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MAPPING THE DIMENSIONS OF LABOR REVITALIZATION: MOVEMENT INNOVATORS SURVEY THE CALIFORNIA FRONTIER*

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In light of the ongoing dialogue regarding the possibility and potential for revitalizing the U.S. labor movement, this paper seeks to map systematically the emblematic activities of this re-emergence. An inventory of innovative and promising labor movement activity is compiled and analyzed through semi-structured interviews with labor scholars, community leaders, organizers, and union officials in California. Analysis of the data suggests several emerging patterns: (1) the declining role of traditional union activity in the new labor movement, (2) the importance of immigrant workers to labor's revitalization, and (3) the absence of white-collar workers from the range of labor activity viewed as promising.

Since the 1995 election of John Sweeney and his "new voice" team to lead the AFL-CIO, there have been numerous scholarly debates and discussions about the possibility and prospects for a new, revitalized labor movement. A series of high-profile union victories, such as the Teamsters' UPS strike in 1997, the Justice for Janitors campaigns, and the successful effort by the Service Employees' International Union (SEIU) to organize 70,000 home care workers, fueled speculation that labor may indeed be making a comeback. In this context, labor scholars and observers have produced literature addressing myriad obstacles to revitalization and proposing strategies to overcome them. Much of the discussion appears in edited volumes with such hopeful titles as *A New Labor Movement for the New Century* (Mantsios 1998a); *The Transformation of U.S. Unions* (Tillman and Cummings 1999); and *Rekindling the Movement* (Turner, Katz, and Hurd 2001), which underscore the optimism about the future of the U.S. labor movement (Milkman 2000b; Mort 1998; Nissen 1999; Wood, Meiksins, and Yates 1998).

These empirical and theoretical works identify a variety of issues facing organized labor in the United States and have contributed to a vibrant dialogue among labor practitioners and scholars concerning the prospects and potential of labor revitalization. Much of the existing empirical research is based on studies of

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single cases — often high-profile successes — exploring a specific dynamic, strategy, or site. Furthermore, many of the theoretical essays are ideologically charged and/or based on anecdotal evidence.

What is lacking so far is a systematic exploration of how the revitalization effort is being conceptualized and implemented "on the ground." What are the labor movement practices fulfilling the goals of revitalization set by its advocates? What areas of disagreement about the nature of such revitalization are expressed among labor intellectuals and organizers? How might knowing the way movement innovators are conceptualizing labor revitalization improve our understanding and theorizing?

This paper addresses these questions by attempting to chart the dimensions of labor revitalization as participants in California define them. I argue that in order to develop theories able to account for the qualitative changes associated with labor revitalization, it is necessary to map the range of activities that reform-oriented organizers and analysts believe comprise it. Creating an inventory of the actual episodes of transformation they nominate will show how movement innovators define in practice what revitalization means and how they perceive its progress and pitfalls. In this article, I provide such a preliminary map of the new labor movement. The analysis is based on data from interviews with innovative union leaders, community activists, and labor scholars. I will discuss several emerging patterns: (1) the declining role of traditional union activity, (2) the importance of immigrant workers, and (3) the surprising absence of white-collar workers.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF LABOR REVITALIZATION

The extensive theorizing and research on labor's transformation has led several labor scholars to begin delineating a sociology of labor revitalization. Much of the writing in this nascent subfield takes the form of theoretical essays and empirical work examining key dynamics, problems, and potentialities viewed by the authors as central to the project of labor transformation. Central themes in this literature include social movement unionism, organizational dynamics within unions, labor-community coalitions, diversity within the movement, and tactical innovations in organizing.

A significant portion of this scholarship makes the case for various types of social movement unionism. These proposals usually call for one or more of the following: stronger alliances with existing social movements, adopting social movement-style tactics, and broadening the goals of organized labor to reflect a social justice orientation (Clawson 2003; Johnston 2001; Robinson 2000; Turner and Hurd 2001). A related branch of this work focuses on unions making links with community organizations as part of a rebuilding strategy. These proposals range from creating union-community alliances to shifting the focus of organizing from the workplace to the community itself (Brecher and Costello 1990; Delgado and Clawson 2003; Fine 1998; Needleman 1998; Ness 1998; Nissen and Rosen 1999).

Issues internal to labor movement organizations are also receiving much attention. Many scholars have argued that transforming unions and the wider labor movement will require increasing levels of democracy and rank-and-file militancy (Brecher and Costello 1998; Eisenscher 1999; Mantsios 1998b). Others have focused on obstacles within unions, pointing out that institutional inertia, organizational

culture, and active resistance to innovations remain formidable barriers to revitalization (Fletcher and Hurd 1998; Foerster 2001; Voss and Sherman 2000).

Other research has identified the changing demographic composition of the contemporary labor force and has argued for the need to increase gender and racial diversity within union organizations to reflect these changes (Clawson and Clawson 1999). From this viewpoint, labor's revitalization will necessarily entail organizing immigrant workers and women, as well as addressing the intersection of race and gender (Cobble 1993; Delgado 1993; Kurtz 2002; Milkman 2000a; Nussbaum 1998).

