitors. On March 30, the day before the Los Angeles janitors' current master agreement was set to expire, a group of ten janitors from nine cities throughout the U.S. arrived in Los Angeles. These janitors offered immediate support for the Local 1877 janitors in a final demonstration before their contract expired, but they also planned on staying in Los Angeles through April 4, ensuring that they would be available to support the Los Angeles janitors if they decided to go on strike.

This strike preparation—largely occurring behind the scenes—worked in coordination with the existing Year 2000 campaign preparation and contract negotiation actions to lay the groundwork for the Los Angeles janitors to make an important decision on March 31, 2000. On this day, Local 1877's bargaining committee sat down with the cleaning contractor representatives for a final negotiation session before the contract expiration. In a final offer, the contractors proposed a wage increase of fifty cents per year for downtown Los Angeles janitors

¹⁰ Union solidarity 2000 strike files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 11, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

for a three-year contract but a wage freeze for the rest of the janitors for the first year of the contract, only providing wage increases for the second and third years. This final offer was thus an improvement from the cleaning contractors' initial proposals but still a long way away from the janitors' goals of a dollar per year raise for all janitors. When faced with this final offer, Local 1877 janitors had to make a decision: they either had to back down from their commitment to winning a "breakthrough" victory for the Year 2000 campaign or they had to strike.¹¹

The decision was not an easy or carefree one for Los Angeles janitors. In the wake of the contractors' final offer, one of Local 1877 janitors named Cristobál Antonio Hernández lamented: "No sé qué va a pasar. Tengo que pagar mi casa, alimentar a mis tres hijos, salir adelante..." (I don't know what is going to happen. I have to pay for my house, support my three children, continue going forward...) ¹² Most Local 1877 janitors faced a situation similar to Hernández's. They had little savings and depended on their jobs, as low-paying and insecure as these jobs were, to meet their basic needs and those of their family members. Regardless of whether they worked or not, the janitors would continue to face normal living expenses. Furthermore, because of the geographic extent of the janitorial industry in Los Angeles, the janitors could not depend on Local 1877 leaders and staff to orchestrate an effective strike. As Local 1877 leaders and staff discussed with the janitors ahead of time, members of the rank and file would have to provide the leadership and direction necessary to make a strike of 8,000 janitors possible.¹³ Going out on strike thus required Los Angeles janitors to risk their families' livelihoods and to assume unprecedented union responsibility, all for an uncertain outcome.

¹¹ Nancy Cleeland, "Defiant Janitors Gird for Contract Battles," *Los Angeles Times*, April 1, 2000; Nancy Cleeland and Nicholas Riccardi, "Janitors Tie Up Downtown as Strike Enters Its Second Day," *Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 2000.

¹² Miguel Angel Vega, "Lo que ganamos no nos alcanza," *La Opinión*, April 5, 2000.

¹³ Aida Barragan, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, August 15, 2014.

The janitors decided to accept this risk and responsibility. After the cleaning contractors presented their final offer, janitors discussed striking with their Year 2000 campaign geographic action team leaders and expressed their determination to continue fighting. As the janitors articulated, they felt a need to continue fighting for better wages and benefits and for the security and power of a strong contract. In finishing his above mentioned statement, for example, Cristobál Antonio Hernández asserted: "...Pero también sé que si no nos levantamos en huelga, vamos a seguir sufriendo de un mal salario, sin beneficios y sin contrato. Será duro, pero es nuestra última alternativa" (...But I also know that if we do not rise up in strike, we will continue to suffer a bad salary, without benefits and without a contract. It will be difficult, but it is our last resort.)¹⁴

Confident in their demands and confident in the network of internal and external support that they had built over the last two years, Local 1877 janitors voted to go on strike on April 3, 2000. With this decision, the janitors launched what would prove to be a monumental display of worker militancy and intersectional solidarity. Building from the preparatory work that they had already done, the janitors made the strike much more than a struggle for a better contract. Through hard work and personal sacrifice, they made the strike an important symbol and even a starting point for a much bigger struggle for a more socially and economically equitable future. And in doing so, they won the support and solidarity of a diverse group of individuals and organizations. As I will demonstrate below, the Los Angeles janitors' strike proved the transformative power of people joining together across traditional boundaries of gender, ethnicity, citizenship, and class and collectively demanding justice.

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¹⁴ Miguel Angel Vega, 'Lo que ganamos no nos alcanza,' *La Opinión*, April 5, 2000.

From the very beginning, the Local 1877 Year 2000 strike was an impressive logistical feat made possible by the commitment and dedication of the Los Angeles janitors. The first logistical feat that the janitors accomplished was a secret, “rolling start” to the strike. In preparing for the strike, Los Angeles JfJ group reasoned that a traditional start, with all of the janitors walking off the job at the same time, would allow cleaning contractors to have new workers ready to replace strikers. Wanting to avoid this, the JfJ group decided to build the strike in geographic waves: janitors from one section of the city would walk off the first day, and in subsequent days janitors from other sections would join them until all of the janitors were on strike. The group also decided to keep the plans for these waves of walkouts a secret, even from the janitors. In other words, janitors willingly put their trust in Los Angeles JfJ staff and showed up to work as usual on April 3 not knowing if they would be going out on strike that night, the next night, or sometime later. They agreed to continue working as usual until they received word that it was their time to strike.

Even though many of the janitors were eager to start the strike and wanted to be chosen for the first wave, they displayed restraint and worked in coordination to make the rolling start to the strike a success. On Monday, April 3, about seven hundred janitors in downtown Los Angeles walked off the job when they received word from local JfJ staff that it was their time to strike. The next day, these janitors joined Local 1877 staff in informing janitors in Glendale, Burbank, El Segundo, Woodland Hills and Beverly Hills that their time to join the strike had arrived. On Wednesday, they brought the strike to Century City, Westwood, and Santa Monica. By Thursday the final wave of janitors from Long Beach and Pasadena walked off their jobs, bringing the total number of striking janitors to more than 8,000.¹⁵

¹⁵ It is important to note that not all Local 1877 janitors participated in the strike. While the majority of the janitors both walked out and actively supported the strike, some janitors continued to work, citing economic necessity. Aida

In addition to making this rolling start to the strike feasible, the janitors put in immense time and effort to ensure that the strike captured the public's attention and put pressure on cleaning contractors. Starting on April 4, the first complete day of the strike, the janitors worked in two overlapping shifts to distribute leaflets, picket buildings,¹⁶ and participate in demonstrations from sunrise to sunset. With this two-shift system and the help of several large cargo vans that Local 1877 rented in advance, the janitors were able to coordinate several strike actions throughout greater Los Angeles each day.

On April 5, for example, members of the first shift of janitors arrived in Glendale at seven o'clock in the morning to display billboards and banners that called attention to the strike and the janitors' demands. At eleven o'clock in the morning, these janitors joined the second shift of janitors in participating in three simultaneous demonstrations. A group of about five hundred janitors marched through the business center of Woodland Hills, briefly holding a sit-in at one of the office complexes before blocking traffic at the intersection of Canoga Avenue and Oxnard Street. At the same time, another group of about five hundred janitors marched through Glendale, blocking traffic on Brand Boulevard. A third group of about five hundred janitors marched through Beverly Hills, drawing the attention of shoppers and tourists on Rodeo Drive and blocking traffic at the intersection of Wilshire and Santa Monica Boulevards. Following these demonstrations, the first shift of janitors went home, while members of the second shift

Barragan, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, August 15, 2014; Strike logistics files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 13, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Peter Y. Hong, "Buoyed by New Respect, Janitors Back at Work," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 2000.

¹⁶ As Christopher Erickson et al. note in "Justice for Janitors in Los Angeles," California's new "Little Norris La Guardia Act," which increased the burden of proof for organizations seeking injunctions, proved valuable to the janitors during the strike. This act prevented cleaning contractors from gaining an injunction to limit the size of the janitors' picket lines. Christopher Erickson et al., "Justice for Janitors in Los Angeles: Lessons from Three Rounds of Negotiations," *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 40, no. 3 (September 2002): 543-567; Michael White, "Striking janitors win battle in courtroom," *Ventura County Star*, April 8, 2000.

continued protesting in Glendale for a few hours. In the afternoon, some of these members took buses to El Segundo for another demonstration, and some joined Los Angeles JfJ staff in informing Century City, Westwood, and Santa Monica workers that it was their time to join the strike. At eleven o'clock at night, all of the janitors met in their geographic action teams to plan and coordinate strike actions for subsequent days.¹⁷

While coordinating and participating in these long, intense days of action, the Los Angeles janitors also put in the time and effort to ensure that their activism would be sustainable. The janitors wanted to make sure that they would not quickly exhaust themselves or their resources and abandon the strike. One of the main ways in which the janitors ensured this was through food. Working in coordination with Los Angeles JfJ staff and community supporters, members of the janitors' "comida" committee ensured that all of the striking janitors and their families would be well-fed for the duration of the strike. Even before the start of the strike, members of the food committee coordinated with the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor to establish a food bank for the janitors.¹⁸ While on strike, the janitors were able to take donated food from the food bank to help alleviate some of the economic strain that the strike put on them and their families. In preparation for the strike, members of the food committee also coordinated with several supportive religious and labor organizations to establish strike kitchens throughout Los Angeles.¹⁹ Once the strike began, members of the food committee worked to provide food and drinks to the janitors during their strike shifts.

¹⁷ Strike logistics files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 13, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Troy Anderson, Dominic Berbeo, and Sylvia Oliande, "Strike Gets More Tense; Janitors Turn Up Heat with Protests," *Daily News of Los Angeles*, April 6, 2000; Monte Morin and Indraneel Sur, "Janitors Take Protest to Beverly Hills Shops," *Los Angeles Times*, April 6, 2000; Claudia Peschiutta, "Marching Forward: Union janitors block traffic during lunchtime protest on Brand," *The Glendale-News Press*, April 6, 2000.

¹⁸ Jesse J. Linares, "Trabajadores de limpieza en huelga," *La Opinión*, April 4, 2000.

¹⁹ The Delores Mission served as the downtown strike kitchen, the Westwood United Methodist Church served as the "Westside" strike kitchen, the Kol Tikvah Temple served as the Woodland Hills strike kitchen, and the

Like coordinating the strike actions, coordinating this behind-the-scenes food support was no easy or small task. Starting at six o'clock in the morning each day, designated members of the food committee purchased any necessary supplies for the day. Around 7:30 a.m., the first shift of "cooks" arrived at the strike kitchens or started working from home. They made and distributed coffee and hot chocolate to the first shift of janitors. Around 9 a.m., they cooked and distributed breakfast to the first shift. After cleaning up after breakfast, the cooks prepared lunch and distributed it to janitors participating in actions throughout the city around 1:30 p.m. After lunch, the second shift of cooks took over. Between 5 p.m. and 7 p.m., they made and distributed dinner. They finished the day by making and bringing coffee to the nightly coordination meetings between 11 p.m. and midnight.²⁰ By only the third day of the strike, members of the food committee and volunteer supporters had cooked sixty pounds of potatoes, twenty-five pounds of beans, and more than seven hundred eggs to make nearly four hundred breakfast burritos, and they had prepared more than three thousand sandwiches.

This food work was extremely time consuming and difficult. One of the janitors on the food committee even asserted that it was harder than cleaning office buildings. Despite its difficulty, however, this work was extremely valuable and worth the effort. It provided the janitors with the sustenance that they need to continue striking, even as their walkout stretched into a second and third week.²¹

headquarters of IAM District 777 served as the Long Beach strike kitchen. Some of the janitors also turned their houses into strike kitchens, cooking meals and making coffee for their fellow janitors throughout the duration of the strike. Strike logistics files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 13, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

²⁰ Strike logistics files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 13, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

²¹ Lucero Amador, "Solidaridad con huelguistas: Parroquia Misión Dolores, de Boyle Heights, se convierte en su centro de apoyo," *La Opinión*, April 6, 2000.

Over the course of the three-week strike, however, the janitors displayed unity and resilience that went beyond the fact that they did not have to worry about going hungry while they were on strike. Even as they faced opposition and hardship, the janitors remained organized and focused on winning their contract goals. They proved willing to put concern for themselves aside in order to support the campaign. During their strike actions and demonstrations, for example, many janitors participated in acts of civil disobedience and were willingly arrested. The janitors also refused to be intimidated when police tried to contain or stop their protests. Although this strike was overwhelmingly peaceful and free of police violence (especially in comparison to the janitors' 1990 Century City strike), several janitors endured blows from police officers wielding batons while they were on picket lines and participating in demonstrations.

Many of the janitors also risked their safety to block strike replacement workers from breaking the strike. When cleaning contractors started hiring replacement workers, many of the janitors tried to physically prevent these workers from entering the buildings by standing and even lying in front of building driveways and entrances. In the process, some janitors were arrested and others were injured. In the course of trying to prevent replacement workers from entering the parking garage at 1000 Wilshire Boulevard, for example, Laura Pozos was hit by a replacement worker's car. Even after hitting Pozos, the replacement worker continued driving, dragging Pozos's left foot under the car for about a hundred feet. In a separate incident, a replacement worker drove over janitor Victor Terriquez's foot at the 700 S. Flower building after Terriquez tried to convince him to honor the strike. (Both Pozos and Terriquez received \$500 settlements from ABM, the cleaning contractor that hired the strike replacement workers who injured them.)²²

²² Assault charges files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 15, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

In addition to these specific incidents when some of the janitors risked their security and safety, the janitors collectively chose to prioritize the strike over their physical and financial comfort and security on a daily basis. As suggested above, the janitors' schedule of strike actions and support was rigorous and took a physical toll on the janitors. But the janitors' activism did not wane over the course of the strike. Instead, in response to continued opposition from building owners and cleaning contractors, some of the janitors started camping out in front of a few of the office buildings during the second week of the strike. Thus, after protesting in the streets all day, many janitors started sleeping in the streets at night, publicly demonstrating their dedication to the strike.²³

As the strike reached the end of the second week and extended to a third week, many of the janitors struggled financially. While working full-time to support the strike, they were not taking home a paycheck. (Local 1877 leaders did not start using the union's financial resources to provide strike pay to the janitors until the third week of the strike.) Struggling with financial concerns as well as the daily physical toll of the strike, some of the janitors admitted their desperation for a resolution to the strike. And yet, even as they spoke about the burden of the strike, the janitors remained united and confident behind Local 1877 staff and rank-and-file campaign leaders.²⁴

As the burden of the strike grew, janitors were able to draw support from more than just Local 1877 staff and their rank-and-file leaders. They were also able to draw support from several other groups of people who joined in partnership with the janitors to support the strike. One of these groups included union members and leaders from other industries and unions throughout Los Angeles.

²³ Lucero Amador, "Huelguistas acampan frente a edificios," *La Opinión*, April 12, 2000.

²⁴ Lucero Amador, "Conserjes viven con menos de mil dólares al mes," *La Opinión*, April 14, 2000; Lucero Amador, "Llega ayuda para los huelguistas," *La Opinión*, April 18, 2000.

Following the example set by the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, members of the Los Angeles Building Trades Council, the Elevator Constructors Local 18, and the Painters and Allied Trades District Council all committed to support the Los Angeles janitors' strike and refuse any work that would require them to cross the janitors' picket lines. Putting aside a history of isolation and conflict, members of Teamsters Local 396 also pledged to honor the janitors' picket line. These members, particularly the United Parcel Service (UPS) and garbage truck drivers in the local, helped janitors disrupt business as usual in the office buildings by refusing to make deliveries and pick up trash.²⁵ Essentially, these union workers were able to use their relationship to the building trade industry and office buildings to put concentrated pressure on building owners and motivate these owners to intervene on behalf of the janitors with their cleaning contractors.

While other union members did not have power or influence to put direct pressure on building owners, many still provided valuable support to the janitors during the strike. Members of the Bakers Union and UFCW Local 770, for example, provided the janitors' food committee with access to discounted bolillos and lunch meat for the sandwiches that they made and distributed to the striking janitors each day.²⁶

In providing support to the janitors, some of these union members risked their own job security. Local 1877 members at the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), for example,

²⁵ While union members such as those in Teamster Local 396 voluntarily pledged to support the janitors' strike sanction, the Los Angeles janitors made sure that they were held accountable to their pledge and honored the sanction. They yelled at drivers who threatened to cross their picket lines and recorded license plate numbers of the drivers who could not be persuaded to turn around. In other words, even as other union members offered their support, Local 1877 janitors put in effort to realize and maximize this support. Troy Anderson, Dominic Berbeo, and Sylvia Oliande, "Strike Gets More Tense; Janitors Turn Up Heat with Protests," *Daily News of Los Angeles*, April 6, 2000; Union solidarity 2000 strike files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 11, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

²⁶ Strike logistics files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 13, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

risked backlash from their employer to support the janitors' strike. On April 12, LAX janitors, who had a contract separate from the office building janitors, held a one-day work stoppage in solidarity with their fellow janitors and Local 1877 members. In retaliation, the airport cleaning contractor fired one of the LAX janitors' rank-and-file leaders. While Local 1877 staff worked to find a new job for this fired janitor, he remained out of work for more than a month.²⁷

While other Local 1877 members acted in solidarity with the Los Angeles janitors, a diverse group of union activists traveled to the local to lend their support as well. During the course of the three-week strike, more than thirty union staff members representing nine other SEIU locals, the International SEIU, the AFL-CIO, the L.A. County Federation of Labor, HERE, UNITE, ILWU, UFCW, IAM, and the Bakers Union all came to Local 1877 to participate in the strike. These staff members provided valuable assistance in helping the janitors and Los Angeles JfJ staff coordinate strike actions and logistics. As several of these union activists expressed, though, their participation in the strike was also a valuable learning experience for them. They learned first hand about the power of a strike that was overwhelmingly supported and run by members. They also learned about the value of partnering with members in a commitment to social justice, rather than just contract improvements. Following the strike, one of the staff members visiting from a different SEIU local even submitted her resume to Local 1877 and expressed her interest in working for the local.²⁸

Workers who did not have a history of participating in the labor movement, or even in the formal economy, also offered their support and acted in solidarity with the janitors during their strike. As a newspaper article on the strike detailed, for example, one of the volunteer cooks at

²⁷ Strike logistics files, Service Employees International Union, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 13, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

²⁸ Strike staff, United Service Workers West records (Collection Number 1940), Box 45, Folder 12, UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA; Nancy Cleeland, "Organization, Commitment Power Strike," *Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 2000.

the janitors' downtown strike kitchen was an "ama de casa" (housewife) with no industry or personal connection to the striking janitors. Although she did not have any obvious reasons for supporting the janitors, she expressed an underlying connection with the janitors, many of whom like her struggled to raise children without benefits or a good salary. Understanding the janitors' struggle through her own experience, she felt good supporting what she knew to be "una causa justa" (a just cause).²⁹

During the strike, the janitors also received rather unexpected support from some workers who could not as easily relate to their economic struggles. Many office workers—including some who had to bring bathroom supplies from home and take up cleaning responsibilities for themselves during the strike—expressed understanding and sympathy for the janitors. Some office workers even stopped working when the janitors protested nearby in order to wave and cheer in support of their efforts.³⁰ Others took their support a step further, offering more direct assistance to the janitors. A few lawyers, for example, gave their business cards to janitors and offered the janitors their legal services. As one of the janitors who received an offer of assistance from a lawyer asserted, "Sabén que es una causa justa, que los salarios que nos pagan son bajos y que esto no es cosa de juegos" ([The lawyers] know that it is a just cause, that the salaries that they pay us are low and that this is not a game)."³¹

The fact that such a wide range of workers supported the strike suggests that the janitors had captured the public's attention. More importantly, in doing so, the janitors sparked an outpouring of solidarity and support for their efforts. This solidarity extended beyond other

²⁹ Lucero Amador, "Solidaridad con huelguistas: Parroquia Misión Dolores, de Boyle Heights, se convierte en su centro de apoyo," *La Opinión*, April 6, 2000.

³⁰ Martin Kasindorf, "L.A. Copes Without Janitors," *USA Today*, April 6, 2000; Peter Y. Hong, "Jesse Jackson Leads Striking Janitors' Protest," *Los Angeles Times*, April 7, 2000.

³¹ Jesse J. Linares and Lucero Amador, "Demandas incumplidas: Sigue la huelga con reducidos efectos," *La Opinión*, April 8, 2000.

union members and workers from similar economic backgrounds. It crossed the class divide and even overrode the inconvenience that the strike imposed on office workers. And, as the quotes from janitors and non-janitor participants illustrate above, this solidarity centered on the janitors' demand for justice.

The Los Angeles Y2K strike thus highlights that the demand for justice was a key source of power for the Justice for Janitors campaign at the advent of the twenty-first century. This demand had powerful resonance within and beyond Los Angeles. The demand captured the interest and sympathy of a broad group of allies in a way that a more specific demand for a wage increase or benefit improvements likely would not. Amidst a broader surge of progressive labor reform and social movement activism, the janitors made themselves known as legitimate members of society who deserved basic social and economic recognition for the legitimate labor that they performed. And in many ways, the janitors earned important social recognition for their labor through the course of the strike. In standing behind janitors and their demand for justice, a broad coalition of workers affirmed that janitors deserved to be recognized and treated fairly.

While I recognize this demand for justice as a powerful, pragmatic element of the Justice for Janitors campaign, I also consider this demand for justice as a reflection of some of the more conservative elements of the Justice for Janitors campaign. In demanding justice, Los Angeles janitors—like other janitors throughout the history of the campaign—avoided the rhetoric of class struggle. Their demand for justice, in other words, was a more conservative alternative to calls for class-consciousness, worker empowerment, and struggles against the inherent inequality of the capitalist system. In demanding justice, the janitors built a wide base of allies and supporters. But they also, I would argue, lost out on an important opportunity to directly expose

the connection between the invisibility and exploitation that they faced and the broader system of neoliberal capitalism. In other words, they lost out on an opportunity to explicitly demand a more just alternative economic system for all workers. With a broader, more radical demand, the janitors could have more directly capitalized on and channeled the momentum of their strike and the broader surge of labor and social movement activism and reform during this period into a more explicit struggle against neoliberal capitalism.

Nevertheless, even while the Los Angeles janitors avoided the rhetoric of class struggles, they successfully framed their contract campaign as more than an isolated struggle against a particular instance of injustice. Instead, they portrayed their Y2K campaign as part of a broader struggle against broad patterns of injustice. Media coverage of the strike provides evidence of this. This media coverage also likely helped further boost support and momentum for the strike as it was ongoing.

On April 6, just a few days into the strike, *La Opinión* published an editorial in support of the Los Angeles janitors. The editorial specifically acknowledged that the janitors performed humble work and that their strike was an extreme measure. But the editorial also asserted that the janitors worked hard, provided an important service, and went on strike in response to the extreme disparity between their wages and the general wealth and prosperity of Los Angeles. After suggesting the legitimacy of the strike, the editorial concluded with a powerful claim of the broad value of the janitors' strike:

El reclamo de los janitors no se limita solamente a los intereses de su gremio. En realidad, las pancartas rojinegras en que piden justicia, y que han empezado a alzarse orgullosamente a partir del lunes, hablan igualmente por otros sectores que también trabajan duro, y que igual que los janitors, aún aguardan que la bonanza de que tanto se hace alarde, llegue hasta donde ellos se encuentran (The janitors' claim is not limited only to the interests of their union. In reality, the red and black banners on which they demand justice and which they have started to proudly raise since Monday speak equally for the other sectors that also work

hard and that, like the janitors, are still awaiting for much boasted prosperity to arrive where they are).³²

In other words, the strike, *La Opinión* claimed, was not an isolated, self-interested struggle. It was a rejection of the injustice of growing economic polarization that enriched the few at the expense of the majority. As such, the editorial suggested, individuals other than janitors and other than SEIU members had a vested interest in the outcome of this struggle.

