

The Geographies of the \$15 Wage Movement:
New Union Campaigns, Mobility Politics, and Local Minimum Wage Policies

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A dissertation

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University of Washington

2017

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

Geography

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Abstract

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The \$15 wage movement has grown substantially since the first \$15 minimum wage initiative was passed in SeaTac, Washington in 2013. This dissertation investigates the geographies of the \$15 wage movement that has developed in the years since. Taking the form of a three-part comparative case study, this dissertation traces the connections and disconnections between \$15 minimum wage campaigns in Seattle, Washington, Chicago, Illinois, and two cities in North Carolina, Greensboro and Durham. Drawing on one year of fieldwork and 101 interviews with policymakers, labor union staff, and activists, it argues that the \$15 wage movement is an example of a broader shift in labor organizing that has taken root in the last decade, which takes labor organizing out of its traditional location within workplaces and into broader social, political, and economic geographies. This geographic shift in the location, scale, and organization of labor politics is a long-awaited response to the spatial reorganization of work that occurred

gradually beginning in the 1970s, which has changed the potential spatiality of workplace solidarity. This study analyzes the discursive contestations of the \$15 wage movement, both nationally and within local campaigns, as the campaign seeks to contest dominant understandings of how the low-wage labor market functions. It investigates the spatial organization of the Fight for \$15, SEIU's signature organizing campaign, noting how national-level coordination is carried out (or not carried out) on the local level and arguing that mobility between local campaigns is a central spatial strategy. Lastly, it investigates the politics surrounding the \$15 minimum wage policy itself, using a historical view of minimum wage policy to argue that cycles of mobilization are tied to electoral politics and to the politics of rendering policies technical, ostensibly apolitical, and therefore mobile.

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Acknowledgements

In the five years I have been working on my PhD, the people who have given their time, their resources, and their insight to this project are too numerous to count.

First, I need thank the more than 100 people who gave freely of their time to talk with a graduate student who approached them more or less out of thin air. In particular, I am grateful to Sarah Finken, Andrew Beane, Sejal Parikh, Sterling Harders, Sage Wilson, Jonathan Rosenblum, Leonard Smith, Michelle O'Brien, and Memo Rivera, who are not only collaborators in this project, but colleagues and friends. The work you do is inspiring, and I hope I have done it justice here.

Without funding support from the Harry Bridges Labor Center, the National Science Foundation, the Howard Martin Travel Award from the UW Department of Geography, and the Center for Engaged Scholarship, this project would not have been completed. The SeaTac/Seattle Minimum Wage History Project is an important project that I was lucky to be part of. I am so grateful and privileged to have been able to spend the last few years of my life entirely dedicated to this project because of this support.

To my colleagues in the UW geography department over the years who read drafts and watched first run-throughs of presentations: thank you. To Arianna Muirow, who got me started on this last year thinking we could both finish: thank you. To Tim Palmer, whose insights into labor movement history and strategy are peerless: thank you. Others along the way have supported this project in so many ways. We are the sum total of the people with whom we spend our days, and I am lucky to count you all as my friends.

I would like to thank my committee (Michael Brown, Mark Ellis, and George Lovell) for comments, nudges, and course work that have been foundational to this project. I would also like to thank my advisor, Kim England, for thoughtful comments, long hours on Skype, and constant advocacy on my behalf. Advising a dissertation is an ultimate act of care, and I appreciate all that you have done to help me get to this point.

Finally, measureless gratitude to my family: Austen, for your Sunday dinners in Chicago and endless arguments about art and activism; Kate, for your thoughtful contributions to said arguments about art and activism; Mom for being proud of me no matter what; and Dad, for always asking me how life in the Comintern was going. And to Naihomy, who gave me a great reason to stay in North Carolina, and the support I needed to finish.

Chapter 1:

Introducing the Geographies of the \$15 Wage Movement

In 2012, the US federal minimum wage was \$7.25. The highest minimum wage in the country was the \$12.06 minimum wage in San Francisco, one of the most expensive cities in the country. Washington State, which had pegged its minimum wage to inflation in the late 1990s, had the highest state minimum wage, at \$9.04. It had been several years since the national minimum wage had increased, and the purchasing power of the minimum wage had gradually declined because of inflation. Democrats in Congress half-heartedly called for a national raise to \$10.10, but the issue was generally dismissed as a political non-starter. In the face of increasing right-wing political ascendancy throughout the country, who could have imagined that a just year later major cities and states would begin implementing new \$15 minimum wage standards? Yet, alongside the rising conservative momentum that would sweep Republican majorities into legislatures across the country, the next five years would see a veritable explosion of activity pushing a \$15 minimum wage through all levels of government. By 2017, more than 20% of workers in the United States would be living in jurisdictions that were phasing-in a \$15 minimum wage.

Rumblings of activity on the left had long suggested that the minimum wage should be higher, even much higher, than it currently was. Living wage proponents, who had been perfecting different methodologies for determining which wages would allow people to live comfortably depending on cost of living since the 1990s, still produced reports and ran campaigns to increase municipal contractor wages. By 2003, 121 local governments had passed such ordinances, all of

which mandated wages lower than \$15 per hour and were limited to municipal employees and contractors (M. Brenner & Luce, 2005). Barely a dozen new cities adopted living wage ordinances in the 2000s. Before 2012, only 5 cities had minimum wage ordinances; by September 2017, 33 had adopted such ordinances (UC Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education, 2016). Moreover, 20 cities and counties had adopted a minimum wage that would reach \$15.00 an hour. See Table 1.1 for a complete listing of cities with minimum wage ordinances and the years they were enacted.

Then, in November of 2012, fast food workers in New York City walked off the job for a daylong strike action, calling for \$15 and a union. A year later, airport workers in a small suburb of Seattle, SeaTac, Washington, narrowly won a city initiative that raised wages to \$15 an hour, mandated paid sick leave, and introduced a novel full-time work provision for current employees. Soon, Seattle had passed a \$15 minimum wage for workers within the city that would be phased in over several years. San Francisco, then Los Angeles, then El Cerrito, then Mountain View, then Santa Monica quickly followed suit. Suddenly, a minimum wage that was preposterous just months earlier was being adopted and put into effect everywhere from Seattle to Washington, D.C. Conservative states like Arkansas and South Dakota were adopting higher minimum wages. Large private employers such as Facebook were requiring their contractors to pay \$15 minimum wages. Union employers were writing \$15 minimum wages into new collective bargaining agreements, in industries from health care to municipal employment. These victories weren't contained in safe progressive cities and states, either: Greensboro and Durham, North Carolina, were defying their reactionary state legislature to pass \$15 minimum wages for municipal employees, while Birmingham, Alabama, was also defying its solidly conservative state legislature to pass a \$10.10 citywide minimum wage, though this law would be pre-empted by the state of Alabama before it could go into effect. Nor were these victories merely local: by 2016, the two largest states in the country, California and New York, had implemented plans to raise their state minimum wages to

\$15 per hour. This alone will cover more than 58.5 million people, almost 20% of the entire US population.

Table 1.1: Cities and Counties with Minimum Wage Ordinances¹

Locality (year enacted)	Highest Maximum Wage (year reached)
Albuquerque, NM (2012)	\$8.50 (2013)
Bangor, ME (2015)	\$9.75 (2019)
Berkeley, CA (2016)	\$15.00 (2018)
Chicago, IL (2014)	\$13.00 (2019)
Cupertino, CA (2016)	\$15.00 (2019)
El Cerrito, CA (2015)	\$15.00 (2019)
Emeryville, CA (2015)	\$15.00 (2018)
Flagstaff, AZ (2016; amended 2017)	\$15.50 (2021) (or \$2.00 above state MW)
Las Cruces, NM (2014)	\$10.10 (2019)
Los Altos, CA (2016)	\$15.00 (2019)
Los Angeles, CA (2015)	\$15.00 (2021)
Malibu, CA (2016)	\$15.00 (2021)
Miami Beach, FL (2016)	\$13.31 (2021)
Milpitas, CA (2017)	\$15.00 (2019)
Minneapolis, MN (2017)	\$15.00 (2022)
Mountain View, CA (2015)	\$15.00 (2018)
Oakland, CA (2014)	\$12.25 (2015)
Palo Alto, CA (2015)	\$15.00 (2019)
Pasadena, CA (2016)	
<i>large businesses (26 or more employees)</i>	\$13.25 (2018)
<i>small businesses (25 or fewer employees)</i>	\$12.00 (2018)
Portland, ME (2015)	\$10.68 (2017)
Richmond, CA (2014)	\$13.00 (2018)
San Diego, CA (2014)	\$11.50 (2017)
San Francisco, CA (2014)	\$15.00 (2018)
San Jose, CA (2016)	\$15.00 (2019)
San Leandro, CA (2016)	\$15.00 (2020)
San Mateo, CA (2016)	\$15.00 (2020)
Santa Clara, CA (2015)	\$11.00 (2016)
Santa Fe, NM (2003)	\$9.50 (2005)
Santa Monica, CA (2016)	\$15.00 (2021)
Seattle, WA (2014)	\$15.75 (2020)
Sunnyvale, CA (2014; amended 2016)	\$15.00 (2018)
Tacoma, WA (2015)	\$12.00 (2018)
Washington D.C. (2014; amended 2016)	\$15.00 (2020)

¹ Many cities employed different phase-in timelines for large and small businesses, which they defined in various ways. Most, with the exception of Pasadena, eventually reached the same minimum wage rate. For the sake of simplicity, the date listed is the date at which the slower phase-in timeline completed.

The actions that precipitated these minimum wage laws, beginning with the fast food strike in New York City, were not spontaneous. Rather, they were deeply embedded in a multiple year effort to strategically shift the new union organizing work of the largest service sector union in the country, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). The coalition of unions and community groups organizing the fast food workers stretched across the country, concentrated in large urban centers with strong traditions of union strength, with large SEIU locals from Seattle to Miami funding and staffing community organizing efforts. After years of activity focused on issues ranging from an opposition to corporate tax loopholes to austerity cuts, these groups had settled on a call to action that would resonate across space, across industry, across occupations, and across multiple intersections of identity: The Fight for \$15. From its origin in a tightly organized and massively resourced campaign sponsored by the SEIU, the new \$15 wage movement would continue to spread, grow, and expand. Over the next few years, it would be taken up or reintroduced by third party socialist activists, by militant democratic unions unaffiliated with the SEIU, and by progressive policymakers eager to align themselves with progressive headwinds.

This dissertation is an analysis of the spread and growth of the \$15 wage movement, a movement that is changing how labor unions organize workers, how we view the role of cities in labor regulation, and the how policymakers conceptualize the purpose of the minimum wage itself. The explosion of local campaigns to substantially increase the minimum wage raises represents a dramatic rethinking of labor organizing strategy, a rethinking of the authority of cities in establishing labor regulations, and a rethinking of the sorts of social and economic problems the minimum wage can solve. A \$15 minimum wage is more than a bare-bones wage floor designed to protect workers from the worst forms of abject exploitation. It is a statement of hope and a site of possibility, the chance to get ahead rather than subsist. It is an effort to combat not only poverty but also to combat inequality and corporate welfare. The rescaling of minimum wage labor regulation to the city follows

the neoliberal trend of localizing economic governance, but also signals new strategies that recognizes that political opportunity structures for progressive change are increasingly localized. These changes to local labor policy processes and to labor union strategy make the \$15 wage movement a profound counter example to the ascendance of reactionary conservative politics in the US.

More than a retrospective of a single, on-going campaign, however, this dissertation is an exploration of how an idea travels. As the \$15 minimum wage has traveled from place to place, it has begun to exceed the initial SEIU-sponsored campaign that began it. It was adopted quickly and decisively by labor activists, both in the institutionalized trade union movement and in grassroots organizations, but it has also been adopted by policymakers and by business people. This dissertation therefore explores how an idea – an idea that is at once a rallying cry, a plea for justice, and a policy prescription – is made mobile, how it moves through networks of institutions and people, and how it is then adopted, adapted, and implemented in specific places. Meanwhile, it is also attentive to the fact that the \$15 minimum wage is not just any viral idea: unlike the many neoliberal reforms that have ‘gone viral’ over the last generation, it is not an idea that is part of a political movement that could be said to be on the ascendance in any other way. Rather, the \$15 wage movement grew out the organizational heart of institutionalized trade union movement in the US in an explicitly orchestrated experimentation in novel spatial organizing strategies. The novel combination of a well-worn and pragmatic scalar politics with a strategy that emphasizes mobility (of people, policies, and campaigns) represents a unique response to the spatial reorganization of work relationships under late capitalism.

This dissertation is concerned with the geographic movement of the \$15 wage, both as a policy idea and as the embodiment of spatially novel campaign strategies employed by an embattled labor movement. The \$15 wage movement is an exciting example of pro-worker progressive

victories being won in neoliberal times, but it is also controversial within the labor movement because of how it re-conceptualizes the scales, spaces, and goals of union organizing. Because of this, this dissertation is devoted to understanding these strategic decisions from the point of view of a moribund trade union movement in the US. I argue that the \$15 wage movement characterizes a moment in which the spatiality of labor organization is being reconfigured in response to the spatial reorganization of work and employment relationships. In particular, two spatial reconfigurations are important: moving from workplace-centered campaigns to more broadly-conceived community campaigns and employing new mobility strategies involving policy change to build worker power.

The arguments below are based on a comparative case study of three iterations of \$15 wage movement activism. I followed campaigns as they developed in Seattle, Chicago, and two cities in North Carolina, Durham and Greensboro. Each of these cities was different from the other: they represent different regions, different economic bases and trajectories, different positions within their state political systems, and different connections with labor organizing. Each engaged in deeply specific policy processes that would result in distinct versions of minimum wage law, ranging from a universal \$15 minimum wage in Seattle to a \$13 minimum wage in Chicago to a \$15 minimum wage for city workers in Greensboro and Durham. Yet, each city was connected by webs of activism and implicated in the broader \$15 wage movement that was sweeping the country. I interviewed 101 labor union staff, worker activists, city staff members, members of city-sponsored working groups, community activists, business leaders, politicians, journalists, and independent policy analysts. I participated in actions, rallies, marches, public and private meetings. I reviewed policy documents, economic reports commissioned by various organizations, internal campaign materials, and public-facing campaign materials such as Facebook postings. I followed media accounts of the campaigns. Through it all, I asked how the campaigns and the minimum wage policy were traveling: what conditions smoothed the road for an ambitious policy change like a \$15 local minimum wage? What

blocked or discouraged adoption? What strategies were successful, and in what places? I was particularly attuned to these moments of connection, as well as the moments of disconnection, which conditioned the movement of campaigns and the policies that were crafted as a result of these campaigns.

The result is a dissertation that is organized as a three-paper dissertation. It compiles three separate empirical chapters, a methods chapter, a chapter that reviews relevant literature to contextualize and draw connections between the three empirical chapters, and a conclusion that discusses some recent developments and considers what may come. Each empirical chapter draws on research from the three field sites. However, some chapters rely more on evidence from some places than others. Seattle, being the site of the first successful campaigns for \$15 minimum wages in the country plays an important role in each of the chapters.

In Chapter 2, I offer an overview of the literature on the current sociopolitical and economic context facing labor unions in the US. By tracing the historic path of union organization in the US, which was shaped by legal organization, economic processes, and strategic decisions by labor leaders, I identify several challenges facing labor unions that are a result of the ongoing spatial reorganization of work. Then, I contextualize the \$15 wage movement by identifying several spatial strategies that characterize “new labor” union organizing. These include a new relationship with city-based organizing, a reinvigorated and complex engagement with the politics of scale, and a new engagement with socio-spatial positionality and social identity markers in addition to class. Finally, I explore the increasing importance of policy campaigns in labor organizing and turn towards the emerging mobilities paradigm for insight into how strategies that center the mobility of resources, ideas, and policies themselves influence the movement of \$15 minimum wages.

The empirical chapters each take on a specific aspect of the \$15 wage movement. Chapter 4 analyzes the methods and arguments used by minimum wage activists as they contest dominant narratives about how the low-wage labor market functions. Using a wide range of data, from interviews to policy documents to an analysis of campaign Facebook posts, I categorize three different strategies used by minimum wage activists to re-conceptualize low-wage work and the low-wage labor market. The first borrows from Keynesian ideas about the economy, arguing that the economy is a unified whole that is improved by conceiving of low-wage workers as pre-middle class consumers rather than workers. The second emphasizes the importance of race and neoliberal subjectification in the classification of low-wage workers as a class of workers who deserve low pay, using a racial economy framework to highlight and critique the imperative of self-improvement. The final category emphasizes a moral economy approach, incorporating professions of love and a deeper consideration of the worth of workers into activism.

Chapter 5 turns specifically to the organization of SEIU's signature campaign, the Fight for \$15. This campaign does not represent the extent of the \$15 wage movement (as other components of this dissertation make clear), but it is the most important union-backed community organizing campaign to emerge in the last few years. Through an analysis of the development of this campaign, which originated as an ambitious community organizing experiment and morphed into an international low-wage worker movement that crosses industry and occupations, I explore the chaotic geography of Fight for \$15 protests. I argue that the novel geographies – jumping scale, utilizing mobilities, and attending to place-specificity – are an important component of the new form of union organizing represented by this campaign.

Chapter 6 turns to the \$15 minimum wage policy itself. The minimum wage itself is almost adorably old-fashioned, bearing little in common with the innovative policies that have captivated contemporary policy scholars and city governments. Yet, it is meaningful in its conventionality, and

events of the past five years suggest it has entered into a new historical cycle of increased mobility. I argue that tracing the cycles of mobility and innovation that accompany an explicitly partisan and contentious policy like the minimum wage helps identify the ways that policies are put to the service of electoral politics, and the way electoral politics are put to the service of policy campaigns. More than this, though, the contemporary policy-making process endeavors to render even the most contentious policies technical and rational, creating the appearance of an apolitical process.

I conclude in Chapter 7 with a brief summary of where we've come in the meantime, since this project began. The \$15 minimum wage in Seattle is by now so well established that it has provided the empirical basis for a series of conflicting studies on the impacts of the policy on the low-wage workers it was meant to help. The production of these studies and the reception of these studies in the media are indicative of the continued importance and political contestation surrounding techno-rational analyses of the economy. Moreover, since this project began, the election of Donald Trump has shifted political discourse in the US around race and the working class; the \$15 wage movement fits uneasily but importantly in this discussion, as it has consistently emphasized economic organizing that centers the specific challenges faced by low-wage workers of color. Finally, it appears that the \$15 wage movement has reached real limits to its geographic potential, as it continues to grapple with jurisdictional conflicts between local and state policies. Despite these changes, unions, community groups, and progressive policymakers in cities throughout the US continue to muddle their way into meaningful challenges to the current wage system. While the US continues to experience wage stagnation alongside economic growth while confronting political uncertainty in the Presidency of Donald Trump, the \$15 wage movement, in all its opportunistic, innovative, and geographically sophisticated glory, remains a bright spot for an otherwise embattled American left.

Chapter 2:

Literature Review: The Spatial Reorganization of Work and New Union Campaigns

Introduction

The \$15 wage movement is a powerful, well-resourced, and durable example of a broader shift in labor organizing that has taken root in the last decade, which takes labor organizing out of its traditional location within workplaces and into broader social, political, and economic geographies. This geographic shift in the location, scale, and organization of labor politics is a long-awaited response to the spatial reorganization of work that occurred gradually beginning in the 1970s, and has fundamentally changed the potential spatiality of workplace solidarity. The union movement that gained strength in the middle of the 20th Century developed strategies of spatial organization in response to 20th Century forms of industrialism, and the spatial reorganization of work in the US has had profound effects on the ability of unions to organize and find points of leverage within an increasingly dispersed economic system.

Formally organized unions are entering their fifth decade of almost unbroken decline in the US. In the 1950s, a third of workers in the US were represented by unions; in 2017, 10 percent of workers are represented by unions. This chapter will examine the remnants of trade union organization in the US and how these structures were affected by economic globalization and other capital strategies to fissure employment. First, I discuss the geography of business unionism as it developed in the US, outlining the spatial organizing techniques that developed out of the labor

movement's strategic decision to rely on specific legal and industrial forms of organization. Then, I outline how the reorganization of work has affected the union movement. Turning to recent efforts to revitalize the labor movement, I discuss the emerging spatiality of new union organizing, using examples from the \$15 wage movement to illustrate the importance of various spatial strategies. In particular, I note the importance of the labor movement's re-engagement with the city, the continued salience of scalar politics, the new ways of grappling with social identity markers in addition to class politics, the specific geographies of policy campaigns, and the increasing centrality of mobility strategies to new union organizing.

The Spatial Reorganization of Work and Its Impact on Unionization in the US

The American model of “pure and simple” or “business” unionism developed relatively quickly during the postwar period in the 20th century, following decades of militant unrest and organizational experimentation. In contrast to Europe and Britain, where relatively strong working class political parties that articulated broad class politics within existing political systems were formed, the American labor movement prioritized direct negotiation with employers and the development of enforceable contractual relationships (Archer, 2007; Tomlins, 1985; Zieger, 1995). In Katznelson's (1981) famous formulation, this split between community politics (which in the US typically meant ethnic and racial politics) and workplace politics (class politics) was a foundational component of American political development, and resulted in a disconnect between electoral and governmental politics and workplace politics. This meant a separation between class politics, which remained confined to the workplace, and politics writ large, which “were governed by boundaries and rules that stress ethnicity, race, and territoriality, rather than class, and that emphasize the distribution of goods and services, while excluding questions of production of workplace relations” (Katznelson, 1981, p. 6). Accordingly, instead of a broad-based class politics, the US labor

movement developed an organizational structure and geography that prioritized narrow workplace issues.

Business unionism in the US developed a distinct geography, and successful trade unions developed specific forms of socio-spatial solidarity to succeed within the system. In the workplace, the institutionalization of the labor movement resulted in nested scales of organization that developed to structure the contractual legal relationships between local labor unions, national labor federations, and businesses. These relationships were formalized, legalized, and bureaucratized throughout the 20th Century as the organization of labor unions in the US became a series of accords between labor, business, and the federal government. The labor movement sought legal protections and a scale of organization that would even the playing field with large corporations, the US government sought to decrease labor unrest, and employers sought to minimize conflict and loss of profit (Rogers, 1989; Tomlins, 1985). As Clark (1989) discusses in his work on the importance of the local community in union organizing, the structure of union elections required by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) produced a system in which the majority of important decisions and elections take place at the local level. A national level labor movement was made possible by bureaucratic structures that aggregated disparate locals into national unions or federations, but these formations are contingent and relatively precarious. The legal system of labor regulation resulted in a largely fragmented movement: “unions rationally adopt[ed] particularistic bargaining strategies in their dealings with employers,” which led to unions “divided within themselves, from one another, and from unorganized workers” (Rogers, 1989, p. 213).

The NLRB administers the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), which covers a large majority of workers in the US. Transportation workers, such as airline employees and railroad employees, are governed by the 1926 Railway Labor Act (RLA), which created a very different geography of labor organization. A union election that is held under the auspices of the NLRA is

held at the level of individual bargaining units. These bargaining units are defined as those that create a particular “community of interest,” and are typically confined to a single shop or a small region. Elections are decided by a majority of votes cast. In contrast, the RLA requires a vote for union certification to be held on a national basis, and elections are decided by a majority of bargaining unit members. The RLA disallows more forms of economic tactics than the NLRA does, for example forbidding a strike for union recognition and requiring arbitration if an impasse is reached in contract negotiations. Once in place, RLA unions are difficult to decertify.

The fragmentation imposed by the legal structure of bargaining under the NLRA was mitigated through labor union strategic bargaining practices. In the period in which labor organization was consolidating into its 20th Century form, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) purposefully transitioned from a collection of hyper-local craft unions into a national-scale bureaucracy that sought national-level relationships with large employers and found other ways to link national and local plant-level bargaining (Tomlins, 1985; Katz, 1985). As the Fordist compromise progressed throughout the century, unions often made industry-wide (frequently nation-wide and sometimes cross-border) uniformity in wages and working conditions a bargaining priority (Holmes, 2004). These methods for consolidating union solidarity across space were successful insofar as the central compromise between labor and capital remained, and they had an outsized effect on the forms of union organization that would develop strength. These local relationships were stitched together through national federation strategies that nationalized agreements with large employers, and distributed union resources throughout a larger geographic area.

The fragmentation of legal bargaining encouraged particular socio-spatial relationships to foster solidarity within labor unions, such that the center of immediate solidarity lay in singular, preferably large worksites. Ultimately, the primacy of the local worksite under the NLRB regulatory

framework, as well as the over-reliance of large industrial business unions on that regulatory framework, encouraged a geography of solidarity that centered on large, employment dense worksites. The geographic home of this labor movement was condensed employment centers, such as large factories within urban centers or tight-knit mining communities. Especially early in the history of the US labor movement, workers were able to use the social and communal ties developed within working class communities in cities and manufacturing towns to effectively organize against employer abuses (Gutman, 1986). These small communities, whether they were small towns or tight-knit neighborhoods within cities, allowed for the creation of robust class identity and group solidarity because they promoted “multiple, overlapping contexts” in which working class people could build relationships of trust (J. Freeman, 2003, p. 4). The centrality of communal spaces outside the workplace, which were easier to manipulate towards union solidarity, were more present in these dense environments.

Industry-wide organizing strategy also relied on density of employment. Searching for the best way to spend organizing resources, unions focused on building density by targeting specific employers within specific industries, which meant that trade unions tended to first focus on the largest employment sites of strategically central employers within production networks. What Gordon has called “metropolitan unionism,” for instance, was a strategic practice of constructing “silos of solidarity” (1999). Using this method, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) built relationships of solidarity around particular industries in particular places before developing a pattern of bargaining across distinct iterations of these industry forms. The Steel Workers Organizing Committee is a good example of this foundational industrial union strategy. Concentrating first on a large campaign against US Steel, the CIO was able to build strength in strategically central plants. Once it achieved a breakthrough in organizing by wresting a contract from US Steel, the CIO was able to parlay bargaining gains in wages and working conditions into

victories throughout the steel industry and into connected industries like coal mining (Zieger, 1995). As Holmes (2004) has noted, building union density plant-by-plant within an industry allowed unions to use victories in isolated plants to influence employment standards across space, even in non-union plants.

The organizing tactics used to build union strength within these locations and industries took on a specific geography as well: in these locations, organizers and worker activists have access to a high concentration of workers as they enter or leave the employment site, and workers build relationships among each other because of close proximity on the shop floor (Savage, 2006). In coordinated industry campaigns such as the successful auto industry organizing in the 1930s and 1940s or even the largely unsuccessful attempt to organize southern textile mills in Operation Dixie, union organizers relied on gaining access to workers at shift change, building communities of workers and worker committees within factories, and using geographic proximity to engender relationships of solidarity over time (Wills, 1998). On a new union organizing drive, business unionism was characterized by the pursuit of “hot shops” with a focused electoral mindset that emphasized signed cards and votes over expansive leadership development, an appeal to workers through an identitarian commitment to their status as *workers* rather than any other communities to which they might belong, and a focus on large and concentrated worksites (Green & Tilly, 1987).

As the current moment highlights the drawbacks of the system that developed in the middle of the 20th Century, it is important to remember that although the strategic consensus of business unionism gained preeminence in the post-war period, it was never universal. Instead, it represented the resolution of several intra-movement contests. In fact, labor organizing in the 1910s through the 1930s took on a dramatically different character than labor organizing in the 1950s through the 1970s, mobilizing workers in and through their communities, establishing partnerships with other progressive movements, and promoting the participation and leadership of rank-and-file workers

(Milkman, 2013; Savage, 2006). This kind of organizing was not rooted in the workplace, but rather a more dispersed and networked affair, and represents an important historical comparison to the present era.

The labor movement flourished within industries that typified the socio-spatial organization that benefited from these industry-wide strategies and worker-communication tactics that worked best in large factories. Unions used the spatiality of the manufacturing industry and to a lesser extent extractive industries to foster ties of solidarity and build strategic leverage points to support collective bargaining relationships under existing labor law. Using Hirsch and Macpherson's union membership database, which they adapt from Bureau of Labor Statistics survey data, I analyzed the percentage of union members across industries.² To compare industries across time, I consolidated industries based on updated industrial classifications as described in footnotes to Table 2.1, below. In this analysis, I found that in 1983, nearing the end of the Fordist compromise that characterized mid-century labor relations, almost 32% of union members were employed in the manufacturing industry. This was by far the largest share of union members in the private sector. At that time, only about 24% of workers were employed in the manufacturing industry, meaning union members were over-represented in the industry. In only two industries, education and transportation, were union members similarly over-represented, making up about 16% of union workers compared with 10% of workers, and 11% of union members compared with 4% of workers, respectively. Education workers are governed by public sector labor law, which differs by state, and promotes different organizing opportunities. Transportation workers are largely (but not exclusively) governed by the

² Hirsch and Macpherson created the Union Membership and Coverage Database in 2002, and update the resource annually. It is an Internet resource, and it includes private and public sector union membership, coverage, and density estimates, which are compiled monthly from the Current Population Survey using Bureau of Labor Statistics methods. Data for these measures by state, industry, and occupation begin in 1983.

RLA, which also dictates unique spatial organization, as noted above. In absolute and relative numbers, the manufacturing industry was central to union strength.

Table 2.1: Union Membership by Industry, 1983

Industry ³	Total union members	Percentage of union members
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	61,207	0.4
Business services ⁴	411,789	2.4
Construction	1,292,689	7.7
Educational services	2,715,710	16.1
Entertainment and recreation services	131,723	0.8
Medical services ⁵	1,199,255	7.1
Manufacturing, durable goods	3,302,966	19.6
Manufacturing, nondurable goods	2,050,729	12.2
Mining	179,890	1.1
Other professional services	127,134	0.8
Public administration	1,426,363	8.5
Retail trade	1,249,195	7.4
Transportation	1,811,185	10.7
Utilities and sanitary services	574,078	3.4
Wholesale trade	341,305	2.0
Total	16,875,218	100

Union density, measured by the percentage of workers covered by a union contract, has declined steadily since the middle of the 20th Century, and began its precipitous decline around 1980. Labor union density peaked in 1954, when approximately 1 in 3 workers belonged to labor unions (Farber & Krueber, 1992; Hirsch & Macpherson, 2003). Over the last half century, density has declined to approximately 1 in 10. There are many explanations for this decline, many of which emphasize the growing political opposition to unionization from employers who face increased competitive pressures (R. Freeman, 1988), from business’s political allies (Tope & Jacobs, 2009), and

³ To compare industry percentage over time, some industry classifications were consolidated as noted below.

⁴ The category “Business services” includes 1983 industry classifications of “business and repair” and “personal services.”

⁵ The category “Medical services” includes 1983 industry classifications of “hospitals” and “social services.”

from unorganized workers themselves (Troy, 2004). These political pressures are undoubtedly an important component to labor's decline. Additionally, however, I want to highlight the confluence of two spatial organizational factors that have led to labor's decline. Partly because of the labor movement's reliance on ossified socio-spatial relationships of solidarity and legal bargaining contracts, business unionism was irreparably harmed by economic and political restructuring that took place during the last quarter of the 20th century. The increasing mobility of capital has contributed substantially to union decline (Silver, 2003). The spatial organization that facilitated business unionism – consolidated industries and relatively large worksites – was replaced by global production networks that relocated site-based work away from heavily unionized locations in the US to first the US South and then the Global South. Business unions as a whole were insufficiently nimble to respond to this spatial reorganization. Since business unionism was the dominant structure of the US labor movement, the overall movement declined along with it. These economic shifts encouraged by the relocation of labor-heavy production processes led to the decline in national employment in heavily-unionized industries and the concordant decline in union membership (Farber & Western, 2001, 2002; Moody, 2009). Economic globalization and the relocation of manufacturing to low-cost locations has resulted in a “race to the bottom” and a “one-sided class war,” and one of the most profound impacts of this war is a decline in unionization rates (Rachleff, 2006, p. 462). The spatial shifts were not only out of the US, either: the relocation of some manufacturing from the Rust Belt to the largely un-unionized South exacerbated union membership decline (Moody, 2009; Peet, 1983). Meanwhile, globalization processes have weakened the ability of states to enforce workers' rights, further weakening the bargaining ability of unions (Tilly, 1995). As Wills put it, from her perspective in the UK, “the ruling class had a geographical strategy to defeat labor, localizing struggle through outlawing secondary action and taking on one group of workers at a time” (Wills, 1998). The spatial implications of decline of trade union

membership are crucial to understanding the strategies of capital in combatting union power, the role of trade union organizing strategies in failing to stem the decline, and the construction of new spatial strategies aimed both at capital's strength and retooling labor's spatial orientation.

As manufacturing and other productive activities have left the US in search of low-wage labor markets, to the extent that the jobs are replaced, they have been replaced by jobs in the free-wheeling and wide-ranging service sector. Farber and Western (2001) have argued that the decline in employment growth in traditionally unionized sectors (e.g. manufacturing) in favor of growth in traditionally un-unionized sectors (e.g. retail) accounted for most of the decline in unionization rates. Moreover, they argue, it is this difference in employment growth by industry, rather than the labor movement's waning interest in new organizing, that has resulted in decline. In 2014, 80.1% of all jobs were in the service sector, up from about 69.2% in 1980. The health care and social assistance sectors alone are projected to be responsible for one-third of the growth in employment between 2014 and 2024 (Henderson, 2015). This trend has been intensifying, but it has been present throughout the decades in which trade union organization has declined. The service sector itself is riven by polarization between highly compensated positions in professional and business services and low-wage positions in retail and food service (Doussard, 2013). While the service sector does not require low wages (Buera & Kaboski, 2007), the majority of service sector jobs remain low-wage positions held by women, people of color, and immigrants (Walker 1985). As a component of the growing service sector, care occupations in particular share a series of characteristics that increase the difficulty of organizing workers into unions: profound spatial and organizational atomization, ambiguous employment relationships, and correspondingly low wages (Rhee & Zabin, 2009). The trend is most prominent in the largest urban areas, so-called global cities, a pattern which changes the organization of urban space along with the organization of work and increases inequality (Sassen, 1988).

The growth of the low-wage service sector relative to the professionalized service sector has been identified as a central reason that income inequality is increasing along with social polarization (Fainstein, Gordon, & Harloe, 1992). However, as Gray (2004) points out, there is nothing inherent about the lowest segment of the service sector that requires it be poorly compensated and dead-end. Rather, the presence or absence of trade union organization in the service sector has a large effect on the conditions of employment (Gray, 2004). The reorganization of employment in the US, from a manufacturing economy to a service economy has played a large role in the decline of unionization because of historic patterns of union organization and because the strategies used by unions to organize workers were designed to succeed in the manufacturing industry.

The spatial organization of service sector employment makes unionization more difficult. Most service sector industries require very little in terms of equipment investments to get started, and these low barriers to entry result in the proliferation of smaller employers and increase competition (Savage, 2006; Weil, 2014; Wills, 2009). Employers in the service sector require few workers to meet demand: compare a typical busy McDonald's shift, which employs 5-10 workers, with light industry employment, where a shift would be more likely to employ 70-100 workers. The work itself is often spatially dispersed or mobile. Consider, for example, the janitorial industry, in which a few workers are responsible for cleaning entire buildings and move themselves throughout any given metropolitan area, or the home care industry in which separate workers occupy fundamentally isolated worksites inside single client homes. This spatial atomization makes traditional union tactics, developed under Fordism and reliant on large worksites where many workers can be contacted at once, difficult to employ. Workers themselves aren't as easily accessible, as they are in large worksites. Their relationships with each other as workers are constrained by spatial distance or total isolation, which limits the ability of union organizers to develop organic worker leaders and utilize pre-existing relationships of trust to activate workers (Boris & Klein,

2006). Finally, the proliferation of small employers and the increased competition this engenders makes it difficult for a union to gain traction in a market. Unions that do organize a small employer are frequently unable to bargain gains for workers that result in increased costs for employers, since they are easily replaced by cheaper competitors (Herod & Aguiar, 2006; Wills, 2008, 2009).

Traditional organizing and bargaining strategies of consolidating strength within large employers and then driving standards throughout an industry are unable to gain footholds within this economic structure.

These two profound spatial reorganizations of the economy – the increased mobility of capital and movement away from heavily unionized areas, and the proliferation of small service sector employers in place of more or less consolidated manufacturing employers – have rendered traditional union organizing strategies less powerful. In addition, large corporations have adopted organizational strategies that have further shattered the spatial relationships that have supported formal union organizing in the past. In his book *The Fissured Workplace*, David Weil brings together three central ways that work is being re-spatialized, or, in his term, fissured: subcontracting, franchising, and supply chains (Weil, 2014). The employment relationships that characterized the Fordist system of production in the 20th Century have been decentralized and pushed out from a consolidated home in large corporations into a sea of contracted service-providers. Corporations, pressured by investment capital, have morphed from vertically integrated companies with a substantial amount of control over the employment relationships central to their business models into horizontally oriented companies that manage a vast array of contractual relationships governing employment relationships. Through the subcontracting of local services ranging from legal services to janitorial services, companies externalize costs associated with managing employment of strategically non-central work. By cultivating franchising relationships, companies dictate many terms of employment while distancing themselves from legal liability. Through the increased

management of transnational supply chains, companies take advantage of the employment standards in low-wage, low-regulation states to keep costs down in end-market locations. A labor movement that was built on a national framework for organization has been ill-equipped to develop the international solidarity networks that are required to organize along supply chains that cross national borders (Cumbers, Nativel, & Routledge, 2008). The combination of privatization, deregulation, offshoring, an increase in service sector employment, subcontracting, and franchising resulted in an effective re-spatialization of work in a direction that discourages the collective organization of the working classes.

The twin challenges of increasingly fissured employment relationships and the corresponding increase in the proportion of workers employed in the service sector have fundamentally reshaped the labor movement, its institutionalized pockets of strength, and the socio-spatial strategies necessary to organize new workers and stem declines in union density. As Table 2.2 shows, the unions lost strength in every industry except for public administration between 1983 and 2015, but these losses were not evenly distributed. In 1983, density in the manufacturing industry – the heart of the labor movement under the industrial pluralist paradigm – was 28%. By 2015, density in the manufacturing sector had fallen to just 9.4%. Between 1983 and 2015, the US lost 4.6 million jobs in the manufacturing industry and nearly 4 million union members in manufacturing. The largest membership losses came in industries with strong traditions of place-based organizing: manufacturing (more than 75% of members lost) and mining (74% of members lost). Meanwhile, unions have added members, in absolute if not relative terms, in the fast-growing industries of education and health care. Because of this shift, the industries central to the trade union movement in the US are fundamentally different than they were in 1983. Whereas manufacturing jobs represented 32% of union members in 1983, they accounted for only 9.3% of union members in 2015. The prominence of manufacturing membership in the union movement was replaced by the

increasing importance of education and health care: in 1983, about 16% of union members were employed in education, while in 2015 more than 28% were. The health care industry was a slower engine for membership growth, but still indicated a sea-change in union membership distribution. The industry more than doubled the number of people it employed, and the proportion of union members in the healthcare industry increased by two-thirds, rising from 7.1% to 11.6% in the same time period. To put this in perspective, in 1983, there were 4.5 times as many union members in the manufacturing industry as there were in healthcare; by 2015, there were more healthcare union members than manufacturing union members.

In sum, the reorganization of work has dramatically affected the contours of the organized labor movement. The relocation of production, the expansion of the service sector, and innovative fissuring practices on the part of capital are certainly external factors that have resulted in declining unionization rates. This does not, however, absolve unions themselves for failing to respond to these large-scale shifts. The over-reliance of unions on spatial organizing practices that were successful in the economic conditions that characterized the 20th Century has left large, bureaucratic business unions unable to respond nimbly to a changing game. While the shift in union density has been dramatic, it has not been uniform. Although significant losses in traditional union industry strongholds have severely hamstrung the movement overall, unions representing white and blue collar public sector workers, healthcare workers, and educators have maintained or even expanded. These unions, as I will show below, rely on innovative spatial organizing practices well-suited to new industry formations.

Table 2.2: Change in Union Density and Membership by Industry, 1983-2015

Industry	1983			2015			Change in Union Membership, 1983-2015
	Total Employment (1,000s)	Union Members (1,000s)	Union Density	Total Employment (1,000s)	Union Members (1,000s)	Union Density	
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	1,564	61	3.9%	1,319	21	1.6%	-65.0%
Business services ⁶	6,660	412	6.2%	12,296	385	3.1%	-6.5%
Construction	4,609	1,293	28.0%	7,493	1,050	14.0%	-18.8%
Educational services	7,837	2,716	34.7%	13,349	4,186	31.4%	54.2%
Entertainment & recreation services	1,010	132	13.0%	2,624	192	7.3%	45.7%
Medical services ⁷	8,659	1,199	13.8%	18,714	1,716	9.2%	43.1%
Manufacturing, durable goods	11,294	3,303	29.2%	9,344	883	9.5%	-73.3%
Manufacturing, nondurable goods	7,929	2,051	25.9%	5,269	496	9.4%	-75.8%
Mining	872	180	20.6%	867	47	5.4%	-74.0%
Other professional services	2,692	127	4.7%	17,194	619	3.6%	386.6%
Public administration	4,751	1,426	30.0%	6,844	2,149	31.4%	50.6%
Retail trade	14,510	1,249	8.6%	15,577	760	4.9%	-39.2%
Transportation	3,627	1,811	49.9%	5,750	1,489	25.9%	-17.8%
Utilities and sanitary services	1,473	574	39.0%	1,282	287	22.4%	-50.0%
Wholesale trade	3,657	341	9.3%	3,349	127	3.8%	-62.8%
Accommodation & food services ⁸				10,199	252	2.5%	
Real estate & rental & leasing ⁹				2,301	128	5.6%	
	81,146	16,875	20.8%	133,770	14,786	11.1%	-12%

Data source: Hirsch & Macpherson, 2003

⁶ The category “Business services” includes 1983 industry classifications of “business and repair” and “personal services.”

⁷ The category “Medical services” includes 1983 industry classifications of “hospitals” and “social services.”

⁸ Industry disaggregation for “Accommodation and food services” was unavailable for 1983.

⁹ Industry disaggregation for “Real estate & rental & leasing” was unavailable for 1983.

Spatial Strategies of New Union¹⁰ Organizations and the \$15 Wage Movement

In this section, I explore how new union organizing strategies differ from business union and trade union strategies from the 20th Century. I argue that a central difference is a re-spatialization of struggle along multiple axes, including a shifting relationship to the city, to scalar politics, to social identity markers, and to policy. I have outlined these central differences in Table 3, below. Business unionism, as discussed above, emphasizes contract campaigns at large employers, and has developed strong bureaucratic structures to institutionalize these relationships. Trade unions organize not by industry, but by trade, and have remained relevant in the construction trades in large urban areas, controlling entry to the workforce through apprenticeship programs. New union campaigns are characterized by more informal union organizations, relying less on NLRB elections than on other methods to form organizations and engage in class politics. These differences, it must be emphasized, are stylistic conventions: a large labor union that has engaged in business union activity throughout the 20th Century may invest in new union organizing campaigns. However, comparing archetypal campaigns of business unionism, new unionism, and trade unionism suggests important differences in industry, organizational form, relationship to social (that is, non-class) identity markers, in addition to the spatial frames and scalar strategies preferred by the different forms of campaigns.

¹⁰ Others have sought to classify and characterize a so-called “New Labor” to distinguish in various ways between traditional industrial unions and new strategies. At times they have been called “organizing unions” or “alt-labor.” Jane McAlevey includes CWA, AFSCME, LIUNA, and UAW in her list; Bronfenbrenner and Hickey don’t include UFCW or the Teamsters. Most recognize the important Change to Win (CTW) split at the 2004 AFL-CIO convention as a critical defining moment, but the distinction doesn’t end there. I argue that unions that are thinking critically and uniquely about new organizing practices are those that are in industries that best represent the new spatial organization of the economy.

Table 2.3: Spatial Praxis of Different Union Forms

	Business Unionism	New Unionism	Trade Unionism
Important Campaigns	Flint Sit-Down Strike and automobile industry organizing IAM's 2013 contract campaign with Boeing	Justice for Janitors OUR WalMart Fight for \$15 Port Truckers Worker Centers	Las Vegas Building Trades Organizing Project (BTOP)
Central Industries	Manufacturing Public sector Extractive industries	Service industry (retail, janitorial, food service) Logistics	Construction trades
Organizational Form	Union bureaucracy of Locals nested within an International	Hybrid organizations, nominally independent but typically funded by international unions Coalition politics between local unions and community groups Non-union associations	Relatively independent locals, with state and regional federations particularly important
Relationship to Social Identity	Emerges as necessary in the course of workplace organizing. Source of tension in past, and used by bosses to divide workers.	Central. Non-majority social identity (race, gender, immigration status) emerges as a central category upon which trust and solidarity is built.	Fraught. Gatekeeping of apprenticeship programs based on non-class affiliations is common.
Scalar Strategies and Tactics	Collective bargaining may expand and contract geographic area it covers to gain leverage within an industry. Economic tactics (strikes, slow-downs) are, by virtue of most US labor law, limited to worksites.	Local policy campaigns take advantage of political opportunity at city and county level. Organizing campaigns that aggregate dispersed workers into citywide or statewide organizations	Organizes trades on a city level, controls admittance to trade via union apprenticeship programs.
Spatial Frame of Typical Campaign	Campaigns worksite by worksite, scaling up to industry-wide campaigns.	Campaigns on expansive geographies (e.g. the city) without relying on worksite, industry, or trade.	Campaigns on a trade-wide basis, typically in urban area.

Unions in the US realized in the 1990s that their collective response to the neoliberal globalization had been wildly insufficient. Several began experimenting with shifts in spatial strategies of organization in order to combat the spatial reorganization and the rightwing political organizing that decimated organized labor in the US. In traditional industrial unions, these organizing strategies have revolved around changing the scale of collective bargaining. In the auto industry, for instance, modular manufacturing and outsourcing limited the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) union's ability to influence employment standards, so the union responded by stretching the boundaries of what was covered under their collective bargaining agreement, creating new concepts such as "work ownership" and "satellite bargaining" that expanded the geographic reach of the agreements (Holmes, 2004). The movement toward lean production, which has been so damaging to unions' ability to organize workers effectively on a plant basis, may continue to open opportunities "at the scale of interplant relations" for effective strategies (Herod, 2000, p. 521). An expansion of collective bargaining along those lines, to include far-flung yet increasingly connected industrial workers allowed paper and pulp industry workers in British Columbia to fight back against a planned plant closure (Sweeney & Holmes, 2012). These examples aren't limited to plant-based work: several examples of longshore workers' cultivation of extra-local scalar frames, be they "grassroots internationalism" (Castree, 2000) or national-scale agreements (Herod, 1997), hint at the effort of traditional industrial unions to re-spatialize bargaining in response to various pressures, both internal and external. These 'up-scaling' efforts are rife throughout many other industries that developed traditions of union organization in the post-war period and relied heavily on plant-level organization for strong collective bargaining agreements. However, in the industrialized global north, the relevance of these unions and these industries continues to wane.