Finally, many of the empirical studies of labor revitalization examine specific organizing strategies and their effectiveness (Bronfenbrenner and Hickey 2003; Bronfenbrenner and Juravich 1998; Fiorito, Jarley, and Delaney 1995). Lopez's (2004) recent work broke new ground by placing anti-union sentiments among workers as a key obstacle to overcome. Lerner (2003) has sparked a lively debate with his "Immodest Proposal," a call for the consolidation of unions and a focus on organizing in key industrial sectors. Arguably, the single most important contribution in the domain of strategic and tactical innovation is a volume edited by Bronfenbrenner and her colleagues (1998). In this collection of research, contributors addressed a wide range of issues and innovations, such as tactics leading to successful unionizing outcomes, organizing campaigns outside the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) process, member involvement in organizing, and labor-community partnerships.

EFFORTS TO CONSTRUCT A SOCIOLOGY OF LABOR REVITALIZATION

Attempts have been made to organize this wide-ranging literature into a sociology of labor revitalization. Nissen (2003) contended that proposals offered by scholars to revitalize the labor movement form two schools of thought: Value-Added Unionism (VAU) and Social Movement Unionism (SMU). Proponents of the Value-Added school argue that technological and competitive changes have rendered traditional adversarial labor relations obsolete. They believe the survival of organized labor requires emphasizing the potential competitive benefits — greater productivity, labor peace, and improved efficiency — that unions are able to offer employers.

Members of the Social Movement Unionism School, on the other hand, have been highly critical of the post-World War II labor relations regime, particularly organized labor's accommodationist stance. They believe this post-WWII accord led to excessive union bureaucracy, top-down leadership, fixation on legalities of employer relations, and a lack of rank-and-file participation, all of which contributed to labor's decline. As Nissen (2003) put it, SMU advocates have contended that unions should "once again become champions of those oppressed by the U.S. economic system" by making "common cause with other social movements" (p. 141).

Cornfield and Fletcher (2001) drew on labor market segmentation theory in their framing of the sociology of labor revitalization. They were critical of the deterministic classical theories that view labor movement strength as inexorably linked to large scale social and economic processes such as globalization, the rise of the welfare state, the decline of manufacturing sector, or the absence of a labor party. Instead, they argued, these macrosociological forces "do not fully illuminate the structure of worker demand for unionization, the effectiveness of strategic actions taken by labor

unions, and therefore, the sociological conditions for labor revitalization" (p. 71). They proposed a research agenda that focuses on these dynamics.

Efforts to organize the labor revitalization literature are useful, but they suffer from two important shortcomings. First, existing attempts to codify labor revitalization have focused entirely on how current labor unions can gain power, membership, and impact. Therefore, they have overlooked activity occurring on the ground and being discussed in literature that falls outside of traditional union organizations. Second, there is significant ambiguity about the elements constituting the domain of labor revitalization.

Reducing the sociology of labor revitalization to an analysis of unions is a problematic theoretical move, particularly considering the calls to rethink old boundaries and adopt new conceptualizations of the labor movement. Many observers agree with Cobble's (2001) belief that "the labor movement needs to move beyond contract unionism and broaden the current definition of what constitutes a union" (p. 90). Furthermore, important questions about the types of activities included as part of labor transformation remain unresolved. Recognizing the need to map such activity, Cornfield and Fletcher (2001) contended, "A sociology of labor revitalization ought to develop a large empirical inventory and typology of these innovations" (p. 78-79).

The present work seeks to inventory a range of labor innovations and to expand the scope of analysis to include innovations occurring outside conventional union organizations (Cobble 2001; Johnston 2001; Webster and Lipsig-Mummé 2002). By mapping these constitutive elements, this study will, hopefully, improve theorizing and lead to stronger and more inclusive analyses of labor revitalization.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The labor movement has more potential sources of data collected about its activities than most other movements — compiled by a variety of governmental organizations such as the Bureau of Labor Statistics. However, there is a bias in these data toward institutionalized or institutionally recognized forms of action, such as strikes, work stoppages, and certification elections. As valuable as these sources are, they are unable to capture activity occurring outside conventional practices. Similar problems arise with the use of data collected by local and international unions. Media reports are problematic because they tend to cover only the most dramatic and public instances of movement activity when they cover labor at all. Given my interest in documenting how movement innovators define revitalization, I chose to construct an inventory based on semi-structured interviews with these practioners.

CALIFORNIA FOCUS

I have limited my investigation to California for practical and intuitive reasons. California is a major force in the "new" domestic economy, and alone it represents one of the largest economies in the world. In many interesting ways it both reflects and departs from national employment and demographic trends (Bronfenbrenner and Hickey 2003). By traditional measures of organized labor's strength, it is home to one of the strongest labor movements in the country. With 16.8 percent of the state's

workers belonging to unions, it far exceeds the national union density rate of 12.9 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2004). As a leader among states in terms of union membership, California was one of only three states where density levels of union membership increased between 1998 and 2002 (Milkman and Rooks 2003). California has also been the site of some of labor's most dramatic recent victories, including those by janitors, home care workers, nurses, teaching assistants, and medical doctors (Sullivan 2003; Waldinger et al. 1998).

