

Changing Structures, Structuring Change:
The Political Economy of Education and the
Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association, 1964-2017

by

Eleni Brelis Schirmer

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Educational Policy Studies and Curriculum and Instruction)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - MADISON
2021

Date of final oral examination: 10/24/2019

The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Erica Turner, Associate Professor, Educational Policy Studies
John Rudolph, Professor, Curriculum and Instruction
Michael Apple, Professor, Curriculum and Instruction and Educational Policy Studies
Kathryn Moeller, Assistant Professor, Educational Policy Studies
Nancy Kendall, Professor, Educational Policy Studies
Simone Schweber, Professor, Educational Policy Studies and Curriculum and Instruction
Bill Reese, Professor, Educational Policy Studies and History

© Copyright by Eleni Schirmer, 2021
All Rights Reserved

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Preface	1
Chapter One: Introduction	19
PART I	50
Chapter Two: FORM “As If You Were Sterilizing and Fertilizing the Plant at the Same Time”: Becoming the Milwaukee Teachers’ Education Association, 1901-1964	50
Chapter Three: FIGHT “We Are Not in the Restaurant Business”: MTEA’s Defensive Posture, 1963-1968	89
Chapter 4: FRACTURE “Power is only what you chose to do with it”: The social movements MTEA spurned, 1970-1974	117
Chapter Five: FESTER “The Best Contract Ever Written”: The “Good” Strike of 1975 and the “Bad” Strike of 1977	155
PART II	190
Chapter Six: RE-THINK “To Fight Well for Teachers:” Rethinking MTEA, 1980-2000	190
Chapter Seven: RE-FORM “None of this, The savior is coming, business:” Milwaukee’s progressive movement for public education, 2009-2017	226
Conclusion	275
Appendices	295
Bibliography	297

Abstract

This dissertation examines the role of teachers' union within the political economy of education. Using historical and qualitative research methods, I examine the competing political visions adopted by the Milwaukee teachers' union over time and how those visions, in turn, shaped the context of public education in Milwaukee. Milwaukee exemplifies many contemporary urban challenges: deeply entrenched racial segregation, aggressive privatization and the declining power of public workers and public institutions. This study traces how the teachers' union organized in response to these issues – at times catalyzing their effects, at other times ameliorating them. I look to five critical junctures in the union's history to understand its shifting position in the political economy: the union's formation, 1901-1964 (Chapter 2); its struggles against civil rights' groups in Milwaukee, 1964-1968 (Chapter 3); its disaffiliation with the state teacher movement, 1970-1974 (Chapter 4); its two key strikes, 1975-1977 (Chapter 5); the simultaneous rise of vouchers schools in Milwaukee and the advent of progressive caucus in the teachers' union, 1980-2000 (Chapter 6); the union's reformation as a "social justice" union following Act 10, 2009-2017 (Chapter 7).

I look to these junctures to explore not only the dynamics within the union, to offer a new conceptual framework to consider educators' labor power. Prevailing thinking on unions posit unions as determined by the political forces around them, from contracts to labor law. My work adds an important addendum. Unions, my work shows, are both structured by the political forces around them *and* capable of re-structuring them. Unions, my research asserts, offer more than material gains for workers; they also provide a means to establish a collective identity and create sites for ideological formation. Those formations, in turn, structure the material demands unions are capable of asserting. As public care-workers, my research argues, teachers' unions occupy a contradictory class location -- agents of the welfare state and subjects of it, deeply structured by race

and gender. This contradictory position has important implications for the possibilities and limitations of their actions to create educational change.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation is born of social struggle. It owes its existence to the legacy of ordinary people's bravery, some of which I've been lucky enough to encounter both prior to and throughout graduate school. In particular, I thank my comrades and companions with whom I spent the winter of 2011 marching around the Wisconsin State Capitol building. The 2011 Wisconsin Uprising shook my world and sparked questions that this dissertation attempts to answer. I am grateful to all of the teachers I met along the way, and all those who have struggled before me in generations past. In the words of poet Roque Dalton, *"My veins don't end in me but in the unanimous blood of those who struggle for life."*

I am especially grateful to Michael Apple, a teacher, mentor and friend, who has been as much a dissertation adviser as a river captain, helping me navigate the restless currents of the academy and activism, poetry and politics. To be a student of Michael is not simply to learn to read the world in ever more political and nuanced dimensions, but to enter a tradition of thinkers and teachers who similarly see the struggle to name the world as a fundamental one. I receive these teachings as a treasured inheritance, and I welcome my responsibility to steward its movement with honor.

I am also especially grateful to Erica Turner, who has patiently and wisely shepherded me on this course. Erica's steady attention and careful listening has helped me find my footing time and time again. Erica, I affectionately quip, is as much dissertation advisor as an idea therapist. I ramble, she listens patiently, then asks kind but sharp questions that help me clarify my own thinking, and push me to see the situation with more depth and insight. As an advisor, Erica has imparted me with intellectual trust and encouragement that has truly been a gift to receive. Under Erica's mentorship, I have been free to ask questions that I found most pressing, read the literature that drove my curiosities, pursue research methodologies best suited to the questions that thrilled me. Erica

included me as an apprentice in research methods, and it's thanks to her guidance that I have any idea how to "do research." Her concerns for me have extended beyond my intellectual and professional development to include my overall well-being. She has been a support during the exhilarating and exhausting parts of this journey alike, and I feel tremendously lucky to have her guidance.

My journey has been greatly enriched by a wise and loving counsel of committee members. Kathryn Moeller's ability to combine theoretical insight with stirring empirical detail has been an inspiration for my own scholarship, and I'm incredibly grateful for her intellectual mentorship and warm friendship as I cut my path. Nancy Kendall encouraged me to take my own mind – and feelings – seriously, even (especially) as they ran against the grain, among the dearest invitations one can receive from a teacher and a friend. Simone Schweber has been a bright and early guiding star on my graduate school path. Her attention to the things that matter, from writing to personhood, is exemplary, and I feel honored to have received her care in both of these realms. Bill Reese first helped me discover the thrills of historical research. His sense of delight in the work of history is infectious, and his chuckling adage, "In the long run, we'll all be revised," will be a lifelong mantra.

Beyond my dissertation committee, I'm grateful for faculty mentorship and camaraderie from Jane Collins, Will Jones, Karma Chávez, Patrick Barrett, Erik Olin Wright, Barry Eidlin, Adam Nelson, Walter Stern, and Becky Tarlau. Thanks to John Rudolph for charitably agreeing to chair my dissertation defense, and also for sharing historical interpretations of the 1974 Hortonville strike. Marilyn Fearn and Thomas Tegart have helped me keep all the pieces together. MJ Gessler is truly the shadow chancellor of all important matters, and I have yet to find the problem she can't solve (it does not exist).

This research was supported by generous material and institutional support from the Avril S. Barr dissertation fellowship, the Morgridge dissertation fellowship, the United Association of Labor

Educator's "New Generations" award, the Labor Research Action Network research award, and the Albert Shanker Fellowship for Research in Education. I'm especially grateful for archival research support from the Walter Reuther archive's Dan Golodner, truly an angel of knowledge. Jane Collins, Michael Apple, Nancy Kendall and Erica Turner all generously allocated faculty research funds to support various phases of this research.

The true backbone of this dissertation has been the work of intrepid activists, organizers and educators in Milwaukee. I owe tremendous thanks to Bob Peterson for his very long legacy of organizing work; it is an honor to trace his footsteps. I'm also grateful to him for opening his personal archives and records to me, which have lent much more texture and detail to my project. Many thanks to Barbara Miner for her own pioneering work on Milwaukee, which helped me sketch out the parameters of my projects, as well as for indulging us aspirational historians. My project took on a special spark upon encountering the magnetic forces of Gail Hicks and Marva Herndon, affectionately known as the Snoop Sisters. Ms. Hicks and Ms. Herndon's rigor in research and relentless quest for justice is matched only by the joy and humor they bring to their work. Thanks to Larry Hoffman for his meticulous record keeping and scrupulous steering of Schools and Community United. I'm very grateful to the entire steering committee of Schools and Communities United, who generously and patiently welcomed me into their work. In MTEA, Kathy Lehsten graciously oriented me to the MTEA archive and assisted me with a number of requests during my research. I am indebted to MTEA leaders and organizers Amy Mizialko, Ingrid Walker-Henry, Lauren Baker, John Fleissner, Don Feilbach, Donelle Johnson, Mike Langyel, Jim and Jan Gibson, Chuck Howard, Bob Lehman and WEAC leaders Morris Andrews and Jermitt Krage. I also owe many thanks to previous scholars of Milwaukee, especially Jack Doherty, whose own dissertation records became a valuable set of resources for my work, especially his interview with Lauri Wynn, a critical MTEA and WEAC leader who had passed away long before I began my research.

Graduate school has gifted me with my most prized treasures: dear friends and trusted comrades. I feel incredibly lucky for the friendship and support of fellow travelers in the School of Education, including Sophia Friedson-Ridenour, Lauren Gatti, Liz Hauck, Fahima Ife, Andrew Knudsen, Lauren Lauter, Jason Lee, James Meadows, Paula McAvoy, Amato Nocera and Carrie Welsh. It is not an exaggeration to say I would not have entered graduate school were it not for the force of Apple group members, especially derria byrd, Ru Dawley-Carr, Kiel Harrel, Jon Iftikar, Sara Lam, Jorge Rodriguez, Beth Sondel, Katy Swalwell, and Quentin Wheeler-Bell. And I certainly wouldn't have stayed in graduate school if it didn't give me an opportunity to conspire with the TAA members, especially Michael Billeaux, Adrienne Pagac, Molly Noble, Jason Lee, Naomi R Williams, Charity Schmidt, Dan Suarez, Katie Zaman, Carl Sack, Taylan Acar and other members of the TAA's Radical Caucus. Christian Dewey watched the first flickers of this project come into focus, and I'm grateful to have spent time loving words and ideas together. Spring Greeney, Joe Sepe and Francis Eanes were the best companions to pass the miles with. In my final chapters of this path, Amy Zanoni and Lana Povitz have been among my dearest companions.

Writing is a solitary pursuit but it has been made much richer thanks to writing retreats with derria byrd, Beth Sondel and Lauren Gatti, and brilliant readers in Liz Hauck, Amy Zanoni, Lana Povitz, Quentin Wheeler-Bell, Michael Billeaux, Spring Greeney and Geneviève Dorais. Amy Zanoni provided the catalyst for several useful conference presentations on my findings; those productive connections are among the many gifts of her comradeship. Amy and Quentin in particular read draft after draft of nearly every single chapter; whatever clarity this work offers owes much to them.

As Michael Apple famously tells us, "We don't write dissertations, dissertations write us." Yet to allow oneself to be written by a project such as a dissertation demands much care, and I'm grateful for all the hands that have kept me safe on this journey, including Sandy Sulzer and Andrew

Schupp. Beth Binhammer has oriented me to the aims of truth and the expanses of the world more powerfully than any course of study, and I'm grateful for all of her teachings. The Dorais family has welcomed me lovingly into their family and made my Montréal life much brighter and warmer. Thanks especially to Louise Dorais for piloting many trips to and from the Pierre Elliot Trudeau airport and Louise and Jacques' graceful help negotiating life between two countries. *C'est une honneur de faire partie de votre famille.*

My family have been my biggest champions. My grandparents, though not physically present with me during this journey, have been with me every step of the way. Their legacies, from movement work to writing, have been among my strongest pulses; Nancy Jay's spirit, in particular, has been a constant shepherd. I owe my deepest thanks to Maria, a bird-understander, who has helped me learn words, and Zoe, my favorite teacher, who taught me to love books. Ted, a force of a brother, has been a gift to team Schirmer. Gabriella's light entered this world when we need it most. My parents have given me the most profound education I could imagine: to treat the world tenderly and with delight while we are here, to strive to leave it a better place upon our departure. My father, Joe Schirmer, has taught me to read carefully, run long, and sing whenever possible. My mother, Jane Schirmer, has taught me to rise early, pounce quickly, and listen fiercely. I am humbled to come into this world as their daughter.

Lastly, I thank Geneviève Dorais, who has been nothing short of a compass – all four winds and the rose. I'm grateful for every day as her *compañera*; may the road be long.

Preface
Finding the River of Fire

In the winter of 2011, Governor Scott Walker made national history by curtailing collective bargaining rights for public sector employees in Wisconsin – the first state in the nation to grant public workers’ union rights. Within days, thousands of Wisconsinites -- teachers, students, librarians, nurses, snowplow drivers – poured in to the capital’s streets and filled the Capitol’s building in protest. I was one of them. Born and raised in Wisconsin, my second semester of graduate school began by marching alongside my fellow graduate unionists and my elementary school teachers, my thesis advisor and my parents’ co-workers. Walker’s proposed law, now known as Act 10, dismantled the outline of society many of us took for granted: that the state worked to buffer ordinary people from being smashed by the tides of “the market,” that we had some meager say over our working lives, that public education was a public treasure. Although day to day, most working people knew the scales were tipped against them, this bill brazenly removed the fulcrum. The balance of forces slammed to the ground.

For nearly two weeks, we protested. In the dead of winter, we marched around the Capitol building, carrying signs that read things like “Scotty, if you can read this, thank a teacher” and “Remember this when you hit a pothole.”¹ We marched, we testified, we called in sick. We occupied. As long as people were registered to give public comment, the bill could not advance to the Republican-controlled Senate, where it was sure to be approved. Person after person, we signed up to speak. We would not leave the Capitol building until we had “killed the bill,” as the chants went –

¹ A fantastic record of Wisconsin’s protest signs and memento can be found at the Wisconsin Uprising Archive: www.wisconsinuprisingarchive.com.

or it killed us. For two weeks, Wisconsin road workers, farmers, and retirees built a small society in the marble halls of state government. Mutual aid stations, knitting circles, reading groups swirled into being like little constellations of a newly formed universe. One hand-written sign leaned against an ornate pillar inside the Capitol that read, “What time is breakfast and where is the laundry room?” A sympathetic state representative took to removing her kitten heels each morning as she entered her office in order to not disturb the child nap area that had taken over the corridor outside of her office. Lyric sheets of “Solidarity Forever” fluttered through halls like intermittent snow flurries. Boxes of pizza sent to us from supporters in Cairo, California, Canada, became our breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Thanks to the courage of activists within the Capitol and the solidarity that poured in from outside it – local marchers continually ringed the Capitol square, circling the block over and over, at nearly all hours of day and night – the Uprising continued. We could not, would not leave.

The collective anger and instantaneous mobilization of the protests took the nation by surprise. For some, it offered inspiration. The Capitol rotunda ringed in red-shirted humans (the Badger State’s color scheme conveniently evocative of revolution) became a protest icon. Its images and architecture were taken up elsewhere around the country in the coming years, from the mass protest of Ohio’s copy-cat union-busting bill mere weeks later, to the Chicago teachers’ strike the next fall. The Wisconsin Uprising was a small verse in the songs of unrest that rang across the globe that year. Three weeks before Walker unveiled Act 10, thousands across Egypt protested the brutal regime of President Mubarak. Under pressure from protestors, Mubarak resigned on February 11th, just three days before Walker would introduce Act 10. In Madison the next week, bundled in hats and scarves, people waddled around the Capitol square, mitten-hands holding signs that read, “Walk like an Egyptian.”

But the Wisconsin Uprising also became a cautionary tale. The bill we protested ultimately passed in June of that year, enabling draconian budget cuts to public education and public services.

Walker survived both a recall attempt and a re-election. His legislation emboldened conservative movements nationwide. In the ensuing months, some of us took to introducing ourselves to activists from other states by saying, I'm from Wisconsin – I'm from your future.² When the Supreme Court passed the *Janus* decision in 2018, what started as a Wisconsin problem became a national problem.³ What was going on?

It was a question many of us wondered. We flapped through the weeks after Act 10 like a cage of canaries, bereft of strategy to navigate the encroaching darkness beyond our frightened gasping. The choking was real. The budget cuts Act 10 enabled would cause public schools to close down, people to suffer job losses, families to lose health insurance, as the state dialed back public funding to historic lows. Private sector unions knew they were bargaining under their last breaths, only a matter of time until right to work laws would shackle their own powers. At the same time, bargaining rights for police remained intact; funding for state corrections grew. The carceral state waxed and the welfare state waned. I stared at my hands during family dinners as my father, a state worker of 30 years, made plans to take a job at the local hardware store. Funding for his department, the state's childhood lead-poisoning prevention program, had been cut. I lay awake at night wondering if the union-fought tuition remission and health insurance that made graduate school possible for me would be redacted, forcing my path in other directions. Fear and fatigue hollowed us all.

² For example: Bob Peterson, "Transforming Teacher Unions in a Post-Janus World," *Rethinking Schools* 32, no. 4 (2018).

³ The 2018 Supreme Court ruling, *Janus vs. AFSCME*, ruled that public-sector employees do not have to pay dues to their union. The removal of what's called "fair-share dues" was also one of the main thrusts of Wisconsin's Act 10. Under "fair-share" dues, all employees pay union dues, whether or not they choose to be members of the association. Because unions secure protections for all workers, regardless of association membership, fair share dues constituted a nearly 40-year piece of labor legislation aimed at addressing the free-rider dilemma of collective action, that discourages any individual to participate in a collective action. In effect, the *Janus* ruling made the colloquialism, "Why pay for the cow when you can get the milk for free?" the labor law of the land. The ruling aimed to radically shift the financial base of unions by prohibiting automatic dues deduction and, in turn, the political influence of unions, a traditionally Democratic power base.

And yet, fear and fatigue are, in the crudest, coarsest sense, the basis of politics. They can reveal what needs are most important to us. Politics interpret and translate these private pulsations into a public program. Fear can clarify the deep yearnings of what people want and need; fatigue can prioritize them. Fear can summon courage. It can draw people previously disunited to stand together. But fear can also narrow politics. It can drive people apart. In times of terror, people will ask monsters to protect them. That winter in Wisconsin, fear narrowed the political horizon. On the right, Walker tapped into working people's real sense of economic vulnerability by slashing protections for those who had them. Why should hard-working taxpayers, many struggling to get by in the sputtering post-2008 economy, pay for teachers' three months of vacation time and health insurance, goaded Act 10. A scarcity known intimately by many cut open a jagged politics of resentment.⁴

But fear also narrowed politics for forces on the left. Nearly overnight, the expansive politics of resistance that roused people by thousands to protest the bill disappeared. Politicians and union leaders alike shifted the focus from protecting and expanding the welfare state to recalling the governor. Wisconsin's Democratic Party leadership, a state-sized canary, screeched one shrill note to warn the mine: Recall, recall, recall. In doing so, liberal politicians inadvertently not only narrowed the time horizon of politics to the next election cycle and no further – they also winnowed its demands. They offered little explanations for the real problems faced by ordinary people – insufficient wages, expensive insurance, unaffordable education – beyond name-calling the Republican administration. Fear blustered behind the liberal refrain that the stakes were high, higher than ever before. There is no time to quibble, we were told, anybody is better than the despot, we

⁴ Katherine Cramer, *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness and the Rise of Scott Walker* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

must remove the despot. The anger and the creativity and solidarity of the Uprising was nowhere to be found among the Democratic party leadership.

All the while, society's infrastructure continued to fragment. In addition to union rights, Walker and his administration slashed other social protections. They cut massive funds from public health care spending, everything from Medicaid and Medicare, to AIDS/HIV resource centers, community and mental health clinics, lead poisoning and exposure services, dental care for rural parts of state.⁵ Schools, especially high poverty schools, lost funding. Meanwhile, the GOP expanded state aid for private vouchers. They enacted major tax breaks for corporations, including an exclusion loophole for capital gains tax. And they increased the carceral state, the state's license to police and punish. Republican representatives proposed a bill that would require law enforcement officers to ask for proof of citizenship status for all minor civil violations; a parking ticket could result in deportation. Undocumented students were no longer eligible for in-state tuition at public colleges or food assistance. Walker repealed early prison release and allocated \$1 million in raises for state prosecutors.

While the thrust of Wisconsin's labor uprising had focused on the loss of middle-class job protections, it drew few connections with the bill's impacts on the people who depended upon those services, a disproportionate number of which were people of color and living in poverty. In fact, in the days after Act 10, many union leaders said they would agree to the budget cuts if Walker would just give them their collective bargaining rights back.⁶ As the attacks on the public sector and public institutions of the state continued to grow, the leaders of the supposed fight-back, from union officials to Democratic leadership, offered no program to coordinate a collective defense. They did not attempt to fashion a new political bloc out of the collective suffering, and seemed only distantly

⁵ "Comparative Analysis of 2011-13 Biennial Budget Bill," 2011.

⁶ Jason Stein, Patrick Marley, and Lee Bergquist, "Walker's Budget Cuts Would Touch Most Wisconsinites," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, March 1, 2011. "Comparative Analysis of 2011-13 Biennial Budget Bill."

aware of the concerns and needs of ordinary people. Things will get better if we can just vote these guys out, they continued to bleat.

The tendency in politics to re-interpret movement demands as narrow electoral strategies is not new. Rosa Luxemburg cursed it, Antonio Gramsci warned against it, Stuart Hall decried it. “That bureaucratic conception of politics has nothing to do with the mobilization of a variety of popular forces,” Hall rebuked. “It doesn’t have any conception of how people become empowered by doing something: first of all about their immediate troubles; then, the power expands their political capacities and ambitions, so that they begin to think again about what it might be like to rule the world.”⁷ The project of politics was to help people re-imagine the world they want to live in, to understand the power they have to bring it closer. For a few flickering moments in the 2011 Uprising, we had that. We saw a brave, strange new world in which ordinary people did not accept the forces weighing upon us. We stood up, ready to build something else. It was fleeting, and it didn’t go far enough. But it was something.

In our union of graduate employees, the Teaching Assistants’ Association (TAA), we weren’t ready to let it go. We debated what to do. Just how much power did we have? How high were the stakes? New to graduate school and the union, I watched in awe as a gang of older, female grad students negotiated these questions against the swaggering bravado of bros who had run the union for years. The Capitol occupation, it seemed, had warmed these gentlemen’s’ elbows and whet their appetites. In the aftermath of Act 10, they sought to align our scrappy little union with the state’s liberal political leadership’s recall mission, perhaps imagining future career opportunities for themselves to emerge in the process. Members of the Ladies Auxiliary, as the older group of female

⁷ Stuart Hall, “Gramsci and Us,” in *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and Crisis of the Left* (New York: Verso, 1988), 171.

grad unionists called themselves, did not agree with this strategy. They contested not only the lack of democratic decision making, but the narrowing of politics to electoral opportunism. The people in this room matter, they said over and over, standing proudly, talking fiercely. How we talk to each other matters, they asserted, when the bros rolled their eyes. And so does articulating the vision of politics and society we want. It is not enough to be against Walker, we must speak up for what we stand for. They were unapologetically beautiful, neither shy to wear nice clothes to meetings nor to show up in sweatshirts and jeans. When mansplainers (men who patronizingly overexplain information to women) or mack-tivists (men who hit on women in the course of mutual activism) attempted to derail them, they flicked them aside. These women kept their own notes during meetings, took charge of the union's finances, crafted new rules of order, built alliances with other labor federations. At the first Ladies Auxiliary meeting I was invited to, I sipped a gin gimlet and listened spellbound to every single word, rapt in equal measure by their brilliance and their confidence. I felt a new version of myself filling out.

I went to more and more union meetings. My then-boyfriend would sigh and hang up when I'd call to tell him not to wait for dinner, I'd be home late again. After the meetings, a group of us, many members of the Ladies Auxiliary but more, too, a dozen or so, different genders, ages, races, academic departments, would flock to the dingy beerhall at the university's student center that smelled of old beer and stale popcorn. We fashioned ourselves the Radical Caucus. We contested the union leadership's political vision to collapse the union's politics exclusively into the liberal program of recall. The union's Political Education Committee, we quipped, had become the Political Endorsement Committee. Endorsing politicians had constituted the program of political action for the union – and the candidates frankly weren't that good. Most had not even pledged to defend and re-instate the most basic and uncontroversial of workers' rights – to collectively bargain. Must we

endorse a block of cheese simply because it wasn't Walker? We sought to restore our union's power, not to procure crutches as we hobbled off a cliff.

Why should we go along with the conditions of our undoing? This question led Gramsci to articulate the mechanisms of hegemony. More verb than noun, Gramsci theorized, hegemony is the struggle to arrange the pieces of the world -- the ideas and the images and the language and the culture and the politics and the music and the sexual norms -- such that they affirm existing power relations. Not a static or once-and-for-all times power bloc, hegemony is continually negotiated and re-arranged. To maintain dominance, the ruling class must compel its subjects to consent to its rules. Power has a hook *and* a latch. Dominance may be less a portrait of a pyramid, in which gravity sustains the elite few to bear over the powerless many, than a lean-to structure, in which the dominators and dominated depend on each other to sustain the planks of power, albeit on slanted ground. How could we pull out the planks?

Our radical caucus's first strategy, we decided, was to attempt to disarticulate our union's power from the state apparatus that had just spurned it. In the spring of 2011, we proposed a resolution to withhold endorsing any gubernatorial candidate unless they met a set of a priori baseline criteria -- primarily their commitment to rescinding Act 10 and restoring basic labor rights. Although it seems an uncontroversial, even basic demand, it presented a major break from the dominant union and Democratic strategy, which sought to guide liberals' feeble tendrils towards electoral poles, any really, for support. We proposed that our union withhold our political power to consent to a political program, in the event that leadership didn't articulate a program that would express a commitment to our affirming our right, as a union, to exist. We saw the whole apparatus of the welfare state at stake, and bristled at the union leadership's willingness to sacrifice political principles for short-term outcomes.

Really what we wanted was a way towards more artful, more expansive politics of the possible. We hunched over those tables that winter, the lighting dim and greasy, and plotted how to broaden our demands and deepen our power. Our eyes flashed, and the electricity of working on something bigger than us all caught fire in us together. The despair of that winter broke into something bright. As spring trickled in, I lay awake at night, this time tripping with excitement, pondering the wording in the document we were drafting to bring members to our cause, the press release we needed to issue. We felt our power flickering, knew something was stronger because we were here. Years later, when I read Vivian Gornick's account of the affective dimension of political life of Communist party members, I found the words for that process: "You were, if you were there, in the presence of one of the most amazing of humanizing processes: that process whereby one emerges by merging."⁸ We were coming into being.

It was intoxicating, collectively emerging. On the one hand it felt limitless, our political imagination expanding. On the other hand, I became acutely aware of the hard, compacted limits that bound our horizons. I tapped my feet impatiently during meetings when fellow unionists would opine about the need to defeat Walker by any means necessary, no matter the principles we would have to sacrifice en route. I had uncovered, in Stuart Hall's phrase, the river of fire, that boundary between reformism and a will to socialism. "When that gulf opens, the river of fire dissects people's lives and they glimpse the possibility not of having the existing set of social relations improved a bit, but of beginning the long, dangerous, historical process of reconstructing society according to a different model, a different logic and principle that do not come 'spontaneously.' It does not drop like manna from the skies. It has to be made, constructed and struggled over."⁹ It wasn't that we thought we had the answers; it was that we were willing to struggle to find them. Tall with

⁸ Vivian Gornick, *The Romance of American Communism* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977), 9.

⁹ Stuart Hall, "The Battle for Socialist Ideas in the 1980s," in *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and Crisis of the Left* (New York: Verso, 1990), 184.

conviction, we believed things could be made other than what they were, that we had power to rearrange the forces, that new openings could be made. We went to work.

The meeting to vote on the resolution to adopt political criteria as the basis for electoral endorsements drew a crowd, one of the largest and most tense union meetings I had ever attended. People crammed into the aisles, stood at the back of the room, people I had never seen at prior union meetings, or back to school happy hours or end of semester celebrations. As more and more people raised their hands to speak, the traditional meeting facilitation tool of a speaker's list became democracy's scroll. People, it seemed, were not only desperate to *do* something, they were desperate to *deliberate* it. Finally, a union meeting that collectively assessed the balance of forces, sought to understand our power to engage and influence! Though our caucus's resolution to adopt political criteria prior to endorsing politicians did not pass, neither did the actual endorsements of gubernatorial challengers to Walker. If a bold opening had not been made, neither had space been closed down.

The Radical Caucus took it as a win. Empowered, we decided to amp up our strategy, to run more members for executive board positions and officers. We wanted to change the terms of the debate of our union. When two radical caucus members took over the co-presidency and many more of us joined the executive board, we made critical decisions. We decided not to re-certify our union. Act 10 imposed recertification requirements that meant annually each union must receive authorization votes from 51 percent of all members of the bargaining unit; not voting counted as a vote against the union. If the onerous task of recertifying was completed successfully, the union was only able to bargain over wages capped at inflation. Not benefits. Not working conditions. Not solidarity demands. Our union decided it was not worth our effort to gain such narrow opportunity. We, thus, became a union sans state recognition. Those first few months, we gawked and stumbled as we tried to find our bearings in this new landscape. Our task, we quickly realized, was to form a

union recognizable first and foremost to ourselves. Under new leadership, we put organizing at the center of our work. Every small grievance, every new university policy became the terrain of struggle, a moment to assert the value of our labor and the importance of our education. We moved into a war of position.

In our more frustrated moments, when yet another member told us she just couldn't afford the union dues, or few people seemed to care that the university was experimenting with performance pay for all of its workers, from its custodial employees to its graduate researchers to its tenured faculty, we called ourselves captains of the sinking ships. But in our sager moments, we held steady amidst our defeats. We knew there was good work to be done, even if it would not produce short-term victories. We re-acquainted ourselves with the power our union had, absent bargaining: to build solidarity with others, to deepen our political understandings, to prioritize collective action. I stepped up to serve as steward's council co-chair, then co-president. One executive board member silk screened a batch of T-shirts with a craggily image of Sisyphus pushing a rock up a hill. We joined other social movement groups around town, marched with Black Lives Matter and immigrants' right groups. We became disciples of the gospel of Friday Night Light's Coach Taylor, muttering to ourselves as we taped butcher paper organizing plans to the walls, "Success is not the goal; it's the by-product of a good method." We led a series of organizing workshops titled, "*Clear eyes. Full hearts. Can't lose.*" We frequently hyperlinked Taylor Swift's "Shake It Off" in our email updates to our membership, when the university administration unrolled yet another policy threatening graduate labor protections. When Walker signed Right to Work legislation into law in 2015, essentially extending Act 10 to the private sector, we crammed into the Capitol, our backpack-bearing and bespectacled members shoulder-to-shoulder with burly building trades workers. Minutes before the bill was passed, my fellow co-president and I – eyes bright, palms sweaty, jubilant and

terrified all at once – started to chant, the packed rotunda joining in, *I believe that we will win, I believe that we will win, I believe that we will win.*

The truth was we wouldn't win, not that round, at least. But we were after something else. If we measure unions' successes exclusively in terms of the short-term outcomes wrought by its mobilizations – did they get the goods? Did they defeat the naughty politicians? – we dangerously narrow the scope and power of union activity. Workers' collective power does not only come from these wins; it also comes from the spaces created and nurtured for future movements to take root, for future activists to form. This dimension of workers' power is slower to build and more difficult to detect. But it is arguably the more vital project of a union: it relies on workers' changing sense of what can become possible, the solidarities sown and sustained by each struggle to bring faraway aspirations into reach. Narrowly-defined successes foreclose future possibilities as potently as a flopped mobilization can be used to cultivate new horizons. We may not always win but we can fail better.

Leading this work is noble, but it is also hard. We kept our spirits up day to day, but we were fighting up hill, up mountains, actually. By 2015, if we didn't feel entirely defeated, the people around us did. And that became a force of its own. Faculty hemorrhaged from UW Madison, jumping ship as fast as they could in search of more secure jobs. A number of our most vital activists either dropped out of graduate school, reading the writing on the wall, or hunkered down deep in its ranks, trying to professionally create a path out for themselves. Pessimism became a force of its own we had to contend with. "What the emphasis on the 'temporary' character of obstacles to political class consciousness tended to obscure," explains Mike Davis, "was precisely the cumulative impact of the series of historic defeats suffered by the American working class."¹⁰ Each defeat infused a successive layer of despair and disempowerment in our ranks.

¹⁰ Mike Davis, "Why the US Working Class Is Different," *New Left Review*, 1980, 3–44.

This subjective sense of defeat was, of course, objective. The right *was* growing in power. Analyses of the rising power of the political and economic elite, the rise of the hard right, became increasingly part of the mainstream consciousness.¹¹ Walker's electoral victories came into focus as the product of right-wing networks, especially the Koch brothers, who spent more than \$5.6 million on Walker's campaigns between 2010 and 2014.¹² We learned with more detail how right-wing philanthropies like Wisconsin's Bradley Foundation funded advocacy and litigation groups to enact their agenda of free-market capitalism, unfettered by workers' protections. We consumed this news as the looming sense of the behemoth, every news article more or less as useful as a data point of an unfolding infinity. How could we win? A growing awareness of the right's power contributed to a growing sense of disempowerment on the left. The right turned every space into a political contest, from professorships to school board elections. Working people felt powerless to fight, much less win, this war of position. With a failed recall, and then a re-elected Walker, Wisconsin liberals settled in to a time of hopelessness, powerless to change things until the next election cycle.

But were we actually powerless or had we been disempowered? And what was the difference anyway? I cringed every time I skimmed yet another report documenting the depth and breadth of conservative funding poured into the state, not so much for the reports' findings, but from my sense of how people would interpret them, would wave the document around, shrieking about the monsters that rendered us victims. These reports, I began to believe, framed our powerlessness; they did not clarify our power. We had our breath knocked out. But we were not bereft of individual and collective capacity.

The difference between "powerlessness" and "disempowered" is not a matter of degrees of Pollyanna-optimism, but rather diverging conceptions of power. Liberal "powerlessness," labor

¹¹ Jane Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires behind the Rise of the Radical Right* (New York: Doubleday, 2016).

¹² "How the Koch Brothers Helped Scott Walker," 2015.

theorist Jane McAlevey reminds us, belies a top-down theory of power, in which political and financial elites control the mechanisms of change, positioning the rest of us as its dependent victims.¹³ But this configuration not only sinfully denies the agency of the oppressed; it also misapprehends the structure of hegemonic dominance. We had been clobbered of our legal protections and siphoned of our resources, but we had not entirely lost our power. After all, the powers that be still needed us to work. There were more of us being harmed by the austerity government and carceral state than there were people profiting from it. Plus, we had convictions, believed that we would be stronger if we tried to survive together, rather than face the machine alone. Our task was to figure out where and how we were leaning into the structures of power, how we could walk away and let the planks topple behind us. But this task required an even more fundamental one: not just to figure out how to use our power, but to remember that we have it in the first place. Most of the time working people know we don't have power; now we had to convince ourselves that we did.¹⁴

But simply wanting to organize people to recognize our collective power is not the same thing as doing it. And doing it is not the same as doing it well. The more we grinded, the more I feared we were stripping the screws, torquing an angle so impossible that we would exhaust our feeble labor and ensure the parts could never be used again. Our union hemorrhaged members. More budget cuts put vital public services and institutions on life support. We were losing ground and fast. We looked for directions. There were none.

I found myself wanting an explanation of the weaknesses the labor movement had inherited, a history of the contradictions upon which it had formed its power. How had the public sector

¹³ I am grateful to Beth Binhammer for providing me with insight on the difference between “powerlessness” and “disempowered.” McAlevey’s writing further clarified it for me. Jane McAlevey, *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁴ This formulation is indebted to Alyssa Battistoni’s brilliant framing. See Alyssa Battistoni, “Spadework: On Political Organizing,” *N+1*, 2019.

become so vulnerable to the forces mobilizing to digest it? More and more, I wanted to know not simply the path forward, but to better understand how the public sector and its workers' path had become so stony and narrow. What resources were available to us to change it? These questions launched me into my dissertation research. The following account is my earnest attempt to sketch out, in Stuart Hall's terms, "the history of the present."

Methodological note

As the above account indicates, I do not approach this work with the pretense of objectivity. I am guided by deep personal, political and intellectual commitments to understanding labor, education and social movements and how they can be made stronger. For this research, the best tools I found to address these questions were historical and qualitative research methods. I examined the archives, I talked to as many people as I could, I observed a union in transformation, attempting to become something else.

In many instances, my own participation in Wisconsin's recent labor struggle granted me access to these records, people and spaces. A former TAA member connected me with an archivist at Wayne State's Reuther archive. Friends introduced me to people to talk with. One of my early trips working in the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association's (MTEA) archives, a woman entered the basement archives and studied me with narrow eyes. I hadn't seen anyone for hours and was alarmed by her perfectly reasonable and necessary inquiry, "What are you doing here?" I was, after all, a random stranger pilfering intimate and essential records, some of which were more than 100 years old. When I told her my advisors' names and my own union membership affiliations, she visibly relaxed, I suspect relieved that I was neither a conservative media member nor an auditor. When I poured through pages of early editions of *Rethinking Schools*, I was taken back to my childhood when it would be regularly delivered to my parents' home. I chuckled to realize some of

the back issues I had obtained from the *Rethinking School's* office were addressed to close family friends. Intimacy, in some cases, formed easily. Members of the union trusted me, and saw me as an ally in their broad aims. Some interviews were conducted at participants' homes, where I found myself a welcome guest, invited to stay for meals or return later. I, in turn, saw myself as an accomplice. I aided their efforts when possible, sharing research or resources as much as I could.

