

Chapter Four

Building Coalitions for Regional Power: Labor's Emerging Urban Strategy

By David Reynolds

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Urban politics scholars have long realized that the governing power structure of a city or urban area encompasses far more than elected officials and public administration. (See for example, Stone and Sanders 1987, Stone 1989, Clavel 1986, and Clavel and Wiewel 1991.) Because local government capacity and authority are limited public officials must ally with private groups that can offer knowledge and resources necessary to impact the region's economic future. Typically, urban politics in the United States revolves around various alliances between local government officials and private business. Such regimes have governing "power" in the sense that they are able to set the terms of public debate and practice around regional economic and social development. Recently, however, labor and its allies in a small but growing number of urban areas have begun to put into place systematic strategies for establishing alternative progressive power. They aim not simply to elect progressive majorities, but also to establish the broader resources and knowledge base that will allow new coalitions to govern a region by defining the public debate over its economic and social future from inside and outside the halls of government. We refer to this general strategy as regional power building.

This paper draws on case studies conducted in seven cities to identify six defining components that make regional power building a distinct strategy: deep coalition building, aggressive political action, economic development agendas, "think and do" tanks, leadership development, and growing organizational capacity. We refer to "region" as a greater metropolitan area -- a core city and its surrounding suburban rings.

Regional Power Building in Seven Cities

In 2003 the AFL-CIO Field Mobilization department, the AFL-CIO Central Labor Council Advisory Committee, and the United Association for Labor Education's Central Labor Council Task Force

launched the Building Regional Power Research Network (powerbuilding.wayne.edu) to document and promote self-conscious power-building work by central labor councils. Our cases draw from those experiences identified by key activists and staff as the best examples of power building work underway in the country.¹ The seven cases available at the time of this paper were San Jose, Los Angeles, Denver, Houston, Seattle, Cleveland, and Buffalo. Below we offer a snap shot of each before exploring in detail the common forces at work and the six components of common strategy. Table 1 provides summary information on the size of the councils, their principle affiliates, and their direct staffing resources.

San Jose offers a well-established case that has served as a model for others. Although citizen movements of the 1970s shaped the area's moderate-liberal governing regime, organized labor traditionally had not had strong political influence. At the same time, the much-touted economic growth in Silicon Valley has had a significant dark side. An explosion of low-paying service jobs and contingent work has combined with a high cost of living. Following the election of Amy Dean as its president in 1994, the South Bay Labor Council began to build a capacity for labor and its allies to shape the future direction of the Valley's political economy. Organizers describe their strategy in terms of three legs: labor-community coalition building, aggressive political action, and developing a capacity for policy research and development. Building these legs has entailed increasing political coordination among union affiliates and key community allies, founding a non-profit "think and do" tank called Working Partnerships USA, building of an active interfaith committee, and launching a series of city and county policy campaigns. Ten years later leaders point to concrete victories around such areas as living wage campaigns, a children's health initiative, and affordable housing. The ability to enact local government reforms around these areas reflected a growing electoral capacity that has produced pro-labor majorities in San Jose and suburban Sunnyvale.

Faced with a Republican-dominated state government and an affiliate base of only 50,000 Denver Area Labor Federation (DALF) leaders drew self-consciously on San Jose's three-legged strategy.² Following the 1998 election of Jobs With Justice staff person Leslie Moody as DALF's only full-time paid officer, the council revamped its political program. Rather than each union running its own operations, DALF convinced affiliates to place staff and rank-and-file members under its direction. These personnel fed into the core electoral activities of intensive voter registration, education, and get out the vote work. This increasingly effective electoral work delivered a string of successes (along with some defeats) for school board, city council, and state legislative races. In 2004, these seeds produced the first Democratically-controlled state legislature in forty years in addition to two Democratic U.S. House and Senate victories. DALF launched the Front Range Economic Strategy Center to help develop effective policy campaigns. FRESC has grown from one staff to six and a budget of \$450,000 in three years. Growing electoral and policy capacity has allowed DALF to pursue coalitions for intervening in regional economic development decisions. A success living wage campaign has been followed by an ongoing DALF and FRESC-led alliance to secure a community benefits agreement with the \$1 billion redevelopment of the former Gates Rubber Factory site. Partners on this later campaign include ACORN, 9 to 5, and Save our Section 8.

Power building components came together differently in Los Angeles, originating in two separate but complementary developments. In 1993, HERE Local 11 launched what is today called the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE). Now with two-dozen staff, LAANE builds a progressive voice for regional economic development decisions through research, policy development, and coalition building. LAANE, for example, has done extensive research and monitoring of the city's economic development programs. Findings show that Los Angeles leads the nation in generating poverty-wage jobs. The second development came in the mid-1990s when the LA Federation of Labor

began to revamp and reenergize its political program under the direction of Miguel Contreras. Today, the Federation coordinates hundreds of full-time precinct walkers supported by many more weekend volunteers. A number of alliances have proven key to the LA Federation's growing influence. The new Organization of Los Angeles Workers (OLAW) brought together labor and Latino groups to increase Latino voter participation in targeted, typically Republican-represented districts.³ A similar coalition with Action for Grassroots Empowerment and Neighborhood Development Alternatives (AGENDA) increases turnout in black-brown neighborhoods. Today the LA city council and several suburban communities have pro-labor majorities. Growing progressive political strength was reflected in the ability of the LA Federation's former political director Fabian Nuñez to not only win a California state house seat in his first time as a candidate in 2002, but to quickly become the house speaker – making him one of the most powerful Democrats in the state. LAANE's policy development has combined with the LA Federation's political capacity to produce a rich experience of coalition building around model living wage enforcement efforts, pioneering community benefits agreements, and several large-scale immigrant rights campaigns.