As Jane McAlevey (2016) points out, there are still examples of traditional union organizing campaigns that win victories for workers despite the rightward shift of public opinion, the dispersion of production relationships, and the increasing atomization of work. There are still large factories in the US South that have very little tradition of union organizing but would potentially benefit from targeted industry campaigns that rely on site-specific deep organizing practices. There are concentrations of workers in health care and in education that are capable of militancy, and who use strike tactics effectively to “create a crisis” for their employers. In particular, McAlevey points to the successful organizing drive at the Smithfield pork processing plant in a small town in North Carolina. This campaign centered on a 5,000-worker plant in an isolated farming community, bringing together workers across lines of race and immigration status, and building up to significant displays of militancy, including an impromptu walk-out of immigrant employees. The employer itself was a central player in food processing industry in the region, deemed strategically central to union efforts throughout the country. The case is a heartening one for many reasons, and after 14 years of consistent organizing work and resource expenditure, the workers won a contract with wages starting at \$15 per hour. That said, organizational victories in traditional industrial hubs of union strength are few and far between, and are insufficient to stem the tide of economic restructuring. Over the course of the 14 years it took to win the Smithfield campaign in North Carolina, the state as a whole lost more than 26,000 union members. Corporate strategies that disperse production relations in response to union activity won’t be combatted with plant-by-plant organization campaigns, and while pockets of dense employment may exist within segments of the service sector (particularly in large hospitals and hotels), the spatial organization of the service sector is such that these pockets aren’t sufficiently large to allow union density to match levels reached at the height of the industrial pluralist paradigm in the US.

In the place of the giants of 20th Century industrial unionism, unions who represent geographically dispersed workers in the service sector, health care, and the logistics industry are emerging as the leaders of the nascent 21st Century labor movement. These innovative unions, especially UNITE-HERE, UFCW, SEIU, and the Teamsters, are experimenting with organizing strategies that have moved outside of traditional collective bargaining relationships and that carry with them an increasingly unique geography. Trends in new union organizing have gone by many different names as academics seek to classify and categorize them: comprehensive campaigns (Bronfenbrenner, 2003; Bronfenbrenner & Juravich, 1998), whole-worker organizing (McAlevey & Ostertag, 2012), organizing unionism (Savage, 2006), community unionism (Fine, 2005; Jordhus-Lier, 2012; Stewart et al., 2009; Tufts, 1998; Wills, 2001), and social movement unionism (Clawson, 2003). The Fight for \$15 is one example, but it is joined by campaigns like OUR Walmart, the Port Truckers campaign, the campaign to organize Uber drivers, and the proliferation of Worker Centers across the country.

Although precarity in employment continues to increase, the workers who have made gains through novel campaigns in recent years have been low-paid workers, immigrant workers, working predominately in geographically immobile but dispersed sectors such as cleaning, care, and hospitality (Gray, 2004; Milkman, 2011; Wills, 2008). These campaigns share certain tactics, such as high-visibility direct action; they tend to organize precarious workers; and the workers they organize are typically marginalized because of race, gender, and immigrant status in addition to their class position. These aspects don't distinguish them, necessarily, from traditional union campaigns, however. A central distinguishing feature of these campaigns is a new strategic relationship to spatial organizing. The spatiality of these new labor organizing movements is more chaotic, more dispersed, and more amorphous than those contained in the collective bargaining system, and it represents a restructuring of the sorts of labor movement activity that is possible and necessary under the

conditions of late capitalism. In these campaigns, the space and scale of ‘the city,’ rather than the workplace, is paramount, which results in three shared spatial components of these campaigns: a new relationship to extra-class positionalities, a new reliance on policy levers instead of formalistic collective bargaining practices, and a growing understanding that strategies of mobility are crucially important to the growth of the labor movement into the next century.

The Importance of the City in New Union Campaigns

As business unions seek to expand the geographies of collective bargaining, alternative union practices largely eschew collective bargaining in favor of new spatialities of protest and organizing that move class politics out of the workplace and into a broadly conceived community. The contours and boundaries of this ‘community’ change depending on the campaign, but the new spatiality of organizing and bargaining tends to prioritize the city. Acknowledging the centrality of the city to union campaigns first requires the acknowledgement that the city is, for geographers, a chaotic concept; or, as Jane M. Jacobs put it, “unbound” (Jacobs, 1993). There is no readily agreed upon definition for a city, and in fact there are multiple operationalizations of the concept. For the purposes of this work, I follow Massey’s thinking on the issue: cities are best thought of as nodes within relational networks, “the coming together of the previously unrelated, a constellation of processes rather than a thing” (Massey, 2005, 141, 2011). These processual relations, which, swirling together, produce a city, also result in real economic effects. Contemporary capital accumulation strategies that have flourished under neoliberal capitalism tend to privilege the city as a site of development and production (N. Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Harvey, 1982; Peck & Tickell, 2002). Moreover, cities remain prominent sites of political and social change, and as Doussard has shown in his detailed work on low-wage employers in Chicago, an understanding of the micro-geographies of economic and social relations within a city provide needed nuance to dominant understandings of

sweeping macroeconomic theories of economic change (Doussard, 2013). Cities, increasingly, are replete with instances of both contestation of and collaboration with broader economic forces. The necessity to think through a city using both territorial and relational analyses, which understand both the immediate and unique components of individual places, policies, economies, and politics while attending to the inter-scalar conditioning that relates these places to mezzo and global processes (Brenner and Theodore 2002; McCann 2008; Peck and Tickell 2002; Ward 2006, 2007). Cities, as grounded and relational nodes, bring with them unique histories, unique physical form, infrastructure, geography and trajectories of development, and unique sociopolitical structures, all of which contribute to current efforts of the labor movement to reinvent spatial strategies of organization to counter capital.

Historic analysis of the relationship between unions and cities suggests that the economic, administrative and physical organization of cities during the rapid urbanization that accompanied industrialization variously hindered and encouraged union organization (Hobsbawm, 1987). By the middle of the 20th Century, union membership was concentrated in urban centers, where it remains. Certain trade union strategic organizing practices, for example the tradition of construction trades organizing on the basis of occupation within a particular urban labor market rather than by employer, used the city as a potent organizing force and milieu (Gordon, 1999). The symbiotic relationship that supported both urban density and union organization broke down gradually in the post-war period, along with other processes of economic consolidation, with the relocation of urban populations and industry south and west during the Sun Belt shift suburbanization processes (J. Freeman, 2003; Gordon, 2014). Regardless, the continued importance of cities in contemporary economic accumulation strategies, the devolution of social and political responsibility to ever more local levels due to neoliberal reforms, and the simple fact that union membership is already

concentrated in urban spaces contributes to the strategic centrality of cities for union renewal (MacDonald, 2011).

An example of how the space of the city conditions new union campaigns as they reimagine the relationship between workplace politics and city politics is the expanded local geography is the SeaTac Airport organizing campaign. The SeaTac campaign was one of the first instances of a \$15 minimum wage campaign in the US, and an important catalyst and early victory of the Fight for \$15. In the neoliberal airport economy, subcontracting had decimated the few industrial unions, such as the International Association of Machinists (IAM), that had represented airline service workers. Although workers who worked directly for the airlines (especially the large airlines) tended to be organized into unions, services such as baggage handling, cabin cleaning, aircraft fueling, and wheelchair driving had been subcontracted to a sea of airline service providers. Union organizers likened the shifting contracts to a game of musical chairs. The work and in most cases the workers themselves would stay the same as contractors won and lost service contracts, while any pressure to increase wages or enhance safety measures under one contractor would result in the contract being pulled and a more cost-friendly contractor put in place. The constant shifting of contracts amongst the service providers resulted in a unique workplace geography: although two workers could be doing the same job a few hundred feet from each other, they were likely to be employed by different contractors, wearing different uniforms, and working under different rules. This orchestrated fissuring of employment relationships, like Weil suggests, created the competitive pressures that makes union organizing so difficult.

The airport economy in SeaTac was unique, however, because the workers themselves had strong community ties to each other, regardless of their employer. About 21% of workers at SeaTac lived in the communities surrounding the airport (Martin Associates, 2014). A large percentage of airline service employees were immigrants or refugees from the East Africa. They worshiped

together in local mosques and shopped at the same SeaTac area stores. They lived in the cheap housing surrounding the airport, and their children attended the SeaTac public schools. They received services from local churches, often arriving in their airport uniforms to pick up food from church-run food banks (Bolerjack, 2015). Many of them held multiple jobs with different contractors, which increased the amount of interconnection between workers and contractors. Although labor law saw these workers as atomized employees of one of a dozen airline services contractors, they saw themselves as airport workers, and they cultivated social and political relationships amongst each other as airport workers and as SeaTac residents. Union organizers from SEIU, UFCW, UNITE-HERE, and Teamsters had been working in and around the airport on and off for a decade, and when the Fight for a Fair Economy community organizing drive was implemented, the low-income immigrant communities around SeaTac were among the first canvassed.¹¹ Additionally, the airport itself was the central economic engine of the City of SeaTac. The airport not only employed many SeaTac city residents, but also diverted travelers or visitors to nearby hotels and parking areas, accounting for more than 18,000 jobs and more than \$1 billion in worker expenditures in the local economy (Martin Associates, 2014).

Organizers began an airport-wide organizing committee called Good Jobs Now, bringing together contracted employees across occupations. The structure of the campaign mirrored the successful Justice for Janitors campaign (Aguiar & Ryan, 2009; Savage, 2006; Waldinger et al., 1997) and the Living Wage campaigns in London or Baltimore (Walsh, 2000; Wills, 2008), both of which used city-wide organizing committees of subcontracted janitors working in large central city buildings to pressure the ‘real employers’ who actually controlled the economics of employment relationships. By exploiting the interconnectedness between the airport and the city, exemplified by

¹¹ The Fight for a Fair Economy was the precursor to the Fight for \$15, and is explained in depth below in Chapter 4.

the residential patterns of low-wage workers, by the economic impact of the airport on the region, and by the community relationships engendered by these patterns, the organizers opportunistically built up a campaign scaled to the city.

Organizers and worker activists experimented with a variety of strategies to build power: they marched through the airport with faith leaders demanding “good jobs”; they organized workers as required under a traditional NLRB process, holding elections by contracted employer; and they filed an intention to strike with a particularly militant group of aircraft fuelers. Each of these more or less traditional actions was stymied by existing labor law. The final action – the intent to strike – was halted by the court because the workers were deemed to fall under the jurisdiction of the RLA rather than the NRLA, which not only limited many of the more militant economic tactics (strikes for recognition and boycotts) but also re-spatialized the bargaining unit from a local one into a national “community of interest.” Without the resources or the inclination to organize nationally, workers shifted tactics and took the campaign beyond the borders of the airport and into the city of SeaTac. The resulting voter initiative was an expansive attempt to legislate a collective bargaining agreement that would cover the airport, and it required that union activists convince a majority of SeaTac’s citizen voters to increase airport wages to \$15 per hour, mandate paid sick leave, and create an innovative full-time work requirement to minimize displacement because of increased wages. The initiative was a success, largely because the union get-out-the-vote effort mobilized new immigrant voters in an unprecedented way, taking advantage of the community ties of airport workers within local mosques, churches, and other centers of immigrant community. In a divisive and deeply contested election, the union ground game proved decisive, and the initiative passed by just 77 votes. By expanding the scale of workplace organizing outward – first to the airport economy as a whole and then to the city of SeaTac – workers manipulated the scope of labor regulation in their favor and shone a light on the importance of the city-scale to new worker initiatives.

Scalar Politics and New Union Campaigns

The politics of scale is central to the new ways labor unions are negotiating urban organizing. Scale is also a complex, socially constructed concept, and requires some exposition at the outset. Space does not function, organizationally, as a series of nested scalar containers, in which power flows downward (Smith, 1992). The fluidity of scalar frames is both a social process and an object of contestation. In this sense, I consider the strategic contests over the scale of union activity along the lines of Smith, who writes that “scale demarcates the sites of social contest, the object as well as resolution of contest. . . . It is geographical scale that defines the boundaries and binds the identities around which control is executed *and* contested” (Smith, 1992). The utility of the concept has been critiqued extensively, and a variety of analogous forms and concepts have been suggested to take its place (for a review of the debate, see Leitner & Miller, 2007; Marston, Jones, & Woodward, 2005).

Throughout this analytical reckoning, however, an important practical and political consideration remains: the federated US formal political system is organized in nested scales, with elected (or appointed) political bodies governing cities, counties, special jurisdictions, and the federal government (Leitner, Sheppard, & Sziarto, 2008; Swyngedouw, 1997). To use Cox’s analytical distinction, state agencies and state political bodies, at various scales, operate in spaces of dependence, that is, they are reliant on constituents within a geographical area, and are thus spatially constrained (Cox, 1998). Especially as labor unions use alternative organizational forms to pursue local policy campaigns, the scales of political organization become central to new labor’s political strategies. These political scales are not static, and power does not flow in only one direction. Scales of state government may shift, creating new scales or changing the relative importance of a specific scale. But the persistence of this organization, along with labor’s own nested organization, has contributed to the continued relevance of scalar politics to labor geographers and geographers of

social movement. As Coe and Jordhus-Lier write, “Labour’s ability to engage with political scales, and its position in class maps and global networks of production, help define its potential as a political actor” (2010, p. 219). The scalar frames and scalar strategies of new labor formations are central to the innovations of these campaigns.

New union campaigns are both an expansion of the scale of workplace organizing and a contraction of traditional labor organization. They expand the community of interest out from an isolated workplace and into a broader urban community, while at the same time focusing resources and policy fights on the local rather than the national scale. Fine (2005) in particular emphasizes the importance of the “geographic demarcations of community” to the growing worker center movement and alt-labor more generally. She argues that community unions’ relationship with an expanded geography is central to the new form of organizing they represent: “Community unions are distinguished by the fact that they are based in geographic communities more than individual work sites and are defined by the geographic demarcations of community – neighborhood, city, and town – and all that this implies” (Fine, 2005, p. 160). These geographic demarcations of community imply quite a bit, although Fine does not elaborate. They imply a socio-spatial positionality that brings workers together across industry and occupation. They imply a broader set of concerns than bread and butter workplace issues. And, importantly, they imply the role of workers and the working class in the active creation of relevant scales of organization. These organizing strategies collect workers from across a geographic catchment area, bringing disparate people together across industry and occupation in neighborhood-wide or city-wide campaigns, relying on the creation of solidarity that transcends workplace issues by using commonalities of race, ethnicity, or immigration status in addition to class. In contrast to business union campaigns, which organize collective bargaining by workplace and stitch together national campaigns in ad hoc agreements, these initiatives take a mesogeographic approach, drawing activists from across a larger geographic space than a workplace

but concentrating political advocacy and servicing work on areas smaller than an industry or national scale.

The Geographies of Policy Campaigns in Class Politics

Another central geostrategic commonality of these campaigns is their reliance on policy levers to make change in the absence of collective bargaining avenues. It is not an accident that the best-studied alt-labor initiatives have involved local-level policy change, from living wage campaigns to sanctuary city policies. The SeaTac campaign makes clear that even in an industry like the airline industry, in which economic tactics like strikes have the potential to cause significant disruption, contemporary campaigns are reluctant or unable to employ economic tactics and find more success with local policy initiatives. The primacy of local policy in the emerging geographies of new union organizing is a central strategic commitment of the \$15 wage movement. The implications of these successes and the geographies implicit in the organizing needed to achieve them are particularly controversial, and represent a dramatic departure from traditional business union tactics.

The relationship between union strategies based on economic tactics and policy-oriented tactics is multifaceted, and can best be understood via Erik Olin Wright's useful distinction between associational power and structural power, which he uses to understand the different sources of power in working class movements (Wright, 2000). Associational power is that which accrues by virtue of the collective organization of workers into trade unions and political parties; structural power is that which accrues as a result of workers' position within an economic system, either because of tight labor market conditions and enhanced bargaining power that comes from low unemployment or because a strategic location within a given industrial system gives a set of workers the ability to affect production. As they have traditionally been organized, unions have been

instrumental in developing and wielding both forms of influence. By aggregating workers with common grievances into organizations, business unions increased associational power and translated this power into support for the Democratic Party in electoral politics at all levels of government. Business unions utilize structural power in two central ways. First, using economic tactics such as strikes, business unions use the position of workers in key locations within industrial systems to highlight and exploit structural weaknesses within even the most complex production networks. By strategically withholding labor, structurally significant workers can create a crisis for their employer. Secondly, trade unions use apprenticeship systems or licensure requirements for occupations in order to control the supply of available workers, thereby tightening the labor market. These forms of power build off one another, as in the case of unions organizing politically to pass regulations that require licensure for occupations, or in the case of unions in structurally central employment locations such as ports maintaining high density in membership because workers understand their structural importance and the power of strike actions.

Current global economic processes create “a vicious circle in which weakening marketplace bargaining power undermines associational power and vice versa” (Silver, 2003, p. 14). Fissured employment distributes workers through space and weakens the strength of any given worker in strategic positions, making it more difficult for unions to employ economic tactics to improve conditions for workers, which then weakens the draw of associations. Low-wage workers in particular have seen their structural power diminish substantially through the fissuring of employment relationships and the increasing use of subcontracting and franchising, both of which limit the ability of workers to develop associational power on the level of occupation or employer. Low-wage worker activists have two main options for improving their working and living conditions: political intervention in the local policy sphere and direct economic intervention in the labor market. Both options have a distinct geography, and it appears that the community union

movement has more success with the former (Fine, 2005). Understanding the distinction between union organizing focusing on economic tactics and union organizing focusing on policy is crucial to understanding the geographies of the alt-labor movement.

Low-wage workers and the unions that represent them, by virtue of an increasingly precarious position in local labor markets, are more successful in intervening in local policy processes, and are largely unable to translate increased organization into direct economic influence. Despite hopefulness about the political possibility of low-wage worker activism, the lack of a corresponding increase in strength within the economic relations that constrain workers is a significant limitation alt-union organizing models. Some of the most convincing critiques hold that these practices are unable to engage in the deep organizing that is possible in workplace organizing, and rely instead on professional elites for advocacy work among policy makers (Jenkins, 2002; McAleve, 2016). Structural limitations, such as a reliance on progressive foundation or traditional union funding, abound, and despite attempts to find non-elite membership bases, activists have yet to be able to address these issues. When funding comes exclusively from foundations and not from rank and file participation and dues money, the pressure to respond to funder demands rather than worker demands is great, and it also raises questions about the level of commitment of worker activists who are not asked to financially contribute to the function of the organization (Jenkins, 2002). To the extent that community unions do not result in dues-paying members of labor organizations, they will remain vulnerable to the funding pressures and anti-democratic tendencies of the nonprofit industrial complex.

The minimum wage policy process occurs in urban “political-economic space” that is “a complex, tangled mosaic of superimposed and interpenetrating nodes, levels, scales, and morphologies” (N. Brenner, 2004; McCann, 2011, p. 115). The relationships between these nodes and scales are critical loci for strategic interventions, and community-labor coalition activists and

policymakers interested in minimum wage policy mobilization operate explicitly on multiple electoral scales at once. Minimum wage policy has traditionally been controlled on the state and federal level in the US. The introduction of minimum wage regulation at the local level is a relatively new development, and is one that is uneven throughout the country. Minimum wage policy operates on multiple jurisdictional scales, governed by complex interplay between power structures at different levels of government, in non-juridical city spaces, and in mediation and relation between, say, a conversation at a voter's house and a state policy that creates certain parameters for local action.

Socio-Spatial Positionality in New Union Campaigns

New union campaigns also strive to build intra-class solidarity across multiple axes of difference. One of the strengths of these new union campaigns, something that is enabled by the expanded geography of a city-wide or community-wide organization, is their commitment to what Wills (2008) has described as an “anti-essentialist class politics.” In particular, she argued that new union campaigns have a unique capacity to reach across racial, ethnic, and religious identities, workplaces, and sectors. Following Gibson-Graham et al. (2000), Wills argues that new union strategies at work in a campaign for a living wage in London have resulted in a class politics that focuses on the political potential of manipulating the process of class formation rather than organizing under the strictures of pre-existing class structures. Because of the ways living wage campaigns transcend the “site of exploitation,” they create the “potential for political agency in and beyond the direct exploitation that takes place at work” and expand class politics to articulate creative links between economic exploitation and other axes of identity (Wills, 2008, p. 5). These campaigns show how “class interests can be mobilized beyond any fixity in the social structure (class is not just about employment relations at the point of production or service) and beyond any dependence on shared interests or common identities arising from work” (Wills, 2008, p. 16). The

articulation between ostensibly atomized constituencies – labor and race, labor and gender, labor and immigration status – links up these campaigns with broader struggles for racial and economic justice that transcend narrow struggles for union recognition, wages, and benefits.

Another way to conceptualize this new relationship to class politics – a class politics that is not confined to the workplace – is through the concept of socio-spatial positionality (Sheppard, 2002). As Leitner et al. (2008, p. 164) elaborate, the spatiality of positionality is an important point of negotiation in social movements, both in the mobilization of constituents from diverse locations and in the practice of creating a common “standpoint” around which to organize resistance. In a new union campaign, for example, workers are put into action from different positions, both in their geographical location and their social location; as class politics is removed from its assumed and traditional point of origin in the workplace, the locations from which organization begins become an explicit point of contest. As Pile noted in his discussion of the politics of location, “resistance is formed through the production of location as much as through the uncovering of location” (Pile 1997, 29). Because new union campaigns do not take the geographical location of organization for granted, they are forced to grapple with the positionality of workers and activists in new ways, engaging with difference without a pre-built site of commonality.

These new campaigns represent labor’s new attempt to grapple with extra-class identities and concerns. To some extent, the labor movement has always used forms of connection that transcend class to build solidarity, whether in ethnic enclaves of the early 20th century (Waldinger, 1996) or retrogressive white nationalist politics in the middle of the 20th century (Griffey, 2010). It is also relatively easy, despite a prevailing view of labor unions as “pale, male, and stale,” to find examples of inter-racial solidarity, such as the success of Local 22 of the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers (FTA Local 22) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina during the middle of the 20th Century (Korstad, 2003), or the West Virginia coal industry in the early 20th Century (Brier, 1994).

That said, the AFL in particular has been more defined by exclusion than open-armed inclusion, having at various times excluded unskilled workers, Black workers, and opposed forms of immigration (Fine & Tichenor, 2009; Korstad & Lichtenstein, 1988). Employers have also used rifts between workers' external community relationships to disrupt cross-racial or cross-gender class solidarity. It is not enough for labor to build within marginalized communities in an atomized way: instead the idea is to create a shared experience of class processes. In workplace campaigns, organizers use extra-class identity affiliations to build solidarity by exploiting relationships of trust amongst people with whom workers share other commonalities in a relatively narrow fight for a union, a contract, or to right a workplace wrong. In the broader campaigns indicative of new union organizing, the number of issues being addressed is larger – perhaps including affordable housing, immigrant rights, and health care in addition to workplace issues – which encourages a wider constituency of people to become involved. Initiatives such as the Fight for \$15 incorporate anti-racism and immigrant justice explicitly into organizing frames; worker centers such as Make the Road New York are the epicenter of immigrant worker rights organizing (Fine, 2005; McAleve, 2016; Milkman, 2011).

Turning again to the SeaTac organizing campaign, the unions' ability to build solidarity and trust among immigrant workers, Muslim workers, and native-born African American and white workers was crucial to the outcome. The low-wage workforce in SeaTac was mostly comprised of people of color, recent immigrants and refugees, and women. Rental car workers, for instance, already represented by Teamsters Local 117, were majority Muslim, and organizers soon found that the most pressing concern was lack of access to prayer areas. Relations of trust had been compromised in the recent past, however, when workers found the union unwilling to support a worker who had been disciplined for praying. As organizers worked to re-establish trust to move the airport campaign forward, the Teamsters Local 117 grappled with articulating the importance of

cultural and religious expression to a traditionally white and male workforce at other locations. Hiring organizers from relevant communities, who had language skills and religious affinity with workers, was an important act of building trust, as was simply supporting workers as complaints arose. These campaigns dissolve the boundary lines between a worker's issue and a community issue: workers' concerns are simply community-wide concerns, and community (be it a geographic community, an ethnic community, or a racial community) concerns are simply class-wide concern. These shared understandings of class and other markers of identity and the underlying processes that create crises are hallmarks of new union organizing.

Mobilities and the Labor Movement

Unions remain some of the best-funded, longest-established, and most-organized leftist institutions in the US, despite the losses accrued over the past half-century, and are thus still crucial to broader leftist movement. Efforts to re-spatialize union practice in response to the spatial reorganization of work are rightly viewed as an encouraging, but are incomplete and partial. These campaigns' relationship to the city scale, their mobilization of constituents from diverse socio-spatial positionalities, and their use of policy in lieu of contracts to drive standards for workers have prompted a plethora of case studies that laud their accomplishments and offer individualized critiques. However, these individual case studies fail to address a central problematic to the re-spatialization of labor organizing: to what extent are these campaigns isolated, one-off events that fail to fluoresce, and to what extent are they rendered mobile and spread from place to place, in order to be stitched together into a broader strategic narrative?

Even as the prevailing economic and political climate tended towards the market logic, privatization of public services, and austerity measures that typify neoliberal capitalism, local

examples running counter to this broad trend are common. These examples tend to attract significant analytical attention. Although encouraging and powerful examples of the imperfection of neoliberalism abound, many caution against valorizing these local struggles over campaigns that organize on the scale of global capital. A persistent complaint about the proliferation of locally focused campaigns is that they will necessarily fail unless labor unions find the ability to organize on the scale on which global capital institutions exert influence – at the supra-national or global scale (Harvey, 1996; Peck, 1996). If low-wage workers are unable to build the structural capacity to influence economics, new union campaigns that focus exclusively on local policy campaigns will have gained a powerful new tool at the expense of time-worn tactics that not only affect local workers but also have reliably stitched together disparate campaigns into larger movements. Another way to understand the broader impacts of these local campaigns is to understand the mobility processes that allow for the translation and the proliferation of linkages between localities along the same topographical lines. Centering the local scale while attending closely to the relationships between locals allows scholars to identify the nodes of engagement between the local and the global and to locate productive spots of “scale-jumping, and geography-crossing” responses to globalization (C. Katz, 2001, p. 1217). Here, identifying and promoting the politics of “translation” and “extension” from the local to the global and vice versa is the central task of analytic engagement with political struggles. A central challenge to understanding and evaluating alt-labor strategies that organize on the city scale, build intersectional analyses and rely on policy rather than contracts to win for workers, is understanding the ways these strategies are made mobile and spread from place to place.

To address some of these questions, this dissertation takes on the emerging “mobilities turn” to consider the various mobilities that are implicit and explicit in the \$15 wage movement. These mobilities are central to the overall strategic thrust of the \$15 wage movement, and are an important

but understudied component of the spatiality of the movement. As Pile put it, “it is no coincidence that communities of resistance are called movements” (Pile, 1997). The \$15 wage movement is a collection of organizations and individuals, of institutions and discourses, of media and picket signs, all of which are circulating in both material and immaterial forms through place and from place to place. By pushing back against the “sedentarist bias” of contemporary social science (Miller & Ponto, 2016), an analysis of the \$15 wage movement that takes the point of view of this movement allows for a deeper understanding of the connectivity and disconnectivity that enables and constrains the packaging and travel of the ideas that constitute the \$15 wage movement. In the remainder of this chapter, I consider the following aspects of mobility and their relationship to the labor movement: the relationship between mobility and place-based fixity in translating union traditions, the cross-scalar mobility of organization within labor unions and the tension between local and national organizing objectives, the importance of material mobility in transferring resources and ideas, and the emerging discussion about the mobilities of policies themselves.

In an early example of labor geography, Jane Wills emphasizes tension between fixity and flow as it translates to the mobility of union traditions.

I have argued that union traditions are ideas, grounded in place while also circulating in space... Ideas need to ‘take place’ in some material sense if they are to be reproduced and reinvented. Ideas can only be reproduced and reinvented in the long term — among workers, at any rate — through being materially grounded in some way. Hence, as events ‘take place,’ workers can ‘prove’ their ideas against the others on offer, reformulating their traditions in the process — a process that will itself be highly uneven across space ... Embedded in place, yet also mobile across space in a way that defies prior delimitation, the translation of tradition is a fundamental part of the geographical landscape, shaping the arena in which capital investment is made. (Wills, 1998, p. 130)

Building concrete demonstrations of union potential in a specific place and time, always with a view to connecting workers across space to spread the successful ideas, is important to the translation of union traditions. An idea, regardless of theoretical strength, has little purchase without a ‘grounded’

demonstration. Planting, then, is a precursor to mobility. Her study of an English labor union during the reactionary 1980s and 1990s outlines how the physical mobility of people helped spread traditions of solidarity amongst organized factories in the UK, focusing on the ways this mobility interacted with on-the-ground campaigns. Emplaced labor activists built traditions of solidarity within individual plants, but never in isolation. They used local conditions as organizing tools, but expanded networks with other plants as well. The translation of traditions between places was mediated by coordinated union campaigns, media coverage, and by so-called “demonstration effects.” Wills argued that these demonstration effects had both positive and negative potential: activists could just as easily be dissuaded from launching an action because of its failure elsewhere as they could be encouraged by victories.

Local histories of militant action in particular places are important predictors of future militant action: “If people strike in a place, it is partly because their fathers and grandfathers also struck, or because they find themselves in a community with firmly rooted conflictual institutions and with collective mentalities of ancient pedigree” (Shorter and Tilly 1974). The converse is also true, in that places with short or demoralizing histories of labor action are less likely to make the jump to action. The US South is a potent example in this regard, with the hard-fought failure of most militant action in the 1930s and 1940s leading to generations of blacklisting and mistrust of unions (Simon, 1997). In the case of the \$15 wage movement, the initial strategy of SEIU to fund and staff campaigns in locations with strong labor histories and local labor movements indicates an interest in collecting victories – not defeats – for a \$15 wage in order to encourage its translation to places with less strong histories of organization.

The translation of union organizing traditions across space, especially when these ideas are relatively novel strategic and tactical efforts, takes on a different character within the nested structure and internal politics of the institutional labor movement. In her work on the Justice for Janitors

campaign, for example, Lydia Savage highlights the tensions between multiple scalarities of organizing work within a large international union, the SEIU. She deftly outlines the strategy of developing strong local organizations that center the city scale rather than the workplace or employer to build worker power within the janitorial industry, which is the hallmark of the Justice for Janitors campaign. Then, she goes a step further. In this case, the tensions that developed within the SEIU had its own internal politics of scale, with the international opposed to the activities of the local, and capable of enforcing its will through trusteeship. Throughout the 2000s, the SEIU international used the trusteeship tactic to enforce the international program on local unions, whether it was to rearrange and consolidate representation in order to reward political allies and punish opponents, or to simply take local unions over wholesale. The prevalence of fraught relationships between local unions and their internationals is quite large. Indeed, the struggle between local control and grassroots organization within the labor movement, and the prominence and control of international governing bodies (with the moniker ‘international’ typically referring to the national organization with varying international ambitions).

The individual mobilities associated with particular bodies, objects, and forms of knowledge is central to various political projects. As the emerging policy mobilities paradigm makes plain, policies themselves are important objects of knowledge that are rendered mobile and adapted from place to place (McCann, 2008, 2011; Peck & Theodore, 2015; Temenos & McCann, 2013). Moreover, the conjunction of bodies, objects, and ideas in motion frequently has political effects. Cresswell (2006), for example, in his study of the women’s suffrage movement in the US, argues that steamship travel to England and car trips throughout the Northeast allowed movement leaders to reach audiences outside those already active in the movement. This particular conjunction of mobility between bodies, ideas, and objects functioned politically, and resulted in a new “moral geography of gender” (Leitner et al., 2008, p. 160). In recent years, in addition to social movement

or labor scholarship that concerns the ways that ideas or traditions or structures of organization spread and influence each other, there is a burgeoning body of work that considers how policies are made mobile and spread from place to place. These increasing global “policy models” are capable of not only being rendered mobile and spread from place to place, but also exerting their own normative power across distance (Peck & Theodore, 2015). Increasingly transnational networks of consultants, who travel to conferences and engage in fact-finding trips, produce forms of knowledge and expertise that they bring with them on their travels, facilitating the adaptation of policies in new locations (Temenos & McCann, 2013). Activists who contest the negative effects of neoliberalism at the local level have adopted forms of “fast resistance transfer,” sharing strategies, tactics, objects, resources, and ideas quickly from place to place (Purcell, 2008). As urban places themselves become implicated in new union campaigns like the Fight for \$15, processes of cross-place comparison are solidified and inscribed upon the wage policies that result (McCann & Ward, 2010). The \$15 wage movement is a profound example of the importance of policies in the mobility of political campaigns, and vice versa. Activists in local places adopt and promote a the seemingly simple policy tweak, raising the minimum wage to \$15, in order to build networks, organization, and resource-sharing practices that stitch disparate places together. A more critical genealogy of the policy discourses that travel with and around a \$15 wage policy qua policy offers another view into the practices and processes of policy change, opening space to investigate how strategies of policy mobility intersect with labor mobility strategies.

Conclusion

The labor movement, by most measures, is at its lowest point in a century, and its continued decline seems all but inevitable. Through a review of the literature on union decline and the changing spatiality of work and employment, I argue that an important component of this decline is

the reliance of unions on antiquated spatial strategies of organizing and bargaining. These spatial practices of solidarity- and strength-building were developed in the context of an industrial system that promoted dense employment centers and under a legal system that was built on local bargaining units. While these practices they were successful in the middle of the 20th Century, they have been made obsolete by capital's new spatial praxis of dispersion, atomization, subcontracted competition, and mobility.

Despite the implosion of the labor-capital accord and the functional and political obsolescence of business unions, as long as there are workers, there will be labor movement(s). The form and quality of the next labor movement is currently up for grabs, and several innovative unions representing workers in the service industry and in logistics are exploring the contours of these alternative organizations. The Fight for \$15 and the \$15 wage movement more broadly is one important example of a new philosophy of labor organization. As these campaigns develop, they are experimenting with new types of formal and informal legal organization, exploring the organization of industries that were previously deemed un-organizable, grappling with the alternative forms of solidarity that are necessary to build trust among diverse low-wage workers, and discovering new levers of strength. Throughout it all, one of the most important reconfigurations of these new campaigns is a new relationship to spatial organizing praxis. By reviewing academic research into these new campaigns and interspersing it with examples from the \$15 wage movement, I have pulled out and contextualized four central spatial re-framings that are emerging in the new union movement.

First, unions are finding new ways to engage with the city. Although cities have always been important sites for union campaigns, the campaigns themselves typically concentrated on specific worksites. New union efforts are finding ways to build campaigns that span throughout a city, using city and citizen politics, intra-community relationships, and residential patterns to build the

conditions necessary for unionization. Second, new union campaigns are grappling with scalar politics in novel ways. Whereas traditional business unions center their scalar politics on the construction of collective bargaining agreements, new unions are increasingly engaged with the scalar politics embedded within the relationships between political jurisdictions. These complex scalar negotiations find labor and community groups opportunistically searching for political leverage points across multiple scales at once, and introduce new forms of opposition to established campaigns. Third, new union campaigns take seriously the multiplicity of socio-spatial positionalities within workplaces and the community. Unions have historically struggled with bridging gaps between people based on social markers of identity, language, religion, gender, and race, and these differences have been exploited by employers who prefer hostility and mistrust amongst workers. New union campaigns, recognizing the increasing diversity of the low-wage workforce in the US, are finding ways to build trust amongst diverse workers, most often through struggle. Fourth, new union campaigns are embracing mobility politics, using the physical and symbolic movement of bodies, objects, and ideas to increase their flexibility and reach. In particular, the \$15 wage movement relies on policy mobility as a strategy to build organization in particular places.

Labor organizing strategies and tactics are not static, but in many respects, they have been victim of their own success. The capital-labor accord eventually encouraged complacency with tactical and strategic experimentation. That time has come to an end. Unions are increasingly experimental, willing to invest in campaigns that few unions would have considered putting resources behind 20 years ago. Although it remains to be seen which, if any, of these new organizational forms or campaign strategies will gain prominence in the coming years, the successes of the \$15 wage movement suggest that bold initiatives organizing seemingly impossible to organize workers may have the capacity to alter the course of an otherwise moribund labor movement.

Chapter 3:

Context and Methodology

Introduction

The \$15 wage movement is a polymorphous and unwieldy object of study. It involves, as I will outline below, multiple institutional actors, individual activists, strategies, tactics, goals, and policy innovations. It occurs in multiple locations, from city policy campaigns to national media campaigns, and takes multiple shapes and sizes. It is variously mobile and immobile, designed for specific forms of coordination and yet slipping past them while moving and morphing as it moves. Acknowledging the breadth of this phenomenon, both geographically and organizationally, I became interested in the following questions: How is the \$15 wage movement growing and spreading throughout the country? What is the role of organized labor in directing the spatial strategies used in translating \$15 minimum wage campaigns from one place to another? How are the \$15 minimum wage policies themselves rendered mobile, becoming key actors in the growth of the \$15 minimum wage movement? Finally, how are specific places, connected to each other through informal and formal relationships, contouring the movement?

To answer these questions, this dissertation takes the shape of a three-part comparative case study. I conducted fieldwork in Seattle, Chicago, and the Piedmont Crescent of North Carolina (Greensboro and Durham). These places had an important similarity: they were all sites of struggle over a \$15 minimum wage. They were chosen, however, because of several defining differences that characterized both the potential and the limits of political movement. These cities, as I will describe

below, occupied very different locations in the 21st Century economy, from a booming technology hub, to a rust belt city still grappling with deindustrialization, to two southern cities with recent industrial pasts and uncertain futures. They occupied very different positions in the 20th Century labor movement, from the originator of US labor union organizing traditions (Chicago), to a stalwart of industrial unionism and innovative new union strength (Seattle), to some of the least unionized cities in the US (Greensboro and Durham). And they occupy very different positions in their states' political environments, from a city large and powerful enough to dictate the terms of state governance (Seattle), to divided governance (Chicago), to overtly hostile political relationships (Greensboro and Durham). Because I was interested in the nuances of a campaign's translation from place to place and the contours of a policy's travel trajectory, I used qualitative interviewing, participant observation, and document review as central methods. By attending to these differences, as well as the similarities embedded within a simplistic review of differences, I aimed to trace the connections and disconnections between iterations of the \$15 wage movement.

In this chapter, I outline the central methodological concerns of this project. I begin with contextualizing the methodological overlap between policy mobilities scholarship and labor geography. I then move on to outline the 'overflows' of the \$15 wage movement, explaining the limits to the project as it exists. Then, I turn to the cases at hand, briefly summarizing the contours of the locations I chose as case studies. Next, I discuss the methods themselves, including the types of qualitative interviews and participant observation, as well as the challenges faced during the fieldwork. Finally, I discuss the analysis procedure.

Mobilities & Labor Geography as Methodology

I start this project with two critical methodological lineages: the policy mobilities subset of critical policy studies and the labor geography subset of economic and political geography. Both offer methodological insight that is crucial to the project, and both draw the analytical eye to different aspects of phenomena. Labor geography, through critical case study research, identifies the multiple ways that labor acts as an agent under neoliberal capitalism, manipulating spatial frames politically to the advantage of workers. Policy mobilities, on the other hand, embraces the complexity of a multi-agentic process, focusing on the tracing of a thing across multiple sites. This methodological orientation expands the concept of the field, and removes it from geographic and institutional moorings. By combining both lineages, this project attends both to the agency of labor unions and the spatial strategies they use to construct campaigns, and to the importance and agency of the thing that is moving and the channels in which it moves, in this case, a \$15 minimum wage policy.

Labor geography offers a critical orientation and insight that is crucial to this project. Namely, labor geography provides an insight that labor itself has agency to affect the economic and political landscape of capital and capitalism, and this influence is important to investigate empirically (Herod, 1997). Labor is not an abstract, formless being that is buffeted by the whims of capital, drawn to capital's liking and powerless to affect the environment in which it finds itself. Rather, labor can act, does act, and is a profoundly influential actor within complex political-economic systems that constitute the world under contemporary neoliberal capitalism (Herod, 1997). The efforts of labor geographers to investigate labor agency are numerous, but one strain of the literature that is particularly helpful is that which investigates the forms of organization that workers have employed, creating labor unions and other alternative labor organizations to enhance agency (Coe &

Jordhus-Lier, 2010). The unit of analysis in these studies is the union or the union campaign, focusing on the worker activists who are formally organized and the union staffers who are directly involved in campaign strategy (Fine, 2005; Herod & Aguiar, 2006; Holmes, 2004; Savage, 2006; Sweeney & Holmes, 2012; Tufts, 1998, 2009, Wills, 2001, 2008). These studies are typically organized as case studies, and they are almost entirely focused on successful campaigns, though the definitions of success are in reality quite variable. Another strain of the labor geography literature focuses on the experiences of workers themselves, specifically the intersections between workers' lives at work and other facets of their identity (see McDowell, 2009 for an overview; Wills, 2008; Wills, Evans, Herbert, May, & McIlwaine, 2009). These studies use workers themselves as the units of analysis, investigating personal experiences with work and how these experiences intersect with larger organizing questions. Through deep investigation into the strategies of labor – usually institutionalized labor unions, but also workers who are informally organized or unorganized – labor geographers tease out the impacts of competing groups on the political and economic environment of cities, town, nations. International and global processes are investigated as well, but, as befitting a methodological concentration on containable case studies, these investigations take the local as their starting point.

Critical policy studies and policy mobilities, on the other hand, draw the eye differently. Borrowing from global ethnographic “follow the thing” methods (Freidberg, 2001; Peck & Theodore, 2012), policy mobilities scholars use multiple research sites to trace relationships in and between locations. This lens takes a critically global view, one that understands local processes as constitutively embedded within the global, and global processes as constitutively embedded in the local. It is attuned to connections, disconnections, networks, social milieu both local and extra-local, and the ways in which subjects are enrolled in political processes in multiple locations. The key insight here is the acknowledgement that social processes are multi-sited and require methods that

span multiple locations. This insight complicates traditional understandings of the field, drawing attention to the ways that loosely connected actors relate throughout a spatial field that is not geographically fixed or institutionally embedded (Wedel, Shore, Feldman, & Lathrop, 2005). Moreover, these scholars problematize the policymaking process, especially the ways that the policy process extends beyond traditional jurisdictional and departmental containers, exhibiting a “tendency to ‘overflow’” traditional boundaries (Peck & Theodore, 2012, p. 22). To investigate these components of policy making and mobility, Peck and Theodore developed what they call the “distended case approach,” which follows phenomena and social processes through multiple locations, iterations, and socio-institutional contexts. By following a policy as it moves and mutates, attending to the political, institutional, social, and economic contexts that facilitate and impede mobility, this view highlights the contradictions of fixity and flow in global urban policymaking (McCann, 2011). Like labor geographers, policy mobilities scholars use a variety of qualitative methods, from participant observation and other ethnographic techniques to in-depth interviewing; however, the unit of analysis is the policy, with attention to the local context and institutional and individual actors. Along the way, while maintaining a focus on wider forces, policy mobilities methodology takes seriously the notion that policies themselves are important actors in contemporary global urban political economy.

For this study, I borrow from both perspectives. I investigate the agency of workers and their organizations in the \$15 wage movement, specifically the strategies that they are implementing, and the implications of these strategies for the organized labor movement more generally. I also investigate the policy-making process and the process through which a \$15 wage policy is rendered mobile, which are related to the ways loosely connected actors (including institutional labor) relate across space. Both orientations emphasize the relationships between actors in different places, and the connections (and disconnections) that constitute the broader webs of action that cohere into the

\$15 wage movement. To trace these connections, while attending to the importance of how theory and practice work in specific locations, I employed a three-part case study, investigating three iterations of the \$15 wage movement in three different regions.

The 'Overflows': Defining the \$15 Wage Movement

At the outset, it is important to work towards clarifying the ways a \$15 minimum wage, as a policy and a movement, troubles several traditional analytical boundaries. As anthropologists of public policy have noted, a policy project such as a \$15 minimum wage has the “tendency to ‘overflow’ and exceed” traditional conceptions of governmental processes and jurisdictions (Peck & Theodore, 2012, p. 22). These ‘overflows’ are crucial to understanding movement and mobility in the intersections between social movements and policy movements.

To many commentators, the call for a \$15 minimum wage is synonymous with the Fight for \$15, SEIU’s fast food organizing initiative, which has a specific history that I detail below. In this project, I conceive the \$15 wage movement as much broader than the Fight for \$15, though the Fight for \$15 is a central component of it. Throughout this dissertation, I will use the term Fight for \$15 to refer specifically to the SEIU-sponsored fast food organizing campaign. I will use the more general term, the “\$15 wage movement” to discuss policy campaigns, leftist organizing, and other union \$15 wage campaigns in addition to the SEIU campaign. The \$15 wage movement is a multi-faceted and growing effort to encourage all levels of government to dramatically increase minimum wages. It includes the Fight for \$15, which is SEIU’s signature organizing campaign, but it also includes socialist organizing campaigns such as \$15 Now and the efforts of other trade unions to incorporate \$15 figures into collective bargaining and policy campaigns. As the movement organized through SEIU has developed and achieved victories, another aspect of the \$15 wage movement has emerged: \$15 minimum wage policy innovations and networks that have rendered the idea of a \$15

minimum wage mobile and enabled it to travel across jurisdictions even without organized campaigns. In this section, I offer a brief history of the entangled trajectories of the \$15 minimum wage, and its multiple manifestations.

The Fight for \$15: SEIU's Community Organizing and Fast Food Union Campaign

A central component of the \$15 wage movement is SEIU's Fight for \$15, which emerged gradually over the course of several years. As SEIU's Fight for \$15 has developed, it has cultivated diverse constituencies of worker activists, non-worker activists, organizations, messages, strategies, and tactics through diverse local campaigns and an overarching national coordination, financing, and media presence. These swirling components require a historical view as well: the origins of SEIU's Fight for \$15 lie with early experimentations with community organizing initiatives in selected cities, designed to support industrial union organizing.

The Fight for \$15 developed out of SEIU's first community organizing initiative, which was called the Fight for a Fair Economy (FFE). The FFE was Mary Kay Henry's signature initiative, which she implemented upon her surprise election to the presidency of SEIU in 2010. It began with a mass, door-to-door canvass of low-income neighborhoods with significant people of color populations in 17 targeted cities¹². The people who were mobilized through the canvass and through concurrent workplace-centered efforts were organized into community organizing initiatives (e.g. a housing rights campaign in a Seattle suburb), political organizing (e.g. Jobs Not Cuts activism in opposition to austerity cuts in cities throughout the country), or union organizing (e.g. airport contractor campaigns at airports throughout the country).

¹² Cities involved in the initial FFE organizing were Miami, Orlando, Houston, Dallas, Chicago, Milwaukee, Cleveland, Seattle, New York City, Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Minneapolis, St. Louis, Detroit, Kansas City, and San Diego.

Following two years of organizing under the FFE moniker, SEIU had built up significant community organizing infrastructure in several cities throughout the country. This infrastructure included lists of politically aligned residents, paid organizers, office space, and relationships with local organizations and political power structures. As the FFE developed, however, the community organizing arms experienced a decline in momentum, and by the fall of 2012, none had received the kind of media attention SEIU International leaders were pursuing. At this juncture, SEIU leadership, in conjunction with local FFE affiliates, stumbled upon the campaign that would become the hallmark campaign of SEIU for the next several years. While developing community-organizing campaigns, different cities had developed industry campaigns in different local high-profile industries. Seattle, for instance, had begun to organize coffee shop workers, and had been exploring how a \$15 minimum wage voter initiative might support an organizing campaign at the SeaTac Airport. Chicago, for its part, had begun a campaign to organize retail workers in the luxury shops along the Magnificent Mile. During this period of experimentation, Chicago began organizing under the “Fight for \$15” moniker; eventually, they began to focus on organizing McDonald’s workers and a corporate campaign against the nearby McDonald’s headquarters. Meanwhile, organizers in New York City, working closely with the community organizing group Make the Road, began organizing fast food workers; these workers went out on strike in November 2012, a significant tactical leap that garnered national media coverage and interest from leftist communities across the country. These three streams – the “Fight for \$15” campaign name, the strategy of organizing fast food workers, and the development of local-level policy campaigns – converged gradually into the Fight for \$15 over the course of the following year, 2013.