While many other states continue to shift to the right politically, since the late 1990s, California has been run almost entirely by Democrats. In the years immediately preceding and including my fieldwork, Democrats controlled both houses of the state legislature and the governor's office as well. Moreover, they held nearly every other statewide office from lieutenant governor to insurance commissioner. The success that Democrats enjoyed was due in large measure to the role that organized labor played in electoral politics. It has become increasingly difficult for California's politicians at any level of government to win without union support. Together, these dynamics suggest that California may be leading labor's revitalization efforts, and as such, it is a logical site for focused examination. As Harvard scholar and long-time activist Marshal Ganz said of California, "Doing academic work and research in that context is like being in Detroit in the 1930s. . . . This is where it's happening (2001)."

ASSESSING THE NEW LABOR MOVEMENT

In order to assess the quality and scope of the new labor movement in California, I conducted 35 semi-structured interviews with labor scholars, union officials, and community-based leaders. Semi-structured interviews are a respected methodological tool in social movement studies (Lofland 1996; Rubin and Rubin 1995). As Blee and Taylor (2002) pointed out, semi-structured interviews are particularly appropriate "in studies where the goals are exploration, discovery, and interpretation of complex social events and processes" (p. 93). Furthermore, this approach allows researchers to, in their words "gain access to motivations and perspectives of a *broader* and *more diverse* group of social movement participants" to generate "themes and categories of analysis" (p. 93–94). While semi-structured interviews have limitations, they are powerful means of uncovering emergent trends (Blee and Taylor 2002). They were especially appropriate in this case because they enabled me to capture a fuller range of activities than would have been produced by relying solely on interviews with top union officials or on content analysis of newspaper accounts of labor action.

Because the goal was to map labor revitalization efforts, I interviewed people considered to be "movement innovators," defined by Voss and Sherman (2000) as union leaders who view organizing as a top priority and possess "the knowledge, vision, and sense of urgency required to use confrontational strategies and take organizational chances" (p. 327–328). Innovative unions are those committed to organizing, pursuing organizational innovation, and adopting a tactical repertoire that includes rank and file intensive strategies, corporate campaigns, strategic targeting, and circumventing NLRB elections (Sherman and Voss 2000). Although Voss and Sherman referred specifically to *union* leaders and organizations, I extended their concept to activists working both within and outside of trade unions.

Drawing on key informants with significant experience in and knowledge of the California labor movement, I based my project design on the assumption that those interviewed were qualified to identify exemplary cases and salient features of labor revitalization.

I conducted interviews between July 2001 and July 2002. Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was usually held in the informant's home or office. I conducted seven interviews by telephone. The interviews centered on several open-ended questions and spontaneous follow-up questions sparked during the course of the conversation. The key question for this paper asked subjects to "identify promising cases of recent labor movement activity in California." I encouraged respondents to think of the labor movement in broad terms and told them that cases and events outside the realm of traditional collective bargaining system and union organizations were appropriate. I assured the subjects confidentiality.

SUBJECTS: SELECTION AND AFFILIATION

I identified interview subjects using snowball sample techniques, beginning with approximately 10 informants to whom I had access through personal and professional networks. While several members of this initial group became interview subjects, they were most valuable in identifying other prospective interview subjects by providing contact information and making introductions. Ultimately, the pool of potential subjects grew to more than 90, 35 of whom were interviewed.

Three factors were considered in selecting interview subjects: balance of sample, potential contribution, and access. Although not formally a quota sample, I was interested in achieving balance among different status positions of subjects to ensure adequate representation of academics, union officials, and leaders of community-based organizations. Within these categories, efforts were made to select interviewees from a range of different organizations so that union officials came from many different unions and scholars came from many different campuses. In addition, I strove to balance the subject pool in terms of gender, race, and geographic region. Of those interviewed, 15 were women, 20 were men; one-third were people of color. The sample was evenly divided between subjects from Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bay Area. A second consideration for subject selection was the potential contribution of the prospective interviewee. Because the research design was based on interviews with innovators as key informants, I prioritized people holding high-status positions and those identified repeatedly by other subjects as having considerable knowledge of the movement landscape in California.

Finally, the ability to gain access to subjects was often a determining factor in who was ultimately interviewed. As with elite interviews generally, establishing contact and gaining consent of high-status informants was frequently a frustrating task (Rubin and Rubin 1995). Most prospective interviewees were often reluctant to participate in a research project because they had significant demands on their time. Another obstacle to gaining access to subjects was trust. The status differential between the researcher and the subject, coupled with the sensitive political nature of their work, often made establishing confidence difficult. These problems were more easily overcome when someone the subject knew personally had referred me. Also, mentioning that the University of California Institute for Labor and Employment was

funding the research lent credibility and prestige to the project and contributed to gaining subjects' participation.