At other times, however, my own experiences and beliefs clouded my ability to see clearly the participants in their own terms. When I went back to listen to my early interviews, I was mortified to realize I had asked questions that were driving at confusion about *my* experiences more than attempting to understand the participant's, hearing for the first time the irritation lacing responses. At times, my independent political assessments and experiences meant I disagreed with my participants' interpretations and, occasionally, chronologies.

I also found myself subtly negotiating the identity facets of political differences. When I talked to conservative folks, I was less inclined to interview in jeans or to mention my own organizing background – though I certainly did not hide it and when it came up, it provided interesting banter. When I ran into a friend on my way to interview the head of a Bradley-funded law firm, she remarked, “Well, aren't you looking Republican today.” I spoke differently, too, learning the words that divided the political landscape, “education reform” not “education privatization”; “choice schools” not “voucher schools.”¹⁵ Some engaged me on social media. One watched a Youtube video of me giving a talk at a labor conference about Wisconsin's organizing more than five years prior to our contact, and immediately emailed me with a list of counterpoints.

¹⁵ When I emailed a community leader active in implementing Milwaukee's voucher program requesting to interview him, he responded by telling me he was off-put by my use of the word “privatization” to in my introduction email describing my project. As he explained, the word “privatization” pejoratively cast the “reform” project he was involved in. Despite many attempts, I was unfortunately never able to set up an interview with him.

However, the biggest methodological obstacle I faced was neither the struggle to work across disciplines – to connect historical narratives to contemporary ones – nor to reconcile my own identity with those of my research subjects. My biggest challenge was a story-telling problem. How does one narrate the story of forces in relation to each other, when interactions are flimsy, fleeting or simply fail to transpire? For much of its history, the teachers' union I studied had little to no relationships with broader political or social movements. When Milwaukee's municipal workers led the fight for collective bargaining and union rights, Milwaukee teachers were nowhere to be found. When capital moved out of Milwaukee, leaving many of its residents jobless, the teachers' union did not address de-industrialization either in its abstract or its particulars. These gaps, the places where the union *did not* act, proved to be vital. They were absent presences.¹⁶ The work of charting omissions and silence – the search for the hush of paths-not taken – became my task.¹⁷

My theoretical and political commitments embolden me to do this work and, perhaps hubristically, to view it as necessary. How we choose to negotiate our agency is often limited and constrained, but it exists. If we take seriously our power to collectively create change – and I believe we must – we must also take seriously our agency to block solidarity. “Marxism with no guarantees,” counsels Stuart Hall. History, like the future, is the opposite of inevitable. I wanted to see how. I forced my attention to how movements have *limited* possibilities – in addition to centering the histories they have made possible. I approached this story not with the intention of flogging the past, much less to blame workers for capitalism's oppressions. Rather, I wanted to search for the choices that presaged the seemingly-inevitable unfolding of events. I wanted to pull out the planks

¹⁶ I am indebted to Michael Apple for my understanding of “absent presences.” (And more.) See, for example: Michael W. Apple, “The Absent Presence of Race in Educational Reform,” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 2, no. 1 (1999): 9–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332990020102>.

¹⁷ Or, in the words of poet Ilya Kaminsky, “The deaf don't believe in silence. Silence is the invention of the hearing.” Ilya Kaminsky, *Deaf Republic: Poems* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2019).

of the structures of dominance, to lay something anew, readying a path for future movements to follow.

In the dissertation that follows, I trace the political evolution of Wisconsin's first and largest teachers' union local, the Milwaukee teachers' union, from its initial formation to its contemporary re-formation. By combing through the union's past record as well as observing its contemporary manifestation, I sought to examine the interests, identities and conjunctures that sustained a vision for a union. Could those identities, that vision, become otherwise? If so, how?

Chapter One: Introduction

“I would do without theory if I could! The problem is I cannot. You cannot. Because the world presents itself in the chaos of appearances, and the only way in which one can understand, break down, analyze, grasp, in order to do something about the present conjuncture that confronts one, is to break in to that series of congealed and opaque appearances with the only tools you have: concepts, ideas and thoughts. To break into it and to come back to the surface of a situation or conjuncture one is trying to explain, having made ‘the detour through theory.’”

- Stuart Hall, “Epilogue: Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life,” p. 279.

In 2011, as the Great Recession began to hit public coffers, Wisconsin governor Scott Walker addressed a purported budget crisis by attacking public workers. Walker’s signature bill, Act 10, struck down public-sector unions’ ability to automatically collect dues and to bargain over anything but wages capped at inflation. Teachers could no longer negotiate class sizes. Nurses were forced to accept mandatory overtime. Unions lost money and members. Similar anti-union legislation quickly spread across other states. These state-level offensives culminated in a national policy shift in the summer of 2018, when the Supreme Court’s *Janus* ruling made it illegal for public-sector unions to automatically gather dues from employees. Critics wrung their hands and pronounced it a nail in the coffin for public unions. What started as a Wisconsin union problem had now become a national one. And yet. Today, teachers’ militancy sweeps the nation. Waves of red surge across Oklahoma, Arizona, Colorado. Rainy Los Angeles bursts with striking, joyful teachers. Chicago charter teacher unionists lace their arms against the racist project of education privatization. Amidst this burgeoning resistance, Wisconsin unionists appear to droop, the concussed victims of a brutal first round. This contradictory landscape raises an open question: Are today’s unions the victorious challengers of late capitalism, or among its many victims?

In the following chapters, I take up this question, examining the role of the teachers’ unions in the shifting political economy of education. I look to Milwaukee, Wisconsin’s largest and oldest teachers’ union local, to understand both how teachers’ unions became the target of conservative movements, and also how they have become key leaders in struggles to resist conservative

mobilizations. As “ground zero” for recent conservative attacks on public institutions and workers, Wisconsin, especially Milwaukee, provides an important focal point to study changes in the political economy. In 1990, conservative groups and Black activists in Milwaukee pioneered the first school voucher programs; today Milwaukee operates the nation’s largest and oldest school voucher program. Two decades later, in 2011, conservative politicians in Wisconsin led an offensive on public sector labor in the state, which other states quickly followed suit. Yet, Wisconsin has also provided an important focal point for progressive movements. In 1959, it became the first state to legally allow public sector workers to unionize. In the 1990s, teacher activists in the Milwaukee teachers’ union were among the first teacher unionists to lead a national call for “social justice teachers’ unionism.” While Wisconsin’s teacher unions may not spark as vividly as other teacher union’s today, such as the Chicago or Los Angeles teachers’ unions, looking to Wisconsin and Milwaukee provide a prototype of both the extraordinary and the common political struggles of teachers’ unions. In this regard, this dissertation suggests the insights gleaned from the Milwaukee teachers’ unions come less from its success in any particular moment, but from its longevity. Tracing its evolution over time offers resources to better understand the shifting political economy of education and movements therein.

This dissertation contributes to the growing body of scholarship that examines the political economy of education. This scholarship considers how broader political and economic arrangements that emerge outside of schools deeply influence education. My work expands on this literature in two ways. First, it brings to focus *the role of labor* – specifically teachers’ unions – to understand the political economy of education, a surprisingly overlooked topic in the field of political economy of education. And, second, I look *historically* at the political economy of education in order to better understand contemporary changes within and around teachers’ unions. I draw

attention to the role of teachers' unions as both determined by the political economy and capable of determining it. They are both subjects of the political economy and agents capable of changing it.

At its broadest, this dissertation builds from the observation that teachers' unions are not the organizers of the political economy – they are its *re*-organizers. Capital and the state first and foremost organize the social and economic relations which structure education. Teachers' unions, like all unions, *re*-organize people, at times to work within those structures, at times to push against them. Unions re-organize workers by enabling workers to form associations; through associations workers are able to partially compensate for the power advantage possessed by capital and, in the case of public sector unions, the state.¹⁸ Whereas private sector unions typically organize within and against labor markets, public sector unions operate on a different terrain. As sociologist Paul Johnston notes, public sector unions are constrained to frame their demands as “public needs.” While private sector unions can exert pressure on a single firm, public sector unions must present their claims more broadly, as both legitimate and administrable, and aligned with other groups' needs. Public sector union bargaining efforts constitute a political debate about public policy.¹⁹ For these reasons, Johnston dubs public sector unions “the quintessential state-making movement.” As public sector unions, in other words, teachers' unions work to re-organize not only workers themselves, but also the boundaries of the state.

¹⁸ The notion of unions as secondary organizers builds from Claus Offe and Helmut Wessenthal, “Two Logics of Collective Action: Theoretical Notes on Social Class and Organizational Form,” in *Political Power and Social Theory*, ed. Maurice Zeitlin (JAI Press, 1980), 67–116. Offe and Wessenthal distinguish between “living labor” power, owned by workers and sold to capitalists, and “dead labor”, or past labor congealed into capital goods. Offe and Wessenthal note that while capitalists can add one unit of capital (money) to another to integrate, amass and liquify resources, the same cannot be done with workers, who are atomized and divided by competition and circumstance. “At best,” Offe and Wessenthal write, “workers can associate in order to partly compensate for the power advantage that capital derives from the liquidity of ‘dead’ labor.” (p. 178).

¹⁹ Paul Johnston, *Success While Others Fail: Social Movement Unionism and the Public Workplace* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1994), 11–14.

Conceptualizing teachers' unions as re-organizers draws to light the question of their relative autonomy.²⁰ While teachers' union have autonomous power to make demands of capital and the state and collectively organize in pursuit of those demands, their efforts are relative. That is, teachers' unions are constrained by the counter-powers first exerted by capital and the state. Teachers' unions do not have the absolute power to determine either how resources get distributed to schools. As re-organizers, they must make material demands on capital and the state to ensure that resources get distributed to schools, both to remunerate the work of teaching and to provide adequate conditions of learning and community formation. Teachers' unions can also use their economic and political power to elect politicians, in attempt to counterbalance the influence of corporations on education agendas. These material demands reflect the instrumental orientation of unions: unions procure pecuniary gains. This orientation can be interpreted narrowly – for example, as teachers' unions exclusively bargain over the wages and benefits of their members, at times to the detriment of other community groups.²¹ Or it can be interpreted broadly, for example, when teachers' unions demand more green spaces in cities, health care access for all, or immigrants' rights' protections.²²

This relates to the second capacity of teachers' unions as re-organizers. Teachers' union power comes not just from the material demands they win for schools, but the political horizons they work to define. Teachers' unions assert ideological demands against the constant pressures of

²⁰ Michael W. Apple, "Does Education Have Independent Power? Bernstein and the Question of Relative Autonomy," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 23, no. April 2015 (2002): 607–16, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142569022000038459>.

²¹ As Francis Fox Piven remarked after vicious strike between teachers' and Black community control activists in New York, "Organized public employees have become a powerful force shaping the policies of municipal agencies, but the policies that suit employees often run counter to "ghetto" interests. We may be entering another phase in the long and tragic history of antagonism between the Black poor and the white working class in America." In Frances Fox Piven, "Militant Civil Servants in New York City," *Trans-Action* 7, no. 1 (1969): 24–28.

²² This strategy was recently popularized by the 2012 Chicago Teachers' Strike and the 2019 Los Angeles teachers' strike, and is often referred to as "bargaining for the common good." Joseph A McCartin, "Bargaining for the Common Good," *Dissent* 63, no. 2 (2016): 128–35; Marilyn Sneiderman and Secky Fascione, "Going on Offense during Challenging Times," *New Labor Forum* 1, no. January (2018): 54–62, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1095796017745036>.

both capital and the state to narrow the project of education and the public good towards the needs of capital accumulation, and the pernicious social divisions therein, in which race, class, nationality and gender overdetermine one's educational outcomes and social position.

This dimension of teachers' unions' power can be thought of as the "*how*" of teachers' unions. As a potential site of democratic deliberation, teachers' unions have the capacity to expand teachers' political horizons and widen the boundaries of democracy.²³ Through educational trainings and discussions, teachers' unions can identify the ways existing institutions and social systems alienate, disenfranchise and exploit people on people. They can lead discussions, for example, about how increased policing in schools causes harms for students.²⁴ These discussions can help educators and communities identify desirable alternatives, bringing into focus the big picture and aspirational dreams for society. Of course, this is to say nothing of the tactics of collective action and democratic decision making available to unions, some of them uniquely so, such as a strikes or work-slow downs.²⁵ These actions, coupled with teachers' unions connections with communities, can help unions build solidarity and critical power.

Of course, the democratic capacity of teachers' unions hardly necessitates that teachers' unions will reframe political problems in democratic, much less transformative, ways. Quite the

²³ My depiction of the tasks of teachers' unions build from Erik Olin Wright's assessment of the tasks of emancipatory social science. Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (New York: Verso, 2010), 10–29. For more on the role of associations as a means to develop democratic practices and habits, see Mark E. Warren, *Democracy and Association* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

²⁴ For studies of contemporary examples of teachers' unions developing as counterhegemonic and political education spaces, see: Rhinnanon. Maton, "WE Learn Together: Philadelphia Educators Putting Social Justice Unionism Principles into Practice," *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor* 26 (2016): 5–19; P. Gutstein, E. & Lipman, "The Rebirth of the Chicago Teachers Union and Possibilities for a Counterhegemonic Education Movement," *Monthly Review* 65, no. 2 (2013): 1–12; Chloe Asselin, "Tensions, Dilemmas, and Radical Possibility in Democratizing Teacher Unions: Stories of Two Social Justice Caucuses in New York City and Philadelphia" (2019); Peter Brogan, "Getting to the CORE of the Chicago Teachers' Union Transformation," *Studies in Social Justice* 8, no. 2 (2014): 145–64. Maton, R. (2018). From neoliberalism to structural racism: Problem framing in a teacher-led activist organization. *Curriculum Inquiry*. Stark, L. W. & Maton, R. (2018). Teacher radicalization and school closures in the United States. In E. M. Duncan (Ed.), *Losing Schools: Race, Community, and School Closures in American Cities*. Information Age Publishing.

²⁵ Judith Stepan-Norris, "The Making of Union Democracy," *Social Forces* 76, no. 2 (1997): 475–510; Micah Uetricht and Barry Eidlin, "U.S. Union Revitalization and the Missing 'Militant Minority,'" *Labor Studies Journal* 44, no. 1 (2019): 36–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0160449X19828470>; "Teacher Picketing Injunction Asked," *The Racine Journal Times*, April 18, 1974.

contrary, as this dissertation shows, teachers' unions can use their ideological capacity to narrow the domain of politics. Teachers' unions can forge a reactionary political consciousness, in which teachers' grievances emerge *in reaction* to the political arrangements, fighting for a place within the systemic constraints, rather than attempting to transform its boundaries and dynamics.²⁶ Teachers' unions ideological capacity, thus, ought to be considered ambivalent, in the most neutral sense: it can be contradictory and move in multiple directions, incumbent upon the will and force of the people who press within unions. Unions, in other words, can both sow divisions *and* bridge them, diminish political imaginations *and* foment them.²⁷

This dissertation makes the fairly straightforward argument that as teachers' unions either abandon or narrow each of their material or ideological capacities, their power weakens. And, conversely, as they deepen and broaden these capacities, their power grows. In the pages that follow, I turn to a historical case study of the Milwaukee teachers' union to attempt to show the complicated dynamics and choices that presaged both the teachers' political narrowing in its first decades, and its more recent efforts towards revitalization.

Why does emphasizing the rather airy domains of thoughts and ideas matter for understanding the hard, earthy realms of power and movements? As social movement theorists declare, the puzzle of collective action is surprisingly less about the coordination of bodies or logistics, but rather the summoning and creation of ideologies and identities that *prefigure* action.²⁸

²⁶ As sociologist Erik Wright explains, "Reformist versus reactionary politics are struggles over the rules of the game that define institutional exclusions; revolutionary versus counterrevolutionary politics are struggles over the systemic constraints that define what game is being played." EO Wright, "Working-Class Power, Capitalist-Class Interests, and Class Compromise," *American Journal of Sociology* 105, no. 4 (2000): 998, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/3003886>.

²⁷ My discussion of the "instrumental" and "ambivalent" aims of unions loosely builds from, Gordon Marshall, "Some Remarks on the Study of Working-Class Consciousness," *Politics & Society* 12, no. 3 (1983): 263–301.

²⁸ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movement, Collective Action and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Alberto Melucci, "The Process of Collective Identity," in *Social Movements and Culture*, ed. Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 41–63; Alberto Melucci, "Getting Involved: Identity and Mobilization in Social Movements," *International Social Movement Research* 1 (1988): 329–48; Francesca Polletta and James M Jasper, "Collective Identity and Social Movements," *Annual Review of Sociology* 27, no. 2001 (2001): 283–305.

This dissertation asks, what were the political ideologies and identities that drove teachers' unions' subsequent actions? It traces what some might call the class consciousness of teachers in Milwaukee.²⁹ By class consciousness, I mean the often-contradictory set of ideas people have about the political, economic and social arrangements of the world, and their place within those arrangements. I do not conceptualize this consciousness as either static or passive, a thing that could be either true or false. Rather, I understand consciousness to be something active and contingent – a process, not a product; a set of beliefs that are all at once structured, fractured and limited.³⁰

In an attempt to see this consciousness in formation, I look to moments of conjuncture, that is, moments in time when different forces come together to create new terrain, forcing open a different set of politics. “When a conjuncture unrolls,” explains Stuart Hall, “there is no ‘going back.’ History shifts gears. The terrain changes. You are in a new moment.”³¹ These conjunctures often became ruptures, that is, tears in the existing order that exposed how teachers' ideas and ideologies got put into action. They offered sharp, sometimes piercing notes of teachers' understanding of the world around them, a break in the din of the union's day to day operations.³²

As such, the dissertation that follows is not a continuous or exhaustive history of the Milwaukee teachers' unions, but rather a study of its key moments of rupture. It focuses on five critical junctures: the union's formation, 1901-1964 (Chapter 2); its struggles against civil rights' groups in Milwaukee, 1964-1968 (Chapter 3); its disaffiliation with the state teacher movement, 1970-1974 (Chapter 4); its two key strikes, 1975-1977 (Chapter 5); the simultaneous rise of vouchers

²⁹ For example of class consciousness, see Rick Fantasia, *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action and Contemporary American Workers* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988).

³⁰ Julie Greene, Bruce Laurie, and Eric Arneson, eds., *Labor Histories: Class, Politics, and the Working Class Experience* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Stuart Hall, “The Problem of Ideology-Marxism without Guarantees,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (June 1, 1986): 28–44, <https://doi.org/10.1177/019685998601000203>; Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

³¹ Hall, “Gramsci and Us.”

³² As Rick Fantasia describes, these ruptures offer points when “the customary practices of daily life are suspended,” requiring a “new repertoire of behavior, associational ties and valuations.” Fantasia, *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action and Contemporary American Workers*, 14.

schools in Milwaukee and the advent of progressive caucus in the teachers' union, 1980-2000 (Chapter 6); the union's reformation as a "social justice" union following Act 10, 2009-2017 (Chapter 7). I look to these junctures to explore not only the dynamics within the union, but also to assess changes in the broader political economy around schools and unions.

The political economy of education

The advent of neoliberalism has renewed scholarly interest in the political economy of education. Neoliberalism is the governing rationality of late-stage capitalism. It is, more or less, capitalism unshackled from the state's constraints and aided by the state's intervention to selectively secure conditions of capital accumulation. Capitalism, briefly, is the particular arrangement of the economy and society in which *the means of production* are privately owned and controlled, separated from those who do *the work of both material production and social reproduction*. While immensely varied across time and place, the most general and enduring features of capitalism are: 1) the social relations generated by the means of production under capitalism (i.e., "workers," "owners," "caretakers," "enslaved persons"), and 2) the mechanism of economic coordination through decentralized markets, in which not only goods and services are allocated through markets, but key decisions over society's surplus are relegated to "market forces," rather than, say, planned or democratic decision-making. The state plays a key role in regulating capitalism's social and economic organization, working to both ensure a clear path for private accumulation and cleaning up after its contradictions and inconsistencies.³³ In this late twentieth-century phase of neoliberalism, both the state and capital assert the "public good" is best fulfilled through private markets. Neoliberalism,

³³This immense simplification of capitalism is deeply informed by: Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*; Nancy Fraser, "Behind Marx's Hidden Abode: For an Expanded Conception of Capitalism," *New Left Review*, 2014, 55-72.

thus, is a particular configuration of late-stage capitalism. It is an extra hungry capitalism, enthusiastically fed by the state.

A constellation of critical education scholars concerned with the political economy of education has emerged as neoliberalism's gaping witnesses. These scholars examine how, as neoliberalism chokes off revenue and political support for public education, it rolls out a vast array of private education programs. New markets spring forth, from curriculum to standardized tests, test prep programs to tutoring services, teacher training to online education.³⁴ Schools themselves have become a source of profit. Charter school bonds and charter school real estate potentials rise as promising new sites of investment, sparking interest from hedge fund managers, private investors and venture capitalists.³⁵ The twinned logic of budget cuts and school closures have enabled this market expansion.

Critical scholars have identified and decried the formula: reduce funding for public schools, indict underfunded schools as 'failing,' close public schools, open charter and free market programs. This process, scholars have noted, is a fundamentally racialized one, in which schools in Black and brown low-income neighborhoods are labeled as failing and marked for closure.³⁶ Closing public schools, critical scholars document, dehumanizes and disenfranchises communities of color.³⁷ Yet nonetheless, bipartisan politicians, financial elites and philanthropic foundations continue to push for neoliberal education reforms. After all, they have made the calculation that education is a stable

³⁴ Patricia Burch, *Hidden Markets: The New Education Privatization* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Stephen J. Ball, *Global Education Inc.: New Policy Networks and the Neo-Liberal Imaginary* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

³⁵ Benjamin F. Teresa and Ryan M. Good, "Speculative Charter School Growth in the Case of UNO Charter School Network in Chicago," *Urban Affairs Review*, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087417703487>; Kerry Kretchmar, Beth Sondel, and Joe J. Ferrare, "Mapping the Terrain: Teach For America, Charter School Reform, and Corporate Sponsorship," *Journal of Education Policy* 29 (2013): 742–759; Maia Cucchiara and E V A Gold, "Contracts, Choice, and Customer Service: Marketization and Public Engagement in Education" 113, no. 11 (2001): 2460–2502.

³⁶ Domingo Morel, *Takeover: Race, Education, and American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

³⁷ Eve Ewing, *Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago's South Side* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

and profitable business venture; it is in their interest to prove themselves right. Urban education, educational scholar Pauline Lipman notes, has become a form of state violence.³⁸

Critically, the political economic turn in education scholarship frames the problems of urban education as beyond schools themselves. Heeding insights from critical geographers, these scholars push out from the narrow confines of the school house walls. Instead, these scholars embed education within cities. Their work draws connections between education privatization, racist housing markets, rising gentrification, and the carceral state. Urban geography provides an axis of explanation. When education historians John Rury and Jeff Mirel called on education scholars in their 1997 essay to take seriously the role of the political economy in the study of education, they declared improving urban schools as fundamentally a matter of spatial distribution. “The central issue remains one of geography,” they wrote. “Finding ways to study – and eventually to overcome – the difficult politics of space is perhaps the key to resolving the ongoing crisis of urban education.”³⁹

Nearly two decades later, in the midst of neoliberalism’s reign, Janelle Scott and Jennifer Holme re-issued a similar call to address the political economy of education, this time updated from the point of view of understanding market expansion in education. Like Rury and Mirel before, Scott and Holme grounded their analysis in geography: “An urban political economy framework—incorporating the social and geographic landscape of space and the racialized politics that drive it—helps illuminate how and why market-based reforms have taken deeper roots in these evolving urban contexts, and how these reforms, when layered on the existing inequality, can magnify social, economic, and spatial divisions.”⁴⁰ As they note, the problems of urban education are fundamentally

³⁸ Pauline Lipman, “Urban Education as Racialized State Violence: What Is the Role of Higher Education?,” in *24th Annual Conference of the Coalition for Urban and Metropolitan Universities* (Chicago, Illinois, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.18060/22929>.

³⁹ John L. Rury and Jeffrey E. Mirel, *The Political Economy of Urban Education*, *Review of Research in Education*, vol. 22, 1997, 99, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1167374>.

⁴⁰ Janelle Scott and Jennifer Holme, “The Political Economy of Market-Based Educational Policies: Race and Reform in Urban School Districts, 1915 to 2016,” *Review of Research in Education* 40, no. March (2016): 281, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X16681001>.

problems of urban cities. Once communities of color are disproportionately policed and underemployed, their schools indicted and closed, charter schools enter, licensed by shock doctrine, to “turn-around” neighborhoods made to fail.

Indeed, reading the literature on the political economy of education leaves one with a landscape portrait of a wildfire. Disaster ignites within the public sector, fire catches and spreads. Everything proximate – and downwind – burns. The flame-licked timbers of one public institution collapse on the eaves of another. Crisis spreads from sector to sector, simultaneously burning down communities and creating new markets for investors. Corporate philanthropies, venture capitalists and state actors, eyes gleaming, scatter seeds in the disturbed soil. New markets spring up like fireweeds. The literature has drawn attention to two key factors: *ignition*, the spark function of neoliberalism, and *spread*, the spatial distribution within and around cities.

Yet its focus on these factors have created two blind spots. First, the scholarship has largely occluded the historical formation of the political economy and, second, it has swept aside the role of class relations therein. What if this was a story set in motion not by neoliberalism, but rather by the period of liberal capitalism that preceded it? And what if it was not the densely interlocking institutions of cities that rendered urban education unstable, but the fundamental class relations -- the delicate balance between, capital, the state and labor and its deep inscriptions in racialized and gendered forms -- that formed the combustible landscape? The chapters that follow attempt to both add a historical dimension to shifting political economy of education, and the class relations therein.

Why is it important to historicize the political economy of education before the neoliberal curtain dropped, so to speak, in the mid 1970s? The study of the “new” political economy of education has more or less unhinged neoliberalism, generally assumed to begin in the late 1970s, from the larger project of capitalism, of which neoliberalism is a particular formation. Indeed, one

stumbling into this literature uninitiated might walk away thinking neoliberalism marked the state's debut intervention in protecting capital's interests at the expense of working peoples', or that it marked corporations' first forays into educational policy -- notions that historical studies amply debunk.⁴¹ This is not to say that applying a precise diagnosis of "neoliberalism" to contemporary issues is unfounded -- it can indeed illuminate specific processes and consequences, as we shall see. However, its overuse runs the risk of engaging in one of neoliberalism's own devices: historical erasure that deems the current moment inevitable and immaculately conceived. Efforts to cleave the present into its own era by attributing today's political changes to "neoliberalism" may obstruct an understanding of the continuity of these struggles and the fundamental mechanisms of capitalism, of which neoliberalism is a phase.

This relates to what I see as the second blind-spot of the existing scholarship on the political economy of education. For all its attention to the vulnerability of schools to market forces, surprisingly little scholarship has documented the actual *class relations* that undergird both urban poverty and extreme concentration of wealth. The sheer existence of a billionaire class amidst widespread poverty -- much less billionaire's affiliated corporate foundations, venture philanthropies and political lobbies -- reflects a set of class relations. And it is precisely these relations that have enabled the wealthy and political elite to accumulate the financial and political resources to construct an educational agenda targeted towards children of color living in poverty in urban centers.⁴²

The literature on the political economy of education has, by and large, described the *effects* of marketization and economic divisions on schools. To the extent it takes up a causal analysis of the political economy of education, it often does so by way of urban geography. Urban geography has

⁴¹ Rosemary Feurer and Chad Pearson, *Against Labor: How U.S. Employers Organized to Defeat Union Activism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017); Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir, *Schooling for All: Class, Race and the Decline of the Democratic Ideal* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1985); Dorothy Shipps, *School Reform, Corporate Style: Chicago, 1880-2000* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

⁴² Erik Olin Wright, *Understanding Class* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2015).

framed the problem of urban education as a product of spatial relationships and opportunity, rather than the class relations, and the role of the state to mediate labor and capital. Scott and Holme, for example, describe de-industrialization and white flight as the key factors driving urban plight, as jobs moved out of cities, and suburbs became a place for predominantly white, middle-class residents to secure and protect their material advantages. Their analysis depicts the common explanation of economic inequality as a function of what sociologists call *opportunity hoarding*, in which class gets defined by *access to* and *exclusion from* economic opportunity.⁴³ While a number of educational historians have offered important calls to consider the development of the political and economic forces that have shaped education, these studies have almost exclusively narrowed the understanding go “political and economic forces” to questions of geography, such as housing and urban development.⁴⁴ As historian Matthew Lassiter stated bluntly in an article summarizing the turn of historians of education towards political economy, “Housing was the cause; schools were but a symptom.”⁴⁵

But what if housing itself was also just a symptom? And the bigger cause were the functions of *domination* and *exploitation* – and the state’s capacity to regulate these processes through both labor and capital– that not only structure urban spaces, but more fundamentally, create and maintain class

⁴³ Wright; Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998); Quentin Wheeler-Bell, “Broken Glass: The Social Evil of Urban Poverty and a Critical Education,” *Educational Policy*, 2018, 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904818755467>. For examples of educational scholarship focusing on opportunity hoarding see: Argun Saatcioglu and John L. Rury, “Suburban Advantage: Opportunity Hoarding and Secondary Attainment in the Postwar Metropolitan North,” *American Journal of Education* 117, no. 3 (2011): 307–42; Dawn Lyken-Segosebe and Serena E. Hinz, “The Politics of Parental Involvement: How Opportunity Hoarding and Prying Shape Educational Opportunity,” *Peabody Journal of Education* 90, no. 1 (2015): 93–112; E. Green, T. L., Sánchez, J., & Germain, “Communities and School Ratings: Examining Geography of Opportunity in an Urban School District Located in a Resource-Rich City,” *The Urban Review* 49, no. 5 (2017): 777–804.

⁴⁴ Matthew D Lassiter, “Schools and Housing in Metropolitan History : An Introduction,” *Journal of Urban History* 38, no. 2 (2012): 195–204, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144211427111>; Jack Dougherty, “Bridging the Gap between Urban, Suburban, and Educational History,” in *Rethinking the History of American Education*, ed. William Reese and John Rury, 2007, 245–60; Christopher Lubienski and Jack Dougherty, “Mapping Educational Opportunity : Spatial Analysis and School Choices” 115, no. AUGUST (2009): 485–91.

⁴⁵ Lassiter, “Schools and Housing in Metropolitan History : An Introduction,” 196.

relations.⁴⁶ Domination refers to the process of controlling the activities of others. Exploitation refers to the process of economically benefiting from others' domination. Dominating involves compelling people to act without giving them choice to do otherwise.⁴⁷ For most people, capitalism's reliance on markets and wage labor, for example, operates as a form of domination. Most of us cannot choose to *not* work. Capitalism literally compels us to work in order to make a living.⁴⁸ Exploitation takes that domination one step further, by gaining profit from another person's wage-making labor. In both the opportunity hoarding perspective and domination/exploitation perspective of class, power and legal rules are critical for maintaining social conditions. While an opportunity hoarding lens draws to light the market advantage that inequality generates, domination and exploitation center the actions such advantage relies upon.⁴⁹

Whereas an opportunity hoarding treatment of inequality sees inequality as a function of one group being excluded from necessary resources, exploitation and domination perspectives center not just the conditions of inequality, but the processes that create inequality. "Capital is not a thing," stated Marx, the preeminent relational analyst, "but a social relationship between persons which is mediated through things."⁵⁰ Relational class analysis moves away from a static analysis of "preformed" substances towards an understanding of both structures and agents as preeminently dynamic in nature, in constant tension and co-relation.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Wright, *Understanding Class*, 2015. Scott and Holme use the word "spatial" 26 times in their analysis to describe the political economy of education, the word "domination" once, and "exploitation" not at all.

⁴⁷ Erik Olin Wright, "Understanding Class," *New Left Review* 60 (2009): 107.

⁴⁸ "Capitalism begins not with the offer of work," explains scholar Michael Denning, "but the imperative to make a living." Michael Denning, "Wageless Life," *New Left Review* 66 (2010): 80.

⁴⁹ Wright, *Understanding Class*, 2015. To develop a metaphor to distinguish these two components of inequality, consider one might consider, say, the experience of Black Friday shopping splurges. Opportunity hoarding would tell the story of a consumer who fills his or her shopping cart with low priced goods, thereby denying others such bargains. He or she got the deal first. Domination and exploitation, on the other hand, would tell the story of the shopper who got better deals by way of not just putting more items in his or her cart first, but pushing, crowding, shoving, grabbing, budging, stealing, for example, in order to do so.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Mustafa Emirbayer, "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology," *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 2 (1997): 281–317.

⁵¹ Emirbayer; Matthew Desmond, "Relational Ethnography," *Theory and Society* 43, no. 5 (2014): 547–79, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-014-9232-5>.

Why does this matter for studies of the political economy of education? Although a growing number of education scholars concern themselves with the political economy of education, very few rigorously examine the *relations* of class inequalities that structure the political economy. Scott and Holme, for example, shy away from a rigorous examination of class inequalities, decrying such methods as “overly reductionist”, “functionalist”, and perniciously silent on the role of race and racism. Yet, this common perspective has two limitations. First it overlooks the massive body of literature that sees racial dominance and class dominance as critically intertwined.⁵² Second, as critical philosopher Quentin Wheeler-Bell notes, it mis-frames the problem of class inequalities as solely a function of opportunity hoarding, rather than produced by relations of class domination and exploitation that are deeply structured by and, in turn, structure racial domination.⁵³

Whereas geography-inflected studies of the political economy of education have illuminated the canvas on which social processes take place, an analysis of class relations centers the relational sparks and clashes between actors to understand social processes. Relational analysis queries the clang of characters and actions that constitute plot – not just the stage on which it unfolds. Class relational analysis considers the levers of class – capital, labor, state – and the *relationships* of exploitation and domination. Labor unions comprise a key character in class relations. Labor unions

⁵² While it’s certainly true class-focused literature erroneously writes out the critical importance of both race and gender in constructing the system of social and economic relations known as capitalism, this conclusion problematically overlooks a critical and massive body of literature that examines class and racial domination as precisely intertwined. Much of this literature focuses on the agentic role of local actors to make consequential political choices and actions. For example: Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Michael C Dawson, “Hidden in Plain Sight: A Note on Legitimation Crises and the Racial Order,” *Critical Historical Studies*, no. Spring (2016): 143–61; Karen Fields and Barbara Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (New York: Verso, 2012); Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement,” *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, 1978, 362–72, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203357071>; Oliver Cromwell. Cox, *Caste, Class, and Race: A Study of Structural Dynamics* (New York: Doubleday, 1948); Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prison, Surplus, Crisis and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007); Evelyn Nakano Glenn, *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2015); Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002); S Hall, “Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance,” *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, 1996, 16–60.

⁵³ Wheeler-Bell, “Broken Glass: The Social Evil of Urban Poverty and a Critical Education.”

have risen historically as the countervailing institution to buffer capital's exploitation. Unions, in their most basic sense, ensure that rising economic productivity gets redistributed into wages for working people, not simply captured as profits for investors and shareholders. "Organized labor wasn't simply some minor bit in the 'golden age' of welfare capitalism," writes sociologist Jake Rosenfeld. "It was *the* core equalizing institution."⁵⁴

Unions and the welfare state

What do unions have to do with the welfare state? And why does the welfare state matter for understanding teachers' unions and education? In my research, I take the position that unions not only provide an important character to analyze class relations, but even more so, examining unions provides a means to trace the broader welfare state. The welfare state reflects the state's basic commitment to distributing resources and protecting livelihoods. In the United States, the labor movement has shouldered the work of creating large portions of the welfare state. From ensuring economic redistribution to workplace safety to access to health insurance, unions in the US performed the work that is the undertaking of the state in many European countries.⁵⁵ As a semi-privatized welfare state, U.S. employers' -- rather than the state -- provide workers with social benefits such as health insurance and pensions.⁵⁶ However, although the state offloads the provision of social benefits on to employers, it does not mandate them to provide such benefits. Securing benefits becomes the onus of workers, incumbent upon the work of unions. If people want health care benefits and workplace protections, they must first form a union, then demand and organize for

⁵⁴ Jake Rosenfeld, *What Unions No Longer Do* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014). Quoted in Windham, p. 17.

⁵⁵ Lane Windham, *Knocking on - Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 17.

⁵⁶ J. S. Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State: The Battle over Public and Private Social Benefits in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Jennifer Klein, *For All These Rights: Business, Labor, and the Shaping of America's Public-Private Welfare State* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); Marie Gottschalk, *The Shadow Welfare State: Labor, Business, and the Politics of Health Care in the United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

such protections. In the post-World War II era, collective bargaining became the mechanism to ensure citizens' social welfare.

This arrangement has generated two critical effects on the shape and design of the US welfare state. First, it has spurred anti-union hostility and, second, it has fueled contradictions among those whose work is worthy of protections. The U.S.' semi-private welfare state means that employers, not the state, are obligated to provide benefits. This onus gives employers huge incentives to resist union organizing. Virtually since the New Deal legislation first instated labor protections, employers have adopted all measures to oppose unionization, leading vigorous anti-union campaigns at the firm level, drafting and supporting anti-union legislation, and relocating production to cities, states and countries with cheaper access to resources and fewer regulations, without labor protections.⁵⁷ Under pressure from capital and business advocates, the state relaxed its protections of working people, and instead intervened to protect the conditions of capital accumulation. Yet in addition to fueling employers' union hostility, union's responsibility for securing benefits and protections had another critical effect.