Our four other cases show leaders starting on a power building path by developing one or more components, although not necessarily a complete or self-conscious long-term project. In late 1999, Seattle became known worldwide for the massive demonstrations and direct action against the World Trade Organization. The large crowds in part reflected years of innovative coalition building by the King County Labor Council beginning in 1993 when Ron Judd was elected the council's executive secretary. Previously as president of the Seattle-King County Building and Construction Trades Council, Judd had worked to overcome years of tensions with minority communities by building alliances to increase minority and women apprenticeship opportunities and the use of union labor in public construction work. Throughout the 1990s the Council worked to build union and community

mobilization capacity around such key labor battles as the 1995 and 2000 strikes at Boeing. Using national AFL-CIO funds the Council launched Seattle Union Now as an ambitious plan to support worker organizing. When Steve Williamson succeeded Judd in 2000 he placed a greater emphasis on the council's electoral program, including helping to elect a pro-labor Seattle Mayor. The new millennium has also seen increasing coalition work around public economic development efforts and support for union organizing and bargaining within the city's massive port and airport facilities.

With its massive deindustrialization Cleveland represents a classic rust-belt city. Following his election in 1987, Cleveland council executive secretary John Ryan worked to revitalize the area's labor-backed United Way affiliate (the United Labor Agency) by not simply renewing its traditional community service work but by expanding the organization's scope into such areas as a dislocated worker program, a community hiring hall for displaced and homeless workers, support for minority union apprenticeship training in the building trades, housing renovation, and a nonpartisan voter registration project. The Council has also worked with affiliates to better coordinate political endorsements and campaign work. A 2001 school bond issue and a living wage campaign are among its successes. The United Labor Agency and the Cleveland AFL-CIO also provided seed money to launch Policy Matters Ohio as a non-profit institute that conducts research on economic and policy issues in Cleveland and Ohio. The Council also established a full-time position to support multi-union organizing.

Unlike Cleveland and Seattle labor has never had a strong presence in Houston. An exploding immigrant population could have been seen as a threat by the area's struggle largely Anglo union movement.⁴ Yet, when elected to the leadership of the Harris County AFL-CIO in 1995, Dale Wortham and Richard Shaw saw an opportunity to reach out to the Latino community around several initiatives. The council helped build a Justice and Equality in the Workplace Partnership to bring together

government, labor, and community groups to build awareness among immigrants of their legal protections at work and to strengthen governmental enforcement of these rights. The Council also supported a new Mayor's Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs staffed by an immigrant rights activist. As in many of the cases, the Houston Council was an active sponsor of the 2004 Immigrant Worker Freedom Rides. The Council also developed an active "street heat" capacity in the form of a yearly Justice Bus that delivers a bus load of union and community activists to confront hostile employers. More recently the council has begun to enter into economic development debates and is working with affiliates and a local interfaith organization to expand its Community Services Program into a more comprehensive Workers' Center.

Buffalo, by contrast, has traditionally been one of the most unionized cities in the county. Yet, like Cleveland it has witness deindustrialization and declining union density. Beginning in the 1970s these challenges produced strong efforts at labor-management cooperation to save existing industrial jobs through high performance workplaces. What makes Buffalo notable, however, is how this workplace activism grew into broader community projects that have positioned labor as a major player in regional economic development decisions -- connecting unions with a rich array of coalitions within the community. Today the union-driven Economic Development Group serves as the project coordinator for several major public-private initiatives including electricity relicensing, a downtown biomass heating system, and a minority jobs training initiative. The joint labor-management Champions Network promotes the area's skilled, high performance unionized workforce as an advantage for would-be investors. At the same time, through the work of the Coalition for Economic Justice, unions have linked up with community groups to block the alternative "low road" in which employers compete by increasing the direct exploitation of their workforce and the community. Unlike the other cases this has

taken largely outside the local labor council and without the major transformation of union political action.

Common Forces at Work With Local Labor Movements

While our cases vary in their urban scale, traditional political climate, economic make up, and the level of development of their power building work, they share several characteristics common to power building innovations.

With the exception of Seattle and Buffalo, our case cities have traditionally not been known as labor strongholds. Even in Seattle and Buffalo declining union fortunes have played out in a way that has established a critical mass of local unions looking to confront a challenging future through new collective responses. In nearly every case traditional union political activity -- that sought insider access with individual office holders -- reached some kind of standstill. Instead, the agenda driving government policy had shifted firmly onto the neo-liberal ground of privatization, tax cuts, and “free market” economic development. Faced with a shifting local political framework, progressives generally are less able to pursue individual policy goals without both joining forces with other groups and seeking to move the overall terms of the regional debates back onto questions of social justice and corporate responsibility.

The cases also point to the growing importance of local (i.e. county, city, and municipal) politics for union political action. Several forces are at work. First, devolution from the federal government onto the states and from state governments onto the local level has pushed responsibility downward. At the same time conservative and neo-liberal dominance at the national level and within many state governments has made the local level the terrain most favorable for developing progressive policy responses. Second, despite the much-publicized forces of globalization, localized factors such as

regional labor markets, workforce development, infrastructure and energy costs, community quality of life, and regional consumer markets play major roles in firm success and investment decisions. Companies that pursue “high road” strategies typically rely on cooperation and resources that develop at a regional level. At the same time, a region’s political economy strongly influences the relatively availability and attraction of “low road” alternatives. Finally, in contrast to national and often state action, intervention in a region’s political economy does not involve necessarily confronting the corporate power structure head on. The on-the-ground opponents of regional power building work are typically not an alliance of big corporate players, but developers, retailers, hotels, and entertainment businesses that have a vested interest in both local economic development policy and low-wage business strategies.