L.A. Weekly also published an editorial in support of the janitors during the first week of the strike. Like the one in *La Opinión*, this editorial emphasized the polarization of wealth in Los Angeles and suggested the value of the strike beyond its immediate benefit to janitors. The editorial noted that the strike was part of a broader union effort to reduce poverty amongst the Latinx working class and make Los Angeles a better city for all of its inhabitants. In addition to just describing the value of the strike, this editorial included specific appeals and suggestions for workers and members of the public to support the janitors. The editorial encouraged building tenants to express support for the janitors' demands to the managers and owners of their buildings. The editorial also encouraged others to donate to food banks, both the existing labor food banks and a new food bank that *L.A. Weekly* created to support the janitors.³³

Even newspapers outside of Los Angeles offered positive portrayals of the strike and its connections to broader struggles against injustice. On April 16, for example, *Washington Post* published a sympathetic article written by journalist David S. Broder, who had witnessed the strike first-hand while visiting Los Angeles. In this article, Broder contrasted the politeness and hard work of janitors with the extravagant wealth and insensitivity of the rich. He also specifically drew a parallel between the invisibility that janitors and other service people suffered in the present with the invisibility that black people suffered in earlier generations. With this, he

³² "Una causa justa: Editorial de Fondo," *La Opinión*, April 6, 2000.

³³ "Editorial: How You Can Help the Janitors – and Your City," *L.A. Weekly*, April 7-13, 2000.

suggested that any illusions that America had made progress in terms of greater equality or justice were false.³⁴

Newspaper coverage of the strike, then, helped spread news of the strike but also, more significantly, helped magnify and extend a supportive, intersectional framing of the strike. As suggested above, janitors struggled in the streets to make themselves visible, express the legitimacy of their struggle, and emphasize the connection between their struggle and that of broader struggles for economic as well as racial, citizenship, gender justice. In doing so, janitors directly built public sympathy and support for their strike. On their own, however, the janitors had a limited ability to influence the public and put pressure on cleaning contractors to settle. Offering their support in partnership with janitors, newspaper writers and editors were able to build public awareness and support for the strike throughout Los Angeles and even across the United States.

As mentioned previously, while the media played a valuable role in supporting the strike, so too did political allies. As discussed above, the Los Angeles janitors earned the support of many political allies in Los Angeles by helping walk precincts and turn out voters in 1998 and 1999. These political allies publicly supported the janitors during the contract negotiation phase of their Year 2000 campaign. And their support for the janitors continued during the strike.

Starting on April 3, several Los Angeles politicians once again publicly declared and demonstrated their support for janitors. Antonio Villaraigosa and Zev Yaroslavsky, for example, both attended and spoke at the janitors' strike authorization rally on April 3. The next day, Yaroslavsky along with his fellow Board of Supervisor members Yvonne Brathwaite Burke and Gloria Molina also pledged to support the janitors during the strike. In subsequent days, members of the L.A. City Council voted unanimously to support the janitors as well, and many

³⁴ David S. Broder, "Of Janitors and Billionaires," *Washington Post*, April 16, 2000.

Los Angeles politicians marched in demonstrations with the janitors. Some of the janitors' Los Angeles political allies even participated in acts of civil disobedience and were arrested alongside of janitors. California State Council and Assembly members Jackie Goldberg, Scott Wildman, Gil Cedillo, and Gloria Romero, for example, were all arrested for sitting down with janitors to block an intersection at the end of a march in Westwood during the strike.³⁵ Many Los Angeles politicians also made calls to office building owners and managers, urging them to settle on the janitors' terms. Furthermore, in addition to supporting the strike directly, the janitors' Los Angeles political allies helped build additional political support for janitors throughout California. During the second week of the strike, for example, Los Angeles politicians helped push a resolution in support of the janitors' strike through the California State Assembly in Sacramento.³⁶

The janitors also benefited from political allies beyond the scope of Los Angeles and even California politics. Notable amongst these non-Californian political allies was Jesse Jackson. As discussed in Chapter 3, Jesse Jackson became an early ally of the Justice for Janitors campaign, supporting the efforts of janitors in Atlanta and Washington D.C. in the late 1980s. More than ten years later, he offered his support to Justice for Janitors once again, participating in several of the Los Angeles janitors' strike demonstrations. On Friday, April 7 for example, he participated in a massive "Pilgrimage for Justice" between downtown Los Angeles and Santa Monica. As part of this pilgrimage, Jesse Jackson led more than fifteen hundred janitors and other allies in a ten-mile march west from Local 1877 headquarters in downtown Los Angeles to Century City. (After a few miles, Jesse Jackson and the few other

³⁵ Harold Meyerson, "Street vs. Suite: Why L.A.'s janitors will win their strike," *L.A. Weekly*, April 7-13, 2000; Jesse J. Linares, "Arrestan a tres asambleístas," *La Opinión*, April 15, 2000.

³⁶ Nancy Cleeland and Peter Hong, "Striking Janitors March From Downtown to Westside," *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 2000; Harold Meyerson, "Enter the Janitors: Transforming L.A.," *L.A. Weekly*, April 14-20, 2000.

political and labor leaders at the front of the pilgrimage switched from marching to riding in the back of a flatbed truck. The janitors, however, tirelessly continued the pilgrimage on foot.) Along the way, Jackson told the janitors that if Martin Luther King Jr. and Cesar Chavez were still alive, they would be marching with the janitors too. When his words were translated into Spanish, the janitors cheered.

While Jackson led the main group of janitors and supporters west into Century City, another group of janitors marched east from Santa Monica. In the afternoon, both groups arrived in Century City, having covered more than fifteen miles collectively. When they arrived in Century City, the marchers found that the city was a virtual ghost town even though normal business hours were not over. Apparently, office building tenants, at the urging of LAPD officers who were notified of the demonstration in advance, decided to quit work early.

These office workers' actions suggested the far-reaching influence that the janitors—with the backing of prominent political allies—were having on the city of Los Angeles. In 1990, Century City office building workers attempted to continue business as usual in the midst of a janitors' strike, and LAPD resorted to violence in their attempt to prevent janitors from disrupting business in the city. Ten years later, both LAPD and Century City businesses decided to concede to the janitors and their growing group of allies rather than attempting to resist.³⁷ This action, in other words, suggested that the Los Angeles JfJ group had made important progress in shifting the balance of power between the traditionally invisible and vulnerable janitors, on the one side, and the business elite and their law enforcement allies, on the other side.

³⁷ Jason Kandel, "Janitors' Walkout Picking Up Steam," *Daily News of Los Angeles*, April 7, 2000; Nancy Cleeland and Peter Hong, "Striking Janitors March From Downtown to Westside," *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 2000; Aida Barragan, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, August 15, 2014.

As the strike entered its second and third week, several other prominent political figures who did not have a history of supporting the janitors also decided to publicly back the janitors' strike. On Monday April 10, for example, Mayor Richard Riordan, who had actually directly opposed the efforts of Local 1877 janitors and other low-wage workers to pass a living wage ordinance in 1997, attended one of the janitors' events.³⁸ Two days later, he personally met with several building owners and urged them to use their power over cleaning contractors to resolve the strike. During the next day, April 13, he included a message of support for the janitors in his State of the City address, and at a press conference following the speech he boldly asserted, "Clearly, I'm on the side of the workers."³⁹

Other prominent politicians including Vice President Al Gore and Senator Ted Kennedy also offered their support as the janitors built momentum and publicity for the strike. On Monday, April 17, the day that marked the start of the third week of the strike, Al Gore attended a janitor rally in Santa Monica. Although he only addressed the janitors briefly, he remarked on their success in capturing the public's attention and asserted in Spanish: "Estoy con ustedes en su lucha" (I am with you in your fight).⁴⁰ During the next day, Ted Kennedy attended a janitors' rally at California Plaza. At this rally, Kennedy declared his support for the janitors' cause, which he asserted was more than a labor struggle. He asserted that their struggle was an issue of dignity and civil rights and a "women's movement."⁴¹ In calling attention to this multifaceted nature of the strike, Kennedy helped bring public attention and support to the janitors' cause as a broad, intersectional, and worthy struggle.

³⁸ Harold Meyerson, "Enter the Janitors: Transforming L.A." *L.A. Weekly*, April 14-20, 2000.

³⁹ Jim Newton, "Riordan's State of City Speech Backs Police Panel, Janitors," *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 2000.

⁴⁰ Nancy Cleeland and Jeffrey L. Rabin, "Gore's Presence at Rally Boosts Janitors' Spirits," *Los Angeles Times*, April 17, 2000.

⁴¹ Gary Gentile, "Politicking: Kennedy backs striking janitors," *Daily Breeze*, April 19, 2000; Joseph Treviño, "Janitor Power," *L.A. Weekly*, April 28-May 4, 2000.

Politicians were not the only prominent figures who decided to lend their support to the janitors. Several religious leaders also decided to partner with janitors in bringing public attention to the strike and support for the janitors' struggle. Most notable amongst these religious leaders was Cardinal Roger Mahony. In the wake of the janitors' massive Pilgrimage for Justice on Friday, April 7, Cardinal Mahony offered his assistance to the janitors. On Saturday, April 8, he made calls to building owners to encourage them to support the janitors in their struggle with cleaning contractors. He also publicly declared the strike an issue of "fundamental economic justice," and offered to provide a mediator to help the cleaning contractors and janitors reach a settlement.⁴²

The janitors welcomed his support. As Local 1877 President Mike Garcia suggested, Cardinal Mahony was an important religious leader for many of the janitors who were Catholic. Additionally, he was a key figure in the "top levels of the Los Angeles power structure."⁴³ In other words, Cardinal Mahony was in a strong position to bridge the divide between janitors and elite building owners and to help bring some of the members of his diverse congregation together in the name of economic justice.

While Local 1877 janitors welcomed Cardinal Mahony's support, the cleaning contractors rejected his offer of mediation services. When the cleaning contractors rejected his offer, Cardinal Mahony offered to hold a mass in honor of the janitors at La Placita Church. Even with little time to prepare, the janitors took advantage of this opportunity. On Monday, April 10, more than five hundred janitors holding white carnations marched into La Placita

⁴² Steve Berry, "Janitors' Union Chief Hints at Compromise," *Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 2000; Harold Meyerson, "Enter the Janitors: Transforming L.A." *L.A. Weekly*, April 14-20, 2000.

⁴³ "Janitors March in Los Angeles After Voting to Begin a Strike," *New York Times*, April 9, 2000; Steve Berry, "Janitors' Union Chief Hints at Compromise," *Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 2000.

church while singing “No Nos Moveran” (“We Shall Not Be Moved”) to attend Mahony’s mass.⁴⁴

During the course of the strike, the Los Angeles janitors also took advantage of offers for support from other religious figures, even those outside of the Roman Catholic faith. On April 19, for example, a group of janitors observed the Passover holiday, eating a traditional Seder meal with Rabbi Steven B. Jacobs in front of the headquarters of a Real Estate Investment Trust (REIT) company. Although the janitors were not Jewish, they welcomed Rabbi Jacobs’s support and the opportunity to emphasize the legitimacy of their struggle. During the Passover meal, Rabbi Jacobs compared the janitors’ struggle to that of the Hebrews who observed the first Passover, referring to the Hebrew people’s exodus from Egypt as a work strike. Janitors contributed to this comparison: they described the many “plagues” that they had been forced to endure, referring to low wages, inadequate health care, poor working conditions, and anti-immigrant hostility.⁴⁵ With this event, then, the janitors continued to use religious ceremonies to promote their struggle as a moral cause. At the same time, though, with this event, the janitors also helped broaden the religious framing of their struggle. They suggested that their struggle was not just relevant and important to their fellow Roman Catholics: instead, it was widely relevant and deserving of the support of all moral people.

Ultimately, then, janitors used an existing foundation of support for the Year 2000 campaign to launch and sustain a powerful strike during the first three weeks of April 2000. This foundation of support was both internal to the union, rooted in a dedicated and activist rank and file, and external to the union, spanning across a broad network of JfJ supporters. Through the

⁴⁴ Steve Berry, “Janitors’ Union Chief Hints at Compromise,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 2000; Gary Gentile, “Janitors, building owners continue talks as sides near agreement,” Associated Press Archive, April 11, 2000; Nancy Cleeland, “Organization, Commitment Power Strike,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 2000.

⁴⁵ Karima A. Haynes, “Janitors Draw Parallels Between Strike, Passover,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 20, 2000.

course of the strike, the Los Angeles janitors built upon this existing foundation to expand and escalate the strike as a broad, intersectional struggle for justice. Along the way, they joined with a growing group of allies to build widespread public sympathy and support for their cause.

By the end of the third week of the strike, this support for the janitors finally pressured the cleaning contractors to make sufficient concessions. As the Los Angeles janitors and their allies vowed to continue fighting and escalating strike actions in a fourth week, the cleaning contractors offered a contract agreement that was satisfactory to the janitors. On Monday, April 24, the janitors voted to approve the contract agreement and ended the strike with a jubilant celebration.⁴⁶

It is important to note that the janitors' new contract agreement was not perfect. The janitors did not succeed in reestablishing organizing rights for Orange County janitors during the bargaining, nor did they achieve their wage goal of a dollar per hour raise each year. Furthermore, the contract still put the janitors at a wage rate that was below the equivalent of what the unionized Los Angeles janitors had earned in 1983. Nevertheless, the janitors did succeed in keeping full-family health insurance. On top of this, the janitors negotiated a reduction in the number of wage tiers in the contract—from five to three—and won approximately twenty-five percent raises for janitors in each of the tiers by the end of the contract. Additionally, they achieved their original goal of a contract expiration date in 2003.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ “Janitors Reach Tentative Contract,” Associated Press Archive, April 23, 2000; Aida Barragan, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, August 15, 2014.

⁴⁷ Under the new contract, janitors in “Area 1” of the contract—downtown and Century City—went from a starting rate of \$7.20 an hour in 2000 to a minimum of \$9.10 in 2003. Janitors in “Area 2”—which included much of the Westside as well as Pasadena, Glendale, Long Beach, City of Commerce, Studio City, Woodland Hills, etc.—went from a starting rate of \$6.30 an hour in 2000 to a minimum of \$8.40 an hour in 2003. Janitors in Area 3—the rest of greater Los Angeles—went from a starting rate of \$5.20 an hour in 2000 to a minimum of \$6.50 an hour in 2003. Peter Y. Hong, “Buoyed by New Respect, Janitors Back at Work,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 2000; Harold Meyerson, “The Red Sea,” *L.A. Weekly*, April 28-May 4, 2000; Christopher Erickson et al., “Justice for Janitors in

As such, the contract still represented a significant economic and strategic victory for the janitors, especially in consideration of the austerity of the contractors' initial proposals and their obduracy during negotiations up to the very end of the strike.

Furthermore, as the janitors articulated, they had more to celebrate than just their tangible contract agreement. As he prepared to return to work on April 25, 2000, one of the janitors told the *Los Angeles Times*, "My head is high... This strike was not just about our wages. It was about respect. We showed we're part of a bigger movement."⁴⁸ As this janitor articulated, the Y2K strike was a successful achievement much beyond the tangible contract gains it produced. During this strike, the Los Angeles janitors publicly rejected their invisibility and the devaluation of their labor, and, in the process, they created a moment of social and political transformation.

The strike itself, then, rather than the contract resolution, was transformative and imbued the janitors and their wide group of supporters with a sense that an even larger, more dramatic workers' struggle was not only possible but also imminent. Over the course of the three-week strike, the Los Angeles janitors went from being part of a hidden and precarious service sector workforce to being the object of astronomical public attention and support. An anonymous donor gave Local 1877 a check for \$500,000 to support the strike. Random bystanders in Beverly Hills handed money to the janitors as they marched. (Journalist Harold Meyerson described this as the first recorded instance of spontaneous redistribution of wealth in Los Angeles.) People in Los Angeles' garment district started producing knock-off versions of the janitors' red and black "Justice for Janitors" t-shirts alongside designer fashion. Billionaire entrepreneur Eli Broad helped convince conservative Mayor Riordan to publicly back the janitors. Elite real estate developer Rob Maguire sat in on the janitors' negotiation sessions to

Los Angeles: Lessons from Three Rounds of Negotiations," *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 40, no. 3 (September 2002): 543-567.

⁴⁸ Peter Y. Hong, "Buoyed by New Respect, Janitors Back at Work," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 2000.

help put pressure on cleaning contractors.⁴⁹ The strike, in other words, created an obvious if admittedly short-lived disruption to the socioeconomic and political status quo of Los Angeles. The janitors definitely proved that an alternative to their socioeconomic and political invisibility and exploitation was possible. And they simultaneously seemed to lay the foundation for a much larger struggle against patterns of socioeconomic and political injustice.

Following the strike, *La Opinión* interviewed Local 1877 president Mike Garcia and asked whether he foresaw the social and political impact that the strike had. Garcia asserted that he had not. But while Garcia had not expected the janitors' struggle to resonate as it did, he offered two reasons to explain why support for the janitors caught fire. He asserted that the first reason was that the janitors were in the right place at the right time. The second reason was that the janitors had the energy and enthusiasm—“el ánimo”—to capture the public's attention worldwide.⁵⁰

With this response, Garcia clearly suggested that the janitors benefited from extenuating circumstances beyond their control. As I have suggested previously, the turn of the century emerged as a moment that seemed primed for socioeconomic and political transformation. The tail end of the 1990s and start of 2000 were rife with social movement activism, particularly in the immigrant rights and global justice movements. The Los Angeles janitors and JfJ activists assuredly contributed to this surge of social movement activism, but they also benefited from the broad sense of hope and possibility that grew alongside developments in these movements.

What made the Los Angeles janitors' Year 2000 campaign strike so significant, however, was not just this sense of hope and possibility. It was the janitors' hard work and dedication to

⁴⁹ Nancy Cleeland, “Janitors Given \$500,000 by Anonymous Donor,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 12, 2000; Harold Meyerson, “The Red Sea,” *L.A. Weekly*, April 28-May 4, 2000; Harold Meyerson, “A Clean Sweep,” *L.A. Prospect*, December 19, 2001.

⁵⁰ David Torres, “Un líder con conocimiento de causa: Mike García,” *La Opinión*, April 27, 2000.

making the most of this moment of hope and possibility. Through the course of the strike, the janitors—with the assistance of union leaders and staff—put in the time and effort to maximize the attention and support that they received and effectively leverage this attention and support to build power. They built economic power to leverage specifically against cleaning contractors, but they also built social and political power to contribute to a broad struggle against the devaluation and exploitation of low-wage workers, immigrant workers, workers of color, and female workers. As Mike Garcia asserted to *La Opinión*: “Quisiéramos ser recordados, y hablo en plural, como los catalizadores que inspiraron la revolución total de los trabajadores en Los Angeles y en todo el país, especialmente de los trabajadores más pobres y más explotados” (We would like to be remembered, and I speak in the plural, as the catalysts that inspired the total revolution of workers, particularly of the poorest and most exploited workers, in Los Angeles and in the whole country).⁵¹

In the end, the Los Angeles janitors’ Year 2000 campaign strike did not catalyze a working class revolution. But the strike was a key, inspirational success within a broader surge of labor and social movement activism. And as part of this surge of activism, the Los Angeles janitors’ actions undeniably helped foster worker empowerment and working class consciousness throughout the United States.

⁵¹ David Torres, “Un líder con conocimiento de causa: Mike García,” *La Opinión*, April 27, 2000.

Chapter 12

Justice for Janitors and the New Strength Unity Plan:

Exploring the Promise but also Problems Embedded in SEIU's Bold Plan for 21st Century Labor Reform (2000-2003)

In this chapter, I explore an intertwined drive for union reform and additional Justice for Janitors organizing in the wake of Year 2000 campaign successes. I start by taking a step back and providing an overview of the strength and vitality of the United States labor movement as a whole at the turn of the century. In doing so, I put the wave of excitement and hope for the future of organized labor, discussed in Chapter 11, in perspective. I highlight the fact that membership density in the U.S. labor movement as a whole and in the SEIU and even the SEIU's building service division more specifically continued to decline in the late 1990s despite Justice for Janitors expansion and growing momentum.

This perspective, I argue, illuminates the immense difficulty of the challenges that organized labor faced amidst neoliberal restructuring. Even as the Justice for Janitors campaign defied public expectations and achieved victories that organized and empowered thousands of workers throughout the U.S., the campaign's larger struggle against the effects of neoliberal restructuring and union decline remained a steep, uphill battle. Reversing union decline seemed more like a pipe dream than an achievable goal. I reveal, however, that this bleak reality of the current conditions of organized labor was more than just a cause for pessimism. Within the SEIU, this bleak reality became a source of inspiration. More specifically, it became a motivation for reform.

I explore how SEIU leaders under President Andy Stern's direction reflected on current labor movement struggles and developed a plan to reform and transform the SEIU to better meet the challenges that organized labor faced in the twenty-first century. I highlight that this plan, the New Strength Unity Plan (NSUP), proposed to reform the SEIU along the lines of changes that SEIU leaders and local JfJ groups had already been implementing in the union's building service division over the course of the Justice for Janitors campaign. As such, I suggest that the NSUP can be understood as an effort to expand, adapt, and enact elements of the Justice for Janitors campaign and JfJ-inspired reform within the SEIU more broadly.

Next, I trace the efforts of JfJ leaders and local JfJ groups to fulfill the NSUP through new Justice for Janitors organizing efforts. I explore an odds-defying janitor organizing drive in Orange County, California; a regional JfJ organizing campaign in the Northeast; and an adaptation of the JfJ campaign to security officer organizing in the early 2000s. I highlight the promise and potential of these organizing efforts, and—in doing so—I also highlight the promise and potential of the New Strength Unity Plan.

At the same time, though, I also highlight growing membership dissatisfaction with the implementation of the NSUP. I explore how tensions embedded within the Justice for Janitors campaign became widespread and escalated throughout the SEIU as a whole. As I explored in the Chapter 10, local JfJ leaders' strength and commitment to rank-and-file participation as a core tenet of the Justice for Janitors campaign had balanced Stern's initial push toward centralization and hierarchy within the campaign in the mid to late 1990s. Although in tension, the push toward campaign centralization and hierarchy and the development of strong, rank-and-file JfJ campaigns on the ground level had proven compatible in laying a foundation for the Year 2000 campaign and arguably in inspiring the NSUP. SEIU leaders' efforts to quickly expand the

JfJ campaign and restructure SEIU locals to fulfill the NSUP, however, caused underlying tensions between the rank and file and SEIU leaders and between the process and goals of reform to rise to the surface and rupture.

Ultimately, I argue that the New Strength Unity Plan was an inspiring reform plan with the potential to foster JfJ expansion and JfJ-inspired organizing on a much larger scale. I also argue, however, that SEIU leaders and especially President Andy Stern seemed to lose sight of one of the two core elements of the NSUP: a proposal to increase membership unity and activism. By becoming so concerned with the end goal of organizing, SEIU leaders angered and alienated their membership. And in doing so, they fundamentally threatened the viability and sustainability of their reform efforts.

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Despite all of the excitement and sense of possibility that came with the Justice for Janitors Year 2000 campaign and the concurrent immigrant rights and global justice movement activism at the turn of the century, the overall situation of the U.S. labor movement at this time was very bleak. Union density in both the SEIU and the United States continued to decline even as the SEIU invested more resources into organizing and added new members in the late 1990s. As of 1995, the International and local levels of the SEIU spent a combined total of less than \$20 million on organizing. Over the course of the next three years, the International and especially local levels of the union devoted more resources to organizing and hired record numbers of organizing staff. By 1998, SEIU had close to five hundred full-time organizers on staff and spent a combined total of more than \$60 million on organizing. This dramatic increase in resources spent on organizing produced some tangible results. In years of record-setting growth, SEIU locals organized more than 122,000 new members through organizing campaigns between

1997 and 1998. (During the same period, SEIU also added 144,000 new members through affiliations).