As unions took on inscribing one portion of the welfare state, they implicitly contributed to its negative dimensions by delineating the very idea of whose work is considered work, and hence worthy of a union. This dimension marks what scholars identify as the division between paid "productive" labor and unpaid "reproductive" labor, imputing stark gendered and racialized divisions into the welfare state. During the New Deal era, the unions of white males advocated robust social welfare programs for workers, by way of a "breadwinners' wage," that is, wages capable of supporting a family, as well as unemployment insurance in the event of loss of work, and Social Security when people became too old to work. While the male breadwinner wage accord "was not a feminist's dream," explain sociologists Jane Collins and Victoria Mayer, it represented the state's role

⁵⁷ Feurer and Pearson, *Against Labor: How U.S. Employers Organized to Defeat Union Activism*.

in insuring a well-being of society and families – at least white, male-headed families.⁵⁸ Still, women and workers of color were largely excluded from the states' newfound consideration for labor protection.⁵⁹ Agricultural and domestic workers were not included in the New Deal legislation enabling collective bargaining, thereby disqualified Black men and women from unionizing, for example.⁶⁰ As such, gender and race constitute fundamental axes around which conceptions of welfare have formed. Gender and race have determined the boundary between “productive” and “reproductive” labor, and they have mediated perceptions of the welfare state’s “deserving” and “undeserving” recipients.

These divisions have essentially constructed a two-channel welfare state: welfare for workers, (conceived as predominantly white men), and welfare for dependents, assumed to be women and people of color. Political movements have divided and polarized these two groups as distinct political subjects: welfare-recipients have become the despised dependents, while worker welfare recipients have become the valorized ones. Welfare policies aimed at middle-class white women, such as aid to mothers, shored up their social function as dependent care takers; aid for poor women of color women inscribed their role as “welfare queens” and society’s “lazy” “takers.” Meanwhile, predominantly male workers rose to the ranks of valorized dependents, society’s “makers” who work hard for their wages and thus deserve state protection by way of labor protections, wage

⁵⁸ Jane L. Collins and Victoria Mayer, *Both Hands Tied: Welfare Reform and the Race to the Bottom in the Low-Wage Labor Market* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 9. Reclaiming a “family wage” has been a strange point of alliance among a strand of feminist-Marxists and neo-conservatives, one aiming to free women from labor market exploitation, the other hoping to protect the traditional domain of the family as the private domain of women.

⁵⁹ Evelyn Nakano Glenn, “From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 18, no. 1 (1992): 1–43.

⁶⁰ Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White, When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005); Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream* (Verson, 1986).

floors, social security, FHA-backed mortgages, other key government support often not thought of as welfare.⁶¹

Union leaders, by and large, have sought to differentiate themselves from other welfare beneficiaries, such as the unemployed or precariously employed, rather than recognizing their shared position as dependents of a redistributive welfare state. In fact, many labor leaders, notably Wisconsin's own Samuel Gompers, fueled antagonism between workers' and non-workers' welfare (including vociferously opposing women's employment, on the grounds that it took wages away from men).⁶² Unions, thus, have both authored large portions of the welfare state, and reinforced its semi-privatized, racialized and gendered norms.

The work of teaching murkily crossed both gendered categories of welfare: teachers were both care providers and formally employed workers. In the 20th century, as more women were drawn into the work of teaching (industrialization having led men to find higher paying jobs elsewhere), schools developed concerted policy to ensure women teachers would not become economically independent, thereby maintaining the gendered channels of the breadwinner wage model valued by the welfare state. Female teachers were often refused employment if they were married, or lost their jobs if they became pregnant. The work of teaching was *not* to provide a family wage, thus rendering female teachers economically independent.

In the first half of the 20th century, teachers possessed contradictory ideas about their identity as workers, a theme explored in Chapter Two. On the one hand, many female teachers rejected campaigns to form unions, instead preferring to associate as professionals. These teachers

⁶¹ Unfortunately, labor unions have seldom looked beyond this boundary, to construct alliances among relief recipients as fellow subjects of the welfare state, clinging instead to their identity as deserving and hard-working subjects. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U . S . Welfare State," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 19, no. 2 (1994): 309–36.

⁶² Paul Buhle, *Taking Care of Business: Samuel Gompers, George Meany, Lane Kirkland, and the Tragedy of American Labor* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999); Virginia Sapiro, "The Gender Basis of American Social Policy," in *Women, The State and Welfare*, ed. Linda Gordon (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 44.

saw professional associations as more genteel distinguished and appropriate for women's work, rather than the more militant, working-class – and masculine – unions. On the other hand, the turn of the century also saw the rise of militant women-led teachers' unions, who fought for increased corporate taxation, went on strike, and demanded higher wages.⁶³ By the middle of the 20th century, education became a major commitment of welfare state. Ascending feminist movements rejected women's economic subordination. Teachers' unions grew in membership and power.⁶⁴

Education and the welfare state

By the middle of the 20th century, education itself supplanted labor as the means to address poverty and inequality.⁶⁵ Whereas the welfare accords of the New Deal provided direct measures of economic security and protections against class domination – such as minimum wage, unemployment insurance, federal support for public assistance, and workers' rights to organize – by the 1960s, these commitments had shifted, replaced by a focus on education.⁶⁶

As “culture of poverty” theories gained dominance, in which the poverty was attributed to the social dispositions of the poor, education initiatives and job training programs became the anointed mechanism to “solve” poverty.⁶⁷ Educational historians have noted that this strategy largely

⁶³ Lois Weiner, “Teachers, Unions, and School Reform: Examining Margaret Haley’s Vision. *Educational Foundations*, 10(3), 85-96. Chicago,” *Educational Foundations* 10, no. 3 (1996): 85–96.

⁶⁴ Michael W Apple, “Work, Gender and Teaching,” *Teachers College Record* 84, no. 3 (1983): 611–28; Michael W. Apple, *Teachers and Texts: A Political Economy of Class and Gender Relations in Education* (New York: Routledge, 1986); S. Acker, “Chapter 3: Gender and Teachers’ Work,” *Review of Research in Education* 21 (1995): 99–162, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X021001099>; Geraldine Joncich Clifford, “Man/Woman/Teacher: Gender, Family, and Career in American Educational History,” in *American Teachers: History of a Profession at Work*, ed. Donald Warren (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 293–343; John L. Rury, “Who Became Teachers? The Social Characteristics of Teachers in American History,” in *American Teachers: History of a Profession at Work*, ed. Donald Warren (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 7–48.

⁶⁵ Harvey Kantor and Robert Lowe, “Educationalizing the Welfare State and Privatizing Education,” in *Closing the Opportunity Gap: What America Must Do to Give Every Child an Even Chance*, ed. Prudence Carter (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 25–39; Harvey Kantor, “Education, Social Reform, and the State: ESEA and Federal Education Policy in the 1960s,” *American Journal of Education* 100, no. 1 (1991): 47–83; Leah Gordon, *From Power to Prejudice: The Rise of Racial Individualism in Midcentury America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

⁶⁶ Kantor and Lowe, “Educationalizing the Welfare State and Privatizing Education.”

⁶⁷ Kantor and Lowe; Gordon, *From Power to Prejudice: The Rise of Racial Individualism in Midcentury America*; Alice O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton

sidestepped the bigger issue of income inequality; education became the politically palatable alternative to New Deal era redistributive policies. Education, in other words, replaced labor rights as the primary arena in which the state addressed economic inequalities.

In 1965, the federal government passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which dramatically increased funding to urban and poor districts through expanded compensatory education programs. A decade prior, following the USSR's launch of Sputnik, the federal government also passed the National Defense Education Act to increase U.S. math and science education. Federal funds for education jumped from \$650 million in 1959-1960 to \$9.5 billion by 1979-80. As funding for schools expanded, more teachers were employed. In 1949-1950, the U.S. employed 914,000 teachers. By 1979-1980, it employed 2.3 million teachers.⁶⁸ Affirmative action commitments by public employers during these years also meant schools became the predominant means of employment for people of color. As historian Jon Shelton has noted, this increase in education spending, particularly during the economic recession of the 1970s, provoked populist ire – many rural people saw their tax increases as caused by growing education spending, and teachers' unions became increasingly more militant in their demands for wage increases.⁶⁹

Teachers, thus, became both agents and subjects of the welfare state. As agents, they were charged with strengthening national defense and ameliorating poverty. Teachers prepared future workers. They provided both the practical “hard” skills, such as mathematics and science instruction, and the dispositional “soft” skills that were hailed as the solution to poverty. Yet, at the same time, teachers themselves were subjects of the welfare state. Their employment was dependent upon a commitment to redistribute resources for public education and by the middle of the 20th

University Press, 2001); Harvey Kantor, “From the New Deal to the Great Society,” *Educational Researcher* 24, no. 3 (1995): 4–11.

⁶⁸ Thomas D Snyder, “120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait,” 1993, 34.

⁶⁹ Jon Shelton, *Teacher Strike!: Public Education and the Making of a New American Political Order* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2017).

century, upon recognition of public sector labor rights. Like fallible protagonists of the shifting welfare state, collectively organized educators were actors facing choices, limits and possibilities, both with power to determine events and radically determined by events.⁷⁰

Teachers' unions

While the scholarship on the political economy of education has only meagerly engaged with teachers' unions, the scholarship on teachers' unions has overlooked their role as politicized actors in the political economy of education. The limited scholarship on teachers' unions can be distilled into three primary channels: *economistic*, *reformist*, and *episodic militancy*. The *economistic* literature primarily focuses on the use of collectively bargained contracts to demand higher wages and benefits for teachers.⁷¹ This scholarship documents teachers' efforts to unionize for greater economic recognition of their work, often depreciated because of its feminization.⁷² By emphasizing the self-interested nature of teacher organizing, this literature has helped fuel political animosity towards teachers' unions, while also obscuring broader dimensions that undergird unions' economic demands.⁷³

Reformist scholars, in an effort to broaden the framing of teachers' unions, positioned teachers' unions as necessary for educators' professionalization.⁷⁴ This literature examines teachers' unions' use of collective bargaining to improve vital conditions of education, such as curriculum,

⁷⁰ Michael W. Apple, *Education and Power*, Second (New York: Routledge, 2012); Apple, *Teachers and Texts: A Political Economy of Class and Gender Relations in Education*.

⁷¹ Wayne Urban, *Why Teachers Organized* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982); Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA 1900-1989* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

⁷² Acker, "Chapter 3: Gender and Teachers' Work"; Susan B. Carter, "Incentives and Rewards to Teaching," in *American Teachers: History of a Profession at Work*, ed. Donald Warren (New York: Macmillian Publishing Company, 1989), 49–63.

⁷³ Terry Moe, *Special Interest: Teachers Unions and America's Public Schools* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2011); Myron Lieberman, *The Teachers Unions: How They Sabotage Educational Reform and Why* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000).

⁷⁴ Nina Bascia, "Teacher Unions and Educational Reform," in *International Handbook on Educational Change*, ed. A. Hargreaves et al. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998).

teaching methods, student assignments, and criteria for assessment of student achievement.⁷⁵ While offering an important corrective to the economistic view of teachers' unions, this literature generally overlooks the state's role in structuring both schools and unions. For example, labor laws such as Wisconsin's Act 10 nullify the reformists' chief insight that unions can intervene to improve schools. Act 10 explicitly prohibits public sector unions from bargaining over anything *except* wages, making it illegal for teachers to negotiate class size, preparation time or curricular control. Additionally, the reformist literature does not address the state's role in schools' continuous loss of state aid, nor the rise of scripted curriculum or high-stakes accountability tests, and in doing so, overemphasizes teachers' professional autonomy.⁷⁶ Finally, this literature generally does not engage with race or class differences between teachers and communities, or among educators within teachers' unions, thereby obfuscating teachers' unions' key historical obstacles and antagonisms.⁷⁷

The *episodic-militancy* literature documents highly politicized confrontations of teachers' unions; I consider this dissertation to be a contribution to this vein of scholarship. The episodic militancy research has exposed the historical and contemporary role of teachers' unions to engage in political activism, and the political effects of such militancy. It has documented the historical conflicts between White teachers and Black communities such as the 1968 Ocean-Hill Brownsville (OH-B) strike, and the efforts of Chicago teacher unionists at the turn of the century to campaign for corporate tax raises in order to offset school budget cuts.⁷⁸ It has also drawn attention to the

⁷⁵ Charles Kerchner and Douglas Mitchell, *The Changing Idea of a Teachers' Union* (New York: Falmer Press, 1988); Nina Bascia and Pamela Osmond, "Teacher Unions and Educational Reform: A Research Review," *National Education Association* (Washington D.C., 2012), <http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/recordDetail?accno=ED293837>; Susan Moore Johnson and Susan M Kardos, "Reform Bargaining and Its Promise for School Improvement," in *Conflicting Missions? Teachers Unions and Educational Reform*, ed. Tom Loveless (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 7–46; Tom Loveless, ed., "Conflicting Missions?: Teachers Unions and Educational Reform" (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000).

⁷⁶ Daniel F Jacoby and Keith Nitta, "The Bellevue Teachers Strike and Its Implications for the Future of Postindustrial Reform Unionism," *Educational Policy* 26, no. 4 (2012): 533–63, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904811417585>.

⁷⁷ Bob Peterson, "Justice and Survival: Rethinking Teacher Union Strategy," in *Transforming Teacher Unions: Fighting for Better Schools and Social Justice* (Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, 1999), 11–19.

⁷⁸ Daniel H. Perlstein, *Justice, Justice: School Politics and the Eclipse of Liberalism*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2004); Jerald E. Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University

teachers' strike wave militancy of the 1970s as the neoliberal order emerged, as well as more recent efforts of teachers' unions – notably the Chicago Teachers' Union – to resist the neoliberal budget cuts imposed on public education.⁷⁹

Both the economic and reformist literature on teachers' unions tends to analyze teachers' unions *vis a vis* their effects on student outcomes – i.e., how do students fare under the range of collective bargaining agreements negotiated by teachers' unions. The episodic militancy literature breaks from this framing and casts teachers as actors in their own right, characters in their own narratives. Indeed, it inserts them as key participants in the unfolding political economy. Yet, taken as a whole, the episodic militancy literature offers diverging narratives on teachers' unions: one of the reactionary politics that have emerged from within unions (i.e., OH-B clashes between white teachers and Black communities), and one of the redistributive politics that can nevertheless flow from union activity (i.e., the Chicago Teachers' Union's struggles for greater public investment in education). Both streams of scholarship provide crucial understandings of the limits and possibilities of teachers' unions. Yet, the gap between these narratives obscures the connection between the union's reactionary politics and liberal labor accords, and the more recent, overtly hostile political projects that now threaten their existence.⁸⁰

The differing portraits of teachers' unions offered by the episodic militancy accounts of teachers' union makes it difficult to assess both the historical and contemporary role of teachers'

Press, 2002); Jonna Perillo, *Uncivil Rights: Teachers, Unions, and Race in the Battle for School Equity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Weiner, "Teachers, Unions, and School Reform: Examining Margaret Haley's Vision. *Educational Foundations*, 10(3), 85-96. Chicago"; Kate Rousmaniere, *Citizen Teacher: The Life and Leadership of Margaret Haley* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2005).

⁷⁹ Shelton, *Teacher Strike!: Public Education and the Making of a New American Political Order*; Steven K Ashby and Robert Bruno, *A Fight for the Soul of Public Education: The Story of the Chicago Teachers' Strike* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016); Gutstein, E. & Lipman, "The Rebirth of the Chicago Teachers Union and Possibilities for a Counterhegemonic Education Movement."; Michael Uetricht, *Strike for America* (New York: Verso, 2014).

⁸⁰ Jon Shelton's account of the 1970s strike wave and Marjorie Murphy's history of the AFT and NEA stands out as notable exceptions, providing important insights into the role of teachers' unions amidst broader political struggles, Shelton, *Teacher Strike!: Public Education and the Making of a New American Political Order*.

unions in the political economy of education. Much of the literature around teachers' unions approaches teachers' unions as *either* "good" *or* "bad." Therefore, the work that follows attempts to both include labor as a key analytic frame to examine the shifting political economy of education. Unions are multifaceted and dynamic, their political direction and character fundamentally dependent on the wills of the members who press upon them and beholden to the collective identities they sow.

Project details and Chapter Overviews

How does a labor movement lose the sparks of solidarity and collective action that bestowed its power in the first place? And, once lost, can those sparks be re-ignited? To address these questions, I look to the Milwaukee teachers' union (MTEA), a thread that vividly traces the process of unraveling and suggests possibilities for re-weaving.

The state's first and largest teachers' union, MTEA formed in the early 1960s as a professional association instead of a union. In the '60s and '70s, it rejected civil rights' movements programs, only to find itself battling a "school choice" movement driven by claims for racial justice in the 1980s and 1990s. Today, Milwaukee is host to the nation's oldest running school voucher program, and the school choice networks that have swarmed around Milwaukee have provided a nucleus for the growing hard-right conservative movement that, among other things, led a successful charge against Wisconsin public sector unions. As of this writing, Milwaukee is the most racially segregated city in the country. Its public schools have been threatened three different times with total takeovers in less than a decade. But in recent years, the union has mobilized a broad coalition of community forces, all committed to fighting for public schools. It is the only school district to have resisted takeover attempts with such success *and* endurance. The blows of Act 10, it seems, have strengthened the union's spark capacity. "We're not supposed to be as powerful as we are right

now,” declared the MTEA president to a crowd of cheering teachers in September 2016, “but here we are.”⁸¹

In any social movement, the puzzle of collective action is often less a function of what groups do once mobilized, but how a “we” comes to form in the first place.⁸² My research aims to trace MTEA’s history to understand how its “we” became so narrow and then, later, broadened. Drawing on original historical research and contemporary ethnographic fieldwork, the following dissertation is my attempt to answer these questions. I interviewed dozens of Milwaukee’s teachers’ union leaders and community activists, past and present. I spoke with leaders of the conservative movement in Milwaukee: leaders of Bradley-backed school choice advocacy groups and business associations, funders of school choice and network leaders. I watched dozens of hours of union meetings and community organizing groups. I read through newspapers chronicling Milwaukee’s political history. I studied the union’s own archive, and the papers collected by its past leaders. The following is my attempt to summarize what I have learned and seen.

Chapter Two examines how growing pressures on teachers’ work in the first half of the 20th century encouraged teachers to form associations for stronger workplace protections. Yet teachers formed two different types of associations: professional associations and teachers’ unions. This chapter looks at the ideological duel between the union and the professional organization during the first half of the 20th century, arguing that Milwaukee teachers’ decision to form a professional organization as a means of consolidating middle-class power set the stage for its conservative impulses going forward. As teaching became one of the few paid employment opportunities available to women at the turn of the century, many women joined the teaching ranks eager to distance themselves from their lower-class backgrounds. For these women, teaching was supposed

⁸¹ Dave Umhoefer, “For Unions in Wisconsin, a Fast and Hard Fall since Act 10,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 9, 2016, <https://projects.jsonline.com/news/2016/11/27/for-unions-in-wisconsin-fast-and-hard-fall-since-act-10.html>.

⁸² Melucci, “The Process of Collective Identity.”

to be a way *out* of their working-class origins – not a call to double-down on its constraints. Many teachers in Milwaukee and elsewhere had little interest in joining the labor federations of their brothers and fathers. Workplace improvements would be found by asserting teachers’ genteelness and professionalism, these early teachers believed -- not by forging class solidarities. They found a comfortable organization home in the professional association, affiliated with the National Education Association (NEA). The competing teacher organization, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), on the other hand, plainly understood itself as a union. It was a member of the local labor federation. It encouraged teachers to explicitly use the words “union” rather than “association” and “strike” rather than “professional withdrawal program,” the latter terms preferred by NEA officers. The point of a union, AFT leaders asserted, was to draw members in to political struggles, not delude them into a false form of power. Yet when teachers finally decided to seize the legal tools of union representation after Wisconsin’s 1959 groundbreaking legislation, they did so under the banner of the professional organization, NEA, only one of two big city locals to do so at the time. This chapter looks at the tension between these two groups, the conversion of the professional association into a union, and the contradictory forces it sowed. Milwaukee’s teachers became a union precisely by rejecting militant, vocal, politically oriented groups associated with labor, instead choosing seemingly apolitical groups that would protect teachers’ “local autonomy.”

Chapter Three looks at how the battles between union and association receded in the face of a larger shift in the welfare order. As the weight of the welfare state shifted to education programs, teachers became burdened with the task of solving both poverty and racial segregation. Legal rulings called on schools to desegregate but left in place the vast inequalities between Black and white neighborhoods, and enabled the economic disenfranchisement of Black communities and property values. Public schools were left shouldering these systemic inequities, the lone beachhead of a crumbling welfare state. As its foot soldiers, teachers were responsible for curing the effects of rising

poverty, housing insecurity and unemployment – and on the wages of a window-cleaner. In Milwaukee, teachers responded to these changes defensively. As I argue, the majority-white teachers looked to gain power *over* Black students, rather than build power *with* Black and poor communities. They turned to the union to demand corporal punishment and stronger powers to expel disrupter students. Partially due to their rejection of overt political engagement, the union had little vocabulary to make demands for a broadened and transformed welfare state that both protected teachers' work *and* empowered communities of color.

Chapter Four looks at how the Milwaukee teachers' union continued to narrow their interests and reject affiliation with statewide teachers' movements. Throughout the 1960s and 70s, the union leadership bitterly rejected civil rights' movement's demands, deepening racial segregation and inequality in the city's schools. In 1974, MTEA disaffiliated from the state teachers' union, partially in rejection of the state union's increasingly political appetites. While these moves enabled MTEA to secure strong contracts for its teachers in the short-term, they crippled teachers' capacity to build broader political movements that defended public schools in the long-term. Through its pursuit of short-term success, I argue, MTEA's disengagement from key political questions strengthened the hands of the politically mobilizing corporate and business classes, rendering the union vulnerable to the rising tide of education privatization that swept through Milwaukee in the decades to come.

Chapter Five looks at the split between the teachers' union and African American activists in the late 1970s. Milwaukee teachers' first strikes formed in response to federal court desegregation orders that overruled portions of the teachers' contract. Their collective action bitterly isolated Black education activists, who began seeking non-traditional allies to pursue their vision for educational justice, moving towards educational privatization outlets. Despite the increasingly political landscape of education in Milwaukee, MTEA remained committed to its "apolitical" purview. Through the

1980s, it functioned as a junior human resource office, not fighting for students or teachers of public education, but negotiating and administering teachers' benefits packages. Members had very little say or stake in the union's operations, much less its vision and priorities. MTEA leadership kept its head down, focused on providing teachers' wages and benefits, in spite of the political crisis brewing. However, not all teachers in MTEA took this posture.

Chapter Six analyzes a new phase in the history of the MTEA. Rising neoliberal pressures, and insufficient responses by MTEA's leadership spurred a group of progressive, activist-minded teachers to take on the work of charting new political horizons in both the union and public schools. This chapter documents the efforts of a feisty group of progressive teachers who saw their role as unionists integrally connected to fights for communities and schools, fighting especially for racial justice. Though predominantly white, this group of teachers sought to articulate a vision of public education that both grappled with the stark inequalities within classrooms and communities *and* inspired the movements necessary to transform them. In 1981, they formed a caucus within the union that was critical of MTEA's leadership, its heavy reliance on union staff to execute the union's priorities and its failure to address racism. To augment their work, in 1986 these educators, along with other community activists, laid out the pages of the first issue of *Rethinking Schools*, now a nationally circulating publication and leading voice in progressive educational reform. Its issues chronicled Milwaukee's specific challenges, from curriculum adopted by the school board, to the union's negotiations, to city politics. It produced some of the earliest reporting on the Bradley Foundation, the Milwaukee-based conservative foundation that funded the city's school choice initiative. The progressive caucus distributed copies of *Rethinking Schools* to building representatives at MTEA's monthly meetings. Many moderate Milwaukee teachers resisted this vision of unionism and teaching. From the mid-80s to 2000s, two slates of unionists, each roughly the same size, vied for control of the union: those attempting to inspire a democratic, rank-and-file union advancing

progressive education, and those fighting to keep the union and its staff focused on narrow, bread-and-butter issues.

Chapter Seven charts how the union fought against programs promoting both school privatization and anti-teachers' unionism. It profiles the work of community leaders and groups who joined forces with the teachers' union to struggle for public education in Milwaukee. A 2009 threat of mayoral takeover spurred new urgency in Milwaukee's fight for public education. Some two dozen community groups, spearheaded by the teachers' union, formed a coalition to demand a democratically governed, public school system. In the process of fighting against the mayoral takeover, something greater happened: disparate groups became unified. Together, they articulated a grassroots, pro-labor, pro-democratic, anti-racist vision for public education. Within months, the 'Stop the MPS Takeover' coalition, as they called themselves, had indeed stopped the takeover. But the work was far from over. This coalition helped stabilize the union when Act 10 dropped in 2011. Immediately following the law's passage, progressive activists set to work re-organizing their union. In lieu of collective bargaining, president Bob Peterson declared, MTEA will embrace collective action. Instead of contract protections, Peterson proclaimed, community alliances will strengthen schools and classrooms.

Milwaukee teachers have fought against and defeated proposals for mayoral *and* a 2016 state takeover attempt – the only school district in the country to have defeated multiple takeover attempts. Working with community coalitions, the teachers have mobilized to oppose unregulated charter school expansion. They have successfully advocated to build a community schools program that provides wraparound services for students and families and operates through community decision-making, *not* by command of private management companies. Teachers have joined with students to fight against more police in schools, demanding instead more funding for educational resources. This re-formation, however, contains contradictions of its own, which Chapter Seven

probes. Just how intertwined is MTEA's social justice mission in its methods? In the concluding chapter, I summarize my findings, explore their significance, raise additional questions and offer final reflections.

PART I

Chapter Two: FORM

“As If You Were Sterilizing and Fertilizing the Plant at the Same Time”:
Becoming the Milwaukee Teachers’ Education Association, 1901-1964

Introduction

At the turn of the century, Milwaukee was a city of associations. The city’s large population of immigrants clustered in neighborhoods and ship yards, workers gathered in union halls, neighbors met in churches, and language schools abounded. The city’s political leadership, an odd amalgam of Socialists, liberals and businessmen, welcomed the preponderance of associations as engines of the city’s economic and democratic vitality.⁸³ Teachers, too, found themselves eager for association. In 1901, they formed the city’s first professional association for teachers, the germinal seeds of the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association (MTEA), today the largest union local in the state.

Milwaukee teachers’ journey from a professional association in 1901 to a labor union in 1964, however, was hardly a straight-forward path. As I argue in this chapter, the evolution of the Milwaukee teachers’ association into a labor union rested on a key contradiction: its rejection of unionism as a means to advance teachers’ power. Throughout the first half of the 20th century, two teacher organizations in Milwaukee duelled for influence and power: MTEA, the professional association affiliated with the national teacher professional association, National Education Association (NEA); and the Milwaukee Teachers’ Union (MTU), the teachers’ union affiliated with the national teacher union, American Federation of Teachers (AFT). The struggle between these two

⁸³ For an excellent account of the many associations that constituted the policy architecture of Milwaukee, especially its public school governance, see, William J. Reese, “‘Partisans of the Proletariat’: The Socialist Working Class and the Milwaukee Schools, 1890-1920,” *History of Education Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1981): 3–50. Stuart Eimer, “From ‘Business Unionism’ to ‘Social Movement Unionism’: The Case of the AFL-CIO Milwaukee County Labor Council,” *Labor Studies Journal* 24, no. 2 (1999): 63–81. S. Ani Mukherji, “Reds Among the Sewer Socialists and McCarthyites: The Communist Party in Milwaukee,” *American Communist History* 16, no. 3–4 (2017): 112–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14743892.2017.1331302>.

groups, I argue, reflected fundamental social and organizational tensions: the diverging gendered dimensions of the teachers' association and teachers' union; the changing labor climate that surrounded teachers' unions; the different approaches to labor affiliation, organizing and workplace actions. As I show, the sparks that ignited the Milwaukee teachers to first unionize ultimately did not catch. Instead, the professional organization that became the teachers' union possessed little of labor's distinguishing attributes. And when the Milwaukee teachers finally decided to adopt union recognition in 1964, they chose to do so under an organization that would prioritize the teachers' professional status, rather than develop its labor strength. These choices would shape the union's trajectory over the coming decades.

The Genteel Ladies of the Milwaukee Teachers' Association

In the fall of 1901, a group of female elementary school teachers formed the Milwaukee Teachers Association (MTA), the predecessor of today's Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association. Through the MTA, the Milwaukee teachers aimed to formalize and augment their professional standing. In particular, they aimed to improve their wages, which were paltry and patchily distributed; teachers' salaries were often set one teacher at a time.⁸⁴ This system of individual consideration for pay not only generally kept wages low, but also encouraged gender disparities within teachers' pay: women were frequently paid less than men.⁸⁵ In Milwaukee, even the facilities and maintenance workers, who were both unionized and comprised mostly of men, had better pay

⁸⁴ For example, in 1892, when the school board deliberated teachers' salaries, a faction of school board directors "strenuously opposed any raises." After "considerable argument," they struck a compromise. They would award raises to a few select few teachers. Miss Anna Colman, the director of mathematics, got a salary increase from \$1000 to \$1200. Mr. Herbert M. Woodward, instructor of manual training, received an increase of \$1200 to \$1400. "High School Salaries: Several of Teachers to Get More Pay," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 25, 1892.

⁸⁵ Of course, this was a problem across the state and nation. In 1853, Wisconsin women teachers earned \$9.94 a month, while men took home \$18.17, nearly twice as much. Dustin Beilke, *Wisconsin Education Association Council: A History* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Education Association Council, 2001).

and protections than did teachers. Until 1870, most teachers had been men; women's entrance into teaching was still a relatively new phenomenon.

Although teachers wanted to form associations in order to develop a collective voice and gain professional authority to improve their status, they were cautious, even diffident, about collectively acting for such. This created a paradoxical tension for teachers: although they wanted – indeed, *needed* – more just recognition and remuneration, they were uncomfortable asking for it. Governed by gendered expectations of “respectability” and class-based “propriety” the female teachers referred to their wage demands as “promotion of their interests,” rather than a forceful or direct assertion of real material needs.⁸⁶

These women teachers were caught both between their class positions and their gendered positions. On the one hand, their class position – that is, their location within the system of economic relations – granted them low pay for their work, especially relative to men. Women were often hired as teachers precisely because they could be paid less than men. This wage differential was based on a gendered assumption undergirding welfare and provision; women were expected to provide the *unpaid* domestic labor necessary for family survival, while men were expected to *financially* provide for their families by selling their labor in return for wages. Women of color often found themselves facing both pressures: expected to labor outside of their homes, performing domestic labor for others, and seeing to the socially reproductive work within their own homes.⁸⁷

White women who entered the workforce represented an aberration to the gendered and racialized

⁸⁶ How social necessities get detected, interpreted and articulated as “needs” is the product of historical and social processes – and contested ones, theorist Nancy Fraser reminds us. According to Fraser, as necessities become publicized, moving from the domain of the private to the domain of the public, they take on the urgent character of needs. This process is a highly gendered endeavor, as “private” concerns, such as health care, child care and other domestic concerns are relegated as women's concerns. In this case, Milwaukee teachers demonstrate the inverse of Fraser's tracings: women teachers did what they could to portray their insufficient salaries as *not*-needs, as in absent brazen forcefulness that be misconstrued as masculine crassness. For more, Nancy Fraser, “Talking about Needs: Interpretive Contests as Political Conflicts in Welfare-State Societies,” *Ethics* 99, no. 2 (1989): 291–313.

⁸⁷ Glenn, “From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor.”

welfare compact – seeking paid labor not only risked undermining men’s exclusive hold on waged labor, it also potentially abandoning the duties within the home. To enforce these assumptions, many school district administrators in Milwaukee and elsewhere would fire teachers who became pregnant or married. They could go so far as to employ single women, but married women or mothers could not also be considered workers.⁸⁸

Yet, women teachers’ desires to maintain a sense of middle-class, feminine respectability mitigated an instinct to protest their exploitation.⁸⁹ Their gendered and middle-class expectations to behave as “respectable” women discouraged them from drawing attention to their material needs or forcefully calling for justice. What’s more, their class position – that these women needed to work in the first place – and their class aspirations -- to move from working class to middle class -- likely caused teachers to double-down on their performance of “respectability” in an effort to distinguish themselves from working-class origins.⁹⁰ Their gendered positions and their class positions, in other words, mutually reinforced each other, sharpening the teachers’ desires for respectability.

To be sure the gendered expectations of Milwaukee teachers were not simply produced and monitored by the teachers through their own language and practices: they were also imposed by a sanctioning public. In Milwaukee, as elsewhere across the country, getting married or becoming pregnant were cause for a teacher’s job termination, entrenching the flawed logic that a person could either perform the role of a woman *or* as a worker, but not both-- and still expect to be awarded the

⁸⁸ Clifford, “Man/Woman/Teacher: Gender, Family, and Career in American Educational History”; William J. Kritek and Delbert K. Clear, “Teachers and Principals in the Milwaukee Public Schools,” in *Seeds of Crisis: Public Schooling in Milwaukee since 1920*, ed. John L. Rury and Frank A. Cassell (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

⁸⁹ Many scholars here see would likely characterize the Milwaukee teachers’ limited class analysis as a function of their *lack* of class-consciousness. I heed Rick Fantasia’s decision to focus on “cultures of solidarity” rather than “class-consciousness.” Class consciousness refers to a person’s subjective awareness of where they are located on a class-stratification continuum and what explanation they have for the relationship *between* strata. It can often be assumed to be static and individualized, an awareness that exists independent of context. Cultures of solidarity, in contrast, emphasize the collective, provisional connections that emerge from relationships and actions to create a set of cultural and psychological ties and bonds. Fantasia, *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action and Contemporary American Workers*, 3–7.

⁹⁰ In general, women who became teachers came working class backgrounds; teaching was an upwardly mobile career path. See, Rury, “Who Became Teachers? The Social Characteristics of Teachers in American History.”

social respectability of a teacher.⁹¹ Within MTA's first months of existence, city newspapers ran reproachful editorials forecasting that associating would embolden teachers to – capriciously and selfishly – revolt in an outbreak of strikes. In response, the association quickly issued a public “no-strike” resolution in April 1902, eager to distinguish their intentions and tactics from labor unions.⁹²

Indeed, the Milwaukee teachers in the Milwaukee Teachers' Association made every effort not to be misconstrued as a teachers' *union*.⁹³ Labor unions were seen as gruff and gritty groups, fit for men who labored for their living. The ladies of the Milwaukee Teachers Association argued that they were, by contrast, upright and distinguished women of society. They set up their meetings in ways that conspicuously displayed this narrative. Although at the turn of the century Milwaukee public school buildings were loci of educational and social foment for many -- large swaths of Milwaukee's working class crowded into classrooms for community meetings and public lectures on educational and political matters -- the teachers' association politely declined the school board's invitation to hold the association's meetings in school buildings, preferring instead to gather in more refined locales.⁹⁴ Annually, they held full-dress banquets, often at the upscale Pfister hotel, and later, in the Hotel Wisconsin, in rooms with grand pianos and Victorian furnishings. To heighten the social and intellectual prestige of their meetings, they mailed handkerchiefs out with membership cards and invited distinguished speakers, such as university presidents and well-known professors, to their meetings to deliver comments on educational issues.⁹⁵ They often convened on Saturday mornings to discuss pedagogical matters such as, “Vertical Penmanship – Is It More Desirable Than

⁹¹ To say nothing of the fact that womanhood, in this configuration, was determined by one's participation in the institutions of motherhood and marriage. Kritek and Clear, “Teachers and Principals in the Milwaukee Public Schools,” 151–52.

⁹² Delbert K. Clear, “The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association” (Milwaukee, WI, 1990), 4.

⁹³ The abiding tensions between women's movements and labor organizations are brilliantly examined by Alice Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁹⁴ Robert Lowe, “The New Unionism and the Very Old,” *Education Week* 17, no. 29 (April 1998): 46–50.

⁹⁵ Clear, “The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association.”

Our Current System?”⁹⁶ Although women teachers’ inferior pay and working conditions necessitated the formation of the Milwaukee Teachers Association, the organization took great pains to cast itself as a genteel associations of ladies, as if it could somehow transcend the gendered oppression and class exploitation that necessitated the group’s formation, without actually addressing those forces themselves.

Yet, it was hard to deny the fact that teachers’ association’s mission to improve the status and treatment of teachers, especially their wages and benefits, bore a marked similarity to labor unions. The four aims of the MTA cited by its founding charter - “pensions, salaries, sociability of teachers, and the general promotion of education” – differed only vaguely in tone from charters of teachers’ unions.⁹⁷ This resemblance was at least partially explained by the U.S. political economy’s particular design as a semi-privatized welfare state. The American welfare system ordained employers to determine the incomes and benefits of citizens, in contrast to European-style social democracies in which the state imposed the burden of demand on employees in order to receive such benefits.⁹⁸ The U.S. social welfare system, in other words, coursed according to the chirpy colloquialism, ‘You don’t ask, you don’t get.’ This structure effectively drove members of both associations and unions into the same category: their access to wages, benefits and status upgrades depended upon the demands they made of their employers.

Where the Milwaukee Teachers’ Association differed from unions, then, was less in how they pursued their mission, and more in *the optics* of how they pursued their mission. These teachers

⁹⁶ “General City News,” *Milwaukee Journal*, April 20, 1894.

⁹⁷ See Urban, *Why Teachers Organized*.