Subjects were affiliated with a number of different types of organizations, although each was connected to the labor movement (Table 1). Approximately 20 informants were affiliated with or worked for 11 different unions. Ten worked for community-based organizations; and nine held research positions in institutes or universities doing labor-related research and teaching. The subjects held various positions within their organizations, including several local union presidents, union officers and staff, directors and staff of community-based organizations, independent and affiliated labor consultants, and university faculty.

TABLE 1

RESPONDENT AFFILIATIONS[a]

Organization	Acronym	*N*
American Federation of State County and Municipal Employees	AFSCME	2
American Federation of Television and Radio Actors	AFTRA	1
Asian Immigrant Women Advocates	AIWA	1
Association of Latin American Gardeners of Los Angeles	ALAGLA	1
California Building Trades Council	CBTC	2
California Nurses Association	CNA	1
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles	CHIRLA	1
Coalition of University Employees	CUE	1
East Bay Alliance for Sustainable Economy	EBASE	1
Garment Workers Center (LA)	GWC	1
Hotel Employee Restaurant Employees	HERE	2
Institute for Labor and Employment	ILE	4
International Longshore and Warehouse Union	ILWU	1
Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates	KIWA	1
Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy	LAANE	1
Monterrey Bay Central Labor Council	MBCLC	1
Santa Monica Living Wage Campaign	SMLWC	1
Service Employees International Union	SEIU	2
United Food and Commercial Workers	UFCW	2
University of California, Berkeley	UCB	1
University of California, Los Angeles	UCLA	2
University of California, Santa Cruz	UCSC	2
Writers Guild of America	WGA	2

[a] Several interviewees held dual affiliations.

METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

While there are advantages to using snowball sampling and semi-structured interviews, there are also limitations. For one, the research design does not allow generalization beyond those interviewed in California. The political context, racial dynamics, and labor's strength may be unique to California, and if a similar study were conducted elsewhere, it is possible the results would differ (see Bronfenbrenner and Hickey 2003). Also, this study cannot — and does not — claim to identify all cases of movement innovation occurring in California. Nevertheless, the strength of this research design rests in its capacity to break new conceptual ground that may lead research and theorizing in promising new directions. What is lost with respect to generalizability is gained in a deeper understanding of the quality and character of

labor revitalization. It is my hope that the questions generated through this research will lead others to explore them further using probability studies.

FINDINGS

Interview subjects identified a total of 156 cases of promising labor movement activity. Responses ranged from specific examples of local and statewide union organizing drives, mobilization centered on electoral campaigns, and actions of community-based organizations, to more general examples of developments within the labor movement, such as efforts to increase diversity. I employed a three-step process to code data from interview transcripts and notes.

First, I identified and listed each response, resulting in 156 responses. Second, I identified and collapsed duplicate responses, producing 66 unique cases. "Unique cases" were counted only once even if they were mentioned several times by different respondents. For instance, the Justice for Janitors campaign was identified many times but is coded as a single unique case. Third, I coded and grouped the 66 unique cases by type of activity and organization involved. Because cases identified included specific references such as "SIEU's Home Care workers campaign," as well as general responses such as "labor's efforts to organize immigrant workers," this coding process was an attempt to identify the most salient feature of the case and to identify patterns in the data.

An analysis of the 66 unique cases produced five broad categories of responses: (1) union-centered activity; (2) labor-related efforts by community based organizations; (3) electoral political campaigns in which labor played a key role; (4) hybrid forms of action that included some combination of union, political, and community-based action; and (5) general strategy or policy changes within the labor movement or its organizations. As these groupings form the basis of my analysis, I provide an overview of the categories and types of cases represented before discussing the patterns and their implications for the sociology of labor revitalization. (See Table 2 for a summary of cases and categories.)

"Union-centered activity" was the largest group of responses. This category includes activities that fit within the general purview of trade union practices such as organizing, job actions, or collective bargaining. The category includes efforts by both well established and newly forming union organizations that operate — or seek to operate — within the established collective bargaining framework. Sixty-eight of the 156 responses in the sample referred to such activity. The SEIU's Justice for Janitors (J for J) campaign to organize custodians who clean office buildings throughout Los Angeles was the most frequently cited example in this category (n = 18). The successful organizing campaign of 70,000 Los Angeles County homecare workers was next (n = 9), followed by the less publicized independent organizing efforts by day laborers in the Bay Area and Los Angeles (n = 5) and gardeners in Los Angeles (n = 4). In all, the category is comprised of roughly 26 unique cases, most of which were identified once or twice.

The second category, "activity by community-based organizations," which was mentioned 20 times, consisted of work by various community groups that either supported, advocated for, or provided services to workers. Of the 11 unique cases identified in this category, the Garment Workers Center (GWC) and the Korean Immigrant

Workers Advocates (KIWA) were the most frequently cited (n = 5 and n = 4, respectively).