The SEIU campaign Fight for \$15, then, involves a combination of local policy campaigns, multiple industrial union organizing campaigns, and a comprehensive union campaign to organize McDonald’s workers. The SEIU is coordinating and financing national strategy, but has delegated a

substantial amount of day-to-day organizing decisions to local campaigns. SEIU locals have incorporated Fight for \$15 rhetoric in their industrial organizing and contract bargaining cycles as well, using \$15 as a benchmark figure in various contracts. Methodologically, it is important to hold the national-level strategy component of the Fight for \$15 distinct from the multiple local campaigns, and to select methods that allow for an understanding of the assemblage of strategies, tactics, local relationships, campaign messaging, staff, and worker activists, across time and space. It is also important to hold the SEIU Fight for \$15 campaign analytically separate from other iterations of the \$15 minimum wage.

\$15 Now: Socialist Organizing and Third-Party Politics

The highly structured, hierarchical, and heavily resourced Fight for \$15 is not the only iteration of the \$15 wage movement. Alongside this national-level union campaign structure, other leftist groups developed their own organizations around the \$15 minimum wage. The most prominent of these organizations is Socialist Alternative, which is a Trotskyist political party that has been active in the US since 1968. In Seattle, the Socialist Alternative leader was economist and politician Kshama Sawant. Socialist Alternative and Sawant focused several years of campaigns on the \$15 minimum wage, even organizing a national organization called \$15 Now to support local \$15 minimum wage organizing in several cities.

In 2012, Kshama Sawant ran as the Socialist Alternative candidate for the 43rd District of the Washington State House of Representatives (a district that includes the University of Washington), trying to defeat an entrenched and powerful political figure, Speaker of the House Frank Chopp. In that election, she floated the idea of a \$15 minimum wage, but did not make it a central component of her campaign. In the end, she won about 30 percent of the vote, a surprisingly good showing

against as well-known and well-connected figure. Bolstered by this showing, Sawant ran again as a Socialist candidate, this time for a citywide position challenging the long-time city councilmember Richard Conlin. Conlin had the recent distinction of being the only city council person to vote against city-wide paid sick leave, which has passed in 2011. Before the \$15 minimum wage took center stage in Seattle city government's agenda, paid sick leave have been the most prominent local policy innovation to protect workers in the city. Socialist Alternative as a national organization was closely tracking the developing fast food strikes, and had participated in the initial strikes in New York. In May of 2013, they participated in Seattle fast food strikes, and, emboldened and encouraged by the energy surrounding the issue, made \$15 minimum wage the central issue in Sawant's campaign for city council. It was a hard-fought election, but Sawant's early cooptation of the issue proved decisive: not only did both mayoral candidates eventually come out in support of a \$15 minimum wage, but Sawant eventually won her election by about 1,600 votes in a stunning come from behind victory. The victory was a shock to the Seattle establishment, not least amongst them the organized labor unions that had largely shunned Sawant's campaign.

Immediately following her election, Sawant and Socialist Alternative organized an extra-political organization they named \$15 Now. This organization now has 22 chapters across the country, and they have been especially active in Minneapolis and Philadelphia. In April of 2014, they organized a two-day conference in Seattle that attracted activists from across the world, adopted a minimum wage policy platform, and built organizational structures that are still in place today. Although still relatively small and not as heavily resourced as behemoths like SEIU, Socialist Alternative continues to organize local policy fights around the \$15 minimum wage and run independent Socialist candidates for local office.

Expansion and Diffusion of \$15 Wage Movement

These two formal organizations, with the organizing staff, lists of activists, campaign infrastructure, electioneering, and a whole host of other resources that were developed with the organizations, were central to the explosion of interest in the idea of a \$15 minimum wage. Because of the concerted, formal investment of SEIU in local organizing campaigns, as well as the concordant Socialist organization 15 Now, the \$15 wage movement has exploded and expanded in capacity and reach. The \$15 wage movement now exceeds both the SEIU-funded fast food movement and the Socialist-organized \$15 Now campaign. It serves as a convenient demand and rallying cry for a variety of labor activists and progressive political figures, and has been picked up in a variety of ways in places throughout the country, even in places without formal Fight for \$15 or \$15 Now campaigns.

Tracing the calls for a \$15 minimum wage, which ‘follow-the-thing’ methods suggest, is a tricky proposition. The first and easiest way to trace the spread of the \$15 minimum wage is to identify states and localities that have considered and/or passed a \$15 minimum wage. Successful policy campaigns have led to \$15 minimum wages in California and New York at the state level, and in cities from Seattle to Washington, D.C. As the \$15 wage movement has gained in visibility, labor organizations throughout the United States are going on record as supporting a \$15 minimum wage, and have organized statewide policy campaigns and local policy campaigns around the issue. All of SEIU’s major occupational divisions – healthcare, property services, and public-sector employees – have begun to use the \$15 wage as a wage floor in negotiations. Organizations ranging from the AFL-CIO’s Working American campaign to OUR Wal-Mart, to small local and democratic member-led unions like United Electrical (UE) Local 150 in North Carolina are incorporating calls for a \$15 minimum wage in both nontraditional community union campaigns and their traditional contract

campaigns. Large un-unionized companies are also involving themselves in the \$15 minimum wage debate, with Facebook and other large companies mandating a \$15 wage floor for their contract employees. The issue has become a political issue in national politics as well. The eventual Democratic nominee, Hillary Clinton, did not fully support a \$15 federal minimum wage, as her leftist challenger Bernie Sanders did, but she supported a \$12 federal minimum wage and endorsed the Fight for \$15's efforts in localities. The Democratic Party platform eventually called for the gradual introduction of a \$15 minimum wage at the federal level as the first item. This is an incredible accomplishment and a strikingly tangible example of the speed of the change of this issue on the national stage. In 2008, Barack Obama ran for President with a call to lift the wage to \$9.50; by 2012, that had risen to \$10.10; by 2014 it was up to the \$12. Even during the federal-level Democratic rout of the 2016 elections, states and localities that voted on minimum wage increases overwhelmingly passed them. A figure that would have been anathema just years earlier had reached the political mainstream.

\$15 Wage as Policy

The incorporation of calls for a \$15 minimum wage in various settings, from labor contract campaigns to political campaigns, shows the mobility of the concept as an organizing tool and strategic initiative. The organizational infrastructures built up around the \$15 minimum wage movement are also an important component of the concept, including both the SEIU Fight for \$15 campaign and the Socialist Alternative \$15 Now campaign. Because of the way that the \$15 wage movement is blossoming into an amorphous, uncontainable mismatch of organizations, tactics, and demands, it is important to consider the mobility of the \$15 wage as a *policy*, not just as a political demand or as a campaign infrastructure.

At a basic analytical level, a \$15 minimum wage is a policy that explicitly regulates the conduct of employers with respect to their employees; these regulations vary and are specific to the jurisdiction in which it is implemented. A policy is also more expansive than its regulations, however. A policy can be an example of the diffuse power relations exemplified as the ‘conduct of conduct,’ a social text that “influences the ways people construct themselves, their conduct, and their social relations as free individuals” (Shore & Wright, 1997). By analyzing policy in this way, the conception of what policy does becomes more expansive than a more or less simplistic evaluation of the policies stated goals and effects (Wedel et al., 2005). Policy does work in social, political, and economic relationships in excess of the explicit regulations embedded within them. Looking at a policy in this way exposes their role as “cultural texts, as classificatory devices with various meanings, as narratives that serve to justify or condemn the present, or as rhetorical devices and discursive formations that function to empower some people and silence others” (Shore & Wright, 1997, p. 7). Policy mobilities scholars, for instance, are concerned with the ways that certain policies become “models” for forms of urban redevelopment, and thus become short-hand stand-ins for specific urban places: the Barcelona model for urban regeneration, or the Porto Alegre model of participatory budgeting, the Baltimore model of waterfront redevelopment, to name a few. In this way, a policy performs important reputational work for cities as cities compete for visibility and accolades within a global policy marketplace. Moreover, although policies have quantifiable effects, they are rarely simply rational creatures. As Shore and Wright (1997) put it, “Policies are most obviously political phenomena, yet it is a feature of policies that their political nature is disguised by the objective, neutral, legal-rational idiom in which they are portrayed” (p. 8). The process of rationalization, the ways that ideas are rendered technical and rational, is a central component of the process through which a policy like the \$15 minimum wage is rendered mobile. As the \$15 minimum wage is packaged as a policy idea – one that may reduce income inequality, or make the

economy more efficient, or allow full-time workers to be self-sufficient actors rather than dependents reliant on government aid – it is rendered mobile.

The \$15 minimum wage policy has begun to emerge in places where neither the Fight for \$15 campaign nor the \$15 Now campaign have longstanding local iterations. In Greensboro, North Carolina, a \$15 minimum wage for city workers was, by many accounts, almost plucked out of the air in the absence of a long, concerted campaign, and in the absence of much outside contestation, either by labor activists or by the business community. In this example, the policy itself had begun to do important political work in the eyes of city boosters, becoming something to which a city could turn to produce progressive bona fides and exert moral influence on the economy of the region. In addition to these rare, but interestingly embedded instances of \$15 minimum wage policy, the \$15 minimum wage has emerged in corporate policies, as city policy, as a policy in special jurisdictions. It has been incorporated into collective bargaining contracts, and in hiring advertisements.

The process through which the \$15 minimum wage is becoming made mobile is still ongoing, and it involves questions surrounding a number of elements. From a methodological point of view, the internal components of the policy require analytical attention from a few perspectives. The process through which the policy is rendered mobile is one area of inquiry, as well as the negotiation process through which internal policy components are contested. Additionally, using a ‘follow the policy approach,’ the following questions arise: Who will the \$15 minimum wage affect, namely, who will be written out of the legislation, and how are these exclusions justified? Finally, there is the question of what relational achievements are produced by the adoption of a \$15 minimum wage: how are cities, politicians, activists, etc., viewed after they have been involved with the adoption and implementation of a \$15 minimum wage? Using the policy mobility method of ‘following the policy,’ I attend to the process of crafting a \$15 minimum wage policy in specific places, as well as the way

the \$15 minimum wage policy has been rendered mobile (along with other contextual factors that facilitate mobility) in excess of the campaigns that purport to move this policy from place to place.

Methods

This project is a three-part case study, spanning three distinct geographical locations and many different labor unions, community organizations, and governmental offices, while centering on the same policy effort: increasing the minimum wage to \$15 per hour. By attending to the local specificity of each campaign while also tracing the contour lines that connect these disparate places, I designed the project to show the moments of connection alongside the moments of disjuncture.

Case Study Site Selection

With a project concerned with mobility, selecting case study sites is the most pressing methodological question. I had two concerns. I wanted to select sites where there was some evidence of connection, threads that stitched the campaigns and policies together. However, I wanted to be attentive to the moments of disconnection and disjuncture. The mobility of campaigns and policies is not smooth across space, and with labor campaigns and progressive policies, the socio-political geographic walls that impede progress are as central to the story as the networks of activists and progressive policymakers that facilitate movement.

I conducted research in three locations: Seattle, Washington, Chicago, Illinois, and the Piedmont Crescent of North Carolina (Greensboro and Durham). These places represent different regions, different histories of labor struggle and trade unionism, different locations within regional and national political economy, different political relationships with their state governments, different governance authorities, and different internal racial and class politics. Despite these differences, each location seriously considered a \$15 minimum wage, either for all workers in the city

or for municipal employees. Below, I introduce the locations that were the site of my research, explaining why each site was chosen and how it connected (or failed to connect) with the other field sites.

Seattle, Washington

The \$15 wage movement saw its two biggest early victories in the Seattle metropolitan region in 2014, making it the logical starting point for this dissertation. Starting this research in Seattle allows for the investigation of how policy ideas and coordinated campaigns take root in particular places, are shaped by the places they find themselves rooted in, and then continue on their way. Seattle's unique "left coast" politics, boom-town tech economy and the accordant inequality that has accompanied the boom, and the confluence of a strong traditional business union movement mixed with radical labor union upstarts and innovative new economy unions makes it an ideal place to study the growth and development of the \$15 wage policy and the campaigns that continue to emerge from it.

Seattle has long been slightly politically separate from the rest of the United States. James Gregory has called Seattle a quintessentially "left coast city," arguing that it is unique in the way that it is entrenched in progressive politics even as it encourages retrogressive redevelopment and a business-friendly environment: "Like San Francisco, Seattle settled into a politics that is relatively uncontentious, sometimes experimental, and proudly tolerant, while also remaining friendly to business and mostly blind to deep-seated inequalities" (Gregory, 2015). Seattle is proud and possessive of its liberal image, making more jarring the contradictions inherent in a largely post-industrial economy that has created immense wealth alongside a booming low-wage service sector. Until the recent spate of local level labor regulation, Seattle's politics would have been more identifiable as being pro-LGBTQ, concerned with environmental sustainability, and interested in

celebrating diversity, rather than engaging in robust class politics. Seattle's current version of progressive politics has not always taken up class as a central organizing feature in recent boom times, although the city has been a leader on environmental justice and LGBT rights.

It wasn't always so, of course. Early in its history, the Pacific Northwest developed a radical labor tradition with a large and active International Workers of the World (IWW) and International Longshore Workers Union (ILWU) (Tyler, 1954). These early organizational and radical efforts resulted in two large-scale strikes: the 1919 general strike, and participation in the West Coast waterfront strike of 1934 (Friedheim, 1964). Seattle saw strong labor unions develop in lockstep with the aerospace industry that dominated the economy of the city through the middle of the 20th century. The prominence of Boeing as the central economic engine of the region during WWII and the post-war period led to the corresponding prominence of aerospace unions as well: The International Association of Machinists (IAM) in particular grew to be a powerful business union check on Boeing's political and economic dominance. However, like many other places struggling with deindustrialization pressures during the 1970s and 1980s, the prominence of Boeing as a regional driver and the corresponding prominence of the IAM and other industrial business unions as the labor foil to the corporate behemoth waned. The WTO protests in 1999 brought together a broad coalition of environmentalist and labor activists, among others, and ushered in a new era of labor coalition politics (Glassman, 2001). In 2015, Washington State had the highest minimum wage in the country, at \$9.47 per hour because a coalition of labor unions had orchestrated a reform to the state minimum wage that tied it to inflation in 1996. Seattle, however, had not joined other progressive cities in adopting so-called Living Wage initiatives during the 1990s or early 2000s. In 2010, a coalition of labor unions – Seattle's local iterations of “new labor,” including UNITE-HERE, UFCW, and SEIU – started agitating on the city level for city-level policy change to help working families, beginning with paid sick leave. Since Seattle's local unions began to concentrate on

city-level policy, they have pushed enough local labor regulatory changes through city council (ban the box, paid sick leave, \$15 minimum wage, and secure scheduling) that the city found it necessary to create a new Office of Labor Standards to oversee the implementation of the new ordinances.

Despite the liberal politics and growing amount of local labor regulation, Seattle has remained a haven for a wide variety of businesses. Boeing, once the defining employer of the region, remains the largest employer, even though its headquarters moved to Chicago in 2007. Paccar, the large truck manufacturer, is still headquartered in the Seattle region, and employs many manufacturing workers in the region; Weyerhaeuser, which was previously a vertically-integrated lumber company before converting to a Real Estate Investment Trust in 2012, is another lasting example from a previous economic era, focused on extractive industries. Although there is still some manufacturing employment, however, the Seattle region is now better known for its booming technology economy. Since the 1990s, Seattle has made a go of it as a tech haven, being the birthplace of Microsoft and Amazon. The technology industry is steadier and more established than the start-up froth that churns in San Francisco, but it is just as reliant on a highly educated workforce, which skews both white and male. As this industry has continued to grow in the wake of the Great Recession, the changing composition of the city's workforce has resulted in an increase to income inequality in the city, as business services and professional technology positions increase alongside the need for low-wage service positions. In 2015, 95% of new arrivals to Seattle were either rich or poor. The flood of liquid capital into the housing market further pressured low and middle-income residents alike, creating an affordability crisis while making some people incredibly wealthy. Homelessness, a perennial and visible urban problem in warmer western climates, was becoming more pronounced and more entrenched as the city grappled with the construction and relocation of tent cities. After the economic recovery from the Great Recession began, the city, like

other large, progressive cities along the west coast, was to grapple with increasingly entrenched income inequality (Brown and Morrill, 2011).

In 2014, Seattle became the first large US city to adopt a \$15 minimum wage. The \$15 wage victory, first in SeaTac and then in Seattle, was a crucial early proof of concept for the promotion of substantial local-level minimum wage increases. Moreover, Seattle was an important location for the early Fight for a Fair Economy organizing, and the same unions involved in the Seattle campaign were also involved in the Sea-Tac Airport campaign that led to the \$15 minimum wage initiative there. The explosion of media coverage of the \$15 wage ordinance in both SeaTac and Seattle brought national attention to what had previously been a fringe labor movement. Until the victory in SeaTac, fast food worker organizing in New York City and Chicago had appeared both novel and outrageous; once \$15 had won on the ballot in SeaTac, it was suddenly clear that these campaigns had the potential to usher in progressive labor regulation at the local level. The importance of Seattle's campaign and the swirl of unions, socialist groups, and mainstream political figures that made it possible are all central to understanding the mobility of the \$15 minimum wage.

As it is appropriate to indicate my own positionality as it relates to this project (England, 1994), I should also note that Seattle has been my home for the majority of my life. I grew up in the 1980s, the child of a Boeing worker, when everyone was still worried about what the next round of Boeing layoffs would do to the city. I left town for most of the 2000s, and returned in 2009 to a vastly transformed playground for young professionals, whose tastes and ways of thinking had irrevocably changed the social and physical landscape of the city. I worked in the labor movement as a researcher for SEIU 775 for three years from 2009-2012, where I worked on the Fight for a Fair Economy campaign and the Sea-Tac Organizing campaign, which was the first successful \$15 minimum wage initiative in the country. I am also white. These experiences certainly influence my

perception of the city and the importance of labor politics within it, and offer access to specific narratives about the \$15 minimum wage movement as it developed.

Chicago, Illinois

The statewide movement for \$15 has gained momentum in Illinois several years after it stalled in Chicago in 2014. As the research and writing of this dissertation has drawn to a close, Illinois has inched closer and closer to passing a statewide \$15 minimum wage. When I began this project in 2015, the chance that the Illinois State government would pass a \$15 minimum wage would have seemed about as likely as Rod Blagojevich being re-elected Governor. But, as of June, 2017, the Illinois State Senate and House of Representatives had both passed a \$15 minimum wage law, sending it to the Republican Governor Bruce Rauner, who will likely veto the legislation. When I conceived this project, I was drawn to Chicago's history of minimum wage activism for two central reasons: 1) I had already observed connections between \$15 minimum wage activists in Seattle and Chicago, through the existing relationships between the labor unions most involved in the early campaigns; and 2) the campaign for a \$15 minimum wage was obviously active and compelling in Chicago, but it was ultimately unsuccessful. This first observation suggests that a deeper analysis of the connections between places would yield interesting results. The second observation provides an insight, however brief and partial, into the politics of policy failure, an aspect of policy mobilities that is attracting increasing scholarship (Urban Politics of Policy Failure session at the 2017 AAG).

The city itself also drew illustrative contrasts with Seattle's political and economic context. Chicago has been a deeply entrenched business union town for most of the 20th Century, with a long history of radical labor union struggle and a more recent history of politically connected business unions with access, resources, and power within the city's party system. Moreover, Chicago's economy, although buffeted by plant closings and deindustrialization like its rust belt neighbors, has

maintained a relevant manufacturing presence alongside new economy drivers in the finance and logistics industries. The contrast between a gleaming technology boom economy like Seattle's, with the massive urban population growth and rising inequality, and the significant, but more measured industrial restructuring within Chicago, which has been accompanied by population decline, is illuminating. The partial victory for the \$15 minimum wage, the deep formal and informal connections between the labor unions driving the \$15 campaigns in Seattle and Chicago, and the important differences in the economic and political histories of these two cities were the central reasons Chicago was selected as a field site.

Chicago, as the saying goes, is a union town. From the battles over the 8-hour day to the Pullman strikes of the late 19th century, the story of US labor is written in and through the story of the city. Currently, the city still has union density in the top 20th percentile of the US metropolitan statistical areas, although it has declined significantly in the past few decades. In the social sciences, Chicago has often been made to stand in for a paradigmatic Fordist economy due to the strength of its manufacturing and food processing sectors and the strength of organized labor within its economy (Doussard, 2013). Its labor movement remains strong in both traditional AFL-CIO trade unions and new labor. The central labor council wields political power in the state and in the city, and is solid in its insider status within the Democratic political machine. In addition, however, there are several new labor groups that are active in various labor-community coalitions in the city. SEIU has both a powerful building services (janitorial) union and a growing healthcare union in the city. SEIU's first incorporated local, SEIU Local 1, is headquartered in Chicago, and has been active since the 1920s. Homecare worker organizing of the 1990s, an innovative campaign in its own right, resulted in a large homecare workers union, which was eventually consolidated into a comprehensive healthcare union, SEIU HCII. The Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) was taken over by a radical contingent in 2010, pushing the union to the left and leading to one of the most notable strikes in

the last 20 years. The Republic Windows and Doors factory occupation in 2008, and the subsequent worker cooperative that emerged from the campaign, represented a surprising (and largely isolated) resurgence of labor militancy in manufacturing. Renewed labor militancy has sat uneasily with the labor groups that remain in the inner circle of Chicago politics, especially the building trades. The labor groups that are building coalitions with community groups (which have their own strong history of grassroots organizing in the city) have found ways to maintain power through outsider status, and are driving the \$15 wage movement.

Unlike Seattle, which never developed a tradition of local living wage policy activism, Chicago is no stranger to living wage policy fights. Beginning in the 1980s, before other cities had begun to fight for living wage laws, activists in Chicago learned that they had a few political windows for passing citywide minimum wage ordinances in spite of the iron fist of the mayor in policy matters. Living wage policies were overwhelmingly popular among Chicago voters, and activists found that if they could pressure recalcitrant aldermen by tying them to an unfavorable position on the minimum wage they could increase their odds of victory with a challenger. Over the course of the 1990s and 2000s, Chicago and Illinois each passed a series of wage increases, and declined to pass others. The coalition of labor and community groups that developed these living wage campaigns was a lasting one, and the interplay between coalition politics, city politics, and city and state policy influenced the political context in which the \$15 minimum wage was debated.

The labor movement in Chicago has been affected by the deindustrialization pressures that have transformed the city's economy in the past 30 years. These economic pressures have been experienced differently than they have been in a city like Seattle, and provide another point of connection and contrast between the two cities. Declining manufacturing and Rust Belt to Sun Belt population shifts over the last half century have changed the industrial make up of Chicago, with the plant closures in the 1970s and 1980s giving way to city that has reimagined itself as a hub for

logistics, technology, and professional financial services. Chicago is the financial capital of the Midwest, home to the Chicago Mercantile Exchange and the Chicago Board of Trade, which makes the city a global center of commodities, derivatives, and futures trading. The city has remained deeply divided, however, with the division most viscerally experienced in the uneven development of the downtown “Loop” versus the deindustrialized “neighborhoods” (Doussard, 2013). Despite the departure from Fordism, however, Chicago remains more balanced than a boomtown like Seattle: Doussard, for example, has characterized the city as a “uniquely mixed economy in an era marked by extremes—more reliant on manufacturing than its peers on the coasts but more successful at capturing finance and advanced services than its industrial neighbors in the Midwest...What emerges is a specific, messy urbanity, not the highly stylized global city of the urban studies imagination.” (Doussard, 2013, p. 54). These specificities of the local economy would become important points of contention in the course of the \$15 wage debate.

Chicago offers a unique perspective on the mobility of the \$15 minimum wage. It offers, for one, glimpses of the connections that stitch together Fight for \$15 activism in disparate places. The large labor unions active in the campaign in Chicago allow for the tracing of explicit institutional ties between places. It is a large city, paradigmatically Fordist during the 20th Century and halfheartedly inching towards the inequalities of a global city economy in the 21st, which implies connections and disconnections with Seattle’s booming economy. It is, however, also the site of a policy failure: the minimum wage that the city passed in 2014 was higher than it had been, but it would not reach \$15. Chicago is an interesting case not because it was first or superlative in any way. It wasn’t the first city to consider a \$15 minimum wage. Until 2017 it seemed unlikely that a \$15 minimum wage would gain traction in the state legislature, like it did in California and New York. Chicago didn’t start the Fight for \$15 or fast food organizing: its Fight for a Fair Economy organizing arm had originally concentrated on high-profile retail. However, in a unique confluence of political events that

occurred as Seattle was debating and passing its own \$15 minimum wage, the city hastily threw together a Minimum Wage working group and pushed through a streamlined \$13 minimum wage for the city just months after the \$15 minimum wage was passed in Seattle. The historic conjuncture of the two events, the deep connections between labor unions in Seattle and Chicago, and the unique and cultivated relationship between Chicago politics and national politics open up space for a considering the role of cross-place and cross-scalar relationships in the negotiation of mobility of the \$15 wage.

The Triad and the Triangle: North Carolina's Industrial Center

In August 2015, Greensboro, NC became the first city in the US South to pass a \$15 minimum wage for municipal employees. By 2015, there had been rumblings of Fight for \$15 campaign activity in the South, but none of the campaigns had achieved inroads into local policy discussions. When I learned about this event through an e-mail newsletter from the AFL-CIO's Working America project, I was immediately intrigued. Greensboro's new policy suggested that the \$15 minimum wage had been transferred, to some extent, across the historic regional firewall that has stopped a substantial amount of pro-worker legislation from crossing the Mason-Dixon line. A \$15 minimum wage policy – much modified, of course – had made inroads in the second-least unionized state in the country, without substantial union investment in a formal Fight for \$15 campaign, without a hospitable state political climate, and without many immediately visible connections between institutionalized labor partners. These factors encouraged me to select Greensboro as the third field site for this project.

The relationship between the US labor movement and the US South is fraught. Labor unions developed in the industrialized North in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, and have simply been unable to cross into the South in significant numbers. Although the ultimate reason

behind this stalled mobility is debatable, it likely has both political and economic roots (Simon, 1997). The dearth of unions in the South has created an internal geographic outlet for American companies seeking low-wage, politically acquiescent environments. As Simon explains, this geographic barrier had effects on the strength of the labor movement throughout the country:

The rise of modern trade unionism, which took place between 1930 and 1950, and brought nearly 40 percent of the nation's manufacturing workers into unions, left the South largely untouched. With a third of the country unorganized, labor's shop-floor power and political potency were severely limited everywhere. As long as large pockets of the nation remained outside of the House of Labor, employers everywhere tried to pull wages down to the dismal levels that prevailed in unorganized areas. (Simon, 1997, pp. 483–484)

A study of mobility that tests the limits of an idea's ability to travel should consider the stress points, specifically historic locations of disconnection. For this project, the movement of labor union campaigns into the South has been such a rupture in the past: considering the form and quality of the movement of the \$15 wage movement to the South offers the opportunity to test the forms of connections that are made across historic political and economic geographic rifts.

North Carolina has the distinction of being one of the most anti-union, most heavily racially gerrymandered, and also one of the most politically divided states in the southern United States. Only its southern neighbor, South Carolina, has a smaller percentage of its workforce represented by a union. The Republican take-over of the state legislature in 2010 resulted in some of the most virulent conservative backlash against Democratic policies seen in the country, beginning with an attempt to rollback voting rights, continuing with a brazenly partisan and racist redistricting process, and culminating in the reactionary bill HB2, which outlawed transgender people from using the bathroom that matched their current gender presentation. HB2 in particular brought North Carolina politics onto a critical national stage. Many of these reactionary actions were later overturned by the courts due to their overt discriminatory character, or, as is the case in HB2, have been amended to mollify critics. Others, however, remain, especially those that limit the authority of cities to pass a

wide variety of legislation, from sanctuary city policies to the ability of cities and counties to regulate the employment practices of city contractors.

Despite the current Republican stranglehold on state politics, however, the state sometimes seems on the cusp of becoming a foothold for Democratic national politics in the inhospitable South. Urban areas are as predictably liberal as cities in the north, although they are less overwhelmingly progressive than a west coast city like Seattle. When gerrymandered districts aren't an issue, as with presidential politics and state-wide races, residents are closely divided: Barack Obama famously won the state in 2008, and although the state flipped for Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election, the Democratic challenger for governor, Roy Cooper, narrowly defeated the incumbent Republican. Smaller cities within the state from, Asheville to Greensboro, are as likely to be Democratic as the largest city, Charlotte; the political divide within the state is at its heart an urban/rural divide.

Within the state, uneven development has created large geographic rifts. The state economy was based from its beginnings on agricultural exports, grew into a center for textile manufacturing, and has been transitioning away from both since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the 1990s decimated the remaining textile firms. Greensboro remains the headquarters of several international textile groups, including the International Textile Group (ITG) and VF Corporation, but the production activities of these firms have largely moved overseas. The Piedmont, an economic region that stretches through the center of Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, is the industrial heartland of the US South, and it passes through the central part of North Carolina between the mountain west and the coastal east. The "Piedmont Crescent" of North Carolina encompasses the large megalopolis region including Charlotte, Greensboro (the Triad), and Raleigh (the Research Triangle). It is the fourth largest manufacturing region in the country, but manufacturing firms remain under constant pressure to relocate further south and out

of the US. The ascendant industries in the state are finance, including insurance, and research and technology, industries that are increasingly geographically concentrated in large urban centers in the state, especially Charlotte and the research triangle surrounding Raleigh. Increasing urbanization is altering the character of the social and economic geography of the state. Raleigh/Durham is the center for biotechnology research and higher education in the state, and has grown substantially in the last ten years. Greensboro, where I spent the majority of my time, has alternately thrived and floundered in the shift from a largely agricultural economy based on tobacco and textiles to knowledge economy work. With multiple universities and a sustainable logistics industry, Greensboro continues to expand economically. However, growth within the metropolitan area is unevenly shared: Greensboro/High Point regularly tops national lists among cities that struggle with hunger (McLaughlin, 2015).

The history of labor in North Carolina is largely one of suppression. It is currently the second-least unionized state in the country, and only about 4% of workers in the state are members of a union. In contrast to other southern states like West Virginia or Alabama, where unions were formed through often bloody industrial conflict, the industrial conflicts in the industrial piedmont, while just as hotly contested, typically ended without union organization. The Piedmont textile strike of 1934 was one of the largest mass strikes in US history. More than 65,000 workers stayed off the job in North Carolina alone, alongside hundreds of thousands more throughout the South through the northeast. The militancy of the southern workers was matched by harsh, multi-generational repression, which quashed all lasting worker organization that emerged from the effort (Stoney, Helfand, & Rostock, 1995). The United Textile Workers (UTW), which had supported the strike in the early days, withdrew resources from the strike as it continued, leaving the workers unprotected from reprisals such as arrest and black lists. The ultimate failure of the strike left a bitter memory that various unions tried and failed to overcome in the proceeding decades. A well-funded attempt

by the CIO to organize southern textile mills, dubbed Operation Dixie, eventually ran out of steam in the 1950s, and since then, there has been little institutional investment in organizing southern workers. Simon sums up the current situation of labor in the South nicely:

Narrow interpretations of labor laws, employee screening, repeated threats of moving further south, and several generations of union defeats make it hard for today's southern laborers to build unions in their communities and secure the protections they so desperately need against dangerous conditions. No unions in turn mean low wages; low wages mean lower tax bases; lower tax bases mean less money for schools; less money for schools means weaker schools, and poor schools make it harder for people to develop the skills necessary to earn higher wages. Lower wage scales, then, attract more antiunion companies. The cycle of anti-unionism that southern workers could not break during the New Deal era continues today without an end in sight. (Simon, 1997, p. 483)

The anti-union cycle that began with the failed textile strike of 1934 continues apace today. North Carolina today continues to be almost entirely un-represented by unions.

However, alongside a history of brutal repression and countless institutional labor losses exists a parallel story of experimentation with novel forms of organizing and radical uprising. Novel labor organizing strategies, born out of necessity, have set down roots in North Carolina throughout the 20th Century and into the 21st. In Winston-Salem, one particular union, the Food, Tobacco, Agriculture and Allied Workers (FTA-CIO) Local 22 built a strong inter-racial (but predominately African American) industrial union in the tobacco industry in the 1950s and 1960s, using a hybrid organizing style that mixed civil rights organizing with class based workplace organizing (Korstad, 2003). In a contemporary example, a non-majority union¹³ in an aerospace parts manufacturer in Greenville, North Carolina, has shown over the last 20 years the power of flexible democratic organization and dogged determination to win a series of victories for workers there (Wrenn, 2002). And the recent decade-long fight to win a union at the Smithfield chicken processing plant in Tar Heel, North Carolina ended in victory in 2007 thanks to the coordinated community campaign that

¹³ A non-majority union is not recognized under federal law as the exclusive bargaining agent with an employer. However, with committed participation of a minority of workers, a non-majority union can pressure employers to make changes at a work place.

brought people to action across the state (McAlevey, 2016). Whereas labor unions grew from chaotic worker mobilizations of the early 20th century into stolid institutions with the power to raise or topple local politicians in places like Seattle or Chicago, in North Carolina, radical action was never contained into strong institutional channels. Where labor militancy exists, and it exists throughout the South if one is interested enough to go looking for it, it is done in a tradition of community-embedded organizing, and it is accomplished without many of the resources of the large northern labor unions.

If North Carolina lacks a strong institutional labor organizational tradition, it does not lack strong institutional organizing practices centered on civil rights and racial equity. Greensboro, in particular, was a vital hub of organizing during the Civil Rights Movement as well as a center of the Black Power Movement in the South. The lunch counter sit-in movement of 1964 started at the Woolworth's counter in downtown Greensboro, and was organized by North Carolina A&T students and supported by local high school students. There were reportedly as many people involved in Civil Rights protests in downtown Greensboro as there were in Birmingham during this period (Chafe, 1980). Leaders who developed from this period are still active in Greensboro, including the Reverend Nelson Johnson and the founders of the International Civil Rights Center and Museum, Melvin Alston and Earl Jones. Today the North Carolina NAACP maintains a flourishing branch, led by the inestimable Rev. William Barber. Rev. Barber. Rev. Barber, using NAACP resources to build a unique coalition of partners throughout the state, developed the Moral Mondays movement in 2013 to respond to Republican-led austerity cuts at the state level. The protest movement brought Sunday morning moral issues to Monday morning state politics, organizing civil disobedience on Mondays throughout several consecutive legislative sessions. This coalition was instrumental to the Smithfield union organizing victory, mentioned above. The interaction between labor organizing and organizing around racial equity is an important component

to North Carolina's history of progressive activism, and an illuminating contrast to the relative importance of racial and labor organizing in non-southern locations like Seattle and Chicago.

Another element of contrast between North Carolina and progressive states like Illinois and Washington is the amount of political contradictions and deeply divisive politics that characterize the state-level political atmosphere in North Carolina. The fastest growing parts of the state – Charlotte and the Research Triangle – skew liberal, while the declining rural portions of the state are becoming more conservative with each passing year. Whereas in Washington State, the Seattle region is large enough and politically homogeneous enough to determine the state legislature's politics, in North Carolina, the largest cities are still outnumbered and outmaneuvered by rural places. In 2010, North Carolina voters ushered in a Republican majority, which quickly moved to ensure its perpetual tenure through voting rights restrictions and racist redistricting maneuvers. These crass political maneuvers resulted in the formation of a novel opposition movement – the Moral Mondays movement – that drew strength from the NAACP, LGBTQ rights groups, the little labor that existed in the state, and progressive religious ministers. Moral Mondays protests stirred a latent outrage over the Republican takeover, organizing thousands of new activists to take part in orchestrated civil disobedience at the state legislature to protest austerity cuts, voting rights act infringements, and, naked political power grabs that sought to limit the ability of cities to pass progressive legislation.

The passage of House Bill 2 (HB2) in 2016, so soon after Greensboro's \$15 minimum wage victory, was an important reason I decided North Carolina would be a particularly apt case study for my project. In a hastily called special session at the beginning of 2016, lawmakers passed a sweeping ban on local authority to protect LGBTQ citizens (especially transgender citizens) and other racial minorities. In a clear overreach, the bill also banned transgender individuals from using the bathroom that matched their gender identity; this aspect of the bill provoked the most outrage from

outside the state, and HB2 became synonymous with reactionary anti-LGBTQ policymaking. In addition to the anti-LGBTQ action, the bill notably included, almost as a footnote, a rescission of county authority to increase minimum wages above the state rate. The state had dispatched with the authority of cities to do so a few years earlier. It was the latest salvo in a long-ranging war on cities, perpetuated by the North Carolina state government on the localities that so frequently defied it through progressive incrementalism. The political divide between urban residents and the rural areas that dominate state politics has resulted in a series of ugly and naked power grabs. The vindictiveness of state legislators towards their local counterparts had been on display multiple times in the years leading up to HB2, which thrust the state into the national spotlight. The state had, for example, undid the ability of cities to acknowledge the alternative IDs of otherwise undocumented residents, and had taken over authority of the Charlotte airport. With HB2, the legislature further limited cities' authority to enforce anti-discrimination ordinances. This hostile relationship between cities and state government is another potential barrier to the mobility of local politics, and by selecting North Carolina cities as their own case study, I wanted to explore the way local policies are shared from place to place under these conditions.

If one were to compare Greensboro with other cities that had waded into the debate over a \$15 minimum wage, say Chicago or Seattle, one would find a significantly lower cost of living, a drastically different economic base, and a population too small and divided to determine the trajectory of state politics. One would also find a city in the “geographical and temporal interstices of the failure and promise of the civil rights movement” – a working class city with professional aspirations, a racially divided and diverse city with a largely white power structure, and a city proud of its Quaker history of resistance to oppression (Robinson, 2014). The contrasts between the South and the North are less extreme than commonly held, but including a progressive southern city in my

study of labor policies that are on the move allowed for deeper considerations of both the connections and disconnections that characterize these movements.

Data Collection

While planning fieldwork, it was important to me to spend sustained time in each of the three locations. I was interested in participating in as many different types of events as possible, from marches to meetings, and because of the nature of grassroots policy campaigns, I knew it would be impossible to time short-term travel in order to participate fully in these activities. That said, time constraints meant that I would spend a different amount of time in each of these three locations. I was in Chicago for three months in the fall of 2015. I was in Greensboro conducting fieldwork, with short trips to Durham, for six months in 2016. I remained in Greensboro while writing up the dissertation, and have been here, in total, for just over a year. I was based in Seattle, doing fieldwork and interviews for almost all of 2014 and 2015. I also worked in the labor movement in Seattle between 2009 and 2012, a time that included an assignment on the Fight for a Fair Economy campaign and the SeaTac Airport organizing campaign. During this period, I organized and attended marches, rallies, and meetings. These experiences produced contacts within the labor movement in Seattle and inform my analyses.

While in each location, I conducted interviews and engaged in participant observation. I reviewed news reports and policy documents about minimum wage policy discussions. As discussed in the overflows section of this chapter, the \$15 minimum wage movement contains a multitude of organizations, actors, and items. Because of this knowledge, I ranged widely, trying to avoid limiting myself to the organizations and actors that I already assumed would be active in \$15 wage activism. I participated in Fight for \$15 activities, Socialist Alternative activities, local union activities, as well as activities that were organized independently by various coalition partners but promoted by groups

that were more centrally involved in \$15 wage movement. I attended public meetings, from city council meetings to organizing committee meetings. I also became more or less formally involved in a few organizations that were important to the \$15 wage movement: during my prolonged stay in Seattle, I was formally employed by a labor union, and during my prolonged stay in Greensboro, I became involved in a local branch of the International Socialist Organization, whose membership was heavily tilted towards the few labor activists active in the city. In this section, I detail the specific forms of data collection I used to form the basis of my analysis.

Interviews

While in each place, I reached out to representatives from various labor organizations, socialist worker groups, community organizations, policy makers, city bureaucrats, labor lawyers, and local academics for interviews. Labor unions and community organizations often put me in touch with worker activists and community activists who were not on the organization payroll. I strove for balance and reach in my interviews in a number of different ways. Although the project fell short in certain ways, which I discuss below, over the course of more than one year in the field I was able to formally interview 101 people, representing a wide range of voices involved in the effort to pass a \$15 minimum wage in each location. Additionally, I had numerous informal, off-the-record conversations with workers and activists involved in various activities, and cultivated a few ongoing relationships with people involved in my research.

The table below outlines the total number of interviews in each location, broken down by the type of organization with which each person was affiliated. Both the category “labor” and “community” includes worker and community activists alongside staff members; the category “policy” includes elected officials, members of government working groups, policy advocacy groups such as think tanks, and bureaucrats. In Seattle and Chicago, socialist activists were included in the

“labor” category despite not necessarily belonging to a labor union. The Seattle and SeaTac interviews were collected with a team of interviewers as part of a broader project, the SeaTac/Seattle Minimum Wage History Project.

Table 2.1: Interviews by Interviewee Affiliation

Study Site	Labor	Community	Policy	Business	Total
Seattle/SeaTac	31	8	11	5	55
Greensboro/Durham	10	6	8	0	24
Chicago	11	5	5	1	22
Total	52	19	24	6	101

In each location, I sought out a mixture of voices, including those who were opposed to minimum wage increases. I found representatives of the opposition in each location, although organized business lobby groups were less likely to respond to my requests than labor organizations. In Greensboro and Durham, because the policy that was considered did not directly affect businesses, there was very little, if any, organized business opposition to the efforts; I spoke instead to some policymakers who opposed the effort to increase the minimum wage. I interviewed staff members from a variety of locations throughout their organizations, from worker activists, entry-level organizers, to local presidents and federation leaders. Moreover, I contacted women, people of color, and LGBTQ people who were active in these organizations, and managed to talk to a diverse group of respondents. However, I did not ask interviewees to identify their race, gender, or sexuality during the interview, and, being unwilling to make assumptions about interview subjects’ identifications, I cannot report the breakdown.

Labor unions (and some established community organizations) can be impenetrable organizations if you are not staff or a worker activist. Closed-off behavior is typically for the protection of vulnerable workers: the risks associated with labor organizing, especially organizing a union at a hostile workplace, are real, and unions protect access to workers and worker-focused meetings in order to minimize these risks. Unions are also wary about political blowback and

infiltration by conservative political organizations. I was fortunate that I had close personal and professional ties with staff members in Seattle and Chicago, cultivated through my previous employment with SEIU 775. I was able to use these contacts for initial introductions with labor union staffers. Gaining access to labor in North Carolina was, in some ways, more difficult than in Seattle or Chicago, both because there are fewer active labor unions in North Carolina and because I had no pre-existing relationships with staffers there. However, I found the labor organizing culture in North Carolina to be more open and willing to engage with outsiders than I had expected. Although there were few organizations to approach, I was able to secure interviews with most of the people I approached. In Seattle and North Carolina, very few labor-affiliated subjects whom I approached declined to be interviewed.

There is one important caveat about my access to labor unions in Chicago. Despite several attempts to schedule an interview with a representative from the Fight for \$15 campaign in Chicago, the director of the local organization ultimately refused an interview. When I approached Fight for \$15 organizers at events, they also declined to participate. The director declined to participate because of time constraints; ground level organizers typically declined to participate by referring me to a communications organizer, who would refer me to the director. Despite securing strong introductions through trusted sources, access to organizations is not inevitable (England, 2002). Although I was unable to directly discuss the campaign with Fight for \$15 activists, I was able to interview representatives from all the major SEIU Locals in Chicago, including SEIU Local 1, SEIU Local 73, and SEIU Healthcare IL/IN. In addition, I was also able to interview representatives from the central community-organizing arm, Action Now, which received a substantial investment (upwards of \$1 million) from the SEIU international to implement the Fight for a Fair Economy organizing project. I was also able to interview representatives from the Grassroots Collaborative,

which, in conjunction with Action Now, SEIU Healthcare IL/IN, and Fight for \$15 ran the \$15 referendum.

The interviews I conducted were semi-structured, and questions were open-ended in order to prompt expanded exposition. For my interviews in Chicago and North Carolina, participants agreed to participate under conditions that would allow their interviews to remain confidential. For my interviews in Seattle, several interviews were collected in conjunction with the Seattle/SeaTac Minimum Wage History Project, which were completed with the knowledge that they would be publicly attached to the name of the person providing the interview. The interviews that I conducted as part of my fieldwork in Chicago and North Carolina were done under the auspices of anonymity to protect participants. Throughout the dissertation, interviews collected through the Minimum Wage History Project are attributed to their authors; interviews collected otherwise are reported with the date of the interview, the category of interviewee, and the location of the interview. The mixture of sourced and anonymous interviews in this article reflects this difference. These interviews were public oral history interviews, and were immediately made available to the public online through the Labor Archives of Washington. Despite the difference in confidentiality in these locations, I did not experience a marked difference in the degree of forthrightness in the interview process. This could be for a few reasons. One, most people who were interviewed with the Minimum Wage History Project were political operatives of one stripe or another, and were publicly invested in publicizing their ideological commitments and successes. Because the Seattle and SeaTac campaigns had been successful, the interviews served almost as a victory lap, and interview subjects were excited to participate in a project to investigate why the success had occurred and record the history of the campaigns for perpetuity. Two, most of the people I interviewed through the Minimum Wage History Project had been my co-workers while I worked at SEIU 775, or I had worked closely with

them on other projects during my tenure there. The pre-existing relationships enhanced trust and encouraged forthrightness.

A sample interview protocol is attached in Appendix B. I asked participants about their personal and organizational involvement with efforts to pass a \$15 minimum wage. I asked about organizational strategies, motivations, goals, and broader impacts of the efforts. I asked specific questions about connections with other places. When appropriate, I probed for more detail. Although questions were slightly different depending on the subject's position – for example, a policymaker would have less insight into alternative strategies for labor organizing – a core set of questions about impacts and connections between places were the same across the interviews. Following the interviews, I wrote down notes highlighting the most important themes that emerged from the conversations. I then transcribed the interviews verbatim, removing identifying characteristics; once the dissertation is accepted, these transcriptions will be deposited with the Labor Archives of Washington, and, following a 5-year holding period, will be available to the public. Several interviews were collected in conjunction with the Seattle/SeaTac Minimum Wage History Project: these interviews were not completed under the IRB protocol, but as a more public-facing project. People interviewed under the Seattle/SeaTac Minimum Wage History Project agreed to keep their names attached with their responses, and to have their interviews publicly available through the Labor Archives of Washington immediately.