⁹⁸ For more on the development of the privatized welfare state, see Gottschalk, *The Shadow Welfare State: Labor, Business, and the Politics of Health Care in the United States*; Klein, *For All These Rights: Business, Labor, and the Shaping of America’s Public-Private Welfare State*; Windham, *Knocking on - Labor’s Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide*; Hacker, *The Divided Welfare State: The Battle over Public and Private Social Benefits in the United States*; Michael K. Brown, “Bargaining for Social Rights: Unions and the Reemergence of Welfare Capitalism, 1945-1952,” *Political Science Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (1997): 645–74.

did not want *to be seen as* a union.⁹⁹ When, in 1903, the teachers' association took up its call for a pension, they poured their support behind a bill establishing a pension bill for teachers. Yet the leaders of the MTA spurned a proposal to organize a mass meeting in support of the bill, fearing it would too closely resemble labor union tactics in its militancy and collective nature. Instead, the MTA opted to pay half of the legal expenses of the Milwaukee Principals' Association, who had aided in the bill's drafting. Furthermore, they chose to send a "delegation" to Madison to meet with legislators, and the president of the association traveled to the state capitol repeatedly to present the teachers' case.¹⁰⁰ Although the association's tactics did not broaden the coalition of active teachers, as more collective action approaches might have, it proved an effective means to secure pensions for teachers. In 1907, four years after the teachers' association began their campaign, the Wisconsin legislature enacted the teachers' retirement and annuity fund. The MTA's aims were efficient in the short-term: they achieved their pension goals, even sans action or participation from teacher members.

Yet, it was precisely the efficiency of the MTA's strategy that mitigated its efficacy over the next decades. Because few members were active in the association's affairs, the association provided a meager threat to the resistant school board, particularly as teachers approached the subject of their pay amidst the economic slump of the 1910s. Between 1903 and 1919, the MTA politely pleaded with the school board for raises. But the board barely managed a response to the petitions, instead shuffling MTA's wage proposals from committee to committee, until the proposed revisions became outdated and obsolete to the point of irrelevance. By 1919, when teachers received promissory notes

⁹⁹ Teachers' rejection of unionism perhaps was not simply a product of their conservatism, but rather represented an attempt to operate strategically within an institution structured to serve the interests of men and administrators, over those of women and teachers. See Apple, *Teachers and Texts: A Political Economy of Class and Gender Relations in Education*, 52.

¹⁰⁰ Kritek and Clear, "Teachers and Principals in the Milwaukee Public Schools," 161.

from the local government in lieu of paychecks, the MTA's pleas to the board devolved from raising wages to simply asking that their salaries be paid "when due."¹⁰¹

This manner of communications, if it can be called as much, carried on from the turn of the century to 1920. That year, the teachers' association retained an attorney to help them with their wage campaign.¹⁰² Thanks to the attorney's efforts, the school district adopted a minimum salary for teachers that had been heretofore unattained. As MTEA historian Delbert Clear summarized, this victory significantly changed the association's strategies going forward; they would never find themselves without the services of an attorney.¹⁰³

While instrumental in the short-term, the teachers' association's administrative-legal appeal for recognition from the school board proved insufficient resistance against the oncoming economic depression of the 1930s. The economy's downward spirals triggered an abundance of teachers, as more women were forced into the workforce to offset the labor market contractions in male-dominated sectors.¹⁰⁴ Between 1925 and 1935, the number of teachers in Milwaukee grew by 33%, from 1,975 in 1925 to 2,630 in 1935.¹⁰⁵ The abundant labor supply gave the school board the upper hand in crafting teachers' working conditions in two crucial new ways. First, the influx of women into the teaching ranks prompted the school board to double-down on gender discriminatory employment law. The few male teachers employed during this time were appointed to secondary school positions, where they were paid more than elementary school teachers, positions almost exclusively held by women. This gender-hierarchy of teachers' pay was heightened when the school board outright prohibited married women from becoming permanent teachers in 1932.¹⁰⁶ Second,

¹⁰¹ Clear, "The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association."

¹⁰² Proceedings of the Milwaukee Board of Directors," August 5, 1919. Hereafter *Proceedings*.

¹⁰³ Clear, "The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association," 7.

¹⁰⁴ Clear, 12.

¹⁰⁵ "Superintendent's Monthly Enrollment Summary, October 2, 1925," *Proceedings*, 1925-27.

"Superintendent's Monthly Enrollment Summary, September 30, 1935," *Proceedings*, 1935-36.

¹⁰⁶ Kritek and Clear, "Teachers and Principals in the Milwaukee Public Schools."

the school board forced teachers to accept arbitrary pay reductions. Between 1932 and 1934, the school board cut teachers' salaries 25 percent.¹⁰⁷

Yet, although the MTA thoroughly disapproved of the board's measures and issued their uncharacteristic consternation with the school board, they had exhausted their means of recourse. They scolded the board for its obstinacy, angrily warning the directors in a letter that their policies would make it difficult for teachers to "instill in the minds of their pupils respect for law and government, consideration of personal and property rights of others, regard for upright civil conduct and love of honesty and square dealing."¹⁰⁸ Despite the teachers' stern upbraiding, the school board didn't as much as publish the teachers' letter in the meeting's proceedings, much less refer it to the deciding committee. Teachers had little recourse beyond wringing their hands.

In summary, the MTA formed in effort to bring greater prestige and pay to the predominantly-female Milwaukee teachers. Although the association wanted improved pay and treatment of its members, it was committed to distinguishing itself from a union in two key ways: its style and its tactics. MTA members adopted specific social styles to distinguish its prestige from other groups (meeting in fancy locales out of schools with prestigious guests presiding over the affairs, for example). Its tactics aimed not to offend the school board – it submitted polite requests to the board, shunned protests and collective actions, and relied heavily on a lawyer to do their bidding. Yet the economic downturn of the 1930s revealed the limits of these strategies; the MTA professional association could offer little protection against the school board's cuts.

Labor's Rising Tide

Although Milwaukee's women teachers struggled to gain even the smallest advances in their workplaces in the 1930s, elsewhere in Milwaukee and across the country, workers' power surged

¹⁰⁷ Clear, "The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association," 8.

¹⁰⁸ Kritek and Clear, "Teachers and Principals in the Milwaukee Public Schools."

through an emboldened labor movement. Militant unionists – in mostly male-dominated industries– picketed, protested and rioted in Minneapolis, San Francisco and Toledo. The upsurge in working class organization and rebellion prompted a major shift in the development of the U.S. welfare state.

Wisconsin had been one of the first states to implement legislation known as the “little Wagner Act” that protected rights of workers to unionize, becoming a precursor to federal legislation.¹⁰⁹ In 1933, in response to labor’s escalating pressure and state-level policy changes, President Roosevelt established baseline regulations to protect workers.¹¹⁰ Through the National Recovery Administration, one of the New Deal legislation’s first pillars, Roosevelt legislated the numbers of hours workers could be forced on the job, and the baseline pay they were to receive. Two years later, in 1935, Roosevelt signed the Wagner Act, known as the “Magna Carta” of unions. The law legalized workers in private firms to form unions, made illegal “company unions,” and prohibited employers from intimidating, Blacklisting, or firing worker-organizers. Though the Wagner Act was an important legal victory for workers’ power, it was still only – in the words of labor historian Nelson Lichtenstein – a law, not a social movement.¹¹¹ The social forces that pressed upon the law would determine its impact, and thus remained to be seen.

In the short term, the Wagner Act encouraged private-sector workers’ mobilizations, especially in Milwaukee.¹¹² In mere weeks, 5,000 Milwaukee workers joined unions for the first time in 1933.¹¹³ Workers newfound organization also generated a powerful political apparatus.

¹⁰⁹ Harold A Katz, “Two Decades of State Labor Legislation 1937-1957,” *The University of Chicago Law Review* 25, no. 109- (1957).

¹¹⁰ For an important analysis of the role of rank-and-file militancy in securing New Deal legislation, see Michael Goldfield, “Worker Insurgency, Radical Organization, and New Deal Labor Legislation,” *The American Political Science Review* 83, no. 4 (1989).

¹¹¹ Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002).

¹¹² This law and the mobilizations it spurred, notably, did not apply to public sector employees, such as teachers. Joseph a. McCartin, “A Wagner Act for Public Employees: Labor’s Deferred Dream and the Rise of Conservatism, 1970-1976,” *The Journal of American History* 95, no. June (2008): 123–48.

¹¹³ *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 18, 1933

Milwaukee's labor council, the Federated Trades Council, boasted over 30,000 members, and its strong organization and activism helped to usher a cadre of socialists to positions in municipal government.¹¹⁴ Thanks to the efforts of the FTC, the union spirit pervaded schools, too. The FTC not only helped to elect socialists to the school board, but they also they regularly petitioned the school board to adopt pro-labor positions, pressuring the board to meet janitors' demands for wage raises and to establish itself as an independent tax authority in order to meet wage increases.¹¹⁵

In addition to fiscal matters, the FTC took interest in the ideological project of schooling, often weighing in on textbooks, curriculum focus, and educational policy.¹¹⁶ For example, when Milwaukee's North Division High school play pejoratively portrayed striking workers, the FTC pressed the school board to prohibit such depictions. "Such representations," the FTC warned the school board through a public letter, "lead to class hatred and class strife, and poison the minds of the children in our public schools, and are an insult to the working people of Milwaukee, who are taxed directly and indirectly to support our school system, and who contribute the largest proportion of our school children."¹¹⁷

The Milwaukee labor council's concerns with public schooling reflected not merely the interests of education workers, but also workers' interests in public education.¹¹⁸ Many workers were concerned about the public education their children received, not just for the taxes it cost them. In particular, workers wanted democratic representation on the school board, rejecting the notion

¹¹⁴ Darryl Holter, "Sources of CIO Success: The New Deal Years in Milwaukee," *Labor History* 29, no. 2 (1988): 199–224; Stuart Eimer, "From 'Business Unionism' to 'Social Movement Unionism': The Case of the AFL-CIO Milwaukee County Labor Council," *Labor Studies Journal* 24, no. 2 (1999): 63–81; Meta Berger, *A Milwaukee Woman's Life on the Left: The Autobiography of Meta Berger* (Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 2001).

¹¹⁵ *Proceedings*, June 4 1918; June 30 1919.

¹¹⁶ Kritek and Clear, "Teachers and Principals in the Milwaukee Public Schools," 161.

¹¹⁷ *Proceedings*, Dec. 1919.

¹¹⁸ See, for example: Kenneth Teitelbaum, *Schooling for Good Rebels: Socialist Education for Children in the United States, 1900-1920* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

popular among elite policy makers and businessmen that schools should run like small factories or corporations.¹¹⁹ The FTC understood this concern and tried to defend such interests when they could. At times, this meant a fierce defense of children’s rights, even if it meant encroaching on teachers’ workplace autonomy. In the fall of 1919, for example, the FTC voted unanimously to “most emphatically protest against the brutal system of corporal punishment of the child, which is still being resorted to by some of the teachers in the public schools of this city.”¹²⁰ The FTC further demanded that the school board establish a policy that authorized them to dismiss any teacher who administered corporal punishment to children. Interestingly, some forty-five years later Milwaukee teachers would flock to the unions precisely to secure their ability to administer corporal punishment to students, as we shall see in chapter Three.

The Origins of the Milwaukee Teachers’ Union

Seeking to further strengthen labor’s influence in schools, a small but committed faction of Milwaukee teachers decided to form the city’s first teachers’ union. No doubt roused by the fervor of industrial democracy that buzzed through trades, a group of male teachers at Boy’s Technical School, a vocational school that prepared “mechanically inclined” boys to pursue careers in the trades, formed the city’s first teacher’s union.¹²¹ On February 11, 1933, twenty-six teachers scrawled their names on a sheet of Wisconsin State Federation of Labor letterhead, petitioning the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) for a charter of affiliation.¹²²

¹¹⁹ David Levine, “The Milwaukee Platoon School Battle: Lessons for Activist Teachers,” *Urban Review* 34, no. 1 (2002): 47–69; William J. Reese, “‘Partisans of the Proletariat’: The Socialist Working Class and the Milwaukee Schools, 1890-1920,” *History of Education Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1981): 3–50.

¹²⁰ *Proceedings*, Nov. 4, 1919.

¹²¹ James L. Cox, “Boys’ Technical High School of Milwaukee,” *The Junior High Clearing House (1920-1921)* 1, no. 7 (1920): 13–16.

¹²² Based on the names of the signatories, the teachers were mostly, if not all, men. “We the Undersigned Teachers of Milwaukee” letter to AFT Secretary Treasurer Florence Hanson, February 11, 1933, Milwaukee, AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series VI, Box 26, Folder 252. Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University. Hereafter WPRL.

The call to unionize Milwaukee's teachers bore a decidedly gendered character. Whereas the teachers' association had been formed by a group of women teachers, a group of men called for a union. As the trainers of future trade workers, these teachers likely perceived less ideological distance between the school house and the shop floor than the women elementary school teachers who assembled an association. Their intimate ties to industrial workforce gave them little reason to distinguish themselves from the working class, especially as it was surging in power and organization. What's more, joining a labor federation did not pose a rupture to perceived gendered expectations for these men, who already saw themselves as gruff, gritty and aligned with the men of the labor. If anything, the teachers' calls to unionize teachers reinforced the gender order: their demands rooted not in a desire to raise women's wages but to ensure men entering the profession could secure their status as "bread-winners," thereby fulfilling their own gendered expectations.¹²³ Between 1920 and 1940, the percentage of men teaching high school in Milwaukee jumped from 31 percent to 48 percent, rising to 58 percent by 1955.¹²⁴ As men increasingly entered the work of teaching, they saw unions as a means to raise the pay for historically feminized work that they were now engaging in greater proportions. That unions operated as a means to affirm the gendered order – rather than transform it -- is both notable and not surprising.¹²⁵

¹²³ This refrain was echoed thirty years later, when the teachers' union and the teachers' association duelled to become the representative bargaining agent. Women are good teachers, argued the male union leader, but the pay scale should not be directed towards their needs, as they may only work for a short time or are not expected to feed a family. "Higher Pay Urged to Attract Teachers," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 14, 1965. His demand *reinforced* the gendered order embedded in the family wage that males are breadwinners and females are homemakers, rather than *transforming* it by calling to, say, universalize family wages or issue wage parity for care givers, thereby breaking gender apart from access to living wages and the care work primarily associated with the reproductive sphere and women. Nancy Fraser, "After the Family Wage: A Postindustrial Thought Experiment," in *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis* (London: Verso, 2013).

¹²⁴ Men primarily taught in high school, though by 1955, the majority of middle school teachers were men as well. In 1940, only four percent of elementary school teachers were men. Adapted from Kritek and Clear, "Teachers and Principals in the Milwaukee Public Schools," 149.

¹²⁵ My distinction between "affirmative" versus "transformative" justice remedies heeds Nancy Fraser, who describes affirmative solutions as ameliorating select conditions of injustice while leaving structural causes in tact. Transformative justice remedies, in contrast, rearrange both material and social structures that generate

It is equally notable and equally not surprising that Milwaukee teachers did not consider racial justice as a dimension of their drive to unionize. In the 1930s, Milwaukee's small Black population endured significant discrimination, particularly in employment.¹²⁶ When Black males were employed in Milwaukee's key industries, they were tasked with dirtiest and most dangerous work, pouring molten iron in foundries or stacking pallets on the docks of Lake Michigan as wind whipped skin raw. Driven by both immediate necessity and national momentum, as Black trade unionist leaders across the country pushed for Black employment, Milwaukee Black leaders prioritized jobs as the city's fundamental civil rights issue.¹²⁷ Hiring Black teachers became a special point of concern; until 1930, the school district had not employed a single Black teacher. Milwaukee's Urban League director, William Kelley, in the late 1930s campaigned the Milwaukee Board of Directors to hire more Black teachers, agreeing to the compromise that they were exclusively placed the city's predominantly Black schools. Yet, from the records I have examined, neither the Milwaukee teachers' union nor teachers' association had virtually any interaction with the Urban League, seemingly unconcerned with the issue of hiring more Black teachers. The Urban League's strategy did not turn to the teachers' union, either, to advance their demands; the racism of white teachers, in fact, obstructed their work. As a result, the struggle to address racial justice, particularly in regard to hiring Black teachers, operated independently from the union's functioning.

Despite their lack of concern with either racial justice or gender justice, many Milwaukee teachers still saw joining a labor movement as project bigger than simply their improving their

inequalities and hierarchies. Nancy Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age," *New Left Review*, no. 212 (1995): 68–93, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470756119.ch54>.

¹²⁶ Joe William Trotter, *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 47–55.

¹²⁷ Jack Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform In Milwaukee* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Jack Dougherty, "'That's When We Were Marching for Jobs': Black Teachers and the Early Civil Rights Movement in Milwaukee," *History of Education Society* 38, no. 2 (1998): 121–41; Russell Rickford and Marable Manning, "A . Philip Randolph and the Foundations of Black American Socialism," in *Beyond Boundaries: The Manning Marable Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 175–93.

material interests. These teachers saw joining the labor movement as the best way to improve public schooling: improving schools required a change in political forces and bettering the economic welfare for all that came from working class power. Working with Milwaukee's labor council and national teachers' union, the AFT, provided the means to do this.

In mid-1930s, the AFT nationally functioned as a feminist, militant labor union. Led primarily by women teachers, AFT's national leaders had led calls to tax corporations in order to fund schools, to push for desegregated schools, and deepen the democratic organization of schools and unions.¹²⁸ A number of communist and socialist teachers formed its membership and leadership, and leaders of its locals in big cities. In the early 1930s, a slate of radical women had assumed leadership of the union, including Secretary Treasurer Florence Hanson; AFT unionists in New York fought for anti-racist curriculum and for racial justice in school buildings.¹²⁹ Although Milwaukee teachers did not strong ideological commitments to either feminism or racial justice, their call to unionize affiliated them with this gadfly union. AFT leaders, in turn, cheerfully ushered in the Milwaukee teachers to its ranks.

AFT was a hands-off parent union as far as the Milwaukee local managed its affairs – it imposed “no regulations as to what method of record keeping shall be employed by the local,” so long as the monthly dues to the national union, known as per caps, got paid. In addition to an organizational affiliation, these dues granted each member a subscription to AFT's monthly publication *The American Teacher*, the national organ of the union that frequently published the

¹²⁸ Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA 1900-1989*; Weiner, “Teachers, Unions, and School Reform: Examining Margaret Haley's Vision. *Educational Foundations*, 10(3), 85-96. Chicago”; Rousmaniere, *Citizen Teacher: The Life and Leadership of Margaret Haley*.

¹²⁹ Hanson was a veteran high school teacher and a militant feminist. Her Chicago office, to the dismay of the opposing faction of male leaders, was lined with books about socialism and plastered with posters of Mexican President Calles, the first populist leader of Mexico who called for expanded labor rights, public education and land distribution. Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA 1900-1989*, 100–122.

writing of leading progressive educational thinkers, such as John Dewey and George Counts. Sharing these philosophies with teachers was central to the mission of the AFT.¹³⁰

In addition to supplying teachers with progressive ideas about education and classroom practice, AFT leadership encouraged the Milwaukee teachers to stay connected with their local labor council. AFT's organizing philosophy posited that teachers' power would not be developed in isolation, but rather by forging connections with the growing labor movement. "Labor is manifesting a deep interest in the organization of teachers," AFT Secretary-Treasurer Florence Hanson told the Milwaukee teachers, "Union men are much concerned about the public schools. They therefore welcome the teachers into the labor movement and eagerly hear their story."¹³¹ Connections with local labor councils, the AFT leaders believed, would strengthen the teachers' mission to improve public schools. "Delegates from the teachers' locals to these bodies can do much," Mrs. Hanson noted, "to enlist the cooperation of labor in the improvement of the schools and the conditions of the teachers."¹³² The source of the union's power, in other words, came not from its national affiliation, but from its relationships and solidarities with local working-class organizations.

In addition to building external relationships with other groups, the Milwaukee teachers began to organize their fellow teachers. "The more [teachers] are organized the more they will accomplish," instructed Hanson.¹³³ The labor movement was only as strong as each local, reminded Secretary Treasurer Hanson. Yet organizing was a delicate affair. It required teachers to both fiercely articulate the union's vision and goals, and to warmly welcome and educate teachers who may not

¹³⁰ "Will you please furnish us with a complete list of your members," Secretary Treasurer Florence Hanson chirpily requested to the Milwaukee communications chairman on March 17, 1933, "in order that we send them the magazine each month?" Letter from AFT Secretary-Treasurer Florence Curtis Hanson to Harvey Knoch, March 17, 1933. AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series VI, Box 26, Folder 252. WPRL.

¹³¹ Letter from AFT Secretary-Treasurer Florence Curtis Hanson to Harvey Knoch, March 17, 1933. AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series VI, Box 26, Folder 252. WPRL.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

yet share such goals. To become the “formidable group” they aspired to build, they had to appeal to teachers otherwise uninterested in unions.¹³⁴ This was not such an easy task.

In MTU’s first monthly meetings in 1933, members quickly encountered their fellow teachers’ hesitation at joining a *labor* organization rather than the more familiar professional association. By the end of that school year, MTU members found themselves scratching their heads and wondering first among themselves, then to the AFT leadership, if their mission would be better served by more mildly titling their group. “Although we are fully aware of the fact that we are a local union, affiliated with a national union,” they acknowledged somewhat bashfully in a letter dated May 24, 1933 to the Secretary-Treasurer of AFT, “this word has caused much comment in our group. We are at present trying to build our organization into a formidable group and we feel that if the word ‘union’ will keep a teacher from joining our group it might be diplomatic to use some term which will not have an antagonistic reaction.”¹³⁵ What exactly, the Milwaukee teachers wanted to know, is in a name?

The specific word “union” drew particular concern for many teachers. Yet the Secretary-Treasurer of the AFT hardly batted an eye at the Milwaukee teachers’ questions; their concerns about the connotation of “union” were only too common among the teacher groups Hanson counseled. “I have always advised teachers forming a local to be guided in the choice of a name by local condition,” Hanson assured, “[It] is a matter that rests entirely with your membership.”¹³⁶ Hanson herself, nonetheless, strongly favored the term ‘Union’ and made no apologies for it. “I should like you to consider if it is not part of a teacher’s social education to overcome a prejudice

¹³⁴ Reaching out to those not already with an organization, in contrast to mobilizing those who already stand with you is *the* primary task of organizing, postulates labor strategist and theorist Jane McAlevey. McAlevey, *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age*.

¹³⁵ Letter from Harvey Knoch, MTU Secretary to AFT-Secretary Florence Curtis Hanson, May 24, 1933. AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series VI, Box 26, Folder 252. WPRL.

¹³⁶ Letter from AFT-Secretary Florence Curtis Hanson to Harvey Knoch, MTU Secretary, June 1, 1933. AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series VI, Box 26, Folder 252. WPRL.

against this name and to understand its significance,” she encouraged them. “Would a teacher who would stay out of your local because it is a union be a valuable member?”¹³⁷ In Hanson’s formulation, teachers organize unions – not the other way around. Thus, union strength and energy rests upon the commitments of those who form them – and part of the union’s work was to build that energy among the non-believers.

Sufficiently convinced by Hanson’s analysis, the Milwaukee teachers proudly marched ahead as the Milwaukee Teachers’ Union. When members of the Milwaukee Teachers Union could not outright convince more their skittish colleagues to them to join them, they shifted their strategy to eliminating outright repercussion for union affiliation, in hopes of reducing teachers’ fears. In 1934, MTU drafted a resolution declaring that the school board would not discriminate against teachers for joining a union. “We have no apology to offer on this stand,” proclaimed the chair of the union’s communications committee. “There is no question in the minds of the union members as to our rights.”¹³⁸

The union strategically approached this resolution as an organizing tool. Either the school board would pass the union’s resolution, thereby assuaging one more fear of cautious teachers who feared professional repercussions for joining a union; or the resolution would not pass, and the union could use it to build a bigger campaign. “Favorable action on this resolution by the Board will encourage [the teachers]; unfavorable action by this same group will wake them up,” reflected MTU activist Ernst Kurath in March 1934, “We stand to increase our membership either way.” MTU worked side-by-side with the labor council on their efforts. The Federated Trades Councils proposed the resolution to the school board, putting outside pressure on the board to recognize

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Letter from Harvey Knoch, MTU Secretary to AFT-Secretary Florence Curtis Hanson, March 24, 1933. AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series VI, Box 26, Folder 252. WPRL.

teachers' union rights.¹³⁹ On May 1, 1934, the efforts were successful: the board pledged not to discriminate against teachers for joining unions.

Thus, in the 1930s, the Milwaukee teacher unionists experienced burgeoning courage in their efforts, bolstered in part by the labor movement around them. As hundreds of workers nationwide led waves of strikes, the Milwaukee teacher unionists took pains to identify “The Teacher’s Part in the New Order.”¹⁴⁰ In their monthly newsletters, which ran under the heading “Education in Democracy, Democracy in Education,” they exhorted teachers’ obligations to “hasten the coming of an economic order of higher social utility.” This required teachers’ active participation. “Teachers may not remain aloof,” the unionists presciently urged in December 1934, “They dare not face the past instead of the future; they must not be satisfied with education which merely reflects the status quo, or worse yet the status quo ante.”¹⁴¹ These early teacher unionists understood they were in the early stages of building something important. “If the past is in our present and the present controls the future,” they advised, “we owe it to our profession to make our shadows long, to think things through, and to lead the way for better days.”¹⁴²

Yet despite the MTU’s lofty ambitions, the strength of their movement and impact was hampered by several important dynamics. First, the union was one of many associations that Milwaukee teachers could join to improve their lot; elementary, junior high and secondary school teachers each had respective organizations. Instead of suturing the teachers together to speak with one voice, the plethora of teacher associations splintered teachers’ demands. Each group proposed its own salary schedules and wage demands to the board, thereby allowing the board to

¹³⁹ From Reuther, AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series VI, Box 26, Folder 252. WPRL.

¹⁴⁰ “The Teacher’s Part in a New Order,” MTU Newsletter, December 1934, AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series VI, Box 26, Folder 252. WPRL.

¹⁴¹ “The Union’s Stand with Liberal Forces,” MTU Newsletter, December 1934, AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series VI, Box 26, Folder 252. WPRL.

¹⁴² “A ‘NEW’ Journal of Education: ‘The Social Frontier,’” MTU Newsletter, December 1934, AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series VI, Box 26, Folder 252. WPRL.

pick and choose which elements it would adopt. Perhaps of most consequence, these piecemeal bids disabled teachers from applying unified pressure to change how the school board *levied* funds --- not just how they distributed them. For example, in the 1940s, MTU and the secondary teachers' association urged the school board to seek authority to levy taxes from the state legislature, while the MTA apologetically shuffled to the school board asking for raises "inasmuch as revenue sources [would] permit."¹⁴³ Without a unified platform of pressure, the teachers could not develop sufficient power to change the political and economic conditions surrounding schools. Instead of together demanding a bigger pie, each group of teachers found themselves begging for crumbs. MTU, like the other teacher association, struggled to build its power.

MTU's capacity to fulfill its lofty aims was hampered by a second more structural factor: the nationally changing balance of forces within and around labor movements after 1937. After New Deal legislation expressed the state's willingness to protect workers, employers became more emboldened in their efforts to block unions. Though not immediately successful in undoing the 1930s labor protections, the revival of employers' campaigns to coordinate and organize against labor marked a period that many historians today consider the right's renewal.¹⁴⁴

As employers began reviving their anti-union activism, debates within the labor movement began to brew about how workers should organize themselves. The relative successes and maturation of workers' organizing during the early 1930s meant that rather than simply press for the right to unionize, workers could now debate, even feud, over the strategies and tactics that would deliver them the most power. These debates were most clearly expressed between the tensions of the two major factions of the labor movement, the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and the

¹⁴³ Clear, "The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association," 13.

¹⁴⁴ Mark S. Mizruchi, *The Fracturing of the American Corporate Elite* (Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674075368>; Feurer and Pearson, *Against Labor: How U.S. Employers Organized to Defeat Union Activism*, Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009).

Congress of Industrialized Organizations (CIO). Would workers' power come from doubling down in their crafts and defending their particular skill, the strategy adopted by the AFL? Or, would they be strengthened by organizing industries as a whole – mobilizing entire factories, for example, rather than specific types of workers in a factory? This was the strategy put forward by the CIO. The strategic dilemma reflected a bigger philosophical one: did workers' value and power come from their craftsmanship, or their solidarity?

In Milwaukee, this particular debate came to an explosive head at the Allis Chalmers manufacturing plant between 1939 and 1941, where a radical faction of workers had organized a militant, democratic union affiliated with CIO.¹⁴⁵ The company fiercely retaliated against the radical organizers, eventually breaking the union, purging its key organizers and, in 1948, charging them with Communist activities during House of Un-American Activities Committee hearings. Yet these events did more than break the Allis Chalmers union; they became the backdrop for reformed labor law that empowered employers and weakened workers' organizing rights in the state. The mercurial shifts in Wisconsin's labor law between 1935 and 1939 --the 1935 "Little Wagner" law shored up state level support of unions while the 1939 "Little Taft-Hartley" law imposed barriers to unionization – would soon get projected onto the national stage. In the 1950s, the major school of labor economics and theory arose at University of Wisconsin, out of the need to defend the traditional AFL organizing model both from socialist and management critiques. The Wisconsin school, as it was called, would become a chief proponent of business and bureaucratic unionism. These scholars saw unions as a means to bolster workers' consumption powers, rather than mechanisms of class struggle between the diverging forces of labor and capital.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Meyer, *"Stalin over Wisconsin": The Making and Unmaking of Militant Unionism, 1900-1950*.

¹⁴⁶ Kim Moody, *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism* (New York: Verso, 1988), 53.

All to say, by the late 1930 and through the 1950s, in Wisconsin, then nationally, labor was losing its radical momentum. The advent of World War II forged a re-alignment of organized labor, capital and the state, as employers took advantage of wartime production needs to persuade unions to expel their radical leaders, condemn militant tactics like sit-down strikes, and to sign on to wartime no-strike pledges. National union leadership waved aside their 1930's blustering bellows for industrial democracy in exchange for the bureaucratic babble of labor-management cooperation. "The result was a kind of social contract which 'conscripted' war workers into unions," writes labor scholar Mike Davis, "while at the same time denying the unions any authentic capacity to represent the economic interests of their members."¹⁴⁷ Thus, organized labor eagerly took the passenger seat in the Cold War project that state and capital developed after war's end.

Teachers, too, suffered from labor's shifting tides. In the 1930s, the industrial-wide, radical spirit of the CIO influenced many teachers in the AFT. Many teachers, especially in New York, were members of the Communist Party and used this political framework to expand a vision of unionism beyond the narrow confines of professionalism and teachers' pay.¹⁴⁸ These teachers sought to forge relationships with parent and community groups, and were especially effective in Harlem and Bedford Stuyvesant, where they succeeded in getting new two schools built in historically under-resourced, predominantly Black neighborhoods. They explicitly agitated for anti-racist curriculum, removing racist textbooks, creating Black history bibliographies and classroom materials.¹⁴⁹

However, by the early 1940s, the conservative strand of teacher unionists assumed national

¹⁴⁷ Mike Davis, "The Barren Marriage of American Labour and the Democratic Party," *New Left Review* 124 (1980): 43–84.

¹⁴⁸ Clarence Taylor, *Reds at the Blackboard: Communism, Civil Rights and the New York City Teachers Union* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Perillo, *Uncivil Rights: Teachers, Unions, and Race In the Battle for School Equity*; Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA 1900-1989*.

¹⁴⁹ Lauri Johnson, "Making Democracy Real: Teacher Union and Community Activism to Promote Diversity in the New York City Public Schools," *Urban Education* 37, no. 5 (2002): 566–87, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085902238674>.

leadership, denounced its Communist factions and muted the anti-racist projects that formed within its radical pockets. By the 1950s, AFT's militant feminist leadership had been replaced by male leaders, many of whom were eager to strengthen ties with the AFL and its bureaucratic style of unionism.¹⁵⁰ Thus, in Milwaukee, as teachers in MTU gained strength locally, the contours of the union movement which they were joining had changed shape.

The Rise of Public Sector Labor Law

Despite these changes in the political landscape, Milwaukee teachers pressed ahead in their fight to unionize. On the first Saturday in March in 1958, Carl Megel, the president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), traveled to Milwaukee to celebrate the Milwaukee Teachers Union 25th anniversary. Although it had been a busy season for Megel, with 13 trips to different locals in the past month alone, Megel was fired up to visit Milwaukee.¹⁵¹ The Milwaukee teachers' union membership had just surged to close to 900 teachers, a 75 percent jump since 1955, earning the union national recognition from AFT.¹⁵² Milwaukee's broader labor coalition, too, had just had an up-swell – its two dueling factions (the AFL and CIO) had recently merged into one combined union, marking a shifting tide in the city's labor movement.¹⁵³ The Milwaukee Teachers' Union, like

¹⁵⁰ During the late 1920s, the AFL had spurned AFT's radicalism, and aligned itself with NEA leaders. As the president of AFT wrote to her comrade secretary treasure Florence Hanson, "The affinity between the AFL and the NEA has finally dawned on me. As much alike as two peas in a pod. As much alike as two peas in a pod. Autocratic, complaisant, monopolistic – antisocial, fear ridden, illiberal inherently." Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA 1900-1989*, 121.

¹⁵¹ "A report by Carl J. Megel, president, to the convention of the American Federation of Teachers," Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1958. Pamphlet collection, Wisconsin Historical Society. Hereafter WHS.

¹⁵² Megel's convention report; Local 252 per caps, AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series XII, Box 14, Folder 252. WPRL.

¹⁵³ Milwaukee's merging of AFL and CIO followed the national merger in 1955. It bears noting that at the time of this merging, both nationally and locally, nearly all political differences had been eliminated between the two factions, after the CIO purged its Communist leadership. See, Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002)

AFT locals across the country, found itself united as a part of AFL-CIO. Milwaukee teachers' spike in union membership coincided with a broader re-organization in labor.

At MTU's 25th anniversary celebration, Megel praised the union's efforts. "By joining hands with the men and women who have traditionally been the best friends of American education," he declared, "you have abetted your cause and theirs." He toasted the union's past leaders, claiming he knew of "no other people in the labor movement that have given their time and energies in the interest of teachers unionism."¹⁵⁴ Yet, Megel also encouraged the union to keep up their efforts, reminding them that a union was only as strong as its actions. In the face of anti-union sentiments cresting amidst conservative business circles and within school administrators and teacher professional associations, Megel reminded the teachers they would need to be unrelenting in their efforts to bring more teachers into active participation in the union, lest they get siphoned into the apolitical vision of professional associations and company unionism.¹⁵⁵ The success or failure of the Milwaukee Teachers Union would cast a long shadow for other teacher unionists.

That said, it bears restating that at the moment Megel implored the Milwaukee teachers to take greater union action, the labor movement itself changed shape. No longer the germinator of radical political and social visions, the labor movement slogged forward as a kind of bureaucratic behemoth. By 1958 in Wisconsin and nationwide, radical elements of the industrial labor movement had been driven off, as a result of intense anti-communist purges and rising anti-communist sentiment. Radical political parties had also been dismantled. By the late 1950s, collective bargaining agreements had become the proxy for class struggle.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ AFT President Carl Megel's speech to MTU's 25th Anniversary, Milwaukee, WI, March 1, 1958. AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series XII, Box 76, Folder 252. WPRL.

¹⁵⁶ Some labor sociologists and historians decry labor's transition from 1930s political militancy to the bureaucratic model of business unionism common prevalent in 1950s as either the inevitable growth cycle of union maturity, or the structurally-determined character of unions to become only ever a means of expressing capitalism – not changing it. Although in this paragraph I point to the fact that much of the labor movement

Nonetheless, in Wisconsin, labor organizations sought a defense against budding free-enterprise movements, and looked to public sector workers to do so.¹⁵⁷ In December 1958, the largest labor meeting in the city's history took place. 2800 municipal employees – librarians, sanitation workers, office clerks – crowded into a labor hall to debate whether to go on strike to be recognized as the exclusive union of the municipal employees. Although these workers were all members of the American Federation of State, Council and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) union, as public-sector employees, they had no legal protection at that point. Municipal employees had been excluded from the tide of labor laws of the 1930s (such as the Wagner Act) that formally recognized private-sector workers' rights to unions. Public-sector employers – the state itself – had no obligation to recognize public sector workers' organizing, much less negotiate their demands. By the meeting's close, the 2800 Milwaukee AFSCME members had voted to authorize a strike if the city refused to recognize the union as the exclusive bargaining agent of the city employees. AFSCME's power soon generated sufficient pressure and allies. In 1959, the Wisconsin governor signed a law recognizing public-sector employees' right to unionize, becoming the first state in the country to do so.

Milwaukee teachers, however, were not present at AFSCME's meetings. When the public sector union law passed and included teachers in the category of municipal employees, they become peculiar beneficiaries – gaining protections they had neither organized nor argued for. In fact, as the bill made its way through the legislative halls, the lobbyist for the League of Municipalities, a municipal employers association, slyly pressed to include teachers in the bill, believing that the mere specter of unionized teachers would induce sufficient odium to kill the entire bill. Therefore, when

did in fact embody the role of capital's "junior partner," I do not subscribe to the philosophy that it is the pre-ordained character of unions to behave this way. Rather, I point out the limitations merely to reveal how much the labor landscape had changed by the late 1950s when teachers were beginning to join it.