TABLE 2

CASES OF PROMISING LABOR MOVEMENT ACTIVITY BY CATEGORY

Union-Centered Activity (68)	Community-Based Organizations (20)	Electoral Politics (13)	Strategy Changes (36)
Justice for Janitors — SEIU (18)	Garment workers centers (5)	Villaraigosa campaign (2)	Immigrant Organizing/AFL stance on immigration (15)
Home Care Workers — SEIU (9)	KIWA — Korean Immigrant Worker Advocates (4)	Campaign to defeat Prop. 226 (2)	More organizing
Day Laborers (5)	AIWA — Asian Immigrant Women Advocates (2)	LA County Labor Federation political activism (2)	Independent organizing
Assoc. Latin American Gardeners LA — ALAGLA (4)	MIWON — Multi-ethnic Immigrant Workers Organizing Network	Mobilization against prop. 187	Labor/environmental coalition
So. California Drywallers (3)	Workers' associations/centers	Labor political alliances in LA	Increased activism in bldg. trades
CUE — Coalition of University Employees (3)	OLAW — Organization of Los Angeles Workers	Labor Party	Use of "new" technologies
CNA — California Nurses Association (2)	Affordable Housing Trust Movement	Campaign for Justice SF	Strategic v. hotshop organizing
Farmer John Reorganization — UFCW (2)	Chinese Progressive Association	Politics (Get Out The Vote)	CBT videos (anti tobacco etc.)
Catholic Healthcare West — SEIU (2)	Asian Aid Association	Labor-neighbor program	Greater Diversity in LM
Nursing home organizing (2)	Religion Labor alliance	Political work (Propositions; elections; OLAW)	Non NLRB approaches
S.F. Airport organizing	APALA — Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance		New regionalism (CLC)
Farm Fresh potato processing plant	CHIRLA — Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights LA		Increasing rank & file democracy
WH Smith at LAX (HERE 814)			Efforts to overcome racism & sexism
Bus drivers' strike (MTA)		**Hybrid Forms (19)**	Job site actions
Gigante supermarket		Living Wage Campaigns (6)	
SEIU hospital organizing (399)		LAMAP — LA Manufacturing Action Project (3)	CWA use of Web to organize IBM workers
United F.A. worldwide contract		WPUSA — Working Partnerships USA (2)	Int'l labor solidarity w/3rd world unions
Entertainment industry		LAANE Los Angeles Alliance for New Economy	Recognizing class struggle beyond point of production
WGA		EBASE — East Bay Alliance for Sustainable Economy	Immigrant working class consciousness
SEIU 715		Young Workers Project (2)	Rapid response teams
Carpenters union		SF Bike Messengers	Central Labor Councils regional focus
CWA		Staples Center I and II	Willingness to engage in direct action
UC temp workers (AFSCME)		"Three-pronged models"	Worker PR campaigns
UTE school bus drivers in SF		Public policy as weapon	
LA Port truckers		Independent research (ILE)	
Developmental disability workers			
S. Central LA electronics workers			

The third category involved cases of electoral "political activity," in which labor played an important role. A total of 13 such cases were identified. The two most fre-

quently mentioned events were the unsuccessful campaign of Antonio Villaraigosa, who would, if elected, have become the first Latino and staunchly pro-labor Mayor of Los Angeles, and labor's successful efforts to thwart Proposition 226, a 1998 ballot initiative that would have required unions to get permission from members before making political contributions.

The fourth category, "hybrid forms" (n = 19), represents an amalgam of different organizations and types of activity. Each of the cases in this group shared some combination of elements of the previous three categories: union organization involvement, community-based activity, and an electoral or policy dimension. Examples included various living wage campaigns (n = 6) and the research and political work of groups such as Los Angeles Alliance for New Economy (LAANE) and East Bay Alliance for Sustainable Economy (EBASE).

The final category of responses, "Strategy Changes," is comprised of cases identifying general changes in labor movement strategies or shifts in organized labor's policy orientation. This grouping is the second largest with a total of 36 references, of which approximately 22 are unique cases. Cases range from the very specific tactical changes such as "using the Internet as an organizing tool" to those identifying more general developments such as "labor's greater willingness to engage in direct action." The category, however, is dominated by references to organized labor's new commitment to organize immigrant workers and the AFL-CIO's reversal of its position on legalization of immigrants (n = 15).

DISCUSSION: THEMES AND PATTERNS

What can we learn from the views of labor leaders, community activists, and scholars about the nature of the new labor movement in California? I address three general findings: the variable and complicated role of union-centered activity, the significance of low-wage immigrant workers, and the virtual absence of white-collar workers from the list of promising labor activity.

UNION-CENTERED ACTIVITY

In this study, movement innovators identified activity falling within the purview of traditional union operations — organizing workers, collective bargaining, and strikes — more than any other type of event. Of the 156 cases of promising labor movement activity identified in the sample, 68 were "union-centered activity," and of these cases, efforts by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) accounted for half. No other union had more than five cases to its credit, indicating that as far as these interviewees were concerned, SEIU was far ahead of other unions in terms of innovative mobilization. This finding lends support to claims within the scholarly literature that few established unions are participating in labor's revitalization (Bronfenbrenner and Juravich 1998).