Participant Observation

While I was in each field site, I became involved in as many on-going organizing activities as possible. These included rallies, meetings, marches, direct action, and coalition-sponsored events. I learned of events through a variety of sources. I signed up on e-mail lists and followed campaign Facebook sites. I reached out to contacts and stayed in contact periodically to find events that might

be appropriate. On average, I would attend about one event or meeting per week while in the field. These events were not always sponsored directly by \$15 wage proponents. Some were advertised by \$15 wage movement organizations and incorporated calls for \$15 minimum wage amongst other issues. A good example of this is an action in Chicago in the Fall of 2015, which I learned about through the Chicago Fight for \$15 Facebook page, but which was organized primarily by a youth advocacy organization. The Fight for \$15 contingent was present but less centrally involved in the eventual action, and the event made plan the coalition politics that were instrumental to the Chicago campaigns.

A sample participant observation protocol is attached in Appendix B. While attending marches, meetings, and rallies, I observed the participants of the events, the location and arrangement of the events, and the materials used in the events. Concerning the participants themselves, I observed their appearance, their verbal and physical participation in the events, and their movement or mobility in and through the event. Concerning the event space itself, I observed the physical location of the event, the symbolic value of the location, and the spatial arrangement of the event. Finally, I noted the props, signs, and other materials that were used in the events to display messages.

The events that became most central to the analyses that follow were those directly organized by the Fight for \$15. I attended multiple “days of action” in Seattle, Chicago, and North Carolina. These “days of action” were coordinated nationally, and would occur simultaneously in places throughout the country. These events were daylong affairs, typically including strikes at multiple fast food locations. I was able to attend iterations of these days in each of the three field sites, two in 2014, two in 2015, and two in 2016. Being able to attend these nationally coordinated events in multiple locations allowed for comparisons between places.

Document and Website Review

My data collection included the collection and review of various documents related to the \$15 wage movement, policy planning and implementation of the \$15 wage, and media coverage of policy efforts and campaigns, between 2014-2016. I reviewed all official policy documents related to the consideration and implementation of a \$15 wage in each site. This included the reports commissioned by the two official working groups in Seattle (the Income Inequality Advisory Committee) and Chicago (the Minimum Wage Working Group), as well as analyses by Greensboro and Durham city managers relating to the implementation of the \$15 wage for municipal employees. I reviewed labor union flyers, strategic power point presentations, and other campaign documents. I also followed local news coverage about \$15 minimum wage throughout the data collection period and into the writing of the dissertation.

An important source of information about the relationships between local campaigns was Facebook, which is currently an important public face to local campaigns. The Seattle, Chicago, and North Carolina local iterations of the Fight for \$15 all maintained active Facebook pages in order to recruit participants, share educational materials, and construct various narratives about the minimum wage and the importance of increasing it. I routinely followed these pages for information on upcoming events. In addition, I utilized a web-scraping tool to collect the text of the posts from May of 2011 through October of 2016. This amounted to over 2,000 posts from the three campaign sites. These posts and their dates were aggregated into CSV format for easy analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was done concurrently with data collection. Immediately following interviews and events, I jotted down notes and summarized the key themes that had emerged. Following the collection of interview data and participant observation data, I used a variation of Grounded Theory

Method (Charmaz, 2000) to code the data, proceeding inductively, with key categories and connections emerging from the data. Using NVivo, I organized qualitative responses into themes and patterns, noting similarities and differences across sites. After the open coding, I reanalyzed transcripts and field notes, using axial coding to relate the codes to one another across interviews, notes, and sites.

When the project started, I expected to find certain themes, including ‘references to other cities,’ ‘scaling up or ‘going national,’ ‘movement of staff and activists,’ ‘informal personal relationships,’ ‘formal gatherings/conferences,’ and ‘material investment.’ Some of these codes were important in the final analysis; others, such as ‘informal personal relationships’ were less prominent. Other themes, however, emerged throughout the course of the data analysis. Themes such as ‘strike tactics,’ ‘morality/moral economies,’ ‘racial disparities/racial economies,’ and ‘solidarity with places or with other movements’ were unexpected, but quickly became central to the analysis. I completed the analysis when I found that important categories were repeating often enough and new categories were less likely to emerge, especially those relating to the relationships between policy campaigns in different locations, the spatial strategies of labor organizations, and any times commentators or policy documents emphasized place-specificity. After identifying the important themes, I turned to identifying more linkages between places: interviewees and policy documents, for instance, mentioned other places to make comparisons, to draw contrasts, or to describe ways that learning or resource sharing had occurred between places. Here, I looked for the frequency that different types of linkages were invoked, as well as whether these linkages were emphasized or downplayed in the conversation or the document. Tracing the connections between places included tracking references interviewees and the documents made to other places as well as noticing the similarities and differences between language and themes that were employed in specific places.

In addition to the thematic coding of interview transcripts and field notes, I conducted comparative analyses of the events I attended over the course of fieldwork. When reviewing field notes, I analyzed the events I attended (meetings, rallies, marches, direct action) along the following themes: messaging, participation, audience, location of activities, and targets. For example, I noted the quality, tenor, branding, forms of participation, and presence of specific demographics of people and organizations participating in campaign activities. These components, which make up actions and rallies, include the types of protest tactics and the way they are deployed, as well as the targets of campaign activities and publicized demands. I compared the types of actions and their components across the three campaign sites in order to identify how strategies are borrowed between local contexts. Field notes from participant observation was particularly relevant to identifying themes that connected places without being explicitly discussed in interviews or documents. For example, the messages and tenor of signs at rallies and marches frequently employed similar images and words regardless of the location; moreover, in big national events, place-based signs were prominently displayed. This additional avenue of comparison brought out nuanced differences in strategic and tactical execution between the three campaigns, which were not accessible through qualitative interviewing.

The research described above forms the basis of the analysis in the chapters below.

Chapter 4: Contentious Constructions of the Low-Wage Labor Market

“For a highly local campaign, the nature of the argument was surprisingly ‘big picture’: a battle of competing ideas about the national economy. It was either ‘middle-out’ economics versus ‘trickle down,’ or ‘free-enterprise’ versus ‘big government,’ depending on your political leanings” (Rolf & Bryant, 2016, p. 118, quoting Gavin Kelly “SeaTac: The Small US Town that Sparked a New Movement against Low Wages” The Guardian, 2/22/2104).

Introduction

In 2017, the first high-profile study was released arguing that Seattle’s new \$15 minimum wage was hurting low-wage workers. The study, produced by the Minimum Wage Impact research team at the University of Washington, estimated that low-wage workers *lost* an average of \$125 per month because of the wage increase, and had seen their hours decline by 9 percent. While the study found that, overall, low-wage workers were better off following the increase to the minimum wage, they chalked these gains up to the blistering pace of growth in the local economy. Knowing that this study would jeopardize the future of the scheduled minimum wage increases and the chance that similar increases would be considered in other parts of the country, Seattle Mayor Ed Murray had commissioned a competing study as soon as he was made aware of this study’s preliminary findings. The competing study, produced at UC Berkeley, was produced very quickly and found that the minimum wage increase had not negatively affected low-wage workers in the restaurant industry. The reception of these dueling studies in the media was immediate, deafening, and

partisan. Conservative and business media touted the original UW findings relentlessly, using words like “shameless” to describe the study’s critics. The progressive Economic Policy Institute released a detailed critique of the UW study, which was repeated ad nauseam by proponents of the \$15 minimum wage. Then, after a few weeks, a worker activist spoke up with a piece in the local alternative weekly: “I keep on seeing news about this report that says workers in Seattle are hurt by the \$15 minimum wage. But I’m a worker in Seattle, I’m making \$15 now—and that report sure doesn’t look like my life... How is someone studying the effect of the \$15 minimum wage without actually looking at the people who needed it bad enough that they went on strike to win it?” (Thompson, 2017). These competing studies, and the discourses surrounding them, are fighting both methodologically and politically over some of the fundamental assumptions about the low-wage labor market and the effects of minimum wage increases. This chapter will analyze and categorize the arguments used by \$15 wage movement activists to contest dominant understandings of the low-wage labor market.

The \$15 wage movement has confronted a difficult discursive landscape with vigor. Contemporary neoliberal valorizations of economic rationalizations have prized market thinking in order to explain away injustices and inequality within the labor market (England & Ward, 2007; Harvey, 2005; Lerner, 2000; Peck & Tickell, 2002). These conceptual understandings of the economy have largely replaced pro-social economic explanations that center the underlying social relations that constitute the economy, most notably the Fordist-Keynesian compromise that exemplified prevailing labor market policy understanding through the middle of the 20th Century (Brenner, Peck, & Theodore, 2010; Peck, 1996). The personal inculcation of market discipline within individuals has rendered low-wage workers ‘responsibilized’ for their own low pay and poor working conditions; meanwhile, the macro-

level market discipline enforced on state programs increases inequality and precarity (Dean, 2010; Herod & Aguiar, 2006; Kalleberg, 2011; Sparke, 2013). Both individual-level market discipline and society-level market discipline have been wielded with slashing force against low-wage workers.

The discursive strategies of the \$15 wage movement, in Facebook posts, in publicizing worker narratives, in economic impact reports, and in accepted practices at rallies and civil disobedience actions, have explicitly targeted neoliberal justifications for what make efficient and equitable economic policy relating to the labor market. This chapter analyzes the variety of discursive strategies used by \$15 wage activists and policymakers alike to interject competing economic rationalizations into mainstream discussion about the low-wage labor market. Through this analysis, I categorized three primary critical theoretical frameworks that \$15 wage movement activists have relied on to contest economic rationalization: the “middle-out economics” framework which seeks to reinvigorate Keynesian economics (Liu & Hanauer, 2011), a racial economy framework (Wilson, 2009) and a moral economy framework (see Sayer, 2015). Contestation over normative understandings of the labor market’s function is a central underlying component that stitches together the local campaigns to raise the minimum wage that are proliferating across the country.

I argue that \$15 wage activists and policy debates have taken a few different tacks to contest neoliberal understandings of the economy. First, and most prominently, they have used the language and economic rationalization of neoliberalism to highlight the inefficiency of less-regulated labor markets. In this category of argument, activists and policymakers have rehabilitated Keynesian arguments about the economy and sought to recast low-wage workers as pre-middle-class consumers, whose increased earnings are vital to the health the

overall economy. Secondly, by engaging with the racialized and gendered nature of the low-wage labor market, activists have sought to contest the uneven inculcation of low-wage workers into regimes of self-improvement. Here, worker activists have contested the double bind of neoliberal requirements of self-improvement regimes, highlighting both the inability to engage in self-improvement activity because of exploitative labor market practices and by reclaiming organizing activity as a form of collective self-improvement. These two tactics have spoken the language of neoliberalism in order to critique it, either by highlighting contradictions or by seeking efficiency through equity-enhancing efforts. Finally, activists have also sought to critique the underlying logic of neoliberalism itself by claiming a moral economic framework. These efforts, which have been especially prevalent in the US South, call into question underlying questions of value and worth that accrue to workers as human beings. By complicating these questions of value and dependence, and interjecting love into economic debates, these activists seek to contest the undergirding assumptions of economic rationalization.

This chapter takes a wide view of the \$15 wage movement, considering the normative and critical nationwide discourses about low-wage labor markets. The three critical orientations that I have highlighted here (neo-Keynesian, racial economy, and moral economy) emerge in all three of the case study sites. However, the discursive strategies employed by \$15 wage movement activists also demonstrate the importance of local specificity, taking identifiably different tacks depending on location. By emphasizing different rationales for increasing equity in low-wage labor markets, activists have exploited the place-based political opportunity structures that are more or less receptive to different logics of contestation. The discussions and understandings about how the economy works are not uniform, even amongst activists involved in the same \$15 wage movement, but take

on differences depending on the political and cultural opportunity structures that characterize the localities in which the campaigns are undertaken. These differences emerge in spite of attempts of large national organizations (think tanks and labor unions) to advance a specific argument about collective responsibility for the economy, which draws heavily on Keynesian economic theory and its new cousin “middle-out economics.”

The arguments in this chapter are based on a range of data. The first important source of information is the fieldwork – interviews, participant observation, and policy document review – that I conducted in Chicago, Seattle, and Greensboro/Durham, North Carolina. These qualitative interviews with 101 policymakers, labor activists, and business leaders who were centrally involved in the policy discussions frequently circled around to foundational understandings about the purpose of wage-related regulation within the labor market. The second source of data underlying the arguments here is an analysis of the local campaigns’ Facebook posts. For this component of data collection, I used a web-scraping tool to collect information on each campaigns’ Facebook posts, including the text of the post, the date, and the number of ‘likes’ and shares. Then, I analyzed the campaigns’ posts from October of 2015 to October of 2016, using an inductive coding process to categorize the posts’ content. Through this analysis, I was then able to use axial coding to analyze the connections and disconnections between the sorts of posts that the different campaign locations chose to highlight. These different data sources allow for both a general, birds’ eye view of campaign discourse and an attention to local specificity.

Economic Theory and the Minimum Wage

A key characteristic of the policy debate about raising the minimum wage is a prevailing ethos of economic rationalization and a subsequent tempering or side-lining of

arguments that center the nonmaterial rights, needs, and desires of workers. As Peck argued in *Work-Place*, the 1990s saw a theoretical and political retreat from social understandings of the labor market and, with the consolidation of neoliberalism, prioritized mechanistic economic explanations for success or marginalization with the labor market. Policy discussions about whether raising the minimum wage is a good idea ask whether businesses will close, whether minimum wage workers will be put out of work and therefore left worse off than before, and whether inflationary pressure will degrade the purchasing power of the minimum wage enough to negate the positive effects of the increase. The competing studies discussed in the opening paragraph of this chapter follow in this vein. I will not be wading into the debate about whether raising the wage is a good idea. The empirical economic literature and theoretical debates surrounding the impact of minimum wage establishment and increases is sprawling and relatively comprehensive (see Fine, 1998 for an early review). Once economists loosened the grips of neoclassical economic theory and explored the effects of minimum wage increases in increasingly sophisticated empirical case studies, academic opinion shifted so that a strong preponderance of evidence shows that minimum wage increases do not lead to unemployment and do, in fact, allow minimum wage workers to earn more money (Allegretto, Dube, & Reich, 2011; Card & Krueber, 1995; Doucougliagos & Stanley, 2009; Dube, Lester, & Reich, 2010; Reich, Jacobs, & Bernhardt, 2014). There remains a small contingent of economists who produce works pointing to disemployment effects, but these studies are currently isolated in the economic literature and have been discredited (see Neumark & Wascher, 2006 for an example and Schmitt, 2013 for a rebuttal). The recent work by the UW minimum wage study, while showing preliminary negative results, remains an interim report in a long-ranged series of planned analyses on the effects of the wage increase (Jardim, Long, van Inwegen, Vigdor, & Wething, 2017).

Although I do not plan to evaluate the methods of the studies themselves, however, I do want to address the underlying assumptions that undergird these empirical studies, and the political contestation that goes into articulating common understandings of what it means to craft a minimum wage policy that “works.”

The explanations for why these empirical studies show the effects they do rely on different understandings of the fundamental processes that constitute the labor market, and represent a potent site of contestation for \$15 wage activists. There are two common, mainstream understandings of how the low-wage labor market functions. The first is the neoclassical view: the labor market works like a traditional market, in which the supply of labor intersects with the demand for that labor, and the intersection point establishes the wage (Neumark, Salas, & Wascher, 2013). Government regulation to create a wage floor, in this scenario, artificially suppresses demand and inflates supply, creating a surplus of labor and causing unemployment effects. This suggests that government regulation interferes with a rational system in a way that leads to fewer jobs and paradoxically hurt the low-wage workers a raise is designed to help. The second is the Keynesian view: we collectively create the demand that dictates the size of the economy, and so increasing the spending power of poor people will increase the demand and grow the economy overall (Card & Krueber, 1995). This suggests that the *lack* of regulation is hurting the economy by artificially suppressing demand and leading to a smaller overall economy. Both of these understandings underpin a large portion of the discussion surrounding whether localities should raise the minimum wage. These arguments have been repeated every few years since the establishment of the federal minimum wage in 1938.

The persistence of low-wage, precarious work is normalized in contemporary capitalist societies through recourse to a dominant understanding of labor as a commodity

that is subject to rules of supply and demand (Peck, 1996). Under perfectly competitive conditions, if an individual worker possesses more skills than other workers, that worker should command a higher wage, more benefits and more stability than a worker who lacks those skills. Therefore, low-wage workers have an easy, individual solution to their relative exploitation: investing in their human capital in a way that makes them sought after in the labor market. Under this understanding, while it may make sense for the labor market to include divisions or submarkets, each submarket should operate under the same rules, and the strategies for individuals to improve their position should not change regardless of where they are originally positioned. When discussing minimum wage increases, these arguments are most clearly articulated by the chorus of voices arguing that fast food workers should pursue more education, or use the fast food job as a springboard opportunity to gain experience and skills in order to position themselves for advancement within the labor market.

This understanding of the labor market fails on several levels, however. As theorists of labor segmentation have observed, social characteristics such as race, gender, migration status, age, and (dis)ability have more effect on the relative position of workers in the labor market than any measure of human capital, such as education, training or skills (Piore, 1979; Peck, 1996). As Peck explains it, “the distribution of labor market opportunities is highly sensitive to the ascribed rather than achieved characteristics of the work force” (Peck, 1996, p. 54). Social divisions within the workforce, such as race, gender, age, migrant status, and (dis)ability, are exploited by employers, who use divisions and perceived attachment to the labor market to keep labor costs low (Hall & Farkas, 2008). Groups are socialized to expect and accept subordinated status within the labor market, and expectations surrounding women’s household responsibilities still serve to relegate women’s occupational

opportunities to contingent and precarious employment (Dolby, Dimitriadis, & Willis, 2004). The disadvantage of marginalized social groups within the labor market persists *within* firms or organizations, as well as within the broader labor market (Acker, 2000). Moreover, the persistence of divisions of labor between social groups have been shown to affect the development of cities (Scott, 1988) and the relationship between cities (Sassen, 1988).

Taken as a whole, labor unions intervene in the labor markets in ways that tend to decrease differences between social groups. The gender wage gap, for example, is significantly smaller for unionized workers (Blau & Kahn, 2016; Robbins & Entmacher, 2014), and one analysis showed that the shrinking difference in unionization rates between men and women was a contributing factor to the decline of the wage gap (Even & Macpherson, 1993). However, some labor union strategies have served to widen rifts among the working class rather than narrow them. These strategies rely on the exclusion of certain workers from access to primary labor market employment, and include popular union strategies such as apprenticeship programs, training, and licensing requirements, which are typically controlled by the union itself. These programs have allowed unions to be agents of discrimination, and well-documented struggles to integrate the construction trades are indicative of the power of unions to re-create discriminatory labor markets (Griffey, 2010). This way, organized groups of workers have used segmentation to create “discontinuities in the distribution of power within the working class” (Peck, 1996, p. 68). Unions have historically relied on racialized and gendered power differentials, which exist prior to a worker’s entry into the labor market, to make marginal gains for certain members of the working class, and have put less effort into strategies like increasing the minimum wage, which might have class-wide effects (J. Fine, 2005; J. Fine & Tichenor, 2009; Griffey, 2010).

This, of course, doesn't actually aim at labor's strategic disadvantage in the market, but rather redistributes disadvantage within the working class.

As Peck writes, the labor market is "riven with contradictions...Because labor is not a true commodity, the self-regulating mechanisms associated with conventional commodity markets cannot be expected to regulate the labor market" (Peck, 1996, p. 42). Although introducing new forms of regulation is therefore necessary, the form and character of these regulations, and especially the scale on which they occur, are not a given. As unions have seen their market-based bargaining power decline and, correspondingly, found new purchase in their political capacity to affect regulatory structure of local labor markets, they have put more effort into minimum wage regulation that has class-wide effects (J. Fine, 2005). "Thus, although we have theories of the conditions for the reproduction of capitalism in its various phases, and therefore of the corresponding *necessary* state interventions, we have only ad hoc accounts of the *actual*, specific and concrete interventions" (Burawoy, 1985, p. 128). The complexity of the wage relation, and prevailing political understandings of it, introduces conceptual and practical problems when it comes to local, national, and international regulation of the labor market. In the absence of national-level political avenues to regulate the labor market, and because of neoliberalization's devolution of regulatory responsibility to an increasingly local scale, efforts to affect the regulation of the labor market are increasingly occurring in local government structures (Peck, Theodore, & Brenner, 2013).

Advocating for local level labor market regulation, which is one of the central aims of the \$15 wage movement, requires a complex negotiation with and contestation of the assumptions that undergird the current regulatory regime. Through my empirical research, I categorize three central frames used by \$15 wage movement activists to contest dominant understandings of the low-wage labor market. The first of these is a neo-Keynesian view,

which argues that low-wage workers are part of, and not separate from, the economy. By reconstructing low-wage workers as pre-middle-class consumers, these arguments seek to allow low-wage workers entry into the rarified and protected economic system. The second of these is a racial economy perspective, which investigates the importance of racialized and gendered subjectivities in situating individuals within the labor market and structuring the economy as a whole (Wilson, 2009). The extent to which a worker deviates from an idealized neoliberal subjectivity – an independent, self-maximizing, economic and civic-minded individual – determines the extent to which this worker is marginalized and exploited within the economic system. The third of these is a moral economy perspective that positions the economy as a moral rather than an amoral set of processes. In this perspective, a fundamental economic concept like value is reformulated to include more than monetary exchange, especially a consideration of an inherent human value to life and to labor (Sayer, 2015). As I will argue below, activists have used these framings in different ways and to different effects depending on their locations.

Resubjectification of Low-Wage Workers into (Pre)Middle-Class Consumers

The largest organizations involved in the \$15 wage movement have been keen to promote a neo-Keynesian theory about the relationship between the low-wage labor market and the broader economy. This reconfiguration of the economy and the workers that constitute it reframes the economy from a zero-sum, closed system into a dynamic, social system. Conventional economic narratives hold that corporations and businesses create jobs, which they bestow upon the community, at great cost to them. Under prevailing neoliberal discourses, markets are the most efficient ways to organize economy activity because of their association with competition and choice (Larner, 2000). Activists seek to reframe this

argument into one that centers the reciprocal importance of consumption and demand in the growth of the overall economy, a position that requires low-wage workers be reconfigured as productive, active members of the economy, rather than economic burdens. This position does not contest the underlying assumption of market primacy, but it shifts responsibility for a healthy economy from businesses to consumers and producers alike. This stance is holistic rather than individualistic: according to this line of argument, policies that support low-wage workers *by definition* support the economy, rather than detracting from it. This holistic view of the economy requires a re-subjectification of low-wage workers into a (potential) middle-class consumer rather than a drain on state coffers and economic activity. Campaigns have tried to make this shift by producing research reports that describe a particular narrative about the broader economy and the impact of minimum wage legislation, using economic arguments and visual argument to advance the argument. In this section, I outline the ways that this argument is used at the national level and in local campaigns, relying on three sources: a messaging strategy document produced by a national consulting firm, economic impact reports produced by campaigns in both Seattle and Chicago, and a detailed comparison of images used in Chicago's policy process and those suggested by national consultants. Throughout, I am attentive to both the generalizing forces of national-level strategy documents and how these suggestions are adapted to place-specific campaigns.

One document in particular demonstrates a broad, national-level attempt to coordinate \$15 wage movement discourse about the economy. This document, put together by Topos Partnership, advocates that progressive activists “create a new common sense” about the economy. Topos Partnership is an important but behind-the-scenes strategist in national-level progressive worker politics (see <http://www.topospartnership.com/>). They have produced several high-level framing memoranda and PowerPoint presentations for

Fight for \$15 activists, including an influence memorandum on fast food strike tactics and messaging. The document I quote below was an internal campaign document provided to me by Fight for \$15 activists.

Two of the strongest default perspectives we have to contend with focus on what *businesses* need, and what *individuals* need. Opponents of the job quality agenda typically emphasize the former, while advocates on our side often emphasize the latter... we need to highlight a different set of needs: namely *what our economy needs* (and by extension, all of us and our communities). Essentially, to counter the conservative argument that economic success depends on giving business what it wants, we need to reframe the idea of how the economy works. Rather than focus on either individuals or business, this focus ties the two together in a helpful way...By making jobs the focus, we change the essential contrast from “business vs. workers” to a choice between “economy-boosting” and “economy-busting” jobs.¹⁴

The fundamental issue, here, is a debate over whether the economy is a collective entity – collectively created and collectively enjoyed – or an individual affair in which one person’s or one organization’s advance comes at another’s expense. In the current political climate, the Topos authors claim, activists can’t win an argument that pits workers against businesses, so they must find a way to change the parameters of the debate in a way that places workers and businesses on the same side. The solution is this: what is good for workers is good for the economy.

Seattle, in particular, was the site of coordinated attempts to promote a version of “middle-out economics.” Two central partners who worked to promote the \$15 minimum wage, union leader David Rolf of SEIU 775 and venture capitalist Nick Hanauer of Second Avenue Partners, repeatedly promoted the economic theory in public writings and speeches (Hanauer & Rolf, 2015). In an oral history interview with the Seattle Minimum Wage History

¹⁴ This report was an internal document given to me by \$15 wage movement activists. It has no authorship or date information except for the Topos Partnership logo. It is 66 pages long (too long to include in its entirety here). I have included the title page, introduction, and table of contents Appendix D. Please contact me if you are interested in the full report.

Project, Nick Hanauer explains the economic argument that he has made somewhat of a cottage industry:

To make an extraordinarily long story short, when you go from conceptualizing an economy in a neoclassical sort of orthodox way, as a linear, mechanistic closed system, essentially a zero-sum system, the way in which most orthodox economists and policy makers think about it, to conceptualizing it in a twenty-first-century way, as an open, dynamic, nonlinear, non-equilibrium system, you come to entirely different conclusions about how the system works and what you might do to make it better. And Eric Liu and I evolved a framework called “middle-out economics”, which again, is a long story, but it is largely the view that a thriving middle-class isn’t the consequence of growth. A thriving middle-class in a technological capitalist economy is the source of growth. And that a policy focus therefore on the middle class is the thing that drives a robust capitalistic economy. In another parlance, the orthodox view, entrepreneurs and business people like me are job creators and that just isn’t true; we are idea-creators and solution-creators, but jobs are a consequence of a feedback loop between consumers and businesses. The true job creators in a capitalist economy are middle class consumers. When they thrive, so does business and employment and so on and so forth. (Hanauer, 9/18/2015, Seattle)

Centering middle class consumers as the drivers of growth is, of course, not a new argument. In many respects, it represents instead a full-throated return to the Fordist compromise that the supply-side theory of neoliberal economic policy repudiated. However, linking minimum wage policy with policy that supports a thriving middle class of consumers is an important shift in the argument. As a policy, the minimum wage was not designed to bring people into the middle class. In order for this argument to cohere, minimum wage workers, who by definition occupy the bottom strata of the labor market, must be re-entered into the discussion about wages as pre-middle-class consumers.

This framing of the debate, emphasizing the role of low-wage workers as pre-middle class consumers who contribute to growing the economy as a whole, clearly resonated in the debates in both Seattle and Chicago. In both locations, activists produced detailed reports on the positive economic impact of raising the minimum wage, using economic models that assumed increased demand would increase the overall size of the economy. One report

produced by Chicago activists, for example, makes the claim that raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour would increase economic activity by \$179 million, and that for every 25 workers receiving a raise, 1 full-time job would be created (Action Now & Stand Up! Chicago, 2014). Puget Sound Sage, a community-labor initiative out of Seattle, argued that a \$15 minimum wage would create a “total ripple effect” of \$625 million in the regional economy (Vallesterio Keenan & Greenwich, 2014). These reports utilized multiplier effects to estimate the total impact of wage increases throughout the economy. The Chicago report adjusted the figure down slightly to account for employer reductions in the face of cost pressures, but the Seattle report did not. Both emphasized the importance of increased circulation to the overall health of the economy and the negative effects that lagging wages have on the economy. An econometric argument like the one produced by the UW study on the impacts of the wage increase, in which the study authors used modeling to disentangle the effects of generalized economic growth from the effects of the minimum wage increase, is paradoxical according to this line of argument. For proponents of this theory, ‘the economy’ is not something that can be held apart from the livelihood of low-wage workers, and, accordingly, methods that seek to separate out responsibility between economic growth and wage increases are faulty.

Economic reports and talking points are not the only vehicle through which the importance of recasting low-wage workers as potential middle-class consumers is emphasized in local campaigns. Images used to accompany policy papers, reports, and campaign documents are an important vehicle for transmitting these arguments and influencing the broader public’s narrative about the low-wage labor market. Images in reports and campaign materials are carefully chosen to present visual arguments that cohere with textual arguments, and, because of this, were an important component of Topos

Partnership's messaging strategy. Throughout my document review, I found that similar images depicting the economy emerge in different places, suggesting the importance of sharing strategies and messaging techniques between strategy firms (like Topos), activists, and policymakers. One example of the use of images to promote the idea that shared prosperity is created through the empowerment of low-wage workers as productive consumers comes from the report produced by the Chicago Minimum Wage Working Group. These images were uncannily similar to ones proposed as successful framing images by the Topos Partnership report, a fact that highlights how national-level attempts to structure the debate about minimum wage policy have filtered into local campaigns. The images suggested by the Topos report are reproduced in figure 4.1; the images used by the Chicago Minimum Wage Working Group are reproduced in figure 4.2.

The Topos document encourages activists to avoid depictions of struggle and hardship when illustrating the effects of minimum wage increases. They argue that depictions of hardship keep the focus on low-wage workers as individuals rather than crucial actors in the broader economic system. Rather, Topos suggests using images that emphasize the consumptive activity of workers. The first suggested image, a blurred image of a busy downtown street, consists of faceless consumers toting shopping bags or purses. The blur effect implies a frenetic pace of constant activity, mobility, and movement. The figures are anonymous, and, taken together, the effect is one that homogenizes the picture's subjects into a collective mass of activity. The second image is of two individuals of ambiguous races, presumably a straight couple, shopping for produce at an outdoor farmer's market. The woman consumer carefully selects healthy fruit from the produce stand as a man stands by, observing. The bright colors, the contrasting yellow of the lemons and the red of the apples, combined with the outdoor scene suggest health and wellness. The class markers of the

scene are paramount as well (the outdoor farmer's market, the tasteful black clothes of the subjects), and the overall effect suggests that consumers with extra spending potential are able to contribute to both the economy and to their own health. Through this juxtaposition, the overall health of the economy is powerfully linked with the health of consumers themselves. In both iterations of the visual argument, minimum wage workers are refashioned primarily as consumers who create the economy, from which they also benefit.

Figure 4.1: Topos Partnership Suggested Images



The Chicago Minimum Wage Working Group found the suggested images helpful, and included strikingly similar, but locally specific images on the cover of their final report. Chicago includes a blurred shopping scene that, similar to the Topos images, suggests a collective mass of consumers moving quickly and decisively through the halls of consumerism. In a local twist, Chicago's Working Group places this image in a popular indoor downtown mall. By referencing the national suggested image, but placing the image within a local landmark, the report connects the workings of the local economy with national concerns. The report also includes not one, but two images of consumers selecting produce.

Figure 4.2: Chicago Minimum Wage Working Group Report Images

The first produce image is more ambiguous than the Topos Partnership image. The male subject is alone, not partnered, and is in an indoor supermarket rather than an outdoor market. He is of indeterminate race, and also of indeterminate status: because of the lack of a cart or basket, he could easily be either a worker displaying fruit or a consumer selecting fruit to purchase. The indeterminacy here helps link the consumptive and productive activities of low-wage workers. Since it is not possible to easily distinguish between a worker and a consumer in the image, the policies that are being suggested to increase wages for low-wage

workers apply to both categories equally. The second photo involving fruit is of a smiling woman, also of indeterminate race, in a crowded indoor market, one hand precariously balancing four tomatoes while she reaches out for a fifth, her arms full of folders and pens. The class markers in these images are more ambiguous than those suggested by Topos Partnership, as is the race of the subjects of the photo, but the primary colors, the healthy fruit, and the careful produce selection contribute to the linkages between a healthy economy and a healthy consumer. These images provide a powerful example of the ways that national-level discourse filters through local, place-specific campaigns, embedding broad critical discourses about the function and purpose of the economy in place.

Organizations with a national focus, like Topos and SEIU, have focused heavily on messaging that emphasizes the interconnectedness of economic actors. Portraying workers as pre-middle class consumers is a strategic priority of the national level \$15 wage movement campaign. These messages have filtered throughout the \$15 wage movement, and local campaigns have worked to contribute to the idea that low-wage workers have the productive capacity to contribute to the economy.

Racial Economy Framework and the \$15 Wage Movement

The second frame of labor market discourse I identified uses a racial economy framework to critique dominant understandings of the labor market. For activists using this framework, race is a “central frame of reference that embeds within the economy’s heart” (Wilson, 2009, p. 142), crucial to the project of subverting neoliberal normalization of a “proper” economic subjects and promoting enhanced justice within existing economic systems. The racial economy perspective understands the interconnectedness of neoliberalism and processes of racialization, noting, for example the way racial tropes such as

“welfare queens” are used to construct entire populations as the antithesis to an ideal neoliberal subject (Roberts & Mahtani, 2010). Above all, the centrality of race as an operating force within cities and economies is central (McKittrick, 2006; Pulido, 2000, 2006). Within the \$15 wage movement, this understanding extends, although to a somewhat lesser extent, to the centrality of gender as an organizing force within economies as well. Embedded in this critique is a new understanding that suggests that measures of human capital – education, training, and skills – are not reliable determinants of one’s position in the labor market, and that the discriminatory effects of racialization and gender are in fact more central.

In his 1978 lectures *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault outlines a central figure in an emerging American neoliberal tradition: a redefined homo œconomicus, or economic man. This figure “is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself... being for himself his own capital, being for himself his own producer, being for himself the source of [his] earnings” (Foucault, 2004, p. 226). This new, “active economic subject” is not only given the opportunity but also the *requirement* to maximize his or her own “human capital” through proper investments in self. The ‘will to (self) improvement’ is an unconscious condition of entry into contemporary governmental fields of power. The regulation of the extent to which individuals adopt this subjectivity is not imposed outright, but imposed through a governmental field of power that “operates by educating desires and configuring habits, aspirations, and beliefs” (Murray Li, 2007, p. 5). To observe the subjectification of the neoliberal subject homo œconomicus in practice is difficult, because these operations and infiltrations happen without consent, and often without conscious knowledge. Governmental fields of power operate by manufacturing subjects who identify with the requirement for active, entrepreneurial being and behavior. The ‘will to (self) improvement’

therefore becomes an unconscious condition of entry into contemporary neoliberal governmental fields of power.

The extent to which individuals differ from the ideal neoliberal subject determines their relative position in the labor market. The ideal economic citizen is independent, responsible, productive, competitive, and constantly self-improving. He is also white, and male, and able bodied. As David Wilson (2009) puts it, race is a “central frame of reference that embeds within the economy’s heart” (p. 142), and, along with gender, is an important determinant of the extent to which individuals differ from the ideal neoliberal subject. Whiteness especially “constitutes the identity of the deserving” (Wilson, 2009, p. 142). More than this, the ideal citizen is one who is not only entrepreneurial, but also one who avoids all dependencies. This avoidance of dependence is a crucial component of the problematic of neoliberalism, leading to the emphasis on the spatial and social distribution of jobs, regardless of those jobs’ quality, above all else (Haylett, 2003). Dependencies are also seen to accrue to various subjectivities, especially young people, women, and people with disabilities, distancing these populations from the ability to achieve the ideal subjecthood that would allow full access to the job market (Fraser & Gordon, 1994, Peck, 1996). The low-wage labor market depends on the existence of working populations that are constructed as undeserving because they are women, immigrants, people of color, undereducated, or young (McDowell, 2008; Piore, 1979; Waldinger & Lichter, 2003). These racialized and gendered constructions of low-wage workers accrue in opposition to an idealized neoliberal subject: dependent instead of autonomous, stagnant instead of self-improving, and fundamentally unable to compete in a freewheeling labor market (Wilson, 2009). Because the imperative of self-improvement is so deeply embedded in the contemporary economy, low-wage workers and labor activists confront opponents that simply assume that low-wage workers are

undeserving of full inclusion into economic life. This opposition is familiar to anti-poverty activists, but in minimum wage activism, shouts of “get a job” have been replaced by “get a degree.”

The internalization of this imperative of self-improvement is equally (though differentially) shared by majority and minority subjectivities alike. Paul Gilroy (2013) argues that a potent strain of thought and action among transatlantic Black communities, which he calls “vernacular neoliberalism,” emphasizes themes of uplift and self-improvement in ways that are more seductive to already marginalized and vulnerable populations. This strain of thought holds that collective uplift occurs *through* individual uplift: the care of the self, individual grit and determination, and eventual success in individual entrepreneurial endeavors become the prerequisites for collective progress. Gilroy traces the lure of neoliberal ideology within Black diaspora communities through American traditions of Black nationalism which document collective uplift as occurring *through* individual uplift: the care of the self, individual grit and determination, and eventual success in individual entrepreneurial endeavors are the prerequisites for collective progress. Although Gilroy is careful to point out that Black communities are not somehow more susceptible to these neoliberal impulses than other communities, he argues that “the history of being denied recognition as an individual has actually enhanced the appeal of particular varieties of extreme individualism” (Gilroy, 35). This appeal is exemplified by the changing definition of the word “hustle” in Black communities – whereas hustle once implied chicanery, it is now associated only with the hard work, entrepreneurialism, and self-promotion necessary to survive without access to the formal economy (Spence, 2015).

Although the system that triggers these complicated psychic attachments with the requirements of the ‘entrepreneurship of the self’ is dominant, it is not universal. The

complex construction, unstable character, and apparent contradictions of these racial economies open frequent moments for contestation. Indeed, these racial and gendered economies come embedded with the expectation and requirement of contestation. “Resistance is seen as ceaselessly constitutive of racial economies...Racial economies thus emerge and develop as ever-responsive, contestation-sensitive entities that always have to navigate place-based opportunities and challenges” (Wilson, 2009, p. 144). The \$15 wage movement enters into contestation over the subjectification of low-wage workers in several ways. Some aspects of this contestation are place-dependent and rely on local political opportunity structures to make plain, while others reach out toward for national-level discursive resistance. The first strategy of contestation identifies racial and gendered inequities, engaging critically with dominant policy discourses that name inequality without identifying the source of it and building common political cause with movements that center anti-racist politics. The second strategy takes aim at the imperative of self-improvement, highlighting the contradictory double bind that low-wage workers experience while also re-signifying collective action and organizing activity as a version of collective self-improvement.

Identifying Racial and Gendered Disparities: Policy Discourses vs. Activist Discourse

Mainstream policy discourse surrounding the effects of minimum wage increases highlights and centralizes race and gender as determining factors in low-wage labor market participation, but is unable to identify and critique the underlying processes that condition this inequality. Engaging in what Karen Fields and Barbara Fields term “racecraft,” these reports engage in a discursive sleight of hand that reifies social categories of race (and

gender) while obscuring the discriminatory causes of inequality in the low-wage labor market (Fields & Fields, 2014). Both Seattle and Chicago, in the process of analyzing the potential impacts of minimum wage legislation, conducted careful analyses of the composition of minimum wage workers, finding, unsurprisingly, that people of color, immigrants, and women were over-represented in the workforce. Chicago includes this table as evidence for their simple claim that “women and minorities make up a disproportionate share of low-wage workers in Chicago” (Minimum Wage Working Group, 2014):

Figure 4.3: Chicago Working Group Table

CHICAGOANS MAKING UNDER \$13 AN HOUR					
Race		Gender		Age	
Asian	7%	Female	55%	Under 18	2%
Black	27%	Male	45%	18-25	28%
Hispanic	38%			25-40	35%
White	27%			40-65	32%
Other	1%			65+	3%

Source: Minimum Wage Working Group, 2014, pg. 3

Both the Seattle and the Chicago reports are searching for a way to articulate a problem – the persistence of racial and gender discrimination in the labor market – but the language they use to describe the problem fails to properly articulate the causes. Chicago’s workmanlike description of the problem leaves potential reasons for the disproportionality uncovered. The Seattle report engages in a hybrid tautology, blaming workers’ characteristics for their low wages while also endeavoring to disprove the connections between race, gender, and age in discriminatory labor market contexts.

Low wages are more likely among workers with characteristics typically associated with low wages: younger workers, less education, being female or a racial/ethnic minority, poor, or receiving public assistance. However, the majority of those earning low wages mirror the population: non-poor, some college education, white, and not receiving public assistance. (Klawitter, Long, & Plotnick, 2014).

In this sentence, the Seattle report authors first repeat the association between low wages and a variety of social characteristics. This alone is not surprising or revelatory. However, by immediately following this observation with the statement that most low-wage workers do not share these characteristics, the report begins to imply that workers with the above characteristics have contributed to their position in the labor market. Are we as readers meant to care about the non-poor, college educated, white workers who are not on public assistance, understanding that low-wages can happen to anyone? Or are we meant to understand that one's position in the labor market is conditioned by factors outside of one's control, and a broad minimum wage law is a protective agent against discrimination? Ultimately, the impulse to untether the minimum wage from workers "with characteristics typically associated with low wages" both pushes back at stereotypes of low-wage workers and also enshrines them as young, uneducated, female, and belonging to a racialized minority in the public mind. The recognition of the association between low wages and social identity markers is insufficient to critique the underlying assumptions about the accrual of human capital to neoliberal subjectivity and its relationship to social identity markers.

These formal reports, while articulating a particular association between low wages and social identity markets, are ultimately ill-equipped to critique the central association of race, gender, and age with 'human capital' arguments about the persistence of low wages. Here, activists have stepped in, bringing a racial economy approach to the question in order to combat the linkages between assumptions about workers' human capital and their race or gender. In my analysis of more than 2,000 Facebook posts from Seattle (292 posts), Chicago

(1,274 posts), and Raise Up¹⁵ (467 posts) Fight for \$15 campaign pages, I found that 222 posts highlighted racial disparities within the low wage labor market, either to construct solidarity with other anti-racist organizations or to highlight the discriminatory reality of low-wage workers. These engagements with racial disparities had a distinct geography: Seattle's Working Washington organization did not explicitly contest racial economic frames in the period between October 2015 and 2016, while nearly 13 percent of Chicago's Fight for \$15 Facebook activity and just under 12 percent of Raise Up's campaign posts discussed racial disparity or called for solidarity between workers of different races. Gendered disparities were less frequently highlighted, with only about 3 percent of Raise Up, 4 percent of Chicago, and less than 1 percent of Seattle posts centering that theme.

One example of the types of racial economy messages that seek to combine racial economy with racial justice work more broadly is a call made on Raise Up's Facebook page following the police shooting of Keith Scott¹⁶. After the shooting, Raise Up activists organized a strike of Black workers in the city. They explained in a Facebook announcement: "Black workers are on strike today in Charlotte because the same workers who are the lowest paid are also the most heavily policed. Enough is enough!" (Raise Up, 2016). By expressly linking the over-policing and disproportionate violence experienced by Black workers with their additional marginalization within the workplace, Raise Up emphasized the interconnectedness of racial economy. The police violence that shapes Black life in the US is,

¹⁵ Raise Up is the campaign name for the southern region of the Fight for \$15, and it mostly consisted of North Carolina's \$15 wage movement work through 2015 and 2016.

¹⁶ Keith Scott was a 43-year old Black man fatally shot by Brently Vinson, a Charlotte police officer, on September 20, 2016. The shooting sparked the Charlotte uprising, civil unrest including peaceful and non-peaceful demonstrations against the shooting, which lasted for several days following the shooting. A community organization called Charlotte Uprising developed out of the events and still exists in fall 2017. Officer Vinson was not charged in the shooting and remains an officer on the Charlotte police force.

for Raise Up activists, inextricably linked to the racial discrimination that results in disproportionately low pay for Black workers.

In other examples, activists sought to explain the political and economic purpose of racial segmentation within the labor market, noting that corporations use divisions to keep down wages for everyone. “Racism drives down wages for all workers,” proclaims one Raise Up link to a larger study on the effects of the racial wealth gap (Raise Up, 2016). Here, racism, not race, is the active cause of low wages. More than this, racism is described as a strategy that limits wages for workers regardless of race: racism allows for corporations to keep wages down across industries for workers of all races. Similar racial economy understandings and solidarity efforts are prominent in Chicago’s campaign materials as well. These techniques tie together racialized and gendered disparities with economic processes, identifying core inequalities in the labor market in order to contest them.

In addition to highlighting the racialized and gendered disparities that structure the low-wage job market, however, \$15 wage movement proponents have also taken aim at the underlying processes that lead to segmentation. The emerging racial economy perspective has opened up entry points for activists to contest the underlying social relationships that characterize and structure the labor market, in addition to being structured by the labor market. Central to the \$15 wage movement’s reading of the economy is an emphasis on the processes of subjectification that marginalize or prioritize certain subjects in the labor market. The process of neoliberal subjectification – and the labor market consequences for those who are constructed as undeserving, insufficient subjects – is a crucial site of disruption for the campaigns to increase the minimum wage.

“I’ve worked on myself really hard to just no end:” Fast Food Worker Narrative Resistance to Regimes of Self-Improvement

The process of neoliberal subjectification – and the labor market consequences for those who are constructed as undeserving – is a crucial site of disruption for the campaigns to increase the minimum wage. In particular, activists critique the specific double bind faced by low-wage workers when they strive to improve themselves but are unable to afford expected investments in themselves. I want to focus on this discursive strategy here because the effort is a complicated and contradictory engagement with neoliberal ideology: activists seek entry into regimes of self-improvement, yes, but they also seek to complicate these by holding up collective action itself as an important method of self-improvement. The specific double bind they highlight is that faced by low-wage workers when they strive to improve themselves through independence or education but are unable to make expected investments in themselves.

A slim volume of worker narratives, printed in a book called *Fifteen Stories*, provides general insight into the ways that the Seattle campaign in particular engaged with the problematic of self-improvement.¹⁷ In these narratives, workers express a palpable sense of indignity at being barred from full inclusion in neoliberal governance schemes of self-improvement: the internalized desire to ‘do as one ought’ is ever-present, but is opened to critique as workers discount the moral authority of a system that does not offer them full inclusion into the regimes of self-improvement they are cultivated to desire. Worker activists display a unique ability to at once discount the moral authority of a system of governance that negatively adjudicates their personal worth based on their position in the labor market

¹⁷ These worker narratives were collected by Working Washington staff members, who asked workers a series of questions about their involvement in the \$15 minimum wage campaign and recorded their open-ended responses. The responses were transcribed, printed and sold as a fundraiser for Working Washington.

while appealing for full inclusion into regimes of self-improvement to which they feel excluded. The worker narratives produced by the Seattle campaign are a fascinating exploration of the process of politicization, as worker activists work to identify the culprits behind their discontent and explain why they became involved in the campaign and the effects this involvement had on their lives. In these discussions, workers and organizers both re-conceptualize the process of organizing itself as one of self-improvement, reclaiming the process from neoliberal imperatives and collectivizing the process.

At first glance, the narratives of fast food worker activists mirror the narratives of uplift and “ennobling labor” that Gilroy (2013) holds up as emblematic of vernacular neoliberalism. A valuation of higher education plays a large role in these accounts, as do smaller, more incremental changes like moving out of parents’ homes or into an apartment that has enough rooms for all its inhabitants, getting off food stamps, or paying off debt. Many workers even express the desire to own their own business to more fully live up to entrepreneurial expectations. One worker, describing his own politicization process, emphasizes:

I would like people to know that I have worked endlessly hard on perfecting my own attitude and my own thought process and my own movements... I want people to understand that I’ve worked on myself really hard to just no end, because it’s an ever-evolving process of working on yourself. (Sam LeLoo, pg. 20)

This kind of statement is a defensive maneuver to counter those who would denigrate the value of fast food work and a fast food cook, either because of age, inexperience, lack of education, or other reasons to devalue a worker’s human capital. In a direct repudiation to an imagined foe who would simply tell Sam to “go to school” or “better yourself,” Sam claims full entry into the regime of self-improvement required by contemporary neoliberal ideology. Indeed, large swaths of these narratives reveal how workers have been called into and

encouraged to claim a specific form of neoliberal subjectivity that emphasizes self-improvement.