Even with this record-setting growth, however, union density declined in ten of the twelve industries in which SEIU was the dominant union during this period. The only exceptions, where union density increased slightly between 1997 and 1998, were in the public sector and medical clinics. In the janitorial industry, SEIU had gained majority representation of janitors in twenty-six major cities by the late 1990s. Industry-wide, however, the union only represented eight percent of janitors in the United States. At the same time, union density in the United States as a whole continued to drop. From a highpoint of thirty-five percent in 1955, union density had dropped to 13.9 percent in 1998.¹

While this union decline was undeniably a potential source of discouragement and pessimism, the SEIU did not shy away from the poor prognosis of the U.S. labor movement at the turn of the century. In fact, at the behest of President Andy Stern, a group of SEIU leaders conducted a thorough review of the state of the SEIU, the labor movement, and the situation of workers throughout the U.S. between 1998 and 1999. This group, the President's Committee 2000, produced a series of reports that were distributed throughout the union. The committee's first report, which included the facts detailed above, juxtaposed the recent progress and sense of momentum within the SEIU with the overall decline of the labor movement and the rising economic inequality in the United States in the late twentieth century. The report concluded that despite all of the SEIU's recent success and momentum, workers and unions were facing a crisis that necessitated further action—something more than the reforms that the SEIU had already

¹ President's Committee files, SEIU Education Department Records, Box 3, Folder 3, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

taken to halt union decline and to improve the wages, working conditions, and security of workers in the late 1990s.

Under Stern's direction, the President's Committee 2000 transitioned from their review of the SEIU and the U.S. economy to an exploration of ideas, strategies, and opportunities for further reform to address this crisis. In a very participatory and transparent process, the President's Committee posed a series of questions to SEIU leaders and members, asking what SEIU needed to do to become a more effective, capable union and to build industry strength in the twenty-first century. The committee solicited feedback to these questions at regional conferences and via email. The committee used this feedback to produce a series of reform recommendations for the SEIU. The committee then solicited leader and member opinions on these recommendations in a series of regional hearings and through an independent membership poll. The final result of the committee's efforts was an action plan called the New Strength Unity Plan (NSUP).

The New Strength Unity Plan was described in detail in the third and final report that the President's Committee 2000 produced in April of 2000. This report listed eight main highlights of the reform recommendations included in the plan. Broadly speaking, however, the NSUP can be understood as an effort to implement two major types of changes within the SEIU. Firstly, the NSUP called for division restructuring and new policies and programs that would increase centralization and hierarchy within the union. With the goal of increasing and coordinating organizing and bargaining efforts, the NSUP proposed new leadership oversight at the International level of the SEIU for each division, new standards for establishing local union jurisdiction, and new, more stringent policies for holding local unions accountable to division requirements. Secondly, the NSUP called for a series of new policies and programs that would

increase membership unity and participation within the union, within the workplace, and within the community. The NSUP proposed increased communication between leaders and members within the union, new leadership development programs to expand and diversify union leadership, a new member-driven political action program, and greater coordination between SEIU members and other union, community, and social movement organizations to build strong organizing campaigns, particularly in the South.²

These New Strength Unity Plan recommendations are strikingly similar to many of the changes that International SEIU leaders and local JfJ groups had already implemented in areas of the janitorial division through the Justice for Janitors campaign, especially the Y2K campaign, in the late 1990s. As I have described in previous chapters, JfJ leaders and President Stern oversaw local mergers and intervened into corrupt and conflicted locals to create a stronger, more centralized Justice for Janitors campaign for the advent of the twenty-first century. At the same time, local JfJ groups fostered greater member activism, leadership, and community engagement at the local level to provide a firm foundation for (and arguably a counterbalance to) the increasing centralization and hierarchy of the JfJ campaign.

As my exploration of the Justice for Janitors Year 2000 campaign demonstrates, these changes responded to ongoing economic transformations amidst neoliberal restructuring, produced tangible organizing and bargaining achievements, and fostered a newfound sense of excitement and momentum amongst union members and the broader community. The New Strength Unity Plan can be understood, then, as a proposal to implement the sorts of changes that had been producing success in the Justice for Janitors campaign throughout the union more broadly. In light of this, the Justice for Janitors campaign can be understood as doing more than

² President's Committee files, SEIU Education Department Records, Box 3, Folder 3, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

continuing to adapt and evolve as an organizing campaign at the turn of the century; it was also spurring adaptation and evolution within the SEIU as a whole during this period.

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After articulating the New Strength Unity Plan in their third report, members of the President's Committee 2000 presented the NSUP to delegates at the SEIU's quadrennial convention in May of 2000. Amidst a broad surge of excitement and hope for the future of a resurgent labor movement, the SEIU delegates voted to adopt the New Strength Unity Plan.³ Broadly speaking, in adopting the NSUP, the convention delegates provided the SEIU with a relatively concrete course of action to become a stronger, more unified and also more participatory union that would hopefully prove capable of addressing the acute crisis affecting the labor movement and workers more broadly amidst neoliberal restructuring. In the specific context of the janitorial division, though, the adoption of the NSUP provided SEIU leaders and members involved in the Justice for Janitors campaign with a sort of mandate. The adoption of the NSUP provided them with a mandate to build on the momentum of the Y2K campaign and continue expanding and evolving the campaign in the twenty-first century.

Throughout the early 2000s, local JfJ groups and International leaders involved in the campaign made a concerted effort to fulfill this mandate. During this period, local JfJ groups capitalized on the excitement and momentum of their recent Y2K campaign successes to build new organizing drives and expand the Justice for Janitors campaign throughout their jurisdictions. At the same time, local JfJ groups also joined together and partnered with International leaders to create a new coordinated surge of Justice for Janitors action in the Northeast. Lastly, local JfJ groups and International leaders also started taking action to fulfill

³ Fred Gaboury, "SEIU maps plans for November elections," *People's Weekly World*, May 27, 2000.

earlier proposals to adapt and expand the Justice for Janitors campaign to organize security officers.

The most remarkable example of a local Justice for Janitors group using the excitement and momentum of the Year 2000 campaign to build a new organizing drive can be seen in the actions of the Los Angeles JfJ group in the early 2000s. As noted in Chapter 11, the Los Angeles janitors were forced to abandon one of their original bargaining goals for the Y2K campaign— access and employer neutrality to organize janitors in nearby Orange County— during their contract negotiations. The Los Angeles JfJ group, however, did not forget this goal. After the Year 2000 campaign was settled with a new contract, Los Angeles Local 1877 leaders and janitors worked to translate all of the excitement and momentum from their recent Y2K strike and success into building a janitor organizing drive in Orange County (O.C.).

Capitalizing on the rank-and-file energy of the Year 2000 strike, Local 1877 President Mike Garcia hired a rank-and-file activist from the Y2K strike named Marisol Rivera as an organizer for the O.C. organizing drive. Rivera joined forces with other rank-and-file Latina organizers such as Jasmin Castillo in launching this organizing drive.⁴ As these JfJ organizers started their initial outreach, they found a very receptive workforce. The Los Angeles janitors' recent, well-publicized strike and Y2K contract success had left an impression on many of the janitors who worked in Orange County. The strike and contract success proved to these janitors that winning wage and working condition improvements and greater respect and security on the job was possible. As a janitor named Guillermo Trejo who worked in Newport Beach described, for example, he was originally very skeptical of the Los Angeles janitors' strike efforts in April

⁴ David Stilwell, conversation with the author, November 10, 2016.

of 2000. The outcome of the strike, however, changed his mind. A few months after the strike, he noted: “I thought they weren't going to get anything... Now I have hope.”⁵

This hope—that rested on a belief that an alternative to job insecurity and poor wages and working conditions was possible—proved extremely valuable in the Orange County janitor organizing drive. In only nine months, the Los Angeles JfJ group was able to not only build a successful organizing campaign but also negotiate a first contract covering approximately 3,000 Orange County janitors. Although not equivalent to the contract that the Los Angeles janitors had achieved in late April of 2000, the contract that the Orange County janitors negotiated in January of 2001 included significant wage and benefit improvements. The contract raised the wages of most O.C. janitors from \$6.25 to \$7.45 an hour in the first sixteen months. The contract also provided the janitors with health insurance benefits in January of 2003.⁶

The swift success of this organizing drive in Orange County was extraordinary. This county has been well documented as a bastion of conservatism and a point of origin in the rise of the New Right in the United States in the second half of the twentieth century.⁷ Orange County’s right-wing bent was well known to the Los Angeles JfJ group. As one Los Angeles JfJ leader joked retrospectively, union leaders viewed Orange County a place that was “full of Republican cowboys” and essentially off-limits to labor activism in the 1970s and 1980s.⁸ Even as the Justice for Janitors campaign gained momentum in Los Angeles after the 1990 victory against ISS, the JfJ group still did not consider organizing in Orange County to be feasible. In describing the union connections and receptivity that existed amongst cleaning contractors in Los

⁵ Maria Sacchetti, “Janitors seek hike in wages, benefits,” *The Orange County Register*, September 24, 2000.

⁶ Bonnie Harris, “O.C. Janitors Ready to Vote on Their First Union Contract,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 2001.

⁷ See, for example: Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

⁸ David Stilwell, conversation with the author, November 10, 2016.

Angeles in the wake of the ISS victory in 1990, for example, JfJ organizer Jono Shaffer asserted, “...it’s not like Orange County, where they’d shoot you before they became union.”⁹

Only ten years after Shaffer made this statement, the Los Angeles JfJ group successfully extended the campaign to 3,000 janitors in Orange County, without an outbreak of violence or even a single strike action. The Orange County organizing drive, then, provided a clear illustration of how local JfJ groups were making headway in the struggle against union decline and neoliberal restructuring. In this organizing drive, the JfJ group added thousands of new union members and proved that no area—no matter how conservative and inhospitable to labor—was off-limits to a continually expanding Justice for Janitors campaign.

While the Los Angeles JfJ group made its successful foray into organizing in Orange County, local JfJ groups in the Northeast joined together with the help of leaders like Stephen Lerner at the International to launch a new regional Justice for Janitors organizing drive. This regional organizing campaign initially centered on northern New Jersey, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. To a large extent, this drive was designed to take advantage of and build upon both the recent Y2K campaign momentum and existing Justice for Janitors campaign strength in the region. As mentioned in Chapter 6, JfJ leaders had made an effort to build a suburban JfJ project in the Northeast in the mid to late 1990s. This suburban project, however, had proven limited in its efficacy, particularly as old guard leaders like Gus Bevona had stood as a barrier to coordinated organizing efforts in the region and members of the nearby Washington D.C. JfJ campaign were still struggling to make headway in their own downtown organizing efforts. By

⁹ Mary Ann Huser, “Janitors’ triumph may be future: Effective tactics led to contract,” *Torrance Daily Breeze*, July 1, 1990.

late 2000, however, Gus Bevona had been removed from New York Local 32BJ¹⁰ and the Washington D.C. JfJ campaign had become a stronger resource for organizing after a period of trusteeship and rebuilding in Local 82.

Recently transformed Locals 32BJ and Local 82 joined together with nearby Philadelphia Local 36 and collectively created a surge of organizing and contract bargaining success in the region in the early 2000s. The Baltimore and northern New Jersey organizing drives, in particular, had a lot in common with the Orange County organizing drive. They featured rank-and-file and Latinx leadership and extensive rank-and-file support, and they experienced swift success.

The northern New Jersey organizing drive, like its counterpart organizing efforts in Baltimore and Philadelphia, officially launched with a series of major protest actions in April of 2001.¹¹ These actions were made possible, however, due to the hard work of a group of sixty member organizers working out of Local 32BJ who had gone door-to-door, informing New Jersey janitors about the regional JfJ organizing drive and building rank-and-file support in the months prior. These member organizers' dedication quickly generated widespread rank-and-file support for the campaign. As Local 32BJ's recently elected secretary-treasurer Hector Figueroa described, the speed with which the local JfJ group developed such strong rank-and-file support for the New Jersey organizing drive was impressive. At the same time, though, Figueroa also suggested that this rank-and-file support was not surprising. Instead, it was a reflection of the fact that Local 32BJ leaders and organizers had made a conscious effort to ground the campaign in the local community and publicly support immigrant rights efforts. As Figueroa noted,

¹⁰ Around 2000, SEIU Local 32B-32J (which was originally created from a merger of Local 32B and Local 32J in 1977) became more commonly known as Local 32BJ. Following this shift, I refer to Local 32B-32J in this chapter as Local 32BJ.

¹¹ Leigh Strope, "Union launches East Coast janitor campaign," Associated Press Archive, April 6, 2001.

janitors in New Jersey were able to see Local 32BJ, a local that had previously been known for corruption and complacency, “as a vehicle for them to assert not only their rights in the workplace, but also their rights in society.”¹²

Unifying around Local 32BJ, hundreds of northern New Jersey janitors engaged in militant protest actions and a May Day demonstration in support of the immigrant rights movement in the spring of 2001. Several hundred janitors even walked out of work on strike in mid-May. These actions, much like the JfJ member organizers’ initial outreach efforts, quickly generated results. In late May, five hundred janitors in Hudson County New Jersey gained union representation and, with Local 32BJ’s help, negotiated a contract that dramatically increased their wages from around \$5.75 an hour to \$10.75 an hour by 2004. This contract also included a card check recognition provision with a density trigger for other New Jersey counties. Under this provision, the cleaning contractors agreed to card check recognition for other New Jersey janitors and agreed that the contract’s wage increases would go into effect for newly organized janitors once at least fifty-five percent of the janitors in the county had signed union cards. This provision paved the way for several hundred additional New Jersey janitors to follow in the Hudson County janitors’ footsteps and win union recognition, major wage increases, and benefits including access to English-language classes and legal assistance for immigration concerns.¹³

This northern New Jersey organizing drive, like the Orange County organizing drive, can be seen as a successful extension of the Year 2000 campaign. This drive emerged in the immediate wake of Y2K success and helped carry the publicity and success of the Justice for Janitors campaign forward into the twenty-first century. At the same time, as part of a larger

¹² Gregory DeFreitas, “Can Unions Win at Region-wide Low-wage Organizing?: A Conversation with Hector Figueroa of Justice for Janitors,” *Regional Labor Review* 4, no. 1 (Fall 2001): 12-24.

¹³ Brian Donohue, “23 firms sign union pact for office janitors,” *Star-Ledger*, July 3, 2001; Cotton Delo, “PATH cleaners not sharing in union victory,” *Jersey Journal*, July 3, 2001; Jason Fink, “North Jersey janitors OK union pact with cleaning service,” *Jersey Journal*, August 15, 2001.

regional JfJ organizing drive, the New Jersey JfJ campaign should also be recognized as an early affirmation of the New Strength Unity Plan, which specifically called for locals to pool their resources and participate in coordinated organizing drives and called for greater membership participation and activism in the union. While producing significant victories on its own, the results of the northern New Jersey organizing drive are even more remarkable in light of roughly concurrent successes for the overarching regional campaign in Baltimore and Philadelphia.

While member organizers created the foundation for the northern New Jersey organizing drive in early 2001, a formerly undocumented immigrant from El Salvador and rank-and-file D.C. janitor named Jaime Contreras spearheaded the concurrent organizing drive in Baltimore. As Contreras has recalled retrospectively, he and some of his fellow organizers, who were white, stood out from the predominantly African American community in Baltimore as they did their initial outreach efforts through neighborhood canvassing. But they found that the Baltimore community and janitorial workforce were very receptive to their organizing efforts. With extensive rank-and-file and community support, Contreras and the D.C. JfJ group were able to orchestrate major public demonstrations that put pressure on Baltimore cleaning contractors and business owners while their counterparts did the same in northern New Jersey.

In partnership with the Baltimore janitors, Contreras and the D.C. JfJ group were also able to stave off police efforts to quell their protest actions and growing campaign momentum. As Contreras recalls, at one point in the organizing drive he led a march of about one hundred and fifty African American and Latinx janitors through one of the most luxurious office buildings in Baltimore. When they came out of the building, they found a group of fifty police officers waiting for them. These officers surrounded Contreras as if to arrest him and end the march. When the police officers surrounded Contreras, however, the janitors surrounded the

police. Outnumbered, the police officers decided to let Contreras and the janitors off with a warning rather than making any arrests.¹⁴

As the Baltimore janitors demonstrated their collective power in moments like this, Baltimore cleaning contractors and building owners (many of whom, like Mortimer Zuckerman, also owned buildings in D.C. and had already been the targets of JfJ action) quickly conceded to the janitors' organizing demands. Less than eight months after Contreras and other Local 82 organizers started their initial outreach efforts, the Baltimore janitors achieved a major victory. In July of 2001, several Baltimore cleaning contractors agreed to union representation and to enter into contract negotiations. In August, a total of about five hundred Baltimore janitors ratified their first contract.

At the time, most of these Baltimore janitors had been working three and a half hour shifts each night, made between \$5.15 and \$5.25 an hour, and had little to no benefits. The newly ratified contract set a minimum four-hour daily work shift, increased wages to \$7.50 an hour, and provided janitors with sick pay, health insurance, six paid holidays a year, and paid vacations by January of 2006. Although it did not provide quite as significant of a raise as contracts concurrently negotiated in New Jersey, the contract was still a major victory for the Baltimore janitors. As Contreras recalled, the Baltimore janitors were astonished with their success: having largely been resigned to continue suffering low wages and poor working conditions before the start of the organizing drive, they could hardly believe that they had proven successful. Following this major organizing victory, the now-expanded Washington D.C. JfJ

¹⁴ "Jaime Contreras (Unionism)," Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University.

group continued their organizing drive in nearby Montgomery County, Maryland, where they would continue expanding the ranks of Local 82.¹⁵

Because Local 36 had participated in the suburban project and already started organizing janitors in the Philadelphia suburbs in the late 1990s, the Philadelphia component of the regional JfJ organizing drive in the early 2000s was not quite as dramatic as the New Jersey and Baltimore components, which developed from the ground up in a short period of time. Nevertheless, the JfJ organizers and janitors in Philadelphia were important contributors to the coordinated wave of regional JfJ organizing and activism in the spring and summer of 2001. And, like their counterparts in New Jersey and Baltimore, they experienced success. With the help of Local 36 leaders, organizers, and already unionized janitors in downtown Philadelphia, janitors in the Philly suburbs engaged in a series of community outreach efforts and demonstrations that culminated in a one-day strike in mid-July.

On the heels of this strike action, five of the eight major cleaning contractors that operated in the Philadelphia suburbs agreed to recognize Local 36 as the janitors' bargaining representative and sign a first contract. This first contract brought janitor wages from an average of about \$7 an hour to between \$9 and \$9.50 an hour by 2004 and also provided janitors with health insurance, sick days, paid holidays, and paid vacation. Like the contract negotiated in New Jersey, this contract also contained density trigger provisions and marked a key victory but hardly an endpoint in the Philadelphia organizing drive. Shortly after this contract victory, for

¹⁵ Ted Shelsby, "Janitors to vote on contract Service Employees union, 7 companies reach tentative pact," *The Sun*, August 16, 2001; "Jaime Contreras (Unionism)" and "Jaime Contreras (29 April 2013)," Justice for Janitors DC: A Digital History, Kalmanovitz Initiative for Labor and the Working Poor, Georgetown University.

example, a group of Philly janitors working for Shellville Services went on strike for ten weeks to gain union recognition.¹⁶

Altogether, the organizing actions and victories in northern New Jersey, Baltimore, and Philadelphia confirmed the efficacy of coordinated regional organizing. They also helped maintain a sense of momentum for the Justice for Janitors campaign in the early 2000s and establish firm footholds for the campaign in a region that had long been deemed the territory of old guard leaders and off-limits to progressive union organizing efforts. This expansion of the campaign in the Northeast, however, was far from the only major campaign expansion effort during this period. While helping to provide resources and coordination assistance to the Northeast regional campaign, JfJ leaders and organizers at the International also started laying the groundwork for an adaptive expansion of the Justice for Janitors campaign to security officer organizing.

As discussed in Chapter 7, Los Angeles JfJ organizer Jono Shaffer initially conceptualized an expansion and adaptation of the Justice for Janitors campaign to security officers in the mid-1990s. This adaptive expansion of the campaign was designed to take advantage of the relationships that JfJ groups had already developed with building owners and managers who contracted with security companies and to deepen the power and influence of the union within cities with majority janitor representation. Shaffer's initial plans for an expansion of the JfJ campaign to security officers fell by the wayside amidst internal conflict in what was then still Local 399 and amidst leadership changes and reorganization at the International level of the SEIU. In the wake of the Year 2000 campaign success, however, Stephen Lerner recruited Shaffer, who had been working on organizing airport workers with the AFL-CIO in the late

¹⁶ Jane M. Von Bergen, "Janitors campaigning for equity in the suburbs," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 8, 2001; Jane M. Von Bergen, "Janitors' contract OK'd in suburbs," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 20, 2001; Jane M. Von Bergen, "Union squabbles add to office cleaners' woes," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 9, 2002.

1990s, to return to the SEIU and lead a national security officer organizing drive. Starting in late 2000, Shaffer helped oversee the creation of a security-focused working group within the SEIU. Members of this working group set their sight on key areas of JfJ strength—Chicago, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and the surrounding Bay Area—in making initial plans for the organizing campaign.

As members of the working group started doing industry research and laying the groundwork for an organizing drive, they took advantage of the newly formed Union Network International (UNI), a global union headquartered in Europe.¹⁷ Much like the janitorial industry, the private security industry had transformed amidst industry consolidation and globalization trends in the late twentieth century. By the early 2000s, a few major global security contractors dominated the industry. Because these major security contractors were European-owned, the UNI helped make introductions between the security working group in the SEIU and the heads of the major security contractors. In meeting with these security contractor leaders, the SEIU security group found that the contractors were receptive to unionization. They were amenable to paying security officers higher wages with the incentive of reducing turnover and having better-trained, more valuable security officers. These cleaning contractor leaders' receptivity to unionization, as well as growing concerns with security in the wake of the September 11 terrorist

¹⁷ The UNI was created in 2000 as an organization to promote cooperation between nearly one thousand affiliate unions, which represented more than fifteen million workers across one hundred and forty countries. UNI literature promoted the organization as “a new global union for a new millennium and a new economy.” UNI further proclaimed: “We are part of the trade union response to increasing economic regionalisation and globalisation and to the convergence of what were, in the past, separate industries.” The UNI, then, like the Justice for Janitors campaign in the United States, can be understood as a response to neoliberal restructuring on a global level. While supporting the SEIU’s security officer organizing efforts, the UNI also helped promote global solidarity for the JfJ campaign in the early 2000s. “Meet UNI,” Union Network International, 2001, Internet Archive Wayback Machine, https://web.archive.org/web/20010911190052/http://www.union-network.org:80/UNISite/About_Us/Presentation_of_UNI/leaflet/EN-1.html; “Property Services Sector,” Service Employees International Union, updated June 11, 2001, Internet Archive Wayback Machine, https://web.archive.org/web/20011107014739/http://www.union-network.org:80/unisite/Sectors/Property_Services/Property_Services.html.

attacks in 2001, led the SEIU security group to initially pursue a non-aggressive approach to the security organizing campaign. Members of this group envisioned security organizing as a “win-win” situation: workers would benefit from better wages, benefits, and job security, and security contractors as well as building owners and managers would benefit from a more stable, better-trained security workforce.

As members of the SEIU security group started approaching building owners and managers about supporting security officer unionization, however, they realized that their initial ideas about labor-management partnership in supporting security officer organizing had been too idealistic. They discovered that building owners and managers, the very same individuals and corporations that had conceded to janitor organizing under the JfJ campaign, firmly opposed security officer organizing. As Shaffer recalls, they “defaulted” to the antiunion strategy of using the fact that security work was contracted to defend the status quo. Eschewing any responsibility for the security officers who guarded their buildings, they claimed that security organizing was a matter for the union and contractors to work out, not something that they were willing to support by agreeing to more expensive security contracts.¹⁸

Members of the SEIU security group pushed back against this initial reaction, reminding building owners and managers of the fact that they had already admitted to being responsible for the well-being of their contracted workers as part of the JfJ campaign. In response, building owners and managers developed a new strategy to resist the SEIU organizing drive. They started asserting that they supported the unionization of security officers in theory, but that they did not want security officers and janitors to be members of the same union (under the assumption that

¹⁸ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, January 24, 2012.

janitors and security officers' collective power within a single union would overpower that of building owners and managers in bargaining).