Most SEIU activity identified came from references to the Justice for Janitors campaign in Los Angeles, specifically their successful strike in 2000, in which the union of predominantly Latino workers won significant contract gains and enjoyed widespread public support. The janitors' strike was part of SEIU's national Justice for Janitors campaign to organize custodians in commercial real estate. Significantly, 18

of the 35 interview subjects cited this case as encouraging. The pervasiveness of this response suggests that it may be the most inspiring labor activity in California over the last few years. It was typically the first case identified by subjects in response to the question. Often, respondents did not immediately offer reasons why they felt it was an important case, suggesting that its importance was self-evident. When they did elaborate, subjects were most inspired that the campaign had adopted social movement-style tactics, had energized immigrant communities, and had won such widespread public support. One long-time union organizer characterized the campaign as "a model for changing the labor movement, from what looks like a self-serving movement for high wage workers, to one that really is on the forefront for fighting for low-wage workers."

The "union-centered activity" category also suggests that promising action is not confined to efforts of well-established unions. Within this category, more than one-fourth of the cases involve workers organizing independently of the AFL-CIO and its affiliated unions (e.g., day laborers, gardeners, University of California clerical workers). The relatively high frequency of union activity by independent groups is instructive. Despite the disparities in resources available to independent labor organizations and the relatively small number of such unions, low-budget upstarts were disproportionately represented among the promising instances of labor movement renewal. Labor's future may not lie *exclusively* in the efforts of independent organizing, but it may indicate that innovation is easier for new organizations than it is for more established ones (Voss and Sherman 2000). Taken together, efforts by SEIU and the various independent actions account for 80 percent of all "union-centered activity." It is worth noting that the most frequently identified cases in this category, the Justice for Janitors and Homecare workers campaigns, were characterized by strategies and tactics departing from conventional union practices.

The near consensus among interviewees about the ineffectiveness of strategies involving the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) further supports the finding that activity outside the traditional collective bargaining framework is seen as most encouraging. For more than 50 years, the NLRB has been the accepted mechanism through which unions have won recognition and adjudicated disputes with employers. However, very few of the promising cases cited, across all categories, involved strategies relying exclusively on the NLRB. A representative of a central labor council described the NLRB path to recognition as "a recipe for disaster and defeat, and loss. NLRB elections in and of themselves don't win, don't work." Echoing this sentiment, a community organizer said that a "holistic" organizing approach has been embraced by unions that:

> Reject the traditional methods of achieving representation . . . . [and] get employers to agree to sign a card-check neutrality agreement that guarantees a process, a simple process, for organizing and recognizing a union and bargaining a contract. The unions that have adopted that method of organizing have been more successful. [Because] they have had, by necessity, to adopt a movement-building approach. . . . They see themselves as totally connected to the rest of the labor movement and the rest of the community. They recognize that the only way they're going to be successful in the long term is to really build a movement, to really build power amongst and between unions representing low-wage people.

Data from the National Labor Relations Board support these assessments. It reports that there were one-third fewer elections held in 2001 than five years earlier

(Labor Research Association 2002). This finding suggests that a substantial portion of the "new labor movement" is occurring outside the domain of the traditional collective bargaining framework. Union-centered cases comprise only half of the responses in the overall sample, and a significant amount of this activity is unconventional. Community organizations, independent workers' groups, political coalitions, and hybrid formations account for the other half of all promising movement activity cited. These findings provide compelling evidence of a fundamental shift in the way the contemporary labor movement is being defined by movement innovators. A veteran union and community organizer stated:

> I think that in order to look at workers organizing in a bigger scale and in a bigger way, we have to look beyond the AFL-CIO model. . . . I'm still very pro-union, I still believe in the traditional NLRB, the collective bargaining unit, but I don't think it's enough either because it does not hit all the industries. It does not hit all the smaller-scale businesses which a lot of immigrants and people of color are working in or women are working in.

Thus, movement innovators do not entirely dismiss established labor movement institutions and modes of operation, but they do recognize the need to expand the way the labor movement is conceptualized. Scholars might do well to expand their analytic focus to include efforts occurring outside the established labor relations system. Redefining the scope of labor movement studies in this way might aid labor's revitalization and strengthen theorizing about it (see Webster and Lipsig-Mummé 2002).

Moreover, these findings raise questions about efforts by the architects of the sociology of labor revitalization to limit analysis to traditional activities by traditional union organizations. For example, Cornfield and Fletcher (2001) charted a narrow course: "The emphasis of the research agenda that we now propose is on the structure and function of existing labor organizations" (p. 73). If, by "existing labor organizations," they are referring to trade unions, their agenda does not square with the views of these movement innovators. Likewise, Nissen (2003) advocated limiting the scope of social movement unionism to conventional trade union issues, cautioning reformers to "tailor the social movement activities of unions so they mesh closely with the quest for industrial justice at the workplace" (p. 147). The data presented here, however, suggest a need to uncouple analyses of labor revitalization from workplace and trade union orthodoxy. As these movement innovators indicate, labor revitalization is not *union*-centered, and if researchers remain focused on traditional union activities, we may be missing half the action.