These narratives are more than defensive postures, however. A more detailed read of the narratives produced by striking fast food workers during the union-led campaign to increase Seattle's minimum wage suggests a fraught moment of neoliberal subjectification in process: as worker activists narrate their call into a politicized identity, they alternately defend their own efforts of self-improvement and attack unrealizable external expectations that they invest in themselves in unattainable ways. These claims call forth a moment that lays bare the 'strategic reversibility' of power relations (Gordon, 1991; Rose, 1999). The very terms of governmental rationality, here expressed as the individualistic requirement to behave entrepreneurially, become the focus of resistance. In the course of the politicization process of workers involved in the Fight for \$15, narratives of self-improvement morph to reveal significant moments of rupture or imperfection within the subjectification process.

A central thread throughout these narratives is the way that avenues for self-improvement are precluded under current conditions. In the face of the resource challenges that preclude meaningful avenues for self-improvement, workers hold up the radical possibilities of self-improvement engendered by the \$15 wage itself. Here, worker activists position themselves as thwarted agents of self-improvement – fully aware that they *should* go to school or move into their own apartment, but unable to take the requisite steps toward self-improvement because their financial situation precludes meaningful investment in their own human capital. As one worker put it, "They say I don't deserve this money because I didn't go to college, but I can't even pay for college because I can't get the money that I need for it!" (Sam LeLoo, pg. 20). Workers repeatedly express frustration over this double bind – fully knowing and internalizing the expectations outlined by a proper, fully optimized,

neoliberal subjectivity, yet unable to accrue enough wealth to deposit receipts into their own human capital. The solution to full inclusion in regimes of self-improvement is not, workers argue, better incentives, more ‘nudges,’ or articulations of why it is important to go to school to get ahead: the solution, throughout, is simply \$15.

When I get \$15 an hour, the first thing I’ll do is save and move out. I’d save for like a little small apartment, and put me and my daughter into school. It would make a difference, let me start putting stuff aside so I can have, like, steps. I’d be a better person. I’d stop worrying about what can I do and what can’t I do – I’d be able to do more. (Brittany Phelps, pg. 7)

The \$15 wage, here, stands in for possibility and for progress. It stands in for opportunity – decidedly *not* the opportunity to ‘get ahead’, which workers expressly condemn or downplay, but rather the opportunity to work on oneself in a meaningful way.

In this complex interplay between ‘reaching for’ and subsequently reworking the neoliberal subjectivity of homo œconomicus, fast food workers provide an example of forms of repetition that Butler suggests are moments of trouble for forces of normalization. Reading Foucault against Althusser and psychoanalysis, Butler (1997) argues that these moments of repetition of subjectivities, marginalized or not, offers the possibility of a successful subjectification (in this case into the entrepreneurial neoliberal subject), but does not necessarily accomplish this fact. Rather, moments of deliberate “misrecognition” produce one of those discursive moments that Foucault perhaps identifies as one of those “stumbling blocks” to power (Foucault, 1990, p. 101). Fast food worker activists acknowledge predominate ‘hailings’ of themselves as devalued workers – low skill, low education, excluded from the category ‘hard worker,’ doing a job anyone could do – but refuse to succumb to them, using claims of self-improvement and critiques of self-improvement in order to do so.

For the fast food workers involved in the campaign for the \$15 minimum wage, however, the process of re-signifying injurious subjectifications is not done in psychic isolation, as Butler suggests is the case. In fact, the addition of collective action itself to a regime of self-improvement is a potent reversal of neoliberal individuation. Murray Li suggests that envisioning collective responses to the “will to improve” is relatively easy: “to the extent that practices of government form groups rather than isolated individuals, critical insight is potentially shared” (Murray Li, 2007, p. 26). This may be so, and the Fight for \$15 offers one example of the process through which critical insight is collectivized. Worker activists take this criticism an important step further. Throughout these narratives, workers reframe collective action itself as crucial to their ongoing self-improvement.

Strike day was very exciting. I was very nervous, but I was very excited about what I was doing, and I had y’all to back me... I think that the more I am involved in stuff like this, you know, there’s a better me, expressing myself, speaking to others. (Larkin Potts III, pg. 23)

As another striker put it in a speech on strike day, “When my Taco Bell shut down, I felt like a person again. I wasn’t a Taco Bell employee; I was a human being” (Carolyn Duroucher, May 2014). Strike experiences themselves are moments that contribute to their workers’ human capital, enabling them to work towards creating a better self.

This self-improvement engendered by collective action is not, however, of the same quality as the individualized self-improvement marked by neoliberalized entrepreneurial competition. Rather, it is collectivized self-improvement, reminiscent of Gilroy’s exposition of collective uplift through individual uplift, but stripped of competitive impulses. The competitive strain of uplift that utilizes capitalist success as the metric for the individual uplift is missing. In its place is the reading together of self-improvement (in speaking, behavior, and confidence) and collective improvement (through politics and policy). Workers talk about being approached by other workers at their restaurant and being looked

to as newly minted leaders in the workplace and the community. In one evocative exchange, Larkin Potts III describes running into an acquaintance from his neighborhood:

This guy, you know, he's from the neighborhood, and I didn't expect him to say anything about it, and he said, *I seen you on the news, y'know, you sounded good, maybe you should think about becoming a councilman yourself, go out and speak for the people.* No, I ain't ready! But it was good to hear that. (Larkin Potts III, pg. 24, emphasis in the original)

There's a fair amount of pride expressed here, pride in being seen as a leader because of the work that's been done, but there's also an important critique of individuation – Larkin is supposed to go out and speak for the people, not for himself. Refiguring collective action as a mechanism for self-improvement effectively weds the neoliberal subjectivity of the individual self-maximizer with a critique of individuation.

The centrality of race and gender to the collectivization of this struggle, especially in the Chicago and North Carolina campaigns, offers yet another entry point into the contestation over regimes of self-improvement. In a taped statement for the beginning of Black history month, Angel Mitchell, a Chicago fast food worker activist, explicitly combats dominant valorizations of neoliberal self-improvement and competition in order to lift up the experience of collectivizing struggle. She says:

In 2016, Black women are still considered inferior, although we have risen above many challenges and obstacles because of our Blackness and our gender. We have proven that we are more than just sex symbols, we're more than just mothers. We can do whatever it is other races can do on the same level if not better. But to cut out the competition, I believe it's a beautiful time in 2016 to be Black, to be a Black woman, to be a Black, low-wage worker is nothing to be ashamed of. Low-wage work has helped take care of our families, it has helped us strengthen our bond with our families, it has helped us not at all times get the bare necessities that we need, but it has helped us survive in America. I believe that in general it's time for Black women to stick together, to stop downing each other, to really lift each other up, because in numbers we can do so much. It's not a competition. As far as low-wage work, be proud of it. Don't be ashamed of it. If you have time join the Fight for \$15, because what do you have to lose? I'm doing it because I have nothing to lose and everything to gain. The fight is real. (Mitchell, 2016)

This statement accomplishes several important re-framings of low-wage workers and the role of collective action. For Angel Mitchell, it is important to combat the shame that accrues to low-wage work by emphasizing the role it plays in survival and in supporting families. Mitchell also on two occasions argues against competition within and between marginalized groups. The first statement against competition decries competition between groups, and the second decries competition between Black women. The collective struggle, which for Mitchell is joining the Fight for \$15 and lifting up other Black women, is the most valuable thing, not because of the way it will help her achieve an individual goal, but because collective uplift is a goal in and of itself.

Low-wage workers are constructed in opposition to the ideal neoliberal economic subject, which is self-maximizing, independent, and competitive – and white, male, and able-bodied. The Fight for \$15 has employed two central discursive strategies to contest these racialized and gendered constructions of low-wage workers. The first centralizes the importance of the racialization of the low-wage labor market, by actively constructing solidarity with anti-racist politics and highlighting the racial disparity of the low-wage labor market. The second focuses on the imperative of self-improvement by arguing that workplace protections would allow workers to improve themselves and that the act of organizing and protesting unjust working conditions is a form of this self-improvement. These forms of contestations are strategically employed depending on place, audience, and strategic policy objective, demonstrating the importance of situated, grounded contestation in the workings of racial economies.

“We Deserve a Future:” Local Campaigns’ Moral Economies

I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the third critical framing used by \$15 wage movement activists: a normative perspective that positions the economy as a moral set of processes. In neoliberal times, the critique of the activation of neoliberal subjects, and the hard political work of pointing out the contradictions that adhere to the responsibility and requirement of self-improvement has been vital to the success of the \$15 wage movement. In addition to these political claims, however, the full-throated critique of the low-wage labor market also hinges on deep moral commitments. These moral commitments guide activists in critique that centers underlying moral assumptions about how a ‘just’ economy should function.

The first two categories of contentious economic narratives that I have discussed above rely on what Amartya Sen would call an ‘engineering’ approach to the economy (1987). In fact, influential, national-level strategists like Topos Partnership explicitly discourage the use of moral arguments in contesting the economy. The Topos model of economic engagement argues that messaging strategy should ignore the needs of individual workers because a framework that appeals to justice pits workers against businesses in a fight that workers cannot win. Despite this national-level preference for mechanistic arguments about the economy’s function, however, local-level campaign discourse is often quite different. In many writings, actions, and interviews, proponents of a \$15 wage clearly outline a vision of the economy as a set of social practices that can be good or bad on moral grounds.

Here, a moral economy framework becomes useful to understanding the importance behind the political contestation over the ethical nature of the labor market. As Sayer

explains, all economies rely on moral or ethical justifications to explain how they function (2015).

Legitimations of economic institutions may appeal to criteria of need (e.g. for child benefit), or desert (how much people deserve to be paid in relation to what they contribute), or justice (about what is fair vis-à-vis comparable others, or exploitative, or oppressive), or, as in utilitarianism, to outcomes (not the relationships and processes that produce those outcomes)...Part of our job as academics is to assess these folk moral economic beliefs critically and improve upon them. (Sayer, 2015, p. 293)

However, these justifications do not precede the formation of economic institutions: rather, these justifications are products of power relations, and are frequently formed after the institutions that they are used to justify. In the case of the low-wage labor market, the position of workers in precarious employment is justified in a few ways: first, the purpose of a wage is abstracted and removed from the workers' subsistence and social reproduction, and second, the work itself is demeaned, deemed unskilled and 'easy.' The value of minimum wage work is consistently and systematically denied, allowing for the persistence of low wages and a prevailing ethos that low-wage workers do not deserve higher compensation. Subjecting these prior justifications to critique is a central aim of the \$15 wage movement. Moral claims abound throughout the local campaigns for \$15 minimum wages that I investigated. These claims argue that hard work should earn a living wage, that workers deserve more in order to live full lives, and that fairness and justice require more equity in income between executives and workers.

These moral claims, similar to the critiques of the racialization of the low-wage labor market, have a geography. Between 10 and 11 percent of the Facebook posts I coded on Chicago and Seattle's Facebook pages included explicit moral themes as their central argument. These claims were most prominent, however, in the North Carolina campaigns and the larger southern Raise Up campaign: almost 19 percent of these campaigns' materials

included a central moral claim. The centrality of moral messages to North Carolina's Raise Up campaign is deeply connected to the partnership formed between Rev. Barber and the \$15 wage movement in the South. Rev. Barber is the architect of the Moral Mondays movement in North Carolina, which developed in 2013 in response to austerity measures proposed by the state Legislature. SEIU officials decided to fund a Raise Up chapter in North Carolina in part because the Moral Mondays movement had taken the state by storm and inaugurated a renewal of mass protest in the state. This campaign seeks to re-introduce moral claims into progressive (but not partisan) politics, rather than cede moral language to conservatives (Barber II & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016). From the beginning, the Raise Up campaign linked arms closely with Rev. Barber's Moral Movement, seeking to harness the activity surrounding anti-austerity organizing to push a positive economic justice message. In a state with a strong tradition of religiously centered political organizing, Rev. William Barber III has used faith traditions of revival and liturgy to bring together a unique coalition of progressive voices in the state, in an effort that has since spread throughout the country. These claims introduce arguments that complicate the underlying conceptualizations about the economy with respect to how work deserves to be compensated, and with respect to the inherent value or worth that accrues to differently positioned subjects.

From the start, the Moral Mondays movement in North Carolina was deeply connected to labor politics in the state, despite the relative dearth of labor unions in the state. During a union campaign at a small factory in Martinsville, Rev. Barber began consolidating his theory of a moral movement for economic justice. This theory included the importance of both political power and moral authority, and Barber therefore developed a pragmatic vision that included collaboration with labor unions and labor-organized campaigns. Although the Martinsville battle ended in defeat for the union, the highly

publicized effort to organize a Smithfield processing plant in Tar Heel offered another opportunity to link moral precepts with economic analysis, and it eventually resulted in a victory just a few year later. The campaign not only resulted in the formation of a union, but it also resulted in \$15 starting wages for workers.¹⁸ Rev. Barber called this campaign a “moral movement for a just economy,” emphasizing both the economic and racial justice components of the campaign work in a “deeply antiracist analysis” of the economic problems they were fighting (Barber II & Wilson-Hartgrove, 2016, p. 70). For Barber (2016), this moral movement was a collective one, and it was one that shifted the conversation away from how growing the economy benefitted different groups:

Conversations about ‘fair wages’ or ‘civil rights’ could not be reduced to the self-interest of separate groups. No, we were engaged together in a conversation about what kind of economy builds up the common good. (p. 70)

The economy, for Barber, is put to the service of the “common good,” rather than the “common good” being put to the service of the economy. The distinction may seem a small one, but it is in fact central to the difference between a mechanistic argument for an increased minimum wage and a moral one. The ultimate goal of these efforts is to enhance the common good; it is not, as proponents of a neo-Keynesian view would have it, to use the common good to enhance the economy. The reversal of the relationship between the “common good” and the economy is an important distinction between the mechanistic arguments made in the “middle-out economics” framework that was so successful in Seattle.

¹⁸ Jane McAlevey (2016) somewhat pointedly suggests that the \$15 minimum wage won by the Smithfield workers far surpasses the \$15 minimum wage won by Seattle activists because of the differences in cost of living between the two places. She uses this comparison to suggest that the power of workplace-centered but community-connected campaign has more potential than a broad-based community-centered and workplace-connected campaign, like Seattle’s. While the Smithfield campaign is impressive, the two efforts are in no way comparable. The scope of the Seattle minimum wage law, which affects more than 100,000 people, and the size of the increase, which was more than 60 percent over the existing minimum wage, and the speed of the campaign, which was over in less than two years, makes these comparisons misleading.

Rev. Barber's moral leadership and economic theory has been adopted by the Raise Up campaign, as a burgeoning partnership between the Fight for \$15 and Rev. Barber's Moral Movement has resulted in several high-profile appearances of Barber at Fight for \$15 events, as well as the consistent turn-out effort of the Fight for \$15 to Barber's Moral Revival actions. The partnership is a partnership between organizations as well as between places: The Fight for \$15 builds bridges between northern and southern organizing, has also injected the Fight for \$15 with a deeper anti-racist analysis of the economic injustice navigated by low-wage workers.

One of the ways the \$15 wage movement, in Seattle and Chicago as well as North Carolina, intervenes in a moral discussion about the economy is through a discussion about the value of individual workers and the value of work. From slogans plastered on signs ("We Deserve More") to snippets of statements advertised on Facebook ("Look, if any job is going to take up someone's life, it deserves a living wage"), the campaigns seek to increase the value associated with both the *work* of low-wage labor and with the *workers* who do the work. As Stephen Goodwin, a Fight for \$15 activist in Chicago, explained in a Facebook post, comparing the monetary cost of a full-time minimum wage worker to the cost to incarcerate one prisoner: "You're saying I'm more valuable to the country incarcerated than I am working. So that's an issue ... We're not saying that we don't appreciate our jobs. But we wish our jobs appreciated us also" (Goodwin, 2016). The statement includes an important elision: the value that Goodwin references is a dollar figure, which allows for comparisons between the costs associated with working and the costs associated with incarceration, but it is also an abstract value associated with his own human life. Goodwin attached the value of work directly to the value of a person, thereby highlighting the societal hypocrisy that claims that raising worker wages is too expensive but paying more money to incarcerate prisoners is

necessary. In this and other examples, activists reconfigure the moral base for deciding a wage value by explicitly connecting the worth of the job to the worth of the person doing the job.

In these statements, activists argue that workers “deserve more” or “deserve better,” because of their inherent value as human beings. That which constitutes the “more” is another site where activists contest the underlying logic of the economy, but the use of the word “deserve” is deliberate, consistent, and deeply tied to notions of fairness. The question of what workers deserve is contested and expanded. Put simply, the \$15 wage movement is about more than wages. In addition to \$15 and a union, workers claim the right to take care of their families and children. They claim the right to a comfortable and safe work environment, engaging in actions targeting employers who refused to fix air conditioning systems during the summer months. In addition to these concrete non-economic claims, these Facebook narratives argue that workers deserve abstract rights that are not typically considered built-into the wage relation. These include concepts such as “dignity” and “respect,” which are invoked frequently. They also include abstract wishes: “We too deserve a future,” writes the Raise Up campaign Facebook page, introducing an article about the dearth of state support for poor African Americans in the US South. These rights also suggest that workers are claiming a different relationship to the fruits of their labor: activists wrote often of deserving to “share in the success” of companies like McDonald’s, who are profiting from their labor. One important aspect of a \$15 wage is not what it purchases, but the access to deeper and more abstract qualities of life that it affords.

A moral understanding of the economy wasn’t relegated to activists or social justice-minded clergy, moreover. Local policymakers in cities from Greensboro to Durham couched their justifications for raising the minimum wage for city workers in almost exclusively moral

terms, preferring to claim moral authority as opposed to, say, political authority. In an interview, a city politician from Durham explained to me that doing what was “right” for the city was relatively easy.

At least my actions weren’t predicated on the fact that someone was out there pushing for it. It was based on the fact that it was something we could do, something we could afford to do, and it was time to do it... It was the right thing to do, and we could afford it. (Policymaker 1, 7/22/2016).

In this interview, more than once, the politician argued that the plan to start the city pay scale at \$15 per hour was a clear-cut calculus between what was possible and what was morally right. It had little to do with the value of the labor provided or even the organized agitation around the issue: it was a clear, moral choice. Notably absent from my discussions with policymakers in North Carolina were economic rationalizations about raising wages to boost the economy, or arguments that point out racial or gendered disparities within the city.

The moral force behind the decision to increase wages for city workers has a practical component, of course, and politicians throughout North Carolina often brought up the need to remain a competitive employer in order to retain the best workers. However, some also imbued the decision to increase the minimum wage with the significance of setting a moral example.

I think we have really great employees and that they should be rewarded for working for the city. I felt that we should set the example... We have good employees and we don’t want them looking to go elsewhere. We want to be competitive. We want to make sure we’re paying competitive salaries. We did it to make a statement about our employees and what we think is right. (Policymaker 2, 6/14/2016).

Here, the interviewee brings up the question of a just reward for public service, increasing the value of the work and heaping praise on employees at the same time. The remark goes further, however, to show that policymakers hoped that the decision to increase wages –

what was believed to be *right*, as opposed to smart or sensible – would serve as a broader example for other actors, from other governmental jurisdictions to private employers. As one policymaker put it: “We have to say to businesses coming into our city that we value our employees and we want you to value the employees that you come to employ as well” (Policymaker 3, 8/18/2015). By declaring the value of employees to the city, the city hoped to have moral ripple effects throughout the region by setting an example.

A final word on efforts to inject a moral understanding into public discussions about the economy must include the importance of radical love to \$15 wage movement work. One difference in protest traditions that I observed in my fieldwork in North Carolina is the outpouring of declarations of love in movement work. In my observations, regardless of the issue – an anti-austerity action organized by Moral Mondays, a Fight for \$15 sit-down – activists were called into professions of love at difficult moments, and these professions of love call on both faith traditions and traditions of relational solidarity. During one especially poignant event in November, 2016, more than 50 people were arrested in front of a McDonald’s in Durham, NC. The city had increased wages for city workers to \$15 just a few months before, and the Raise Up campaign had been relatively quiet since the summer, diverting resources into electoral political mobilization work. Then Donald Trump was elected President of the US, and he nominated fast food CEO Andy Puzder to head the Department of Labor. The Durham action in November of 2016 was organized through the Fight for \$15 in conjunction with hundreds of actions worldwide. Prior to the action, in which activists sat down in an intersection in front of a McDonald’s a few miles from the center of town, Rev. Barber rallied the crowd towards hope in dark times. As he often did in these political moments, Rev. Barber took the crowd on a historical journey from slavery and the “peculiar labor history of the South” through the minimum wage fights of the

present moment. Toward the end of his speech, he noted the particular power of the multi-racial gathering that had convened: “Give hugs and love, and let the world see you. Perfect love casts out fear.” People throughout the crowd embraced happily. The multi-racial love he called forth from the crowd was a direct, active response to this ‘peculiar labor history’ and to the power of love and justice in economic justice work.

After Rev. Barber’s exposition, the crowd of a few hundred marched behind those who were ready to be arrested, who sat down in the intersection, blocking traffic. They were immediately met by disproportionate police force, in gas masks, helmets, tactical vests, and camouflage uniforms, who rapidly encircled the seated protestors and advanced toward them in unison. The arrests began, and the protestors who were supporting the folks risking arrest quickly jumped in with the chant that had accompanied countless Moral Monday arrests in the last few years: “Thank you! We love you! We see you! We love you!” A young Black woman saw it was her turn to be arrested, and she complied easily. But as she was being led away from the crowd she started to break down. “Where’s my mama?” she cried out, emotional, on the verge of tears. She frantically looked around the crowd until she saw a woman pushing her way towards the front. “I love you, mama.” “I love you, sweetheart. I see you, sweetheart.” A little later, a man ahead of me nudged the woman he was standing near: “Your man’s up next.” She brightened, maneuvered herself to the front, and cheered with *vivo* as he was taken. These professions of love, in the community of activists, with the rally crowd as support, lent a different character to the work being done in these spaces and events. As bell hooks wrote, when she decried the absence of a strong ethic of love in progressive activism:

Without love, our efforts to liberate ourselves and our world community from oppression and exploitation are doomed. As long as we refuse to address fully the place of love in struggles for liberation we will not be able to create a culture of

conversion where there is a mass turning away from an ethic of domination. (2006, p. 243)

The moral commitment to solidaristic love was expressed throughout the rally crowd in those days, and many other arrest actions that I have observed in North Carolina as I have participated in \$15 wage activism and other progressive activism in the state. These professions represent, to my mind, an attempt to bring economic justice work away from immediate material concerns and toward a deeper moral engagement with the foundation of economic relationships.

Conclusion:

By combatting neoliberal understandings of the labor market on a variety of fronts, the \$15 wage movement has made decisive inroads into changing policy as well as changing underlying conceptualizations of how the labor market does and should function. One strain of \$15 wage movement thought uses economic rationalization to argue that increasing the minimum wage grows the overall economy. Another takes aim at the subjectification processes that construct low-wage workers as insufficiently entrepreneurial agents, reclaiming a form of self-improvement that centers racial and gendered solidarity practices and movement work as anti-competitive self-improvement activities. The final challenge includes the introduction of a moral economy framework, issued through alliances, statements, and demonstration practices. Importantly, although the discourse justifying current labor market practices is a universalizing one, the discursive strategies employed by \$15 wage movement activists have taken different tacks depending on location. By emphasizing different rationales for increasing equity in low-wage labor markets, activists

have exploited the place-based political opportunity structures that are more or less receptive to different logics of contestation.

Chapter 5: In the Streets: Protest Tactics and the Spatiality of New Union Organizing

Introduction

This chapter explores the emergence and the geographic organization of the Service Employee International Union's (SEIU) Fight for \$15 campaign. This campaign has become synonymous with all efforts to raise minimum wages to \$15, but, as I will show here, it has a varied history, and its connection to union organizing influences the structure and operation of the campaign in many important ways. SEIU's Fight for \$15 campaign is a movement of low-wage workers across many occupations, with the most visible aspect of the campaign focusing on organizing fast food workers at multiple employers. As a union campaign, the Fight for \$15 is an innovative and influential campaign: it has reinvigorated the strike tactic and other militant actions (Kahle, 2013; Oswalt, 2016), it has incorporated legal innovations through the novel use of Unfair Labor Practice (ULP) strikes and by challenging the legal basis of a franchise system that disadvantages worker organization (Dube, 2014; Kann, 2014), and it is organizing precarious workers that were previously considered un-organizable. The aspect of the Fight for \$15 that has received less attention, on which this chapter will focus, is its innovative approach to the spatial organization of labor movement practices. The national (and increasing international) movement utilizes a variety of spatial strategies to stitch local iterations into a coherent whole. I argue that the Fight for \$15

employs a productive but chaotic geography of protest, utilizing spatial frames such as jumping scale and relying on mobilities, networks, and place-specificity in ways that are productively counter to traditional labor union organizing formations.

One scholar succinctly summed up the Fight for \$15 like this: “This was organizing by unions, but it wasn’t union organizing” (Oswalt, 2016, p. 602). This chapter takes Oswalt’s observation as its starting point. The organization, structure, aims, messages, tactics, coalitions, and funding streams of the Fight for \$15 are different than typical union organizing campaigns, yet the Fight for \$15 is organized by the second largest labor union in the US. Consequently, the structure and organization of the campaign is deeply influenced by its roots in labor bureaucracy. My analysis of the interplay between organizing forms draws from two broad literatures that speak to the intersections between the labor movement and contentious politics. First, labor geography offers insight into the unique political and economic geographies of the contemporary labor movement, which have developed alongside bureaucratic organizational forms that have emphasized both upscaling and downscaling struggle. Second, the literature on the spatialities of contentious politics and the contingent, processual, and multiple spatialities that organize social movements more or less horizontally across space. Then, I examine how these spatialities are cultivated, contested, and complicated within the Fight for \$15, analyzing two crucial spatial strategies of the campaign: the use of mobility strategies as epitomized by “blitz” weekend organized by the campaign to pass a \$15 minimum wage initiative in SeaTac, Washington, and the interplay between scalar strategies epitomized by the national organization of the campaign and the tension between coordination and the devolution of control to local iterations of the campaign.

The national-level union bureaucracy coordination of the Fight for \$15 creates important moments of broad-scale change and allows for the sharing of resources, people, and tactics across space; it also results in tensions between local and national organizing priorities. By investigating the complex, variegated spatialities of organizing a labor union-driven social movement, I aim to contribute to thinking on the spatialities of contentious politics, the spatialities of labor agency under contemporary capitalism, and the differences between the two.

This chapter relies primarily on interviews and observations from Seattle, SeaTac, and Chicago. In Seattle, a multi-union effort to organize the Sea-Tac Airport resulted in the first successful initiative for a \$15 minimum wage. Following this effort, SEIU-sponsored Working Washington, in coalition with multiple other local unions, engaged in a multifaceted effort to increase Seattle's minimum wage to \$15, a campaign that was crucial to proving the political viability of the previously outlandish minimum wage demand. Chicago was the site of some of the first fast food strikes organized under the Fight for \$15 campaign banner, and engaged in a similarly multifaceted effort to pressure the Mayor Rahm Emanuel to increase the minimum wage. In this chapter, I use an emphasis on comparative analysis to attend to local specificity while also investigating the connections between disparate sites. By using this comparative case study approach in locations throughout the US, I was able to trace up-down relationships between local campaigns and the SEIU International, horizontal relationships between local campaigns themselves, and moments of local innovation and chaotic interventions tied to specific places.

Labor Unions and Social Movements

Labor unions as they have been constituted in the US have reputations as staid,

bureaucratic institutions that have been devoted primarily to a white and male working class membership and focused on creating and enforcing contractual relationships with corporations (Goluboff, 2007; Hattam, 1993). The legal, economic, and social paradigms that have supported this form of organization have crumbled over the course of the end of the 20th Century, and traditionally organized labor unions have consequently declined (Clawson & Clawson, 1999; Farber & Krueber, 1992; Farber & Western, 2001; Tope & Jacobs, 2009). Moments in which labor unions have pursued broader class interests, or engaged in organizing efforts that incorporated multiple intersections of race, gender, and sexuality, or simply organized outside of the workplace as well as inside of it have received a substantial amount of attention by those interested in union renewal more broadly (Clawson, 2003; Moody, 2009; Wills, 2008). Harkening back to earlier organizing traditions, scholars note that unions developed their 20th Century bureaucratic form in a comprehensive organizing context, using community ties, coalition politics, and broad, class-based initiatives to build strength (Milkman, 2013). Those more optimistic about these efforts have called them examples of “social movement unionism,” seeing the possibility of union renewal in union organizing that does not take the union as the start or end point (Fletcher & Gapasin, 2008; Moody, 2007). New social movements, in contrast to their bureaucratic labor counterparts, are dynamic, interested in grappling with difference across multiple socio-spatial positionalities, and productively amorphous in their structures, goals, and tactics. Instances of the broad, class-wide commitment necessary to sustain social movement unionism are rare, however, and many labor movement scholars have attempted to identify union activity that approaches, if not fully achieves, social movement unions. These include “community unionism” (Fine, 2005; Jordhus-Lier, 2012; Tufts, 1998) social unionism (Kumar and Murray 2006), and “Schumpeterian unionism” (Tufts, 2009). The search for

alternatives to business unionism identifies and enforces a split between the unique historic organization of the labor movement in the US and its social movement counterparts. Even in optimistic accounts, the split between union organizing and social movements is embedded in the search for alternative union practices.

Despite the tendency of labor geographers and social movement scholars to draw more or less stark distinctions between labor unions and new social movements, there are several important ways that the theories are in conversation with each other. In what follows, I investigate the two broad literatures that have investigated the various spatialities of labor unions and social movements. As one social movement union proponent argued, unions are similar to social movements in that they “oppositions that never become governments” and, consequently, “fight from the outside” (Moody, 1997). Despite their similarities, however, institutionalized labor unions and social movements are structured in very different ways, and these differences profoundly influence the spatiality of their organization. Efforts to conceptualize union renewal strategies grapple with the historical and material realities of union organizational structure and the spatial strategies enabled and constrained by these historical legacies.

Labor Geography: Multi-Scalar Strategies and Union Bureaucracies

In Chapter 2, I argued that new union campaigns are re-spatializing the politics of labor organization in various ways. Here, I focus on the connections and disconnections between labor organizing and social movements. Many observers of the labor movement are nostalgic for a time when union organizing resembled social movements: widespread, organically organized class conflict that permeated homes, communities, and entire cities (Milkman, 2013; Fine, 2005). These periods of widespread disruption, evident in the 1930s

especially, resulted in lasting organizations of working people. As the business unions that emerged from this period continue their precipitous decline, unions have again turned to alternative organizing forms to stave off irrelevance. The pace of experimentation with new union forms has quickened in the last few years. Worker centers, for instance, have exploded in popularity, growing from 5 in 1992 to 214 in 2013 (Oswalt, 2016). Despite this progress, social movement unionism seems like only a distant possibility.

Using a social movement framework to understand the spatial and associational practices of new union organizing models is aspirational: labor unions, as they incorporate community organizing principles, engage with new publics, and re-conceptualize the scale and scope of their politics, build *toward* a social movement unionism that is more national or even international in scope without fully achieving it (Jordhus-Lier, 2012). Fine (2005) argues that many aspects of community unionism are similar to conceptualizations of social movement unionism, but differ with respect to the context and scale of activity. For her, social movement unionism – like that practiced in the 1930s – suggests a widespread change in the zeitgeist, happening at the national level. Although community union practices can contribute to the widespread climate change needed to reach social movement status, she argues, they are necessarily partial. “Social movements are good work if you can get them. But most of the time, you can’t” (Fine, 2005, p. 161). Moreover, most union renewal strategies represent strategic compromises with neoliberal capitalism, designed to maintain the influence of labor institutions as a check against capital, but often reflecting their own anti-democratic or neoliberal impulses (MacDonald, 2011; Tufts, 2009).

When considering why labor geographers have engaged less with social movement literature, Jordhus-Lier (2012) suggests that the Marxist tradition of labor geography prefers to conceptualize labor as a distinct organizing force in contemporary capitalist society. This

perspective is important when considering the full scope of labor as a key abstract category, with agency, centrally positioned within ongoing processes of capital accumulation (Castree, Ward, & Samers, 2004). This distinction holds new social movements, associated with social identity markers such as race, gender, and sexuality, apart from the dialectical currents of capitalism, and valorizes labor as a special category. Rather than uphold this split, however, I want to focus on traditionally organized labor unions, which are political and bureaucratic formations that are both enabled and constrained by the historic patterns of organization that institutionalized labor in the US. These historical patterns of trade union organization offer distinct opportunities for engagement and promote organization across space that differs from typical social movements.

The relationship between the nested scales of organization within the institutionalized labor movement is a central component of the scalar politics at play in contemporary labor. As currently structured, an “International” union body is made up of union “Locals,” who enter into a variety of political and economic relationships. Locals remit a portion of their member dues to the International, and they are granted voting rights on International leadership based on their proportional size. The law governing the formation of labor unions in the US requires elections to be held in hyper local bargaining units, which has resulted in the proliferation of relatively small “Locals” – by the 1980s, there were 70,000 distinct local unions overseeing more than 175,000 separate collective bargaining agreements (Oswalt, 2016). Depending on their federation agreement with their International, Locals have options for de-affiliating and either becoming independent or aligning with a rival international union. An International, conversely, has varying rights to put its Locals in “trusteeship,” a practice designed to ferret out local corruption but frequently used to settle political differences between Local and International leadership.

These nested structures are the function of the historic organization of labor in the US, and differ from social movements in their rigidity and relative permanence.

As large labor unions conceive and implement campaigns that span from an individual workplace to international agreements, the political relationships between union “Locals” and the “International” are the sites of intra-union contests that call into question the relative balance of power between these nested union structures (Savage, 2006). The structure of unions in the US neatly corresponds, in certain ways, to the nested structure of the US regulatory state (Coe & Jordhus-Lier, 2010). Recent efforts by International union bodies to consolidate smaller locals into large, regional locals were a central component of the effort to reorganize labor to concentrate on new union organizing in the 1990s and 2000s (Early, 2011; Lerner, 1991). The efforts were hotly contested by recalcitrant local unions and exploited by rival national unions in an effort to poach members (Early, 2011; Savage, 2006). In fact, tensions between local union members, local unions, and international union bodies recur frequently throughout labor history (see Clark, 1989), and recently in small moments of insurrection such as the effort of members of the International Association of Machinists Local 751 to vote down a contract with Boeing that was heavily advocated by the international union leadership (Greenhouse, 2014). The growth of mega-unions and the increasingly multi-scalar strategic orientation of large unions brings these pre-existing relationships to the foreground.

Geography of Social Movements: Horizontal Organizational Forms

In Leitner, Shepard, and Sziarto’s (2008) call to consider the multiplicity of spatialities at play in contentious politics, they identify the spatial concepts of scale, place, network, mobility, and socio-spatial positionality as central organizing concepts. Scholarship

on the spatial practices of social movements has approached the multiplicities of spatialities in ways that are useful for labor scholars to consider as unions embrace social movement practices. Scale remains an important source and object of contestation for social movements, for example, especially given the importance of state-oriented agitation and the nested scalar structure of state government in the US (England, 2017; Leitner et al., 2008). Contentious political activity happens across scales, and social movements act to create scalar politics more amenable to action based power analyses, just as labor unions do (see Coe, 2012). Analytical considerations of the spatialities of contentious politics tend to focus on certain categories to the exclusion of others, depending on the prevailing theoretic interest of the era, but the diversity of the application of spatial concepts to the theorization of social movements is a useful corollary to the application of spatial concepts in the contemporary labor movement.

For example, social movement theorists have grappled with and produced a variety of spatial conceptualizations for the horizontal organization of social movements. Thinking of social movements as “networked” across space has emphasized the topological relations across space, which are themselves deeply interrelated with the materialities that enable these relations (Law & Hetherington, 2000). In these accounts, the agency of non-human actors in these networks is important, and the materialities of the technologies used in networked space are importance influences on the network itself. Social movement networks operate through logics of horizontal organization, increasing the importance of the creation, maintenance, and utilization of communication technologies (Juris, 2008). Others have emphasized the contingent and emergent character of social movement organization across space. McFarlane’s (2009) concept of “translocal assemblage” augments a network perspective of social movement activity by offering a more nuanced understanding of the

ways that power operates over distance within social movements. The distribution of agency – which he defines as the power to act – is uneven throughout networks, and thinking of these relationships as assemblages emphasizes the processual and contingent formation of the organization. These movements cohere, then, as “a gathering of elements...that both forms a coalition and yet preserves something of the agency of impetus of each element” (McFarlane, 2009, p. 566). Although both networks and translocal assemblages are less concerned with how formal hierarchies, such as those incorporated into the labor movement structure in the US, introduce complexity and differential power relations, the way power and agency operate within horizontally organized social movements is a crucial component to understanding the ways that people are organized across space.

A recent turn towards mobilities has introduced another spatial component to considerations of the how both social movements and the labor movement operate (see Sheller & Urry, 2006). Social movements make use of tactical and symbolic mobility, such as marches and rallies that use the movement of people, signs, sound equipment, and pamphlets to lay claim a specific relationship with space (Houston & Pulido, 2002; Wilton & Cranford, 2002). Movements such as the Immigrant Workers’ Freedom Ride employ mobility in strategic and symbolic ways as well, tying the movement to the Civil Rights Movement while enabling the transmission of ideas and relationships across space (Leitner et al., 2008). Similarly, it is through the virtual and material movement of individuals, objects, and ideas throughout a hierarchical labor union that is organized across national space that messages and priorities are transmitted throughout the union bureaucracy. The movement of organizers and worker activists from place to place, the demonstration effect associated with successful campaigns that enables or constrains the movement of strategy, and the use of common protest tactics involving organized mobility such as picket lines and marches all

introduce mobility strategies into the institutionalized labor movement, just as they are made use of by social movements (Wills, 1998). By attending to the spatial dynamics – networked and mobile – of social movements, the organization and agency of labor movements that are incorporating a ‘social movement repertoire’ (Tilly & Wood, 2013) comes into sharper view.

Geographies of the Fight for \$15

The Fight for \$15 is the SEIU’s current signature organizing campaign, best known for organizing fast food workers and for promoting \$15 local minimum wage ordinances in cities and states across the US. In 2013, the campaign organized strikes in six cities; by November of 2017, the campaign was capable of organizing protests in 340 cities across the US in which thousands marched and hundreds were arrested. The Fight for \$15 includes both labor union and non-union actors, from community organizations working in coalition with local iterations of the campaign to Socialist organizations that preceded and exceed the Fight for \$15 campaign.¹⁹ The rapid geographic spread of the campaign and the strategic organization of locally distinct campaigns certainly exceeds SEIU’s top-down control, and the decision-making process stitching together these disparate groups work on minimum wage activism is chaotic and deeply tied to specific local conditions. That said, to discuss the proliferation of \$15 minimum wage campaigns without discussing the outsized role of SEIU in conceptualizing, staffing, funding, and driving national-level strategy of the Fight for \$15

¹⁹ In Chicago alone, the coalition of community groups brought together to agitate for a \$15 minimum wage includes BYP100, ONE Northside, Brighton Park Neighborhood Council Action Now, Grassroots Collaborative, Albany Park Neighborhood Council, the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, ARISE Chicago, Southsiders Organized for Unity and Liberation, and Communities United, among others. Socialist Alternative has an alternative \$15 wage campaign called \$15 Now, with chapters throughout the country.

is to do a disservice to analytical aspects of the campaign that make it a unique labor union/social movement hybrid organizing form.

The Development of the Fight for \$15: SEIU's Community Organizing Foray

The Fight for \$15 in its current form – the broad-based SEIU-sponsored campaign that combines local agitation for \$15 minimum wages with fast food worker organizing – emerged gradually over the course of several years following President Barack Obama's election in 2008. The political climate had deteriorated into a cycle of far-right mobilization, and even rudimentary pro-labor reforms such as the Employee Free Choice Act failed to gain traction in the Democratic-controlled Congress. The SEIU International determined that new union organizing campaigns were unrealistic until the broader political climate was friendlier to union organizing. At this point, SEIU was known for using external leverage to organize workers, and had been successful in running corporate campaigns that focused on convincing national companies to enter into neutrality agreements with SEIU in exchange for political advocacy or for the end to negative press (McAlevey & Ostertag, 2012). According to one Chicago-based activist, this changed in 2010: “we were ready to look at worker heat” (Organizer 4, Chicago, 10/13/2015).

Beginning with the election of Mary Kay Henry to the presidency of the SEIU International in 2010, SEIU began to invest in experiments with community organizing and broadly conceived non-electoral political organizing, which it incorporated into its organizing department. Formal union organizing campaigns would still be run under the auspices of the NLRB, especially at airports and in the healthcare industry, but they would

be structured by a new organizing model.²⁰ The Fight for a Fair Economy (FFE) was the immediate result of this strategic shift. In private, union leaders conceived of the FFE as a Tea Party of the left. Strategically, it emphasized a broad-based “environment change” strategy, trying to “change the narrative” about the economy in order to make the political climate more amenable to union organizing (Moberg, 2012). Ultimately, the FFE was structured under a theory of change that held that changing the political environment in which union organizing was to take place would encourage and facilitate the organization of more new members into the union. Community politics and national politics were inseparable from workplace politics, and a political environment that denigrated unions, blamed middle-class Americans for the housing crisis, and blamed public employees for bloated spending was anathema to proactive union organizing. This strategic orientation to national-level narrative change was pursued through the top-down organization of multiple local campaigns.

In 2011, the SEIU International selected 17 cities²¹ for a pilot community organizing project that would organize unemployed workers alongside their precariously employed counterparts. The cities were chosen because they were pockets of strength for SEIU, both in the number union members in the local economy and in the commitment by local unions to expand traditional political activities to encompass non-members and non-partisan campaigns. They were predictably concentrated in the West, the Midwest, and the Northeast, with flagship campaigns in Seattle, Chicago, and New York, but campaigns were also launched in some southern cities, including Houston and Miami. FFE operations were

²⁰ The NLRB legally covers the process by which union elections are held. Most labor leaders consider the process to give employers an advantage, and have found ways to organize agreements outside the confines of the formal election process.

²¹ Cities involved in the initial FFE organizing were Miami, Orlando, Houston, Dallas, Chicago, Milwaukee, Cleveland, Seattle, New York City, Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Minneapolis, St. Louis, Detroit, Kansas City, and San Diego.

housed either within local SEIU unions, partner community groups (Make the Road New York and Action Now in Chicago are two community organizations that ran field operations for the effort) or, eventually, in spin-off nonprofits mostly comprised of local or international union staff.

The SEIU International conceived of this effort as a nationally-coordinated campaign with local iterations that could capitalize on pre-existing local relationships and nimbly respond to political conditions on-the-ground. Since the SEIU International was preoccupied with “changing the national conversation,” it used a variety of strategies to direct the work of local campaigns to advance the needs of the national campaign. The strategic centrality of the national scale was paramount, even as the SEIU International experimented with novel community-centric strategies in locally-scaled campaigns, such as organizing with residents of public housing who were being threatened with eviction and exposing the tax avoidance strategies of large local companies. The relationships enabled by the FFE campaign structure were not strictly hierarchical, but neither were they akin to more horizontally-structured social movements, where inducements, target-setting, and seduction are more common than explicit coercion (McFarlane, 2009). The relationship between local unions and the International union is complex and contingent, but it is also a legal relationship of federation, which, depending on the terms of the associational agreement, grants the International the ability to place recalcitrant (or corrupt) local unions into trusteeship. In the following sections, I will discuss some of the spatial strategies employed by the SEIU International and local versions of the Fight for \$15 campaign to organize campaign coherence while allowing for local specificity.

The Geography of the Initial Canvass

The FFE initiative began in 2011 with a wholesale canvass of low-income, majority non-white neighborhoods, a tactic that is virtually unheard of in labor organizing. The technique is common in community organizing, however: ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, used neighborhood canvasses to build organization and funding sources for most of its organizational history. Labor unions, with their historic focus on the workplace, tend to focus exploratory organizing conversations on employment centers rather than residential geographies, unless they are engaged in electoral political organizing in support of a candidate or a voter initiative. As a Chicago organizer explained, however, the geographic concentration of low-wage workers into specific neighborhoods had become so extreme that it was now possible to go door-to-door and be virtually assured that you would find a resident who was precariously employed or unemployed altogether (Organizer 4, Chicago, October 13, 2015).

During the nation-wide canvass, which lasted for several months in early 2011, union staff organizers, paid canvassers, and member activists had general organizing conversations with residents in the neighborhood, trying to gauge their support for progressive economic policies and to understand the political issues that mattered most to them. Canvass efforts were directed by the local unions in partnership with other friendly unions and community groups, and they were funded by the SEIU International. Organizers were evaluated based on the number of signed cards they collected each shift, which indicated a contact's interest in getting involved in an issue-specific campaign. These cards were compiled together into lists of sympathetic people. The lists that emerged were the most important strategic outcome of the canvass. These lists—which became tens of thousands of people long by the

end of the canvass—were used to invite people to protests and to funnel names and affiliations into electoral campaign databases.

Following the canvass, large-scale mobilizations for a wide range of local and federal policies – from the “Jobs bill” to efforts to close tax loopholes – were organized through carefully coordinated national days of action. Some joint actions were organized with local Occupy chapters: in November of 2011, for example, FFE chapters organized a nation-wide day of bridge occupations in support of infrastructure investment, along with OWS camps in places from Seattle to New York. The nation-wide FFE came together for a weeklong event to “Occupy the Capitol” in December of 2011, erecting white canopy tents across the Mall, organizing sit-ins in Congressional offices, and disrupting private events throughout the city.

In 2012, campaign activities shifted towards the upcoming presidential and congressional elections. Through the political season leading to November of 2012, FFE organizers and activists protested corporate tax cheats, Republican candidates for local and national elections, and Mitt Romney’s politically damaging corporate dealings. Local campaigns in the initial 17 cities targeted local candidates for office and highlighted locally relevant issues and targets, coordinated by national-level FFE strategists. In August of 2012, FFE chapters across the country held candidate town halls to support favored candidates and engage potential voters in political education activities. Barack Obama won the presidential election in 2012 and the Democrats increased their majority in the Senate, but failed to regain control of the House of Representatives.

As the end of the 2012 election season, the FFE again shifted gears. After two years of community organizing activity and political engagement, SEIU and partner unions were struggling to turn the lists of politically allied workers into meaningful workplace organizing

campaigns. The lists created through the canvass were mined for employer connections, and from these connections, union leaders developed strategies to target industries and workplaces that might result in high-visibility campaigns. These high-visibility campaigns were selected because they would elevate the importance of unionization within the broader consciousness. The interplay between the canvass and workplace concerns was mixed, but organizers identified some areas where there was a high level of workplace-community connection for further investigation. After the 2012 presidential election, FFE morphed into a series of occupation-specific and policy-specific organizing campaigns. The occupation-specific campaigns largely tracked SEIU's existing membership in health care, property services (including airport contractor employees), and the public sector.