¹⁵⁷ Connell, *Conservative Counterrevolution: Challenging Liberalism in 1950s Milwaukee*, 127–47; Joseph Slater, *Public Workers: Government Unions, the Law and the State, 1900-1962* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 158–92.

the bill passed with teachers included, the state teachers' association, the Wisconsin Educational Association, was just as surprised as the League of Municipalities to learn the bill had passed – with teachers included.¹⁵⁸ Teachers received rights for which they had not asked, much less struggled.

In this way, the 1959 law was not so much a spark for teachers' unionization, but an ember – an accidental means to store heat, allowing teachers some slowness and slumber before flame either faltered or took hold. Four years would pass before teachers in Milwaukee would formally petition for union recognition. During those years, small fires elsewhere lit around the Milwaukee teachers. Milwaukee's other municipal employees – the city's building inspectors, nurses and bus drivers -- joined unions. In New York, the teachers positively blazed, not only joining unions but rousing them to strike for better pay and recognition. Beginning to feel the heat, the Milwaukee Teachers' Union rose to their feet.

MTU Builds Its Power

Perhaps roused by the municipal organizing around the city, in the late 1950s, the Milwaukee Teachers' Union amped up its organizing. In 1958, the MTU spearheaded a salary campaign, which yielded an across-the board raise for teachers, \$100 higher than the superintendent's proposal. They organized unprecedented turnout to the school board's salary hearings - nearly 800 teachers showed up at the October 1, Finance Committee meeting. The teachers' demands caught the attention of not only the school board, but also the city's press. The *Milwaukee Journal* remarked with surprise, "Never before has the school board faced such a gathering of teachers."¹⁵⁹ When the board passed the raise, the teachers' union officers and building representatives beamed with pride; their "back-

¹⁵⁸ GM Saltzman, "A Progressive Experiment: The Evolution of Wisconsin's Collective Bargaining Legislation for Local Government Employees," *Journal of Collective Negotiations in the Public Sector* 15, no. 1 (1986): 1–25.

¹⁵⁹ "500 Teachers Jam Pay Hearing to Protest \$250 Raise Proposal," *Milwaukee Journal*, October 2, 1959.

breaking effort and long hours of work” had made a difference.¹⁶⁰ “For that extra \$100, it is well known the teachers are beholden to the Milwaukee Teachers Union and the Milwaukee County Labor Council,” the Milwaukee Teachers Union boasted. The teachers’ union also advocated for employee benefits. They successfully lobbied the School Board to provide health insurance, liability insurance, and life insurance for teachers. “After all,” one MTU pamphlet proudly declared, “teachers do not live by salaries alone, but also by fringe benefits.”¹⁶¹

In addition to providing the right to fight for better salaries and benefits, the 1959 law also enabled teachers to protect themselves against union discrimination. In 1959, an increasing number of teachers faced discrimination from principals for their union activity. Under this law, an important part of MTU’s work became defending teachers who had faced discrimination for union membership.¹⁶² Before the year’s end, the union had taken on several other similar cases.¹⁶³

Providing legal defense to teachers facing discrimination for their union affiliation was a complicated strategy for the MTU. On the one hand, it protected teachers and forced legitimacy upon union affiliation. Yet it also narrowed the grounds on which teachers found standing for union affiliation alone. Although the teacher union’s fought against discrimination based on union affiliation, they were ominously silent on other forms of discrimination long-faced by teachers, particularly racial and gender discrimination. Virtually no documents in MTU’s paper record address the racist and unequal treatment of Black teachers or the mistreatment of women teachers of any race or status. These omissions were particularly stark during the union’s activity during the 1930s, at

¹⁶⁰ “MTU Spearheads Drive for Salary Increases” MTU Newsletter, October 1959, Volume 1, Number 2. WSHS.

¹⁶¹ “What the Milwaukee Teachers Union Has Been Doing For You Lately” pamphlet. AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series XII, Box 76, Folder 252, WPRL.

¹⁶² Arvid Anderson, “Labor Relations in the Public Service,” *Wisconsin Law Review*, 1961, 601–35. Also MTU newsletters, September, December 1960, WSHS.

¹⁶³ Letter from Soucie to Megel, Dec 1960. AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series XII, Box 76, Folder 252, WPRL.

which point Urban League director William Kelley was waging a campaign to hire more Black teachers in Milwaukee public schools. These efforts appeared to have receive little to no support or even attention from either MTA or MTU during these years, silently cordoning off a racist order of both groups' purview: the hiring, pay and treatment of *Black* teachers were not their province. This racial exclusion would have consequences in the years to come, as Chapter Three explores.¹⁶⁴

MTU's membership and infrastructure continued to grow. Instead, when MTU did take up "discrimination" they focused on the discrimination of union teachers for union affiliation, presumably all of whom were white and most of whom were men. In addition to narrowing the political purview of the union, in more banal terms, this strategy drained the union's finances. By the end of 1959, the union solicited its members and other locals with requests for money donations and launched a "defense fund" to keep the union financially afloat. "In the light of the unusually heavy legal expenses incurred by the Milwaukee Teachers Union in its three court cases of the past year," MTU president Soucie wrote to its membership, "the MTU defense fund is in great need of your help."¹⁶⁵ The defense fund revealed a bigger complication in the union's revenue calculus: the union needed resources in order to fight for teachers, but in order to get these resources the union had to convince teachers the union was worth the money. The solution to this problem, the MTU executive board decided, was to grow the infrastructure of the union. They petitioned members for a dues' increase, and hired an executive secretary to help coordinate the union's day-to-day activities, since all of the union members and leaders were also full-time teachers.¹⁶⁶

With more muscle on board, MTU began to slowly engage with the political landscape around schools. They began to take active endorsement positions in school board and mayoral

¹⁶⁴ Dougherty, "That's When We Were Marching for Jobs?: Black Teachers and the Early Civil Rights Movement in Milwaukee"; Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform In Milwaukee*.

¹⁶⁵ "Drive for Defense Fund to Be Conducted by 252," January 1961, MTU Newsletter. WHS.

¹⁶⁶ "Letter from Carl Megel, AFT president to Donald Soucie, MTU President," December 20 1960. AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series XII, Box 76, Folder 252, WPRL.

candidates. They also attempted to insert themselves in bigger political conversations about the structural problems of school finance and racial inequality in Milwaukee. For example, they advocated to shift school funding from property taxes to income taxes and increased state aid.¹⁶⁷ And they offered a congratulatory, albeit bland, statement to members in 1959 when Mayor Zeidler commissioned his report on racial inequality in Milwaukee.¹⁶⁸ Although MTU's efforts towards political activity were by no means revolutionary, they revealed the union's earnest, plodding interest in the political issues that surrounded schools, beyond teachers' wages.

MTU was also concerned about the political forms within the union. Members frequently discussed about how to make both the union and Milwaukee public schools' more democratic. One member led a study on the democratic processes and schools and unions, reporting his findings as a matter of union business. MTU's early newsletters bluntly urged members to come speak up. It frequently ran articles and editorials that implored teachers to show up and participate in the debates, *especially* when they disagreed with union's direction. MTU's May 1961 newsletter chided, "Don't be a pedagogical Achilles and sulk in your educational tent because you may have some reservation about some MTU action or policy. These decisions are arrived at democratically at regular membership meetings open to all. From what we hear, no other Milwaukee teachers' organization can make that statement."¹⁶⁹ As membership grew, union materials went beyond declaring the importance of democratic deliberation to explaining steps to enact it within the union. An April 1963 newsletter instructed: "When we agree with the majority opinions of the group, everything is fine. What happens when we disagree with the opinion or the decision of the majority?"

¹⁶⁷ "Labor Council Plans Tax Conference" March 1960, MTU Newsletter. AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series XII, Box 76, Folder 252, WPRL.

¹⁶⁸ MTU Newsletter, 1959. AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series XII, Box 76, Folder 252, WPRL.

¹⁶⁹ "Dues Deadline Nears" May 1961, MTU Newsletter. AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series XII, Box 76, Folder 252, WPRL.

What does the intelligent believer in group action do then? First you have to ask yourself a few questions. Did [I?] take an active part in forming the opinion of my organization by attending the meetings? Did I make my thoughts known by speaking up at the meeting? (You know that's what the meetings are designed for.)"¹⁷⁰

MTU, thus, sought to build an empowered teachers' union, one that foregrounded teachers' own participation in education affairs and took seriously the work of organizing fellow teachers. Though active in fostering democratic and political discussion, MTU paid little attention to issues of either racial and gendered discrimination faced by teachers. They prided themselves on their role as a vocal and militant union, but the political bounds of this militancy did not challenge either racial or gender norms. Their efforts would soon come to a test when they decided to bid for sole collective bargaining recognition.

The Duel for Union Representation

By 1962, things changed for the Milwaukee teachers' union. The 1959 state's public sector employee law had been augmented. Now, not only were municipal employees legally allowed to unionize, but municipal employers were *mandated* to bargain with certified unions. This provided a new opportunity for the MTU. If they could become the exclusive bargaining representative for the Milwaukee teachers, they would no longer have to beg the school board to listen to their demands; they could collectively bargain. In the fall of 1963, MTU petitioned the Wisconsin Employment Relations Board to become the sole representative bargaining unit for teachers throughout the city. Almost immediately, MTEA decided to challenge MTU for recognition, forcing an election between the two organization. In February 1964, Milwaukee teachers would go to the polls to determine who would become their exclusive bargaining representative, the MTU or the MTEA.

¹⁷⁰ "Toward Unity of Action," April 1963, MTU Newsletter. AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series XII, Box 76, Folder 252, WPRL.

Though MTEA had taken little interest in the state's revamped public-sector labor law, it could not ignore the growing drumbeat of MTU. In March 1963, the Milwaukee Teachers Association, the group of predominantly elementary school teachers, put aside their decades-old differences with the secondary teachers' association, the MSEA. In an effort to unify the "professionals" against the union, the two groups merged to become the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association (MTEA), representing for the first time secondary teachers *and* elementary school teachers. In its early years, MTEA was seen as a women's organization, while the MTU was perceived to be the association for men, carving yet another gendered division between teachers and unions.¹⁷¹ Many saw MTEA's decision to unionize as an attempt to dissolve the gender boundary that had previously divided the two groups. Several male teachers ran for MTEA's leadership; women joined MTU's memberships. While the groups themselves were more integrated by sex, the power hierarchies within reinforced a gendered order – men constituted the majority of the leadership bodies of both MTU and MTEA.

When MTEA leaders learned of the MTU's petition to the WERB, they immediately filed an intervention to be included on the ballot and called a special meeting of union representatives. As MTEA president Eileen Cantwell told teacher at the October special meeting of that year, "This MTU move has been anticipated, but not expected this soon." Cantwell insisted that MTEA building reps must "work doubly hard" to convince the large majority of teachers who belonged to neither the association nor the union to join cause with the association.¹⁷² "The greatest problem at present is the apathy of the teachers," Cantwell chided at a special meeting held the next month. "If Milwaukee teachers are going to enjoy teaching in the manner to which we have been accustomed, MTEA has to win the bargaining rights election."¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Interview with author, July 17, 2017.

¹⁷² MTEA Building Representative Meeting Minutes, October 23, 1963. MTEA Archives.

¹⁷³ MTEA Building Representative Meeting Minutes, November 13, 1963. MTEA archives.

Thus, began MTEA's defensive campaign against MTU for exclusive bargaining rights, a small, bright conflict in Milwaukee's education history that sizzled over the next three years.¹⁷⁴ While MTU pushed to unionize teachers, MTEA trumpeted themselves as champions of the existing state of affairs. After all, had it not been the Association who had so mannerly met with the school board over all these years? "With the work professional associations have done for the teachers of Milwaukee," MTEA leaders huffed, "the WERB will be made to realize the claims of the MTU are, politely, 'far out in left field.'"¹⁷⁵ MTEA promptly put out a paper summarizing the benefits it had obtained for teachers since its founding in 1901. But the list was notably short, trailing off especially the past decade. As historian Delbert Clear flatly observed, "of the 21 items listed, only five had been achieved since 1950."¹⁷⁶ Despite its claims to longevity as the successor of the MTA, MTEA had little actions or efforts to present to teachers, besides a close relationship with management.

It would be easy to narrate the schism between MTEA and MTU that occurred from 1963 to 1965 as another episode in the oft-rehearsed conflict of "unions versus professional associations" – and for good reason.¹⁷⁷ After all, the organizations *were* unions and professional associations. Yet what arguments of what differentiated this battled in Milwaukee from duels elsewhere was the fact that public employees in Wisconsin legally had the right to unionize. Though MTEA sought to cast itself as the association most fit for professionals, in reality it aimed to become collective bargaining agent, in other words, a union. Whether or not the teachers called themselves a union, by petition for collective bargaining rights, the state recognized them as such. The 1959 law thus inadvertently

¹⁷⁴ "NEA Field Letter Representative Letter to Mrs. Kingston," Jan 20 1964. AFT Collections Inventory, Part II, Series XII, Box 76, Folder 252, WPRL.

¹⁷⁵ MTEA Building Representative Meeting Minutes, October 23, 1963. MTEA Archives.

¹⁷⁶ Clear, "The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association," 24.

¹⁷⁷ As MTEA's previous historian concludes. See, Clear, "The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association"; For a national level discussion of this conflict, see: Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA 1900-1989*.

sowed a set of contradictions into MTEA's campaign. Although MTEA wanted to be recognized as the sole bargaining agent, thus becoming the teachers' union, it eschewed unionism.

But what is a union after all? MTEA's campaign to be a union-but-not-actually-a-union reveals a central premise. Rather than a determined organization, unions are better understood as what Stuart Hall calls 'floating signifiers,' that is, organizations formed by the desires and directions of the workers who fill its rank, changing across time according to utterance and epoch.¹⁷⁸ A union, in the words of Gramsci is "not a predetermined phenomenon: it *becomes* a determinate institution, that is, it assumes a definite historical form to the extent that the strength and will of the workers who are its members impress a policy and propose an aim that define it."¹⁷⁹ Thus, framing the debates between MTU and MTEA as a conflict between unions and professionals obscures the more specific, salient differences between the two groups. The difference between the two groups may perhaps better understood by way of the operational dynamics that ripped through the competing currents, namely: independence versus affiliation, and the types of actions organization would impel (strikes vs. sanctions, protest vs. staying-put). Anything but static, as I explore below, these issues undergirded the more fundamental shift occurring within teachers' turn to unions. The real question at this pivotal turning point was less whether Milwaukee teachers would join a professional association versus union, but what kind of political voice they strived to constitute and what political activities they were willing to engage in as public school teachers.

For many, joining a union provoked fears of political domination. Teachers worried labor affiliation would undermine their professional and political independence. MTEA's campaign, thus, stressed independence for teachers and freedom from organizations without education ties. "If teachers go union, they will lose autonomy. . . . The professional association has served teachers. It is

¹⁷⁸ Stuart Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?," *Social Justice* 20, no. 1 (1993): 104–14.

¹⁷⁹ Antonio Gramsci, "Soviets in Italy," *New Left Review*, 1968, 39.

not interested in other activities,” president Cantwell warned in October 1963. “But if teachers align with other groups having political and social interests, in spite of yourself you will be drawn into these things.”¹⁸⁰ MTEA leaders pointed out that labor affiliation meant higher dues. By contrast, MTEA’s nominal dues “keep officers from being dictatorial [and] take care of ordinary obligations MTEA without any high-powered body to dictate in other matters not related to education.”¹⁸¹

Yet more than political domination, MTEA leaders also framed unions as coercive bodies that restricted members’ choice to *not* belong to a union. “Follow the line, the history of unions,” president Cantwell warned MTEA teachers in October 1963. “Where unions have gone and secured negotiating powers, the next step has been a closed shop.”¹⁸² For MTEA, unions not only took away critical political freedoms, they saw them as an infringement on their professional identity. “Do you want professional policies set aside for labor policies?” Cantwell stressed to her fellow teachers.¹⁸³ Echoing Cantwell’s refrain, one teacher fearfully surmised, “The stakes are high – higher than you realize. It is only a matter of time until the closed shop. . . . I venture you to say you will not recognize the teaching profession in Milwaukee, and you will be in a different position than you are now.”¹⁸⁴

MTEA teachers’ fear of union domination bore traces of the conservative “public choice theory” gathering momentum in the early 1960s.¹⁸⁵ This doctrine took aim at the collective logics embedded in democracy (i.e., majority rule), and sought a means to break unwilling individuals from the yoke of a group. For public choice theorists, freedom was interpreted in its negative: freedom

¹⁸⁰ MTEA Building Representative Meeting Minutes, October 23, 1963. MTEA Archives.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ See, Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Viking, 2017); Eleni Schirmer and Michael W. Apple, “(Un)Chaining Democracy: An Essay Review of Nancy MacLean’s History of the Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America,” *Education Review*, January 2018.

from government, from labor unions, and from demands for racial equity. And it was summoned by the unregulated market: right-to-work laws, privatized school vouchers, and racially segregated institutions. Although MTEA members did not go so far as to demand the state's submission to the market as public choice theorists concluded, their objections to unions echoed public choice theorists' decries against "compulsory unionism."¹⁸⁶ Collective political projects corroded pure aims.¹⁸⁷ As MTEA membership chairman put it, unions presented "a problem of rights – the right of choice. In a union situation, members have no choice." Freedom of choice for teachers, MTEA's membership chairman exhorted forebodingly, meant voting *against* labor organizations and *for* the MTEA.¹⁸⁸

MTU, on the other hand, approached the question of political independence more instrumentally. They saw it as an effective means to pursue their broader goals of transforming public education. As the assistant to AFT president reminded MTU leadership, "Union' means acting in concert, there is no better word. 'Association,' signifies a more reserved, weaker bond. What it gains in dignity, it loses in spirit and cohesiveness."¹⁸⁹ The labor affiliation became a point of strength for MTU.¹⁹⁰ "Please note that the Milwaukee Teachers Union is affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers AFL-CIO," a MTU flyer plainly stated in 1963, "The Union is not a shamed of that affiliation." Instead, MTU trumpeted the benefits of affiliation, proudly announcing "what a nickel a month" brought to teachers: "The strongest support for federal aid to

¹⁸⁶ Joseph A. McCartin and Jean-Christian Vinel, "Compulsory Unionism': Sylvester Petro and the Career of an Anti-Union Idea, 1957-1987," in *The Right and Labor in America: Politics, Ideology and Imagination* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 226–51.

¹⁸⁷ MTEA made clear its disinterest in "other" activities, such as political and economic conditions of schools. As president Cantwell blustered, the professional association "is not interested in other activities. It serves teachers." MTEA Building Representative Meeting Minutes, October 23, 1963. MTEA archives.

¹⁸⁸ MTEA Building Representative Meeting Minutes, October 23, 1963. MTEA archives.

¹⁸⁹ "Letter to Allen Engel," March 20 1964. AFT Collections Inventory, Part II, Series XII, Box 76, Folder 252. WPRL.

¹⁹⁰ "Celebrate Our Anniversary," April 1963. MTU Newsletter. AFT Collections Inventory, Part II, Series XII, Box 76, Folder 252. WPRL.

education, state aid, and local support for better school budgets. The most effective force for social legislation – civil rights, Medicare, improved social security, better tax laws . . . plus research and many other services.”¹⁹¹

Although it was opposed to labor affiliation, MTEA sought significant support from the national NEA, the professional association of teachers and school administrators’ analogue to the AFT, during its campaign. Upon MTEA’s request, NEA’s national office sent appeals far and wide for other locals to send support to MTEA, even flying in the 1963 National Teacher of the Year from Washington state.¹⁹² In turn, MTU cried foul, contesting MTEA’s purported claims of neutrality. “If [MTEA] is affiliated with NEA, why doesn’t it say so? Is the other organization secretly dominated?” a MTU flyer probed. More than anything, this bickering revealed a profound and widespread skepticism held by Milwaukee teachers on both sides towards organizational affiliation. For better or worse, Milwaukee teachers valued their independence.

Beyond independence, the question of unionism also triggered concerns about strikes.¹⁹³ As a labor organization, AFT maintained the important role of strikes in securing teachers’ power. Yet they had to walk delicately on the issue so as not to provoke additional fears. One way that union leaders attempted to assuage teachers’ concerns about strikes was by emphasizing the democratic character of the union. Strikes, like other matters of union business, could only be made by the members of a local – not decreed on high from national leadership. “Walter Reuther, Carl Meigel,

¹⁹¹ “The Truth Squad of the Milwaukee Teachers’ Union.” AFT Collections Inventory, Part II, Series XII, Box 76, Folder 252, WPRL.

¹⁹² During his visit to Milwaukee, while giving a speech in which he accused the union of communism, Ousley reportedly took his shoe off and, while pounding it on the table, bellowed, “We would not want this to happen here would we?!” “Letter to the Editor of Phi Delta Kappa,” April 15, 1964. AFT Collections Inventory, Part II, Series XII, Box 76, Folder 252, WPRL.

¹⁹³ This concern animated the bulk of the debate around public sector unions, writ large. Even labor-liberal leaders like Milwaukee Mayor Zeidler were adamantly opposed to public sector strikes, revealing a deep-seated contradiction in liberals’ support for unions and their conception of the state. See Frank Zeidler, “Public Servants as Organized Labor,” *The Municipality*, 1972; Connell, *Conservative Counterrevolution: Challenging Liberalism in 1950s Milwaukee*.

and [Milwaukee president] Al Siemsen cannot call a strike of teachers. It has to be done by a vote of membership,” AFT president consoled a fretful Milwaukee teacher. MTEA, by contrast, opposed strikes. Instead, they made a small provision for members to enact “work sanctions” in the advent of unresponsive or hostile negotiations.

Yet despite AFT’s recognition of the importance of discursive struggles in union power, local leadership in the MTU exhibited a degree of reticence and uncertainty towards such political forthrightness, in light of their colleagues’ bashfulness. In February 1964, one MTU leader worried that the union’s militant language of strikes had repelled teachers from joining the MTU. He wondered, would substituting the term “professional withdrawal program” for the word strike have strengthened the union’s cause?¹⁹⁴ Pete Schnauffer, AFT’s assistant to the president, strongly rebuffed this notion. Political principles gathered in language, he argued, and formed a power that was not to be abandoned. The struggle to name the world was paramount. De facto segregation, banned books, and collective bargaining were not popular, Schnauffer declared, “but you cannot make them popular by changing the wording, for example, changing ‘integration of pupils’ to ‘assimilation of ethnically disparate school populations.’ The first phrase states your meaning, the second phrase begs not to offend.”¹⁹⁵ The point of a union, Schnauffer continued, was to draw members in to these political principles, not delude them into a false form of power. Failing to educate members on a “union program and the need for concerted action” weakened the aims of union. “It’s as if you were sterilizing and fertilizing the plant at the same time,” he warned the Milwaukee teachers.

¹⁹⁴ “Letter from MTU leader Allen Engel AFT to Assistant to the President Pete Schnauffer,” March 20, 1964. AFT Collections Inventory, Part II, Series XII, Box 76, Folder 252, WPRL.

¹⁹⁵ “Letter from AFT Assistant to the President Pete Schnauffer to MTU leader Allen Engel,” March 20, 1964. AFT Collections Inventory, Part II, Series XII, Box 76, Folder 252. WPRL.

Nonetheless, MTU's clear-spoken assertion of its political aims and affiliations proved to hold an insufficient appeal for Milwaukee teachers. In February 1964, MTU lost its representative election, by a fairly wide margin, 2,249 votes to 1,645 votes.¹⁹⁶ MTEA had won the election, becoming the representative bargaining agent – in other words, the union – for Milwaukee teachers and setting forth its own vision of politics. While many leaders of MTU continued to organize and gather informally, including fighting the school board for the right to distribute materials to teachers and post information in schools, acting as a minority union, their vision for unionism was not heeded by the Milwaukee teachers. Instead, the Milwaukee teachers opted to union by way of electing a “not-union,” that is, the professional association gained collective bargaining rights. While teachers in Milwaukee voted in 1964 to legally form a union, they rejected the political dimension of MTU – labor affiliation, use of direct actions, interest in broader political problems – in favor of a narrow organization concerned with the status of members.

Conclusion

Though Milwaukee's first teachers' association, the MTA, originally formed to recognize the inferior pay and working conditions of women teachers, it restrained from explicitly calling attentions to either the gender or class relationships that caused the teachers' inferior treatment. Instead, they formed a professional association. Three decades later, in the height of a nationally surging labor movement, a group of male vocational teachers formed a union, and took on the work of advocating against the structural inequalities that denigrated teachers' work and disempowered workers. Although their vision of unions hardly advanced gender equity as a primary motivator – much less racial equity -- their members vocally addressed the unequal financial structures around schools, even advocating for higher corporate taxes in order to fund schools, and sought to build solidarity with other workers' associations.

¹⁹⁶ “National Unit Lauds MTEA for Victory,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 14, 1964.

Yet, when presented with a choice for union recognition in 1963, Milwaukee teachers voted to affiliate with the professional association, not the labor one. Although just a year before New York teachers had led a dramatic strike that won them union recognition and elected to affiliate with AFT over NEA, Milwaukee teachers went in the other direction. Milwaukee teachers selected MTEA, the NEA affiliate, as its bargaining precisely because of its *depoliticized* dimensions, its *lack* of affiliation with organized labor, and its *professional* image over a militant one. MTEA, thus, became the Milwaukee teachers' union, a contradictory vessel to pursue teachers' interests. In the poetic words of one union leader, MTEA was sterilized and fertilized at the same moment. Just what movements would this bear?

Chapter Three: FIGHT

“We Are Not in the Restaurant Business”: MTEA’s Defensive Posture, 1963-1968

Introduction

In the summer of 1963, chairman of the Wisconsin NAACP Lloyd Barbee stood before a group of junior attorneys in Milwaukee, and made a proclamation that startled that started the white audience seated before him. Racial segregation and bigotry were not specters of faraway places like Georgia or Alabama, Barbee declared. Right here in Milwaukee, segregation was bound into the brick and mortar of the public schools. The unequal reality between Blacks and whites was not a product of accidental happenstance, Barbee explained; it was aided by specific policies maintained by the school board. Prodding the group’s liberal self-identification, Barbee urged the attorneys to deploy their legal powers to dismantle the rampant and systematic racial segregation seeped into the infrastructure of Northern institutions. Barbee’s remarks were by far the most public and formal decry of Milwaukee’s racially segregated schools issued to a white audience in the city to that point. They startled not only the young lawyers in the room, but educational policy-makers around the city and the state, for Barbee called attention to these actors’ roles in creating and maintaining such segregation. His remarks catalyzed the first formal phase of the city’s civil rights struggles, aimed at integrating Milwaukee’s public schools.¹⁹⁷

Yet at nearly the same instant that the civil rights energy in Milwaukee trained its firepower on schools, teachers in Milwaukee began to mobilize for union recognition. In the fall of 1963, the

¹⁹⁷To be sure, by the time Lloyd Barbee made his address in 1963, a number of protests and pickets had begun to address racial inequality in Milwaukee. Yet scholars’ of Milwaukee’s civil rights’ movement typically cite the call for school integration to mark the movements transition from disconnected events towards a coordinated campaign. See Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform In Milwaukee*; Patrick D. Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

newly-constituted MTEA huffed defensively at Barbee's concerns. "Inferences have been made that teachers of the inner core (central city) are inferior, that their teaching is not good, and that 'second-class' teachers are teaching 'second-class' children," proclaimed MTEA's building representatives shortly after the school board responded to Barbee's charges.¹⁹⁸ As MTEA president Eileen Cantwell told the press, "Many children in the inner core come to us with lower educational and cultural backgrounds; therefore the teaching problems are harder. We've almost had to change the curriculum to meet the needs of the shifting population."¹⁹⁹ In response, MTEA publicly issued a statement defending the predominantly white Milwaukee teachers, especially those working in the predominantly-Black 'inner core.' Within months MTEA would pass a resolution, the first in the union history, decrying the school boycott organized by Black student activists, in protests of the segregated facilities.²⁰⁰

In this chapter, I look at the fomenting division between MTEA members and Milwaukee's burgeoning civil rights movement. The early 1960s' developments of both the teachers' union and the civil rights' movements in Milwaukee reveal important fault lines that preceded a subsequent fracture. Over the coming decades, acrimonious division between the teachers' union and Black activists in Milwaukee would mount. Relations between the teachers' unions and prominent Black educational activists reached a breaking point in the 1990s when Black activists and organizers worked with free-market and conservative groups to catalyze school voucher programs; many of the Black activists sought school choice options precisely to obtain education options beyond the union's purview. Yet this early phase of both civil rights' activists and the teachers' union offers important resources to understand this division for two reasons.

¹⁹⁸ MTEA Building Representative Minutes, Sept 11, 1963, MTEA archives.

¹⁹⁹ *Milwaukee Journal*, June 22, 1963. Quoted in Dahlk, p. 88.

²⁰⁰ MTEA Building Representative Minutes, April 15, 1964, MTEA archives.

First, examining the roots of this antagonism offers resources towards understanding how and why could-have-been allies became opponents. After all, both the teachers' union and Milwaukee's early phase of civil rights organizing were generally concerned with improving public schools; however they did not see each other as allies in their work. By taking up the *early* stages of teachers unionism and the civil rights movement in the first half of the 1960s, this chapter explores the antecedents of the polarizing conflict between "teacher power" and "Black power" that got projected onto the national stage in the late 1960s and early 1970s, best emblemized by the bitter struggle between New York teachers' unionists and African American community activists in the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville teachers' strike.²⁰¹ Although a dramatic explosion between Black activists and teachers' unionists akin to Ocean Hill-Brownsville did not occur in Milwaukee, a slower, longer freeze drove the two forces apart in subsequent decades. As such, this account of Milwaukee provides something of a slow-motion look at the diverging justice struggles between teachers' unions and African American educational activists in Milwaukee, heretofore only addressed in passing in accounts of Black-led education reform efforts in Milwaukee.²⁰²

Second, the teachers' impatient and reactionary response to civil rights' demands showcases teachers' growing exasperation with the mounting expectations placed on teachers and schools to solve structural social inequalities. In the mid 1960s, the division between the two competing factions of teacher associations (NEA-affiliated MTEA and the AFT-affiliated MTU) receded into

²⁰¹ Jonna Perillo, *Uncivil Rights: Teachers, Unions, and Race In the Battle for School Equity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Daniel H. Perlstein, *Justice, Justice: School Politics and the Eclipse of Liberalism*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2004); Jerald E. Podair, *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Clarence Taylor, *Reds at the Blackboard: Communism, Civil Rights and the New York City Teachers Union* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

²⁰² Bill Dahlk, *Against the Wind: African Americans and the Schools in Milwaukee, 1963-2002* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2010); Barbara Miner, *Lessons from the Heartland: A Turbulent Half-Century of Public Education in an Iconic American City* (New York: The New Press, 2013); Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform In Milwaukee*, James K. Nelsen, "From No Choice to Forced Choice: A History of Educational Options in Milwaukee Public Schools" (University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 2012).

the background, as teachers from both associations became collectively concerned about stronger student discipline policies. As more students of color entered the public schools in the early 1960s, many teachers previously hesitant to embrace unions now enthusiastically reached for the tools of collective bargaining in order to demand stronger student discipline policies. These predominantly white teachers increasingly saw the union as a means to gain institutional protection and power over a growing number of Black students. Indeed, many of their first orders of business as a union revolved around securing corporal punishment provisions for educators, as well as powers to remove “disruptor” students from classrooms.²⁰³

As a result, during the mid 1960s, Milwaukee teachers ceased debating *which* union would represent them, as discussed in Chapter Two, and instead fought to secure any means to institutionalize teachers’ power in the face of changing student demographics and rising demands on teachers’ work. The reactionary reasoning emitted from the teachers’ union during its first years in the 1960s structured the political horizons and logics of possibility that settled within the teachers’ union in the decades to come.

Yet, as I argue in this chapter, teachers’ reactionary response to these challenges was in part driven by the two key contradictions undergirding the welfare state coming into new form during the 1960s. By examining the slow unraveling between the demands of the teachers’ union and civil rights groups, we can draw to light two key contradictions that undergird the postwar welfare state. First, the dominant political and social scientific ideologies increasingly held schools responsible for addressing the *individualized* facets of poverty and inequality – that is, the dispositions, attitudes and cultural socialization of individuals living in poverty -- but afforded little attention to either its structural or its relational dimensions – that is, the structural mechanisms of the economy that

²⁰³ MTEA Building Representative Minutes, April 10, 1963; May 8, 1963. MTEA archives.

generate inequality, such as exploitation and asset hoarding.²⁰⁴ As a result, educators were held responsible for solving problems that originated far beyond schools. Second, while the postwar welfare state leaned on education to address inequality, it afforded little recognition of the labor necessary to do so. Schools' charge to resolve poverty and racial inequality did not come with, say, increased wages for educators, expanded labor rights, or increased authority for teachers to determine curricular and educational policy. Indeed, as Milwaukee piloted many of these federal initiatives, teachers viewed federal charges for education programs as a burden that more often than not reflected the *devaluation* of their work, rather than responsibilities that *esteemed* teachers' skills, knowledge and value. A combination of latent racism and professional defensiveness spurred teachers' reactionary response.

However, as the final section of this chapter argues, MTEA's rejection of an association with overt political analysis (discussed in Chapter Two) such as a union, left Milwaukee teachers poorly positioned to address the pressures weighing upon teachers, beyond simply *reacting* against the forces they perceived to be their threats. MTEA offered teachers neither political analysis nor vocabulary to diagnose, much less oppose, the growing social and political expectations that schools address poverty. While MTU, MTEA's competitor union, proposed plans that addressed the structural limits of school finance and attempted to organize teachers to more forcefully address them, as the non-representative organization, they had little power to influence MTEA's direction. In effect, teachers' exasperated demands for greater student discipline policies, the union's primary program during these years, can be read as teachers' attempt to struggle against the political-economic weight displaced onto schools during the Great Society era.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ EO Wright, "The Class Analysis of Poverty," in *Interrogating Inequality* (Verso, 1994), 32–50,

²⁰⁵ Ira Katznelson, "Was the Great Society a Lost Opportunity?," in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, ed. Gray Gerstle and Steve Fraser (Princeton University Press, 1989).

The Paradox of Post-War Educational Utopianism

The narrowing of teachers' interests, and their growing defensiveness, became all the more significant as school became increasingly identified in the 1960s as *the* institution capable of fixing such inequalities. This compact reflects what historian Leah Gordon dubs “postwar educational utopianism.”²⁰⁶ This ideological consensus posited that inequality not only a) existed, but b) was undesirable and c) needed to be fixed *by way of education*.²⁰⁷ Yet, despite the widespread political consensus about these issues, there was far less unanimity on the *causes* of inequality, much less the primary dimensions in which it occurred. Therefore, rather than unifying committed actors towards a solution, the proposals taken up by key actors in this period struck jangled, discordant tones.

Liberal thought in the U.S. post World War II presented a utopian promise of public education: that schools could solve the inequality, especially racial inequality, that was becoming increasingly obvious by the 1960s within liberal institutions.²⁰⁸ The broad consensus that schools should and could solve inequality represented a new policy framing of inequality from preceding era. Its emergence was precipitated by three key factors: 1) the rising emphasis in social scientific thought on race as “individualized” phenomena, over political-economic or socio-cultural theories or racial formation; 2) the popularization of “culture of poverty” theories to understand poverty; and, 3) the changing priorities of the state.

²⁰⁶ Gordon, *From Power to Prejudice: The Rise of Racial Individualism in Midcentury America*.

²⁰⁷ This fulfills what theorist Goran Therborn's identifies as the dimensions of ideology. According to Therborn, ideology is the matrix of information that answers the questions, *what exists; what is good; what is possible*. Because “postwar educational utopianism” operated as an ideology – that is, it fulfilled yearnings of society's central questions -- made it a particularly stable governing force, more than simply a policy proposal or legislative demand. For more, see Goran Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1980).

²⁰⁸ Gordon, *From Power to Prejudice: The Rise of Racial Individualism in Midcentury America*; Leah Gordon, “If Opportunity Is Not Enough: Coleman and His Critics in the Era of Equality of Results,” *History of Education Quarterly* 57, no. 04 (2017): 601–15, <https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2017.34>.

In the 1930s, labor movements and policy agendas foregrounded economic inequality among predominantly white labor sectors. New Deal legislation brought new protections to white workers' rights by establishing new precedents in employment contracts and market regulations, yet excluded the economic conditions of predominantly Black care workers, such as domestic workers, public sector employees, and agricultural workers.²⁰⁹ By the 1940s and 1950s, however, Cold War fears eclipsed class-based definitions of inequality, from mainstream public discourse, much less social science research and policy agendas, for Blacks and whites alike. As racial inequalities rose in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the social justice movements that transpired to address inequalities primarily framed inequality in individual terms, namely through demands for “equality of opportunity.”

This was partially in response to the politics, and also partially because of shifting knowledge production about race and racial inequality. As Gordon explains, social science research shifted from political-economic definitions or racial oppression, prevalent in the 1920s and 1930s, to psychological and individualistic ones. Newfound energy in claims of “scientism” and “objective” scholarship meant that philanthropic foundations, such as the Ford and Rockefeller Foundation, funded research that viewed racial inequality by way of one’s individual characteristics, such as their attitudes and dispositions, rather than through collective or economic terms. These philanthropies stopped funding activist-oriented or applied research groups, particularly if the groups had ties with groups agitating for racial justice.²¹⁰ As a result, researchers committed to examining inequality

²⁰⁹ Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White, When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005); Gary Gerstle, “The Protean Character of American Liberalism,” *American Historical Association* 99, no. 4 (1994): 1043–73.