Finally, innovation has generally followed from changes in labor council leadership. This pattern in part reflects the rise of a new generation of leaders coming out of specific local unions or allied groups (such as Jobs with Justice chapters). For these leaders even the most effective organizing and servicing by individual unions is not enough for labor’s rebound. Organized labor’s difficulties are rooted in the basic power imbalance between America’s democratic potential and runaway corporate power. Only by becoming a core force in building a revitalized progressive movement for political and economic change can unions hope to experience the kind of upsurge of the later 19th century or 1930s.

With our cases we are also seeing a critical change in the importance attached to central labor councils as a position attractive to innovative leadership. Traditionally central labor council positions have not served as centers of power in most local labor movements. Therefore the ambitions of rising and dynamic local leaders naturally tended to focus elsewhere. By contrast within most of our cases key gifted activists had come to view holding central labor council office as a position from which they could exercise important and meaningful leadership in their region.

Six Components of Power Building

While no one community is the same, collectively our cases point to an emerging six-part model for regional power building. Table 1 summarizes how each case fits into these six components. As we will argue, all six strategies are necessary to sustain successful progressive regional power building over the long term. Indeed, together they produce a sum that is far greater than the parts.

1. From Single Issue Alliances to Deep Coalition Building

In our cases, coalitions have formed around a range of issues including living wages, affordable housing, workers' right to organize, health care, immigrant rights, and job access. Labor's community partners have spanned the spectrum from low-income to interfaith to civil rights to environmental to immigrant rights groups. While labor-community coalition experiences in general have increased over the past two decades, the work found in our case studies stands out for combining three distinct characteristics.

First, groups are not simply supporting each other's organizational agendas. Coalition activity can include, for example, community support for union organizing and contract campaigns. However, the overall basis for alliance building lay in a process by which labor and community groups have developed new mutual agendas that often transcend their tradition activities. This transcendent character can be seen in such efforts as living wage campaigns, community/labor benefits agreements, the Children's Health Initiative, and labor protections for immigrant workers. In each case, the direct organizational interests of key partners became embedded in a larger community cause around which the campaigns were organized.

Second, the while the coalition work can involve a broad range of groups that vary from campaign to campaign, the power building cases also involve deliberate efforts to establish deeper

relationships among a core of partners. In San Jose, for example, cooperation between the labor council and ACORN around renters' rights and affordable housing produced a more formal partnership. In the summer and fall of 2003, a joint grassroots organizing team combining labor and ACORN organizers conducted door-to-door neighborhood visits in poor, predominantly immigrant neighborhoods in support of a new Community Benefits Initiative campaign. This partnership produced new ACORN members, greater community support for the community benefits initiative, and a stronger electoral base for labor. The labor-Latino political alliance in Los Angeles similarly reflects deep coalitions building. Union organizing and political action has become a path for Latino empowerment and, in turn, Latino political development strengthens labor.

Third, every case includes some form of significant outreach by labor specifically to minority communities --African-American, Latino, and immigrant. At least three logics appear to be at work. The low-income organizing of specific unions, such as SEIU and UNITE-HERE, has enmeshed them in minority communities. Alliances around broader community issues reflect these unions' organizing campaigns that have involved significant community outreach. In the process joining unions becomes framed as a key dimension of community development. As Bronfenbrenner has documented as a general rule minority workers are particularly receptive to unionization (Bronfenbrenner 1998).

New coalition work has also set out to address past tensions between organized labor and minority communities. For example, the pre-apprenticeship training and minority hiring programs seen in several cases respond to a history of conflict over job access between the building trades unions and African-American and Latino communities. Over the past twenty years non-union contractors have used their base in residential construction to move into the core areas of union industrial work. They have sought to draw on African-American, Latino, and immigrant workers as a source of both skilled and unskilled labor (Linder 2000). Either the building trades unions find ways to build alliances in such

communities or these workers provide a weapon for employers to use against organized labor.

Finally, the new connections between labor and minority communities reflect a common dilemma of local political marginalization or declining influence. For minority communities the local regime has either locked them out all together or their representation is dominated by business-oriented, middle-class elites. Basic math on potential voter numbers naturally suggests political alliances – neither labor nor specific minority communities alone have the strength to achieve electoral power.

2. New Alliances for Aggressive Political Action

As with coalition building, grassroots electoral activism by itself signifies nothing new. However, our cases point to a decisive shift in the goal and scope of this work. Put concisely, power-building aims not simply to elect endorsed candidates or enact specific policy reforms, but to establish a capacity to govern. This capacity has several aspects.

First, power building requires an expanded scale of electoral mobilization. During the 2001 Los Angeles mayoral race, for example, OLAW fielded one hundred and fifty full-time precinct walkers six weeks before the election. In addition, the LA Federation mobilized 2,700 volunteers. In most of the cases, labor and its allies have developed some form of systematic electoral program that strategically examines an area's voting patterns and then marshals the resources needed to raise voter turnout among targeted populations.

Second, increased scale is possible due to greater political coordination among key partners. Power-building central labor councils have assumed a more central role in coordinating and directing union political work. Most significantly, in many cases they have taken over directing union members brought out of their workplace and placed on "lost-time" by their locals. Control over this resource has been traditionally well guarded by individual unions.