CENTRAL ROLE OF IMMIGRANT WORKERS

Although the role that traditional union organizations will play in labor's future may be ambiguous, interviewees were unequivocal in their view that immigrant workers are central to labor movement transformation. The most frequently cited case in the "strategy changes" category dealt with the AFL-CIO's shift in its stance on extending citizenship rights to undocumented immigrants and its unions' new willingness to organize immigrant workers. Fifteen of the 35 informants identified these changes as promising. A labor official stated, "I think one of the most promising developments in the labor movement — it may not have shown great payoff yet in

terms of new members and its strength and vitality for the labor movement — but there's been this dramatic shift in attitude towards immigrant workers."

Previously, organized labor had officially opposed extending rights to immigrant workers and made few attempts to try to organize them. Although it represented a change in the federation's internal policy, many subjects believed the reversal would have a dramatic impact on public policy and the political power of labor. There was also recognition of the symbolic importance that these changes would have on immigrant workers themselves. A director of a community-based organization identified the Justice for Janitors campaign primarily for what it meant to other undocumented immigrants:

> Because it was a large number of undocumented workers that were coming out in the public and saying "We have worker rights." And I think, in terms of most immigrant workers, they're in this underground economy where no one knows they exist, and they don't believe that they have any rights. And to see thousands of janitors in the street saying that they are undocumented, you know, basically putting it into the face of the government saying, "We're undocumented, but we still have rights and we're not scared." I think that was very significant. . . . That was a huge turn of events, in terms of the union who had been supporting employer sanctions and supporting all these crazy things. So . . . those two things for our workers were very significant.

Many informants felt that labor's increased commitment to organizing immigrants indicated that fundamental changes were taking place within organized labor. One of these changes — labor strengthening its links with communities — was particularly evident among responses identifying immigrant organizing as promising. In describing why she was encouraged by labor's new stance on immigrant workers, a union organizer and living wage activist admitted "[it] is not specifically a labor struggle. . . . [but] it is emblematic of . . . how labor has to build this movement with its community allies in order to really have power to organize workers and to give workers the power to organize and the protection to organize."

Evidence of the key role immigrant workers play in the new labor movement was even more compelling when cases from all categories were analyzed for reference to immigrant workers. The vast majority of the total cases in the sample were in some way related to immigrant worker organizing. This trend was consistent across each of the analytic groupings. In the categories "union-centered activity," "politics," "hybrid forms," and "strategy changes," immigrant-related cases represented roughly half of the responses in each, while the "community based organizations" category was almost exclusively comprised of organizations focused on immigrant worker issues.

The widespread belief among those interviewed that immigrant worker organizing would be at the center of a new labor movement is consistent with recent scholarship that argues — against long-held views to the contrary — that immigrant workers are willing and able to organize and often do so impressively (Zabin 2000). One academic referring to this ironic shift in the conventional wisdom noted, "Immigrants are sort of the salvation of the Los Angeles labor movement. . . . [Now] people are saying immigrants are much easier to organize than others."

The importance of immigrant workers is likely to remain high. Based on projections from the Census Bureau, 25 percent of California's population may now be foreign born (Lopez and Feliciano 2000). In light of the increasingly complex racial politics of the state, it is clear that for the labor movement to be successful, it must

include immigrant workers. If this study is any indication, it appears that this is an area in which organized labor is headed in the right direction.

TRENDS IN ABSENTIA: WHERE ARE WHITE-COLLAR WORKERS?

As is often the case with social research, something not found in the data can be as interesting as what is present. In the last few years, California has been the site of many high-profile labor actions by some unlikely groups of workers. Medical doctors have formed unions, "dot-comers" in the Silicon Valley experimented with collective bargaining, and nearly 10,000 University of California graduate student teaching assistants joined the fold of organized labor. In light of these remarkable advances and the extensive media coverage they received, I expected they would be represented among the range of promising labor activity. However, none of these cases was mentioned. In fact, reference to organizing efforts by *any* white-collar workers was rare — only six of 156 responses.

This pattern raises two provocative questions. First, what role, if any, will white-collar workers play in labor's revitalization? The fact that well-publicized and novel episodes of white-collar organizing were not considered inspiring might indicate that labor scholars and activists see the revitalization as principally a blue-collar concern. The absence was particularly glaring in the interviews with people who had first-hand knowledge of white-collar organizing. For instance, although it was fairly common for interviewees to promote their own organizations' revitalizing efforts, an organizer who was involved in an historic effort to win union recognition for a group of medical doctors did not include this case in his list of promising labor activity.