²¹⁰ Leah Gordon, *From Power to Prejudice: The Rise of Racial Individualism in Midcentury America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). Lani Guinier, “From Racial Liberalism to Racial Literacy: *Brown v. Board of Education* and the Interest-Divergence Dilemma,” *The Journal of American History* 91, no. 1 (2004): 92–118; G. Ladson-Billings, “Landing on the Wrong Note: The Price We Paid for *Brown*,” *Educational Researcher* 33, no. 7 (2004): 3–13;

through socio-cultural or political-economic contexts faced political and financial challenges, causing such research tools to be not only politically deprioritized but academically under-invested in.²¹¹

The divestment of these political-economic frameworks and the rise of individualized measures coincided with the rise of “culture of poverty” thesis popularized in the early 1960s. While an emphasis on the individual has long been a priority of liberal political agendas, this interest took an eager and pathological turn in the early 1960s, as research by anthropologist Oscar Lewis in 1961 on the “culture of poverty” became popularized. Lewis’s research identified the dispositions and attitudes of the poor as key mechanisms keeping in creating and perpetuating poverty. Poverty, Lewis asserted, was not just caused by lack of income, but also from a variety of psychological habits, such as inability to delay gratification, feelings of inferiority, helplessness and marginality.²¹² Changing the poor’s disposition and skills, thus, became heralded as a key means to eliminating poverty.²¹³ This work was relegated to professional intervention, and primed federal policy discourse to adopt education programs and social work tied to welfare as anti-poverty measures.

In addition to a narrow social scientific framework capable of analyzing inequality, the rising attention to psychological and dispositional habits of the poor, the nature of the state’s priorities and responsibilities shifted over the course of the mid 19th century. During the New Deal era, militant labor movements pushed the state to regulate capital, rather than accommodate it. However, the combination of purging of radicals from labor movements and increased productivity during World War II emboldened business interests and conservative politicians to roll back the regulatory state, in favor of what Alan Brinkley calls “the compensatory state.” The state’s new role was not to regulate capitalism, as much as it was to compensate for its “inevitable flaws without interfering with its

²¹¹ Leah Gordon, “The Question of Prejudice: Social Science, Education, and the Struggle to Define ‘The Race Problem’ in Mid-Century America, 1935-1965” (University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 20.

²¹² Oscar Lewis, “The Culture of Poverty,” in *Understanding Poverty: Perspectives from the Social Sciences*, ed. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 191–99.

²¹³ Kantor, “Education, Social Reform, and the State: ESEA and Federal Education Policy in the 1960s.”

internal workings.”²¹⁴ In addition, this compact proposed new economic models which sought economic growth through tax cuts, rather than government spending. As a result, the previous commitment to address poverty through direct market intervention was replaced with programs to reform individuals, and the behavior of public institutions. Johnson’s Great Society program, thus, swapped out labor’s demands from the 1930s New Deal program to address poverty and inequality, and turned instead to education to do so. Education was a chief prong of the War on Poverty, providing rationale for 1965 Educational Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the federal government’s first major intervention in public education.

Thus, precisely as schools became increasingly identified as the institution capable of solving poverty and inequality, they attended to the *individualized* aspects of inequality, rather than its systemic or relational dimensions.²¹⁵ Schools addressed inequality by enhancing one’s individual attributes and improving dispositions, primarily through compensatory education and job training programs. While ESEA allocated funds for textbooks and library expansion and provided grants for community organizations to conduct education innovation programs, the bulk of the funding was allocated for job training programs and compensatory education programs for children living in poverty. The state used its prerogative not to intervene in the labor market or capital’s logic of private accumulation and exploitation, but rather to prepare the poor to better compete within capitalism’s framework.

²¹⁴ Alan Brinkley, “The New Deal and the Idea of the State,” in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, ed. Steven Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), 92.

²¹⁵ This corresponded with an analogous shift in understanding the purpose of schools. Postwar Americans increasingly saw schools as a means to secure an individual’s private interests and credentials, rather than an institution to develop public benefits for a community as a whole. David Labaree, “Consuming the Public School,” *Educational Theory* 61, no. 4 (August 4, 2011): 381–94. Harvey Kantor and Robert Lowe, “No Child Left Behind and the Devolution of Responsibility For Equal Opportunity,” *Harvard Educational Review* 76, no. 4 (2006): 474–502.

As such, the postwar educational utopianism contained two key contradictions. First, and fundamentally, though schools were charged with fixing poverty, they had little power to address its root causes. In practical terms, allocation of federal funds to school districts was not accompanied by mandates for how such funds could be used; state and local authorities had the final say in how education programs were implemented. Federal authorities were politically wary to overstep any of state and local districts' local control and authority to define and provide public education.

More profoundly, schools had no authority to address the root causes of inequality, despite being hailed as the institution capable to do so. They were authorized to neither prevent nor punish, for example, capital's flight from central cities to suburbs, dragging jobs and infrastructure along with it, and laying the planks for suburban white flight that, especially when aided by federal housing policy and exploitative real estate practices, would undermine public education schools in the coming decades.²¹⁶ Nor did growing concerns with inequality bestow schools the power to secure well-paying, non-exploitative jobs for their students' parents – the lack of which was the most direct perpetrator of the poverty schools were tasked with ameliorating. Amidst growing awareness of the crises caused by inequality, public discourse stammered to articulate the underlying rifts in the political economic order that caused it. The postwar educational utopianism thus presented a

²¹⁶ Lassiter, "Schools and Housing in Metropolitan History: An Introduction"; Marc V. Levine and John F. Zipp, "A City at Risk: The Changing Social and Economic Context of Public Schooling in Milwaukee," in *Seeds of Crisis: Public Schooling in Milwaukee since 1920*, ed. John L. Rury and Frank A. Cassell (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 42–72; William J. Wilson, *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997); Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Home Ownership* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

paradox: schools were charged to solve inequality, yet -- absent social struggles demanding this authority -- schools were not empowered to address its root causes.²¹⁷

The second key contradiction of educational utopianism was that although federal programs newly identified schools as the agents capable of solving poverty and racial inequality, such initiatives only meagerly recognized the labor required to execute such work. Funding for compensatory education programs did not, for example, mandate that educators themselves receive above-poverty line wages.²¹⁸ Nor was it accompanied with salary increases for teachers, increased union rights for teachers or even, in some cases, increased staff or faculty. Though schools were increasingly charged with the responsibilities to economic quality, this work came with no requirements for remunerating educators for this labor. As we shall see, this contradiction generated a point of friction for teachers.

The Rise of Compensatory Education in Milwaukee

Nearly five years before the federal government issued the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, a fundamental prong of the War on Poverty, Milwaukee Mayor Frank Zeidler turned

²¹⁷ This idea heeds Nancy Fraser's notions of "boundary struggles. As she explains, the institutional order of capitalism establishing distinct realms: "economic" separated "non-economic"; "social reproductive labor" separated "productive" labor; "white" bodies distinct and superior to "non-white" bodies.²¹⁷ These boundaries create a fundamental contradiction within capitalism's social order: it cordons off spheres that are fundamentally interconnected as distinct and separate. For example, separating the political governance structures of schools from urban governance structures meant that schools increasingly had to bear the effects of discriminatory housing policies, say, or weakening employment, yet had no formal authority to address those issues. As Nancy Fraser describes, "this peculiar relation of separation-cum-dependence-cum-disavowal is an inherent source of instability." See Fraser, "Behind Marx's Hidden Abode: For an Expanded Conception of Capitalism"; Nancy Fraser, "Contradictions of Capital and Care," *New Left Review* 100, no. July Aug 2016 (2016): 99–117.

²¹⁸ Title I, the major educational program for low-income children created by ESEA, erected separate administrative structures from the daily school operations. The program was designed to "supplement not supplant" existing educational programs. This separation meant that Title I educators taught Title I children in Title I classrooms; the federal government did not intervene in the management of the "regular" matters of schooling. As a result, concludes Kaestle and Smith, the program "placed no pressure on the regular structure to improve," becoming little more than "a symbol of national concern for the poor rather than as viable response to their needs." Carl Kaestle and Marshall Smith, "The Federal Role in Elementary and Secondary Education, 1940-1980," *Harvard Educational Review* 52, no. 4 (1982): 400.

to compensatory education in Milwaukee to address poverty in the city's racially segregated inner core. In the late 1950s, race tensions in Milwaukee surged to new levels. When an unarmed Black man, Daniel Bell, was shot by a white police officer in 1958, a new wave of protest broke open in Milwaukee's Black community, marking what historian Patrick Jones calls "the opening shot" of Milwaukee's civil rights movement.²¹⁹ As Black protests mounted over the next year, Mayor Zeidler commissioned in 1959 a study to address rising racial conflicts. The report produced by the commission, known as the "Inner Core Report" analyzed the problems faced by residents of Milwaukee's "inner core" area, the five square miles north of the city that housed 90 percent of the city's residents of color. The report's findings highlighted great disparities between the inner core and the rest of the city, especially in terms of housing.

To be sure, Zeidler had attempted to address the problem of Milwaukee's inner core's acute housing segregation previously. In 1951, his administration commissioned a Human Rights report which documented that Milwaukee's discriminatory housing practices had resulted in a "ghetto pattern" in which African Americans found it "almost impossible to move out of Milwaukee's worst housing area."²²⁰ He proposed building integrated public housing units throughout the city. However, his plan met with severe opposition from realtors and property owners' associations, who believed "private enterprise" should be responsible for rebuilding the inner city. These forces mounted an attack on Zeidler's vision as "un-American" and "socialistic," and soon joined forces with a staunch anticommunist Catholic priest, who chastised Zeidler as a "church-burner" and his plan for urban renewal a program of anti-democracy.²²¹ By 1955, anticommunist vitriol and the political influence of realtor associations had brought Zeidler's so-called "socialist" urban renewal

²¹⁹ Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee*.

²²⁰ Kevin D Smith, "From Socialism to Racism: The Politics of Class and Identity in Postwar Milwaukee," *Michigan Historical Review* 29, no. 1 (2003): 83.

²²¹ Connell, *Conservative Counterrevolution: Challenging Liberalism in 1950s Milwaukee*.

plan to a standstill. Over the decade, as Black community leaders became increasingly vocal in their demands for fair housing -- including a 1958 proposal to city council by Vel Phillips, the city's first Black woman alderperson -- anticommunist hostility quickly coupled with racist sentiments to oppose plans for racially equitable and publicly-organized urban renewal.²²² The option to address Milwaukee's racist and unequal housing practices *in the terms of the problem*, that is, through housing, had been made impossible by conservative forces. In 1960, the Zeidler administration tried a different angle to address the problems of segregation and inequality.

Desperate to address the inferior living conditions of the inner core somehow, Zeidler's 1960 report identified residents' lack acculturation as a key cause of the neighborhood's blight "The great problem of all newcomers to the core area of the city," the report declared, "is orientation and acculturation to the life of a highly industrialized urban community." The report and the subsequent policy discourse it wrought defined "deficiencies" almost exclusively in individual and psychological dimensions.²²³ The solutions Zeidler offered, while not concrete, reflected the vogue policy ideas of the period. "Compensatory education" programs, the report asserted, would help children from the inner core overcome their "impoverished" home life which ill-prepared them to "accept, comprehend, and use" the regular curriculum of schools, and to acculturate to the "the values and practices of mainstream America."²²⁴ However, Zeidler's term as mayor ended five days after the report was published. The problems of the "inner core" became the charge of his successor, Mayor Henry Maier.

²²² Smith, "From Socialism to Racism: The Politics of Class and Identity in Postwar Milwaukee"; Connell, *Conservative Counterrevolution: Challenging Liberalism in 1950s Milwaukee*.

²²³ This was not a discourse unique to Milwaukee, but embedded in social science agendas and liberal thoughts, especially channeled through philanthropic foundations. See Alice O'Connor, "Community Action, Urban Reform, and the Fight against Poverty: The Ford Foundation's Gray Areas Program," *Journal of Urban History* 22, no. 5 (1996): 586-625; Gordon, *From Power to Prejudice: The Rise of Racial Individualism in Midcentury America*; Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

²²⁴ "Final Report to the Honorable Frank P. Zeidler" (Milwaukee, 1960), 11. Wisconsin Historical Society.

Maier received this “controversial ‘gift,’” in his words, waiting on his desk the day he took office with reluctance. Maier, a liberal who had close alliances with Milwaukee’s business and real estate interests, was far less eager than Zeidler to pursue housing reform. He found Zeidler’s report “long on description, short on prescription” and dismissed its lack of “blueprints and cost analyses showing how to accomplish the lofty goals.”²²⁵ Upon pressure from journalists who accused the mayor of trying to sweep the inner core problems under the rug, Maier finally began looking for solutions to address the problem of the inner core, and turned to foundations to do so. In 1963, Maier received a grant from the Ford Foundation to fund pilot program for compensatory education for “in-migrant” students, one a few select cities around the country to receive such an award.²²⁶ As historian Jack Dougherty explains, Milwaukee was thus an early leader in compensatory education; its program provided a national model for what would ultimately become the backbone of Johnson’s 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act.²²⁷

In Milwaukee, compensatory education was as much a program to “fix” the cultural deficiencies of individual students as it was to solve poverty. These programs included orientation centers for “in-migrant and transient” students, cultural enrichment activities, after-school reading and study centers, additional reading centers, increased counseling programs, school-work projects, and secretary development programs.²²⁸ For some Milwaukee educational policymakers, perceived cultural deficiencies mapped onto a racialized schema, in which Black families were assumed *not to value* education the same as whites – schools were tasked with countering these deficiencies.²²⁹ Some

²²⁵ Henry Maier, *The Mayor Who Made Milwaukee Famous: An Autobiography* (Lanham, Maryland: Madison Books, 1993), 39.

²²⁶ Maier, 41.

²²⁷ Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform In Milwaukee*, 66–69.

²²⁸ “Racial Imbalance in the Milwaukee Public Schools,” Report by Wisconsin Governor’s Commission on Human Rights, 1966. File 10, Box 1, Milwaukee Public Schools Collection (MSS 1680) Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, WI

²²⁹ “Attitudes and Opinions of Milwaukee Public School Teachers in Central City Schools” (Milwaukee Board of School Directors, 1965). Wisconsin Historical Society.

Black Milwaukeeans, such as Urban League's Wesley Scott saw compensatory education as an important job preparation program for Black Milwaukeeans looking for work.²³⁰

However, other Milwaukeeans, had a different response to the inequality. These activists, many of whom were led by Lloyd Barbee, drew attention to inequality by way of the segregated structural conditions, which excluded Black students from accessing the same educational opportunities. "Compensatory education," Barbee wrote in September 1963, "no matter how massive, cannot eliminate segregation in the school."²³¹ Two diverging philosophies on how to solve inequality, thus, sprang up in Milwaukee: compensatory education and integrated education. Though the two differed in their framing of the origins of racial inequality, nonetheless, both posited schools as the remedy to segregation and racial inequality.

For both integrationists and compensatory education supporters, teachers became heralded as the agents responsible to meliorate the inequalities within the rapidly changing city. Though both groups upheld education as the solution to growing racial and economic inequalities, and saw teachers as central to that mission, each group viewed the work of teachers slightly differently. Proponents of compensatory education saw teachers as inequality's solvent, performing the role of cultural missionaries sent in to reform the unruly inner-city pupils. Unlike proponents of compensatory education who believed schools would become equal by "fixing the deficient Black kids," proponents of integration believed that only by addressing the inequality inherent in segregated institutions could schools become equal. For integrationists, integrating teaching staff was a key component of their demands, necessary to improve not only educational outcomes for

²³⁰ Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform In Milwaukee*, 67.

²³¹ "Racial Imbalance in the Milwaukee Public Schools," Report by Wisconsin Governor's Commission on Human Rights, 1966.

children of color, but also the employment opportunities for adults of color.²³² Thus, as inequality in Milwaukee in the early 1960s came to light almost exclusively through individualistic and cultural dimensions rather than structural ones, teachers, acting as the state's assumed cultural workers, bore the burden of the cure.

MTEA's Defensive Response

However, while many forces outside of schools saw teachers as a key component of addressing racial inequalities, educators in Milwaukee did not see themselves in those terms. Instead, they approached the growing pressures placed on schools with reactionary defensiveness. They saw many of the charges being placed on teachers as additional responsibilities put upon them, without additional compensation or relief from other duties. For example, when Milwaukee Public schools unveiled a pilot study for a breakfast program for students funded by a federal child nutrition program in 1967, MTEA teachers voted to oppose the program. "I'm not opposed to feeding breakfast to children," a sixth grade teacher told the *Milwaukee Journal*. "But if the government wants to feed them, let them hire their own people to run the program. We are not in the restaurant business."²³³

On the one hand, teachers' lackluster enthusiasm towards the breakfast program can be interpreted as evidence of teachers' "selfishness" or, at least, their narrowly defined self-interest, particularly when the duties in question required providing additional care for inner-city students. The very title of the *Milwaukee Journal* article on the subject, "Teachers unwilling to feed pupils," suggests as much, censuring teachers for renegeing on their societal expectations to incessantly care

²³² This argument traces back to earlier generations of Milwaukee's civil rights activists that advocated for the hiring Black teachers as a key program of racial justice in the city. Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform In Milwaukee*, 9–33.

²³³ MTEA Building Representative minutes, February 8, 1967. MTEA archives. "Teachers Unwilling to Help Feed Pupils," *Milwaukee Journal*, Feb. 9, 1967.

for others. But on the other hand, teacher refusal to accept additional duties can be read as an attempt to protect and defend their work as professional educators. They were teachers, not chefs, after all. Their unwillingness to assume additional care duties may have in part been their attempt to assert the intellectual and social boundaries around their primary work responsibilities. The work of teaching was not guided by some infinite set of feminized instincts, such as women's supposed "natural" disposition to care and nurture, but rather required skills and energy; its protection demanded limits. Professionalism became a means for teachers to valorize those skills, thereby improving their working conditions, despite not directly making claims about their needs as workers, as discussed in Chapter Two. Milwaukee teachers' refusal of additional non-teaching tasks may have been these teachers' attempt to defend the importance of their work. In reality, both teachers' defense of the boundaries of their work as well as narrowly-defined self-interests were integrally linked.

From the point of view of the present, it is easy to view teachers' reaction to growing expectations on schools' anti-poverty responsibilities as racist or selfish. However, when viewed in light of the growing national consensus of that period that poverty and racism were to be fixed by teachers in schools, teachers' resistance takes on a different light. Teachers were – albeit in a shortsighted, defensive way – rejecting the postwar educational utopian program that held schools responsible for economic and structural forces that emerged far beyond the school house walls. However, rather than framing their opposition by contesting the state's changing expectations of their work and dominant understanding of the causes of poverty, teachers reacted more shortsightedly, seeking whatever means possible to gain power and control. Ensuring teachers' power over unruly and disruptive students became their pressing issue; questions of school discipline loomed large in their interests.

As teachers' concerns over school discipline rose to new levels in the mid 1960s, they turned to MTEA as a means to vigorously demand stronger disciplinary policies. For example, in 1963, when the school board crafted a discipline policy that allowed teachers to physically strike a student out of defense or to stop a breach of discipline, MTEA denounced the plan as not going far enough. They criticized the policy as "very restrictive," and demanded instead a policy that allowed teachers to physically strike students. According to MTEA spokesperson, Donald Feilbach, the school board's policy did not take into account the fact that discipline can be disrupted by "students attitudes."²³⁴ Teachers, Feilbach declared, should have more latitude to physically strike misbehaving students, no matter the reason.²³⁵ Their teachers' bargaining priorities were routinely increased disciplinary measures.

More broadly, MTEA sought to create a culture of "law and order" in the Milwaukee public schools, particularly the inner city, predominantly Black schools. For many teachers, MTEA became the teachers' instrument to demand not only greater *empowerment* for teachers to administer physical discipline for students, but also the organization that asserted teachers' need for greater *protection* from unruly, inner city students. In this way, MTEA's earliest and shrillest demands conjured a drama animated by racialized and gender specters: predominantly white women, working as care givers, turned to unions as a way to seek protection from predominantly Black student "hoodlums."

MTEA voiced their concerns not only to the school administration, but also to the city's criminal justice apparatus. In the spring of 1964, when a student at Roosevelt Junior High School, a school populated almost exclusively by Black students on the north side of Milwaukee, attacked a principal with a knife, MTEA turned to the local police force for help. MTEA's president Eileen Cantwell requested a meeting with the superintendent, the mayor, the police chief, the district

²³⁴ "School Discipline Policy Assailed," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 14, 1963.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

attorney, the juvenile judge, and the police youth aid bureau to discuss “a more stringent law enforcement program.” As MTEA executive board stated, “While we all recognize that there are a number of long-range goals of the School board and your office aimed at alleviating such ‘wrongs’ as overloaded classes, expanded sociological and psychological counseling services, specialized educational training and other programs,” they underscored, “the need to protect our teachers is immediate.”²³⁶

Absent a political or economic framework to explain the changes facing students, educators and schools, teachers formed uncommon alliances with police to help them gain power and control.²³⁷ First and foremost, MTEA wanted more security, including police patrols, in and around schools.²³⁸ MTEA demanded increases in state money to hire guards for certain “disruptor” schools. (In their demands for these funds, the only school MTEA mentioned by name was North Division High School, the predominantly Black high school on the north side of town.) When a number of Black parents spoke out against the plan to place guards in schools, the board overturned MTEA’s proposal.irate with the board’s lack of response to their concerns, MTEA threatened to shut down inner city schools. “We feel that the verbal and physical assaults by students cannot be tolerated and feel this cannot continue if the teaching staff is to provide productive experiences for young

²³⁶ Letter from MTEA President Eileen Cantwell to MPS Superintendent Harold Vincent, March 20, 1964. MTEA Executive Board minutes, MTEA archives.

²³⁷ The professional alliances between teachers and police officers was suggested to me more than once in my research. Though beyond the scope of this project, the relationship bears noting and would merit additional research. Both teachers and police represented middle-class professional jobs, often held by people from working-class origins who pursued these employment paths as a means of social mobility. As agents of social control, teachers and police officers likely forged racial alliances, as predominantly white professionals charged with controlling the social order and bodies of Milwaukee’s Black and poor residents. Additionally, in Milwaukee, both police officers and teachers were the displeased subjects of the city’s residency requirements, and their alliance was strengthened through their mutual political opposition to the requirement. What’s more, reportedly a number of MTEA teachers were married to police officers during the 1960s and 1970s, sustaining connections through personal intimacy as well as shared political interests and racial identities.

²³⁸ Anxious about intruders, teachers especially desired more police patrol on school grounds, so as to prevent “youths not in school from entering schools looking for a girl friend or for accosting pupils in the school grounds.” See “Make our Schools Safe’ – MTEA Plea,” March 20, 1964, *Milwaukee Sentinel*; “Police Hike Attention to School,” April 13, 1964, *Milwaukee Sentinel*.

people,” declared MTEA leader Donald Feilbach.²³⁹ Speaking on behalf of her members, President Cantwell told the press that the teachers feel that whole policy of handling juvenile delinquents is too lenient ... it’s time to tighten up.’’²⁴⁰

Significantly, the question of what constituted delinquent behavior for MTEA members was partially a response to Milwaukee’s growing civil rights movement. When Barbee and other community leaders planned a series of school boycotts in protest of the racially segregated facilities, MTEA immediately recoiled.²⁴¹ MTEA viewed the civil rights’ groups direct-action tactics as a form of unruly, criminal behavior. The very first resolution passed by MTEA upon becoming the teachers’ official union in 1964 was a statement of opposition to school boycotts organized by Lloyd Barbee’s association. “By its very nature,” the resolution asserted, “the boycott encourages disrespect for law and order and fosters further breaches of student discipline.’’²⁴² In both the executive board and the building representatives, MTEA teachers unanimously stood behind the resolution. Although in formal statements, MTEA claimed to support integrated schools, they fiercely opposed the civil rights’ groups direct action tactics.

By 1968, as students continued to organize protests in schools, MTEA’s emphasis on law and order, student discipline, and opposition to the direct-action organizing efforts of the civil rights’ movement fused a distinct racialized frontier in their budding vision politic. When student organizers held a demonstration demanding more Black history curriculum and more African American cooking staff, 20 to 30 teachers joined their protests. MTEA immediately called for all the teachers who attended the demonstration to be fired for “promoting insurrection” in schools. “Not

²³⁹ “Teachers Demand Safety in Rowdy Core Schools,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 7, 1968.

²⁴⁰ ““Make Our Schools Safe’ –MTEA Plea,” March 20, 1964, *Milwaukee Sentinel*; “Stabbing Sentence Held ‘Pat on Hand,’ April 29, 1964, *Milwaukee Sentinel*.

²⁴¹ Jones, *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee*.

²⁴² MTEA Executive board Minutes, April 8, 1964. MTEA Archives.

only is this a breach of ethics, but it verges on criminal action in our judgment.”²⁴³ MTEA’s concerns over student discipline fused with their opposition to civil rights’ groups’ struggles for racial justice in schools.²⁴⁴ MTEA’s eager defense of the school administration and Milwaukee teachers demonstrated the association’s allegiance to their employers and sense of “law and order” rather than racially equitable schools, or democratic procedures to develop and make audible teachers’ concerns.

In this regard, the civil rights’ movements’ growing charges of segregated schools forged common ground between MTEA and the MPS administration — the teachers’ employer — precisely at the moment when the relationship between administrators and MTEA shifted onto new terrain. Since its founding in 1903, MTEA had long declared itself to be first and foremost a professional association and therefore in alliance with school administrators. Yet by the early 1960s, mounting pressures from MTU - the avowed teachers’ *union* - coupled with changes in the state’s labor laws provoked MTEA to compete for sole representation rights as the teachers’ union. MTEA’s victorious outcome meant that, for the first time, MTEA was forced to formally acknowledge its interests were distinct - even antagonistic - to the administration. Yet MTEA and MPS’s mutual defense against the civil rights’ movements charges of racially discriminatory teachers and administrative staff fashioned an alliance between the two camps, despite new divisions created by MTEA’s shift from a professional association to a teachers’ union.

²⁴³ “Teachers Demand Safety in Rowdy Core Schools,” Milwaukee Journal, March 7, 1968.

²⁴⁴ The fusing of particular, distinct demands into a common “logic of equivalence” (in this case, the ‘more school discipline’ demanded = ‘oppose civil rights’ demand) enabled MTEA teachers to form a unified sense of “us” vs. “them” (“them” constituted as inner-city students and activists), what Ernesto Laclau calls the frontier of populist reasoning. These two factors, logics of equivalence and the creation of a frontier, provided the discursive platform for a collective identity to emerge, for teachers to become not just teachers who are members of MTEA, but MTEA teachers. Demands, Laclau posits, summon the collective identity which establishes the group; the group doesn’t issue the demands. This discursive construction characterizes what Laclau refers to as populism, a particular system of political logics which centers certain factors in the foreground and excludes other elements. For more, see Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (New York: Verso, 2005).

One particular way the school board took up on the concerns of the teachers was to deploy the Harold Story's Committee on Equality of Educational Opportunity to study the "the attitudes and opinions of Milwaukee public school teachers in central city schools." In a report of their findings, the committee declared that "central city teachers face special problems not usually encountered in middle class neighborhoods. Many of the culturally deprived boys and girls in central city schools are severely handicapped in learning."²⁴⁵ The main conclusion drawn by the report was that inner-city students' home lives deprive them of love, care, interest and responsibility, and as a result, teachers must provide compensatory care work. "Many students come to school every day in a state of hyper-activity, sexual stimulation and anger," the report proclaimed. "They are ready to fly apart at the slightest circumstance."²⁴⁶ Consequentially, inner city teachers have to face "physical and hygienic conditions" never faced by teachers in other areas.²⁴⁷ "Teachers themselves have the parental job of restraining, training and diverting primitive and infantile emotions to constructive channels. Great love, patience, and understanding are required of the teachers." This report formalized the view shared by teachers and administrators alike that the fundamental problem of racial equity in schools stemmed from inadequate home lives. "I sometimes feel these children are born in hatred,"²⁴⁸ remarked one teacher. "The only love or understanding they receive is from the school teacher," they asserted. As the report concluded, improving inner core schools tasked teachers with the burden of socializing "the emotionally disturbed" students.

Yet teachers' actual statements compiled by the committee's report revealed significantly more contradictory and varied understandings by teachers' assessments of Milwaukee's educational

²⁴⁵ "Attitudes and Opinions of Milwaukee Public School Teachers in Central City Schools," Milwaukee Board of School Directors, Special Committee on Equality of Educational Opportunity. November 1965. Wisconsin Historical Society.

²⁴⁶ Ibid, pg. 3.

²⁴⁷ Ibid, pg. 2.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, pg. 12.

problems. For one thing, fifty-seven percent of teachers commented that they needed more training, such as courses and programs, to better serve their “inner core” students. Yet the School Board did not highlight this as either a core finding of the report, nor did it provoke them to negotiate more seriously for the teachers’ collective bargaining demands for more resources in schools.²⁴⁹ More than anything, this report revealed the contradictory ideological position of teachers, as both care-providers and themselves in need of care, increasingly understood as agents of social control but with little control themselves over their own work lives.²⁵⁰

Secondly, the report revealed real divergences in teachers’ beliefs about integration. Some teachers denied the existence of segregated schools. “Segregation, as such, does not exist in Milwaukee Public Schools,” scrawled one teacher. “I feel that integration has been handled very well,” another similarly declared. Yet other teachers saw segregated schools as evidence of Blacks’ racial inferiority: “Love and ambition cannot be legislated. ... [The Negro] believes he needs special treatment to make up for his lack of ability to help himself. Until he changes his attitudes and believes in his ability to help himself he will find progress difficult.”²⁵¹ Still another faction of teachers held more critical views of the city’s segregation. “I think the School Board is definitely aware of the fact that there is segregation in the schools,” one teacher wrote “but is safely hiding behind the neighborhood school system.” Segregated schools were also a product of staff assignment, as one teacher explained: “Few Negro teachers were hired in Milwaukee until there was an influx of Negroes into the city, and they practically filled certain core schools.”²⁵² Still other teachers understood housing segregation was a major cause of educational segregation and saw

²⁴⁹ “Attitudes and Opinions of Milwaukee Public School Teachers in Central City Schools,” p. 18-19.

²⁵⁰ For more on the contradictory class location of teachers, see: Apple, “Work, Gender and Teaching”; Kate Rousmaniere, *City Teachers: Teaching and School Reform in Historical Perspective* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1997).

²⁵¹ “Attitudes and Opinions of Milwaukee Public School Teachers in Central City Schools,” p. 16.

²⁵² Ibid.

teachers' as having a responsibility to address those underlying problems. The committee's report on the teaching conditions of inner-city schools revealed teachers held far more complicated and contradictory set of beliefs about educational inequalities. Nonetheless, the school board's report stitched together teachers' discordant positions into a somewhat coherent narrative that framed the primary problem with central city schools as one of students' attitudes and disposition.

Key questions about teachers' unionization — such as should they form a professional association or union, should they ally with administration or oppose it — were sidestepped as the teachers increasingly found common ground in fighting for more student discipline and seeking ways to preserve the racial order. The mission to gain more control over disruptive students enabled MTEA to form a common front with both MTU members and the MPS administrations, MTEA's would-be opponents. Though MTEA recognized high student-teacher ratios and lack of resources for schools and teaching as a large problem facing Milwaukee public schools, their chief demands were for higher teacher salaries and securing stronger student discipline programs in schools. MTEA's program eclipsed other calls made by Milwaukee teachers, specifically MTU's calls for school financing reform, or support for the Milwaukee's civil rights' movements struggles for housing desegregation.

Funding demands

MTEA's focus on student discipline eclipsed the broader political and economic changes happening within schools and communities that weighed heavily on schools. This omission from MTEA's program was brought into relief by the alternative discourse offered by the Milwaukee Teachers' union. Although the Milwaukee Teachers' Union lost the 1964 representative election, it continued to operate as minority union, and challenged MTEA to be the representative agent for a

second time in 1967.²⁵³ As a minority union, it could not formally bargain on behalf of teachers, but it could organize, agitate and propose policies. It generally operated to push the MTEA slightly to the left. The political priorities they set were often assumed in similar fashion by MTEA. When MTU planned walkouts or threatened strike provisions, they often spurred MTEA to ramp up their own activity level. MTEA and MTU differed radically in their methods to seek changes for teachers. MTEA typically relied on the goodwill of school board, administrators and legislators to produce a trickle of funds to be used in schools. MTU, by contrast, believed that if teachers wanted changes in schools and working conditions, they themselves would have to demand them. Fueled by their labor perspectives, as well as examples from other cities, MTU leader Al Siemsen reported, “Teachers themselves must provide the imaginative leadership and impetus necessary to provide the tools for an effective educational system.”²⁵⁴

In addition to providing a more militant repertoire of actions, MTU teachers’ demands to improve schools reflected a deeper structural understanding of the political economy. In 1966, the Milwaukee Teachers Union, declared the public schools in a state of crisis, and called for greater public funding in education. “The liberation of the creative force in our children justifies any and all necessary investment in education by the citizens,” the Milwaukee Teachers Unions stated in a resolution directed at fellow teachers and citizens. “The investment in more effective schools is much less than the cost of ineffective schools to citizens, society and the country.”²⁵⁵

For MTU, growing class sizes were the crux of the crisis in Milwaukee public schools, as they signaled a billowing demand for public education that outsized the institutions’ capacity. In particular, MTU cited insufficient school funding system, declining teacher training, recruitment and

²⁵³ “2nd Union Vote Seen for 4675 Teachers,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 26, 1967.

²⁵⁴ “Teachers Bargaining Vote is Slated June 1,” *Milwaukee Labor Press*, May 25, 1967.

²⁵⁵ “Crisis in the Milwaukee Public Schools”, December 7, 1966, Barbee papers, Box 103, Folder 14, UW-Milwaukee.

retention, and rising migration to Milwaukee as the causes of this imbalance. Because of growing class sizes, MTU asserted, Milwaukee public school students suffered from too few gym, art and music classes, insufficient counseling and therapy for students, a school curriculum that did not address “true role of minorities in our country’s history,” a failure to deal with the psychodynamics of prejudice, and the increasing segregation of schools.

Following MTU’s lead, MTEA, the official bargaining representative of teachers, similarly called for increased funding for Milwaukee public schools, though less forcefully than MTU. Like MTU, MTEA petitioned for more specialty teachers to teach music, art, and gym in elementary schools, more school aides to support teachers, a specific program to reduce class sizes, and an expanded program for students needed therapeutic treatment and those with disciplinary problems.²⁵⁶ “Let’s put the board in a position where, if they want first rate education, they are going to have to realize it costs money,” declared Donald Baer, a teacher at 12th street school and chairman of MTEA’s collective bargaining committee.²⁵⁷

Yet, although both MTEA and MTU called for additional funds for schools, each proposed different plans for financing their plans. MTU members, committed to re-envision the funding mechanisms for schools, joined several working groups about educational finance, backed legislation to raise tax limits for schools, and proposed their own initiatives to increase the county’s income tax to fund Milwaukee schools in order to offset the growing pressures on property taxes.²⁵⁸ When MTU presented their proposal to reduce classes in schools to 15 pupils per classroom, school board members scoffed at the demand, derisively dubbing it the “million dollar proposal.” Yet, as an MTU member retorted, “If we don’t propose these things, who will?” Certainly, the teacher added, “the

²⁵⁶ “Schools Ask \$1.6 Million for Pay Raises,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 28 1964.

²⁵⁷ “Fault Found in Teachers’ Pay Boosts,” *Milwaukee Journal*, October 8, 1964.

²⁵⁸ “MTU Supports Bill to Raise Tax Limits” MTU Newsletter, March 1963; “Support Sought for City Income Tax,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, Feb 15, 1965.

taxpayers alliance won't."²⁵⁹ Real change in schools and communities, MTU teachers believed, must be demanded through a strong and creative teachers' union, capable of both identifying and re-defining the political horizon.

MTEA's records, in contrast, showed little attention to the mechanisms by which schools were funded, save teachers' broad support for an increase in sales tax to fund schools.²⁶⁰ Unlike income taxes, sales taxes bear a disproportionate burden on low-income residents. Thus, while both MTEA and MTU called for more funding in schools to offset the growing pressures on public education, MTU called for more socially redistributive measures.

However, in 1967, MTU lost their second attempt to become the representative bargaining agent. Shortly thereafter, the union dissolved.²⁶¹ Absent a program encouraging teachers to take up an explicitly framework to both diagnose shortcomings and demand transformations in schools and communities, teachers were left with the myopic analysis of reactionary politics to understand changes in their working conditions.²⁶²

Conclusion

As civil rights movements grew nationally and in Milwaukee, schools increasingly became hailed as the mechanism to solve both poverty and racial segregation. However, this framing contained two key contradictions. It overlooked the structural and relational elements of both

²⁵⁹ "Make the Classroom Safer," MTU Newsletter, March 1963.

²⁶⁰ "Teacher Vote Backs Boost in Sales Tax" *Milwaukee Journal* May 2, 1967

²⁶¹ My sense of when MTU dissolved is based on when they stopped paying per cap dues to their parent union, AFT. It's possible and indeed likely MTU teachers continued to informally operate as a group for several years thereafter, but I have little archival evidence of their activity. AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series XII, Box 14, Folder 252, Local 252 per caps. WPRL.