Third, power building places the electoral mobilization in the context of a more coherent and coordinated progressive message. While in no case has a power-building project been able to produce a comprehensive blue print for regional change, over time the many electoral and policy reform campaigns have articulated a greater common sense of progressive values, given more priority to a messages of social and economic justice, and raised questions about corporate power.⁵ Issues such as job creation move from the neo-liberal focus on raw numbers and a “better business climate” to questions of job quality and overall community well being.

Fourth, because of its other components, power building connects the general themes and issues raised during election seasons to practical grassroots organizing and legislative policy campaigns that are year round. With its emphasis on individualized candidate campaigns, such connections are rare in American politics.⁶

As electoral work and policy development takes on new life, power building begins to evolve the relationships that labor and its allies have with candidates. Traditionally, labor and community groups endorse candidates by seeking their positions on a range of specific issues. By contrast, power-building politics seeks a greater role in developing both candidates and their messages. In cases such as Denver, labor and its allies now require candidates to go through training on their core concerns. In San Jose, the development of current and future office holders is one of the outcomes sought by the Leaders Development Institute explained below.

Power building can lead to confrontations with centrist Democrats. Ongoing policy campaigns highlight the gap between progressive champions and the more limited horizons of centrist Democrats. This contradiction worked itself out in Los Angeles in 2001 when the LA County Federation backed Hilda Solis’ successful challenge to long-standing centrist member of Congress, Marty Martinez. Solis had led the fight in the California state legislature in 1996 to successfully raise the state’s minimum

wage. By supporting her, the County Federation sent a message that working people need “labor champions” and “labor warriors” in office.

3. The Glue: Where the Private Economy Connects with Public Decisions

By themselves, the above two components do not lead to the kind of sustained and coherent effort that grows progressive power over time. Elections are episodic and rarely do coalitions live beyond the issue or campaign that pulled groups together. Sustained power building requires a focal point that connects the many different efforts over time. This need highlights the significance of the emphasis placed on regional economic development policy found in all of the cases. Economic development provides an arena where private employer decisions connect with public authority and resources. Local policy tools include tax abatements and public financial assistance, zoning regulations, the public acquisition and selling of land, government contracting, local workforce development programs, and leases at public facilities such as airports and port authorities.⁷

By its very nature local development policy connects specific projects with ongoing questions of a region’s long-term future. It also provides an arena in which a modest investigative effort can unearth a compelling case for change. In Los Angeles, for example, LAANE’s research into two major local economic development programs found millions of dollars in public subsidies being spent with little effective criteria for community wellbeing. Job quality, for example, was not a criterion used in either program. Public efforts were not targeted specifically toward under-served communities. Indeed, the city had no coherent strategy targeting key industry sectors, but rather focused its energy on attracting individual firms. The reports recommended far less emphasis on retail and much greater attention to smaller projects. The research fed successful campaigns around living wage policies, labor peace compacts, and community benefits agreements. The lax standards shown in Los Angeles are all too typical. Given the business-driven nature of the process it comes as no surprise that such community-

destroying employers as Wal Mart enjoy lucrative economic development assistance from communities across the country.

The economic development arena offers activists the opportunity to organize around specific and winnable local reforms that nevertheless speak to larger issues of concern to labor and community groups. This dual nature can be seen in the success of living wage campaigns – identified in six of the seven cases in Table 1. On the one hand, the actual reform of requiring companies that receive public funds to pay a living wage is a fairly clear step that local governments generally have the power to enact. Because battles over local living wage ordinances usually do not draw in large corporate players, local campaigns can prevail over the opposition of local chambers of commerce and their local business allies. On the other hand, while the reach of living wage laws -- in terms of the portion of an area's working poor covered -- is quite modest, living wage campaigns speak to big questions about poverty wages, public spending, and the role of local government in private economic decisions. Indeed, the tendency of the opposition to speak of living wage ordinances as if they were across-the-board minimum wage laws or some even greater attempt at “government control over the economy” reflects the broad issues embedded in this very specific reform.

As Table 1 suggests, four of our cases have also produced what is likely the next step in economic development intervention beyond accountability measures: the community benefits agreement.⁸ These take the form of legally binding documents signed between a grassroots coalition and the developer of a specific large-scale project. The developer commits to such measures as a building a certain percentage of affordable housing, living wage requirements for leasing business, space and funds for childcare or youth centers, resources for community development projects, local hiring, prevailing wage construction, and neutrality and card check recognition for worker organizing drives. A potentially broad range of union and community partners can build their goals into such agreements. In

return, the developer receives the support of the coalition in moving through the public approval process. Community benefits campaigns take advantage of the fact that for developers time is money. The support or opposition of a grassroots coalition can have a major impact on both the speed and final outcome of the public process.

While living wage campaigns and community benefits agreements seek to raise standards, the kinds of “high road” economic development found in Buffalo points toward complementing work to better support and reward desirable company practices at a regional level. Today, most public economic development practice focuses on attracting outside investment on an isolated firm-by-firm basis. By contrast, power building develops alternative agendas that focus far more on locally grown and integrated resources, collective business success, and shared community prosperity.