While working to expand union campaigns in sectors in which SEIU was already established, activists were also on the lookout for something more: an organizing campaign focused on a novel, highly visible, high impact industry that would draw national attention to the problem of income inequality and precarious, low-wage labor. Different local iterations of the campaigns explored different high-profile low-wage worker industry campaigns. Seattle flirted with a campaign focused on coffee shops and baristas, Chicago put substantial organizing muscle behind a campaign to organize retail workers in the Magnificent Mile, and New York threw resources headlong into fast food worker organizing. After probing multiple different occupations, and seeing the immediate impact of fast food worker strikes in New York, the SEIU International decided that the fast food industry, which had become synonymous with bad conditions and low wages, was an ideal flagship campaign.

Fast food organizing began to gain traction in New York City in the fall of 2012. Labor organizing in New York had a long history, and recent innovative organizing campaigns such as Machinists' efforts to organize black car drivers had focused attention on

independent and precarious workers, who were largely immigrants and people of color (Ness, 2005). In this context, the first strike of fast food workers took place on November 29, 2012. Around 200 workers walked off the job for the day to protest low wages, wage theft, and poor working conditions (Greenhouse, 2012). Fast food workers in Chicago were the next city to go out on strike, on April 24, 2013. Other cities joined quickly in the spring of 2013: Detroit, St. Louis, Milwaukee, and Seattle, then Flint and Kansas City. Around this time, FFE campaigns began to incorporate themselves into independent labor/community organizations, with nominally independent boards and fundraising goals. The Fight for \$15 had begun to take shape.

In the next section, I turn from the development of the Fight for \$15 to workings of the campaign itself. In particular, I focus on the spatial strategies used by the campaign to coordinate a national message while delegating day-to-day operations to local campaigns.

Organizing Geographies: Coordinating a Demand, National Strike Days, and Inter-Campaign Mobilities

The Fight for \$15 employs multiple strategies to encourage coordination and sharing between sites, using the movement of people, resources, and communication materials to coordinate and spread campaign strategies and tactics. These campaign strategies are partly embroiled in a politics of scale, but also introduce multiple complications and tensions that emphasize the multi-scalarity of the organization. Below, I discuss two central forms of sharing that enabled the spread of local campaigns for \$15 minimum wages: the cultivation of national-level tactics and demands, and inter-campaign resource sharing.

National Days of Action: National Coordination and the Geographies of Fight for \$15 Strikes

Linking local campaigns into a coherent national campaign is central to the strategic toolbox of the Fight for \$15. As organizers describe it, a central goal of Fight for \$15 activity, above and beyond any single union organizing campaign or citywide minimum wage policy campaign, is to “change the national narrative around what was really going on in the economy” (Andrew Beane, Seattle, 7/8/2015). The national orientation of the Fight for \$15 does not mean that the campaign is most focused on a federal policy or a nation-wide neutrality agreement with McDonald’s. The broader goal of “narrative change” exists simultaneously in localities and in the national media.

In the labor geography and political geography literatures, this impulse is best described analytically through recourse to the concept of “scale-jumping,” the process through which campaigns that are pursued on a local level are brought into a larger sphere of influence, or, conversely, the process through which nationally-focused campaigns are devolved to local campaigns in search of favorable political opportunities (Smith, 1992). The process of creating these linkages is tenuous, with agency exerted in both directions. The SEIU International works to manufacture internal coherence amongst the disparate local campaigns, building a national and international Fight for \$15 movement, while SEIU locals and other local iterations of the campaign experiment with ideas and organizing tactics that then go on to shape the policy goals and strategic efforts of the national campaign. The continued salience of scale for labor unions is no accident: the federated structure of large unions like the SEIU creates mechanisms of control, devolution, and democratic decision-making that make the scalar negotiations of union-led non-union organizing campaigns like the Fight for \$15 continual and qualitatively different from other social movements.

Geographic Dispersion of Campaigns

One strategic method the campaign used to knit disparate campaigns into a national whole was the geographic dispersion of the campaigns themselves. Although local fast food campaigns were loosely federated, they shared the same funding source. Organizers recognized that the story of income inequality differed depending on one's location within the US: the injustice of a poverty-wage job in booming Seattle, for instance, is experienced differently than the injustice of an entire city or region where the only jobs to be found are low-wage jobs. To the extent possible with the resources and geographic strengths that they already possessed, SEIU confederated campaigns to highlight these differences and make the story a national one.

I think it worked in a sense that this thing was rolling across the country—in places with really different economies. There was New York—obviously you can't have a much stronger inequality story than a fast food worker in Manhattan. That's inequality in a nutshell... Milwaukee had a strike, which is thought to be more of a struggling, Midwestern-industrial city. Then there was us [Seattle], with this thriving-techy new economy. All these different manifestations of what the economy looks like, and each city representing a part of that. I don't know how much that was designed and how much that kind of happened, but I think that made the movement seem bigger and more national more quickly, because there were so many different kinds of places. (Sage Wilson, Seattle, 8/4/2015)

As described by union activists, the actions by fast food workers in different places were designed to present a series of portraits about the effects of the low-wage job market, which differ from place to place. The Seattle activists highlighted the rapidly increasing income inequality born from a boomtown growth in technology, while New York highlighted the stubborn persistence of inequality in a global city, and Midwestern towns drew connections with struggle based in the flight of capital and industry from the rust belt. These differences

cohered together into a larger whole: a national narrative about a low-wage labor market that wasn't working for anyone.

National Coordination and Naming: The Importance of the 'Fight for \$15'

Another process that contributed to the scalar politics of the Fight for \$15 included the call for a \$15 minimum wage, which stitched together campaigns across the world. The phrase "Fight for \$15" has become a short-hand for many different types of campaigns, from local policy campaigns to union contract campaigns to fast food worker organizing. The name, slogan, and short-hand policy demand of the movement was one of the last aspects of the strategy to emerge. The first fast food strikes in New York were organized under the "Fast Food Forward" banner; Seattle's campaign for a \$15 minimum wage was alternately called Good Jobs Seattle and Working Washington. The campaign in the South is officially called Raise Up, although activists on the ground tend to use the Fight for \$15 label. By the time the first national fast food strikes were organized in May of 2013, however, the Fight for \$15 had crystallized into a key connective tissue between the campaigns. The process through which this phrase was coined, adopted, and dispersed throughout geographically disparate campaigns is a good window into the processes of adjustment between local and national campaign priorities. The phrase originated in a local campaign before expanding to encompass the national strategy. Even as its political power as an organizing tool became clear, the Fight for \$15 moniker received criticism from local campaigns and was unevenly adopted. Despite criticism, however, the phrase became a potent political marketing tool to indicate a national-level cohesion, even as local campaigns diverged from national-level priorities.

There is considerable disagreement over where the idea for a \$15 minimum wage came from. Some promote the idea that it emerged organically from fast food workers in New York, others argue that the figure came about more scientifically through an analysis of inflation and productivity, and still others suggest that two senior SEIU International staffers decided on the campaign over drinks in a bar. Despite disagreement over the origin story, it is commonly accepted that activists in Chicago were the first to popularize the phrase “Fight for \$15,” and began organizing under that moniker even before shifting their organizing focus to fast food. The influence of this local adaptation irrevocably shaped the larger, national movement, and far exceeds the eventual organizing gains made on the ground in Chicago. The process through which the Fight for \$15 achieved its name, and, consequently, its policy lever and national cohesion, is an example of the influence of local activism on the larger whole. Chicago organizers upscaled a local campaign into a broader national message. This messaging effort has been wildly successful, and the \$15 minimum wage has now exceeded the community organizing component of SEIU’s union organizing strategy that it was meant to coordinate.

The Fight for \$15 moniker, and the call for \$15 itself, was not uncritically taken up by local campaigns. When the Seattle campaign was organizing the first fast food worker strike in May of 2013, they hesitated to use the \$15 figure, despite pressure from the International to do so.

We were really antsy about putting ‘\$15’ on our signs, honestly. We kind of thought—I definitely thought this, I think I was wrong—it seemed kind of ridiculous, it just seemed like a little bit of an absurdist demand. It just seemed too much and kind of random. (Sage Wilson, Seattle, 8/4/2015)

These hesitations were echoed by worker activists brought into Working Washington as well. In one planning meeting leading up to the strike vote, a worker argued that \$15 was too big a reach: “We’ll never get there. They’ll never let this happen. They’ll continue to fight back,

and we're never going to get to \$15" (Sejal Parikh, Seattle, 9/24/2015). Workers and organizers eventually decided to employ the \$15 figure, partly because it showed coherence with the SeaTac campaign that was on-going at the time, partly because it was advocated by the International coordination of the disparate campaigns, and partly because Socialist Alternative, a leftist group in Seattle, was running an independent city council campaign on a \$15 minimum wage. Working Washington did, however, break with the International in one key respect: Seattle fast food workers did not call for "\$15 and a Union," but rather made the claim to \$15 and the "right to organize without retaliation" (Sejal Parikh, Seattle, 9/24/2015). Working Washington took that position because it was in the process of being incorporated into a non-union organization for workers, and was trying to pursue non-union organizational funding and nonprofit status. This distinction – whether to "Fight for \$15" or "Fight for \$15 and a Union" is one that divided a number of Fight for \$15 campaigns. These local disagreements were allowed, if not encouraged, by the "loosely confederated" structure of the campaign: "The funding sources were the same, but there was also a lot of good amount of freedom in each place to do things differently with each other" (Sage Wilsons, Seattle, 8/4/2015). After the initial successes in SeaTac and then Seattle, the call for \$15 crystallized as the centralized component that stitched the campaigns together into a relatively coherent national whole.

Strike Days: National Days of Action

Another important component of the national structure and cohesion of the Fight for \$15 is the coordination of National Strike Days. These days of action have been semi-annual events since 2013 and are important moments of top-down coordination and message control, but they also allow for local improvisation. The days are announced by the

SEIU International, and significant resources are expended by local arms of Fight for \$15 campaigns to hold actions on specified days. While certain aspects of the day's events are left to local organizers, one tactic has become so associated with the Fight for \$15 that it is essentially non-negotiable: the short-term Unfair Labor Practices (ULP) strike.

Although strikes have been used in limited respects by social movements, they are most deeply connected to labor movement, in both its institutional and grassroots forms (Brecher, 1972). Despite the historic centrality of striking to the labor movement, however, the use of the tactic has dropped precipitously in the last few decades (McAlevey, 2016; Oswalt, 2016). The national Fight for \$15 campaign made a strategic decision to rehabilitate the strike for a new purpose, and through this decision has cultivated a specific relationship to the strike that has stitched together disparate campaigns while allowing for chaotic local iterations. I argue below that the chaotic geography of a national strike day is a central strategy that the Fight for \$15 uses to incorporate and influence multiple spatialities (mobilities, scalar politics, and networks) to bring attention to the working conditions of a variety of low-wage workers.

Strikes themselves have distinct geographies, and these geographies have changed with time alongside the geographies of economic relations, institutional relationships, and legal parameters. Within the US, the use of strikes is a tactic more prevalent in certain regions, especially those with histories of trade union organization, a lack of right-to-work laws, and an industrial mix more susceptible to economic strikes (Ellis, 1992). Besides being concentrated in certain regions (notably the industrial north), strikes in the US are almost always focused on a single employer, and, in the post-War period, have almost always involved already-unionized workers (Oswalt, 2016). That is to say, strikes for union recognition have been vanishingly rare since the 1930s. Even if the firm in question is a

nation-wide firm, under the NLRA, strikes typically occur at the level of the bargaining unit. Only under the Railway Labor Act (RLA) (the labor law governing transportation workers) is a nationwide strike like the one against United Parcel Service (UPS) in 1997 legally actionable.

This has not always been the case, as evidenced by the socialist and revolutionary-syndicalist movement activity that abounded in the US in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For instance, the geography of the railroad strike of 1877, in which American workers seized control of the railroads and general strikes erupted in dozens of major cities, was national in scope, and refused to focus on a single firm (Brecher, 1972). In this case, widespread, working-class, militant strike activity spread throughout the country from New York to Texas, following railroad lines, spreading quickly from activity focused on one employer to secondary strikes (Asimakopoulos, 2007). In contrast, the Flint sit-down strikes of 1934, in which thousands of General Motors employees refused to leave their work stations to protest anti-union organizing by the company, was a site-based contestation over broad economic ideals (Fuoss, 1995). The localism of strikes has increased in the Post-War period, with national or international strikes the exception rather than the rule. In fact, strikes have the potential to revert into parochial and defensive localism, as occurred in the British oil refinery workers' strike in 2009, where the slogan "British Jobs for British Workers" was uncritically adopted by striking workers in a dispute with a multinational oil conglomerate (Ince et al., 2014). Strikes have been increasingly relegated to hyper-local struggles, even if these struggles have global significance or rely on cross-national solidarities (Castree, 2000).

The strikes organized under the Fight for \$15 banner are qualitatively different than the quintessential union-organized strike. While other forms of unionism may benefit from

minority union activity, strikes usually require supermajority commitment to be effective. To exact economic costs sufficient to bring single employers to the table, strikes require massive worker commitment, as striking workers risk their jobs, livelihood, physical security, and personal relationships. As such, strikes are the ultimate “structure test,” to use Jane McAlevey’s words: their fundamental purpose is to demonstrate super-majority worker support for their union and the capacity to work in deep solidarity (McAlevey, 2016). The Fight for \$15 strikes, in contrast, have low barriers to entry for workers. On national action days, Fight for \$15 strikes span entire metropolitan areas, targeting multiple employers, even if only one or two workers have prepared to strike during that work shift. While these strikes carry specific demands, they are not organized or sustained in a way that would cause direct economic damage to the fast food companies organizers are targeting. The strategic goal is geographic breadth rather than the depth of organizing commitments, as measured by length of work stoppage, the number of workers on strike, or the amount of economic damage caused to employers.

The Fight for \$15 strikes are designed re-acclimate the US labor movement to ‘traditional’ militant economic tactics. Organizers I spoke with, when asked about Fight for \$15 strikes, view them as signals of “worker heat” (Organizer 4, Chicago, 10/13/2015). Despite the ultimate limitations of the model of short-term strikes to cause significant economic damage to employers, staff members spoke effusively about the power and destructive capacity of the strikes.

I think the labor movement is getting to a place where we have to cause destruction... We don’t even need to get to that point, we just need to have the threat that we can actually shut things down. It’s people standing up and going on strike, and I think that’s what it’s going to take to move ahead. (Organizer 5, Chicago, 10/25/2015)

The spirit of militancy and surprise, even if this spirit does not (yet) have the capability to the cause economic hardship for employers, is a crucial strategic stance of the national Fight for \$15. The sheer unexpectedness of a strike in a fast food restaurant draws more attention to the campaign. As one activist put it,

[Fast food work] is the factory floor of the service economy. Because it sounds like such an impossible thing to pull off, a fast food worker strike therefore is more dramatic and important. It's some of the most disempowered workers doing something to take power back. (Sage Wilson, Seattle, 8/4/2015)

It should be mentioned that the use of short-term, minority strikes has been criticized by activist and academic commentators alike for watering down the purpose and cause of the strike (Gupta, 2015; McAlevey, 2016). These commentators argue that fast food strikes are really a “strike on the media,” not on an employer, and do not represent actual commitment by workers (Gupta, 2015). This is true, with some exceptions: workers at fast food restaurants have used the strike tactic to get employers to replace air conditioners in Chicago and in North Carolina, for example. But the critique misses the central strategic innovation of the ULP strike tactic in the Fight for \$15: re-acclimating the US political climate to militant action, regardless of actual organizing strength, and using the element of surprise to garner attention to the issue of wide-spread worker exploitation. Meanwhile, the use of short-term ULP strikes has become almost as much of a national signature for the campaign as the call for \$15 an hour.

The first and most central aspect of Fight for \$15 strike days is their national organization. National coordination from the SEIU International makes space for local improvisation, but requires significant resource commitment from local organizations. A Chicago organizer, who represented a community organization that was funded by SEIU to implement the Fight for a Fair Economy Campaign, put it this way when discussing the gradual transition from the FFE to the Fight for \$15:

It became difficult to get used to such a top-down approach in a national campaign. Like they were waging – you pretty much had to be able to say there was going to be a strike on this day, it's going to be nationwide, and you're all going to participate at a certain level. (Organizer 4, Chicago, 10/13/2015)

The parameters for participating in national strike days were distributed to local campaigns through “strike in a box” memos, which advised organizers on methods of keeping strikers out of legal trouble and sharing messaging items such as signs (Gupta, 2015). In Chicago, where the organizing work had remained separate from SEIU locals (unlike the Seattle campaign, for example), organizers fought hard against strategic shifts that they believed to be abandoning workers. For example, although organizers had been working diligently to organize retail workers along the Magnificent Mile, and had already coined the term “Fight for \$15,” when fast food workers in New York were ready to strike in the Fall of 2012, Chicago did not join them. Organizers on the ground knew the workers were not ready for a strike, as measured by more traditional metrics associated with strike-readiness.

When they demurred, the SEIU-funded local organizer embedded with the campaign was replaced with an organizer much more invested in the International’s strategic vision, and the campaign shifted from retail to fast food (Organizer 13, Chicago, 10/28/2015; Organizer 4, Chicago, 10/13/2015). In response, the community organization that had been responsible for the canvass pulled out, increasingly wary that such a high percentage of its funding was dependent on a continued relationship with SEIU and unhappy that they were not able to exercise local decision-making within the campaign (Organizer 13, Chicago, 10/28/2015). “It was pretty clear that as a national movement they needed to meet certain benchmarks that were not driven by local needs. They were driven by national needs.” (Organizer 4, Chicago, 10/13/2015). After the community organization declined to continue running the on-going canvass, the SEIU International directly staffed and funded a Fight for \$15 Chicago branch, which it still controls.

Although the types of strikes required by national coordinators were sometimes critiqued by local iterations of Fight for \$15 campaigns, certain aspects of the national coordination were deemed crucial to the formation of bonds of solidarity amongst workers across space. As organizers and workers were gearing up for the first fast food strikes in Seattle, for instance, they took comfort and inspiration from connections with the New York campaign in particular.

I think it was really interesting for the workers in Seattle when we showed them solidarity videos of fast food workers from across the country. A lot of them would say, ‘Oh, yeah, I haven’t gotten to buy a new jacket in years as well.’ Even though the workers didn’t get to meet each other at that point—they did, down the road—there was a lot of sense of, ‘This isn’t just me; this isn’t just the coworkers I have in my store. This isn’t just the city of Seattle. This is workers across the country.’ (Sejal Parikh, Seattle, 9/24/2015)

Sharing video testimonials from workers across the country was a precursor to other formalized methods of connecting across space. Airport Fight for \$15 campaigns made frequent use of “Skyped Solidarity” calls, where workers who worked for the same airport contractor would meet in small groups to chat with workers elsewhere about the challenges they faced with their employers (Memo Rivera, Seattle, 7/15/2015). Workers involved in the Fight for \$15 would go on to attend worker conventions in Detroit, Chicago, and Richmond, discussing the future of the movement and building connections with workers in other places (Organizer 5, Chicago, 10/29/2015). These networked technologies, as well as the immobile spaces such as conference centers and meeting spaces (Cook & Ward, 2012; Temenos & McCann, 2013) were important to build excitement and connection amongst workers in different places. These virtual and material networks kept workers engaged and contributed to a sense that they were involved in something much larger than a single store in a single fast food company.

The fast food strikes' association with a national movement was central to the newsworthiness of the events in Seattle, as skeptical members of the media attended events in order to see how the local iteration of the campaign would proceed. As it became clear that the Seattle strikes were not only linked with the national fast food movement, but also indicative of real organizational capacity and excitement amongst fast food workers, the strikes took on a different importance. When one journalist, interviewed for the Minimum Wage History Project, discussed how her news organization decided to cover the initial strikes, she said this:

Seattle was getting engaged in a movement that had started nationally. It had started in New York and had kind of traveled. Watching it show up in Seattle, we didn't know where this was going to go... After the first one there were some later events, and I think at that point we started having our conversation in the newsroom about how best to cover that because it felt like the most important issue happening in the city—very quickly. Within a few months there was nothing else dominating the conversation in the way that this fight is dominating the conversation and it's our responsibility to cover that. (Ana Minard, Seattle, 8/11/2015)

Part of the reason the strikes were taken seriously from the beginning was because the geographic dispersion of the strikes throughout the city was extensive enough to be meaningful. The breadth of the strikes was significant enough to convince skeptical journalists of their importance. As Minard continued:

That day got really crazy. It went all day long. It was at different neighborhoods all over the city. I can't even remember how many—a dozen different stores. I went to a place in the U-District and just went to see what was happening. I didn't know how big or how interesting it would be. There was a crowd of people out front, mostly community supporters, chanting and signing songs and holding signs. I was like, are there workers here? Which is always a reporter's question. Were there even any people who work at this taco place here? And there were only three people who worked at this taco restaurant, and two of them were outside trying to coax their co-worker to come out with them and shut the whole store down. (Ana Minard, Seattle, 8/11/2015)

Here, even as the reporter is impressed by the geographic reach of the strikes, she correctly notes that most of the participants were community supporters. The store in the University

District did not even shut down because one worker remained on the job. Despite this, the sense of momentum for the campaign was palpable, and it continued to build in the coming months.

Equally important to the geographic breadth of the strikes were the “improvisations” (Oswalt, 2016) that were encouraged amongst local iterations of the campaigns during National Strike Days. The first fast food strike in Seattle is a good example of the ways the strikes themselves are chaotic expressions of nationally coordinated, locally dispersed, networked, and mobile worker agency. An organizer in Seattle explains the start to the first fast food strike day like this:

Walking into our first strikes in May 2013 was really fun and really scary because a number of us hadn't really done work like this before. We didn't really know what to expect...The first two strike lines we have, those stores just shut down. That was not expected, and that definitely wasn't the goal that we had. But just to see the tremendous momentum, and workers who were scared being talked to by other workers. Then the day unfolds and we have strike lines up across the city. Reports are that if you were in the city of Seattle you could not miss a strike line in fast food. (Sejal Parikh, Seattle, 9/24/2015)

This strike day was the culmination of hundreds of hours of organizer labor, and yet the outcomes were not predetermined. It was unclear whether any of the targeted stores, which included Taco Bells, Subways, and gas stations, would shut down. As workers talked with other workers, the planned events spread across the entire city, sometimes to stores that had not been reached by organizers.

In contrast to the almost militaristic organizer-controlled SEIU-sponsored protests, the fast food strikes in Seattle quickly exceeded organizers' capacity and control. Many people involved in the original strikes emphasized the feeling of losing track of people across the space of the city, as workers used networks heretofore unknown to organizers to bring new workers on strike. Rather than detract from the event, organizers saw this chaos as central to the success of the strike:

In all this lefty protest events that I've touched or gone to, it's the only one besides WTO that I can think of that unpredictable things actually did happen. We really didn't know people were walking out of places. We didn't know who they were. They knew each other. There were actually networks of workers were being formed. (Sage Wilson, Seattle, 8/4/2015).

I'm in the office and we have a plan of where the press can go for strike lines. All of a sudden I start getting calls from people saying, 'We don't know where this worker is. We don't know where this worker is.' And they had just asked organizers or other folks who were on the strike lines to give them a ride because they knew a different worker at a different store in a different location. [The workers] just started going store by store, talking to workers and telling them what was going on, signing them up for strike notices. Those workers would walk off. I kept getting reports about Subway after Subway in downtown Seattle shutting down. And there's no one inside the store anymore. It was genuinely chaos. It was a little bit frightening because I didn't know where everyone was; I wanted to make sure everyone was safe. But chaos in the greatest way because I still to this day could not tell you how many workers went on strike that day. I still to this day could not tell you all the stores. I heard that four gas stations went on strike. I don't know, seven gas stations, 14? That number kept climbing...I think that if they weren't as chaotic as they were, the campaign trajectory would have been very different. (Sejal Parikh, Seattle, 9/24/2015).

The horizontal networked organization of workers in this strike day is notable because it occurred in the context of a more or less rigidly hierarchical organization. This, coupled with the uncontrollable mobility of workers from store to store as they sought out their friends to convince them to strike, contributed significantly to the success of that first strike day. The novelty and excitement of the early strike days would wear off, but the momentum created by the chaotic geography of that first strike day played a large role in the passing of Seattle's \$15 minimum wage.

As the campaign continued to develop, these National Days of Action became platforms through which SEIU signaled strategic shifts in the focus of the Fight for \$15. For example, 4/15/2015 was a day devoted to expanding the circle of workers organizing under the Fight for \$15 moniker to include child care workers, adjunct professors, airport contractor employees, home care workers and other SEIU-organized occupations. I attended this National Day of Action in Seattle, and saw this message shift signaled through the local

sites chosen for protest: Seattle activists occupied Seattle University to show solidarity with an organizing drive among faculty there. In addition, the coalition of people brought in as speakers represented a wide range of occupations, and the activists who chose to be arrested for blocking the street in front of Seattle University wore t-shirts with their occupations printed on the front: Teacher, Childcare Worker, Homecare Worker, Fast Food Worker. The next national call to action, which I attended in Chicago on 11/11/2015, signaled a growing alliance with the Black Lives Matter movement and began a year-long march to the election. The program there incorporated representatives from anti-police brutality organizations and included the slogan “come get our vote” to signs and chants. The National Day of Action following the fast food worker convention in Richmond, Virginia, which I attended in August of 2016, similarly signaled the growing importance of racial justice movements on the Fight for \$15, and completed the turn toward electoral organizing. These moments of coordination, along with the chaotic geographies of the days themselves and the negotiations between different components of the campaign, are crucial to the overall project.

Inter-Campaign Mobilities: Resource Sharing and Campaign Autonomy

An important component of the national-level organization of local campaigns is the movement of people, resources, images, articles, arguments, and slogans from site to site. According to my interviews and observations, SEIU repeatedly shifted staff members, worker activists, and other resources from campaign to campaign depending on the needs of the local campaign. These redeployments of staff and resources occurred multiple times during the period under study: Chicago and North Carolina staff members were deployed

for several months to New York while the wage boards were underway, for instance, and staff were redeployed on a long-term basis from Chicago to SeaTac to support airport organizing there. Union staff members and paid worker activists were flown throughout the country, living in hotel rooms for extended periods of times, when campaigns that were deemed essential to the broader goals of the movement needed support. Campaign needs in specific places are time-dependent, as different campaigns reach choke points at different times, requiring flexibility, administrative labor, and financial resources to implement.

In this section, I discuss in detail one particularly meaningful instance of inter-campaign resource and staff sharing: the 4-day voter mobilization blitz that took place in the middle of October, 2013, to support the SeaTac Good Jobs initiative, the first time a \$15 minimum wage was on the ballot. The blitz brought staff members and worker activists from across the country to SeaTac to ensure voters mailed their ballots. The weekend was marked by a number of material and immaterial mobilities: people, ideas, news stories, rental cars, and ballots all traversed miles of space and deeply affected the result and the broader significance of the campaign. Meanwhile, the weekend was shaped just as deeply by various immobilities that created choke points and affected the morale and character of the campaign.

As the SeaTac \$15 minimum wage initiative approached Election Day in October of 2013, organizers and worker activists from international unions across the country arrived on the ground in SeaTac for a get-out-the-vote blitz. By this point, the Fight for \$15 had begun organizing fast food workers in New York, but the concept of a \$15 minimum wage had yet to be put to a vote: SeaTac, despite the campaign's origins in a more traditional union organizing drive, would be the first electoral test of a \$15 minimum wage, and was accordingly a strategic priority for the national campaign. Voting in Washington State

happens by mail, rather than in-person, meaning that voters could vote any day between the moment the ballots arrived and Election Day, increasing the importance of a sustained door-to-door effort to ensure supportive voters cast their ballots. SEIU and the Teamsters, who were jointly organizing at the Airport, reached out to their international unions for resources to support the weeks leading up to the election. Both Internationals responded by sending staff and other resources for a 4-day weekend chasing ballots. As one Seattle-based campaigner told me: “These are the best organizers that each of these locals have to offer that they’ve put on the planes so that we win this fucking campaign, because everybody knew how important it was” (Brianna Thomas, 8/27/2015). In this way, the investment of international unions in the mobility of organizers and worker activists from across the country signaled the heavy strategic importance they placed on the outcome of this election.

There were fewer than 12,000 voters in a typical election in the city of SeaTac. This is a relatively small voter mobilization operation for a campaign receiving national attention, but it is roughly comparable in size to an industrial union organizing campaign. For the blitz weekend, unions transferred roughly 300 staff members, worker activists, and other volunteers to the Northwest to work on the campaign. The logistical and monetary costs of coordinating this group were tremendous. Election staff members who had already been working on the campaign for months worked long hours cutting turf, developing talking points and scripts, and planning trainings. Local union staff members, especially those in administrative roles, were tasked with arranging flights, rental cars, lodging, and meals for the hundreds of people brought into SeaTac. Most union officers I spoke with considered the blitz weekend crucial to the SeaTac victory, for instance:

It absolutely bore out that that had a huge impact because when you looked at the way that – and we continued that campaign through election day – those first four days was a huge influx of resources and huge numbers of people on the door. We

know that ultimately had a huge impact because when you looked at the way returns trended: we were up on election night, fifty-two to forty-eight, which it feels like a decent margin when you're in elections, but of course by the time all the ballots were counted, we only actually won by seventy-seven votes. The returns that came in on the front-end were folks that we had turned out on that we first big blitz weekend. (Sterling Harders, Seattle, 7/8/2015)

The investment was crucial to the ultimate victory of the campaign, and contributed the campaign becoming a national test case for the viability of a \$15 minimum wage.

If the mobility of people and resources from across the country contributed to the victory and to the national profile of the campaign, however, the weekend itself was also characterized by stubborn immobilities. The importance of considering immobility alongside mobility as “intertwined, mutually constituting and reinforcing elements” is an emerging consideration of mobilities studies (McCann & Ward, 2015). The sheer volume of people who were brought in to help with the campaign led to clogs in the circulation of people and ballots throughout the targeted election precincts. Each person brought in for the blitz was responsible for encouraging a total of 20 voters to cast their ballots over the course of the weekend. The voters resided in the same small geographic area, which meant that, in practice, campaign workers spent a majority of their time in the northwest waiting in front of houses for people to return home, or knocking on doors multiple times throughout the day. As one organizer put it, “their job was to basically set up shop until they got all their ballots turned in” (Brianna Thomas, Seattle, 8/27/2015). The inability or refusal to circulate was as significant as the free movement of people and other resources.

Moreover, the campaign was brought to a standstill in the first days of the blitz because the ballots themselves were not circulated on schedule.

And then there were no ballots. We had this 300-person canvass set up to get the vote out over four days with people from all over the country and there were no fucking ballots. The ballots dropped late in SeaTac... We had 300 volunteers and there were no fucking ballots to chase, there were no voters to talk to so we ended up chasing mailmen because we just wanted to know... We were waiting for

someone to someone to tell us that they had laid eyes on just one ballot and that these 300 people were about to have something to actually do. (Brianna Thomas, Seattle, 8/27/2015)

The refusal of the ballots to cooperate with the organizers' schedule affected the entire weekend. Organizers scrambled to come up with something for volunteers to do, and volunteers scoured their turfs looking for signs that the mail was being delivered. When the ballots finally arrived, the impact was immediate: volunteers descended on their turfs quickly and rapaciously, in what was described by several people on the campaign as overzealous or over-aggressive. This instance highlights an important consequence of impeded mobility. The frustrated circulation of volunteers throughout their turf, both because of planning decisions and because of uncooperative external material circulations, created a build-up of energy and tension, which erupted in a flurry of activity.

In important respects, the movement of people and resources from across the country to SeaTac changed the character of the local campaign and marked a shift in the campaign. Until that point, the organizing at the Sea-Tac airport had been a traditional union organizing initiative, focused on building trust amongst workers and union organizers, developing worker leaders, and organizing actions to build capacity and test the strength of the budding organization. Worker participation during these early campaign activities is not only a signal of campaign capacity, but also the ultimate purpose and goal of the activities themselves. Discussing the shift in the campaign as it changed from one seeking a union election to one pursuing a voter initiative, one organizer said the following:

We worked hard in the field to get workers at the airport on that campaign to get signatures and to do the GOTV [Get Out the Vote] work. We really wanted workers doing that. We didn't want—we all brought in staff, we all put in money, we all brought in staff from around the country to come in and work on this campaign. SEIU brought in hundreds of people one day. We brought in what we could. It was just, to get out there and to get out the vote and do all this stuff. We put people from lost time from our membership, from our rank and file to work the campaign. And

we went out there and worked the hell out of it, but we didn't do the work at the airport that I think needed to be done. (Leonard Smith, June 11, 2015)

As the campaign took on an electoral character, the needs and goals shifted from engaging workers to brute force electoral engagement of city residents, which had the potential to detract from the organization being built at the airport itself. During the blitz weekend, as one organizer put it, “You’ve got people from Atlanta and Pittsburgh and L.A., all coming in and not knowing each other.” (Brianna Thomas, Seattle, 8/27/2015). Although several activities, from organized role-playing to campaign-sponsored dinners, were designed to quickly build a sense of camaraderie among the volunteers, the short-term nature of their participation of the campaign meant that any relationships would be temporary and unable to build into something larger. Although organizers who were engaged with worker activists at the airport tried to align the two efforts by bringing airport workers onto the GOTV effort, the needs of the campaign soon exceeded the capacity of organizers to organize deeply with airport workers while organizing quickly with voters.

Conclusion

The Fight for \$15 represents a unique confluence of hierarchical, top-down labor union organizing and fluid, locally specific, horizontally conditioned organizing. Because of this hybridity, it has been critiqued by traditional labor movement proponents and social movement proponents alike. Its goals of “narrative change” are too amorphous, and they will never result in the formation of unions, one line of argumentation goes. It is watering down the strike, the most powerful economic tactic of labor, forcing it upon tiny bands of still-disorganized workers who don't exhibit the deep organization required to actually cause economic damage to employers. Besides all this, it is too hierarchical, too top-down. The

SEIU International dictates what days people are going to strike, regardless of local conditions, and it distributes “strike in a box” packets to locals in order to enforce military-like precision in messaging and tactical deployments. These top-down tactics really amount to a “strike on the media” rather than a movement of workers from the bottom up.

The Fight for \$15 is, in my view, neither a successful but blunted top-down media campaign nor an instance of deep union organizing. It is both of these things, but only partially. Returning to the observation from Oswalt that started this chapter, “it is organizing by unions, but it isn’t union organizing.” Examining the spatialities of the Fight for \$15, I have identified some of the key distinguishing aspects of the spatial organization of the campaigns. These campaigns are contingent, and are continually in the process of coming together. The relationships between the national-level coordination of the campaign and the local iterations of the campaign are collaborative but at times fraught. Nevertheless, the strategies of national coordination have resulted in a powerful, broad messaging campaign partly by allowing for local innovation. Moreover, mobility strategies are crucial to the continuance of the campaign, allowing national-level coordinators to move resources, people, and ideas to the places they are most needed. Throughout it all, the Fight for \$15 employs a productive but chaotic geography of protest, and the opportunistic spatial frames of scale-jumping and mobility are beginning to develop into new union organizing formations.

Chapter 6: At the Table: Policy Negotiations and the Politics of Policy Mobility

“Raising the minimum wage is one of the most mainstream, old-fashioned political programs in America. The Catholic Church, for instance, has always supported raising the minimum wage. It was, in some sense, not a radical idea at all.” – Mayor Ed Murray, Seattle, WA

Introduction

In November of 2012, braving a characteristically cold, damp, and dark Pacific Northwest fall day, dozens of labor activists bundled up and began a “15” mile march from SeaTac to Seattle. Airport workers in SeaTac had just won a voter initiative campaign to raise airport economy²² wages to \$15 per hour, along with sick leave and provisions for full-time work. The labor unions that had invested heavily in the election campaign were ecstatic, and they planned to use the momentum from this victory to push local and state level wage victories across the country. First, though, they would start by marching their \$15 wage victory up to Seattle, where they had pressuring candidates for office to support a universal \$15 minimum wage in the city. The marchers concluded after dusk, carrying placards lit by candles, at Seattle City Hall, where they were met by several Seattle council members with hot chocolate and tea. In a little more than six months, Seattle would pass a \$15 minimum

²² The initiative created something called an “airport economy district,” carved out from the SeaTac city limits, that would be subject to the legislation. This district encompassed the entirety of the physical space of the Sea-Tac Airport as well as hotels and rental car agencies on International Boulevard.

wage that would eventually cover all workers in the city. The \$15 minimum wage was literally on the move.

The months and years that followed saw a veritable explosion of cities and states passing \$15 minimum wages. When reaching \$15 was politically untenable, cities and states instead recommitted themselves to increasing local and state minimum wages more gradually. Although this new explosion of interest in local minimum wage raises ran counter to the prevailing neoliberal governance regime that seemed omnipresent in the US, it was not *new*, exactly. The minimum wage is a quintessentially 20th Century labor regulation: in the US, it formed the backbone of the New Deal and was a hallmark of the Fordist compromise between labor and capital. Since its adoption at the federal level through the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, the minimum wage has been subject to cycles of agitation, mobilization, and innovations, while facing consistent and gradual erosion due to the effects of inflation. Small policy tweaks introduced along the way have expanded the minimum wage's reach by covering more classes of workers and eliminating various exceptions that were built into the original policy. Despite these small changes, however, the minimum wage itself remains comfortable in an old-fashioned way. The structure of today's minimum wage would be familiar to the architects of the original federal policy established in 1938. Moreover, despite recent prominent rightwing attacks against the concept, it remains popular amongst liberal and conservative voters alike.²³

The minimum wage has entered a new cycle of mobilization and is being taken up at various scales of government and subject to new innovations and policy debates. In this moment, the particular historical context and the contours of its movement throughout the

²³ While over 80% of Democrats report support, a majority of 53% of Republicans also support a modest increase to the minimum wage (National Employment Law Project, 2015).

US rise to the surface. What contributes to the cyclical, inter-jurisdictional mobility of a policy with such a long and robust politicized history? How does the current moment of hyper-mobility, increased inter-jurisdictional and international sharing and learning, and tendency toward techno-rationalization shape (or not shape) the parameters of the debate surrounding local minimum wage policy? By using insights from the emerging policy mobilities framework, this chapter aims to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms of policy mobility by tracing the cycles of contestation and innovation of a hallmark 20th Century labor policy.

I argue that tracing the historical cycles of minimum wage policy and activism allow for a broader view of the politics of policy mobility. An in-depth view of the history and present of local minimum wage policy allows a view into the specific mechanisms through which politicized – that is, contentious and partisan – policies are rendered technical in gestures towards rational and apolitical policymaking. The paths traveled by policies are undoubtedly contoured by politics, as is deftly and repeatedly acknowledged by policy mobilities work (McCann, 2011; Peck & Theodore, 2010; Temenos & McCann, 2012; Ward, 2006; Wood, 2015); policies are also put to work in the service of politics, specifically electoral politics, in ways that are underexplored. In this chapter, I focus on two areas: first, the importance of electoral politics in facilitating policy mobility, and the importance of policy positions and activism in electoral politics; second, the mechanisms through which hyper-politicized issues, such as the minimum wage, are rendered technical and apolitical, in efforts to circumvent contestation.

The argument proceeds as follows. I review the literature on policy mobilities, focusing on the relationship between politics and the increasing importance of techno-rationalization of local policymaking. Then, I turn to a necessarily brief review of minimum

wage policy from its beginning in the early 20th Century, examining how policy histories condition the present. Turning to the two cases at hand, the \$15 minimum wage policy discussions in Seattle and Chicago from 2012 to 2014, I examine the role of politics in conditioning the policy campaigns. First, I emphasize the reciprocal uses of electoral politics to condition policy mobility and the use of policy mobility to drive electoral politics. Second, I turn to a detailed analysis of the policy negotiations surrounding minimum wage increases as they occurred in Seattle and Chicago. Here, I focus on the processes that allowed a hyper-politicized issue, already used to great effect in electoral politics, to be rendered apolitical, including the importance of cross-place comparisons in this process.

Policy Mobility and Politics: Techno-Rational Approaches

Scholars interested in the transnational spread of policies have drawn attention to the ways these policies are tied to and transcend the places, scales, networks, institutions, and political communities as they develop, travel, make, and remake their contexts (McCann, 2011; McCann & Ward, 2011; Peck & Theodore, 2015). The policies that have garnered the attention of critical policy scholars and urban geographers are new, quickly made mobile, and packaged to appeal to a political mindset that prioritizes limited government spending. In particular, scholars have critically explored the virality and mobility of policies that fit easily under market-prioritized neoliberal governance schemes, such as tax-increment financing (Baker, Cook, McCann, Temenos, & Ward, 2016), sustainability politics that promote specific forms of profit-making developments (Temenos & McCann, 2012), business improvement districts (Ward, 2006), work-fare (Peck & Theodore, 2001), and creative city policies (Peck, 2011a), among many others. Analyses have also explored the

potential mobility of policies that promote alternatives to neoliberalism, from conditional cash transfers (Mahon & Macdonald, 2010; Peck & Theodore, 2015) to bus rapid transit (Wood, 2015) to a harm-reduction framework for addressing drug addiction (McCann, 2008). As forms of policies that are becoming mobile defy simple political characterization, many have become interested in developing a generalized theory of what Purcell (2008) calls ‘fast resistance transfer.’ Increasingly, instances in which neoliberal policy fixes have failed to take root or to blossom are becoming objects of analysis (Prince, 2010; Wells, 2014). Policy mobility scholars talk of “waves of innovation” and a “concordant churning” that is increasingly characterizing local policymaking in a globalizing world (McCann & Ward, 2011, p. xiv).

In a figurative sense, policymakers seem to be under increasing pressure to ‘get a move on’ –to keep up with the latest trends and ‘hot’ ideas that sweep into their offices, to convert those ideas into locally appropriate ‘solutions’ and to ‘roll them out,’ thus making the most of them before the next fad arrives. (McCann & Ward, 2011, p. xiv)

Like policymakers themselves, policy mobility scholars have been most interested in the theoretical and practical implications of the new, the novel, and the immediate. On the surface, perhaps, the new virality of local minimum wage increases throughout the US (as well as gestures toward increasing transnational adoption of minimum wage policies) has little in common with the wave of mobile policymaking that has captured the attention of geographers.

Indeed, while policy mobilities scholars have drawn a critical eye to the transnational networks of policy consultants, conference spaces, fact-finding trips, and “conditioning contexts” (Temenos & McCann, 2013, p. 348) that loosen certain channels and facilitate the adaptation of policies from place to place, they have focused largely on new, relatively untested, and innovative policies. The field has expanded its interest in policy failures, but

has little to say about the continued relevance, circulation, mutation, and mobility of policies with decades of existence and continual cycles of revision. As Temenos and McCann (2013) mention in their review of the geography of policy mobilities literature:

Paradoxically, studies of characteristically ‘fast’ policy transfer need time to fully explore the histories, presents, and outcomes of policy implementation. This careful analysis is necessary to overcome concerns of ‘presentism’ – a narrow focus on current successful policies, without regard for what has come before, for what was perhaps unsuccessful, or for alternative policy narratives – in policy mobilities research. (p. 352)

This emphasis on the new, whether it is the viral spread of neoliberalism or the increasing mobility of resistance tactics, inspires a certain focus on the role of contemporary policies, if not the future or past possibility of these policies.

Specific policies do not go viral simply because they are the best available solution to a pressing local problem. Early political science scholarship on policy transfer emphasized a “lesson-drawing process” through which policymakers identified local problems, scanned the policy landscape for potential solutions, and then adapted them to their local context (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996). The policies that get selected, under this framework, were theoretically superior to those that remain localized. Peck calls this the “modernist conception of effective of superior policies diffusing (first and fastest) across jurisdictional spaces” (Peck, 2011b, p. 776). Responding to this predominately technical-rational analysis of policy transfer, which assumes a unidirectional take-up of successful policies in an uncomplicated marketplace of ideas, a neo-Marxist approach suggests that certain policies become models that are made mobile and shared from place to place as ‘best practices’ for political reasons. In contrast, policy mobilities scholars such as Temenos and McCann argue that the policies that get transferred are not intrinsically the ‘best’ ones, and that “what is important about them is not so much that they move around in some abstract sense, but that

people move them around for particular purposes' (Temenos & McCann, 2013, p. 344 italics in original). These "particular purposes" are fundamentally political (McCann, 2008; Peck & Theodore, 2001; Temenos & McCann, 2012).

Peck and Theodore (2001, p. 446) have gone so far as to call the rapid diffusion of workfare policies the "triumph of politics over policy," because of the ways that certain neoliberal policy channels are so lubricated as to transcend established policymaking procedures, skipping steps in the policy process such as the evaluation of the policies themselves. On the one hand, there is an increasing convergence of policies across the world, bolstered by shared political commitments to neoliberal governance strategies. On the other hand, however this convergence is incomplete, contingent, and processual. Contestation circulates both within and outside of policy networks, channels, institutions, and discourses. That said, however, this contestation is in some ways muted, hidden, and obscured by the increasing technical components and rationalizations, embedded in processes and policy discourses, which aims to depoliticize the political components of policymaking. Clarke (2011), for example, argues that discussions of public policy, especially at the city level, have been rendered technical and scientific in an effort to remove them from the political realm of struggle, disagreement, and contention. In this way, Clarke ties policy mobility to an anti-politics framework, arguing that urban policy mobility "requires that diverse networks be maintained (through avoidance of contentious issues) and that policies be generalizable (as opposed to being products of site-specific political struggle)" (pg. 37). In case study after case study, the process of policy mobility is imbued with politics, but politics does not appear in its traditional, contentious form (Temenos & McCann, 2012). The contention of the political process is smoothed over in order to give the veneer of technical rationality.

The role of electoral politics in policy mobility is comparatively less studied (though see the discussion of the Washington, D.C. privatization regime, ushered in by elected officials steeped in the finance industry in Wells (2014) and the role of electoral politics in supporting harm reduction strategies in McCann (2008)). In an early discussion of inter-jurisdictional learning, Robertson (1991) uses the case of local labor market policies such as the minimum wage rate to explore the impact of partisan political affiliation in the process of ostensibly politically neutral policy transfer. The labor market policies that Robertson examines are deeply partisan political issues: liberal politicians promote those policies that promote certain forms of income redistribution, while conservative politicians promote policies that decrease government regulation. In the process of advocating for policies, at different stages throughout the policy process from agenda-setting to negotiation, lessons from elsewhere are utilized to bolster claims of the importance of the policy fix or to draw cautionary tales from failures. These first studies of policy transfer investigated the spread of state-level policies protecting workers and found that ideologically aligned political operatives were more likely to share with each other. Clarke (2011) argues that urban policy mobility is qualitatively different phenomenon now than in the 20th Century, as the pace and techno-rationalization of the process has intensified. However, the movement of policies from place to place, along with the tweaks, reapplications, and re-purposings that accompany inter-local sharing has existed for a long time.