Members of the SEIU security group were not able to immediately poke holes in this antiunion strategy, but they were well-versed in building successful organizing drives in the face of building owner and management hostility. From their JfJ experience, they knew that opposition from building owners and managers could be overcome through strong organizing campaigns that were grounded in local worker support and focused on leveraging public support against the opposition. In the face of continued hostility from building owners and managers, members of the SEIU security group started making plans for a more confrontational security organizing campaign. Their plans for this campaign, however, depended on the willingness of SEIU locals to not only participate in the campaign but also potentially risk the relationships that they had created with building owners and managers over the course of the Justice for Janitors campaign. Some SEIU locals were reluctant to risk the building owner and manager support for janitor organizing that they had developed over time in order to pursue security officer organizing in a confrontational campaign. Nevertheless, the security group found space and support to launch JfJ street heat-style security organizing campaigns in Los Angeles Local 1877 and Minneapolis Local 26 in 2002.

In each of these cities, SEIU organizers joined forces with security officers and built strong, community-focused organizing campaigns. In Minneapolis, the predominantly Somali security workforce joined forces with the larger Somali community, which had faced hostility and discrimination in the wake of the September 11 attacks, and created a powerful campaign under the banner "Hate Has No Home Here." In Los Angeles, security officers joined forces with allies in the African American community to build a campaign under the slogan "Stand for

Security.” Together, these campaigns proved successful not only in winning union representation for local security officers but also in winning contracts with the major global security companies that brought thousands of security officers in cities throughout the United States into the SEIU in the mid to late 2000s.¹⁹

Much like the concurrent Northeast JfJ organizing campaign, this security organizing campaign can be seen as a sign that the SEIU was working to fulfill the organizing, and especially the cooperative organizing mandate, of the New Strength Unity Plan. Furthermore, this organizing drive illustrates that, in fulfilling this mandate, the SEIU was achieving remarkable organizing victories that challenged the escalation of union decline amidst neoliberal restructuring. Amidst widespread labor movement decline in the U.S., the SEIU’s Justice for Janitors campaign, now adapted to the security industry as well, suggested that organized labor was not doomed to defeat in the twenty-first century. This campaign suggested that a union could meet the growing challenges of union hostility, subcontracting, and industry consolidation head on and win. Working in accordance with the NSUP, the Justice for Janitors campaign during this period continued to expand and gain momentum, offering hope for the future of the SEIU and the labor movement in general.

The security officer organizing campaign, like the JfJ organizing campaigns discussed so far in this chapter, however, centered on locals that were already committed to organizing and had a history of Justice for Janitors activism. The New Strength Unity Plan was not designed as an optional set of goals that only the most amenable locals would adopt and strive for. Instead,

¹⁹ Doug Grow, “Small voices have impact in dispute: Cultural training for guards is a welcome sign of progress,” *Star Tribune: Newspaper of the Twin Cities*, March 20, 2002; Mike Hughlett, “Labor Ways: Unions Looking to Replenish Their Ranks are Using the Card-Check Campaign to Organize,” *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, September 5, 2004; Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, January 24, 2012. For more specifically on the Los Angeles security organizing drive see: Joshua Bloom, “Ally to Win: Black Community Leaders and SEIU’s L.A. Security Unionization Campaign,” in *Working for Justice: The L.A. Model of Organizing and Activism*, ed. Ruth Milkman, Joshua Bloom, and Victory Narro (Ithaca: IRL Press, 2010), 167-190.

the plan included new organizing goals and provisions for greater International authority over locals to ensure local accountability to these new organizing goals. And SEIU leaders did shy away from taking advantage of these NSUP provisions.

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While pro-organizing SEIU locals willingly expanded their organizing efforts in the early 2000s, top SEIU leaders established a pattern of top-down intervention into locals that did not readily support organizing. These leaders justified their actions with the New Strength Unity Plan. Under President Andy Stern's direction, SEIU leaders pushed out remaining old guard local leaders and pushed for mergers that established regional jurisdictions and centralized power within the union. These top-down interventions initially came with the promise of fostering organizing and building collective strength for workers, but they also raised concerns about local democracy and sparked a wave of local opposition.

One of the most initially promising top-down interventions following the adoption of the NSUP occurred in Boston Local 254. After Stern negotiated Gus Bevona's departure from Local 32BJ in 1999, Local 254 was the last major local under old guard building service leadership in the SEIU. The local's president, Ed Sullivan, had virtually inherited control of the local from his father and, like other old guard leaders, had refused to support Justice for Janitors organizing. Because of his resistance to the JfJ campaign, Sullivan stood as the last major obstacle amongst local SEIU leaders to an expansion of the JfJ campaign, particularly in the Northeast. Sullivan did not remain an obstacle very long after the NSUP was passed, however. In 2001, shortly after Sullivan was convicted of driving a union car on a suspended license, Stern intervened into Local 254, putting the local into trusteeship and forcing Sullivan out. Stern appointed Rocio Saenz, a long-time Los Angeles JfJ organizer, to serve as Local 254's trustee. From her new leadership

position at Local 254, Saenz laid the groundwork for the local to enter into a new phase of bargaining and organizing activism.

When Local 254 was put in trusteeship in 2001, the local already had an existing master janitorial contract that covered the janitors who cleaned buildings in downtown Boston. This contract, however, was significantly weaker than what janitors in other major East Coast cities had recently achieved in the Y2K campaign. While janitors in New York were earning \$17 an hour with health insurance, full-time janitors in Boston earned \$10.20 an hour. Boston's part-time janitors only earned \$9.95 an hour and did not receive health benefits. Saenz and other JfJ leaders saw this disparity as an opportunity for the Boston janitors to achieve a stronger contract. As local JfJ groups in Baltimore, New Jersey, and Philadelphia engaged in janitor organizing nearby, Saenz helped set in motion a JfJ contract campaign in Boston, which added excitement and momentum to the Northeast regional JfJ campaign in 2001 and 2002.

The Boston contract campaign can be understood as proof of the value of increased hierarchy and centralization within the SEIU. In the span of only one year, Saenz was able to oversee the creation, development, and success of a major campaign that brought wage and benefit improvements to Boston janitors. After a three-week janitor strike in October of 2002, Boston cleaning companies agreed to a five-year contract that provided a wage rate of between \$12.95 and \$13.15 an hour (janitors with seniority earned slightly higher rates) to both part-time and full-time janitors. The contract also provided health benefits to about a thousand part-time Boston janitors for the first time.²⁰

At the same time, though, this contract campaign "success" came hand-in-hand with tension and membership disappointment in the local. This tension and disappointment emerged on two fronts. On the one side, some of Local 254's veteran leaders and members did not

²⁰ Steven Greenhouse, "Tentative Agreement Ends Boston Janitors' Strike," *New York Times*, October 24, 2002.

support the imposition of “outsider” trustees and JfJ activism in the local. As a local newspaper reported in the midst of the JfJ contract campaign, a veteran Local 254 staff member claimed that Saenz and other International leaders had “misread” the situation in Boston when they launched the campaign. This staff member asserted: “They are cramming their national foolishness down the throats of people who don’t want it.”²¹

While some leaders and members resented the International interference and newfound JfJ activism within the local, others felt that the contract campaign was rushed and failed to achieve a better contract because of the lack of membership participation and leadership in the campaign. These individuals did not resent the imposition of JfJ activism. Instead, they suggested that the contract campaign did not go far enough in changing the status quo of unionism in Local 254. These janitors wanted the rank-and-file-centered campaign activism and worker empowerment that was publicly associated with Justice for Janitors, not a quick contract campaign that was implemented from above.

As local newspapers reported in the wake of the contract campaign settlement, Local 254 leaders had hired a few part-time rank-and-file organizers for the contract campaign, but they had not sought rank-and-file input on campaign strategy or reconsidered the timing of the campaign in the midst of limited membership participation. (Out of the 12,000 janitors who worked in Boston, only 2,000 participated in the strike). Then, even as limited janitor participation weakened the union’s bargaining power, Local 254 leaders negotiated the contract settlement without rank-and-file involvement. Local 254 members did eventually ratify this settlement, but fewer than 800 janitors voted in the ratification process. Although Local 254 leaders suggested that the low membership turnout for the ratification vote was a sign that

²¹ Scott Van Voorhis, “Critics say janitors may broom plans to strike,” *Boston Herald*, September 9, 2002; Scott Van Voorhis, “Past union policies hurt janitors,” *Boston Herald*, September 17, 2002.

members supported the agreement, several members espoused the opposite, asserting that they and their co-workers were dissatisfied with the campaign and its outcome.²²

Tension within Local 254 grew in the months following the contract settlement. During this period, Saenz and other top SEIU leaders pushed forward a plan to further transform Local 254 to fulfill the New Strength Unity Plan. Despite membership dissatisfaction with the top-down interventions to date, they made plans to split Local 254 along industry lines and merge the building service portion of the local along with janitors from Local 134 in Rhode Island into a newly created local, Local 615, with a wide regional jurisdiction. In recent months, SEIU leaders had overseen a wave of local union reorganization—dividing locals along industry lines and merging smaller locals into larger ones—to fulfill the NSUP. And they had championed this reorganization as an important step toward building stronger, more powerful locals for SEIU members.²³ While expecting support for the NSUP-inspired reorganizing in Boston, International leaders discovered that their plans to split Local 254 and merge Boston janitors into Local 615 were met with a combination of widespread membership inaction and a concentrated surge of membership opposition. When the leadership organized a vote for Local 254 janitors to approve the local reorganization in December of 2002, fewer than 400 of the 12,000 eligible members turned out for the vote. Out of those 400, a majority voted against the local reorganization—much to the surprise of Local 254’s trustee leadership.²⁴

²² Amy Offner, “Despite Largest Support Coalition Ever: Boston Janitors Say Strike Settlement Is No Victory,” *Labor Notes* no. 285 (December 2002): 1,11.

²³ In an interview in 2001, for example, Local 32BJ Secretary-Treasurer Hector Figueroa talked about how the merger of Local 32-E into Local 32BJ had recently helped organizing and strike efforts in New Jersey. And in 2002, SEIU leader Bob Kirkman wrote an article in the *New Labor Forum* emphasizing the value of recent mergers amongst health care workers in New York. Gregory DeFreitas, “Can Unions Win at Region-wide Low-wage Organizing?: A Conversation with Hector Figueroa of Justice for Janitors,” *Regional Labor Review* 4, no. 1 (Fall 2001): 12-24; Bob Kirkman, “Mergers that Work: The Experience of the SEIU,” *New Labor Forum* 10 (Spring 2002): 48.

²⁴ Amy Offner, “Turnout is Tiny: Boston Janitors Vote Not To Form New Local,” *Labor Notes* no. 287 (February 2003): 5.

Rather than accepting this vote outcome, Local 254's leadership made plans to build membership support for the New Strength Unity Plan and schedule a second vote to approve the split of Local 254 and merger of the building service division into Local 615. At this second vote, which took place in May of 2003, Local 254 members voted to approve the restructuring. International SEIU leaders hailed this vote as a rank-and-file endorsement of the more controversial elements of the New Strength Unity Plan, which increased hierarchy and centralization within the union.²⁵

In celebrating this NSUP endorsement, however, SEIU leaders did not address the initial far-from-supportive membership reaction to restructuring. While Local 254 janitors eventually supported the local restructuring, this support only emerged after several months, conceivably months when International leaders dedicated significant time and effort to educating members about the value of the NSUP and restructuring, and a second vote. Furthermore, SEIU leaders' celebration of Local 254 members' eventual support for restructuring did not acknowledge the continued resistance of many union members in other SEIU locals to restructuring. Although Boston SEIU members eventually supported local reorganization, other SEIU members remained firm in their opposition to SEIU leaders' plans to reorganize and restructure SEIU locals along division lines and create massive regional locals.

Local leaders and members in San Francisco's Local 87, for example, remained firm in their resistance to International leaders' plans to merge their local into Local 1877 starting in 2001. At this point, Local 1877 was already on track to becoming a statewide building service mega-local. As noted in Chapter 9, Local 1877 came to include building service members as far south as Los Angeles and as far north as Sacramento through a series of mergers in the 1990s. But at the start of the twenty-first century, San Francisco Local 87 still existed as an

²⁵ Donna Goodison, "Local 254 votes to restructure," *Boston Herald*, June 18, 2003.

independent building service local in California. To continue the push toward the goal of uniting building service workers into massive, powerful locals, International SEIU leaders proposed merging Local 87 members into Local 1877 in 2001. International leaders held a series of hearings within Local 87 about the merger and planned to schedule a vote for the local's members to ratify the merger proposal. But after holding the hearings and listening to Local 87 members voice their opposition to merging into Local 1877, International leaders never scheduled a vote. Instead, SEIU President Stern put Local 87 into trusteeship, citing leadership corruption and financial issues, and merged the trustee Local 87 into Local 1877 without membership input in early 2002.

Former Local 87 President Richard Leung decried the trusteeship and merger as a “power grab” and worked with former Local 87 members to resist what they saw as a clear assault on union democracy. Forming a new organization called United Service Workers for Democracy (USWD), these union members set a plan in motion to regain their independence. Their plan came to fruition on August 5, 2004. On this day, a majority of San Francisco janitors voted to decertify Local 1877 as their union representative and form an independent USWD Local 87.²⁶

In the midst of this resistance to local consolidation in California, janitors in Rhode Island resisted reorganization into Local 615 in the Northeast. While Boston janitors eventually voted to support their merger into Local 615, some janitors in Rhode Island joined with other Local 134 members to mount a fierce resistance to merger plans. Much like Local 87 leaders and members in San Francisco, they did not want to be transferred into a much larger local. While International leaders pushed for the merger in 2002, a majority of Local 134 members petitioned to preserve Local 134 with its existing membership. Rather than going

²⁶ “Janitors Protest International Takeover,” *Oakland Post*, April 17, 2002; William Johnson. “Frustrated by Forced Mergers, SEIU Members Go Independent,” *Labor Notes* no. 307 (October 2004): 5.

along with the International's plan, a few Local 134 leaders, including the local's treasurer Charles Wood, supported members in their resistance to the transfer. Speaking on behalf of the majority opposition to the transfer, Wood asserted that Local 134 members did not want to get "swallowed up by a massive local."²⁷

Rather than respecting these members' opposition to the merger, or working to change their minds over time, International SEIU leaders once again used their power to enforce the merger despite local opposition. In July of 2003, Stern placed Local 134 in trusteeship, paving the way for the forced transfer of Local 134 janitors into Local 615. Some Local 134 members refused to acquiesce in the face of this International show of force. Rather than allowing this transfer to happen, a group of Local 134 members voted to decertify and form an independent organization, the United Service and Allied Workers (USAW), in August of 2003. Over the course of the next year and half, a majority of Local 134 members followed suit in decertifying the SEIU and joining the USAW.²⁸

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Ultimately, the development and ratification of the New Strength Unity Plan (along with the concurrent, intertwined wave of Justice for Janitors campaign expansion in the early 2000s) provided hopeful signs of continued labor movement reform and activism. This reform and activism offered a potential course of action or at least direction out of what was otherwise a period of continuing union decline and socioeconomic polarization that benefited the wealthy elite while workers, especially low-wage service workers struggled. Unfortunately, however, as tensions and overt conflicts within Boston, San Francisco, and Rhode Island locals illustrate, the

²⁷ William Johnson. "Frustrated by Forced Mergers, SEIU Members Go Independent," *Labor Notes* no. 307 (October 2004): 5.

²⁸ Steve Early, "The NUHW 16: SEIU's Courtroom Payday Is Pyrrhic Victory for New Corporate Unionism," *Monthly Review Online*, April 12, 2010.

New Strength Unity Plan did not prove to be a source of excitement and empowerment for all of SEIU's low-wage service worker members—at least as International SEIU leaders implemented it in the 2000s.

International leaders' top-down implementation and enforcement of the NSUP clearly had its advantages for many SEIU members. The Local 254 trusteeship and launch of a JfJ contract campaign within Boston, for example, eliminated leadership corruption and complacency within the local and provided a foundation for Boston janitors to join forces with other janitors in a regional wave of JfJ campaign activism. But the contract campaign, implemented quickly and predominantly through outside leadership without member input, became a source of disappointment rather than excitement or momentum for Boston janitors who felt left out of what could have been a much stronger, more participatory campaign. Furthermore, International leaders' efforts to intervene in the size and structure of locals during this period generated resistance. While International leaders proved capable of addressing and working through this resistance over time in Boston, they quickly discounted and overruled this local resistance in several other locals, for example in San Francisco Local 87 and Rhode Island Local 134.

This lack of consideration of membership opposition was a major problem because it drove SEIU members out of the union at the very same time that SEIU leaders were trying to grow and strengthen the union. More than this, though, leaders' disregard for member opposition raised serious questions about the relationship between leaders and members and the relationship between the goals and process of reform within an increasingly centralized and hierarchical SEIU. Did leaders' goals of creating a unified, more powerful labor movement through local restructuring justify their autocratic imposition of trusteeships and mergers without

regard for members' concerns? In other words, did the end goals of reform (which included a more powerful labor movement that would conceivably benefit workers) justify any means of achieving this reform?

While raising serious questions about the purpose and function of the labor movement, this initial membership resistance to International leaders' implementation of NSUP-inspired reform did not seem to give International leaders pause in barreling forward with reform initiatives during this period. In fact, in the midst of this rising member resistance to the NSUP and instances of decertification, a group of top SEIU leaders—including JfJ leader Stephen Lerner—started publicly espousing the need for an even more extreme form of union reform. This reform aimed not just to continue restructuring and transforming the SEIU but to restructure and transform the entire U.S. and even global labor movement.

Chapter 13

“From the Jaws of Victory”:

The Collapse of the Justice for Janitors Campaign and Hopes for 21st Century Labor Movement Reform (2002-)

In this chapter, I explore a drive for large-scale labor movement reform emerging from within the AFL-CIO during the early to mid-2000s. To be more specific, I explore the development of the New Unity Partnership (NUP) and subsequently the creation of the Change to Win (CtW) federation. I note that initial high hopes for John Sweeney’s presidency at the AFL-CIO in the late 1990s were left unmet by the turn of the century, leaving many AFL-CIO affiliate unions disappointed. This disappointment, along with continued labor movement decline, spurred conversations and debates about the need for reform.

Throughout the first part of the chapter, I highlight the central role that the SEIU played in shaping reform conversations and driving a major split within the house of labor. I explore how a reform proposal written by JfJ leader Stephen Lerner sparked discussion and in many ways laid the foundation for the creation of the New Unity Partnership. In detailing Lerner’s proposals for reform, I reveal the similarities between the SEIU’s New Strength Unity Plan (NSUP), discussed extensively in Chapter 12, and what would eventually become the reform demands of the New Unity Partnership (NUP). In addition to exploring NUP leaders’ plans to spearhead reform throughout the U.S. labor movement, I explore their plans to foster greater cooperation and solidarity throughout the global labor movement. I also briefly explore some of the SEIU’s efforts to follow through on these plans with the creation of a global partnerships group.

From this, I discuss how escalating demands for reform and dissatisfaction with John Sweeney's peacemaking efforts ultimately spurred the creation of the Change to Win federation. I explore a variety of reactions to this labor split—ranging from initial excitement and hope to growing concern with union leaders' purpose and intent in pushing reform to such an extreme. I highlight one hindsight assessment of this split from labor scholars and activists Fernando Gapasin and Bill Fletcher Jr., exploring their assessment of this split in relation to a shift toward pragmatism and an “ideologizing of organizing” within the labor movement. I argue that their assessment of the roots of the AFL-CIO split is applicable to SEIU efforts to expand the Justice for Janitors campaign and implement the NSUP regardless of growing membership dissatisfaction in the early 2000s. More than this, I argue that their assessment is also applicable to subsequent SEIU efforts to continue expanding the JfJ campaign in the mid-2000s.

In the second half of the chapter, I explore the development of new Justice for Janitors organizing campaigns in Miami and Houston. I connect these new JfJ campaigns, which were part of the SEIU's new South-Southwest Organizing Project, to the recent reform impetus within the union. At the same time, I also explore the opportunity at redemption that these campaigns offered to JfJ leaders, considering the historic failures of Justice for Janitors in the South. I highlight the initial victories and tangible success of both of these campaigns. I also, though, explore the lesser-known tensions within these campaigns and struggles in the wake of initial success.

In doing so, I highlight the unsustainability of the particular adaptation of Justice for Janitors that SEIU leaders created in the 2000s. In an effort to rapidly expand the campaign and increase organizing, top SEIU and even veteran JfJ leaders lost sight of the importance of a strong, local rank-and-file base of support for the campaign. While the Miami and Houston

campaigns initially seemed to succeed where previous Southern JfJ campaigns had failed, JfJ leaders ultimately fell prey to the some of the same types of issues that had undermined the Atlanta JfJ campaign in the 1980s. Once again, an arguably well-intentioned adaptation of the campaign fell apart without sufficient local strength. Only this time, the Justice for Janitors campaign did not survive and continue adapting in the wake of failure.

In the concluding portion of this chapter, I connect the struggles and eventual collapse of the Houston and Miami campaigns with the concurrent collapse of the Justice for Janitors campaign as a whole throughout the United States. I reveal that the recent increase in centralization and hierarchy that accompanied the drive for reform within the SEIU left the Justice for Janitors campaign extremely vulnerable to the caprices of SEIU President Stern and a few top property service division¹ leaders within the union. When some of these division leaders started resisting the use of pooled local resources to continue expanding JfJ as a national campaign, Stern conceded to their interests. Suddenly unsupported and unwelcome at the International level, the Justice for Janitors campaign fell apart.

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The advent of the twenty-first century was a period of growing tension within the AFL-CIO. The election of John Sweeney and his running-mates in the AFL-CIO's first contested election in 1995 initially inspired a wave of hope and excitement for the future of the federation and organized labor in general. People at all levels in the labor movement saw this election as a sign that labor revitalization was possible and that a surge of organizing was imminent. While a source of hope and excitement, however, this election also raised expectations for the future of

¹ Around 2005, the SEIU renamed the building service division, which now included a significant number of security officers as well as janitors, as the property service division.

the AFL-CIO—arguably unreasonably. Union leaders and members who saw Sweeney as the savior of a declining labor movement unfortunately set Sweeney up for failure.²

Upon taking office at the AFL-CIO, Sweeney oversaw a major drive to increase organizing through internal restructuring and new policies and programs. But the results of his efforts fell short of expectations, fostering a sense of frustration and pessimism amongst several AFL-CIO affiliates. The departure of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters (UBC) from the AFL-CIO in 2001 was a clear marker of growing dissatisfaction within the federation during this period.³

In the midst of growing internal tensions within the AFL-CIO, top SEIU leaders weighed in on emerging debates about the efficacy of the federation. Drawing from internal SEIU discussion about the AFL-CIO, JfJ leader Stephen Lerner produced a working paper in 2002 that called for major labor movement reform. In this working paper, which he submitted to a *Labor Notes* roundtable on union organizing, Lerner asserted that the current structure of the U.S. labor movement was an obstacle to rebuilding density within industries and to organizing—two intertwined actions that he and other SEIU leaders considered the crux of the labor movement’s ongoing decline and weakness. More specifically, Lerner asserted that the U.S. labor movement had become an amalgamation of weak “general workers unions” that worked at cross-purposes. These unions implemented “non-strategic” mergers, with the primary goal of surviving rather than building a stronger, unified labor movement as a whole. Additionally, these general

² Marick F. Masters, Ray Gibney, and Tom Zagenczyk, “The AFL-CIO v. CTW: The Competing Visions, Strategies, and Structures,” *Journal of Labor Research* 27, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 473-504.