One explanation for the tendency to overlook white-collar organizing might be that these innovators were not aware of these cases. Or, they may not have considered them to be promising. It is possible that the strategies and tactics used in white-collar organizing campaigns are fairly conventional, reflecting "old" labor approaches applied to new groups of workers. Finally, this finding might indicate that respondents gave socially acceptable responses reflecting persistent views about who comprises the working class and whom the labor movement represents. Relatively privileged white-collar workers have not historically been part of that vision.

Whatever the reasons for omitting them, it is worthwhile to contemplate the place of professional workers in the new labor movement. It may be easier to generate enthusiasm and sympathy for organized labor when the workers are janitors or garment workers rather than doctors or computer programmers, but there may be significant strategic and theoretical implications in ascribing labor's transformation exclusively to one segment of the contemporary working class. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that over 60 percent of workers nationwide fall into the occupational categories "managerial and professional specialty" and "technical, sales, and administrative support" (NCES 2002). As the United States moves increasingly toward an information-based "new" economy, the growth of the white-collar sector is likely to continue. Therefore, it is imperative to recognize the impact these trends will have on the movement and its future.

If the labor movement and scholars who study it ignore such a significant share of the workforce, they may fail to identify potential areas of membership growth and sources of political power, while reinforcing attitudes held by many white-collar

workers that "unions aren't for people like me" (see Freeman and Rogers 1999; Lipset and Katchanovski 2001).

The failure of interviewees to recognize the efforts of white-collar workers leads to a second question: If a rejuvenated labor movement is primarily about mobilizing low-wage workers, particularly immigrants, is there really anything qualitatively *new* about it? There is nothing exceptional about a labor movement inspired and mobilized by low-wage immigrant workers. Some historians would suggest that this is a relatively common feature of U.S. labor history (Brecher 1997; Cameron 1993; Cohen 1990; Voss 1993). Armed with this long view, one might argue that the contemporary labor movement is simply rediscovering one of its oldest constituencies. Using a shorter historical lens, however, others could point to the increased commitment to organizing and the willingness to include women and racial minorities as significant departures from the movement's last 50 years.

Ultimately, whether the current moment can be characterized as "new" is less important than what the respective interpretations reveal about various understandings of what labor transformation *means*. Revitalization, whose goal is to increase membership in order to repopulate existing movement organizations, is a fundamentally different project than transformation seeking an elemental reshaping of the goals, practices, and orientation of the movement itself. The current study provides some empirical evidence that these conflicting definitions of labor revitalization may be having an impact on analyses attempting to explain it.

The renewed commitment to organizing, particularly among immigrant workers, is a welcome improvement over the most recent past. However, these changes, by themselves, may not represent the fundamental shift that many say is necessary to truly transform the labor movement (Bronfenbrenner 2001). The larger question confronting labor is whether remobilizing its traditional base will alone be sufficient for revitalization or whether it will require more fundamental changes — new faces *and* new organizational forms, new goals, and entirely new strategic models.

CONCLUSION

As an effort to map labor revitalization efforts of the California labor movement, this research draws some limited but important conclusions. There is evidence that union activity represents a significant portion of the promising labor movement action. However, this activity is restricted to a small handful of unions. In California, SEIU and a number of independent unions were acknowledged for doing most of the movement's rebuilding work.

Furthermore, although unions remain a central component, labor revitalization appears to involve much more than traditional union organizing and collective bargaining. A significant portion of the activity inspiring these movement innovators is taking place outside the boundaries of conventional union practices. This activity is an important indication that labor's traditional goals, strategies, and organizations may be giving way to new movement forms. It is quite possible that community-based organizations, political mobilization, and new hybrid formations may represent the best hope for labor transformation.

As for labor's future, the view of subjects in this study was unequivocal that immigrant workers are vital. The AFL-CIO's shift in its stance on immigration policy and new efforts by unions to organize immigrant workers are seen as among the most hopeful developments in the California labor movement. The unanimity among scholars, union leaders, and community activists on this point is particularly encouraging because it suggests that a shared vision across diverse sectors of the labor movement is emerging.

Finally, we gain some important insights into the way the new labor movement is being defined by noting the relative absence of white-collar workers. Recognizing the reluctance to see white-collar workers as part of a revitalized labor movement reveals the underlying assumptions about how the labor movement is conceptualized. These assumptions may create analytic gaps that could ultimately diminish the value of research intended to aid labor's efforts to transform. This is an area within the sociology of labor revitalization that warrants further examination.

As scholars call for labor to expand its mission, adopt social movement tactics, locate labor struggles in the community, and transform trade unions, research and theorizing about the contemporary labor movement must respond in kind. In short, appeals for innovation on the ground must be met with equally innovative theoretical analyses to understand these changes. This attempt to chart the dimensions of the new labor movement systematically — guided by the perspectives of innovative movement practitioners and observers — illustrates the practical and theoretical value of such a map. Such efforts expose analytic blind spots, suggest exciting new directions for further inquiry, and ultimately enhance the sociology of labor revitalization.

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