Minimum Wage Policy: Brief History of a 20th Century Idea

The minimum wage is a policy with a long history representing an early example of transnational and inter-jurisdictional policy mobility. Although the bones of the policy itself

have existed since the early 20th Century, local, state, and national discussions about alterations to the minimum wage have ebbed and flowed in more or less predictable cycles, moving from state to state and city to city, incorporating new classes of workers, and increasing to keep pace with inflation. It is impossible to provide a complete history of the evolution of local minimum wage policy here (but see Nordlund (1997) for an extensive treatment). I will provide a necessarily brief, partial, and preliminary account of how the minimum wage entered in the US policy system and how it has circulated, altered, and been put to use over its 100-year history.

Rumblings surrounding the establishment of minimum wage policies in the US began in a transnational policy learning setting. Minimum wage policies themselves have their origins in New Zealand and Australia in the last decade of the 19th Century, with intervening reforms in England and France before the cause was brought to the US (Nordlund, 1997). These laws were aimed at a practice called “sweating,” or “the payment of an employer to his work people of a wage which is insufficient to purchase for them the necessaries of life” (Ayres, 1997, p. 40), placing them squarely in the tradition of living wage advocacy. The late 19th century was a fertile time for experimentation in labor regulation, and the German model of worker’s insurance collective policies, passed in the 1880s, provoked an increased interest in other western countries about the politics of various social spending and labor legislation policies. Skocpol characterizes the time period in this way: “Collective puzzlement on society’s behalf,” to use Hugh Hecló’s phrase, got under way in the turn-of-the-century United States very much in tandem with similar puzzlement about public social benefits and labor regulations elsewhere” (Skocpol, 1992, p. 160). The International Association for Labor Legislation (IALL) was an early facilitator of transatlantic policy sharing; the US arm of the body, the American Association for Labor Legislation (AALL)

was established in 1906. The AALL convened conferences of experts, drafted reports, and distributed model bills to influence legislatures, advocating a wide range of labor regulations, including universal minimum wage legislation (Skocpol, 1992). Early efforts to establish minimum wage legislation were not always supported by organized labor, as trade unions prioritized the rights and privileges of union members over unorganized women workers, and preferred to fight vigorously for maximum hour legislation (Skocpol, 1992, see pg. 187).

The first US experiments in minimum wage legislation were partial, paternalistic, and centered on the protection of women and children (Skocpol, 1992). States led the way as policy adopters. Massachusetts was the first to pass a non-compulsory minimum wage for women and children in 1912, and by 1923, a total of 15 states had implemented minimum wages for women. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) vocally opposed general minimum wage laws, arguing that male workers would earn higher than minimum wages through union organization, while quietly supporting minimum wage laws for women. Despite the quick take-up of these minimum wage policies at the state level, the Supreme Court repeatedly struck down these state laws (Nordlund, 1997). The National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, also struck down by the Supreme Court, was a hodgepodge of reforms designed to bolster the economy, including the first attempt to implement a federal minimum wage. Rather than highlight the protective nature of the minimum wage, as the early efforts in Australia and England did, the US policy was designed, in the words of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, “to increase the buying power of wage earners and farmers so that industry, labor, and the public might benefit through building up the market for farm and factory goods” (quoted in Nordlund, 1997, p. 40). The legislation seemed doomed to be struck down from its inception, and in 1933, the Department of Labor instituted a series of conferences and workshops on the minimum wage to craft minimum wage policy. The

groups involved were representatives from state departments enforcing minimum wage rates, civic groups such as the Young Women's Christian Association, the National's Consumer's League, the National League of Women Voters, and the General Federation of Women's Clubs, as well as labor groups such as the AFL and the National Women's Trade Union League. These and other conventions set the parameters for the scope of labor regulation, including a minimum wage of \$0.25, that would be enshrined in law in the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938.

Since the adoption of the federal minimum wage in 1938, the wage has been raised 22 times, and expanded to cover new classes of workers another 4 times (Nordlund, 1997). Each increase and expansion of the minimum wage, whether at the state or federal level, required concerted political mobilization. When the FLSA was established in 1938, it covered about 40% of US workers; today, it covers about 80% of workers (Ayres, 1997). Along with other labor protections passed through the FLSA, the minimum wage was designed to exclude racialized and gendered workers. The FLSA explicitly did not cover domestic workers or farm workers, categories of workers predominately composed of people of color and women. To date, most state minimum wage laws include a two-tiered wage structure for tipped workers, a category of worker that is predominately female. As the policy matured over the course of the 20th Century, organized efforts emerged to contest the racist and sexist exclusions of the FLSA. The most extensive expansion occurred in 1966, when the Act was expanded to cover workers in hospitals, retail trade, construction, laundry, and education industries. Minimum wage policy has also been weakened by its relative stasis: the original law did not tie the federal minimum wage to inflation, and states did not begin tying their own minimum wages to inflation until the 2000s. Because of this, the minimum wage has been consigned to gradually deteriorating in value as inflation progresses.

These minimum wage increases and policy tweaks have come in cycles. Since the implementation of a nationwide minimum wage in 1938, the minimum wage has been gradually expanded to cover more classes of workers, increased as inflation chipped away at the wage's buying power, and, most recently, been rescaled to take different forms in local jurisdictions. The federal minimum wage was last raised in 2009, as part of legislation passed in 2007 that gradually increased the rate to \$7.25 per hour. This federal increase was the culmination of 15 years of local agitation in minimum wage policy, building off living wage activism that began in the 1990s (which is discussed in detail in the next section). Since 2009, despite some years with Democratic control of the legislative and executive branches, no changes have been made at the federal level. Consequently, innovations and improvements in the minimum wage have been devolved to localities, a geographic intervention to which I now turn.

Minimum Wage Policy Moves to the Local Level

In the 1990s, labor activists fighting against the privatization of public services in Baltimore, MD developed a tweak to the minimum wage they dubbed a “living wage policy,” which brought minimum wage regulation to the scale of the city rather than the state or nation (Walsh, 2000). Confronted with the outsourcing of previously unionized workers to private companies, public sector unions and their allies constructed a policy that would tie city contracts to a higher minimum wage than the existing state standard. The living wage movement sought to use city authority in contractual relationships to influence labor standards in an era of subcontracting. It was originally a defensive posture, a measure promoted by municipal employee unions to ensure that the unionized municipal workforce – the backbone of not only city employees, but also the last bastion of organized labor

strength – would not be repeatedly undercut by subcontracting pressures. These “living wage” policies had the dual effect of making privatization less competitively attractive for cities, since it equalized the playing field between municipal employee union contracts and private.

Between 1990 and 2007, more than 140 localities in the US passed living wage ordinances, increasing the prominence of local jurisdictions in wage regulation. The pace of local living wage policy adoption slowed significantly after the federal minimum wage increased in 2007 (Luce, 2011). Campaigns spread transnationally as well, with one prominent, union-backed living wage campaigns finding success in London (Wills, 2008; Wills, Evans, Herbert, May, & McIlwaine, 2009). These ordinances produced several creative policy reforms in the process of changing the scale of minimum wage legislation. Living wage ordinances sidestepped Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) regulations forbidding localities from requiring health care coverage in contracts by requiring tiered wages for employers who offered health care and those that did not. Some included anti-retaliation provisions for employees pursuing unionization or filing complaints against employers; some included provisions for paid time off. Cities experimented with a variety of minimum wage tweaks to encourage or discourage forms of economic development as well: Chicago, for instance, considered a minimum wage law that expressly targeted big-box retailers such as WalMart and Target, attempting to use wage regulation to lend support to unionization campaigns at these stores.²⁴ Other campaigns focused on hotel districts, and still others on port districts.

Although these local ordinances were powerful in many respects, they have also been limited by their capacity to cover private sector workers, and have varied widely in the wage

²⁴ This effort passed the city council, but was ultimately vetoed by the Mayor, as will be discussed in the next section.

levels they require. Typically, these local living wage ordinances targeted municipal contracts and did not extend to the full private sector. In Los Angeles, for example, the first living wage ordinance passed only covered about 7,600 city contractors in a city with a labor force of 4.4 million (Pollin & Luce, 1998). They varied significantly in their ambition as well, as measured by the wage level they set. The most detailed policy discussions in these local debates centered on choosing amongst a variety of complex formulae to determine a proper 'living wage.' Some models, for example, were based on generic federal poverty level guidelines; others were more detailed and accounted for variations in local cost of living and differentiated by family composition. The MIT Living Wage calculator, a project begun in 2004 by Amy Glasmeier, currently estimates the living wage in the US at \$15.84 per hour for a family of four. This figure ranges from \$14.81 in Greensboro to \$17.10 in Seattle, accounting for differences in housing, food, medical, and transportation among other costs. According to a founding member of the Durham Living Wage initiative, whom I interviewed, by 2010 the living wage movement spawned a veritable cottage industry of models and methods for determining a 'living wage,' and discussions about the models at the city and within activist communities interested in wage regulation generated substantial debate (Organizer 10, Durham, 9/12/2016). Because of this, living wage ordinances differed significantly from place to place: on the one hand, the Los Angeles Airport living wage ordinance, for example, mandated a \$15.37 minimum wage in 2012; on the other hand, the Durham City living wage ordinance, which only covered city workers themselves and not contracted employees, stood at \$11.55 an hour (Keenan & Greenwich, 2013). These wide variations have limited the reach of minimum wage policy, and the process through which cities negotiate the intricacies of minimum wage policy, and the ultimate results of these negotiations, is intimately tied to the unique political and economic forces active in each

location.

Despite these local limitations, these living wage policies introduced the role of the city and other local jurisdictions in promoting innovations in minimum wage policy, which had up until then been the province of the state and federal governments. Each local living wage law built on the last, and the devolution of minimum wage policy to the city level, which the living wage movement began, was an important precursor to the \$15 wage movement. In the next section I transition to discussing two specific case studies of the relationship between local minimum wage policy and electoral politics: the long history of living wage activism in Chicago, which included decades of cyclical agitation surrounding minimum wages at the state and local level, and the relatively quick but impactful history of electoral politics driving the adoption of the \$15 minimum wage in Seattle.

Electoral Politics and the Minimum Wage

Eugene McCann has noted that policy transfer is a “socio-spatially uneven and selective process” (McCann, 2011, p. 121), which raises two important questions: why are certain policies rendered mobile, and what determines the relative unevenness of a policy’s path and uptake? With a policy like the minimum wage, the historic trajectory and cyclical nature of policy innovations and mobilizations of the policy towards different local problems influence current policy discussions and provide insight into the conditions that prompt and facilitate mobility. Specifically, as this next section will argue, electoral politics is a central condition that prompts and facilitates policy mobility; moreover, policies themselves are put to work in electoral politics and become mobilized through their political utility. Elections determine who is responsible for making policy, as well as those who appoint heads of

commissions and departments who are entrusted with evaluating and implementing policy. Elections also determine the prevailing ideological winds of the electorate, to which elected officials are responsible. If elections determine who sets policy, alongside other factors, it is also the case that policies have an impact on elections. Minimum wage policy, like other high-profile populist policies, has many electoral uses. The epigraph that begins this chapter puts it succinctly enough: “Raising the minimum wage is one of the most mainstream, old-fashioned political programs in America” (Murray, Seattle, 2/16/2016). Because of its popularity, familiarity, and visibility, the minimum wage is an effective political wedge issue, used by activists and politicians alike to drive voter turnout. Both labor/community activists and politicians recognize the particular power of the minimum wage issue to mobilize voters during election cycles. In this section, using the cases of Chicago’s adoption of a \$13 minimum wage, and Seattle’s early adoption of a \$15 minimum wage, I emphasize the role of electoral politics on the timing of minimum wage victories, the resulting legislation, and subsequent elections.

Minimum Wage Activism in Chicago, 1995-2015

Activists in Chicago realized the cyclical power of coordinated campaigns for higher minimum wages in the 1990s. During the proliferation of living wage campaigns throughout the country, a community-labor coalition came together to agitate for an ordinance that would set the minimum wage at the poverty level for a family of four, which was then \$7.60. This coalition was called the Jobs and Living Wage Campaign, and the campaign lasted for three years, from 1995-1998. Activists worked for years mobilizing workers in Chicago’s neighborhoods, engaging in creative actions and lobbying city aldermen, but they were

unable to make significant progress until the summer of 1998, the summer before city council elections. Only in the eventual victory did the organizers realize the importance of matching a living wage campaign to the electoral cycles that ruled the city. Reflecting on the timing of that first victory, a long-time Chicago activist said to me:

[The summer before the election] is the one time when the city council—which is completely controlled by the mayor always in Chicago—when they feel like they have to answer to somebody. In the summer before they start moving their petitions they don't want anyone to run against them and they don't want any powerful enemies, and the unions and some of the community organizations are conceivably powerful enemies. They want to keep everybody happy at that moment...It's also the time when their pay can be increased under state law. There's a window when the city electeds—the city council, the mayor, and the other city officials—can get a raise. They can only vote themselves a raise during a certain window, which comes right in that time before the election. So, we realized if they wanted a raise, they had to give people a raise. If they didn't want to be targeted by the unions and community organizations at election time, they needed to do right a little bit. Unlike the rest of the time. (Organizer 4, Chicago, 10/13/2015)

Chicago has a long tradition of a particular brand of party politics, being almost entirely Democratic, and the Mayor has a great deal of power in the careers of prospective council members (Royko, 1971). Once aldermen are elected, those that are most concerned with their political longevity answer predominately to the Mayor. In the months before their petition for election in September, however, they are responsive to other powerful groups. Once activists realized the importance of the dynamic surrounding the electoral cycle, the coalition began a pattern in which they would coordinate a campaign around the issue in the few months before petitions dropped in the fall. This strategy allowed them to quickly win a measure that tied the living wage to inflation in the summer of 2002.

The initial ordinance was limited and it applied to only about 2,000 city contractors at the time. Despite the limited impact on Chicago's low-wage workers, the campaign for the

original ordinance, which began in the early 1990s, resulted in a lasting coalition that would continue to agitate for wage-related policies in the coming decades.

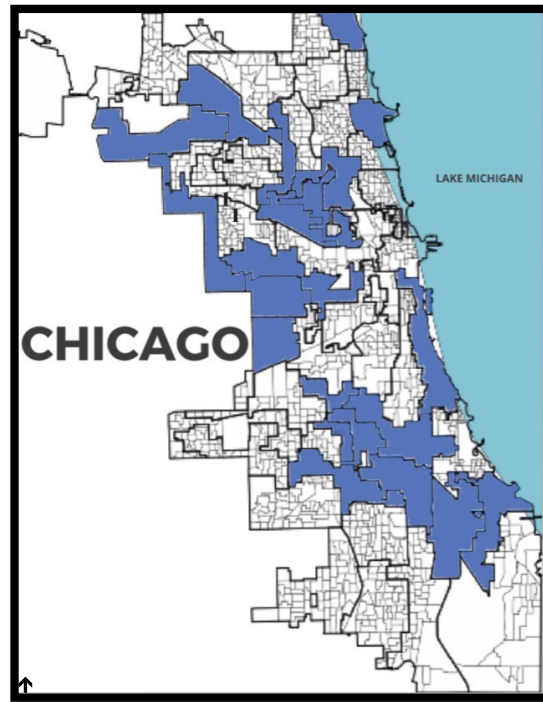
[The Jobs and Living Wage Campaign] had a huge impact on me and the people involved. It built a community-labor coalition in Chicago that became on going. The Grassroots Collaborative came out of it, which exists to this day and is wonderful. It taught a lot of us about how to build really great coalitions, through trial and error, to some extent. It started to build some crossover with some of the organizers, some of the leaders, some of the organizations in town... We figured out the Jobs and Living Wage honed by fire that we had some relationships that were permanent. (Organizer 4, Chicago, 10/13/2015)

These political relationships were crucial to the continuance of the campaign, which existed on and off for the 20 years. Formally brought together through the Grassroots Collaborative, the coalition was a loose group of progressive community and labor groups, including Action Now, SEIU Healthcare Illinois/Indiana (SEIU HCII), Arise Chicago, and Brighton Park Neighborhood Council, among others who cycled in and out. After amending the living wage ordinance to tie it to inflation in 2002, the coalition developed a “big-box store” living wage campaign that would have targeted large retail employers, which they pressed in the summer of 2006. The regulatory theory was that the city was able to make new development permits contingent on the resulting stores paying living wages, just as the city was able to require private city contractors meet certain requirements. However, although the campaign succeeded in passing an ordinance through city council, the Mayor Richard M. Daley used his first veto in 19 years to quash the effort. After this defeat, the coalition worked on state-level policy for a few years before transitioning to the Fight for \$15 in 2013. Partly because of their previous experience with the opposition of the previous Mayor, and partly because of deteriorating political relationship with the current Mayor Rahm Emanuel, the coalition assumed they would need to target both the city council and the mayor during a period of electoral vulnerability.

Gearing up for the \$15 minimum wage campaign in 2013, organizers planned an advisory referendum on the issue, which they ran in carefully chosen precincts. In Chicago, an advisory referendum must qualify for the ballot precinct by precinct, which requires a certain percentage of voters from that precinct to sign a petition for inclusion. It is a large resource investment for a non-legally binding vote, but activists were only partly interested in the eventual result of a \$15 minimum wage: they used the campaign to bolster or challenge vulnerable aldermen. Although activists assumed they wouldn't be able to convince the mayor to push for a \$15 minimum wage, they wanted to use aldermen to pressure the mayor to move in their direction.

We wanted to create a situation where aldermen would have a hard time voting against their constituents. We were trying to set up the tension for the aldermen where there was a clear mandate from their voters, the same voters that elected them, about what they wanted to do on minimum wage, so they would be in the position of having to advocate to the mayor. (Organizer 8, Chicago, 11/3/2015)

In Chicago, a heavily residentially segregated city, place plays an important political role in elections: to appear to represent the entirety of the city without being run on a citywide basis, organizers needed to select precincts from neighborhoods representing the central racial and ethnic constituencies of the city. The precincts selected were distributed throughout the city, incorporating majority Black south and westside districts, majority Latino southwest and northwest districts, and majority white northside districts. Notably absent from the targeted precincts, however, was the downtown core, known as “the Loop,” which was predominately white and affluent. As evident in Figure 6.1, below, the 20 wards that were selected as targets were spread throughout the city, but they did not cover a majority of the city area. The coalition relied on community groups based in these neighborhoods to drive voter mobilization and turnout, and used the process to strengthen and deepen the coalition.

Figure 6.1: Map of \$15 Referendum Results*Figure 1: Blue wards included \$15 wage question on 2013 ballot*

Some of the initial conversations were that we were going to run it in all 50 wards somehow. As we began to understand our capacity, our timeline, what it took to get the signatures, we had to consolidate the strategy. We were really strategic about picking wards. Some wards where we had champions who would really carry the bill, this would give them the political backing to push hard. We picked somewhere we knew the constituency would absolutely support it, but the city council people would be likely to stand with the mayor, so we wanted to back them into a corner. We picked wards where that was the case. We also picked a handful of Northside wards, so it wasn't just low-income communities. We picked some wards where we were pretty sure the city councilperson would want to be with us, but would get pushback from their communities. (Organizer 8, Chicago, 11/3/2015)

A crucial consideration of organizers as they selected which precincts to target, in addition to the coalition-strengthening effects, was the political relationship created between \$15 minimum wage advocates and the politicians who represented the precincts.²⁵ One goal was to create negative pressure on those politicians who were considered more likely to vote with

²⁵ Chicago's city council is large, with 50 elected Aldermen. All Aldermen are elected by ward; there are no at-large council members.

the mayor. In Chicago, because of the history of party politics and the ability of a powerful mayor to make or break political careers, these mayor-loyalists were a large constituency. It would also provide cover for those politicians who supported politics that promoted economic justice but were worried about backlash from their own constituents or from the mayor. Conversations with activists across Chicago made clear that no one working on the issue expected an alderman to vote for a higher minimum wage simply because it was the “best” policy, or the right thing to do, or a policy that would be a solution to a particularly pressing city problem. Rather, the campaign was structured in such a way to create the kind of political pressure necessary to allow politicians to vote with activists on the issue.

Grassroots activists assumed Mayor Rahm Emanuel would be harder to convince than individual aldermen, and their previous experience with the Mayoral veto of the ‘big-box’ living wage ordinance had taught them that they could not rely on city council support alone. By 2013, progressive labor activists were constantly at odds with Mayor Emanuel. The high-profile dispute with the Chicago Teacher’s Union (CTU) had led to one of the biggest political losses of Emanuel’s tenure, and his pointed refusal to award a lucrative janitorial contract at O’Hare Airport to a unionized company had provoked the anger of the oldest SEIU Local in the country, SEIU Local 1. While the labor/community coalition pressed the \$15 referendum, they were also in the process of mounting a challenge to Rahm Emanuel. Before the CTU’s strike victory in 2012, such an attempt would have seemed fanciful. The successful strike was led by CTU’s charismatic new President, Karen Lewis, and the victory had transformed her into a citywide political threat to the mainstream Democratic power structure. Putting forth a credible opponent in the mayor’s race was another central component of the pressure campaign: how would Mayor Emanuel be urged to act on the minimum wage without a threat to his electoral dominance? As one organizer told me:

Ultimately, the mayor was feeling more and more vulnerable. This was when Karen [Lewis] was saying she was going to run, and he really needed this win... This window opened where we could just get it done now. (Organizer 8, Chicago, 11/3/2015)

However, Karen Lewis fell ill before she could run an opposition campaign, and the left-labor coalition circled their wagons instead around Chuy Garcia, a Cook County Commissioner. Once Garcia began his campaign, which ensured that Mayor Emanuel remained concerned about his electoral prospects, Mayor Emanuel began searching for an economic populist policy position that he could use to let the air out of the leftist challenge (Organizer 15, Chicago, 11/25/2015). In ways reminiscent of policy practitioners frantically scanning the policy landscape for new and innovative models to solve their cities' problems, Rahm Emanuel scanned the progressive policy landscape for a legislative issue that would provide political cover from a leftist challenge. Raising the minimum wage was the perfect issue. The Mayor convened the Chicago "Minimum Wage Working Group" soon after Garcia announced his candidacy. By beginning work on the issue, Emanuel denied Garcia the chance to run on a full-throated economic populist message, and, indeed, many people I interviewed from the left-labor coalition expressed frustration that Garcia was forced to run his campaign on crime and neighborhood neglect, and felt that an economic populist campaign on the minimum wage would have been more successful (Organizer 11, Chicago, 10/6/2015; Organizer 12, Chicago, 10/27/2015).

The Minimum Wage Working Group was controversial amongst the left-labor coalition. Most of the organizations that had worked on the \$15 referendum campaign assumed the working group would simply rubber stamp the Mayor's initial wage proposal, which was reportedly around \$9.50 per hour. In an interview, a labor leader told me that some labor leaders who were invited to participate on the working group refused (Organizer

12, Chicago, 10/27/2015). A representative from SEIU Local 73, the public-sector local in Chicago, did choose to participate, which caused a slight rift between with the other two SEIU locals in the area.

Most of the other members of the left-labor coalition chose to influence the Minimum Wage Working Group from the outside, using national connections with the Fight for \$15 and hyper-local precinct referendum results to push the working group towards \$15. Finding way to quantify the political popularity of a \$15 minimum wage and translate this popularity into political pressure on decision-makers was a strategic priority for the Chicago labor-community coalition. The \$15 minimum wage is wildly popular throughout the country, and the fact that activists throughout the country had settled on a single ambitious wage figure of 15 dollars created synergy around the initiative. Most precincts that voted on the \$15 minimum wage in Chicago passed the referendum with more than 90% support; the weakest precincts still voted in favor of the measure by 60% or more. This led one of the organizers of the referendum canvass to acknowledge that, “overwhelmingly, it was one of the easiest campaigns, in terms of door conversations, that we’ve ever run.” (Organizer 8, Chicago, 11/3/2015). She continued:

I think the Fight for \$15 in so many ways made it feel possible. The piece that feels like it was about the synergy and momentum and the imagination...Because they led with such a bold goal, and they acted like it was righteous and deserved, it allowed people to be like, ‘yeah, it is!’ Because it was presented as a rational, reasonable demand, I think people filled the space behind it. ‘Yes, this is, and we should get more.’ I think a lot about what can people imagine winning or deserving. I feel like poles get created around demands, and because Fight for \$15 set the pole there, we were able to step in this space where the argument had already been won. (Organizer 8, Chicago, 11/3/2015)

Once the vote was completed, activists printed cardboard cutouts with the percentage of their precinct that voted in favor of the measure, and brought these to the public meetings held by the Minimum Wage Working Group throughout the city (see the placards held in

Image 2 for an example). Eventually, although the working group did not bring Chicago's minimum wage up to \$15, they significantly overshot the Mayor's original proposal. By fall of 2014, Chicago had passed a citywide minimum wage ordinance of \$13 an hour.

Figure 6.2: Activists at Public Meeting



Figure 2- Source: Progress Illinois, "Chicago Minimum Wage Community Meeting Gets Heated," June 19, 2014

The Fight for \$15 in Seattle

As the first major city to begin a process to increase the city minimum wage to \$15, Seattle was in a unique position. Other cities had increased minimum wages or introduced living wage ordinances governing city contracts, but the amount of the increase and the universality of the increase across city businesses meant that the effort in Seattle broke new ground. Moreover, Seattle was unique amongst large cities in that it had not passed its own living wage ordinance during the heyday of living wage activism. The massive policy shift to a \$15 minimum wage was possible because activists and politicians effectively turned the \$15 minimum wage into a central campaign issue in multiple local area elections, and then followed through to effect policy.

In Seattle, the conditions for beginning the national conversation about a \$15 minimum wage began with the union-led campaign initiative to increase the minimum wage in a close-by suburb, SeaTac. When that campaign won, a palpable sense of momentum, made concrete by a symbolic 15-mile march of labor activists from SeaTac to Seattle, officially brought the \$15 minimum wage into a Seattle-wide policy discussion. Along with the SeaTac election, Seattle fast food workers had begun organizing strikes through the Fight for \$15 organizing campaign, supported by the same unions that financed the SeaTac organizing campaign. The coordination between the Fight for \$15 fast food strikes and the SeaTac \$15 minimum wage initiative proved crucial to both the SeaTac victory and the ultimate victory in Seattle.

The SeaTac campaign did not start out with the intention to be a voter initiative. As I discussed in Chapter 2, a coalition of labor unions had been engaged in a more or less traditional labor union campaign for several years, talking to workers, engaging community support, even calling for a recognition strike. When those efforts failed to lead to union elections or agreements with large airport employers, activists decided that their best path forward lay in a voter campaign. Once the initiative campaign was underway, however, it quickly morphed into a proof of concept campaign, a concrete piece of evidence that a \$15 minimum wage could succeed in a relatively conservative suburban district. As the campaign grew in prominence and received national and international media coverage, it became the first signature electoral campaign of the Fight for \$15. Because of this, as I discussed in Chapter 5, its success was deemed crucial to the nation-wide Fight for \$15, and unions poured money into the campaign to ensure its victory. Unions poured cash and personnel resources into the campaign, and the large financial interests at the Sea-Tac Airport matched them with vigor. The campaigns spent a total of \$2 million, more than \$300 per vote in the

small electorate. The prevailing activist analysis at the time was that a defeat would have been crippling to the nascent \$15 movement.

The initiative process itself was central to the strategy of the SeaTac victory, because the labor coalition did not have the votes needed on the SeaTac City Council to pass a \$15 minimum wage outright. It was also controversial, and introduced political calculations that would prove integral to the policy negotiations that would soon take place in Seattle. Reflecting on the importance of the SeaTac initiative victory, a Seattle-based labor activist commented that “once we realized we could win in relatively conservative SeaTac, we knew and the opposition knew that we could win at the ballot in Seattle. Everyone wanted to avoid that.” (Andrew Beane, Seattle, 7/8/2015). Here, the organizer is referring to the decision to fight for \$15 at the ballot in SeaTac, rather than going through the legislative or bargaining process.

The initiative method is one that labor unions in Washington State use often to introduce popular pieces of legislation. These initiatives are a way to make the political support (or lack of support) for an issue concrete. In Washington State and several other western US states with strong populist traditions, these initiatives have the added effect of effecting policy change and constituting legislation. Despite the power of initiative campaigns, however, there are downsides. Initiative campaigns are resource-intensive and risky. A defeat in an initiative campaign can set a popular movement back decades, and preclude meaningful policy change through the legislature even if there had been previous support for compromise legislation.²⁶ The initiative victory in SeaTac, which, as the organizer

²⁶ One example of the downsides of relying on an initiative for progressive social change is the crushing defeat of the labor community’s initiative campaign to implement a high-earner income tax in Washington State in 2010. Progressive taxation is an important equity issue in Washington State, which has one of the most regressive tax structure in the US, but the political will to implement a progressive income tax has not gotten traction in the legislature because politicians are wary about

above noted has a more conservative electorate than Seattle does, was a significant indication of the power and popularity of a \$15 minimum wage. It displayed the superior organizing and mobilization abilities of the left-labor coalition that ran the campaign, and it kept the idea of the \$15 on the table as fast food strikes and the Seattle mayoral election took place. Meanwhile, the expense of the effort hinted at just how resource-intensive and risky a Seattle initiative would be. The 77-vote margin in SeaTac was far too close to feel confident in the result if the campaign were to move to Seattle.

The Seattle mayoral race was run concurrent with the SeaTac initiative, and activists connected with both communities endeavored to keep the \$15 wage front and center. The single-term incumbent, Mike McGinn, had never fully gained the trust or the support of Seattle's insider political institutions, from labor unions to the organized business community. In his first term, he was largely ineffectual. In the 2014 election, he was viewed as a vulnerable incumbent and attracted a large opposition field. Sensing the chance to change the political landscape while advancing what was becoming a hallmark campaign for worker rights Seattle labor activists pressed mayoral candidates early and often for a strong commitment to a \$15 minimum wage. Fast food workers went on strike multiple times, both with and independent of national Fight for \$15 days of action. The pivot to electoral politics by the Seattle Fight for \$15 occurred during an early mayoral town hall, which fast food worker activists organized soon after their first fast food strike in May of 2012. The mayoral candidates were pressed on whether they would support a \$15 minimum wage for the city, and Ed Murray, a long-time state senator best known for his efforts on LGBT civil rights

supporting any form of taxation. A state income tax has been voted on seven times since it was declared unconstitutional by the State Supreme Court in 1935, and voters have rejected it each time. The trouncing of Initiative 1098 in 2010 offered such stark evidence of the measure's unpopularity that the chance of the state legislature passing an income tax today is small, although the city of Seattle recently passed a city-wide tax on high earners.

legislation, surprised most observers when he became the first serious candidate to endorse the \$15 minimum wage. This early endorsement of labor's central policy issue in the city election won Murray the endorsement of the largest labor unions and federations in the city. He won the election with 52% of the vote.²⁷

The other influential race during the summer of 2012 was Kshama Sawant's race against a long-term city council-member. Sawant ran on the Socialist Alternative ticket, the first serious Socialist candidate in Seattle since the early 20th Century. Sawant's campaign made a \$15 minimum wage the central component of her platform and ran heavily on wage justice in the new Seattle economy. An organizer on Sawant's campaign explained the decision like this:

When we launched that campaign, we thought that the minimum wage would be one issue. We knew that to run the most effective campaign, we wanted to identify, ideally, one issue to be the centerpiece of the campaign—and at most three issues. That was the way we approached it. But we didn't know what those three issues were and what that top issue would be. So, we experimented and tested things out through campaigning, tabling, and canvassing in order to gauge people's response. We also wanted to see what movements developed and how the political situation developed. From the beginning, some of the options we considered making the focus of Kshama's campaign in 2013 against Richard Conlin for City Council were coal trains, police brutality, taxing the rich, and minimum wage. Those were the top four we were thinking about. Our minimum wage demand, from the beginning, was \$15 an hour... (Phillip Locker, Seattle, 6/25/2015)

The campaign didn't settle on the punchy "15 Now" slogan until after participating in the fast food strikes and experiencing the energy and momentum they represented.

I remember Kshama, me, and the rest of the campaign leadership holding a discussion immediately after the strike, where it became absolutely clear that this is our issue. This is our number one issue. For example, we had yard signs that we had already put up around the city that said, 'Kshama Sawant makes Seattle affordable for all.' That was the main campaign slogan. After May 29, we agreed to print new

²⁷ In 2017, Murray was publicly accused of sexually assaulting multiple underage boys in the 1970s and 1980s. He decided against running for re-election, and eventually resigned as Mayor in September of 2017.

yard signs and new materials. The slogan was ‘Fight for \$15 an hour minimum wage.’ (Phillip Locker, Seattle, 6/25/2015)

The centrality of the \$15 minimum wage to Sawant’s campaign was largely agreed to be a central component of her eventual squeaker of a victory, helped considerably by the energy emanating from the fast food worker strikes. After her victory, Sawant was appointed to the Mayor’s Income Inequality Advisory Committee (IIAC) to develop \$15 minimum wage legislation; she also helped found the 15 Now organization, Socialist Alternative’s wage movement arm dedicated to promoting \$15 minimum wages throughout the country. Sawant’s dark horse victory cemented the resonance of the issue with Seattle’s voting public, and produced a full-throated legislative champion for a \$15 minimum wage.

With Mayor Murray and Kshama Sawant both ensconced in city government, there was political will to pursue a \$15 minimum wage, backed by strong evidence of the measure’s popularity and two legislative champions. All three electoral victories – the ballot initiative in SeaTac, Murray’s election as mayor, and Sawant’s surprise victory against a long-term city councilman – were important precursors to the passage of \$15 minimum wage in Seattle.

\$15 Minimum Wage Policy Negotiations: Defining the Problem

By winter of 2014, a \$15 minimum wage was on the table in both Seattle and Chicago, put there by concerted electoral and extra-electoral political action. Once the topic was seriously being debated, the policymaking process entered a period of economic rationalization that sought to mitigate or neutralize coordinated opposition and overt contestation of the new measure. Clarke has suggested that policy discussions in the

contemporary era have “been reduced to questions of science and technology,” which has happened “at the expense of discussion and struggle over questions of value and priority” (Clarke, 2012, p. 35), with the end result being that contention is being replaced by manufactured consensus. The process of rendering these discussions technical is deeply politicized and is itself the result of struggle.

In this political context, what Eugene McCann has called the “political economy of truth” in policy mobility is produced, mediated, circulated, and contested by a new class of “experts of truth” (Rose, 1999). During the process through which policy truths are produced and contested, manifestations of expertise, “from reports to PowerPoint presentations,” (McCann, 2008, p. 4) are rendered mobile. These products and the experts that assemble them are profoundly spatial and relational, and through their travels, they bring far-flung places into conversation with each other. Here, Massey’s insights into the global-relational nature of place is important to understanding the ways that places themselves are mobilized in these discussions (Massey, 1991). In the case of the minimum wage, proponents of an increase relied on carefully constructed comparisons (and contrasts) between their own locations and other localities that had previously implemented drastic minimum wage increases, mobilizing a range of studies to contest common arguments against raising wages. However, because the minimum wage is a deeply politicized issue, tied to Democratic partisan politics and indebted to labor’s concerted and cyclical campaigns, the process of economic rationalization was necessarily incomplete, and frequently the subject of its own political contestation. By tracing the activities of groups tasked with recommending new minimum wage rates, uncovering how these groups mobilized knowledge from other places, and investigating the discourse, rationalities, models, and logics that animated the

work, this section discusses the mundane processes through which a deeply politicized policy such as the minimum wage is rendered mobile.

The problematics of a policy—that is, the process of defining the problem to which the policy will act as the solution—is a key site of politics and power relationships. This agenda-setting process is one leg of John Kingdon’s classic three-leg “policy stream” model, which argues that without a defined problem, the policy solutions and the presence of elected officials willing to implement a policy solution (the remaining two streams of the policy process) are ineffectual (Kingdon, 1995). A neo-Foucauldian approach, while cognizant of the competing groups involved in this process, emphasizes the outsized role of experts in the contemporary policy-making environment. As McCann puts it, “expertise plays a role in orienting the imaginations and practices of urban policy actors in certain directions, to certain scales, and to specific problematizations and programmatic responses” (McCann, 2008, p. 3). The minimum wage has been mobilized as a policy solution to a wide range of problems in its 100-year history: the exploitation of women, inequality between the rich and the poor, the practice of “sweating,” poverty, the provision of basic needs, and bad business practices, to name a few. In the current political moment of increasing mobility of the minimum wage at the local level, the problems against which a minimum wage is mobilized differ depending on the place where the discussion is taking place, providing insights into the political culture, economy, and priorities of the place itself.

Seattle’s foray into a \$15 minimum wage was framed as a solution to the growing income inequality in the booming technology economy, rather than, say, an effort to decrease poverty. The committee that was formed to determine the parameters of the policy was given the unwieldy name of the “Income Inequality Advisory Committee,” or IIAC. In his statement announcing the formation of a committee to negotiate the contours of the \$15

minimum wage, Mayor Ed Murray made the case that a “meaningful increase” to the compensation of Seattle’s workers would help “people to thrive in a more equitable economy and affordable city” and “address opportunity gaps that prevent income and social mobility for all Seattle residents” (“Income Inequality Advisory Committee: Statement of Purpose,” 2013). This framing of the problem emphasizes the seeming inevitability of economic growth, and the imperative to share the growth amongst residents. A city consultant who was brought on to facilitate the heated political discussions of the IIAC put the discussion this way:

At this point in Seattle’s life, we’re in a golden age. The economy here—I get that there are a lot of people hurting, and the issue on the front page every day is the increase in homelessness—but the economy, in general is very strong. It allows us to do things in this community that are unheard of in other communities. (Policymaker 4, Seattle, 2/26/2016)

Seattle sought the opportunity to act boldly, in a progressive way, using the booming economy as a springboard to manufacture opportunity.

In contrast, framing the problem in Chicago centered on increasing fairness and boosting the economy. As the report produced by the Minimum Wage Working Group put it, “it is long past time for cities and states to raise the minimum wage to lift more families out of poverty and stimulate the economy” (Minimum Wage Working Group, 2014, p. 3). Here, the emphasis is not on sharing in the wealth, or increasing opportunity, but on using the minimum wage to boost growth and combat family poverty, which befits a city with a declining population. The report itself was subtitled “A Fair Deal for Chicago’s Working Families,” emphasizing issues of fairness, and, in a noted contrast to Seattle, highlighting the impact on workers and their families, rather than the more generic language of Seattle, which focused on “people” or “all residents.” The mayors of both cities, as discussed in this chapter, were politically committed to raising their city minimum wages, a policy solution

which had proven popular in two direct-democracy efforts. The transition to the policy-crafting process, however, necessitated the careful framing of the local problems in locally relevant and politically popular terms.

These particular ways of framing the problem set the parameters for the discussions that would follow. Definitions of success, which are crafted alongside policies, are related to the initial problems policies are designed to overcome: a minimum wage that seeks to decrease inequality must be evaluated differently than a minimum wage that is more concerned with boosting economic growth. Moreover, the image of the city portrayed in the way the problem is framed is bolstered or undercut by the resultant policy discussions and the eventual policies. In Seattle, policy discussions led by the IIAC were designed to break new ground, to act boldly, progressively, and in a way befitting a city on the upswing. Several members of the committee mentioned in interviews that the Mayor refused to compromise on the dollar figure that would emerge from the structured negotiations; he would only accept a proposal to get to a \$15 wage. Instead, everything else surrounding the structure of the legislation – from the phase-in period to the number of employees that constituted a small business, from tip-credits to health care – remained on the negotiating table. As a policymaker remarked to me:

I think the single biggest driver [of success] was this: The Mayor didn't create this committee and [say] 'tell me if we should adopt a \$15 minimum wage.' The message was 'We are going to adopt a \$15 minimum wage; you tell me how to do it.' That was instrumental. If the mayor had come with a more *laissez faire* 'I think this is a good idea, but I know there are concerns on both sides, tell me, do you think we should adopt a \$15 minimum wage?' I don't think we would have gotten there. (Policymaker 4, Seattle, 2/15/2016).

This laser-like focus on the wage was expressly political, in that it tied Seattle's activities with the larger Fight for \$15 movement. Both Seattle's IIAC and Chicago's Minimum Wage Working Group were composed of business, labor, and community leaders. Chicago's

committee was notably tilted toward labor and Democratic lawmakers. The Seattle committee, on the other hand, was expressly split down the middle between business and labor, although the business leaders chosen for the seats were heavily composed of progressives like entrepreneur Nick Hanauer, who had vocally supported a significant increase to the minimum wage from a business perspective and was close friends with David Rolf, the President of SEIU Local 775. However, several actors worked diligently to make the negotiations in the committee apolitical and solution-focused. Once the committee was functional, members realized quickly the discussions weren't progressing, so the city hired a consultant to facilitate. Once brought on, the consultant realized the politicized nature of the disagreements within the committee were hampering progress:

This was a dynamic from start to finish. There were participants on the committee who in almost every conversation fell back to a place of making a political policy statement. Not, 'how do we work together to find a solution,' but 'here's why I think this is a good idea,' or 'here's why I think that's a bad idea.' It was hard to get the group out of that posturing. (Policymaker 4, Seattle, 2/15/2016)

The group functioned haphazardly in this manner, mostly as a space in which political positions were aired and solidified, until a smaller negotiating subcommittee was formed, with leaders of the business and labor contingents. Still, however, the external political pressures dictated the contours of the discussion. The left, for example, was ready to run an expensive, immediate, unequivocal \$15 wage initiative in the city; the business community, for its part, threatened using its deep pockets to litigate an untenable result for years. Both labor and business leaders needed to take a policy to their allies that would keep these options from being utilized.

Chicago, facing entrenched problems with uneven development throughout the city, had less ambitious goals structuring the negotiations. The Mayor reportedly started the negotiations off with a suggested figure of \$9.50 an hour, anathema to the labor activists

who were seeking to create a national consensus around \$15 minimum wages. Because of this initial disconnect between advocates on the left (representatives from the business community opposed any local minimum wage increase, and therefore did not participate meaningfully in discussions), the Minimum Wage Working Group focused primarily on the dollar figure of the increase, leaving most other aspects of the minimum wage law (small business definition, age exemptions, nonprofit exemptions, etc.) as they were.

One commonality between the two cities was a prevailing ethos of economic rationalization and a subsequent tempering or sidelining of arguments that center the nonmaterial rights, needs, and desires of workers. Both Seattle and Chicago, when prompted by their respective mayors to consider a significant increase to the minimum wage, commissioned a series of reports and analyses to determine the potential economic impacts of the policy change (Klawitter, Long, & Plotnick, 2014; Minimum Wage Working Group, 2014; Reich, Jacobs, & Bernhardt, 2014). There was a substantial overlap in the literature that was reviewed in the two places, including the ground-breaking Card & Krueger studies of adjacent counties in New Jersey and Pennsylvania (Card & Krueber, 1995) and evaluations of wage-raising impacts in Santa Fe (Potter, 2006) and San Francisco (Dube, Naidu, & Reich, 2007). Since the minimum wage has been increased, a flurry of academic and anecdotal studies have continued to evaluate the increases, provoking controversy and providing considerable grist for continuing political discussions (see Jardim, Long, van Inwegen, Vigdor, & Wething, 2017; Reich, Allegretto, Sylvia, & Godoey, 2017). These reports were joined by activist interpretations of the economic impact of raising the minimum wage as well, which will be discussed in the following section (Action Now & Stand Up! Chicago, 2014; Vallesteros Keenan & Greenwich, 2014). These relied heavily on census data, a review of economic studies on the effects of minimum wage legislation, and

investigated whether increasing the minimum wage would lead to unemployment and cost-increases.

Economic studies about the effects of minimum wage increases were integral parts of policy discourse surrounding the minimum wage. They rely on economic rationalizations about the centrality of growth, and are focused on the potential negative consequences of raising the minimum wage. As I discussed in Chapter 3, these discussions are a central area of contestation over the function of the low-wage labor market and the position of low-wage workers. These studies were passed around from city to city, summarized, presented by city staff, and discussed in working group meetings. In my interviews in Chicago, one policymaker, in response to a question about the social science and economic literature that went into the production of the report of the Minimum Wage Working Group, said:

There are a lot of different reasons to do the research... There was no really long history of local studies, the studies that were there were invariably federal or state, so we had to try to draw as much of a connection as we could to studies that looked at New Jersey and Pennsylvania. How do we draw a connection between what we're trying to do and that? The studies served different purposes. One was an exclusionary one, one was guiding the technical drafting of the ultimate ordinance, and another is the economic impact. While there wasn't a lot available we were able to look at the San Francisco one, where we had the longest track record and the most comparable city and we could see that there was no measurable negative impact on economic growth there. The studies were less about finding a model and more about structuring paths not followed and defining scope and ultimately addressing concerns about consequences. (Policymaker 3, 12/17/2015, Chicago)

These studies from elsewhere were used to learn from “paths not followed” while bolstering claims that minimum wage raises positively affect the economy (McCann, 2008). The policymaker in this statement is focused on applying a specific kind of social science research, which teases out the impacts of the minimum wage on economic growth to a new environment by finding proper points of comparison. The preoccupation with broad economic consequences, and with finding proper points of comparison is indicative of a

techno-rational mindset (Clarke, 2012). It treats the economy as a set of levers that policymakers are able to manipulate. Ultimately, the city official quoted above offered a full-throated defense of the prevailing economic consensus on minimum wage effects, namely that disemployment effects were small to nonexistent, although he was unwilling to hypothesize what might happen with a more substantial increase than the roughly \$5 increase the city decided on.

Other commentators were more agnostic about the impact of this kind of research on a heavily politicized issue.

Frankly, that work helped support those who were supportive of the minimum wage and was dismissed by those who were not supportive. Those who were not supportive of the \$15 minimum wage thought the analysis – they were poking holes in it – ‘it didn’t do this or that, it didn’t look at this or that.’ Those that were supportive: ‘See? There’s no loss of business.’ (Policymaker 4, Seattle, 2/15/2016)

This policymaker went on to say:

Sometimes there are ideas that one city begs borrows or steals modifies from another city, that does happen. I don’t want to be cynical and say that doesn’t happen. But with something as politically charged as the minimum wage—[trails off] (Policymaker 4, Seattle, 2/15/2016).

In context, the evocative trailing off suggested that the history and politicization of the minimum wage meant that the effects of contemporary governance practices of studies, best practices, and sharing from place to place were dulled in their impact. Although the committee ran through these processes, running models and reviewing the literature, previously held political commitments remained largely unchanged.

Another aspect of the use of expertise, research, and analysis from other places involves the complex nature of comparisons between places. These economic impact reports and the policy discussions surrounding them were potent vehicles through which officials could negotiate their city’s image in relation to others. As Lerner and Le Heron have noted,

quantitative techniques are particularly useful for making “the ‘incommensurable commensurable” (Larner & Le Heron, 2002, p. 762), creating techniques that allow for abstracted comparisons across discrete places. In this way, as both Ward (2006) and McCann (2011) have argued, the policy process is a profoundly geographical process, with places engaged in a complex negotiation of which other places they believe to be facing similar problems and in need of similar solutions. As McCann (2008) has suggested, the mobilization of stories from other cities’ policymaking results tends to either bolster or counter the local status quo. City officials will look for examples from other places that support the kinds of reforms they seek, while opponents will scan the landscape for evocative failures and use these to contest the suggested reforms (McCann, 2008). At the vanguard of the \$15 wage movement, Seattle policymakers quickly determined that other city’s examples were incomparable to what they considered a bold, new initiative. The IIAC committee consequently spent little time comparing Seattle’s progress to other places. As soon as Seattle passed a \$15 minimum wage, it was Seattle that became an important benchmark city against which other cities, both nearby and distant, would draw comparisons to justify or to qualify their own attempts to increase local minimum wages. Mayor Murray said half in jest while referring to the way his counterparts in large, progressive cities would approach him at conferences: “In some ways I think Seattle embarrassed some of my colleagues around the country because I got there first.” This process of comparison worked as a potent rationalizing force for critics of the high minimum wage, especially in lower cost cities, and a potent mobilizing force for proponents in liberal cities and states that were anxious to achieve parity with ‘left coast’ Seattle.