The rich campaign work around the economic development arena contrasts with the notable lack of energy in our cases around local public social spending – a second potential source of glue for the long-term. The notable exception is the Children’s Health Initiative in San Jose. Here, however, leaders took advantage of a specific opportunity when city and county governments faced a decision on how to spend tobacco settlement funds. By contrast, our power building cases have not produced a clear response to the fiscal crisis facing local governments. For the past twenty-five years neo-liberal reforms at the state and federal level have set up the steady starvation of the public purse. The question of why no clear progressive agenda for reestablishing fair taxes and adequate social spending has emerged at the municipal level offers a promising avenue for exploration that is, however, beyond the scope of this paper. Part of the answer may lie in the fact that while local economic development may be constrained by larger forces it nevertheless involves clear local levers with real impact. By contrast, taxing and spending by local governments has been increasingly constrained by state and federal actions. In addition, tax reform and local public spending does not appear to speak as directly to the organizing

interests of unions such as SEIU, UNITE-HERE, and the building trades in the same way that economic development policy does.

4. Creating Cross-Movement Capacity for Research and Policy Development

All of our power building projects involve either founding new 501(c)3 “think and do tanks” or building a similar capacity out of existing resources. The kinds of coalition building, economic development work, and aggressive political action described above requires a capacity to understand the detailed workings of the local political economy and to develop specific progressive policy reforms that can then be fought for. As indicated in Table 1 the staffing resources of these non-profits typically exceeds that of the central labor bodies, often by significant margins.

While each have their own particulars, three non-profits – the LA Alliance for a New Economy, Working Partnerships USA (San Jose), and the Front Range Economic Strategies Center (Denver) – represent a common model. All pursue two research prongs. They produce general reports on the state of working people within their regional economy that highlight trends of growing inequality. They also conduct detailed investigations of local economic development programs that both identify the local levers of decisions and the lax standards and corporate welfare currently involved. Such understanding allows for focused and effective campaigns for living wages, subsidy accountability, and community benefits agreements.

These non-profits, however, do not simply engage in applied research; they also participate in organizing. Non-profit staff help build policy coalitions. Indeed, where coalition partners have limited staff resources, the organizing capacities of these institutions can prove critical. Working Partnerships USA and LAANE both served as incubators for developing regional interfaith coalitions focused specifically on worker issues.⁹ LAANE also fostered a grassroots membership organization called Santa Monicans for Responsible Tourism (SMART) that fought for a zone-based living wage ordinance and

that has supported worker organizing and contract efforts in the city's booming hospitality industry. The general "think and do" model reflected in these three non-profits have such produced spin offs as the East Bay Alliance for a New Economy in Oakland and the Center for Policy Initiatives in San Diego.

The other cases have attempted to generate a similar capacity in different ways. In Seattle, leaders have struggled to redefine the work of an existing Workers Center to incorporate greater power building work. Specifically the Center has taken on a greater role in supporting economic development campaigns. With an eye to enhancing immigrant rights work in Houston, the labor council and its allies are currently working to put a Workers Center in place. In Cleveland, council leader John Ryan helped found Policy Matters Ohio. Because it generates some of its funding by providing research support to local unions and because it supports progressive policy efforts at the state level Policy Matters Ohio has grown as a more strictly research organization. In Buffalo, the innovative economic development efforts have drawn heavily on the capacities of staff at the Cornell-Buffalo School of Industrial Relations.

The Partnership for Working Families began as a network of the key power-building non-profits in California. In 2005 it brought on new staff to support power-building efforts across the country. By 2006 the Partnership was supporting efforts in at least a dozen cities outside of California to establish community benefits and similar economic development campaigns and to found, staff, and fund non-profit "think and do" arms.

5. Establishing Collective Leadership Development and Bridge Builders

As a decade-long strategy power building must both expand the ranks of current leadership committed to the concept and ensure replacements for the current core leadership. In San Jose, the Labor-Community Leadership Institute (LCLI) brings together primary and secondary leadership from labor, religious, community, and political groups in a seven-session program that develops their understanding of the South Bay political economy and the potential for progressive change. The

program links to the other power building components. Working Partnerships' research and policy materials allow participants to talk about the regional economy and the levers of public authority at a very concrete level. This shared understanding and the one-on-one relationship that participants develop with each other strengthens the groundwork for coalition building. The curriculum includes a class project that plugs participants into some existing campaign. The Institute recruits political leaders as participants and the program explores in detail the roles of both elected officials and appointed boards in the regional political economy. Thus the Institute helps generate knowledgeable progressive champions among the pool of existing and future officeholders and candidates. It also produces "bridge builders" -- activists with background and experiences that span across different types of social movements.

Although Table 1 has many blank entries under leadership development this absence will likely change in the coming years. The importance of generating a network of leaders who share a common vision of regional change is reflected in current efforts to replicate the Labor-Community Leadership Institute model in other cities. The new non-profit Building Partnerships is working to establish Civic Leadership Institutes around the country. Still in its infancy this project is currently developing a general curriculum adaptable to local conditions.¹⁰ Pilot civil leadership institutes will be held in late 2005 in Denver, Boston, and Atlanta. Several of our other cases provide likely sites for future expansion.

6. Building Each Core Partner's Organizational Capacity

Since local government's authority and resources are limited changing the composition and agenda of public authority alone is not sufficient to govern a region. Power building must develop the capacities of non-governmental actors to support the public agenda and to organize for economic change directly. The "think and do" tanks are expression of this capacity. However, power building must also grow the capacities of its core grassroots players

A virtuous cycle must be established between political action, coalition building and union organizing. Unions provide crucial resources for engaging in electoral action, enacting policy, and building coalitions. Yet, ever since the AFL-CIO launched Union Cities in 1996 central labor councils have struggled to define a direct role in worker organizing. In Seattle, Los Angeles, and Cleveland the central labor councils have raised resources to support organizing staff. Defining their precise role has proven a difficult task. Should labor council staff view their role as organizing support for existing union efforts or developing innovative cross-union campaigns?