²⁶² In political terms, I characterize MTU not as a revolutionary union, by any means, but rather a reformist union. MTEA, by contrast, contained more reactionary tendencies. "Reformist versus reactionary politics," explains sociologist Erik Wright, are struggles the rules of the game that define institutional exclusions; revolutionary versus counterrevolutionary politics are struggles over the systemic constraints that define what game is being played." EO Wright, "Working-Class Power, Capitalist-Class Interests, and Class Compromise," *American Journal of Sociology* 105, no. 4 (2000): 991.

poverty and racial inequality, instead focusing exclusively on the individual dimensions. And second, it put more pressure on educators to solve pressing social problems, with little remuneration or recognition of the work required to do so. Facing these pressures, Milwaukee teachers responded with a reactionary instinct to gain power over students, rather than the political and economic forces impacting their work. Not only did this breed a racist set of politics and weakened alliances with Black educational activists, it also narrowed the set of political possibilities they could mobilize for and demand.

They opposed the changes happening *within the terms* of structures – seeking stronger discipline, for example, and opposing civil rights’ protests and boycotts -- rather than calling to transform the structures and relationships that defined inequality in narrow, educationally focused terms.²⁶³ Absent an analysis and vocabulary capable of identifying the political and economic structures that shaped teachers’ workplace struggles, teacher turned to short term and opportunistic modes to gain power. They not only opposed the civil rights’ movement, but as we shall see in the next chapter, also rejected relationships with other teachers’ movements around the state.

²⁶³ This understanding of reactionary politics takes its cue from Wendy Brown, who writes that politics are reactionary, “in the sense of emerging in reaction to perceived injuries or constraints of a regime from within its own terms. Ideals of freedom ordinarily emerge to vanquish their imagined immediate enemies, but int his move they frequently recycle and reinstate rather than transform the terms of domination that generated them.” See Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), 7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2076648>.

Chapter 4: FRACTURE

“Power is only what you chose to do with it”: The social movements MTEA spurned, 1970-1974

In 1970, five years after Milwaukee civil rights groups filed a lawsuit charging the Milwaukee public schools with racial segregation, very little had changed. Students, teachers, school buildings, classrooms, even the playgrounds remained segregated by race. One woman in particular, a Black 6th grade teacher at 21st Street school on Milwaukee’s all-Black north side, found herself unwilling to sit on the sidelines while her students and her own five children received inferior educations. The granddaughter of a Harlem minister, Lauri Wynn was a community organizer from the tips of her fingers to the top of her cropped Afro. When Wynn moved to Milwaukee in 1965 from Harlem, by way of Roxbury, Massachusetts, Richmond, Virginia and the southside of Chicago, she was deeply disturbed by what passed as education in the Milwaukee public schools. “The schooling was just less than fair,” Wynn explained. “And what do you do?”²⁶⁴ In pursuit of this question, Wynn turned to organizing, first with community groups, then with the Milwaukee teachers’ union, MTEA, and the state teachers’ union, WEAC. For Wynn, teachers’ unions provided important mechanisms to create educational change and justice.

However, many Milwaukee teachers did not agree with Wynn’s vision that teachers’ unions should be instruments of social change. As such, Wynn turned her energy towards invigorating the statewide teachers’ union, becoming the state president within a few years. Under Wynn’s leadership, the state teachers’ union developed a more militant and political character. Yet the transformed state federation did little to influence the Milwaukee teachers’ union to similarly engage with pressing

²⁶⁴ Wynn, Lauri. Interview with WHS field researcher. August 30, 1974. WEAC Collections, Tape 11, Side 2. WHS.

political issues. Instead, MTEA chose to reject participation in statewide movements for education change. Their decision to not participate in broader movements, I argue, not only affected the character of MTEA, it altered the direction and force of the statewide education movements forming in the early 1970s.

Between 1970 and 1974, three different movements stormed across Wisconsin: unrest about the racial segregation of Milwaukee schools, growing teacher militancy across the state, and the fomenting ire of taxpayers.. MTEA's reaction to each of these movements, I argue, narrowed the contours of the union. Their focus on "bread and butter" and "nonpolitical issues" made both MTEA and the statewide teachers' union more vulnerable to growing anti-union forces in the years to come. While the preceding chapter documents the narrowing of the union's priorities *within schools*, this chapter explores how MTEA in the early 1970s also narrowed their political alliances with *statewide* forces. I show that MTEA's decision to *not* align either civil rights' groups or the statewide teachers' union impacted both of those movements, and set MTEA on a path of local and narrow control.

The chapter has four parts. First, I explore MTEA's resistance to growing demands for desegregation in schools. This resistance, I argue in the second section, catalyzed a divide between the Milwaukee teachers' union and the burgeoning statewide movement of teacher militancy. Third, I show how across the state, revolting taxpayers saw unionized teachers as responsible for their spiking property taxes, triggering calls to reform educational funding across the state. In the face of rising cries of economic populism, teachers needed a unified association more than ever, to articulate. However, as the final section explore, in 1974, fault lines embedded in teacher unionism across the state broke open. As I argue, the Milwaukee teachers' union's reactionary response to these movements fractured the possibility of forging broad solidarity. What I aim to show in this chapter is that although the movements for desegregating Milwaukee public schools newly

mobilized teachers' militancy and demands for property tax relief all operated independently, MTEA rebuffed each of these movements in order to maintain its local control and autonomy. However, the biggest teachers' unions disengagement from these key issues provided a means to unite and strengthen each movements' opposition.

MTEA and The Battle for Desegregation and Racial Justice

Lauri Wynn was not the kind of person that bemoaned “And what do you do?” with despair or despondency. For her, the question motivated possibility and pragmatics. From her first day as a teacher in Milwaukee schools on May 18, 1964, she became entangled with struggles for racial justice. (Auspiciously, her first day employed by Milwaukee Public Schools was the day civil rights attorney Lloyd Barbee led the first day of the school boycott, which MTEA had vociferously opposed, as discussed in the last chapter.²⁶⁵) As both a public school teacher and a parent of five African American children, Wynn saw the work of racial justice and improving public education as necessarily linked. Fighting to improve schools was a matter of racial justice; fighting for racial justice meant improving public schools.

Yet Wynn understood that neither the state nor markets on their own would mediate social justice. Struggles demanded organization, and organization rooted in groups.²⁶⁶ She learned the power of civic associations from her days as a member of The Arrowettes, a girl gang in Harlem. “You know, people talk about gangs with great disdain,” she reflected years later, “I talk about them with a great deal of respect.” The Arrowettes, after all, bestowed Wynn with “deep fraternalism” and

²⁶⁵ Lauri Wynn interview, April 12, 2008. March On Milwaukee: More than One Struggle, Oral History Interviews. Conducted at Wisconsin Black Historical Society.

²⁶⁶ Though Wynn's appreciation of civics reflected her personal experiences and biography, it reflects a nuanced point of political theory: that associations become the mechanism for democracy's enactment and contest. See, for example: Warren, *Democracy and Association*; Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, “Secondary Associations and Democratic Governance,” *Associations and Democracy* 20, no. 4 (1992): 393–472.

taught her “respect for the individual and the need for collective thought processes.”²⁶⁷ These skills were necessary for survival in Harlem -- what Wynn called “the Cold War of gangs” -- but even more so, they helped Wynn navigate the world as a Black woman. Associations provided Wynn with not only crucial support, a chance to gather alongside like-minded peers, but also a vehicle to demand and motivate change.²⁶⁸ “It takes all kinds of warriors to make a difference,” Wynn observed.²⁶⁹

Accordingly, shortly after moving to Milwaukee in 1965, in addition to working as a teacher at one of Milwaukee’s predominantly Black elementary schools and raising her five children, Wynn became active with a group of inner-city parents, United Community Action Group (UCAG). UCAG advocated for programs to improve the education for Black students, many of whom had recently moved to Milwaukee from southern states with high expectations for better education conditions and were sorely disappointed by what they found. Wynn and several other teachers and parents applied for small funds from the Board of Governmental Operations committee of the legislature to develop a program for inner-city children which emphasized reading skills, small class sizes, specially trained teachers, resources for field trips, even funding to help make sure parents could attend the school meetings.²⁷⁰

Like compensatory education programs proposed by other groups, this initiative emphasized small class sizes and special instruction to help students. “Just having ten kids in a classroom was in

²⁶⁷ Wynn, Lauri. Interview with WHS field researcher. August 30, 1974. WEAC Collections, Tape 11, Side 2. WHS.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Wynn, Lauri. Interview. Interview with Jack Dougherty. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 9 1995. More Than One Struggle Oral History Project, Golda Meir archives, University of Milwaukee. Wynn’s reflections in this interview make clear that the programs she developed were not sufficient on their own – they could not achieve the necessary scale, but they provided an important pilot for efforts to come. This, in addition to the parental support and public moneys and public infrastructure, distinguished it from the “choice” programs that Black activists would later come to demand.

itself revolutionary,” Wynn remarked.²⁷¹ However, unlike the standard compensatory education reform programs, these programs, titled the Interrelated Language Skills Center (ILSC) left behind the “cultural deprivation” philosophy, as discussed in the previous chapter. Instead, these programs were rooted in the premise that parents believe and want the best for their children’s education, and as such, aimed to work closely with parents.²⁷² Designed by a group of parents and teachers, the program was what Milwaukee education historian Bill Dahlk called a “a victory of community self-determination.”²⁷³

As a teacher activist committed to small class sizes and extra resources in schools, Wynn found her interests aligning with MTEA. MTEA approved of ILSC’s emphasis on smaller class sizes and remedial programs, and demanded support for it in their bargaining sessions.²⁷⁴ Working with local community organizing groups, especially with the desegregation case, made it clear to Wynn that “money was a real problem” for advancing civil rights work.²⁷⁵ As she observed, “it came clear to me that the money was with the teachers’ union.”²⁷⁶ Though Wynn worked more closely with community activist groups around Milwaukee public education than the union, she often found MTEA in the late 1960s nodding alongside her efforts. For example, if a union representative could not make a negotiating meeting, MTEA’s executive director would occasionally turn to Wynn to act as proxy. Wynn recalled in hindsight how the MTEA executive director Jim Coulter justified his choice: “You’re not going to be too far away from what we’re interested in,” he would allegedly

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Interview with Jermitt Krage, July 18, 2018. Steven Baruch, “Factors Affecting the Process of Curriculum Formation in the Milwaukee Public Schools, July 1955 to June 1976” (University of Wisconsin -- Milwaukee, 1982), 265–67. Milwaukee Board of School Director Proceedings, 1969-70, p. 804.

²⁷³ Dahlk, *Against the Wind: African Americans and the Schools in Milwaukee, 1963-2002*, 146.

²⁷⁴ Interview with Jermitt Krage, July 18, 2018.

²⁷⁵ Wynn, Lauri. Interview. Interview with Jack Dougherty. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 9 1995. More Than One Struggle Oral History Project, Golda Meir archives, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

²⁷⁶ Wynn, Lauri. Interview. Interview with Jack Dougherty. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 9 1995. More Than One Struggle Oral History Project, Golda Meir archives, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

stress to Wynn.²⁷⁷ Wynn was both an ally of MTEA's and kept outside of it. She was able to aid its work, but she was not part of its leadership counsel.

Yet, by the early 1970s, Wynn's energy shifted away from parent and community organizations like UCAG and focusing more on work within the schools, through both the teachers' union and supporting the desegregation suit against the schools. Wynn's shift reflected the changing landscape of civil rights activism in Milwaukee. By 1970, as Lloyd Barbee's legal strategy of demanding integrated schools dragged on with little progress, a number of Black activists began to look outside the educational system to agitate for Black education reform. Infused with the growing energy of Black nationalism of the period, these groups began mobilizing for Afrocentric schools, independent community schools and a separate predominantly Black school district, leaving the public schools the terrain of the 'educational establishment'.²⁷⁸ While significant scholarly attention has documented the transition of Milwaukee's Black activists to exit the public school system in search of racially just education, less attention has been paid to the work of activists, especially Black teachers, who did not see "exit" as the solution to problems of the education system, and chose to struggle to improve public schools. Instead, most portraits of Milwaukee education reform portray the work of teachers – especially teachers unionists -- and others working "within the system" of Milwaukee public education reform as concerned with maintaining the "status quo" – meaning racial inequalities -- rather than advancing work for racial and educational justice. Yet, as the following pages aim to clarify, the Milwaukee teachers' union reactionary agenda was not a pre-ordained program, but rather rose *in reaction* to debates within and around the union.

Lauri Wynn was one such educator committed to struggling within the public school system. While other Black activists in Milwaukee began to look for alternatives to the existing public

²⁷⁷ Wynn, Lauri. Interview with WHS field researcher. August 30, 1974. WEAC Collections, Tape 11, Side 2. WHS.

²⁷⁸ Dahlk, *Against the Wind: African Americans and the Schools in Milwaukee, 1963-2002*, 187–235; Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform In Milwaukee*, 131–66.

education system, Wynn doubled down on her efforts to push institutional reform within it. By the late 1960s, Wynn had become highly active in teachers' union programs at the local, state and national level. In Milwaukee, Wynn frequently pushed MTEA to adopt more progressive platforms, especially around racial integration in schools. Although MTEA had passed a resolution in 1970 vaguely opposing de facto segregation in Milwaukee public schools, they dragged their feet committing to much more. "With a scheme, and unabashedly, I began -- really it was just me [because] there weren't many Blacks in the union to begin with," Wynn declared, "'I began to pressure the union to stand up and stop talking about all these things and hand in their resolutions and what they said and *do something.*'"²⁷⁹ Wynn found herself regularly probing MTEA to take more assertive postures towards the political issues surrounding education and demanded more teacher engagement and active organizing. For example, when bargaining stalled in 1970, Wynn urged the union to not only reject the board's paltry offers, but called to organize a mass meeting of teachers to determine a response (her petition, unsurprisingly, did not win the support of other teachers).²⁸⁰ She also called for MTEA officer candidates to present their stance on educational issues in elections. She wanted to infuse more explicit discussion to the political debates faced by the teachers unionists. She also, likely, wanted to move away from the "good old boys" patronage club that prevailed in the union's leadership.²⁸¹

Yet it became increasingly clear that Wynn's commitments to organizing and social change put her at odds with other MTEA activists. "I don't think people in an organization like this are trying to be activists in a movement. When I tell them this is a movement, that's because what I really believe it is," Wynn observed. "What I find in this job, when I talk about a movement, is that

²⁷⁹ Wynn, Lauri. Interview. Interview with Jack Dougherty. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 9 1995. More Than One Struggle Oral History Project, Golda Meir archives, University of Milwaukee.

²⁸⁰ MTEA Building Representative minutes, November 11, 1970. MTEA archives.

²⁸¹ MTEA Building Representative minutes, April 16, 1969; May 12, 1970. MTEA archives. Clear, "The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association."

teachers are very restrained in how they speak out. They are very controlled.”²⁸² Not only did the Milwaukee teacher unionists show caution in their tactics, shying away from explicit organizing, they also flinched at taking on the explicitly political issues that energized Wynn. The existing leadership of MTEA, a group of white, mostly male teachers, found themselves frequently unnerved by Wynn’s organizing and social commitments. “We never did anything right, according to Lauri Wynn. We were just a bunch of no goods. We didn’t care about the Blacks, and we didn’t care about this, and we didn’t care about that. Why [was she] always so critical?”²⁸³ grumbled one former executive board member in reflection. As a result of MTEA’s recalcitrance, Wynn shifted her energy towards working with the national and state level teachers’ association, the National Education Association (NEA) and Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC).²⁸⁴

In 1970s, she attended her first national NEA conference, where she formed important like-minded allies. Thanks to these networks, Wynn and other Black teacher unionists formed a national Black teachers’ caucus in the NEA; Wynn served as its chairperson. The caucus especially aimed to ensure that Black representation among Northern local’s leadership, such as Milwaukee. “The North was very quiet,” Wynn observed, “they were not organized.”²⁸⁵ Part of this reflected the geography of U.S. civil rights struggles, which called attention to the explicit institutional segregation of Southern institutions, while enabling Northern racism to fester, undetected by liberalism’s crude legal apparatus. For example, NEA’s southern locals prior to *Brown vs. Board of Education* had been separated by race, locals for whites and locals for Blacks. After *Brown*, southern locals were required

²⁸² Wynn interview, Tape 12, Side 1. WEAC Collections. WHS.

²⁸³ Interview with author, July 22, 2017..See also Veronica Sullivan, Tape 22, Side 1, WEAC Collections. WHS.

²⁸⁴ According to one former executive board member’s account, Wynn became more active in WEAC partially due to prompting by MTEA leadership, who found themselves so frustrated with Wynn, they encouraged her to join WEAC as a sly way to get her out of their hands. Personal interview with source, July 2017.

²⁸⁵ Wynn, Lauri. Interview. Interview with Jack Dougherty. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 9 1995. More Than One Struggle Oral History Project, Golda Meir archives, University of Milwaukee.

to merge into the same association, and were mandated to have Black representation in their local leadership. Northern locals, however, were not held to the same standards.²⁸⁶ It became incumbent upon the organizing and agitation of activists like Wynn to challenge Northern locals to prioritize racial equity in their ranks. “It seemed very important that we [Blacks] would not be the people that were sent for the icing to the conventions,” Wynn explained, “but we be involved in a very intricate sort of manner in our states that we came from.”²⁸⁷ Thanks to her efforts to form Black caucuses in the NEA, Wynn reflected with pride years later, across the North *and* South, “there are Black caucuses who are talking about things like, “Why aren’t we teaching our children more? Why are we segregated?”²⁸⁸

Wynn’s experience with NEA’s national integration effort convinced her the organization could be useful with Milwaukee’s stalled desegregation case. In 1969, Wynn applied for a loan from NEA to aid Milwaukee’s desegregation case. NEA took Wynn’s claims seriously. Within ten days, they approved her request for action and funds, and quickly pledged to call public hearings in Milwaukee for more information and \$10,000 to “computerize” the evidence which Wynn had presented. Simply gathering the record of segregated education institutions had been a major accomplishment of the civil rights’ movement, as the school district had not bothered to track or document the racial demographics of its students. The fight for data evidence of racial segregation was key to mandating desegregation.²⁸⁹ Yet even with NEA’s support, Wynn still had to convince

²⁸⁶ Carol F. Karpinski, *“A Visible Company of Professionals”: African Americans and the National Education Association during the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008). Wynn, WEAC Oral History, Tape

²⁸⁷ Wynn, Lauri. Interview with WHS field researcher. August 30, 1974. WEAC Collections, Tape 12, Side 1. WHS.

²⁸⁸ Wynn, Lauri. Interview. Interview with Jack Dougherty. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 9 1995. More Than One Struggle Oral History Project, Golda Meir archives, University of Milwaukee.

²⁸⁹ Wynn had helped with this pain-staking task of data collection, spearheaded by Milwaukee civil rights attorney, Lloyd Barbee. When Barbee’s office closed on the weekends, Wynn would take her five kids to the NAACP office, where they would spend their Sunday afternoons pouring over decades of past student yearbooks, hunting for any pictures of Black students to determine the racial composition of each school. “Finding somebody Black was like finding a fly in buttermilk,” Wynn remembered. The mounting stacks of yearbooks that had no pictures of Black students became evidence of Milwaukee’s segregated schools. Wynn,

the Milwaukee teachers' not only of the reality of segregation, but the union's responsibility to address it.

On a warm September afternoon in 1970, after finishing her day of teaching at 21st Street elementary school, Wynn had one more stop to make before going home to make dinner, do laundry and check the homework of her five children. She had to go to the MTEA office. That afternoon, MTEA's executive board gathered in the wood-paneled conference room of the union's office for their monthly meeting. Wynn was scheduled to talk to the predominantly white, male, executive board – the teachers' chief decision-making body -- about the pending desegregation suit. As the meeting's final item of business that afternoon, Wynn stood before her fellow teachers and explained the lawsuit against the Milwaukee public schools, noting with painstaking detail the evidence supporting the claim that Milwaukee schools were segregated. A touch dazzled and a touch confused, MTEA's recording secretary noted Wynn's use of "charts" and "computerized data" to illustrate her claim that Milwaukee schools were segregated by design. As Wynn told the gaping executive board that sat before her, MTEA had three courses of action in light of these facts brought forward by the lawsuit. MTEA could either endorse the lawsuit fully, oppose the lawsuit, or take a "wait and see" approach. Wynn also told board members she had already successfully petitioned NEA DuShane reserves, a fund used to protect teachers facing discrimination, to support this suit. Now it was up to MTEA to decide if they would also get on board.²⁹⁰

Lauri. Interview. Interview with Jack Dougherty. Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 9 1995. More Than One Struggle Oral History Project, Golda Meir archives, University of Milwaukee.

²⁹⁰ Originally developed in the 1940s to protect teachers who were persecuted by anti-communists, DuShane funds provided legal and financial protection to teachers facing discrimination. In 1965, the DuShane fund was primarily used to advance civil rights activism, a means to support teachers struggling against segregated schools. For more, see Stuart J. Foster, "Red Alert!: The National Education Association Confronts the 'Red Scare' in American Public Schools, 1947-1954," *Education and Culture* 14, no. 2 (1997): 1–16. MTEA Executive Board meeting minutes, September 2, 1970. MTEA Archives; "Policies and Guidelines of the NEA DuShane Emergency Fund." National Education Association Committee Records 1857-1996, Series 5, Box 1176, Folder 1. George Washington University.

Despite Wynn's clear presentation of data and possible responses to Milwaukee's segregated schools, MTEA's executive board was flummoxed by her request. Unaccustomed to requests from members to adopt political positions – no less about racial segregation, no less issued by a confident and strategic African American woman – the executive board stuttered in response. “It was not exactly clear what Mrs. Wynn wanted,” noted MTEA's recording secretary. The board stalled their decision, and decided to meet the following week to decide just how they would respond to the desegregation suit.

The next week, despite petitions made by several board members, the body as a whole could not be convinced to take a stand against segregation. Freda Norvell, an elementary school teacher at Siefert and chairperson of MTEA's Human Resources committee, declared the content of the suit was “essential and relevant to the urban crisis in Milwaukee” and demanded MTEA's full support and engagement towards positively implementing the courts' directives. Yet the rest of the executive board disagreed and Norvell's motion failed. Another teacher board member tried a different approach, asserting that MTEA should throw their full support behind NEA's DuShane efforts in order that the suit be finished promptly. This motion didn't even earn a second, and the plea dropped from consideration. By the time the executive board shuffled out the meeting that evening, the best they could come up with was a statement declaring their rhetorical opposition to de facto segregation, but abstaining from any efforts to support its legal challenges.²⁹¹ Their leadership – or lack of it – on this issue set the tone for the rest of the membership in the months to come.

That national leadership of NEA, however, was not satisfied by MTEA's executive board's weak hesitations on the desegregation case. They decided to petition the local union themselves for a response. In January 1972, shortly after allocating DuShane funds to support the desegregation

²⁹¹ Ibid. The Executive Board did not even have full consensus on this decision; one member abstained from voting, and another voted against the position.

efforts in Milwaukee, several members of NEA's investigating team travelled to Milwaukee to meet with teachers, community activists and school board representatives in order to develop a plan for the funds. When George Jones, manager of NEA's Human Relations Center, spoke to MTEA teachers at a building representative meeting, he announced that NEA will work with Lloyd Barbee to come up with desegregation plans and implored the teachers to also support the suit. "The view of teachers should be heard," he told the teachers gathered in the auditorium of Story School. "Joining the NEA through support of the Amos suit is one way to do that."²⁹²

Lauri Wynn similarly urged her fellow Milwaukee teachers to support the case. She encouraged them to reframe their professional obligations in light of racial justice demands. "Our professional responsibilities don't stop when the school bell rings," she declared. "The suit claims there is segregation and I believe there is."²⁹³ Yet the Milwaukee teachers at the general assembly were dubious of the NEA's appeal because of their reluctance to take a political stand on desegregation. They peppered the NEA representatives with questions about how teachers' rights would be protected if schools were integrated.²⁹⁴ Like the executive board the year before, the building representative teachers decided to postpone making an official decision. In the meantime, teachers requested more information on the *Amos v Milwaukee* suit, and just exactly its effects on teachers and "the system" would be.²⁹⁵

Time offered neither conviction nor clarity to the Milwaukee teachers' position on the desegregation suit. When they gathered the next month to once again consider officially supporting the *Amos vs. Milwaukee* suit, they were no readier to take a stand. This time, more than indecision

²⁹² Statement presented by George W. Jones, NEA Center for Human Resources to special meeting of MTEA Representative Assembly, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, February 3, 1972. MTEA Archives.

²⁹³ "Teachers Hold Off on Suit," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 13, 1972

²⁹⁴ "Teachers Hold Off on Suit," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 13, 1972; MTEA Representative Assembly, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, February 3, 1972. MTEA Archives.

²⁹⁵ MTEA Building representative meeting minutes, January 12, 1972. MTEA archives.

stymied the body; teachers' latent opposition to desegregation buzzed through the room. For example, Mr. Harris, a middle-school teacher at a school on Milwaukee's predominantly white Southside, fired off against the basic claims of the case. His accusations illuminated that many teachers neither believed segregation existed in Milwaukee public schools nor constituted a social ill that required response.²⁹⁶ Harris demanded MTEA's executive board to petition NEA for funds to file a countersuit against the very premise that Milwaukee Public Schools are segregated. "In this countersuit," Harris bellowed, "we will prove Milwaukee Schools are not segregated and the individuals who have filed this suit are attempting to destroy the school system!"²⁹⁷ Though teachers may have taken aback by the Harris' plainspoken rejection of the civil rights movements' demands, they were not entirely off-put by his sentiment. The teachers nervously asked to respond to Harris' motion by a secret ballot, not wanting to publicly disclose their preferences on the matter. Although that motion failed, so too did the motion for MTEA to go on record supporting the suit – and by a hefty margin.²⁹⁸ Milwaukee teachers, it seemed, were neither fully ready to launch an offensive against the civil rights movement nor to stand behind it. The consequences of MTEA's uncertainty about where and when to take a stand would only become more significant in the years to come.

Milwaukee teachers' aversion toward desegregation coupled with another rising tension: the relationship between MTEA and its national affiliate, NEA. MTEA members, to be sure, had a complicated relationship with its parental association. As Chapter Two explored, teachers joined MTEA precisely because they believed it to be an association absent external influence (in contrast to the explicitly labor-affiliated Milwaukee Teachers' Union, which prized its connection to broader worker federations such as the AFL-CIO). Nonetheless MTEA relied on NEA for influence and

²⁹⁶ This provides important evidence towards the structure of ideology among Milwaukee teachers. Ideology, theorist Goran Therborn notes, is the answer to the questions, what exists, what is possible, what is good. See Therborn Goran Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (London: Verson, 1980).

²⁹⁷ MTEA Building Representatives meeting minutes, February 9, 1972. MTEA archives.

²⁹⁸ MTEA Building Representatives meeting minutes, February 9, 1972. MTEA archives.

clout, and cheerfully accepted their praise and awards.²⁹⁹ In times of need, such as the intense battles for exclusive representation with MTU in the late 1950s and early 1960s noted in Chapter Two, MTEA called on NEA for help, requesting both money, counsel and leadership. Still, MTEA teachers remained skeptical of being part of a larger association, and were almost dogmatically opposed to the suggestion of “outside influence” influencing the teachers. Barely a quarter of MTEA teachers elected to pay monthly dues to join the national federation.³⁰⁰ MTEA teachers, it seemed, deeply engrained desire for local autonomy and control, despite clear limitations of local dominion.

Tension between MTEA and NEA became particularly charged around race. Much to MTEA leadership’s frustration, NEA pushed MTEA to address the district’s racial segregation and funding disparities. For example, when MTEA members voted not to back the desegregation suit, some Milwaukee teachers expressed irritation at NEA for deploying DuShane funds in the Amos vs. Milwaukee suit without consulting the MTEA teachers first. Teachers debated whether to formally censure NEA or not.³⁰¹ In this regard, MTEA’s opposition to higher authority intervention was eerily reminiscent of white resistance to federally mandated integration orders after the 1954 *Brown vs. Board of Education* ruling.³⁰² Loathe to have their organizational priorities bent to the demands of a higher authority, particularly at requirements of racial justice, MTEA leadership struggled to understand how they could either sanction NEA’s involvement or withhold their compliance with it.

To be sure strain between MTEA and NEA around desegregation had been building for

²⁹⁹MTEA Building Representatives meeting minutes, December 8, 1971. MTEA archives.

³⁰⁰ See for example, MTEA Building Representatives meeting minutes, October 13, 1971. MTEA archives.

³⁰¹ MTEA Building Representatives meeting minutes, February 9, 1972. MTEA archives.

³⁰² Especially in Southern states in the mid 1950s years, demands for “local control” in school districts became clarion calls for white resistance to integration. Numan V. Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South during the 1950’s* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999); Nancy MacLean, “The Conservative Quest to ‘Make Democracy Safe for the World’: Privatization as the Sequel to Massive Resistance,” in *The Long Civil Rights Movement: Histories, Politics, Memories* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2009); MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America*.

several years. In 1967, Milwaukee public schools faced a financial crisis, causing MTEA's contract negotiations to stall.³⁰³ Utterly frustrated by inaction from the Milwaukee School Board and Wisconsin State legislators to address the crisis facing Milwaukee public schools, MTEA requested help from NEA and the state affiliate, WEAC, to conduct an investigation in order to facilitate a settlement between the union and the board.³⁰⁴ Between August and October 1967, NEA officials examined the conditions of education in Milwaukee, including deploying national staff to Milwaukee for four days of on-site research, in which they met with teacher groups, community groups, the Board of Education, members of state legislature, even the governor. Based on their research, NEA issued a public report announcing the severity of Milwaukee's problems.³⁰⁵ In part due to NEA's efforts, Wisconsin legislators passed a bill supplying Milwaukee public schools with additional aid and authority to levy higher property taxes several weeks later. MTEA felt their political demands had been satisfied and requested that NEA adjourn their investigation.³⁰⁶

Yet NEA officers were not satisfied. Unlike MTEA teachers, NEA did not see the increase of aid to Milwaukee as a necessarily sufficient remedy to the bigger problems at play in Milwaukee. During the committee's study of Milwaukee, members had noted not merely deficiencies in the *amount* of state aid the school district received, but also problems in its *distribution* to predominantly

³⁰³ With prodding from the Milwaukee Teachers' Union, MTEA conducted a campaign to increase the tax rate for Milwaukee and advocate for greater state aid. MTU had begun planning rallies and actions, even calling for a strike as early as 1966 to draw attention to the financial crisis faced by Milwaukee public schools. See "Union Rally Planned on School Aid," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 14, 1967. "Union: 'Compel State to Raise Funds'" *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 31, 1967. See AFT Organizing Department Records, Box 113, Folder 8, WPRL, for more details.

³⁰⁴ "Statement of Termination for the Milwaukee Investigation," Commission of Professional Rights and Responsibilities, National Education Association, December 1968. National Education Association Records-Commissions, Series 2, Box 991, Folder 3. Special Collections Research Center, George Washington University. Hereafter GWU.

³⁰⁵ "Milwaukee, Wisconsin Investigation Committee Statement," Commission of Professional Rights and Responsibilities, National Education Association, June 1968. National Education Association Records-Commissions, Series 2, Box 991, Folder 3. Special Collections Research Center, GWU.

³⁰⁶ "Milwaukee, Wisconsin Investigation Committee Statement," Commission of Professional Rights and Responsibilities, National Education Association, June 1968. National Education Association Records-Commissions, Series 2, Box 991, Folder 3. Special Collections Research Center, GWU..

Black and low-income schools. The problem of resource distribution exacerbated racial and economic inequalities in the district and was not resolved by simply securing increases in the amount of aid.

What's more, some NEA staff members had been particularly troubled by MTEA's unwillingness to examine racial inequalities in the school system. MTEA officials, a NEA report noted, "attempted to redirect the committee's attention to matters like financial support from the state legislature and to *disallow inquiry* [emphasis added] into other matters of concern to interested citizens such as racial tension and the adequacy of education for poverty groups."³⁰⁷ Members of NEA's special investigation committee also bristled at newspaper statements released by MTEA declaring that the "separation of the races" would not be examined unless it had a direct effect on the curriculum or one of the areas covered by the investigation.³⁰⁸

This lack of concern with the root causes of inequality in Milwaukee schools left many members of NEA's special investigation committee feeling as if MTEA had taken advantage of them. NEA had been called in by MTEA for the national organization's muscle and political clout when MTEA needed help, but MTEA had no interest in NEA's assessment of the situation, much show willingness to heed its recommendations. One particularly troubled committee member of NEA's special committee not only refused to sign off on the committee's aborted report, she resigned from the committee. "It would be a serious mistake not to tell the Milwaukee story," she warned in her resignation letter, "The conclusion that the crisis and the problem has been met is

³⁰⁷ "Resignation letter from Mrs. Frances Jaeschke to NEA Legal Counsel John R. Grinnell," September 16, 1968. Commission of Professional Rights and Responsibilities, National Education Association Records-Commissions, Series 2, Box 991, Folder 4. Special Collections Research Center, GWU. NEA was not the only group upset by this turn of events. Community groups like UCAG were also troubled by MTEA's disregard of racial inequalities. See Dahlk, *Against the Wind: African Americans and the Schools in Milwaukee, 1963-2002*, 129-52.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

premature and suspiciously one-sided.”³⁰⁹ While the committee eventually closed the investigation per MTEA’s request, the affair revealed MTEA’s subtle resistance to addressing racial segregation, particularly when directed to do so by a higher authority, such as the national NEA office. As we shall see, MTEA’s devotion to maintaining political “independence” and local control often served as a tool to rebuff engagement with bigger political questions that had become priorities for the national union.

Given MTEA’s unwillingness to engage in political issues – itself a political act – it was not surprising that by the early 1970s Lauri Wynn soon prioritized working with the national NEA and WEAC. In 1971, Wynn decided to run for office of WEAC, first as third vice president, then second vice president, biting the bullet in 1973 and running for president of the state union.³¹⁰ When she won the election by a six to one margin, Wynn was shocked. “Good God almighty!” she exclaimed, “I got all these white people!”³¹¹ At that time, Wynn noted, WEAC was changing. During the late 1960s to the early 1970s, the state teachers’ association was undergoing a major shift in organizational culture and leadership, becoming a much more explicitly political teachers’ union. With Lauri Wynn’s leadership, what would this new union become?

Changes in WEAC

Whereas MTEA in the early 1970s found itself resisting engagement with bigger political questions, the statewide teachers’ union was directly tackling them. In the early 1970s, the state teachers’ union began redefining itself as a politically active organization, with a formidable

³⁰⁹“Special Problems of the Milwaukee Investigation,” Commission of Professional Rights and Responsibilities, National Education Association, November 7, 1968. National Education Association Records-Commissions, Series 2, Box 991, Folder 3. Special Collections Research Center, GWU.

³¹⁰ “Mrs. Wynn chosen,” *The Greater Milwaukee Star*, August, 7, 1971; “Lauri Wynn to head WEA,” *Milwaukee Star Times*, Thursday, May 13, 1974.

³¹¹ Wynn interview. March on Milwaukee: More Than One Struggle Collection. Interview conducted at Wisconsin Black Historical Society, April 12 2008. Golda Meir library, UWM.

organizational structure, growing membership, revenue and staff. WEAC, an NEA affiliate that obtained its first charter in the 1853, had long seen itself as a professional organization of administrators and teachers alike. Though it advocated for general improvements of public education, until the early 1970s it did not see itself as militant or political body.³¹² By 1972, three major factors prompted changes in WEAC's purpose and practices.

First, the legal climate for Wisconsin's public sector union encouraged new opportunities. Wisconsin's 1959 law enabling collective bargaining for public-sector workers had initially shocked WEAC, which saw itself as a cozy association of both teachers *and* administrators. The 1959 law, however, polarized the structural divisions between Wisconsin teachers and administrators; administrators were not allowed in the same bargaining unit as teachers, and WEAC had to adjust. By 1971, schools no longer were forced to tolerate collective bargaining; they were legally *required* to do so. Teachers, in turn, automatically joined and payed union dues, in "fair share" dues collection legislation.³¹³ The number of teachers who joined WEAC jumped from 26,000 to 44,000 between 1968 and 1972.³¹⁴ What's more, this new legislation explicitly barred administrators and supervisors from joining bargaining units with teachers. "With the departure of the administrators," one long-time WEAC field staff summarized, "the association took on a more classroom teacher-oriented role and became a much more liberal organization and also a much more militant organization."³¹⁵

Secondly, WEAC got new leadership. In the spring of 1972, the previous director of WEAC retired and a new executive director, a man named Morris Andrews, was hired. Unlike the older WEAC leadership, Morris Andrews brought an activist and political sensibility to his work. "We were looking for a strong person, and a young person, and we were also looking for someone who

³¹² Beilke, Dustin. "Wisconsin Educational Association Council: A History" (2001). P. 11-20.

³¹³ Beilke, *Wisconsin Education Association Council: A History*, 24.

³¹⁴ Jermitt Krage, *Memories of a Grateful Past, 1830-1965* (Montello, WI: White Spruce Publishing, 2016), 323.