³ As Bill Fletcher Jr. and Fernando Gapasin discuss in *Solidarity Divided*, UBC President Douglas McCarron oversaw the transformation of the UBC into a right-wing, “highly corporate organizing machine” in the late 1990s. Seeing the AFL-CIO’s priorities and resource allocation, particularly in relation to support for organizing, as insufficient and incongruous with those of the newly transformed UBC, McCarron led the United Brotherhood of Carpenters out of the AFL-CIO in 2001. Bill Fletcher Jr. and Fernando Gapasin, *Solidarity Divided: The Crisis in Organized Labor and a New Path toward Social Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 126-127.

workers unions organized indiscriminately across several industries—that is, if they organized at all.

Seeing these general workers unions as a major obstacle to rebuilding industry density and large-scale organizing, Lerner’s paper called for a complete restructuring of the labor movement. It called for strategic membership transfers and union mergers along industry lines with the goal of creating ten to fifteen major unions, each with a unique industry-oriented jurisdiction. The paper also called for these reorganized unions to pool resources and work together to organize new workers and to drive a national campaign, such as a campaign for universal health care, that would be capable of exciting and mobilizing both union and nonunion workers alike. This reform proposal in many ways, then, can be understood as a call to implement the SEIU’s New Strength Unity Plan on a much broader scale within the U.S. labor movement. Rather than calling for a reassessment of jurisdictions, a reorganization of locals, and increased member activism within the SEIU, Lerner’s new reform proposal called for these same reforms at the level of the AFL-CIO, all with the goal of increasing organizing and building a stronger labor movement.

After laying out a proposal for strategic reform in his paper, Lerner suggested that the AFL-CIO had been subject to excessive criticism from unionists who looked for an easy target to blame for the U.S. labor movement’s decline. He acknowledged that the very nature of the AFL-CIO, as a federation historically governed and operated through consensus, limited the federation’s ability to drive labor movement reform. While acknowledging this limitation, however, Lerner clearly eschewed continuing on with business as usual. Instead, he called for organizing-focused unions to work together—without getting bogged down in either trying to

completely reform the AFL-CIO or depart from it altogether—to reorganize and rebuild the United States labor movement.⁴

Lerner’s working paper published in *Labor Notes*, as well as subsequent variations of this paper, helped spark a flurry of discussion and debate about the structure and function of the U.S. labor movement.⁵ This discussion and debate, as well as continued labor movement decline, quickly generated action within the AFL-CIO. At a council meeting in February of 2003, AFL-CIO leaders voted to establish an advisory committee made up of the presidents of some of the largest and most active AFL-CIO union affiliates to review the focus and mission of the labor federation. The creation of this advisory committee suggested a broad openness and impetus for reform within the AFL-CIO. It also offered a potential path to pursue the type of reform that SEIU leaders had espoused in the “United We Win” reform proposal. SEIU President Andy Stern and a few other prominent union leaders, however, were not satisfied with this path to reform.

Shortly after the AFL-CIO council created the new advisory committee, a group of five union presidents met together and started developing plans for a faster and more intense push for labor movement reform. Spearheaded by SEIU President Stern, this group of leaders also included HERE President John Wilhelm, UNITE President Bruce Raynor, LIUNA President Terence M. O’Sullivan, and UBC President Doug McCarron. Along with the SEIU, the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE) and the Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE) had earned a reputation as progressive, organizing-oriented

⁴ Stephen Lerner, “Three Steps To Reorganizing And Rebuilding The Labor Movement: Building New Strength and Unity for all Working Families,” *Labor Notes*, December 1, 2002.

⁵ An official union version of Lerner’s working paper titled “United We Win” circulated within the SEIU, and a longer version of the original paper was published in *New Labor Forum* under the title “An Immodest Proposal: A New Architecture for the House of Labor.” Service Employees International Union, “United We Win: A Discussion of the Crisis Facing Workers and the Labor Movement” (unpublished discussion paper, February 2003); Stephen Lerner, “An Immodest Proposal: A New Architecture for the House of Labor,” *New Labor Forum* 12, no. 2 (Summer 2003): 8-30.

unions in the 1990s. The Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA) and the United Brotherhood of Carpenters (UBC) had a much more conservative orientation. Nevertheless, both espoused a commitment to organizing. Uniting together behind a commitment to organizing-oriented reform, this group of leaders joined their unions together in what they called the "New Unity Partnership" or NUP.⁶

Initially, the NUP existed as a quasi-independent organization with the U.S. labor movement. Although the UBC had already disaffiliated from the AFL-CIO, the other four union members of the NUP did not break away from the AFL-CIO in forming the NUP. Not long after the creation of the NUP, however, SEIU President Andy Stern started making more pointed demands for reform, suggesting the possibility of a major split within the federation. In his keynote speech at the SEIU's quadrennial convention in June of 2004, for example, Stern emphasized the ongoing transformation of the U.S. economy as well as the SEIU's ongoing, bold reform initiatives to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century economy and labor movement decline. And he used these changes and reform initiatives as a foundation to demand either major reform within the AFL-CIO or the creation of an entirely new labor federation. He asserted:

Our employers have changed, our industries have changed, but the labor movement's structure and culture have sadly stayed the same. John Sweeney, a good man who devoted his life to our union, tried to breathe new life into the AFL-CIO. But John Sweeney has proven that the problem is not who captains the ship—but that the ship was not built to navigate the storms of the modern world... Within SEIU, when our own policies, traditions, or the interests of individual leaders kept workers from uniting their strength—we changed them. And, sisters and brothers, it is time and it is so long overdue that we join with our

⁶ Richard Hurd, "The Failure of Organizing, the New Unity Partnership, and the Future of the Labor Movement," *WorkingUSA: The Journal of Labor and Society* 8 (September 2004): 5-25.

union allies and either transform the AFL-CIO—or build something stronger that can really change workers' lives.⁷

With this keynote speech, Stern suggested that massive labor movement reform to meet the challenges of recent economic changes was crucially imminent. Additionally, he quite pointedly suggested that the AFL-CIO might not be compatible with this massive reform.

While articulating bold demands for reform within the United States labor movement, President Stern and other NUP members also promoted a new role for the U.S. labor movement within the global economy and labor movement. They emphasized joint organizing efforts and pooled resources not just amongst unions within the United States but also amongst unions across the globe as critical to building union density for a stronger labor movement. As suggested in the previous chapter, the SEIU had already started engaging in such transnational organizing efforts through a partnership with the Union Network International (UNI) in the JfJ-adapted security officer organizing campaign in the early 2000s. As this organizing drive made headway, SEIU leaders started laying the groundwork for further global labor solidarity and additional transnational organizing campaigns.

In 2004, for example, SEIU leaders created a global partnerships group in the union to foster global unionism and help workers win organizing struggles against transnational corporations. As part of this global partnerships group, SEIU assigned staff to countries throughout the world with the task of developing partnerships with local unions and working with global union federations such as the UNI on global organizing plans and campaigns. The work of the global partnerships group laid the foundation for unions in the United Kingdom,

⁷ “Keynote Address to SEIU Convention by President Andrew L. Stern,” Service Employees International Union, 2004, Internet Archive Wayback Machine, <https://web.archive.org/web/20040726084634/http://www.seiu2004.org:80/press/keynote.cfm>.

Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the Netherlands, and Germany to build organizing drives amongst janitors in their respective countries in partnership with the SEIU.⁸

While SEIU leaders worked to embody some of the NUP's reform proposals in practice, conflict between the NUP and the AFL-CIO grew throughout 2004 and early 2005. Although AFL-CIO President Sweeney sought to facilitate reform and keep the federation intact, union leaders like Stern failed to find his reform and peacemaking efforts acceptable. In July of 2005, the SEIU followed through on the latter of Stern's "either...or" demand for reform from his keynote convention speech the year prior. Under Stern's leadership, the SEIU joined its other former NUP allies and three new allies—the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW), and the United Farm Workers (UFW)—in forming a new labor federation: Change to Win (CtW).⁹

These International unions with the exception of the UBC, which was already independent, disaffiliated from the AFL-CIO in addition to affiliating with the newly formed CtW. In the wake of these disaffiliations, the AFL-CIO still had more than fifty member unions that represented in combination a total of about nine million workers. Change to Win, in contrast, only had a total of seven member unions. But these seven unions alone claimed a combined total of more than five million workers.¹⁰ As this suggests, Change to Win, despite its small number of affiliate unions, quickly emerged as a significant rival to the AFL-CIO.

⁸ The transnational expansion and adaptation of the Justice for Janitors campaign will be briefly explored in the concluding chapter. For more on this see: Luis L.M. Aguiar and Shaun Ryan, "The Geographies of the Justice for Janitors," *Geoforum* 40 (2009): 949-958; Amanda Tattersall, "Labor-Community Coalitions, Global Union Alliances, and the Potential of SEIU's Global Partnerships," in *Global Unions: Challenging Transnational Capital Through Cross-border Campaigns* ed. Kate Bronfenbrenner (Ithaca: IRL Press, 2010), 155-173; Jamie K. McCallum, *Global Unions, Local Power: The New Spirit of Transnational Labor Organizing* (Ithaca: IRL Press, 2013).

⁹ For more on the formation of Change to Win and the developments leading up to the AFL-CIO split, see Marick F. Masters, Ray Gibney, and Tom Zagenczyk, "The AFL-CIO v. CTW: The Competing Visions, Strategies, and Structures," *Journal of Labor Research* 27, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 473-504.

¹⁰ Steven Greenhouse, "Breakaway Unions Start New Federation," *New York Times*, September 28, 2005.

While obviously causing internal turmoil in the labor movement, the creation of Change to Win came with a sense of hope for the future of organized labor within the United States. The formation of Change to Win marked a clear moment of change. Whether perceived as good or bad, ideal or flawed, this change at the very least disrupted the status quo of the U.S. labor movement. And as the reform discussions leading up to the formation of CtW reveal, leaders in both CtW and the AFL-CIO agreed that this status quo should not be allowed to continue, that it would only lead to further labor movement decline and weakness. In splitting the AFL-CIO, then, the formation of CtW offered organized labor a starting point for a new future.

Recollections of labor movement history helped spur hope for this new future. The last major split in the U.S. house of labor occurred in 1935 when a group of unions broke away from the AFL and formed the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). This rupture and the formation of the CIO preceded a major surge of organizing and labor movement growth in the late 1930s and 1940s. Drawing parallels between the formation of the CIO and CtW, several labor scholars suggested that the formation of Change to Win might spur a resurgence of the U.S. labor movement.¹¹

Signs of underlying issues with the formation of CtW and the actions of its affiliates, however, also emerged alongside this sense of hope for the future of the labor movement. As several prominent labor scholars have detailed in depth, CtW and its affiliates' demands for reform were riddled with ambiguities and tensions. While espousing the need to implement strategic mergers, restructure unions along industry lines, and direct unions to organize in their original core jurisdictions, CtW affiliates did not follow all of these reform demands in practice.

In the lead up to the formation of CtW, for example, the two unions UNITE and HERE merged to form a single union UNITE HERE in 2004. Although this merger fit with the NUP's

¹¹ See for example, Ruth Milkman, "Divided We Stand," *New Labor Forum* 15, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 38-46.

calls for merging unions to create a small number of more powerful unions, it did not fit with the NUP's calls to restructure and reorganize unions along industry lines. Instead, by uniting together hotel and restaurant workers with apparel and laundry workers (as well as workers in various other industries that these unions represented), this merger actually created a massive general workers union—the very type of union that the NUP leaders had suggested was at the core of the labor movement's current problems.¹²

Furthermore, Teamsters President James P. Hoffa celebrated the general workers union nature of the Teamsters right before joining CtW. When asked whether the Teamsters would return to their original jurisdiction in the immediate lead-up to the formation of CtW, Hoffa asserted that the union would not. He noted that the Teamsters represented workers from “A to Z”—“airplane pilots to zookeepers”—and asserted: “We will always be a general union...”¹³

As the actions of NUP and later CtW affiliate leaders seemed to contradict the reform rhetoric that they espoused, labor activists and scholars started questioning the authenticity of these leaders' plans to transform the labor movement. Especially in light of later conflicts and turmoil within CtW, some labor activists and scholars went so far as to describe the formation of CtW as a product of a few labor leaders' egos and desire for power rather than a genuine drive for labor movement reform.¹⁴ While not quite as critical as some, Fernando Gapasin and Bill Fletcher Jr. have connected the type of reform impetus that led to the creation of the New Unity Partnership and then Change to Win to a shift toward pragmatism and what they call the

¹² William Johnson, “The UNITE-HERE Merger: Is It a Step Forward ... or Business as Usual?” *Labor Notes* (April 2004): 10; Kim Moody, “A Substitute for Organizing? What Mergers Make Sense?” *Labor Notes* (April 2005): 8.

¹³ Fletcher and Gapasin, *Solidarity Divided*, 134.

¹⁴ In an article published right before the formation of CtW, Steven Greenhouse reported that several union leaders considered the “dissidents” who were on the verge of breaking away from the AFL-CIO as being “engaged not in a fight over principle, but in an ego trip and power grab.” Steven Greenhouse, “4 Major Unions Plan to Boycott AFL-CIO Event: Split Mars Convention,” *New York Times*, July 25, 2005. For a critical perspective on the creation of Change to Win and subsequent turmoil in the house of labor written a few years later, see Steve Early, *The Civil Wars in U.S. Labor: Birth of a New Workers' Movement or Death Throes of the Old* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2001).

“ideologizing of organizing.”¹⁵ They suggest that the NUP and CtW reform alliances occurred when some of the progressive forces in the labor movement (such as the SEIU) decided to join forces with and even follow the lead of pragmatists (such as the UBC) and promote organizing as an ideal without concern for the process and practice of organizing. While espousing organizing as a key goal and cause for reform within the labor movement, NUP and then CtW labor leaders did so with little concern for the means of organizing and the deeper character or purpose of unions and the labor movement.

I argue that Gapasin and Fletcher’s assessment of the drive for reform that led to the NUP and CtW fits with my exploration in Chapter 12 of SEIU’s intertwined drive to continue expanding the Justice for Janitors campaign and implement internal reform in the early 2000s. While oriented toward the goal of organizing workers and increasing union density, the drive for JfJ expansion in the Northeast, especially in Boston, and the wider implementation of the SEIU’s New Strength Unity Plan reflected little concern for the means of organizing or reform. In fact, the actions of SEIU leaders suggested that the ultimate goals of more union members and a restructured labor movement took precedence over members’ well-founded desires to play a role and have a say in their unions.

Tensions and struggles in the Justice for Janitors campaign in the early 2000s, then, foreshadowed issues that would emerge within CtW. Viewed with the benefit of hindsight, the tensions and struggles within the JfJ campaign can be seen as offering a clear warning against prioritizing goals, even progressive goals, over the process of achieving these goals. The tensions and struggles can also be seen as a cause for caution in continuing to consolidate locals and increase union hierarchy. While increased centralization and hierarchy did serve a purpose in pushing out old guard leaders and facilitating the national expansion of JfJ, strong local JfJ

¹⁵ Fletcher and Gapasin, *Solidarity Divided*, 128.

groups with a solid base of local community supporters and active rank-and-file members and leaders had always provided a necessary counterbalance to the power of top SEIU leaders. This changed in the mid-2000s.

Using continued labor movement decline as justification, top union leaders such as SEIU President Stern continued to push for the end goal of organizing regardless of any concern for membership support and the process of achieving this goal. As I demonstrate below, this push for organizing from above initially helped expand the JfJ campaign in the South and produce some tangible victories for Southern janitors. But it ultimately angered workers and made the Justice for Janitors campaign unsustainable.

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As mentioned in the previous chapter, one of the core proposals of the New Strength Unity Plan, which SEIU delegates ratified in 2000, was to increase coordinated, regional organizing. A secondary but nonetheless influential proposal was to more specifically increase organizing efforts in the South—a region known for right-to-work laws and a historically weak labor movement. Various labor efforts to spark a surge of organizing in the South, from the CIO’s Operation Dixie in the 1940s to the AFL-CIO’s Houston Organizing Project in the 1980s, had failed. The New Strength Unity Plan called for the SEIU to do what these previous organizing efforts had failed to do.

At the union’s 2004 convention, delegates voted to follow through on this call for Southern organizing. They voted to fund a South-Southwest organizing project that aimed to organize and unite workers in the South as far east as Florida and as far west as Nevada.¹⁶ One of the first major efforts included in this South-Southwest organizing project was an expansion

¹⁶ Eliseo Medina, “Labor Will Rise Again: A Strategy for Organizing in the New South,” *New Labor Forum* 15, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 20-31.

of the Justice for Janitors campaign. In 2005, JfJ leaders and activists launched a new regional JfJ organizing drive centered in Miami and Houston.

As previous chapters illustrate, this venture into the South was not something entirely new for the Justice for Janitors campaign. As discussed in Chapter 1, one of the major forerunner campaigns to Justice for Janitors developed in Houston in 1985. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 3, JfJ leaders oversaw the expansion of the campaign to Atlanta in 1987. Interestingly, both of these campaigns, the only JfJ campaigns conducted in the South up to this point, were arguably the campaign's only true failures. Both campaigns were terminated before janitors in these cities achieved a master agreement. As I detailed in my exploration of these two campaigns, the priorities, strategies, and actions of SEIU leaders and their alleged political allies had as much if not more to do with these campaign failures than the hostile environment that the South posed to union organizing. Nevertheless, the fact that the Justice for Janitors campaign had not achieved a major success in the South in its nearly twenty-year history can be seen as a motivating factor behind the Southern Justice for Janitors drive in the mid-2000s. With this regional effort, JfJ leaders and activists embraced an opportunity to challenge the historic weakness of the SEIU and broader labor movement in the South. Beyond this, they also embraced a chance at redemption—an opportunity to prove that the Justice for Janitors campaign was capable of succeeding in the South.

Because of the SEIU's weakness and general lack of presence in the South, JfJ leaders and organizers did not have a base of existing union members or local union strength to draw upon in launching a Southern JfJ organizing drive in 2005. But they did have the benefit of several locals with active, relatively seasoned JfJ groups in the Northeast. Local leaders, organizers, and members in these JfJ groups committed their time and effort to helping

International JfJ leaders make JfJ organizing in the South a reality. The Southern JfJ campaign, then, marked an interesting adaptation of the Justice for Janitors campaign. While launched from the top-down, the Houston and Miami campaigns were seeded with staff, volunteer activists, and financial resources from Chicago Local 1 and New York Local 32BJ, respectively. These campaigns, then, benefited from “horizontal” rather than just top-down assistance in their development.

This adaptation of the campaign proved remarkably successful in quickly generating two exciting JfJ organizing drives that garnered a lot of public attention and won tangible victories for janitors in the South. These campaigns mobilized unorganized janitors with a host of nonunion allies, featured attention-grabbing demonstrations, and resulted in contracts that provided thousands of janitors with higher wages and union representation for the first time. But, much like the Boston campaign that relied heavily on outsiders and was implemented quickly, these two campaigns ultimately left groups of JfJ leaders, local campaign activists, and janitors disappointed in the SEIU. And in the end, neither of these campaigns proved sustainable.

The initial excitement and success of the Miami Justice for Janitors campaign actually came from an unplanned adaptation of the campaign. JfJ leaders and organizers transferred to Miami in 2004 initially set their sights on organizing janitors who cleaned condominiums in Miami Beach. While these leaders and organizers were laying the groundwork to organize condo janitors, a group of janitors from the University of Miami (UM) contacted newly created SEIU Local 11 in Miami and asked for support in building a JfJ organizing drive at the university. In recent years, more than a half dozen other JfJ groups had become involved in university janitor organizing efforts in coordination with student-led living wage and anti-

sweatshop campaigns.¹⁷ Following in the footsteps of these other JfJ groups, leaders and organizers in Miami Local 11 decided to partner with UM janitors and launch a Justice for Janitors organizing campaign at the University of Miami in the fall of 2005.

Owing in large part to the UM janitors' eagerness to unionize and resilience in the face of opposition, this JfJ drive was a major success and celebrated as proof that Justice for Janitors could in fact be victorious in the South. This rank-and-file-centered campaign brought UM janitors, SEIU organizers, student groups, and community allies into direct conflict with UM President Donna Shalala. (Interestingly, as noted in Chapter 8, Shalala had a brief run-in with the JfJ campaign over ten years earlier. While serving as the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services, she had been one of the thousands of motorists stuck in gridlocked traffic caused by the Washington D.C. JfJ group's demonstrations targeting Oliver Carr in 1995). Fitting with the typical union hostility of the South and private universities, Shalala fiercely resisted the JfJ organizing drive. Nevertheless, UM janitors ultimately proved capable of wearing down her resolve. After a risky hunger strike and series of fasts in April of 2006, these janitors won union recognition as well as a raise, more holiday time, and health benefits. The success of this campaign, in turn, generated momentum for other janitor organizing drives in Miami.¹⁸

¹⁷ While the first major Justice for Janitors campaign at a university occurred in coordination with Los Angeles Local 1877 (then Local 399) at the University of Southern California between 1996 and 1997, JfJ campaigns to organize university janitors became a major component of the Northeast regional JfJ campaign in the early 2000s. Various SEIU locals in this region helped support and develop janitor-organizing efforts at universities including Harvard University, the University of Connecticut, Rutgers University and Northeastern University. See, for example, Amy C. Offner, "The Harvard Living Wage Campaign: Origins and Strategy," *Employee Responsibilities & Rights Journal* 25, no. 2 (2013): 135-142; "UConn agrees to pay raise for janitors," *The Chronicle*, May 11, 2001; Kelley Heyboer, "Rutgers students seek Justice for Janitors: Newark campus part of living-wage effort," *Star-Ledger*, April 14, 2002; David Nelson, "Students walk out for janitors," *The U-Wire*, October 15, 2002.

¹⁸ For more on the University of Miami organizing drive, see: Jason Albright, "Contending Rationality, Leadership, and Collective Struggle: The 2006 Justice for Janitors Campaign at the University of Miami," *Labor Studies Journal* 33, no. 1 (March 2008): 63-80, and Randy Shaw, "Yes We Cane: Miami's Justice for Janitors Struggle" in *Beyond the Fields: Cesar Chavez, the UFW, and the Struggle for Justice in the 21st Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 97-120.

Bearing similarity to more traditional JfJ campaigns, the concurrent Justice for Janitors drive in Houston was focused on organizing janitors who cleaned office buildings in the city's downtown region. SEIU leaders hired new organizers and brought in a host of local organizers and rank-and-file janitor activists from Chicago Local 1 and other SEIU locals to help launch a major JfJ organizing blitz out of Houston Local 5 in 2005. According to Eliseo Medina, who oversaw the SEIU's South-Southwest organizing project, as many as eighty JfJ organizers worked on the Houston Justice for Janitors drive and more than two hundred janitors from other local JfJ campaigns traveled to Houston to lend their support.¹⁹

This major organizing push was costly (the *Houston Chronicle* reported that the SEIU was “pouring” more than one million dollars into the organizing drive²⁰), but it quickly generated results. In November of 2005, more than 5,000 Houston janitors won union recognition from their employers. Local 5's initial efforts to negotiate a first contract for these workers stalled. But after a major janitor strike in Houston and solidarity actions throughout the United States and abroad, Local 5 negotiated a two-year contract in November of 2006 that provided Houston janitors with a fifty percent raise and health insurance as well as vacation time and six paid holidays.²¹ Ultimately, this contract achievement, along with the recent success of the JfJ drive at the University of Miami, suggested that SEIU leaders and members' hopes for a surge of organizing in the South could be made a reality. Furthermore, this achievement in the wake of success in Miami also suggested that the long-running hopes and plans of JfJ leaders for a truly national Justice for Janitors campaign were coming into being.

¹⁹ Eliseo Medina, “Labor Will Rise Again: A Strategy for Organizing in the New South,” *New Labor Forum* 15, no. 3 (Fall 2006): 20-31.

²⁰ L.M. Sixel, “Union has sights set on Houston: SEIU pumps resources, efforts into organizing,” *Houston Chronicle*, October 23, 2005.