In Chicago, Seattle’s initiative was mobilized as a powerful counterpart to those who

were pushing for a \$15 minimum wage. During private Working Group meetings, group members circulated business models that showed the differences between Seattle and Chicago business expenses and revenues, and outlined the higher wage expenses for more aggressive phase-in periods (SEIU Local 73, n.d.). An internal set of talking points discussed the research this way: “The Working Group came to the conclusion that \$15 did not make sense for Chicago. In researching other cities, the Working Group found that those cities that have passed \$15 minimum wages – Seattle and San Francisco – have significantly higher costs of living than Chicago” (SEIU Local 73, n.d.). Further comparisons, produced diligently through spreadsheets and graphs and circulated through the Working Group, worked to contrast the cost of living in Seattle and Chicago and purported to show that a \$13 minimum wage in Chicago was in fact equivalent to a \$15 minimum wage Seattle. For comparison, the charts showing the Chicago had a higher cost of living than the rest of Illinois were included in the Working Group report.

These models were put to use to rationalize the political comparisons at the heart of the debate, but they were also contested by \$15 wage activists. These models were also not, in the strictest sense, truer than competing claims or other common understandings about relative costs between the two places. For instance, depending on which family structure you take as the basis for an analysis, Seattle and Chicago have roughly comparable living wage rates when using the MIT Living Wage calculator (Glassmeier, 2017). Internal discussions in Chicago emphasized differential housing costs between the two cities, but higher childcare and transportation costs in Chicago change these calculations, although these costs were not considered in the Working Group.

Moreover, liberal city officials worked to highlight the range of differences between a

place like Seattle and Chicago, focusing on political competition between localities and on the profoundly different industrial mix in the two areas:

We're surrounded by cities and towns—rural places in Indiana—that are significantly different. There's a different [political] attitude about wages, regulation etc. You have a market for a lot of the same type of industries just next door. These are other factors that you don't necessarily see in Washington. I don't think Washington is competing with Idaho in the same way we are competing with Indiana...Seattle's strengths are different too. The reason you go to Seattle is not manufacturing, it's not rail, it's not all the things you might come to Chicago for... There are assets here that are old world, 20th Century drivers. Chicago's the place to go. You don't really go to Seattle for that, you don't go to San Francisco for that. So, you have a different type of workforce...politically there's a legitimate concern about the competitive disparity between a grocery store that's at \$13 an hour a mile from the border. We go to \$13 and that's a big gap. (Policymaker 3, Chicago, 12/17/2016)

Here, the commenter draws multiple contrasts with other cities that have raised minimum wages in recent years. Chicago is not a gleaming 21st Century technology economy, but rather full of “20th Century drivers” like rail and relatively cheap land for traditional industrial uses. The limitations of borrowing from other places are in full effect, as aptly summarized by a Seattle commentator:

I don't mean to be so cynical, but folks often say that what worked in New York or Boston or Boulder or LA or wherever, that's fine, but we've got our set of politics, and our set of stakeholder issues, and our policy history, and our own local economic issues that are different than any place else. That's fine what they did, but we've got to figure it out for ourselves. (Policymaker 4, Seattle, 2/15/2016)

The process through which these local specificities are hammered out in policy working groups was crucial to the development of the minimum wage policies that were adopted by both cities. In other words, both comparisons and contrasts were instrumental in the process.

In the end, the policies adopted by Seattle and Chicago were quite different from each other, as befitting processes that sought to solve different problems and contribute to distinct city images. Table 6.1 outlines the specific differences between the two city's minimum wage policies, highlighting the range of policy tweaks possible within a well-established policy. Seattle, aiming to produce consensus between business and labor while accomplishing a bold new minimum wage rate, focused negotiations on the phase-in period and the extent of exemptions. Chicago, endeavoring to implement a minimum wage to counteract a challenge from the left and spur economic development, focused on the wage rate itself. Seattle IIAC members haggled over the tip credit, which business owners wanted to re-implement (it had been removed from Washington State a decade earlier). They compromised over the definition of "small businesses" and included a new health care credit. Chicago, conversely left the details of the minimum wage policy itself, from nonprofit exemptions to tip credits to differential wage rates for people with disabilities, substantively unchanged.

The working group processes in Seattle and Chicago emphasized an economic rationalization process that actively drew comparisons between different locations in order to mobilize support for varying policy proposals. Research reports, quantitative comparisons between places, and theoretical business models were created, deployed, passed around and haggled over during the course of policy negotiations. In the process, both cities developed distinctive approaches to crafting new minimum wage policy, borrowing and creating as they went.

Table 6.1: Minimum Wage Policy Comparison

	Seattle	Chicago
Small Business Exemption	<500 employees, slower phase-in	<4 employees, never changes
Tip Credit	Applies to small employers. Phases out in 2025	Yes, for all tipped workers. No phase out.
Health Care Credit	Yes, for large & small employers. Phases out in 2025.	No.
Union Opt-Out	No.	Yes. Union contracts are permitted to negotiate wages at less than minimum wage.
Tiers of employers	Total of 4 tiers of employers, with different phase-in schedules. Employers are classified as small or large, and as providing health care or not providing healthcare.	None.
Phase in	A (large, no healthcare): \$15 in 3 years B (large, healthcare): \$15 in 4 years C (small): \$15 in 6 years D (small, with “minimum compensation” including tips and healthcare): \$15 in 5 years	\$13 in 4 years, for everyone.
Highest level	18.13 in 2025 Then increases with inflation.	\$13 in 2019 Then increases with inflation.

Conclusion

Tracing the contours of minimum wage policy as it has traveled through both time and space draws the eye to several important components of policy mobility. First, the centrality of electoral politics to the spread of policies and the reciprocal importance of policy campaigns on electoral campaigns is an important determinant of the pace and shape of policy transfer. Second, in hyper-politicized policy discussions, the contemporary impulse towards scientific rationalization is still apparent, but qualified by the existence of solid

political camps. That said, the role of comparisons between places, and the deeply political nature of these comparisons, is an important determinant of the eventual policy transfer. Finally, the swirl of competing authorities, power, and scalar strategies demonstrates the complexity and multi-level nature of policy mobility. The minimum wage has many political uses and a long history; because of this, it's a unique vehicle to trace through past and present moments of mobility. Such a tracing enhances our understanding of how policies are rendered mobile or static over time.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The \$15 wage movement has ebbed and flowed since this project began. New victories are further and further apart, and are becoming muted in their reach and impact. On one hand, Washington State voters passed a statewide minimum wage of \$13.50, with mandatory paid sick leave; on the other, Illinois managed to pass a \$15 state minimum wage through both houses of the state legislature, only to see it vetoed by Governor Rauner. The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) has prioritized the passage of state-level preemption of local regulations on wages, which has led to state-level preemption laws being passed in 25 states. One city, St. Louis, was put in the terrible position of being ordered by the state of Missouri to decrease its minimum wage, even though it had already begun to phase-in a rise to \$15 per hour. The divergence between cities and states that support labor regulation and those that outlaw its various manifestations is growing. Seattle, for instance, has adopted so many labor-friendly regulations in the last 10 years that it was necessary to open a separate department, a city-level Office of Labor Standards, to manage the implementation and everyday enforcement of the new legislation. Local-level policies on paid sick time, paid family leave, and secure scheduling, among others, are spreading along with minimum wage increases. At the same time, cities like Birmingham, Alabama are denied

the authority to levy even modest increases, and cities are forced to rescind wage increases that they have already adopted.

Not only is the movement changing as political opportunities on the local level get constricted, but the national political climate has changed dramatically since this project began. The 2016 election of Donald Trump, shocking and corrosive as it was, has in many respects simply empowered traditional Republican legislative priorities. It has further strengthened the array of political forces that oppose organized labor to such a degree that it is difficult to imagine organized labor emerging at all from the ashes of a Trump presidency. The Fight for a Fair Economy was developed as an antidote to the Tea Party, conceived as a coordinated nation-wide effort to ‘change the narrative’ about workers and unions in the US. If measured only by presidential elections, it seems to have fallen far short of its goal. In place of a democratic, multi-racial, pro-worker politics, we have seen the rise of nationalistic, authoritarian, white supremacist politics, one that espouses a nominally pro-worker politics to consolidate political authority of the moneyed elites.

In the face of these political challenges, the \$15 wage movement remains a potent, perhaps even hopeful national movement, although one that seems to have reached certain limits. Labor successfully organized against the confirmation of Andy Puzder, then-CEO of the fast food chain Hardee’s, as Secretary of Labor, a nomination that had been a stinging rebuke to fast food worker organizing. He not only withdrew from consideration for Labor Secretary, but later resigned from his position as CEO. Angela Davis called it the “most important struggle of the labor movement right now” (Davis, 2017). Bernie Sanders has re-introduced a \$15 minimum wage bill at the federal level, this time with the support of 23 Democratic Senators, and his support headlined the most recent Fight for \$15 national day of action on Labor Day, 2017. Then, just before this dissertation was filed, Target, the

retailer, announced it would raise starting wages to \$15 over the coming years. A bright spot for labor, yes; a panacea, no.

As I conclude this dissertation, I want to review from where we've come and to preview what is to come. Given the appetite for the movement to increase local minimum wages, which exists alongside a political landscape in which state governments are increasingly openly hostile to cities, what can we learn about the forms of organizing that are possible, strategic, and sustainable in the current political climate? Given the new breathless interest in the trials of the White working class and its power in shaping the current political climate, what can this attempt to connect low-wage worker organizing with explicitly anti-racist struggle move us to consider? Given the fact that \$15 minimum wages will soon no longer be ambitious but unrealized figures, what can we expect from the production of studies defining their effects? While detailed answers to these questions are speculative, and must necessarily be truncated here, I hope the attempt will help identify the most important aspects of the \$15 minimum wage movement as it enters a new phase.

Reports on Policy Effects: Crucial to Continuing Policy Mobility

As \$15 minimum wages are fully implemented, they transition from being unknown factors in local economies to being empirical facts that can be studied and assessed. As discussed in Chapter 6, localities spent significant time and energy during the policy making process discussing research on previous impact of local minimum wage increases in other places, but struggled to make confident predictions. Most research since the 1990s had suggested that minimum wage increases did not result in significant job losses, but because previous increases had been structured differently, with less steep increases and different

phase-in periods, the applicability of this research was questioned. Besides, the past response of local economies to new minimum wages is not always a good predictor of future responses, given the many ways current economic conditions defy comparisons over time. In my fieldwork, it was clear that these questions were deeply politicized in the \$15 minimum wage policy processes in both Seattle and Chicago, even as both sides of the debate couched their claims in the technical-rational language of policy analysis and economics. As \$15 minimum wages are phased-in, the political battles over interpreting the effects are likely to intensify, as new studies emerge and set the contours of the debates in other places that consider these policy changes.

Although the earliest date for a full adoption of a \$15 minimum wage won't be until 2018, long-term evaluations of these policies are already in place. The first studies evaluating the effects of this new round of minimum wage increases are beginning to emerge, and, upon their emergence, to cause instant controversy. As the research and writing of this dissertation was coming to an end, two competing studies about the effects of Seattle's \$15 minimum wage were released. One, produced by a team of researchers at the University of Washington that had been commissioned to study the effects from the beginning, used different data sources and methods to conclude that the wage increase had resulted in lower earnings for low-wage workers. Mayor Murray, after seeing a draft version of the report, quickly commissioned the Labor Center at the University of California, Berkeley to counter the claims. Their approach repeated established methods and found that the scheduled increase to \$13 per hour namely had not cost jobs or hours.

Both studies' results were heavily covered by the media. Conservative and business-friendly media latched onto the negative results with often biting scorn. One *Forbes* headline called out "These people are shameless – Seattle's \$15 minimum wage is worse than you

thought.” The *Washington Post* framed the issue this way: “A ‘very credible’ study on Seattle’s \$15 minimum wage has bad news for liberals.” These reports dismissed and denounced the study from UC Berkeley as a politically motivated because it was commissioned only in response to the UW study’s negative results, and largely avoided engaging with the methods of the study.

The progressive response was immediately critical of the UW study. However, because it was produced in a nominally nonpartisan (or, as conservatives see it, a liberal) institution, it escaped criticism as a political report. Instead, progressive policy institutes critiqued the methodology of the UW study. It was widely publicized that the UW study was unable to account for 40% of the low-wage workforce that worked in chain establishments. Because of this, a worker who left a single-site establishment for a better-paying job at a multi-site establishment would count as a job loss under the study. Since the full phase-in was limited to large establishments, and since franchises were deemed large establishments, they would have been forced to pay more than small competitors, so there likely would have been an incentive for workers to make just such a change. The study was also criticized for its approach to creating a “synthetic Seattle” using an amalgamation of data from cities throughout Washington to compare with the Seattle-specific data. Seattle is unique in Washington State, critics argued, and comparing the metropolitan center of the state with satellite cities could not fully account for the influence Seattle exerts on other cities in the state.

The Economic Policy Institute soon responded with their own study, and Elizabeth Rose, their communications director, e-mailed rapid response talking points to the EPI listserv. Along with talking points, she included the following important caveat: “My

personal preference is that we not draw any undue attention to this debate.” This particular response, more than almost any other, encapsulates the importance of these studies, not as academic debates or debates about empirical interpretations, but as political documents. As studies get circulated, regardless of their merits, their circulation itself gives credence to the study’s arguments. The debate itself validates the contrary position. Despite the impulse of \$15 proponents to control the publicity around these studies, however, these studies have legs. They may not influence policies that have already been adopted, but the critical study in particular has become a lynchpin in \$15 wage debates in other places. In my current position in Hartford, Connecticut, for example, which relates only obliquely to minimum wage activism, I have had precisely two conversations about the \$15 minimum wage. In both of these conversations, my interlocutors wanted my opinion on the UW study. Through this mobilization of competing economic rationalizations, the \$15 minimum wage has reached a choke point. The next wave of studies investigating the impacts of the \$15 minimum wage on jobs, hours, and inflation will have an outsized effect on the future of discussions about the \$15 minimum wage and local minimum wage increases more generally.

Importance of Racial Economy Approaches to Models of Working Class Solidarity

Writing this conclusion after the election of Donald Trump only solidifies the importance of the racial politics of the \$15 wage movement. Following Trump’s victory, pundits and scholars alike turned their attention to the role the white working class played in his victory: the extent of their support for Trump, the extent of the economic stagnation and or decline that led to disillusionment with the Democratic party, the extent to which racism and xenophobia (which, in the US, is incorrectly linked almost exclusively to working class

whites as opposed to middle or upper-class whites) influenced Trump's appeal to this group. The defection of white working-class voters from the Democratic Party, especially in the deindustrialized Midwest, is an important narrative, and it is gratifying to see a new focus on class enter mainstream American dialogues about politics. However, this new, laser-like focus on the *white* working class obfuscates several more important avenues for inquiry regarding the relationships among working class people of different races. The working class in the US is more racially diverse than the country as a whole, and when the working class is taken as a multi-racial whole, it strongly supported the Democratic candidate. The Fight for \$15's efforts to center race in both economic analysis and organizing work, especially the ways these decisions and strategic priorities are emerging in places like the US South, where political divisions by race are particularly salient, suggest that explicitly anti-racist class-based organizing is crucial to whatever labor movement continues in the Trump era.

As I discussed in this dissertation, the national Fight for \$15 movement has carefully cultivated top-level coalition relationships with Rev. William Barber and the Moral Mondays movement, as well as Black Youth Project 100 and Black Lives Matter. The Fight for \$15 has explicitly incorporated anti-racist messaging in signage and in local political work, supporting, just as one example, a 2017 effort in Tampa, Florida to remove a Confederate statue from the Hillsborough County Courthouse. These commitments are transmitted with varying degrees of nuance and fluency depending on the location and the needs and demographics of the Fight for \$15 activists, but they seem at the moment of this writing to be deep strategic and political commitments.

Figure 7.1: Signs from North Carolina's 11/10/2015 Fast Food Strike

A brief vignette to illustrate these commitments. Anna, a 29-year-old, white, single mother from North Carolina was chosen to speak at the march that closed the national Fight for \$15 conference in Richmond, VA, at the end of the summer in 2016. She had worked in fast food for 10 years, and she opened her remarks by saying she has seen many instances of discrimination based on skin color and sexual orientation. She struggled a little for the vocabulary, explaining that a co-worker had been accused of being “ghetto,” and had quit. Anna, however, had learned from the Fight for \$15 to fight, to hang on, and that she had also gotten involved with Moral Mondays. Transitioning to talk about sexual harassment, Anna said “we don’t have to put up with it at home like we do in our jobs. We don’t have to put up with it in our community.” Her halting but deeply felt speech was immediately followed by Rev. William Barber, who outlined in moving testimony the racial history of labor politics in the US, in language and style that was, by now, familiar to most in the Fight for \$15, since he had been appearing at events for months. Tracing the history of the minimum wage beginning with slavery, Barber traced a long arc: “It took 400 years to get to where we are today: it took 400 years to get from \$0 to \$7.25. We’re not going to wait another 400 years to get to \$15.” The crowd at the rally was largely Black, but the “we” used

here by Barber was significant. Linking the minimum wage so explicitly to slavery, standing underneath the shadow of Confederate general Robert E. Lee, Barber joined workers across race into a movement that was simultaneously about economic inequality *and* racial oppression.

These top-level anti-racist commitments transfer in complex ways into the organizing work that is accomplished in specific local campaigns. A Greensboro Fight for \$15 organizer, whom I interviewed in the summer of 2016, used the following story to illustrate the importance of workplace organizing that engaged race head on. He was working on an organizing campaign at a local McDonald's, where the workforce was entirely Black or Latinx. He was himself a Latino immigrant who, prior to being hired on to work on the Fight for \$15, had been organizing in Greensboro for years, starting multiple groups to combat police misconduct, protect immigrants, and promote socialism. The Black workers at this McDonald's were angry: they saw the Latino workers getting more hours than they did, even though they wanted more hours so they could support themselves. The Latino workers thought the Black workers were lazy, that they didn't want to work, and that they piled work off on them. Neither group wanted to organize with the other, so nothing could be done. This organizer worked for weeks to organize a meeting between the Latino and Black workers. In that meeting, it came to light that the Latinx workers weren't just working more hours, they were working 50, 60 hours a week, but being paid for 40. The Black workers weren't lazy – their main complaint was that they wanted to work more – they just couldn't get scheduled. The conversation laid bare the techniques used to divide workers by race, and the difficulty of building traditions of solidarity amongst workers of different races. It also illustrates how beginning these conversations in the context of struggle can promote new understandings.

The emergent anti-racist analysis represented by Anna's statement, although awkwardly expressed, took the side of those who were discriminated against. This suggests that involving white people in worker organizing can encourage new ways of synthesizing experiences with oppression and exploitation into anti-racist frameworks. Meanwhile, using these mobilizations to elevate the analysis of a national Black intellectual and movement-builder extends anti-racist critiques and makes clear the relationship between economic exploitation and racism. White workers can be brought along into anti-racist analysis to complement personal experiences with economic exploitation and oppression based on other identity markers, while the movement as a whole pushes the analysis of the intersections still further. Moreover, the racial divisions that allow for continued economic exploitation transcend white and Black. Coming together, in struggle against a common foe, allows for breaking down suspicion, prejudice, and misconceptions, laying bare the common forms of exploitation that unite rather than divide.

All that said, local organizing in Greensboro, where I spent the majority of my time and activist energies in North Carolina, remained divided by race, class, and age divisions. Deep differences of strategy between the most active leftist groups in town, especially surrounding the relevance of large mobilizations and the importance of confronting the right, turned largely on racial lines and analyses. A particularly controversial moment surrounded a 2017 May Day event, organized by a coalition of labor, immigrant rights, and anti-racist activists. The event, much smaller than May Day events in Seattle or Los Angeles, brought together labor union leaders and immigrants for a speaking program before pivoting to support the activities of Operation Transparency, a police accountability watchdog group. Despite the care taken in organizing this event, a speaker rose at the end of the event to criticize the event for a false commitment to intersectionality and a lack of concern for

transwomen of color. As I seek to explain the importance and centrality of this new movement's engagement with race, I don't mean to downplay these concerns or the difficulties of cross racial organizing

Race permeated almost every conversation I had, every action I attended or helped organize, every meeting I sat in on with labor organizers and community activists in the US South, despite being explicitly discussed only in moments of tension. In Greensboro and Durham, most Fight for \$15 worker activists were Black. Organizers were White, Latino, and Black. Local Fight for \$15 activists were active in anti-racist organizing, speaking at Black Lives Matter protests and in grassroots efforts to defund police. UE 150, the union most responsible for pushing for the \$15 minimum wage in Durham and organizing Greensboro city workers, is a Black-led and democratic union, deeply embedded in social justice practices and anti-racist organizing. Moral Mondays in North Carolina, created by the then-NAACP State Chapter President, Rev. William Barber, organized a multiracial coalition that used non-partisan moral language to connect people across faith traditions, and his ongoing partnership with the Fight for \$15 represented an important signal of cross-class and cross-race solidarities. In Greensboro, moreover, several issue-specific grassroots campaigns were never far from labor, despite the diverse topics and constituencies: organizing meetings typically happened at the Central Carolina Worker Justice Center, and several of the organizers involved currently or previously worked for labor groups such as the Fight for \$15 or Working America. The political work being accomplished that highlighted race, immigration, labor, gender, and sexuality took place in the same spaces, with many of the same people; it worked through political and strategic differences; and it moved forward, in struggle. These multiracial organizing practices, especially those that centered the importance

of race in the workings of the low-wage economy, were central to the organizing successes of the Fight for \$15.

Reconsidering the Sustainability of the Emerging Organizing Strategies

I am writing this almost five years to the day of the first fast food strikes, which took place on November 29, 2012. One measure of union spending estimates that SEIU has spent more than \$90 million on Fight for \$15 campaigns. The figure is almost undoubtedly larger. This \$90 million has gotten approximately 22 million workers a raise. Fights associated with the \$15 minimum wage have been crucial to the organizing and contract bargaining struggle at the University of Pennsylvania Medical Center and the ongoing struggle to organize contract workers at the Sea-Tac and O'Hare airports, and hospice workers in California. However, SEIU's overall membership has stagnated. Membership peaked at 1.92 million in 2011, and after some years during which the union lost members, the numbers have begun climbing again, and are currently at 1.90 million. One can focus on the upward trajectory, or one can focus on the overall decline. Put pessimistically, SEIU has lost about 20,000 union members since beginning the Fight for \$15. Some of these members were lost following the 2014 *Harris v. Quinn* decision, which took away unions' right to collect fee payments for non-members in public sector unions, but many were lost regardless of this legal change. This decline cannot be explained by declines in employment: there are more workers now than there were in 2011. It cannot be explained by industrial shifts: SEIU represents service sector workers whose ranks are increasing at both the low-wage tier (janitorial and security) and mid-wage tier (nurses and university faculty). I recently spoke with a union staffer who had worked for 10 years with a variety of unions and union

federations: Change to Win, UNITE-HERE, the AFL-CIO. In those 10 years, he said, he had never won a campaign. This includes a stint on the Fight for \$15. The Fight for \$15 is bold, anti-racist, and has proven capable of planting slogans in the mouths of pundits and politicians across the country. It has not yet proven to be a response to organizational deficits facing labor unions, and there remains no concerted plan to organize fast food workers into a dues-paying organization.

To make matters worse, local policy campaigns are reaching real practical limits. The number of localities in states without pre-emption (or the threat of pre-emption) legislation is shrinking. The interplay between local authority and state authority, especially when the politics of cities are opposed to those of the state, is a block to the spread of the \$15 minimum wage. This is not a new development: the complex interplay between politics at the local level and the state level was a constant calculus in the minimum wage campaigns I studied for this dissertation. Without going into too much detail, in the U.S. system, a city's authority to regulate any number of issues is granted by the state itself, giving the state the authority to limit or allow a city within its borders to regulate wages. In a state such as Washington, cities were granted expansive rights in the state constitution; in most other states, cities are only given authority to regulate those issues explicitly spelled out in state constitutions. In Illinois, activists feared that the state would rescind Chicago's right to home rule on the wage issue at any point in the course of their campaign. In fact, the ability to regulate a local minimum wage became a bargaining chip in state politics.

The limitation associated with local policy campaigns in hostile state political climates was a central reason I chose to study the \$15 minimum wage in North Carolina, where the issue of inter-jurisdictional conflicts in policy-making is more salient than a state like Washington. In North Carolina, the state political power structure is politically opposed to

most of its largest cities. Similar situations have blocked the implementation of higher minimum wages in cities throughout the US South and Midwest.²⁸ During the discussions for \$15 minimum municipal wages in Durham and Greensboro, North Carolina, the politics that governed the power relationships between jurisdictional scales were central to the policy possibilities at all levels of government, and a central issue of contention.

The North Carolina state legislature passed legislation in the 1990s to ensure that cities wouldn't be able to regulate private sector wages. Because North Carolina cities are only granted regulatory authority by the explicit act of the state, any authority they do have only exist at the pleasure of the state government. Following the very first stirrings of city interest in living wage ordinances, the state legislature made clear that cities were allowed to determine the wages they paid their own workers, but were not allowed to dictate the wages paid by private city contractors, much less private companies throughout the city. Just before I started my fieldwork in North Carolina, the state legislature doubled down and passed the now-infamous HB2, which brought national scrutiny to North Carolina because of the heavy-handed nature of the state involvement in local legislation. Popularly known as the "Bathroom Bill" because it required transgender individuals to use the bathroom that corresponded with the sex assigned at birth, this hastily passed bill represented an explicit attack on the sovereignty of cities to protect minority citizens. It also prohibited county governments from passing living wage legislation, although this provision was less well publicized than the anti-transgender provisions.

Despite these practical limitations, cities in North Carolina still endeavored to join the \$15 wage movement; however, the way they stitched their policies to the broader \$15

²⁸ Several cities have passed increases to local minimum wages only to have them rescinded by the state, including Birmingham, Alabama and St. Louis, Missouri. States throughout the South and Midwest have pre-empted city campaigns for minimum wages by passing legislation taking away local authority.

wage movement was contingent on the authority they could maintain under these conditions. While cities were debating \$15 minimum wages for city workers, state legislators began using their ability to reconfigure city and county government structures in order to lessen the elected political opposition – and local policy innovation – emerging from cities.

Just last week, they [the state legislature] reached into the Asheville city council and redistricted it. They took Charlotte's airport. They took Asheville's water system. We had denied water service to a large development south of downtown that we thought was environmentally damaging, and the legislature passed a law that was narrowly tailored enough only to make Durham extend water to that one developer... There are ten things that are up right now that are damaging to cities... The wage thing is nothing. It's just a little part of a giant conservative—it's important, but it's just one important thing on a whole conservative agenda that is specifically against cities. Their base is elsewhere and they want to punish these cities they see as progressive. (Policymaker 5, Durham, 6/28/2015)

In another similar power grab, the state threatened to redistrict Greensboro's city council in 2015, using districts that would have 'double-bunked' the four current council members of color, putting them in competition with each other. This effort was eventually defeated, but the threat was understood by city councils throughout the state as an existential one to both the political careers of individual politicians and the independence of cities.

As noted in this dissertation, these limitations did not stop cities in North Carolina from joining the \$15 wage movement, but it did dramatically constrain the extent and reach of the resulting policies. Progressive city councils throughout the state, from Greensboro to Durham, were visibly shaken by the display of raw political threat from the state legislature, and shaped policymaking accordingly.

It's hard to respond. Some things we protest... The other way we respond is to figure out when to keep our head down. There are things we do that we say 'uh uh. We could do that, but we know they're going to come in and make it worse.' Like with Chapel Hill with its zoning. It has some local exceptions on the zoning that have made it a little easier for them to require affordable housing. They said to us, please don't try to pass anything like that – we don't want them to notice. Sometimes you

try to keep your head down, but a lot of times you're just protesting it. (Policymaker 5, Durham, 6/28/2016)

In response to these political attacks on local government structure, cities throughout North Carolina have adopted a careful tone when handling issues that might provoke politicized opposition from Republicans in the state legislature. When city councils have managed to find ways to craft and pass innovative progressive legislation, and have not provoked the ire of the state legislature, they sometimes discourage other cities from learning from their efforts in case a proliferation of activity would draw unwanted attention. This fascinated me, because such an impulse contradicts what appears to be a broader municipal tendency toward sharing, which policy mobilities scholars have observed and analyzed. In spite of this nervousness, however, local governments can be defiantly progressive, even in North Carolina. The quickness with which cities such as Greensboro and Durham, as well as local school boards, passed \$15 minimum wages for their own employees is an example of a policy-inspired workaround of partisan political threats.

Additionally, although certain local policy innovations are circumscribed by North Carolina's state legislature's hostile relationship to local authority, this has not stopped local groups from producing creative responses to reactionary state policies. In the case of minimum wage policy, community/labor activists in both Asheville and Durham developed a novel living wage campaign modeled on voluntary certification projects. By organizing local employers and certifying them as "living wage employers," engaging in advertising events like "buy-cotts" and networking fairs, the Living Wage Campaign kept minimum wage increases on the local agenda even as local policy options were being curtailed. This campaign linked minimum wage policies with living wage campaigns of the 1990s, pushing city policy while engaging in a consumer-side pressure campaign to encourage good behavior on the part of local businesses. Originally, the group advocated a minimum wage tied to the

poverty level, using living wage accounting tactics to justify their decision. As the minimum wage policy landscape shifted – as the Fight for \$15 began organizing and gaining strength in Durham and \$15 became a new benchmark for progressive politics nationwide – the organization struggled with matching the new standard because of their voluntary, business-focused strategy. Despite ongoing challenges, however, the labor, community, and academic partners who conceived and implemented the living wage campaign are continuing to organize voluntary business cooperation alongside local policy changes, finding and exploiting the non-governmental space between warring jurisdictional scales.

As the \$15 wage movement faces an increasingly inhospitable political landscape, in which states seek to pre-empt the ability of cities to pass universal minimum wages, the creativity displayed by North Carolina's local governments becomes more instructive. However, it also lays bare the stakes of these political battles. Progressive cities in conservative states face down not only the removal of their ability to pass certain forms of legislation, but also threats to their district boundaries. As the movement confronts these jurisdictional limitations, creative new policy levers and non-state action become more important.

Conclusion

As I conclude this dissertation, I am struck by how much has changed in the last five years. In the summer of 2012, the very idea of a \$15 minimum wage was laughable. Veteran union organizers had real skepticism about the value of fighting for a figure that seemed so preposterous. Now, nearly a quarter of US workers live in jurisdictions that will soon require

just that minimum wage. The Fight for \$15 is on the tongues and in the policies of powerful national politicians.

The change has not been all for the better. The union movement as a whole continues its slow decline. The political effects of its decomposition have rippled throughout the Midwest and arguably contributed to the election of Donald Trump. It is difficult to close a project like this when the political climate seems so deeply hostile to low-wage workers, especially workers of color, even as it uplifts 20th Century manufacturing jobs as a panacea for the economic stagnation experienced by so many US workers. The sheer impossibility of thinking outside 20th Century economic norms, which, thanks to a robust and militant labor movement, included unions as a check against the worst abuses of capital, keeps us stranded in stultified patterns of reaction rather than creation.

The Fight for \$15, and the \$15 wage movement more generally, brings out the best of new labor's strategies. It targets a large, difficult to organize industry that requires, for its sheer existence, the lowest wage allowed by law. This industry, and the service sector as a whole, continues to solidify its place as one of the most central industries in the US economy, and unions must organize within it if they are to remain relevant. It combines the best of community organizing and antiracist organizing traditions with union organizing, taking the labor movement out of the workplace and into the community. It is ambitious, and it has captured the sustained attention of the national and international media as it seeks to contest dominant narratives about the low-wage labor market. In addition to the broader national media strategy, the \$15 wage movement utilizes political strength in localities to promote policy campaigns, which affect all members of the working class in a particular area. It has brought back the strike, albeit in an almost unrecognizable strategic use. Despite these significant strategic innovations, it remains, five years in, significantly limited. In the absence

of continued investment by the SEIU international, the momentum created by this movement will ebb, unless lasting organizations emerge from the work. Even with these limitations, however, the impact of the \$15 wage movement on the conscience and the policy of the US is dramatic. The contours of minimum wage policy, and the labor movement as a whole, are irrevocably changed. The rest is up to us.

Appendix A: Organizations and Acronyms, with Description

ACRONYM	ORGANIZATION	DESCRIPTION
15 NOW	15 Now	Nationwide Issue-specific group organized by Socialist Alternative to promote \$15 minimum wages.
ACTION NOW	Action Now	Citywide community organizing group that led the \$15 referendum voter turnout operation in Chicago.
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor – Congress of Industrial Organizations	Largest national labor federation in the US. The AFL (which was the association of trade unions) and the CIO (which was the association of industrial unions) merged in 1955. SEIU and other CTW unions left the AFL-CIO in 2005.
BPNC	Brighton Park Neighborhood Council	Neighborhood organizing group on Chicago’s west side. Involved in \$15 referendum.
CTW	Change to Win	Splinter labor federation that broke from the AFL-CIO in 2005. As of 2016, it includes SEIU, UFCW, Teamsters, and UFW.
CTU	Chicago Teachers Union	Local union that represents 30,000 educators in Chicago. Won a high-profile strike campaign in 2012 and was active in the \$15 minimum wage referendum in Chicago.
FLSA	Fair Labor Standards Act	The FLSA was enacted in 1938 to establish minimum standards for workers, including establishing a minimum wage. It has been amended multiple times since 1938 to expand the categories of workers covered and increase the minimum wage rate.
FIGHT FOR \$15	Fight for \$15	Name of SEIU’s nationwide campaign to increase local minimum wages and organize fast food workers.
FFE	Fight for a Fair Economy	Name of SEIU’s nationwide community organizing campaign that began in 2011. The campaign developed into the Fight for \$15.
FTA LOCAL 22	Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers of America-CIO Local 22	Inter-racial union of tobacco workers in Winston-Salem, active throughout the middle of the 20 th Century.
GRASSROOTS COLLABORATIVE	Grassroots Collaborative	Citywide political organizing group in Chicago. Along with Action Now, they ran the voter turnout for the \$15 referendum.
IIAC	Income Inequality Advisory Committee	Committee established by Seattle Mayor Ed Murray to design the \$15 minimum wage increase.

TEAMSTERS	International Brotherhood of Teamsters	International labor union representing 1.4 million drivers, warehouse workers, and other related occupations. By many counts the largest union predominately active in the private sector in the US. Left the AFL-CIO in 2005 with the CTW coalition.
TEAMSTERS LOCAL 117	International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 117	Teamsters Local 117 represents warehouse workers and Sea-Tac airport rental car workers in the Seattle area. They were active in the Sea-Tac organizing campaign and the \$15 initiative.
NLRA	National Labor Relations Act	The NLRA was enacted in 1935 to protect the rights of employees to form unions and to establish limits on private sector labor and management practices.
NLRB	National Labor Relations Board	The NLRB is an independent federal agency that was established by the NLRA to enforce its provisions. It governs the election process by which workers form unions and adjudicates claims surrounding Unfair Labor Practices.
ONE NORTHSIDE	Organizing Neighborhoods for Equality: Northside	Neighborhood organizing group on Chicago's north side. Involved in \$15 referendum.
PUGET SOUND SAGE	Puget Sound Sage	Community-labor hybrid organizing group. Active in the Sea-Tac organizing campaign, the SeaTac \$15 initiative, and small-business organizing in the Seattle \$15 minimum wage policy process.
RLA	Railway Labor Act	The RLA was enacted in 1926 to govern labor relations in the railroad and airline industries.
RAISE UP	Raise Up	Campaign name for SEIU's Fight for \$15 campaign. This name is used throughout the US South as a synonym for Fight for \$15.
SEIU	Service Employees International Union	International labor union that represents 1.9 million workers in healthcare, property services, and education (childcare and higher education workers).
SEIU 775	Service Employees International Union 775NW	SEIU Local that represents 40,000 homecare and nursing home workers in Washington State and Montana. Invested heavily in fast food organizing.
SEIU HCII	SEIU Healthcare Illinois/Indiana	SEIU Local that represents 91,000 healthcare workers (nurses, homecare workers, and nursing home workers) in the Midwest. This union was instrumental to funding and staffing the \$15 minimum wage referendum in Chicago.
SEIU LOCAL 6	SEIU Local 6	SEIU Local that represents 6,000 property services workers, including janitors and airport contractors, in Washington State. Heavily involved in the Sea-Tac organizing campaign.
SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE	Socialist Alternative	Kshama Sawant ran with the support of Socialist Alternative in her election to Seattle City Council.

		The organization was central to the \$15 minimum wage ordinance in Seattle, and created \$15 Now, the nationwide organizing group promoting \$15 local minimum wages.
ULP	Unfair Labor Practice	A ULP charge is made against employers or unions that they have engaged in activities that are illegal under the NLRA and other labor laws.
UFCW	United Food and Commercial Workers	International labor unions that represents 1.3 million grocery, retail, and food processing workers, among related occupations.
UNITE-HERE	Union of Needletrades, Industrial, and Textile Employees (UNITE) and Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE).	International labor union that represents 270,000 workers in the hotel, gaming, food service, manufacturing, textile, distribution, laundry, transportation, and airport industries. UNITE merged with HERE in 2004.
UTW	United Textile Workers	National union that supported the 1934 textile strike that encompassed the industrial piedmont region in the US South. In 1939, the UTW merged with the CIO-sponsored rival textile union to form the Textile Workers Union of America (TWUA).
UE 150	United Electrical Workers Local 150	UE 150 represents municipal employees and state health workers in North Carolina. They have chapters in more than a dozen cities in North Carolina, despite a state ban on public sector bargaining.
WORKING AMERICA	Working America	This campaign, run by the AFL-CIO, is a grassroots political campaign to engage non-union, working class, predominately white, communities. Working America was active in campaigning for a \$15 minimum wage for Greensboro city workers.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Introduction:

1. How did you become involved in the \$15/hour campaign in X city?
2. Please describe your role in the campaign.
 - a. What types of campaign activities have you been a part of?
 - b. What are your responsibilities on the campaign?
3. What organizations are involved in the effort to increase the minimum wage here in X city?
4. Tell me more about the role of your organization in the effort to increase the minimum wage in X city.

Campaign-Specific Questions:

5. Tell me about the background of this campaign.
6. What was the motivation for beginning efforts to raise the minimum wage in X city?
7. What are the current goals of the campaign?
8. What is the campaign's strategic plan to achieve these goals?
 - a. Why did you decide on X strategy?
 - b. What other strategies did you consider?
 - c. Who are your campaign targets?
9. How do you see this effort to increase the minimum wage affecting pro-worker efforts in other places?
 - a. What about at the state, national, or global level?

Place-Specific Questions:

10. What other places do you view as models for your efforts to raise the minimum wage? Why?
11. Have you encountered people who have been involved in efforts to increase the minimum wage in other places?
 - a. How did that encounter come about?
 - b. What happened in the encounter?
 - c. What did you learn from the encounter?
 - d. How have you put any of these lessons into action in X city?
12. What makes the campaign to raise the minimum wage here different from other places?
13. What is unique about X in your city that makes you think it will work here?
14. What tactics have been most successful in your city? What tactics have been unsuccessful?

If interviewee is part of a national organization, such as a labor union:

15. What kinds of resources has [your local organization] received from [national organization]?
 - a. Examples might include: staff, supervision, monetary aid, materials, etc.
16. What types of information does the [national organization] provide [your organization]?
17. What type of information is [your organization] expected to provide the [national organization]?

To Close:

18. Who else should I talk to about these efforts to raise the minimum wage here?

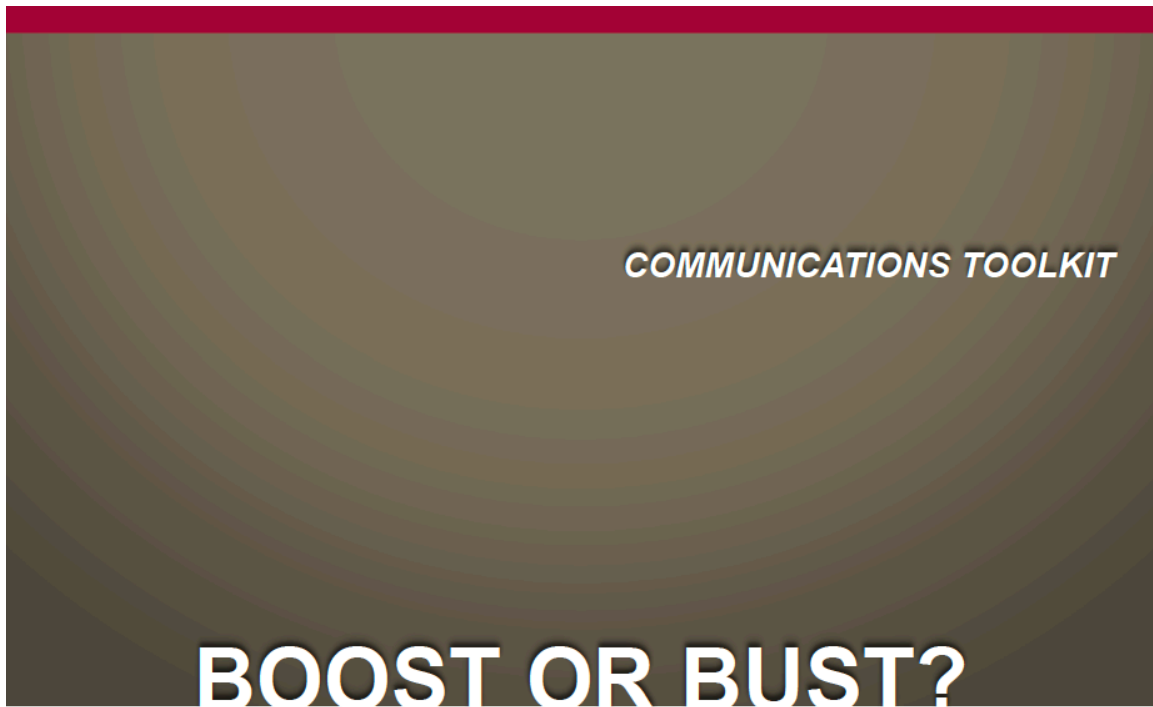
Appendix C: Participant Observation Protocol

CATEGORY OF OBSERVATION	WHAT TO OBSERVE	WHAT TO NOTE
<p>PARTICIPANT APPEARANCE</p> <p>VERBAL PARTICIPATION IN EVENTS: BEHAVIOR AND INTERACTIONS</p>	<p>Clothing, age, gender, physical appearance of group, organizational affiliations expressed through clothing/signs</p> <p>Who is speaking to whom?</p> <p>How long do conversations last?</p> <p>Who initiates conversation?</p> <p>What languages are spoken?</p> <p>What chants are being used?</p> <p>Who is speaking to the group? Who is listening/not listening to the speaker?</p> <p>What is being said?</p>	<p>Things that indicate membership in sub-populations of interest in this study, such as race, gender, worker/organizer, religion, organizational affiliation</p> <p>What are the dynamics of the verbal interactions? How do they relate to appearance and group membership, noted above? What is being said/not said? What is the relationship of the ‘official’ message of the event (displayed through pre-fabricated signs and approved public speakers) and unofficial messages?</p>
<p>PHYSICAL PARTICIPATION IN EVENTS: BEHAVIOR AND GESTURES</p>	<p>What physical activities are people engaged in? (Marching, standing, holding signs, sitting-in, holding hands)</p> <p>Who is physically interacting with whom?</p> <p>Who is not physically engaged?</p> <p>Where is the event located?</p>	<p>How do people use their body to convey emotion and engagement? What is the importance of the physical behavior of the participants to the activity?</p>
<p>PHYSICAL LOCATION OF EVENTS</p>	<p>What are the tactical characteristics of the location (e.g. open square vs. building lobby)?</p> <p>What physical locations are repeated throughout the campaigns?</p>	<p>What are the symbolic characteristics of the location (e.g. corporate headquarters vs. government office)?</p> <p>What do the spaces chosen for different types of campaign activities tell us about the meaning of that activity and its position within the larger campaign?</p>
<p>SPATIAL ARRANGEMENT OF EVENTS</p>	<p>How close are people standing to each other?</p> <p>Who is standing off to the side?</p> <p>Who is standing in the center?</p> <p>How are spatial areas of the event defined (e.g. podium, check-in tent)</p>	<p>What do people’s different physical locations tell us about their relationship to the activity and the other people involved in the activity?</p>
<p>PROPS AND MATERIALS</p>	<p>What signs, banners, written materials, puppets, costumes, t-shirts, light displays, are used to publicize campaign messages?</p>	<p>What is the quality, tenor, and physical branding of the messaging? What demands or claims are made through materials?</p>
<p>PARTICIPANT MOBILITY WITHIN THE EVENT</p>	<p>How do people enter and leave the activity/space? When? Why? How long do they stay in the space/activity?</p> <p>What is the trajectory of the</p>	<p>What are the patterns of movement and how do these relate to markers of group affiliation?</p> <p>What symbolism is encoded in the mobility of the group (e.g. “bringing \$15</p>

**CAMPAIGN
ACTIVITIES**

<p>movement of the event? How many people are present at a given time? Protest tactics: march, rally, flash mob, street theater, sit-in, occupation of public/private space, general direct action. Identified targets: corporate, government, public space, media, etc.</p>	<p>from Sea-Tac to Seattle” by marching)? What kinds of protest tactics are deployed, and by which participants? What is the relationship between the tactics employed and the targets of the action?</p>
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Appendix D:
Topos Partnership Report: Title Page, Introduction, and Table of Contents





INTRODUCTION

An economy marked by high unemployment, stagnant wages, reduced benefits, and increasing insecurity across the country should result in a vigorous public conversation about how to create quality jobs. And yet, public support for policies to improve job quality is often undermined by “common sense” narratives that put workers’ interests and business’s interests at odds. For example:

“What’s good for workers is bad for business, and what’s bad for business is bad for the economy.”

Though average Americans often scoff at the phrase “trickle-down economics”, it is clear that most embrace the underlying notion, which manifests many common sense ideas, for example that businesses create jobs. As a result, what businesses say they need too often drives public and policymaker opinion.

For more than a year, the Topos Partnership has conducted a deep exploration of public understandings of the economy. In the pages that follow, we describe the central challenges advocates face, and suggest a framework to create a new cultural common sense that will give job quality advocates the upper hand in the debate.

This framework is far more than a bumper sticker or slogan. It is a big idea with potential to shift the entire debate onto terrain that favors advocates across a wide swath of economic issues including job quality as well as labor rights, poverty alleviation, and so on.

Advocates are already embracing this strategy, and are implementing extraordinarily creative, effective illustrations of the framework. We include some stellar best practices in this toolkit so communicators can learn from their peers and continue to build on each other’s experiences. It is our hope that these ideas will grow exponentially, until they are firmly established as simple common sense that explains the obvious path forward.

The Topos Team

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