The links between power building and union growth has also emerged through three more indirect links. First, by establishing a capacity to intervene where public authority connects to private employers, power building provides leverage for deactivating anti-union campaigns and securing card-check and neutrality agreements or project labor accords. In Los Angeles, for example, living wage work fed directly into agreements with employers that helped SEIU and HERE build significant strength at the city airport and among area hotels. In Seattle, a coalition campaign helped secure local hiring, minority apprenticeship slots, and union labor at the city's large stadium project. DALF's ability to help elect to new school board members directly resulted in 125 part-time custodians being able to join CWA Local 7777. Political and coalition leverage was also crucial for allowing 4600 graduate students to unionize at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Second, the coalition partners formed around power building also become allies for worker organizing and contract campaigns. Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice, for example, has provided direct aid to HERE and SEIU efforts in and around Los Angeles. The Denver Building Trades Council worked with the revitalized Denver Federation of Labor and FRESA to successfully support efforts by Colorado University students to require strong union-supporting wage, benefits, and apprenticeship standards on \$400 million of campus construction. The Labor-Community Leadership

Institute curriculum includes discussions that build awareness among community leaders of the role and importance of unions for community change.

While political leverage and coalition allies have made a clear difference for organizing by specific unions, the overall numbers remain modest. Organizing gains in general come in units of hundreds and low thousands. However, as many labor historians have observed, the labor movement has never grown incrementally. Rather individual gains lay groundwork for major upswings when broader social and economic conditions foster a period of social awakening. (Clawson 2003).¹¹ Seen in this context power building provides a less measurable but no less important effect in changing the way in which unions are perceived within the broader community. In explaining his immigrant rights work to a local union representative, Houston council leader Richard Shaw commented, “We aren’t going to organize unions for him...but by the time he gets to the parking lot the workers will know who the hell he is and what he is there for.”¹² By pursuing building power, central labor council and key unions leaders are fostering a broad regional movement for social and economic justice that has labor at its center. In the process sectors of the community come to see joining and organizing unions as a central vehicle for community advancement.

Building organizational strength is not restricted to union organizing. Like unions, ACORN is a membership-driven organization. The joint organizing team formed between the South Bay Labor Council and the local ACORN chapter expresses in a formalized way a more general commitment shared by both labor and ACORN elsewhere to build mutual organizational capacity.

Power building also grows the capacities of regional labor bodies. This can take the form of direct organizational growth. The LA County Federation, for example, has grown to nearly two dozen staff. Looking a direct personnel, however, risks missing the main dynamics of growth. In Denver, for example, Leslie Moody remains the only full-time elected officer. Growth in many councils’

organizational capacity has taken place in two areas outside year round staff. First, foundation funds have allowed a noticeable staffing expansion in the “think and do” non-profit organizations. Working Partnerships USA has over twenty staff while FRESC and Policy Matters Ohio range between four and six. Second, councils have developed deeper relationships with core affiliates. Traditionally local unions have viewed council activities as external to their core operations. Through participation in power building work individual locals begin to integrate this council-driven agenda into their internal planning. In addition, unions become more open to sharing resources and capacity. The willingness of unions to place their staff and “lost-time” members under the control of the labor council during election seasons, for example, represents a major shift in the relationship between council and local unions.

Challenges for Effective Power Building

As on-going experiments, the cases reveal several challenges that leaders who pursue regional power building are likely to encounter. An examination of the most active players in our power building cases makes clear that this work must connect to the direct self-interest of the organizations involved. Labor and community leaders do not build power for its own sake or become active in coalitions because it is the right thing to do. They do so because establishing alliances, passing specific government policy, or growing political influence over the long term helps them address the central goals of their organizations. This does not mean such connections must be defined narrowly or simply in immediate terms. Indeed, participation in our cases can reflect a significant broadening by an organization in its understanding of the scope and time frame of its core interests. Thus, growing a constituency for power building efforts involves a twin process of defining the work to speak to different partners’ core goals while at the same time encouraging them to rethink what those self-interests involve.

Related to the above, in most of our cases manufacturing unions are noticeably marginal players in current power building work. This is especially noticeable in Cleveland and Seattle that have traditionally strong unionized manufacturing industries. In part this may reflect the different geographical scope of employers. Building owners and hotels operate in regional markets while large manufacturing firms define their operations in national and international terms. Buffalo, however, stands out as an exception to the above pattern. Why? The Buffalo-Niagara region enjoys relatively high union density based in manufacturing. As a way of saving jobs, manufacturing unions like the UAW pursued significant experiments in labor-management cooperation, worker training, and other innovations to produce high-performance workplaces. While such “high road” strategies are not unique to Buffalo-area unions, the case stands out for how a strictly workplace-restricted experience spilled over into activism around public economic development policy and community coalitions. The extent to which power building can connect to regional manufacturing revival strategies elsewhere represents a topic for greater investigation.¹³

Tensions can occur between labor councils and their affiliates. While power building may incorporate the growth strategies of the most active affiliates, other local unions may be only secondarily involved with the council’s agenda. Leaders of these latter unions may have varied opinions on the wisdom to allocating movement resources to power-building work. Work among immigrant and minority communities, in particular, can generate differences among affiliates since the full virtues of such connections are hardly universally accepted within the American labor movement. The same is true of economic development work. Our cases include examples in which economic development coalitions helped forge new alliances between building-trades unions and minority and immigrant communities and examples of how ongoing tensions between the two groups has worked to undermine such work. Economic development campaigns can offer new opportunities for building trades unions to

connect to such communities while building greater leverage over public construction. However, such campaigns can also seem to threaten traditional trades strategies that have sought project labor agreements on their own.