²¹ L.M. Sixel, “Janitorial union's progress slow: SEIU organized workers last year, but negotiations are ‘frustrating,’” *Houston Chronicle*, August 6, 2006; Monica Rhor, “Houston janitors reach settlement in monthlong strike,” *Associated Press Archive*, November 20, 2006.

Initial excitement and hope in the Houston JfJ success, however, belied underlying membership dissatisfaction with the campaign. While the Houston campaign was successful in organizing janitors and winning a first contract, many of the individuals who participated in this effort criticized the campaign and expressed a sense of disappointment. In interviews with a graduate student doing research on the campaign, several individuals criticized the fact that the Houston JfJ campaign relied so much on outsiders and leaders who did not seem interested in building a base of rank-and-file support and leadership for the campaign. For JfJ organizers who came to Houston, the difference between the Houston campaign and other JfJ campaigns was particularly astute. As one organizer asserted: “[I]n other cities, the janitors had control. They were meeting with each other after work, talking in shops and stuff like that—making plans and getting other workers involved. Now, it’s very like the janitors don’t do as much. It’s not a janitor led thing.”²²

While some organizers generally critiqued the top-down nature of the campaign, several organizers of color also expressed specific frustration with the fact that the top leaders running the campaign were predominantly white and that people of color, including individuals who had more organizing experience than some of the white leaders, were not given leadership opportunities. Others campaign participants criticized particular campaign decisions, such as framing the campaign around images of vulnerable female janitors and not making undocumented janitors’ legal status a major campaign issue. For these participants, the structure and process of the campaign were important. And the Houston campaign, as a campaign with minimal rank-and-file participation and little-to-no member leadership or leadership diversity, was not a clear success in terms of structure and process.

²² Glenn Edward Bracey II, “Interracial Political Coalitions: An Analysis of Justice for Janitors Campaigns in Houston, TX,” (Master’s thesis, Texas A&M University, 2008), 59.

Despite the validity of Houston JfJ participants' criticism of the structure and process of the campaign, it is important to note that the strong antiunion environment and part-time nature of janitorial work in the South made generating local rank-and-file support and leadership for the Houston JfJ campaign difficult.²³ The difficulty of building local worker support and leadership for the campaign within self-imposed time constraints—rather than a complete lack of leadership interest in building this support—was likely the root cause of the top-down and horizontal nature of the Houston Justice for Janitors campaign. In many ways, then, some of the core issues embedded in this 2006 Houston JfJ campaign were virtually identical to the issues that had plagued the Atlanta JfJ campaign twenty years earlier.

At least in the short-run, the top-down and horizontal structure and process of the Houston JfJ campaign did not seem to have a major impact on its outcome. Following the first major contract success in Houston, however, the campaign struggled amidst hostility from local politicians and businesses. In the aftermath of the contract strike, for example, many of the organizers and janitors who had participated in acts of civil disobedience were sentenced with large fines and jail time. While JfJ protesters in other cities typically faced \$50 to \$75 fines for committing acts of civil disobedience, protesters in Houston faced fines as high as \$2,000 and as much as seven days in jail. While JfJ participants faced legal backlash for their organizing efforts, Houston Local 5, as a whole, faced backlash from cleaning contractors. In 2007, one of the major Houston cleaning companies, Professional Janitorial Services (PJS), sued Local 5 for harassing and intimidating the company's clients.²⁴

While the campaign faced this external hostility, it also suffered internal conflict. In 2008, news of an internal struggle within Local 5 became public. In this year, a group of Local 5

²³ Stephen Lerner, email correspondence with author, March 19, 2000.

²⁴ L.M. Sixel, "Union Protesters Pay Price in City," *Houston Chronicle*, March 25, 2007; Jon Cassidy and Charles Blain, "Texas Janitors Mop the Floor With a Bullying Union," *Wall Street Journal*, September 10, 2016;

organizers, who were expected to work long hours often without breaks or vacation time, decided to join a union of their own. Finding union leaders unreceptive to their complaints of being overworked, these organizers reached out to the Federation of Agents and International Representatives (FAIR) to represent them. The SEIU voluntarily recognized FAIR as the Local 5 organizers' representative, but one of the organizers alleged that SEIU leaders punished organizers for their unionization drive—transferring them, giving them harder work assignments, and even firing some of them. Essentially, only a couple years after the Houston JfJ campaign began, the internal support structure for the campaign was already crumbling. While the campaign was initially celebrated as a success and seemed to validate SEIU leaders' bold, rapid expansion of new member organizing, the reality of Houston Justice for Janitors as a campaign that relied heavily on the national JfJ campaign and lacked a solid base of local support became more clear in the late 2000s.²⁵

The Miami Justice for Janitors campaign similarly suffered from internal struggles and failures in the wake of initial, celebrated success. As suggested above, the Miami Justice for Janitors campaign captured public attention amidst an organizing struggle at the University of Miami (UM) in 2006. Unlike the Houston JfJ campaign, this particular organizing struggle in Miami was highly focused on rank-and-file workers. Rather than imposing the JfJ campaign from above, SEIU leaders joined forces with an existing group of activists who had already been organizing on campus. And in doing so, they helped UM janitors organize and gain a strong first contract. In the midst of initial success at UM in March of 2006, JfJ organizers in Miami started reaching out to janitors at two other Florida universities, Florida International University (FIU) and Nova Southeastern University (NSU), to launch JfJ drives on those campuses.

²⁵ L.M. Sixel, "When employees of unions organize," *Houston Chronicle*, November 23, 2008.

At FIU, the JfJ campaign found quick success amongst receptive university leaders. In September of 2006, less than a year after JfJ organizers started approaching janitors at FIU, the university decided to bring janitorial positions back in-house²⁶ and recognize the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), which represented other FIU employees, as the janitors' representative. While not necessarily an organizing victory for the SEIU in terms of gaining new members, this was a clear victory for organized labor generally and for FIU janitors who gained a more than fifty percent raise and access to health care plans as FIU employees and AFSCME members.²⁷

While the JfJ campaigns at UM and FIU proved successful, the concurrent campaign at Nova Southeastern University (NSU) did not. NSU janitors were very receptive to the launch of a JfJ organizing drive, but they faced tough opposition from the university. The university stopped students from distributing pro-union leaflets on campus, prevented the university's newspaper from selling ads to the SEIU, and even blocked all incoming messages from the SEIU on the NSU email system for a period of two weeks. NSU janitors remained committed to the JfJ campaign in the face of this opposition, and in October 2006 a majority of NSU janitors declared their support for union representation. At this point, the contractor that the NSU janitors worked for, UNNICO, agreed to recognize the SEIU as their representative.²⁸ While this should have been a victory for the janitors, it sparked strong backlash from the university. In late 2006, NSU administration decided to terminate the university's contract with UNNICO. Rather than gaining union recognition, NSU janitors lost their jobs.

²⁶ Originally, janitors at FIU were direct employees of the university. During the 1990s, however, FIU, following a common industry trend, outsourced janitorial work to contractors. By bringing janitors back "in-house," FIU returned to hiring janitors directly rather than through a contractor.

²⁷ Niala Boodhoo, "Nova Enters Janitor Pay Controversy," *The Miami Herald*, March 22, 2006; Niala Boodhoo, "FIU Takes Strides For Janitors," *The Miami Herald*, September 28, 2006.

²⁸ Fred Grimm, "Civil liberties swept under the rug at NSU," *The Miami Herald*, May 10, 2007; Niala Boodhoo, "Nova Southeastern University Janitors Ok Union Representation," *The Miami Herald*, October 5, 2006.

The history of the Justice for Janitors campaign is rife with similar instances of antiunion backlash and campaign perseverance in spite of major setbacks. In Miami, however, NSU janitors found little support to continue fighting and quickly became disillusioned with the SEIU. Expressing frustration and a sense of abandonment, one of the NSU janitors who lost her job in the organizing drive asserted two years later, “They [SEIU organizers] were preaching rights and rights and rights, and they forgot about us... They said so many times, ‘Don't worry, we'll be there.’ Then what happened?” Another fired NSU janitor suggested that the campaign had taught her a lesson about organized labor. She asserted, “If the company treats me bad, I'm going to keep my mouth shut... The union's not going to help. That's the way I feel about unions now. I know that not all of them are like that, but that's what they've showed us.”²⁹ Much like Houston's JfJ campaign, then, the Miami Justice for Janitors drive had a promising start but ultimately left many participants feeling upset with and abandoned by the SEIU rather than empowered.

While unfortunate in and of themselves, the JfJ struggles in Houston and Miami were part of a much larger internal struggle and rupture in the SEIU's property service division. In 2006, in the midst of the organizing drives in Houston and Miami, top SEIU property service division leaders based in the Northeast started voicing opposition to continuing to aggressively pursue a national expansion of the Justice for Janitors campaign. These leaders did not want to continue dedicating the resources and energy of their locals to support the campaign outside of their geographic areas of focus and beyond their locals' potential membership base.

Although aggressive organizing was a key issue in the SEIU's recent decision to break from the AFL-CIO and form Change to Win, SEIU President Andy Stern proved beholden to the interests of these leaders. The recent push for increased centralization and hierarchy within the

²⁹ Niala Boodhoo, “Fired Nova Southeastern workers angry at union, too,” *The Miami Herald*, November 23, 2008.

SEIU, which Stern had overseen, concentrated power at the top of the union. This concentration of power gave Stern greater control and authority over the union, but it also made Stern's leadership highly dependent on the support of key division leaders whose power also increased amidst union restructuring and mergers. Unwilling to risk defying the interests of property service division leaders who did not want to continue supporting Justice for Janitors, Stern oversaw what one JfJ leader described as the "disbanding" of the JfJ leadership and staff group at the International level of the union around 2006.

At this point, several local JfJ groups initially sought to continue developing and expanding the Justice for Janitors campaign at the local level. With top union leaders hostile to the campaign, however, several key local JfJ leaders and organizers were forced out of the union or left voluntarily as they found their organizing interests increasingly unwelcome.³⁰ Their departure—along with growing leadership hostility to the campaign—likely contributed to the campaign struggles and failures that janitors and local organizers in Houston and Miami experienced after 2006. And more than this, their departure essentially destroyed any possibility of subsequent major Justice for Janitors organizing drives and victories in the United States. After more than twenty years of adaptation and expansion in the face of major successes and struggles, the Justice for Janitors campaign screeched to a halt.

Quite ironically, Lerner foreshadowed this break in the Justice for Janitors campaign in his 2002 working paper on labor movement reform, which as discussed previously served as a strategic foundation for the New Unity Partnership and then Change to Win's reform efforts. In a section on the importance of leadership to organizing drives in this paper, Lerner asserted:

³⁰ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors' Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, May 6, 2016; Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016.

Many times unions have grabbed defeat from the jaws of victory. Big, smart, strategic campaigns, with massive worker support can be lost by leaders who lack the courage and vision to support them. In the end leadership does matter. Good leadership alone isn't enough to win, but lack of leadership can sabotage and destroy the best organizing campaigns and unions.³¹

For more than twenty years, the Justice for Janitors campaign had developed within and beyond the United States labor movement. The campaign had evolved and persevered through monumental opposition and, in the process, offered newfound hope to millions of workers around the world. But the transformative potential of the campaign was ultimately cut short in the mid-2000s, not by a lack of worker interest or support, but by a combination of increased centralization and hierarchy within the union and the shifting priorities of SEIU leaders.

Because of the emergence of JfJ-inspired campaigns abroad and continued worker support for the campaign, Justice for Janitors did not disappear entirely post-2007. But without leadership support, the campaign faded from the public spotlight in the United States. And much of the sense of hope that Justice for Janitors could challenge union decline and neoliberal restructuring faded away with it.

³¹ Stephen Lerner, "Three Steps To Reorganizing And Rebuilding The Labor Movement: Building New Strength and Unity for all Working Families," *Labor Notes*, December 1, 2002.

Conclusion

The Legacy of Justice for Janitors and Hope in an Open Source Approach to Unionism

In this conclusion, I touch on the legacy of the Justice for Janitors campaign. I explore how the momentum and inspiration of the JfJ campaign endured much beyond the fracturing of internal support for the campaign within the SEIU and the decline of the campaign in the United States. I point to a pattern of former campaign leaders and participants taking and sharing the lessons of the campaign and, in the process, contributing to a subsequent wave of labor and social movement activism and hope for a more equitable future.

In doing so, I purposely avoid placing Justice for Janitors in a narrative arc of success and then failure, rise and then fall, that is common throughout labor history. Although ending a history of the campaign with the unfortunate decline of national Justice for Janitors organizing progress in the United States would be appropriate in an immediate and practical sense, I suggest that doing so would be fundamentally misleading and misrepresentative of the larger history of the campaign, which I have detailed throughout this dissertation.

Throughout the dissertation, I have shown that the JfJ campaign had moments of great triumph and moments of intense struggle and defeat. But I have highlighted the fact that the campaign adapted and persevered through countless moments of struggle and even some major setbacks and failures. The history of the campaign, then, is better understood as following a more-or-less constant pattern of ebb and flow rather than a single arc of development and decline. Furthermore, I suggest that even across this undulating pattern of success and struggle, the campaign as a whole seemed to make progress in bringing diverse groups of people together, building worker consciousness, and inspiring activism and hope for a more equitable future.

This overarching progress did not truly start with the first utterances of the slogan “Justice for Janitors.” Instead, it emerged from a series of experimental organizing and reform efforts in the early 1980s and, even beyond this, drew from and built upon the foundation of the Chicana movement, especially the United Farm Workers movement, and an emerging immigrant rights movement. And arguably more importantly, this overarching progress did not end with the decline of national JfJ organizing in the United States. Instead, owing in significant part to the open source approach to unionism that JfJ leaders and participants embraced, the spirit and strategy of the Justice for Janitors campaign lives on. This spirit and strategy—and an open source approach to unionism more generally—offers hope for and a means to continue struggling against and possibly one day achieving an alternative to the exploitative system that is neoliberal capitalism.

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While the national Justice for Janitors campaign largely fell apart in the United States in the mid to late 2000s, the campaign as a whole did not disappear. In fact, during this period, the Justice for Janitors campaign underwent a remarkable phase of adaptation and expansion abroad. I argue that this new phase of Justice for Janitors growth should be recognized as a continuation of the long-running pattern of campaign experimentation and adaptation in response to neoliberal restructuring and union decline. And more than this, I argue that this phase of JfJ growth should be recognized as a result of JfJ leaders’ conscious decisions to open source the Justice for Janitors campaign and build bridges between unions across immense geographic space.

As noted briefly in Chapter 13, the SEIU created a “global partnerships” group in 2004 to help build global labor movement strength in response to the recent growth and consolidation of transnational companies. Since its formation, this global partnerships group has engaged in three

overlapping types of global union work. The group has worked to develop and lead specific global organizing campaigns, to build partnerships with specific unions outside of the United States in order to foster organizing in these unions, and to support and strengthen the organizing capacity of global union federations. Some members of this group are SEIU organizers and former local union leaders who have been sent abroad to work with global union federations such as UNI Global Union (formerly known as the Union Network International) and with various local unions. Other members include activists from these local unions. As labor activist and scholar Amanda Tattersall has described, the SEIU has employed these activists as “union brokers” and “cultural bridge builders” to facilitate an exchange of organizing strategies and coalition building between the SEIU and these activists’ home unions.¹

The activism of the global partnerships group has not been isolated to the property service division, but the history of international solidarity in the Justice for Janitors campaign and the JfJ-adapted security officer organizing drive (discussed in Chapter 12) laid the groundwork for and served to inspire the development of the global partnerships group.² Building from this history, the global partnerships group has dedicated extensive resources to building and supporting Justice for Janitors as a global organizing campaign. And the group has experienced remarkable success in doing so. While JfJ organizing fell by the wayside in the United States, global adaptations of Justice for Janitors have taken shape in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the Netherlands, and Germany. These JfJ adaptations have made incredible progress in winning tangible wage, benefit, and security improvements for an

¹ Amanda Tattersall, “Labor-Community Coalitions, Global Union Alliances, and the Potential of SEIU’s Global Partnerships,” in *Global Unions: Challenging Transnational Capital Through Cross-border Campaigns* ed. Kate Bronfenbrenner (Ithaca: IRL Press, 2010), 155-173.

² Andy Stern, *A Country that Works: Getting America Back on Track* (New York: Free Press, 2006): 11-113; Amanda Tattersall, “Labor-Community Coalitions, Global Union Alliances, and the Potential of SEIU’s Global Partnerships,” in *Global Unions: Challenging Transnational Capital Through Cross-border Campaigns* ed. Kate Bronfenbrenner (Ithaca: IRL Press, 2010): 155-173.

extraordinary number of janitors around the world. And they have also proven again and again the value of an open source approach to the Justice for Janitors campaign.

The first global adaptation of the Justice for Janitors campaign in the wake of the establishment of the global partnerships group developed in the United Kingdom in 2005.³ Most immediately, this JfJ adaptation emerged from coordination and cooperation between the SEIU and the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU).⁴ Beyond this, though, the development of Justice for Janitors in the U.K. also stemmed from recent social movement activism around a living wage campaign in London.

In 2001, a community organization alliance known as The East London Communities Organization (TELCO) launched a living wage campaign seeking better wages as well as improved benefits and union rights for various groups of subcontracted workers in both the public and private sector in the East End of London. Similar to developments in the United States, a pattern of subcontracting and a downward spiral of wages and benefits had become increasingly common amongst low-wage jobs in the health care and janitorial industries in the United Kingdom. Also as in the U.S., these low-wage jobs were filled primarily with immigrant workers who were largely marginalized from the British labor movement. Focusing on the exploitation that these workers faced, TELCO succeeded in capturing public attention, earning

³ My account of this adaptation of the Justice for Janitors campaign draws from Jane Wills, "Making Class Politics Possible: Organizing Contract Cleaners in London," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32, no. 2 (June 2008): 305-323 and Jane Holgate, "Unionising the low paid in London: the Justice for Janitors campaign: a case study," Labor Unions and Civic Integration of Immigrant Workers research project (February 2009): 1-16.

⁴ Interestingly, this is the same union that then-SEIU building service director Hank Albarelli considered partnering with to develop a trans-Atlantic janitor organizing campaign in the early 1980s. In a way, then, the adapted expansion of the JfJ campaign to the U.K. in 2005 can be seen as a fulfillment of Albarelli's initial hopes and plans of a transnational Justice for Janitors campaign more than twenty years earlier.

the support of the Mayor of London, and helping win significant wage and benefit improvements for many of London's low-wage workers.⁵

In the midst of organizing this living wage campaign, TELCO directly reached out to the Transport and General Workers Union, seeking the union's participation in the campaign. The TGWU's integration into the living wage campaign was not easy. The union historically had a much more formal, top-down structure than the living wage campaign and a traditional site-by-site approach to organizing that did not involve direct action with community coalitions. Despite some tension due to these differences, however, the TGWU became a valuable participant and contributor to the living wage campaign. Under the direction of a new organizing-focused general secretary, the TGWU even dedicated two staff members to focus exclusively on organizing janitors at Canary Wharf, a prominent business district in greater London, around 2004.

The TELCO living wage campaign and the new organizing efforts of the TGWU captured the attention of the newly formed SEIU's global partnerships group. As one member has described, the global partnerships group members decided to focus their initial global outreach efforts on unions that already had some interest and experience in organizing janitors. In 2005, the global partnerships group reached out to the TGWU and started laying the groundwork for an expansion of the Justice for Janitors campaign to London.

During this year, the global partnerships group sent a team of SEIU strategists and organizers to join TGWU in mapping the janitorial industry in Canary Wharf and launching a

⁵ TELCO's first major targets in the living wage campaign included prominent financial institutions like Barclays Bank and the HSBC Bank. After organizing a series of major public demonstrations and making a host of public demands, TELCO succeeded in pressuring Barclays to agree to significant wage and benefit improvement (including a raise from £4.50 to £6 an hour, fifteen paid sick days, and eight additional holidays per year) to the janitors who cleaned the company's headquarters located at Canary Wharf in London. This agreement paved the way for other financial institutions like HSBC to agree to wage and benefit improvements for janitors and other low-wage workers as well. Jane Holgate, "Unionising the low paid in London: the Justice for Janitors campaign: a case study," Labor Unions and Civic Integration of Immigrant Workers research project (February 2009): 3.

geographically focused organizing campaign. Drawing from the lessons of the JfJ campaign in the United States and SEIU organizers' assistance, the TGWU hired a team of multilingual immigrant organizers that included many former rank-and-file janitors who had worked in Canary Wharf. Working in partnership with these local organizers, the SEIU and TGWU launched the "Justice for Cleaners"⁶ campaign and helped organize several thousand janitors in London.

While owing extensively to the support and strategic direction of SEIU global partnerships staff at the beginning, Justice for Cleaners developed into a robust, largely self-sustaining campaign by 2010. With the express purpose of making the campaign sustainable, SEIU and TGWU staff continued to recruit and train new union staff from the rank and file. They also helped organize newly unionized janitors into their own separate branch within the union. As of 2010, this branch had approximately 2,000 dues-paying members, met regularly, and was active in community-based organizing efforts.

While successful within the Transport and General Workers Union (which merged with another U.K. union to become Unite in 2007), the Justice for Cleaners campaign also proved to be a major source of inspiration within the U.K. labor movement. Several other unions, including the Association of University Teachers (now the University Colleges Union) and the National Union of Rail, Maritime, and Transport Workers, took the slogan of the campaign and helped organize janitors throughout London. This diffusion and expansion of the campaign, however, has not been entirely easygoing. Tensions and rivalry between unions and even between unions and London Citizens (the parent organization of the community coalition TELCO) over jurisdiction and organizing rights for various groups of janitors have emerged

⁶ Outside of the United States and Scotland, the term "cleaners" is used instead of "janitors" amongst English speakers.

amidst campaign growth and expansion. Nevertheless, Justice for Cleaners in combination with the living wage campaign has helped win tangible wage and benefit improvements for thousands of janitors. More than this, these campaigns have helped prove the value of migrant workers as union members and transform the demographics of the labor movement in London.

While remarkable in and of itself, the adaptation and expansion of the Justice for Janitors campaign in London was hardly a stand-alone development in the mid-2000s. While developing a partnership with the Transport and General Workers Union and helping launch the Justice for Cleaners campaign in London, SEIU's global partnerships group also started working with the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union (LHMU) in Australia and the Service and Food Workers Union (SFWU) in New Zealand to lay the groundwork for yet another global extension of the JfJ campaign.⁷ Much like the SEIU in the United States, these unions had suffered extensive union decline in the janitorial industry in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly as labor legislation changed amidst neoliberal restructuring in Australia and New Zealand. Historically accustomed to cooperative labor relations, the LHMU and SFWU were ill prepared to address a major shift in labor relations and witnessed their union density rates drop as a result. Nevertheless, these unions were not resistant to organizing. In fact, the LHMU had experimented with organizing strategies inspired by the Justice for Janitors campaign in the 1990s. The LHMU and SFWU, however, made little headway in staving off union decline—that is until the members of SEIU's global partnerships group reached out to these unions with the

⁷ My account of this global adaptation of the Justice for Janitors campaign draws from Luis L.M. Aguiar and Shaun Ryan, "The Geographies of the Justice for Janitors," *Geoforum* 40 (2009): 949-958; Jamie K. McCallum, "The Globalization of the Organizing Model," in *Global Unions, Local Power: The New Spirit of Transnational Labor Organizing* (Ithaca: IRL Press, 2013), 48-73; and Ad Knotter, "Justice for Janitors Goes Dutch. Precarious Labour and Trade Union Response in the Cleaning Industry (1988–2012): A Transnational History," *International Review of Social History* 62, no. 1 (April 2017): 1-35.

express purpose of developing a coordinated JfJ-inspired campaign in Australia and New Zealand.

In 2005, the global partnerships group sent a few SEIU organizers and researchers to work with a group of LHMU and SFWU staff in preparation for this campaign and hired an Australian labor activist, Michael Crosby, to oversee the campaign. Under Crosby's direction, these union staff members, in turn, hired an additional thirty local organizers and five local researchers. After months of preparation, the SEIU-LHMU-SFWU partnership group launched an organizing campaign under the title "A Clean Start: A Fair Deal for Cleaners" in ten cities (eight in Australia and two in New Zealand) in April of 2006.

Especially at the beginning, the Clean Start campaign was deeply rooted in the SEIU's global partnerships group and the lessons of the Justice for Janitors campaign. Under the direction of Crosby and SEIU researchers and organizers, the Clean Start campaign initially targeted fourteen prominent building owners, many of whom were major players in the national and global real estate industry. The campaign focused on gaining and leveraging public support by publishing reports that highlighted inequality in the industry and by organizing a wave of creative, street-heat public protests. While providing strategic direction for these campaign tactics from the history of the JfJ campaign, the SEIU also provided extensive financial resources for the campaign. According to LHMU leaders, the SEIU invested around \$1 million (AUD) in Clean Start over the course of the first three to four years of campaign development.

While owing extensively to the support of the SEIU, however, the Clean Start campaign was more than a copy of Justice for Janitors that a group of SEIU outsiders implemented in Australia and New Zealand. Instead, the campaign was designed to draw from and build upon local history and culture. The campaign's name and primary demands for seven "fair solutions"

for janitors, for example, built from a deep-seated allegiance to the value of egalitarianism and the rhetoric of a “fair go” within Australia. The campaign also developed as a response to particular manifestations of neoliberal restructuring within these countries, such as the introduction of the Work Choices Act in Australia in 2005. Furthermore, as Clean Start developed, local union leaders made a conscious effort to ensure that the campaign’s staff reflected the diversity of the janitorial workforce in these countries by appointing campaign organizers from the rank and file. In other words, many elements of the Clean Start campaign—from its name, to its motivations, to its staff—were drawn from the local culture, politics, and janitorial workforce in Australia and New Zealand.

Developing as an adaptation of Justice for Janitors in the unique local context of Australia and New Zealand, the Clean Start campaign was successful in several key ways. Although this campaign did not result in the organization of thousands of new workers like Justice for Cleaners in London, the Clean Start campaign helped stop union decline within the cleaning industry in Australia and even produced some modest organizing gains. Furthermore, the campaign aided janitors in raising their wages by thirty-three percent and gaining improvements in job security. Beyond these tangible victories for workers, however, Clean Start can be understood as a major success because of the role that it played in spurring a significant internal transformation, marked most notably by a newfound prioritization of organizing, within the LHMU and the SFWU. In helping motivate and inspire greater attention to organizing, the Clean Start campaign gave these unions and janitors across Australia and New Zealand newfound resources, opportunities, and inspiration to fight against union decline and neoliberal restructuring in the cleaning industry and to fight for a more equitable and fairer future.

Additionally, the Clean Start campaign and the relationship between the SEIU and the Australian labor movement have proven generative much beyond their initial scope. Since the start of the Clean Start campaign, representatives from the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) have visited the United States in order to learn from SEIU organizers about organizing strategies and initiatives in other industries. They have then taken what they have learned back to their home country and launched new organizing efforts outside of the janitorial industry. A delegation of eight ACTU representatives to the SEIU in 2010, for example, reportedly inspired the start of the New South Wales Nurses and Midwives' Association's "Fair Share for Aged Care" campaign. While clearly proving most generative for organizing in Australia, the relationship between the SEIU and the Australian labor movement has developed to become more dynamic and beneficial for the SEIU as well. As Michael Crosby has reported, for example, the LHMU has invited local union officials from the SEIU to visit Australia to see how the LHMU and Clean Start campaign have taken the strategies and tactics of the Justice for Janitors campaign "just a bit further."⁸ In doing so, they have created an opportunity for a mutually beneficial cycle of information sharing and strategy adaptation between these unions.

While 2006 marked the start of the Clean Start campaign, this year also marked the beginning of a second, much more successful attempt to expand the Justice for Janitors campaign to Canada. The expansion of the Justice for Janitors campaign to Canada, however, does not fit neatly with the expansion and adaptation of the JfJ campaign detailed above. This is because the SEIU has local affiliates within Canada. The "I," signifying "International," in the acronym SEIU stems from the fact that the membership of the union includes workers in both the United States and Canada.

⁸ Luis L.M. Aguiar and Shaun Ryan, "The Geographies of the Justice for Janitors," *Geoforum* 40 (2009): 954.

Although they are part of the International SEIU, many Canadian locals have a history of operating autonomously and resisting influence and oversight from the Washington D.C.-headquartered International SEIU office. The actions of SEIU Local 204 in Toronto with regard to the Justice for Janitors campaign in the 1990s offer evidence of this. Following the SEIU's nineteenth quadrennial convention, which was held in Toronto in 1988, JfJ leaders met with Local 204's president and directed a few JfJ researchers to conduct a survey of the janitorial industry in Toronto. In conducting this outreach, these JfJ leaders and researchers put together an assessment of Toronto as a valuable site for an experimental expansion of the Justice for Janitors campaign. The city had a large concentration of janitors in a small geographic area, and the more pro-union political and legal environment in Canada in comparison to the United States offered the promise of easy organizing progress at the time. The assessment of Toronto that Stephen Lerner detailed to Andy Stern in 1989, however, also suggested that these advantages of organizing in Toronto would likely be matched if not outweighed by Local 204's lack of willingness to support the campaign. Lerner asserted: "...the fact that we have a local in Toronto is at best irrelevant and at worse a hinderance [sic] to our success. We will have all of their baggage and none of their help."⁹ Like many old guard building service leaders within the SEIU in the United States at the time, union leaders in Toronto did not want to cede any power to outsiders or deviate from their traditional forms of unionism.

Facing strong resistance from Local 204, JfJ leaders did not abandon their interests in an expansion of the JfJ campaign to Canada but instead shifted their focus to Vancouver. During the early 1990s, JfJ leaders used a trusteeship brought on by leadership factionalism in Vancouver Local 244 as an opportunity to implement the campaign in Canada. They oversaw

⁹ Justice for Janitors Toronto files, SEIU Organizing Department Records, Box 6, Folder 38, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

industry research in the city and hired an organizing team to launch a Vancouver JfJ campaign in 1992. While a contract negotiated in Local 244 was featured in the SEIU building service division's *Update* publication in 1993 alongside other Justice for Janitors achievements, the Vancouver JfJ campaign seemed to fall by the wayside and largely disappear. This was likely due in large part to resistance from Local 244 staff who did not appreciate what they saw as an aggressive imposition of an organizing campaign from outside labor leaders without familiarity with local union culture and labor law.¹⁰ The decline of this Vancouver JfJ campaign marked the start of what would be a long but ultimately temporary hiatus in Justice for Janitors organizing in Canada.

This hiatus came to an end in 2006. In the early 2000s, amidst a much larger pattern of union reorganization implemented from above, top SEIU International leaders oversaw the reorganization of six previously geographically organized locals in Ontario, Canada into two mega-locals organized by industry: Local 1, which was made up of health care industry workers, and Local 2, which was made up of property service workers. Under the leadership of veteran Canadian organizer Tom Galivan, newly formed Local 2 launched a Justice for Janitors campaign in late 2006.

While born of the same controversial union restructuring that alienated many SEIU members and contributed to the downfall of JfJ within the United States, Local 2's JfJ campaign in Toronto proved remarkably successful on multiple fronts. In terms of organizing, the campaign helped more than two thousand janitors in Ontario gain union representation in a

¹⁰ Tom Balanoff files, SEIU Executive Office: John Sweeney Records, Box 107, Folder 15, Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; "Bargaining for the best: From Boston to Vancouver, SEIU janitors are negotiating winning contracts," *Building Service Update* 7, no. 3 (Fall/Winter 1993), SEIU Publications (Bound), Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University; Luis L.M. Augiar, "Resisting Neoliberalism in Vancouver: An Uphill Struggle for Cleaners," *Social Justice* 31, no. 3 (2004): 105-129; Luis L.M. Aguiar and Shaun Ryan, "The Geographies of the Justice for Janitors," *Geoforum* 40 (2009): 949-958.

period of only three years. Additionally, the campaign helped spark other non-SEIU unions that represent janitors in Toronto to form partnerships with Local 2 and sign citywide contract agreements with four of the city's five largest cleaning companies. Although still largely considered more labor-friendly and resistant to union decline than the United States, Canada like many countries throughout the world experienced a decline in private sector union density and an increase in anti-unionism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The JfJ campaign in Toronto thus offered an important resource for Local 2 and Toronto janitors to guard against neoliberal restructuring and union decline in the industry.¹¹

While offering a resource to the city's janitors to defend against neoliberal restructuring, the Toronto Justice for Janitors campaign has also served to inspire an expansion of the campaign to other parts of the country. Since the start of the campaign in Toronto in 2006, the JfJ campaign has been extended to Halifax, Ottawa, Alberta, Niagara, Edmonton, and Vancouver—all under the direction of Local 2.¹² This campaign expansion has not been uniform or tension-free. In many areas, like Vancouver, the Canadian JfJ campaign “borrows selectively” from the core Justice for Janitors organizing strategy, eschewing street-heat direct action and relying more on the country's legislative framework for organizing.¹³

Additionally, in experimenting with organizing vulnerable groups of migrant workers, such as Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs), in Canada, the outcomes of the various organizing campaigns have been mixed. As Jason Foster and Bob Barnetson have explored in “Justice for Janitors in Alberta,” a JfJ organizing drive amongst janitors employed by Bee-Clean Maintenance at the University of Alberta in 2010, for example, had mixed outcomes. The campaign resulted in several short-term gains—such as recovered back pay and union

¹¹ Luis L.M. Aguiar and Shaun Ryan, “The Geographies of the Justice for Janitors,” *Geoforum* 40 (2009): 949-958.

¹² “About Us: What is Justice for Janitors,” SEIU Local 2, <http://justiceforjanitors.ca/home/about/>.

¹³ Luis L.M. Aguiar and Shaun Ryan, “The Geographies of the Justice for Janitors,” *Geoforum* 40 (2009): 954.

representation—for the University of Alberta janitors. At the same time, however, the campaign jeopardized the ability of many of the janitors to continue working in Canada as Temporary Foreign Workers. In the wake of this campaign, which exposed the company’s violation of labor laws, Bee-Clean Maintenance lost its eligibility to hire TFWs. This meant that TFW workers at Bee-Clean had to find employment with another eligible employer, which was a difficult task, or return home after their current work permits expired. As such, the campaign can be understood as producing greater hardship for a select group of particularly vulnerable workers in the medium-term although it created short-term benefits.¹⁴ This campaign, in other words, highlights the ways in the application of JfJ organizing strategies from one country in the unique economic and legal context of another country came with risks of unexpected, negative consequences. While some workers have suffered from these risks, however, the expansion of Justice for Janitors to Canada seems to have sparked promising organizing efforts that have helped secure better wages and security benefits for many janitors.

While 2006 marked the start of the Clean Start campaign in Australia and New Zealand and the return of Justice for Janitors to Canada, 2007 marked even more progress in the global expansion and adaptation of the campaign. In this year, the SEIU global partnerships group in partnership with the FNV Bondgenoten launched an organizing campaign amongst janitors in the Netherlands.¹⁵ Like organizers in the LHMU in Australia, organizers in the FNV Bondgenoten

¹⁴ Jason Foster and Bob Barnetson, “Justice for Janitors in Alberta: The Impact of Temporary Foreign Workers on an Organizing Campaign,” *Journal of Workplace Rights* 16, no. 1 (2012): 3-29.

¹⁵ The Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging (FNV) is a federation of Dutch unions, which was founded in 1976. The Bondgenoten—which was formed from an alliance of industrial sector workers, shop assistant and clerical workers, transport workers, and agricultural and food workers in 1998—is the largest of the FNV affiliates. My account of the development of a global adaptation of the JfJ campaign from within FNV Bondgenoten draws from Heather Connolly, Stefania Marino, and Miguel Martinez Lucio, “Justice for Janitors’ goes Dutch: the limits and possibilities of unions’ adoption of organizing in a context of regulated social partnership,” *Work, Employment and Society* 31, no. 2 (February 2017): 319-335 and Ad Knotter, “Justice for Janitors Goes Dutch. Precarious Labour and Trade Union Response in the Cleaning Industry (1988–2012): A Transnational History,” *International Review of Social History* 62, no. 1 (April 2017): 1-35.

were aware of the Justice for Janitors campaign and interested in using JfJ tactics even before the SEIU global partnerships group was created. FNV organizers Mari Marten and Eddy Stam, for example, had learned about the campaign from the film *Bread and Roses*¹⁶ and from SEIU contacts at the Union Network International in the early 2000s. These organizers were key to the global expansion of the JfJ campaign to the Netherlands in that they helped convince FNV Bondgenoten leaders to partner with the SEIU in launching a JfJ-inspired campaign after the global partnerships group was established. Although labor relations in the Netherlands in the late twentieth century were largely harmonious and characterized by union and government cooperation, the rise of neoliberalism exposed cracks in this cooperative system and threatened the strength of Dutch unions. In the midst of this, more aggressive organizing strategies such as those implemented in the JfJ campaign had newfound appeal to Dutch unionists. Dutch unionists looked to these strategies, which had proven successful in the United States, as a necessary response to the erosion of union agreements protecting low-wage, immigrant workers.

While an interest in the JfJ campaign amongst FNV Bondgenoten organizers helped lay the groundwork for a janitor organizing campaign, a two-way exchange of organizers between the SEIU and the FNV Bondgenoten most immediately facilitated the start of the campaign. In 2006, FNV Bondgenoten organizer Mari Martens traveled to the U.S. to take a course on organizing and participate in the Justice for Janitors campaign in Houston. He returned with the mandate of integrating JfJ organizing tactics in his home union. Shortly thereafter, the SEIU global partnerships group sent a team of SEIU organizers, including veteran JfJ organizer Valery Alzaga, to help train more FNV Bondgenoten organizers and prepare for a major organizing

¹⁶ This 2000 film, directed by Ken Loach, is based on the experiences of Los Angeles Local 399 janitors and organizers involved in the Justice for Janitors campaign. The film was made in close association with the union: some of the Los Angeles janitors and organizers, such as Rosa Ayala and Rocio Saenz, even acted in the film. For more on this film and its connection to the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors campaign, see Nancy Cleeland, "A Fight for Dignity," *Los Angeles Times*, October 17, 1999.

drive amongst janitors. The FNV Bondgenoten hired four new organizers and even sent two of these organizers to London to get experience participating in the Justice for Cleaners campaign.

With lessons from this campaign and guidance from SEIU organizers with a history of JfJ activism in the United States, the Dutch organizers focused on reaching out directly to janitors at Schiphol airport and to janitors who worked at The Hague, the site of the Dutch government and administrative capital of the country. The organizers met with the janitors at cafes near their workplaces and at their homes, spreading information about the campaign and building interest. These organizers found that their outreach efforts amongst Schiphol janitors were proving most effective. As such, they decided in 2007 to concentrate on Schiphol as the first major target for an organizing campaign. Once they had this area of focus, the organizers assembled a team of more than thirty janitors who wanted to take an active role in the campaign.

With this growing base of rank-and-file support, the FNV Bondgenoten in coordination with the SEIU officially launched a janitor organizing campaign with the slogan “Voor een betere toekomst” (For a better future) at a gathering of five hundred Schiphol janitors in November of 2007. From this start, the organizing campaign quickly developed and gained momentum. Using creative public demonstrations, such as a “millionaires tour” to the homes of cleaning company executives, campaign participants captured the public’s attention and put pressure on their employers. In doing so, they helped negotiate a nationwide contract in 2008 that raised wages from €8.90 to €10 an hour for all janitors in the Netherlands.¹⁷

After this first major victory, the Schiphol janitors did not lose momentum. Instead, following a tradition from the development of Justice for Janitors in the United States, the janitors capitalized on the momentum of their success and launched a second major campaign

¹⁷ Labor negotiations are conducted nationally in the Netherlands, rather than on a company-by-company basis like in the United States.

effort. They launched this second campaign under the banner “Schiphol Schoon Genoeg” (Schiphol Clean Enough), demanding improvements in benefits and job security in their contracts. After a series of public demonstrations and a four-day strike, the janitors achieved their demands. This successful campaign and strike action, in turn, paved the way for two subsequent, much larger campaign and strike actions.

In December of 2009, a group of Schoon Genoeg rank-and-file leaders, meeting as a “Cleaners’ Parliament,” established a set of wage and benefit demands in preparation for upcoming national contract negotiations in the janitorial industry. When negotiations opened in 2010, however, the cleaning companies refused to meet the janitors’ demands. In doing so, they prompted the Cleaners’ Parliament to call an industry-wide strike. Starting on February 16, 2010, a group of approximately 1,400 janitors participated in the strike, refusing to work and joining in massive demonstrations that generated public attention and, importantly, public support.

In addition to winning public support in the Netherlands, the strike also won the support of an increasingly organized, global labor community. A few weeks into the strike, on April 21, the UNI Global Union announced the start of a global pressure campaign, centered on demonstrations at Dutch embassies, in solidarity with the striking Dutch janitors. These global solidarity actions proved unnecessary, however, as the janitors negotiated a successful conclusion to their strike the next day. On April 22, they achieved a contract that met and even exceeded most of their original demands.

Inspired by this success, a newly elected Cleaners’ Parliament met in 2011 and established a bold set of wage and benefit demands for the next round of contract negotiations in 2012. Once again their demands prompted a strike action. This strike, which started on January

2, 2012, surpassed the 2010 strike in both scale and length. Approximately three thousand workers participated in the strike and held demonstrations throughout the Netherlands until the strike was finally resolved in favor of the janitors on April 16, 2012. After enduring 105 days on strike, the janitors won 4.85 percent wage increases as well as improved training facilities and contract security.

Ultimately, the Schoon Genoeg campaign seems to have inspired a pattern of militancy and success amongst Dutch janitors that has produced significant tangible benefits and a newfound sense of excitement and power for thousands of janitors across the country. Beyond this, though, the campaign has also served to help inspire the expansion and adaptation of the Justice for Janitors campaign to other countries. The start of a Justice for Janitors-inspired campaign amongst janitors in Germany provides evidence of this.

The SEIU's global partnerships group first became active in Germany in partnership with the German service workers union Vereinte Dienstleistungsgewerkschaft (ver.di). In 2005, ver.di invited an SEIU organizer to help the union launch an organizing drive amongst security officers in Hamburg, Germany.¹⁸ Not long after ver.di reached out to the SEIU for help with a security organizing drive, a different German union—IG Bauen-Agrar-Umwelt (IG BAU)—sought assistance from the SEIU in launching an organizing drive amongst janitors.¹⁹ While the SEIU-assisted security officer campaign also likely encouraged the IG BAU to reach out to the SEIU, IG BAU leaders have reported that the impetus for their partnership with the SEIU actually came from their close contact with the FNV Bondgenoten in the Netherlands. After

¹⁸ Lowell Turner, "Advantages of Backwardness: Lessons for Social Europe from the American Labour Movement," *Social Europe* 2, no. 4 (2007): 151-152.

¹⁹ My account of the global adaptation of the Justice for Janitors campaign in Germany draws from Natale Fontana, "A comparative analysis on trade union approaches to precarious work in the cleaning sector using the examples of the US, Germany and the Netherlands" (Master's thesis, Berlin School of Economics and Law, 2012) and Ad Knotter, "Justice for Janitors Goes Dutch. Precarious Labour and Trade Union Response in the Cleaning Industry (1988–2012): A Transnational History," *International Review of Social History* 62, no. 1 (April 2017): 1-35.

Dutch organizers with the FNV Bondgenoten invited SEIU organizers from the global partnerships group into their union, they asked their colleagues at the IG BAU if they would be interested in doing the same. Following the Dutch organizers' example, IG BAU leaders invited SEIU organizers, including Michael Crosby who led the Clean Start campaign in Australia and New Zealand, into their union.

After learning from these organizers about Justice for Janitors campaign strategy and tactics, the IG BAU launched a janitor organizing campaign in 2009. While this campaign initially rallied around the slogan "Sauberkeit hat ihren Preis und ich putze Deutschland" (Cleaning has its price and I clean Germany), the slogan "Die Unsichtbaren sichtbar machen" (Making the invisible visible) also became a prominent slogan for the organizing campaign as it developed across Germany. This campaign has reportedly not involved the same level of rank-and-file engagement and grassroots social movement activism as the Schoon Genoeg campaign in the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the IG BAU's organizing drive has proven successful in organizing janitors, generating worker activism, and winning tangible wage and benefit improvements. When German cleaning companies offered minimal wage improvements to janitors during national industry negotiations in 2009 and then subsequently sought to exploit prolonged negotiations to actually reduce wages in the industry, the IG BAU called a janitors' strike—the first nationwide strike in Germany's janitorial industry—on October 20, 2009. Through the course of this strike, which lasted ten days, the IG BAU helped janitors across Germany win wage and benefit improvements. Also, as a result of the successful strike, about three thousand janitors joined the IG BAU, tripling the union's density in the janitorial industry.

Ultimately, as these brief accounts of JfJ-inspired campaigns reveal, the global expansion and adaptation of the Justice for Janitors campaign across the globe has not been the result of a

uniform or consistent process of union interaction and exchange. These accounts reveal that the SEIU global partnerships group played an important role in helping to build and support janitor organizing campaigns across the globe, especially in the early phases of campaign development. But these accounts also quite importantly reveal that the SEIU global partnerships group joined forces with local unions, social movement organizations, and especially with rank-and-file janitors in building and developing these campaigns to work within their local environments. In doing so, they helped build strong, self-sufficient campaigns that proved capable of winning important wage, benefit, and job security improvements for thousands of janitors. These campaigns, in turn, have spurred further expansion and adaptation of Justice for Janitors organizing strategies, tactics, and slogans both within and beyond national borders.

Also as illustrated above, however, this campaign expansion and adaptation has sparked tensions within local labor movements and created unintended hardships for some janitors. Much like the Justice for Janitors campaign in the United States, then, the global JfJ-inspired janitor organizing campaigns have been imperfect. They necessitate constant experimentation, reflection, and adaptation. Rather than a cause for concern, however, this process of development and adaptation can be understood as a core source of strength for the campaign. This is the aspect of the campaign that has helped inspire JfJ organizers to embrace and champion an open source approach to the campaign and unionism in general.

In helping unions around the globe develop their own Justice for Janitors campaigns, veteran JfJ organizers and other SEIU leaders have not just shared and encouraged other unions to adopt Justice for Janitors organizing strategies and tactics. They have also helped establish lines of communication and partnerships across unions that have developed into a major network

for unions to share information, learn from each other, and support each other's organizing efforts. This network is helping expand union organizing and worker activism across the globe.

Even beyond this, though, the process of adaptation and solidarity that this network facilitates has the potential to produce a better, more powerful, more sustainable form of organizing and labor activism over time. This is the hope embedded in the open source approach to the Justice for Janitors campaign that SEIU organizers have helped spread across the globe. Rather than ending with the decline of Justice for Janitors organizing in the United States, this hope has in many ways flourished through the expansion and adaptation of the campaign outside of the United States in the twenty-first century.

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Hope in the legacy of the Justice for Janitors campaign, however, is not limited to JfJ-inspired organizing campaigns outside of the United States. Instead, hope in ongoing labor and social movement activism is a key feature of the legacy of the Justice for Janitors campaign within the U.S. as well. Even though JfJ organizing in the U.S. ground to a halt in the mid to late 2000s, many JfJ leaders and organizers remained committed to fighting against the inequality and exploitation of neoliberal capitalism and to partnering with low-wage workers in the U.S. to fight for a more equitable future.

When top SEIU leaders made the decision to stop supporting future organizing drives in the national Justice for Janitors campaign, many SEIU leaders and organizers who played a major role in the JfJ campaign had the main focus of their work suddenly taken away. This change understandably prompted many of these former-JfJ activists to shift to new projects and new opportunities. Some of these activists helped pioneer new projects within the SEIU while

others sought opportunities to develop new organizing drives in partnership with other labor and social movement organizations.