When initiative for power building first comes out of individual unions and allied groups, such as Jobs With Justice, tensions can develop with a more traditional or less capable labor council. In one case not covered in this paper, the prior leaders of a local labor council literally attempted to shut down a Jobs With Justice chapter that it saw as a direct threat to their leadership position. An opposite dynamic is also a danger when groups such as Jobs With Justice have traditionally filled mobilizing roles not provided by a central labor body. As a previously moribund council becomes more effective, it may draw in many of the roles and resources previously held by an active Jobs With Justice chapter. In several of our cases the new leadership of the council came directly from Jobs With Justice. Ironically, subsequent power building by the council led to a crisis of purpose for the Jobs With Justice chapter.

Finding greater resources represents an ongoing challenge. To avoid saturating national foundation sources, power building needs strategies to cultivate among regional funders. The ability of the Economic Development Group in Buffalo to become the managing body for major economic development initiatives offers an intriguing dimension of self-funding. While many union affiliates face declining resources full council affiliation by area unions (or some form of resource sharing in cases where affiliation may not be possible) could represent an effective way of steering scarce resources into a pooled capacity. Certainly council reorganization around power building provides a context for raising this question. Furthermore, the labor movement still raises large sums of money for electoral action. Even when such funds go to ground operations rather than candidate campaign coffers, the episodic nature of elections leaves behind a weak organizational legacy. By contrast, regional power

building work offers an ongoing framework conducive to maintaining and utilizing political capacities between election cycles.

The need to redeploy existing resources can present other challenges. What happens to a long-time employee when a council redefines its mission at the expense of traditional work that an individual may have dedicated his or her work life to? The changes in the mission and work of the Worker Center in Seattle and the United Way agency in Cleveland point to a related challenge at an organizational level.

Finally, leaders in several cases explicitly identified strategic planning as a central need. Indeed, our cases vary considerably as to whether work around individual campaigns and power-building components connects to a self-conscious vision for building power over the long term. Even when such a strategic perspective exists among key leaders, how many affiliate unions and allied groups share in this vision? The Leadership Institute model clearly aims to broaden the ranks of leaders with a shared long-term vision. Similarly, the AFL-CIO Field Mobilization Department has pursued leadership development that promotes greater strategic planning around regional power building.

The Promise of Regional Power Building

While power building puts into place the tools, relationships, and capacity to govern at a regional level, it can also provide the incubator for generating strong progressive movements for contesting state and national power. The 2004 Colorado electoral victories, the changes within the California Democratic state caucus, and Hilda Solis' win in Los Angeles all illustrate that since most election districts are a local geographical area, regional power building can also influence state and national politics. As was demonstrated in the history leading up to the New Deal, policy agendas first developed locally can be translated into state and national politics even when local reforms are blocked by interventions from higher levels.¹⁴ Regional power building also allows progressives to develop

messages and a vision that resonates with the public and candidates whose political career is built around championing progressive change. It also should strengthen the grassroots infrastructure for progressive change by growing the capacities of participating organizations and communities.

Finally, the transformation of central labor councils around power building raises the question of a similar potential for state labor federations. The work of Colorado state federation in 2004 to take over the election mobilization capacities first established by the Denver Area Labor Federation provides one example of innovative work. Certainly all of the six components outlined in this paper have relevance for state level power building. And thanks to American federalism, building a capacity to govern states opens the door to fight for such reforms as comprehensive healthcare reform, tax fairness, new public investments, and other potentially exciting and history-in-the-making agendas.

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¹¹ Full papers all seven cases, as well as other materials, are available at www.powerbuilding.wayne.edu. Los Angeles, San Jose, Denver, and Houston were originally published as the December 2004 issue of *Working USA*. (see Bryd and Nari, Frank and Wong, Luce and Nelson, and Karson) The project will document new cases of regional power building as they emerge. The author would like to thank members of the network, especially Barbara Byrd, Kent Wong, Stephanie Luce, Mark Nelson, and Tom Karson for their comments on this paper. Editor Dan Cornfield also provided excellent feedback on several drafts.

² For decades Colorado Republicans had dominated state politics. Indeed, for years labor stood only a few Republican swing votes away from passage of an outright Right to Work law. Even without a full Right to Work law unions in Colorado must win a second election in order to establish a union shop.

³ By 2000, Latinos had grown to encompass 45 percent of the LA county population. Like labor, the Latino communities traditionally had little influence in regional politics.

⁴ In 2000, 38 percent of the city's population was of Latino origin, 31 percent of Anglo.

⁵ Working Partnerships USA did attempt to develop a literal Blue Print for change among its partners. While the process produced several successful efforts around specific issues it failed to produce the kind of overarching and comprehensive progressive agenda that organizers had sought.

⁶ In theory political parties should provide a bridge between what is said during elections and the pursuit of concrete policy changes. However, in the United States weak party structures lead to a much more diffuse process. Candidates traditionally develop their own individualized campaigns that tend to focus on personality and general themes. Party structures play little role in policy development or debates – these functions instead growing out of the Byzantine world of interest group lobbying. Through power building activists are essentially establishing many of the functions that a strong party system would provide.