A notable group of JfJ leaders and organizers, including former building service organizing director Stephen Lerner and Los Angeles organizer Jono Shaffer, for example, decided to use the end of national JfJ organizing as an opportunity to build a “Private Equity Project” within the SEIU starting in 2007. This project was very different from the Justice for Janitors campaign in many ways. Unlike JfJ, this project was not focused on a particular group of workers, and it did not revolve around organizing. At the same time, though, this project—which was designed to bring the often hidden private equity industry into the public spotlight and demand greater regulations for corporate buyouts—was in many ways a logical extension and adaptation of core elements of Justice for Janitors strategies. Much like the Justice for Janitors campaign, this project was designed to leverage public pressure against the economic elite. Also like JfJ, this campaign exposed the socioeconomic polarization of society that grew alongside the financialization of the economy. Beyond these similarities, the Private Equity Project can even be seen as a bold effort to more fundamentally challenge recent economic changes. While the JfJ campaign, at least initially, just focused on challenging the effects of this neoliberal restructuring within a particular industry for a particular group of workers, the Private Equity Project targeted the core of this restructuring—the inner workings of neoliberal capitalism—directly through the private equity industry.²⁰

After laying the groundwork for the project with extensive industry research, former JfJ activists helped officially launch the Private Equity Project in the summer of 2007. They produced a report titled “Behind the Buyouts: Inside the World of Private Equity,” which

²⁰ Jono Shaffer, interview by Andrew Gomez, *Donde Haiga un Trabajador Explotado, Ahí Estaré Yo: Justice for Janitors’ Workers, Organizers, and Allies*, UCLA Library Center for Oral History Research, January 24, 2012; Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016.

explained the industry and explored the negative consequences of five major corporate buyouts for workers and communities. They also produced a website, www.behindthebuyouts.org, where people could access this report and more information about the project. Additionally, these activists organized a series of public demonstrations and informational sessions to bring public attention to the project. In June of 2007, for example, Private Equity Project activists including Jono Shaffer helped organize a prayer vigil that included a coalition of religious leaders, environmental groups, and workers targeting the corporate buyout of ServiceMaster, a major commercial and residential services company, by the private equity investment firm Clayton, Dubilier & Rice. During the following month, the Private Equity Project partnered with the United States Student Association to organize a series of town hall meetings and a large march to the New York headquarters of private equity firm J.C. Flowers. These meetings and the march were designed to cast a public spotlight on an impending corporate buyout of the student loan company Sallie Mae.²¹

After being active throughout the second half of 2007, the Private Equity Project continued building partnerships and organizing actions to bring attention to growing issues in the United States financial services industry as a whole in early 2008. In February of 2008, for example, the Private Equity Project joined with the League of Young Voters in organizing a competition titled “Keep it in your Pants” for students to make short public service announcement videos about the dangers of “Debt Disease” brought on by aggressive credit card marketing to young people.²² Unfortunately, however, at the very time that the wrongdoings and

²¹ “ServiceMaster Shareholders, Coalition of Religious Leaders, Environmentalists, SEIU to Call on CD&R in Shareholders Meeting to Make TruGreen ‘Truly Green,’” PR Newswire, June 22, 2007; “Concerns Growing over Private Equity Buyouts’ Impact on Students, Workers, the Environment,” PR Newswire, June 27, 2007; “With Billions at Stake in Sallie Mae Buyout, SEIU, Students to Push J.C. Flowers, Big Banks to Support Student Loan Rate Cut,” PR Newswire, July 12, 2007;

²² “Student Video Contest: ‘Keep It In Your Pants’ PSA Competition Targets Credit Card ‘Debt Disease,’” PR Newswire, February 6, 2008

unsustainability of the United States financial system were becoming a major object of public attention and concern amidst the 2008 financial crisis, the Private Equity Project fell apart.

The decline of the Private Equity Project, much like the decline of the Justice for Janitors campaign in the United States, came as a result of shifting priorities amongst top SEIU leaders. While SEIU President Stern initially supported the development of the project in 2007, his interests increasingly shifted toward cooperating with and building partnerships with major corporations, not publicly exposing corporate greed and the inequality embedded in the system of neoliberal capitalism.²³ Without support from Stern, the Private Equity Project became less active and eventually disappeared.

This end to the Private Equity Project, on the heels of the end of the JfJ campaign in the United States, serves to further expose the limitations of any sort of narrow labor project that is highly dependent on top union leadership and, particularly, on union finances. Such projects have little resource to endure in the face of changing leadership interests and organizational priorities. An article that Stephen Lerner wrote for *New Labor Forum* in 2011 suggests his growing awareness of this limitation of working within the labor movement for widespread socioeconomic change.

In the article, “A New Insurgency Can Only Arise Outside the Progressive and Labor Establishment” which was published in October of 2011, Lerner asserted:

Unions have the money, members, and capacity to organize, build, and fuel a movement designed to challenge the power of the corporate elite. But despite the fact that thousands of dedicated members, leaders, and staff have worked their hearts out to rebuild the labor movement, unions are just big enough—and just connected enough to the political and economic power structure—to be constrained from leading the kinds of activities that are needed.²⁴

²³ Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016.

²⁴ Stephen Lerner, “A New Insurgency Can Only Arise Outside the Progressive and Labor Establishment,” *New Labor Forum* 20, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 9-13.

Essentially, after the Private Equity Project fell apart, Lerner did not abandon his interest in exposing and challenging the inequality of neoliberal capitalism. But he did shift his perspective on how to go about such actions. Referencing the movement-like nature of the Justice for Janitors campaign, Lerner called for a “movement-based model” that drew upon the enthusiasm, excitement, and creativity of students as well as social movement activists and organizations. While Lerner saw a role for organized labor in this movement-based model, he called for unions to play the supporting role rather than the controlling, leadership role in movement building.

Lerner’s call for this form of movement building in October of 2011 seemed to emerge from the lessons he had learned from the Justice for Janitors campaign and the Private Equity Project and from his hopes for future activism. Frustrated with the limitations of working within organized labor and seeing promising activism fall apart, he called for a broad, long-lasting wave of social protest action capable of creating a sense of crisis and necessitating a change to the socioeconomic and political status quo. His appeal for this type of movement building, however, was not just rooted in past experiences and far-reaching hopes for the future. Instead his call for a movement-based model of labor and social action was deeply rooted in and somewhat prescient of an emerging wave of protest action known as the Occupy Wall Street uprising.

The Occupy Wall Street uprising (OWS) started with a gathering of about two thousand protestors occupying Lower Manhattan on September 17, 2011. This original gathering sparked an outpouring of demonstrations and protest actions that included the occupation of Zuccotti Park in New York City for nearly two months as well as marches and occupations of public space throughout the United States. The slogan “We are the 99 percent” became a central feature of this uprising, which emerged from growing frustration with income inequality and the unequal distribution of wealth in America. This slogan served as a unifying rallying cry for a

relatively diverse group of protestors that included students as well as a range of labor and social movement activists and organizations.²⁵ Former JfJ organizer Lisa Fithian from the Washington D.C. campaign played a central role in training and leading a younger generation of activists during the uprising.²⁶ In many ways, then, an open source approach to the JfJ campaign contributed to this uprising as well as the SEIU's Private Equity Project that preceded it.

The Occupy Wall Street uprising largely fell apart after occupiers were forced out of Zuccotti Park in November of 2011. Nevertheless, by this time, OWS had embodied many of the qualities of the movement-based model that Lerner advocated in his recent article. And in doing so, this wave of protest action undeniably shed light on the inequality and exploitation of neoliberal capitalism and helped shape a new generation of labor and social movement activists.

While some former JfJ leaders and organizers launched the Private Equity Project in the SEIU following the decline of Justice for Janitors in the United States, others left the SEIU to help the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union (UFCW) build an organizing campaign targeting Walmart employees. Amidst a general wave of increased labor movement activism and excitement at the start of the twenty-first century (described in Chapter 10), the UFCW started making a concerted effort to organize Walmart as this discount retail corporation expanded rapidly and started gaining ground in the supermarket industry during this period. The union's initial efforts, however, made little headway against the company's consistent and aggressive use of antiunion tactics. Around 2004, the SEIU took a major interest in targeting Walmart as well. This corporation was a quintessential reflection of the growing power of major transnational corporations that the SEIU sought to challenge with labor movement reform during

²⁵ For more on the Occupy Wall Street uprising, particularly in relation to other post-2008 social movements, see Ruth Milkman, "A New Political Generation: Millennials and the Post-2008 Wave of Protest," *American Sociological Review* 82, no. 1 (2017): 1-31.

²⁶ Josh Harkinson, "Professor Occupy," *Mother Jones* 37, no. 2 (2012): 21-22.

this period.²⁷ In 2005, the SEIU funded a coalition-based project called “Wal-Mart Watch” to take a decidedly non-traditional approach to organizing Walmart employees. This project, which was created with significant input from ACORN founder Wade Rathke, sought to organize Walmart employees into a workers association that would work to pressure the company into providing better wages and benefits for its employees without seeking union representation or collective bargaining rights. Around the same time, the UFCW decided to try a similar approach and launched its own non-traditional Walmart organizing project, under the title “Wake Up Wal-Mart” in 2005.²⁸

While these two groups coexisted and even cooperated for a few years, the SEIU-funded Wal-Mart Watch eventually decided to merge into the UFCW-backed Wake Up Wal-Mart project in 2009. Around the same time, a group of former JfJ leaders and organizers, including Dan Schlademan, Andrea Dehlendorf, and Eddie Inny, decided to leave the SEIU and join the UFCW to work on this project. Under their direction, Wake Up Wal-Mart formed a new workers association for Walmart employees, the Organization United for Respect at Walmart, more commonly known as OUR Walmart.²⁹

This organization name, which bears a distinct similarity to the name of the JfJ-inspired security organizing drive in Los Angeles (Guards United Around Respect and Dignity in Los Angeles or GUARD L.A.), reflects the influence of former JfJ leaders on the campaign. The distinct approach to organizing that OUR Walmart leaders embraced in building this workers

²⁷ As the SEIU’s 2004 annual report notes, delegates to the SEIU’s 2004 Convention ratified a reform program that included the assertion: “We must work to transform the AFL-CIO from its outdated structure to one which can confront the issues and challenges posed by 21st century employer giants such as Wal-Mart.” “Uniting Our Strength to Win Big,” Service Employees International Union, 2004, Internet Archive Way Back Machine, <https://web.archive.org/web/20060602064110/http://www.seiu.org/docUploads/2004%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

²⁸ Wade Rathke, “Leveraging Labor’s Survival: A Proposal to Organize Wal-Mart,” *New Labor Forum* 14, no. 2 (Summer 2005): 59-66; Frank Stephen, “Activists pressure Wal-Mart: Sophisticated campaign takes place of traditional union organizing,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 20, 2005.

²⁹ “Wal-Mart Watch Joins WakeUpWalmart.com to Hold America’s Largest Private Employer Accountable for Promises Made,” PR Newswire, July 31, 2009; Jono Shaffer, conversation with author, October 26, 2016.

association also reflects the influence of Justice for Janitors on the UFCW Walmart campaign. OUR Walmart did not have the ultimate goal of winning collective bargaining rights for workers like the JfJ campaign did. Nevertheless, much like the Justice for Janitors campaign, leaders and activists involved in OUR Walmart made a distinct effort to use direct outreach to workers and creative pressure campaign tactics involving collective action to simultaneously build a strong base of worker support and activism within the campaign and to cast a public spotlight on Walmart's exploitative business practices. Leaders and activists even publicly championed OUR Walmart as an "open source" organization.³⁰

While OUR Walmart gained momentum and publicity with the UFCW's support in the early 2010s, the SEIU experienced a major leadership change. In 2010, SEIU President Andy Stern resigned and designated Anna Burger, the union's current secretary-treasurer, as his successor. Burger served as interim president following Stern's resignation, but the SEIU Executive Board ultimately decided to go against Stern's endorsement of Burger and elect SEIU Vice President Mary Kay Henry as the new SEIU president.³¹

Mary Kay Henry's election ultimately laid the groundwork for the SEIU to develop a non-traditional organizing campaign bearing similarity to the UFCW's Walmart organizing campaign. Under her leadership, the SEIU provided a massive amount of funding to build a fast food workers campaign. Although this campaign officially launched with a demonstration of New York fast food workers in November of 2012, the SEIU reportedly spent about \$2 million on building the campaign in the two years leading up to this first demonstration.³² This

³⁰ David Moberg, "The Walmart Revolt: New Strategies for Old Labor," *In These Times* 37, no. 1 (January 2013): 30-31.

³¹ Steven Greenhouse, "Grass-Roots Choice Leads Race for Top Union Post," *New York Times*, April 27, 2010.

³² William Finnegan, "Dignity: Fast-food workers and a new form of labor activism," *New Yorker* 90, no. 27 (September 2014).

campaign has become widely known by the slogan “Fight for \$15,” which refers to participants’ primary demand for a living wage of \$15 an hour.

The Fight for \$15 campaign can be understood as the unique product of an intersection of an open source approach to unionism and social movement activism. Early in the history of the campaign, SEIU President Mary Kay Henry identified Justice for Janitors as setting a precedent for this campaign. Since then, other SEIU leaders involved in the campaign have noted that the campaign draws from a repertoire of tactics that were used in the Justice for Janitors campaign and then adapted and developed within OUR Walmart. Some leaders and campaign observers have also noted that the campaign builds from growing public concern with income inequality in the wake of Occupy Wall Street.³³

Building from these intersecting influences, the Fight for \$15 campaign has taken a unique form. Rather than seeking to organize workers into the SEIU or even into a single workers association, Fight for \$15 exists as a loose network of local worker organizations. With this structure, Fight for \$15 resembles the structure of a grassroots social movement much more than that of a union within the mainstream labor movement.

This horizontal structure of Fight for \$15 has been the subject of a fair amount of scrutiny and criticism. Some campaign participants and observers have suggested that the campaign, which still benefits from extensive SEIU funding, masquerades as a grassroots movement but is in all actuality a top-down, public relations campaign orchestrated by the SEIU.³⁴ The validity of these critiques and the overall sustainability of the campaign are still somewhat uncertain—particularly in light of recent developments in the OUR Walmart campaign which highlight the

³³ See, for example, William Finnegan, “Dignity: Fast-food workers and a new form of labor activism,” *New Yorker* 90, no. 27 (September 2014); Barbara Joye, “Making Sense of Occupy Wall Street,” *Democratic Left* 43, no. 1 (Summer 2015): 14-15; David Rolf, *The Fight for Fifteen: The Right Wage for a Working America* (New York: The New Press, 2016): 91.

³⁴ See, for example: Micah Uetricht, “Is Fight for 15 for Real?” *In These Times* 37, no. 10 (October 2013): 8-10.

risks embedded in non-traditional worker campaigns that depend heavily on funding from organized labor

In the wake of a leadership change in the UFCW in 2014, the union reportedly cut funding for OUR Walmart and fired Dan Schlademan and Andrea Dehlendorf, two of the organization's main leaders. New UFCW leaders allegedly questioned the excessive cost of the Walmart organizing campaign, which did not offer immediate returns in the form of dues paying members. They sought to shift the focus of the campaign toward media and public relations efforts and away from on-the-ground organizing. In the wake of these alleged UFCW actions, Schlademan and Dehlendorf led a major group of campaign activists and other leaders to break away from the UFCW and establish OUR Walmart as an independent, nonprofit organization.³⁵

The ability of these campaign leaders and participants to keep OUR Walmart alive in the wake of this internal conflict and restructuring suggests the value of the strong horizontal structure of this organization and the Walmart organizing campaign in comparison to the Justice for Janitors campaign in the early 2000s and the Private Equity campaign in the late 2000s. While both of the SEIU campaigns completely fell apart amidst the shifting interests and funding priorities of SEIU leadership, OUR Walmart endured in the face of shifts within the UFCW as OUR Walmart leaders were able to solicit funding from a host of partner organizations. With alternative sources of funding, OUR Walmart was able to continue organizing and supporting Walmart workers even without the extensive financial backing of the UFCW.

Despite the risk embedded in Fight for \$15's continued reliance on SEIU funding, this campaign, much like OUR Walmart, has proven the value of new, experimental organizing campaigns amongst low-wage workers in many ways. The Fight for \$15 campaign and the OUR

³⁵ David Moberg, "Which Way Our Walmart?" *In These Times* 39, no. 9 (September 2015): 24-25; Nathan Layne and Lisa Baertlein, "Wal-Mart worker group splits in two; both sides vow to continue wage fight," Reuters, September 16, 2015.

Walmart campaign have helped thousands of workers earn tangible albeit mainly modest raises and benefit improvements. Beyond this, though, these campaigns—which have themselves intersected as OUR Walmart campaign participants have recently demanded a living wage of \$15 an hour—have intersected with and helped contribute to a broad wave of social protest in the last decade.

Fight for \$15, for example, has intersected with Black Lives Matter, a largely grassroots movement targeting systemic racism and police brutality against black people that first emerged in 2013. Following the police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, members of the Fight for \$15-associated Missouri organization “Show Me \$15” were active participants in the series of protest actions demanding justice for Michael Brown that took place in the late summer and fall of 2014. Since then, Black Lives Matter activists pointing to the fact that struggles for racial and economic justice are deeply intertwined have declared their support for Fight for \$15 and have even participated in Fight for \$15 strategy sessions.³⁶

The Fight for \$15 campaign has also recently joined forces with a host of immigrant rights organizations and other worker organizations to protest the overlapping injustices that low-wage immigrant workers face, particularly in the wake of President Donald Trump’s election in 2016. On February 16, 2017, for example, Fight for \$15 activists participated in a series of coordinated strike and protest actions in solidarity with immigrant rights organizations and activists under the banner of a “Day Without Immigrants.” Less than three months later, a host of immigrant rights organizations and activists joined in solidarity with Fight for \$15 and other labor campaigns in organizing and participating in another coordinated wave of demonstrations

³⁶ See, for example: Jane Slaughter, “‘Mike Brown Is Our Son,’” *Labor Notes*, no. 427 (October 2014): 3-4; Steven Greenhouse, “A Broader Strategy on Wages,” *New York Times*, March 31, 2015; Stephon Johnson, “Fight for \$15 and ‘Black Lives Matter’ take over NYC,” *New York Amsterdam News*, April 23, 2015; Barbara Ransby, “The Class Politics of Black Lives Matter,” *Dissent* 62, no. 4 (Fall 2015): 31-34.

in cities throughout the United States on May Day.³⁷ Ultimately, this recent intersection of non-traditional labor organizing campaigns with social movement activism offers some tangible hope for intersectional collective action and coalition building at a time in which such hope is desperately needed.

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As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, the United States and global economy has undergone a wave of neoliberal restructuring in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. While transforming the relationship between workers, employers, and the State in industries throughout the economy, this neoliberal restructuring has contributed to widespread socioeconomic polarization. As members of the wealthy elite have seen their fortunes and power continue to grow, a majority of workers have experienced increased insecurity and exploitation.

This neoliberal restructuring and socioeconomic polarization show no signs of stopping. Instead, the global economy continues to show signs of transformation, most notably in relation to the rise of the “gig economy,” in this second decade of the twenty-first century. Although wrapped in the rhetoric of individual freedom and idealizations of entrepreneurial spirit and the fairness of the market, the rise of the gig economy is part and parcel of a widespread trend toward precarious labor. This trend portends growing hardship for workers—particularly low-wage immigrant workers, female workers, and workers of color—amidst the ongoing erosion of legislative and social safety net protections.³⁸

³⁷ Michelle Chen, “The Day Without Immigrant Workers Has Begun,” *The Nation*, May 1, 2017; Daniel Galarza, Amy McKeever, Brenna Houck, and Ashok Selvam, “Thousands of Restaurant Workers Protested Wages, Immigrant Rights on May Day,” *Eater*, May 2, 2017.

³⁸ For more information on the growth of the gig economy, particularly in relation to a longer history of immigrant worker marginalization, see: Leticia M. Saucedo, “The Legacy of the Immigrant Workplace: Lessons for the 21st Century Economy,” *Thomas Jefferson Law Review* 40, no. 1 (2017): 1-21.

Amidst these current socioeconomic transformations, organizing and collective action offer hope as a means to achieve an alternative to the status quo, a means to challenge the onslaught of neoliberal restructuring and its effects. I argue that the history of the Justice for Janitors campaign can serve as a valuable resource for future organizing and collective action and, as such, offers much needed hope for the future. The history of this campaign shows that building and even more so sustaining an organizing campaign, especially a constantly expanding and increasingly intersectional organizing campaign, is not easy. The history of Justice for Janitors shows that building and sustaining such a campaign requires a diverse group of leaders, participants, and allies to constantly reconcile their different interests, goals, and priorities—both in the short-term and long-term—while working together. Throughout the history of the campaign, Justice for Janitors leaders, participants, and allies struggled at times to work through their differences, and the campaign suffered internal conflict and some major setbacks as a result. Regardless, the campaign as a whole continued to endure and even thrive despite its challenges for twenty years.

Justice for Janitors did so, I argue, for several key reasons. The campaign was a success for so long because campaign leaders and participants were willing to experiment with organizing strategies, tactics, and actions; to reflect on their successes and failures; and most importantly to adapt—adapt from the lessons they learned and adapt to changing resources and opportunities. Beyond this, the campaign was able to endure for so long because there was a relative balance of power between campaign leaders and participants as well as top SEIU leaders.

When a shift toward centralization and hierarchy within the SEIU upended this balance of power, the momentum and progress of the national Justice for Janitors campaign ground to a

halt. Nevertheless, as I have illustrated throughout this concluding chapter, the decline of national Justice for Janitors organizing in the United States does not really mark the end of the campaign. Instead, elements of the campaign live on in JfJ-adapted campaigns abroad and in recent labor and social movement activism within the United States as former campaign leaders and activists remain committed to JfJ strategies, tactics, and goals.

At present, there is an abundance of former Justice for Janitors leaders, organizers, and participants scattered throughout the global labor movement and social movement organizations. Recently, JfJ leader Stephen Lerner shared with me that at almost every labor or community gathering that he attends, he encounters people who first became involved with labor and social movement activism through the Justice for Janitors campaign.³⁹ Through twenty years of activism and expansion, this campaign inspired and shaped an entire generation of labor and social movement activists. As a result, the campaign continues to have a direct influence on current organizing and social protest actions.

I believe, however, that there is an opportunity for the Justice for Janitors campaign to inspire and shape ongoing and future activism even beyond this. I believe that the long and messy history of the campaign that I have explored in this dissertation can provide lessons to current and future activists and workers who have no direct connections to the campaign. This history points to the importance of unifying a diverse group of organizations and individuals—each with their own skills, resources, and experiences—around a common cause. At the same time, the campaign history illustrates the importance of recognizing, acknowledging, and working through the tensions and disagreements that inevitably result from intersectional activism and coalition building.

³⁹ Stephen Lerner, conversation with author, August 17, 2016.

The history of Justice for Janitors also offers an important lesson in striving for balance between the process of organizing and the purported goals of such organizing. A comprehensive look at the successes and failures of the campaign point to the importance in particular of worker participation in and ownership over organizing campaigns. While outsiders can play an invaluable role in helping to build and sustain a campaign, initial campaign leaders should actively work to develop rank-and-file leaders, especially rank-and-file leaders who reflect the ethno-racial, gender, and age diversity of the workforce.

Lastly, and I would argue most importantly, the history of the Justice for Janitors campaign illustrates the value of drawing from the lessons of the past and conscientiously embracing an open source approach to unionism in the present and future. Such an approach, which is rooted in a process of reflection, adaptation, and information sharing, proved incredibly valuable throughout the history of the Justice for Janitors campaign and is proving valuable in ongoing labor and social movement activism. This approach offers a hopeful means to eventually developing and sustaining a workers' struggle capable of uniting individuals across the globe and achieving a more just alternative to neoliberal capitalism.

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