⁷ The specific strategy of providing subsidies to attract business investment has grown markedly over the past few decades. In 1977, for example, only 28 states had programs to grant businesses property tax abatements, via local governments, for machinery and equipment. By 1993, 41 states had such programs. Eight states allowed local governments to offer loans in 1977; 45 did by 1993. Numbers from the clearinghouse Good Jobs First – www.goodjobsfirst.org.

⁸ Indeed, our two most developed regional power-building movements, Los Angeles and San Jose, are also national leaders in this emerging arena

⁹ Called The Interfaith Council on Race, Religion, Economic and Social Justice and Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice.

¹⁰ The author has served as the developer for this curriculum. For more information contact David Reynolds at aa2589@wayne.edu.

¹¹ Also Nelson Liechtenstein personal conversation.

¹² From an interview with Richard Shaw conducted by Tom Karson, November 2003.

¹³ With its innovative manufacturing partnership (The Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership) and its dynamic and active labor council Milwaukee offers a particularly promising potential case study in this regard. For a discussion of the Milwaukee experience see Reynolds 2002 chapter eight, and Eimer 2001.

¹⁴ Indeed, most of the federal policy reforms that progressive generally support, including most of the New Deal, historically had precursors in pioneering state and local laws. Similarly, Canada's single-payer health system was born out of a system first established in the single province. The hoped for ability of Community Benefits Agreement work in California to move from city to state policy provides a current example of the same dynamic.

Table 1 Summary of Power Building Work

	Buffalo	Cleveland	Denver	Houston	Los Angeles	San Jose	Seattle
Council Name and staffing	Area Labor Federation added to Central Labor Council*	Cleveland AFL-CIO Federation of Labor – 7 staff	Denver Area Labor Federation – 3 staff	Harris County AFL-CIO – 4 staff	Los Angeles County Federation of Labor – 20 staff	South Bay Labor Council – 8 staff	King County Labor Council – 5 staff
Principle Affiliates & Overall Affiliate Base**	CWA, IBEW, IBT, SEIU, USWA, public sector, IAM, OPEIU, PACE, UFCW, UAW 85,000+	AFSCME, UFCW, SEIU, AFT, CWA, Building Trades, Firefighters, UNITEHERE Over 140 affiliate locals	UFCW, CWA, SEIU, AFT, IAM, APWU, AFGE 50,000	CWA, PACE, IBEW, AFT, UFCW, ILWU, 70,000	SEIU, AFT, UFCW, Entertainment industry unions, UNITEHERE, IBT 700,000 members	SEIU, UFCW, UNITEHERE, AFSCME, Building Trades 110,000 members	IAM, SPEEA/IFPTE, UFCW, Building Trades, SEIU, IBT, UNITEHERE 150,000 members
1. Deep Coalition Building***	Minority Training Labor-management partnerships Early childhood education	Minority jobs access: community hiring hall, construction pre-apprenticeship program Housing revitalization School bond	Living Wage Immigrant Worker Freedom Rides	Immigrant Rights including Justice and Equality in the Workplace Worker Development Center Justice Bus	Immigrant-Labor voting block Ethnic media outreach Immigrant Rights Economic justice campaigns Anti-Wal Mart	Children’s Health Initiative Inclusionary zoning – affordable housing Smart Growth	WTO protests Boeing strikes Housing issues Building trades-minority apprenticeships
2. Aggressive Political Action	Voter registration and GOTV	Voter registration Affiliate-council coordinators	Staff& lost timers from affiliates Candidate briefing program	Labor-to-neighbor	Staff& lost timers from affiliates Aggressive labor-community precinct operations and	Staff& lost timers from affiliates Office holder policy education sessions	Labor-neighbor Strengthen endorsement process Strategic targeting of Port & council races

					phone banks.		
3. Economic Development Agenda	Living Wage Champions Group Energy re-licensing Downtown heating High toad business attraction	Living Wage	Living Wage Community Benefits Agreement Reports on regional economy and public policy.	Unsuccessful Minimum Wage Broker PLA	Living Wage Community Benefits Agreements Reports on regional economy and public policy.	Living Wage Community Benefits Agreement Reports on regional economy and public policy.	Port expansion Leverage development agreements – building trades and hospitality
4. “Think and Do” Tank – and staff	Economic Development Group – expand to 5 staff Cornell ILR Champions Network – 2 staff	United Labor Agency –35 staff Policy Matters Ohio – 4 staff	Front Range Economic Strategy Center – 6 staff	Worker Development Center	LAANE – 20+ staff	Working Partnerships USA –20 staff	Workers Center – 7 staff
5. Leadership Development			Piloting Civic Leadership Institute			Labor-Community Leadership Institute	
6. Sample of Building Core Partners (not included in the above)	Coalition for Economic Justice Champions Network Economic Development Group	Union Construction Industry Partnership Jobs with Justice Day Laborers Organizing Committee Full-time organizing coordinator	Jobs with Justice ACORN Leveraged political and community support for organizing	Immigrant work with faith groups & SEIU City of Houston Building Trades – Immigrant work ACORN	Incubate SMART and Clergy and Laity United Leveraged political and community support for organizing by SEIU and UNITE HERE, etc.	ACORN – Council Partnership Interfaith Council Leverage political and grassroots support for union organizing and bargaining.	Jobs with Justice Church Council of Greater Seattle Environmental alliances Leverage political and grassroots support for union

							organizing and bargaining.
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Note in the interest of space entries are intended as selected samples only, not as a comprehensive summary of all the activities found in each case.

* In Buffalo power building was not initiated out of the central labor council. ** Affiliates list the situation prior to July 2005

*** Deep Coalition Building also includes the partnerships behind the projects listed under Economic Development Agenda.