³¹⁵ Ed Golnick interview, Tape 2, Side 1. WEAC Collections. WHS.

was a teacher advocate,” described Lauri Wynn, the WEAC president-elect at the time Andrews was hired. “That is, we were talking about advocating rights of teachers, and we were anxious to get someone who had a zest for the legislative arena – the lobbying, the political activity and what not. And so we found those things in Morris.”³¹⁶ Whereas the previous director had firmly discouraged people from referring to WEAC as a union, Morris fully embraced the term and its connotations. “Since Morris has been here, we have the word “union” on our letterhead,” confided a WEAC secretary. “I could not say the word ‘strike’ to [the former executive director],” she continued, “because, you know, that was a bad thing and against the law. And, you know, Morris was thrown in jail.”³¹⁷ Whereas the previous director was politically conservative but interpersonally affable, Morris’s co-workers described him as the opposite. Often seen stumbling tempestuously down the halls of the WEAC office, a pipe stuffed in his mouth and a scowl plastered on his face, Andrews neither felt obliged to engage in office pleasantries, nor to tolerate biased or bigoted comments that passed for small talk. Coworkers reported that more than once he called out his colleagues for their racist commitments.³¹⁸

Yet Andrews’ irascible temperament belied the deep-seated convictions that fueled his leadership. Born and raised in a union household in Flint, Michigan, Andrews firmly held that teachers should be involved in political organizing. Andrews worked as an organizer for the Michigan Education Association and Illinois Education Association (during which time he reported witnessing nearly 100 teacher strikes) before being hired as the executive director of WEAC. “I am convinced that teachers will be the most potent political group in this state,” Morris declared months after becoming WEAC’s executive director. “I don’t think any politician has the option to

³¹⁶ Wynn interview, Tape 12, Side 2. WEAC Collections. WHS.

³¹⁷ Kay Scholl interview, Tape 23, Side 1. WEAC Collections. WHS.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

ignore teachers anymore.”³¹⁹ Yet what caught many people’s eye was Andrews’ militant organizing style. Trained in Saul Alinsky’s style of Industrial Area Foundations organizing, Andrews developed a hard-nosed approach towards power and organizing as a means to tip the balance of forces towards teachers. “I will make this very brief. ...The essential elements of political process are workers, votes and money,” he bluntly told teachers assembled at the 1973 WEAC convention.³²⁰ Whereas previous generations of teacher unionists fretted over whether or not it was “appropriate” for teachers to get involved in collective action, Andrews’ concerns were more pragmatic: could collective action help teachers accomplish their goals? “Yes,” he declared to teachers at the assembly. “Then it is our task to structure the political action in the most productive manner possible.” As one of Andrews’ fellow coworkers described, “Morris Andrews was an organizer. His mindset was to organize the members to do things for themselves.”³²¹ Andrews’ shrewd and non-nonsense approach to organizing marked a turning point in WEAC’s leadership.

With Andrews at the helm, WEAC was in prime position to respond to the third factor that catalyzed WEAC’s new direction: the spike of teachers’ job action militancy that surged across Wisconsin and the country in the early 1970s. In the mid-sixties, prior to legalized collective bargaining, teachers seldom went on strikes. In 1965 in Wisconsin, a total of 450 teacher work days were lost due to strike. By 1971, that number had jumped nearly 65 times as high, as a total of 29,288 teacher instructional days across the state were lost because of teacher strikes.³²² There was a growing sense that teachers didn’t want to be simply part of an association – they wanted to be part of a movement.³²³

³¹⁹ “Morris Andrews: He Wants ‘Activist’ Teachers,” *The Capital Times*. January 15, 1973.

³²⁰ “WEA Council Meeting Minutes,” May 5, 1973, p. 67. WEAC Collection, Box 3, Folder 4. WHS.

³²¹ Interview with author, May 5 2018.

³²² Joh Hosmanek, “A Descriptive Analysis of Teacher Union Tactics and the Acceptability of Alternative Techniques for Resolving Union-School Board Disputes” (Marquette University, 1975), 32.

³²³ To understand these changes nationally, see Shelton, *Teacher Strike!: Public Education and the Making of a New American Political Order*.

By 1970, teachers across Wisconsin demanded a more militant and engaged union. One Milwaukee teacher, Jermitt Krage, a friend and colleague of Lauri Wynn, was so frustrated at his first WEAC council meeting in 1968 prior to the association's transformation, he stood during one particularly stuffy meeting, and lit his membership card on fire. "I see little value in the format of this conference," he told the 800 teachers gathered in the auditorium. "We have been given no opportunity to discuss issues that students and teachers are confronted with in the classroom, and even less opportunity to discuss any strategies to improve our working and teaching conditions."³²⁴ As the association's leaders dressed in suits stood in the front of the auditorium and gaped at the ashes falling out of Krage's hand, Krage invited other similarly frustrated teachers to join him outside. About forty teachers walked out with Krage. The group spent the rest of the day and a good part of the evening sprawled in a circle in the grass behind the auditorium dialoguing on the issues they felt needed to be addressed. Shortly after Krage's stand at the conference, WEAC hired Krage as an organizer. WEAC recognized a growing sense among teachers that their work required real struggle, not just bureaucratic bluster. Teachers demanded the organization to change.

WEAC's New Political Directions

Armed with new laws, new letterhead, a new director and new energy, a new Wisconsin's teachers' union began to take shape. The association rapidly reorganized. It officially transitioned from WEA, the Wisconsin Education Association, to the Wisconsin Education Association Council, WEAC, shifting the structure and organization of the union.³²⁵ More than a name shift, this reorganization also created the statewide political action fund called Wisconsin Educators Politically Active and Concerned (WEPAC). Funded from voluntary teacher contributions, WEPAC was

³²⁴ Krage, *Memories of a Grateful Past, 1830-1965*, 314.

³²⁵ Wisconsin Education Council Resolution, September 1972. WEAC Collection, Addition, Box 1, Folder 10. WHS.

designed to support candidates for local, state and national offices, designed to give teachers a new opportunity to exercise their voice through political involvement on electoral candidates.

“Historically, teachers have had a reluctance toward political involvement,” declared WEA president Fran Fruzen to Wausau teachers in the fall of 1972. “This lack of involvement did not matter quite as much as when active participation in politics was limited to a select few. But today the implications of state and national policies necessarily makes politicians of all of us.”³²⁶ Teachers, he urged, must expand the boundary of educational community from the classroom to the political arena.

For WEAC, that also meant more than advocating for education-friendly politicians; it also meant taking stands on politically controversial issues. Especially under the leadership of Lauri Wynn, who was elected president in 1973, WEAC began to take up explicitly political issues in education. WEAC, for example, began advocating for migrant children in rural, agricultural-heavy parts of the state, who were often crammed into classrooms without even desks, or simply set out in the halls. “If teachers don’t get involved raising the level of opportunities for the students of migrant employees in the area, if teachers don’t get involved in that, you think the establishment people are going to get involved in the communities?” expounded WEAC’s director of field organizing, Don Krahn. “Heck no.” Thanks to the union’s activity, the school district eventually agreed to provide classroom spaces, desks, and special instruction to the students. “We got the teachers to see it was in their self-interest to make that alliance and do something with and for that section of the community,” Krahn reflected.³²⁷

WEAC also supported Milwaukee’s desegregation lawsuit and improving gender equity in schools (at this point, female teachers were routinely denied health care and prohibited from

³²⁶ “Endorsement of WEPAC Candidates” Press Statement made by Fran Fruzen, Wausau, WI, Oct. 18, 1972. WEAC Collection, Additions, Box 3, Folder 2. WHS.

³²⁷ Don Krahn interview, Tape 6, Side 2. WEAC Collections. WHS.

coaching or participating in athletics). Perhaps most significantly, WEAC, under Andrews and Wynn's leadership, began reconsidering seniority protections – a traditional union touchstone -- in favor of racially balanced teaching staff, signaling a major pivot in the pillars of teacher unionism.

These changes, especially the potential weakening of seniority protections, infuriated the Milwaukee teacher union leadership. MTEA members would be most affected by demands for racially integrated faculty. WEAC, MTEA leadership felt, was “bent on taking over” MTEA’s authority.³²⁸ Yet despite this pressure from the state’s largest local, WEAC leadership’s convictions did not falter. Indeed, their clarity of purpose seemed only to sharpen in focus. “One of our goals is that as an organization we are to be involved in social change,” Wynn stated, “And that bothers people who don’t want to be involved in controversial issues. And so, as we move to work with teachers on issues, we find that you have to talk a lot more than salaries and working conditions, that that is a very limited arena to move in.”³²⁹

Organizational Direction

In the 1970s, many Wisconsin teachers sought greater political muscle as clashes with obstinate school boards grew more intense. Despite teachers’ newfound collective bargaining rights, negotiations stalled out at the bargaining table. Mercurial school boards lashed out at unionized teachers by issuing a wave of non-renewal notices for petty, personal and political reasons in the early 1970s.³³⁰ These pressures managed to coax even leery locals to join with state and national

³²⁸ “WEAC Tackling Wider Issues,” *Milwaukee Journal*. May 7, 1974.

³²⁹ Wynn interview, Tape 12, Side 2. WEAC Collections. WHS.

³³⁰ Krage interview, Tape 19, Side 1, WEAC Collections. WHS. Among the most flagrant incidents involved a school board issuing a nonrenewal to a teacher for a) having sideburns; b) opposing the Vietnam war, and c) offering his Waterloo home as a resting point for Milwaukee welfare recipients and social workers marching from Milwaukee to Madison to protest cuts in the welfare aid.

forces for greater teacher protection, at least temporarily.³³¹ WEAC's membership surged.

Growing membership brought much more dues money and thus more revenue into the organization, and prompted a major hiring wave of staff. Between 1967 and 1971, WEAC had tripled its professional staff.³³² With more hands on deck, WEAC aimed to build more direct contact with locals across the state. WEAC adopted an NEA model of coordination called Uniserv units, in which a state was broken into regions. Each region was assigned a staff member to help the locals in the area negotiate contracts, organize members and represent teachers in grievances, with approximately one staff person per every 1,200 teachers.³³³

With wider coverage of the state, the union needed a means to coordinate each locals' efforts, and turned to unification to do so. Unification automatically bundled local association membership to the state union and the national union, so that membership in a local union means also membership in the state and national union. "It is fitting that individual membership in any one membership would require membership in the others," wrote the NEA and WEAC president in a co-authored 1972 pamphlet. Unification would not only provide a stronger bargaining position for locals, but it would also allow the union to be focused on concerns in education at any level, to have

³³¹ Ibid. The WEA report also notes that the threat of wage freezes, thanks to the falling rate of profit in the 1970s, also spurred some teachers to seek national protection from NEA as a means to protect against wage freezes. For more on WEA's work on teacher non-renewals, see Krage, *Memories of a Grateful Past, 1830-1965*, 318–20.

³³² "Ad Hoc Committee on Unification, Feb. 27, 1971-Aug. 31, 1972," WEAC Collection, Committee Series, Box 25, Folder 3. WHS.

³³³ Whether Uniserv actually prompted greater teacher organization or mobilization, or increased the "service" model of business unionism was an open question, to be sure. While some argued that decentralizing WEA enabled greater member involvement in the union, others posited that it simply enabled greater bureaucratic management by way of staff, and dampened teachers' need to organize for themselves. "I find that where staff people are allowed on [meeting discussions floors], that the input of teachers becomes less and less and less," contended one teacher from Racine at WEA's 1973 annual convention. "Those states which have allowed it have become completely dominated by the association...Some of those people don't have to worry about paying rent on their buildings. They don't have to worry about paying for their electricity. They do not have to worry about paying for their executive secretary because that is also negotiated by the state." WEA Council Meeting minutes, First Session, May 5, 1973. WEAC Collection, Additions, Box 3, Folder 4. WHS.

“strength before local and state government, before power groups, and before the public.” What’s more, NEA and WEAC argued ominously, unification would “safeguard the future independence of the teaching profession from attack.” Prior to 1972 decision to unify, teachers could choose which levels of affiliation they would join, creating lumpy and awkward statewide power. “We members of the teaching profession have everything to gain from unified strength,” the NEA and WEAC president urged Wisconsin teachers, “We have everything to lose by continued fragmentation of effort.”³³⁴

Yet not all locals were as eager about unification as the WEAC and NEA. The implications of unification, specifically the possibility of the state union assuming financial trusteeship over a local, concerned Jim Colter, MTEA’s hard-nosed executive director. “I’d prefer,” Colter bristled, “that the teachers in Milwaukee have the right to decide their own destiny.”³³⁵ Anticipating resistance, WEAC made a point to highlight a local’s autonomy that would be preserved in unification. “Unification does not mean lockstep conformity nor loss of local or state control,” a WEAC pamphlet insisted. “But it does mean a vigorous pursuit of economic and professional gains for members [and a] mutual commitment to common goals.” In their petitions for unification, state leaders had encountered grumbling from larger urban and suburban locals, who felt they had little to gain by unifying with the national and state union, and would need coaxing to join. “The NEA was viewed as a paper tiger,” a WEAC report lamented. WEAC leaders realized that the NEA was for many teachers no more than a source of discount programs, automobile insurance, and mailers -- hardly worthy an increase in their monthly dues payments.³³⁶ What’s more, big locals, Milwaukee in particular, feared that joining the state and national local would cause them to lose their autonomy

³³⁴“Our Target is Unity”, NEA/WEA Statement on Unification, 1972. WEAC Collection, Additions, Box 3, Folder 3. WHS.

³³⁵ “City Teachers Threaten to Leave WEA,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 13, 1973.

³³⁶Ad Hoc Committee on Unification, Feb. 27, 1971-Aug. 31, 1972,” WEAC Collection, Committee Series, Box 25, Folder 3. WHS.

and potentially compel them to adopt political programs they did not support.

Nonetheless, the vote for unification prevailed, at least in the short run. Unification served the majority of locals in the state which had less than 100 teachers in their districts.³³⁷ “We can’t battle the whole education system by ourselves,” WEAC president Lauri Wynn declared. “We have to remain united.”³³⁸ A strong, unified state teachers’ union became especially necessary in the face of growing antagonism towards property taxes, school spending and teachers’ unions.

Property Tax Revolt and Educational Financing Reform

When rural Wisconsin residents received their tax bills the winter of 1972, they jumped at the nearly 200 percent spike in property taxes. “I thought it was a mistake,” winced a pig and dairy farmer from Randolph, Wisconsin upon receiving his 1971 tax bill.³³⁹ In the late 1960s and early 1970s, suburban expansion and sprawl had sparked a nearly ten-fold increase in assessed land value in Wisconsin. Municipal property tax assessors’ eyes gleamed as they marched from farmstead to farmstead, wagering the profits to be made from selling their rolling acres off for housing developments and strip malls.³⁴⁰ As the farmers had been made acutely aware, speculative market value supplanted use value. Startled and infuriated, rural Wisconsinites struggled to eke a living from parcels of land that had alchemized into poisoned gold. What’s more, conditions looked only to worsen. If people had a hard time paying their taxes that winter, one tax assessor said grimly in February 1971, the next year only looked to be worse.³⁴¹

³³⁷ “Membership Information,” WEA Ad Hoc Committee on Unification, 1972. WEAC Collection, Committee Series, Box 5, Folder 3. WHS.

³³⁸ “City Teachers Threaten to Leave WEA,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 13, 1973.

³³⁹ “Ired by Tax Hike, Fox Lake to Withhold School Funds” *Wisconsin State Journal*, February 6, 1972.

³⁴⁰ Carl W. Thompson, “Property Tax: revolt, reform, relief; fight for local control; permanent tax revolt. “The ‘Why’ of Rising Rural Land Taxes,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, February 6, 1972.

³⁴¹ “Votes 225 to 6: Trenton Township to Withhold Taxes,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, February 27, 1972.

Yet rather than directing their frustration at the market forces that caused the property value increases -- including declining corporate tax rates --taxpayers' anger settled on how government *spent* the growing tax pot.³⁴² "Someone has got to stick their necks out," declared the chairman of a small town that voted to put their school tax money in escrow. "Someone has got to say 'no' to all this spending."³⁴³ Educational costs, in particular, became the target of taxpayers' frustration.

Indeed, a bulk of Wisconsin residents' property taxes went towards school funding. From 1964 to 1970, the property taxes levied for education nearly doubled, spiking from \$323 million to \$624 million.³⁴⁴ Unionized teachers played no small part in the rising education costs: teachers' salaries increased 188 percent from 1961 to 1971, accounting for 92 percent of instructional cost.³⁴⁵ Wisconsin's rural residents were "sick and tired" of paying property taxes to support education.³⁴⁶ In particular, many residents resented sending taxes to Madison, the state's capital, and spent on social programming in Milwaukee, the state's largest city with the largest proportion of people of color and people living in poverty.³⁴⁷ This took on a decidedly racist framing for some rural, white residents of Wisconsin. "[The Governor] listens to the colored, the Mexican-Americans, the Indians and those on welfare, but not to the blue-collar worker," spat Mrs. Linda Cooper of the Town of Burke at a village hall meeting, "But when he does listen to the blue-collared man...he is going to see things he has never seen," Mrs. Cooper declared to the cheering crowd of her fellow townspeople. "We're not going to be taxed out of existence without one of the biggest fights you've seen."³⁴⁸

³⁴² How tax revolters' came to blame 'big government' rather than market forces for their financial hardships is brilliantly examined in: Isaac William Martin, *The Permanent Tax Revolt: How the Property Tax Transformed American Politics* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

³⁴³ "Votes 225 to 6: Trenton Township to Withhold Taxes," *Wisconsin State Journal*, February 27, 1972.

³⁴⁴ Terry G. Geske, "The Politics of Reforming School Finance in Wisconsin" (University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1975), 49.

³⁴⁵ Geske, 49.

³⁴⁶ Geske, 189.

³⁴⁷ In reality, much of the social programming, especially in education, targeted for low income students came from the federal aid, not local or state taxes. *Ibid.*

³⁴⁸ "Ired by Tax Hike, Fox Lake to Withhold School Funds" *Wisconsin State Journal*, February 6, 1972.

Over the next two months, rural taxpayers' ire spread like prairie fire across the Wisconsin flatlands. What began as evening townhall meetings broiled into unabashed revolt, as multiple small communities refused to turn over their school funds on tax day. In mid-February, nearly 1000 farmers packed into State Capitol building to attend a public hearing held by Governor Lucey. Jammed shoulder to shoulder in the Capitol's largest hearing room, farmer after farmer told the governor rising property taxes were driving them off their land and into bankruptcy. "Some people tell us that if you can't afford the taxes, to sell our farms," a Spring Green farmer stated. "Well, governor, there are some of us just too dumb or too proud to sell out – we'd just as soon farm."³⁴⁹ When the Governor tried to appease the crowds by pledging tax reform as a long-range goal of his administration, the farmers booed with discontent: they needed instant action and would not be satisfied until they got it. As the executive secretary of the Wisconsin Farmers Union concluded, "I fear, governor, that you see before you the seeds of a tax revolt."³⁵⁰

Choked off from their funding supply, a number of rural schools faced closures. When the State Secretary of Revenue divulged that school districts could prosecute the tax-withholders with jail time penalties, the rebelling groups hardly flinched, and continued to withhold payments well into the spring.³⁵¹ Despite their eventual capitulation, the tax revolters' anger and frustration had been heard loud and clear: property taxes and school funding needed to change. In response, Governor Lucey did what any good leader does in times of crisis: he formed a task force.

The Governor's Task Force on Educational Financing and Property Tax Reform, informally known as the Doyle Commission, formed in January 1972. In addition to growing pressures from taxpayers, the Task Force also formed in response to a recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling that

³⁴⁹ "Lucey Hears Tax Complaints," *Wisconsin State Journal*, February 18, 1972.

³⁵⁰ "Taxpayers Grind Their Ax, Lucey Listens," *The Milwaukee Journal*, February 18, 1972.

³⁵¹ Geske, "The Politics of Reforming School Finance in Wisconsin," 190–91.

mandated equalization of school financing.³⁵² In *Serrano v Priest*, the U.S. Supreme Court found that the school financing systems discriminated against the poor. The quality of a child's education became a function of the wealth of his parents and neighbors, the ruling declared, thereby violating the equal protection clause under the law.³⁵³ Wisconsin policy makers anticipated similar constitutional questions would be raised in Wisconsin, and the task force formed to preempt possible legal fallout in the state.

The task force, thus, possessed dueling purposes: to simultaneously reduce property tax burdens while equalizing state aid. Yet rather than addressing its contradictory aims, the task force by and large side-stepped them, focusing nearly exclusively on controlling school costs. As this objective settled as the group's primary aims, educators and WEAC leaders became increasingly disgruntled. By the end of the summer, Morris Andrews had begun attending and observing the task forces' meetings and began organizing counterproposals to the task force's direction. "It is evident that this task force has concerned itself essentially with property tax relief," stated 1972 WEAC president, Fran Fruzen. WEAC, in contrast, wanted the task force to prioritize educational quality and equality. "As a start," Fruzen continued, "the task force must establish the minimal essential ingredients of a students' education which all school districts shall provide."³⁵⁴ Yet attention to educational quality, much less equality, was barely a point of focus among the task force members. Rather, the task force remained focused on containing costs for local school districts.³⁵⁵

WEAC leaders, therefore, took it upon themselves to propose their own vision of educational financing. Their bold proposals called for abolishing state and local property taxes to fund education, instead proposing full state funding by way of increased income and corporate taxes

³⁵² Geske and Rossmiller, "The Politics Of School Fiscal Reform In Wisconsin."

³⁵³ *Serrano v. Priest*, 1971. Quoted in Geske, "The Politics of Reforming School Finance in Wisconsin," 58.

³⁵⁴ "Tax Relief Plan Pushed," *The Milwaukee Journal*, Oct. 24, 1972.

³⁵⁵ Geske, "The Politics of Reforming School Finance in Wisconsin," 77–82.

and aid to low property value districts. Full state funding would provide the best means to address differing financial capacities of districts, WEAC argued. In particular, WEAC demanded the education needs of children living in poverty received funding priority. “If local districts have discretionary power to raise funds for educational purposes,” WEAC proposed, “they should be denied the right to use any of these funds for preschool education of children other than those children of families classified as poor by federal guidelines.”³⁵⁶ WEAC’s focus on equity in educational funding was an issue that especially affected Milwaukee, given its high percentage of students living in poverty.

However Milwaukee unionists were noticeably absent from the statewide conversations about education finance reform. “What bothers me,” a task force member reflected, “is that we have received nothing in the way of proposals from the Milwaukee Public schools or from the Milwaukee Teachers Association.”³⁵⁷ MTEA’s disengagement from the task force not only threatened the particular interests of Milwaukee schools, it also weakened their political alliances with the rural and poor parts of the state, allowing wealthy suburbs to drive a wedge between low income districts, be they inner city or rural counties.³⁵⁸ What’s more, task force members understood that whatever plan passed would have to benefit Milwaukee, given its political clout and the blocking capacity of Milwaukee legislators. “If Milwaukee loses,” one member commented, “forget it.”³⁵⁹ MTEA’s reticence not only weakened WEAC’s strength in the coalition, it enabled ‘local control’ advocates

³⁵⁶ “Summary of Recommendations Made by the Wisconsin Education Association to the Governor’s Task Force on Educational Financing and Property Tax Reform,” August 23, 1972. WEAC, Additions, Box 1 Folder 9. WHS.

³⁵⁷ “Advice on Financing of Education Sought,” *Milwaukee Journal*, Oct. 31, 1972. J

³⁵⁸ When a similar tax equalization proposal had been made by a by task force two years prior, the State Revenue director noted the lack of partnership between rural and city interests. Had Milwaukee and rural districts forged alliances, the revenue director observed, they could have provided enough strength to counter the growing political force of the state’s suburbs. “Milwaukee-Rural Tie Seen to Push Tarr Bid,” *Milwaukee Journal*, May 5, 1969.

³⁵⁹ Geske, “The Politics of Reforming School Finance in Wisconsin,” 89.

and business interests to assume full control of the committee's direction. Without a forceful majority on the committee, the Task Force had voted to abandon WEAC's call for full state funding, opting for a method of local allocation of property taxes.³⁶⁰ WEAC's dreams of a progressive school financing lay by the wayside.

Instead, the tax reform bill that passed in 1973 provided a significant windfall for business interests in the state. In order to curry political favor among conservative and business interests necessary to pass the educational financing reform proposals, Governor Lucey issued a major tax break to corporations through an exemption for manufacturing machinery and processing equipment. The "M&E exemption," as it came to be known, represented an important turning point in the history of the property tax. Over the next decades, it removed tens of millions of dollars from the state's tax rolls, while distributing millions more in tax refunds to the state's corporations.³⁶¹ In 1977, the front page of *The Wall Street Journal* proclaimed Wisconsin as "the Star of the Snow Belt" thanks to its business-friendly climate and low corporate tax rates.³⁶² This pro-business environment not only reversed the state's historic aversion to direct financial assistance to business, it also provided a platform for capital in the state to convene and determine a political agenda to suit its needs in the years to come.³⁶³ Despite WEAC's best attempts, property taxes continued to govern the logics of Wisconsin school funding. And attempts to appease overburdened rural taxpayers came by way of tax cut that would mostly benefit corporate and industrial interests in the state. What had

³⁶⁰In a gesture of compromise to WEAC's petition for more equitable school funding, the task force voted to adopt a "negative aid" proposal which essentially forced wealthy districts to pay higher funds to be distributed to poorer districts. Yet this compromise was small and fleeting; within two years the courts deemed it unconstitutional. Erik LeRoy, "The Egalitarian Roots of the Education Article of the Wisconsin Constitution: Old History, New Interpretation, *Buse v. Smith* Criticized," *Wisconsin Law Review*, 1981, 1325–60.

³⁶¹ John O. Stark, "A History of the Property Tax and Property Tax Relief," 1992.

³⁶² "Star of Snow Belt," *Wall Street Journal*, September 16, 1977.

³⁶³ Roger M Nacker, "A Short History of Economic Development in Wisconsin And the Rise of Professional Economic Development," 2000.

started as a flickers of a progressive mobilization for more just educational funding became a rotten compromise.

1974 Statewide Fractures: Hortonville strike and MTEA disaffiliation

The advent of corporate tax breaks rather than property tax relief or increased school funding, put Wisconsin schools in a bind in 1973. The failure to reverse reliance on property taxes and “local control” for funding of schools meant not only did tax pressures in small Wisconsin towns continue to grow, so did animus against unionized teachers. Tensions came to a head in 1974 in Hortonville, Wisconsin. This strike revealed different priorities in the WEAC and MTEA, and ultimately caused MTEA to disaffiliate.

Hortonville Teachers’ Strike

Increasing sprawl and suburbanization meant that Hortonville, an exurban town in the Fox River Valley, faced growing enrollment in its small school district, and desperately needed additional funds to expand. Yet because corporations and manufacturers had just received major tax breaks, increasing school funding depended upon voters’ willingness to increase their already hefty-tax burden. When multiple referendum for more school funding failed, and teachers were unable to settle their contract with the school district, the teachers went on strike. Shortly thereafter, the school board fired all 88 teachers.

In response, teachers across the state poured into Hortonville to support the striking teachers. Lauri Wynn, WEAC president at the time, called for a vote among WEAC members to determine if they should conduct a statewide sympathy strike. The vote was a fateful moment. It failed by a four to one margin, in large part due to insufficient support from the state’s largest locals, especially: Milwaukee. As the president of the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association said, “The executive committee feels that it would be very unproductive for Milwaukee to strike. It would be a

violation of our contract, and we are working to make good relations with the school board.”³⁶⁴

Though large unions were willing to provide food and statements of support for the Hortonville teachers, they were unwilling to go on strike to support the smaller locals.³⁶⁵

The decision of large locals like MTEA to not to support the strike changed the calculation for teachers from smaller locals. Madison labor attorney John Lawton commented on the particular vulnerability of small-school districts to take job actions. He said, “In an urban area, which is somewhat labor oriented, it’s very unlikely a municipal employer would attempt such a thing. The size of the work force, the skills involved, and community attitudes – all are important. I think it does put the small union in a small town and rural area at a terrible disadvantage.”³⁶⁶

A teacher from Germantown, Wisconsin described the impacts of the large-district’s vote against the sympathy strike on small school districts, noting the loss of solidarity from the larger school districts weakened the impact of small schools’ actions. “See, I come from an association of about 70 people, less than what Hortonville has. And there’s a lot of insecurity when you only have got seventy people,” the teacher explained. “From the small schools’ stand point, when we saw that, well, Milwaukee isn’t going to go out and a couple of the other larger schools aren’t going to go out, you’re kind of sticking your neck out.”³⁶⁷ Yet the failed solidarity strike with Hortonville teachers was only the beginning of the crumbling alliance between Milwaukee and the state teachers’ unions.

As a result of the failed sympathy strike, Wynn and Andrews announced WEAC would adopt new strategies to achieve their goals. Rather than advancing struggles for educational justice

³⁶⁴ “Teacher Picketing Injunction Asked.”

³⁶⁵ To be sure, not all teachers agreed. As Milwaukee one teacher scribbled on a note clipped to her check to the HEA Donation Fund: “From a Milwaukee teacher who voted to support your cause. Thoroughly disgusted with the position of the MTEA’s executive committee on your strike. Good luck. More money to come.”³⁶⁵ Other teachers wrote similar letters and published op-ed articles displaying their dissatisfaction. For more, see: Disaffiliation folder, MTEA Archives.

³⁶⁶ Mike Hinant, “Hortonville Case Opinions Are ‘Cautious,’” *Appleton Post-Crescent*, June 20, 1976.

³⁶⁷ Oral interview with unidentified teachers from Chippewa Falls, Germantown, Tape 45, Side 2, WEAC Records, WHS.

and teachers or working by engaging in militant job actions and committed solidarity, WEAC would turn to legal advances and lobbying. As Wynn told the press, “We would hope that the public would understand that our concern for the Hortonville teachers have not died, but rather has turned in another direction. We have been in the courts and we will be in the courts. We will be at the Legislature so that they can understand that the law under which we find ourselves working is a deformed law and needs to be changed.”³⁶⁸ Over the next decades, WEAC would go on to become biggest lobbying forces in the state.³⁶⁹

MTEA Disaffiliates from WEAC

Mere months after the Hortonville strike, MTEA made a bold decision to disaffiliate with WEAC altogether. Throughout the spring 1974, members of MTEA’s Executive Board questioned the nature of their relationship with WEAC more generally and began formally discussing disaffiliation. As president of the MTEA, Don Feilbach, argued, MTEA spent too much money on dues to WEAC for too little in return, and Feilbach questioned what the additional \$40 in dues to WEAC provided to MTEA. Feilbach felt that WEAC needed MTEA for its large membership and dues revenue more than MTEA needed WEAC as an organizational, legal or political resource. As he said, “We are not paying for what we are getting. We are paying five times for it ... What Milwaukee has always done is help the state association provide services for the rest of the state.”³⁷⁰

In addition to an objection based on sheer cost for MTEA members, Feilbach and others in MTEA disagreed with the political direction and program that WEAC had begun to develop. In February 1974, members and delegates overwhelmingly voted in favor for a resolution calling for

³⁶⁸ Darryl Holter, ed., “The Hortonville Teachers’ Strike of 1974,” in *Workers and Unions in Wisconsin: A Labor History Anthology* (Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1999), 240–43.

³⁶⁹ Joe Williams, *Cheating Our Kids: How Politics and Greed Ruin Education*, 2005; Jeff Mayers, “Lobbying: Wisconsin’s Growth Industry,” *Wisconsin Interest*, no. Spring (2004): 23–28.

³⁷⁰ “Teachers Break from WEA Seen,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, March 14, 1974.

local organizations to maintain more control from the state federation. Though this resolution was not binding, it signaled to MTEA leadership to continue to press for disaffiliation.³⁷¹ And as the year went on, so did the tensions between WEAC and MTEA. MTEA especially took issue with WEAC's efforts to increase the political power of the statewide federation and its recent formation of WEPAC, the political advocacy arm devoted to aiding electoral contests and legislations to increase state funding for education.³⁷²

MTEA contested WEAC's turn toward political action for two main reasons. First, MTEA did not want to finance WEAC's increased political operations. During WEPAC's inaugural years, it accrued \$75,000 of debt from 1972 and 1973 in lobbying and campaign efforts for state senate and assembly elections and for state superintendent.³⁷³ Many MTEA members did not want to be held financially accountable for these activities, which were targeted to cost individual members an additional \$5 a year in dues payments. Second, and more fundamentally, MTEA opposed WEAC's efforts, especially under Lauri Wynn's leadership, to extend the work of teachers' unions beyond the material interests of members alone. Don Feilbach, president of MTEA, did not view WEAC's social justice mission as the way towards a stronger political environment, but rather a violation of the local's "local control." MTEA wanted to be able to retain control over all decisions, rather than having the statewide federation set conditions and policies for teachers' units. As MTEA's executive director James Colter claimed, "At present WEAC wants complete control, whereas Milwaukee and other urban affiliates want to make decisions within their local jurisdiction."³⁷⁴ Milwaukee, in particular, felt it had sufficient power on its own, deeming the benefits of joining the statewide federation irrelevant. Echoing eerily similar arguments to those deployed by the Hortonville school

³⁷¹ David Bednarek, "Teachers' Local Opposes WEAC," *Milwaukee Journal*, 1974.

³⁷² Adam Mertz, "The 1974 Hortonville Teachers's Strike and the Public Sector Labor Dilemma," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 2015, 1–13.

³⁷³ "Teachers' Local Urged to Drop Out," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 14, 1974.

³⁷⁴ Aenone Rosario, "Local, State Teachers Association Split Seen," *Milwaukee Courier*, May 11, 1974.

board, who wanted local control over education in order to protect the town from outsiders such as teachers and unionists, the Milwaukee teachers' unions used the idea of "local control" as a way to justify the protection of MTEA's autonomy from the state federation's political project.³⁷⁵

MTEA members were concerned that WEAC affiliation would mean that "the state will come in and tell [MTEA] what to do," Wynn and Andrews reassured these teachers that WEAC wanted Milwaukee to be a powerful local *and* embedded within a larger movement. Yet this did not convince MTEA members, who voted resoundingly to disaffiliate. As Andrews reflected, "Milwaukee should be a powerful local. Things should have been done in social issues. Power is only what you chose to do with it. MTEA evidently doesn't want to use theirs."³⁷⁶

Interestingly, in both Hortonville and Milwaukee, arguments for local control animated the discussion. In Hortonville, rural conservative forces argued for local control of school districts to guard against outsiders and calls for higher taxes. In Milwaukee, local control was used to protect political conservatism of those who were not willing to adhere to the social justice oriented political program of the statewide federation. In both rural and urban cases, calls for "local control" excluded possibilities for broader, widespread solidarity, or, the willingness to surrender immediate short-term advantages for the sake of a longer-term, more egalitarian advantage.

As a result of MTEA's disaffiliation, the force and direction of the statewide union shifted. WEAC pivoted its tactics from direct-action and unified mobilizations, towards legal advances and electoral challenges as a means to bolster teacher power and public education.³⁷⁷ Rather than filling its offices with field organizers, the number of attorneys on WEAC's staff grew, becoming the NEA

³⁷⁵ "City Teachers Votes on State Union Won't Count", *Milwaukee Journal*, May 9, 1974. Interestingly, despite MTEA's calls for devolved democratic control, internally they operated using representational system. Only building representatives, for example, were allowed to vote to in disaffiliation debate, leaving the majority of the 5,800 teachers in the district without "local control."

³⁷⁶ Riverside meeting minutes, May 7, 1974. Building Representative Meeting Minutes, MTEA Archives.

³⁷⁷ Eleni Brelis Schirmer, "When Solidarity Doesn't Quite Strike: The 1974 Hortonville, Wisconsin Teachers' Strike and the Rise of Neoliberalism," *Gender and Education* 29, no. 1 (2016): 8–27.

state affiliate with the most attorneys on staff.³⁷⁸ The shift from a teacher labor movement to a teacher legal movement rendered teachers' more vulnerable in the years to come, as the changing political winds brought greater legal challenges to teachers.

Conclusion

As education movements swept across Wisconsin in the early 1970s, MTEA actively chose to *not* join alongside. When civil rights groups petitioned MTEA to join the suit aiding the pending desegregation case, MTEA refused. When teachers across the state pushed for educational financing and tax reform, Milwaukee teachers were nowhere to be found. When teachers in rural parts of the state were punished for striking, spurring a movement for a statewide solidarity strike, MTEA declined to participate, thwarting the whole effort and contributing to the erosion of strike tactics to solve labor disputes.³⁷⁹ As WEAC took on an increasingly political vision and organization structure under the leadership of Lauri Wynn, a Black female teacher from Milwaukee, MTEA broke its ties from the state union, and announced its political and organizational independence. Over the next three decades, MTEA would go it alone.

In nearly all of these cases, MTEA's pursuit of its local autonomy and "political independence" undergirded its decision to abstain from broader actions. The union prioritized its local control over state and national efforts towards building strong support for education funding, teachers' unions power, and racially just schools. Yet this lack of support, even resistance, to more progressive leadership and strategies at that time, contributed to hampering its strength in battles it took up the following decades.

³⁷⁸ Beilke, *Wisconsin Education Association Council: A History*.

³⁷⁹ Schirmer, "When Solidarity Doesn't Quite Strike: The 1974 Hortonville, Wisconsin Teachers' Strike and the Rise of Neoliberalism"; Joe Burns, *Strike Back: Using the Militant Tactics of Labor's Past to Reignite Public Sector Unionism Today* (Brooklyn, NY: Ig Publishing, 2014).

MTEA's lack of engagement on key political and economic issues of this period strengthened the hand of its political opponents, as the political influence of corporate and business interests mounted. Absent a strong statewide union demanding progressive taxation and adequate funds for public education, divisions between urban and rural forces grew, cleaved especially by questions of race and property taxes. This lack of statewide solidarity pushed WEAC to adopt legal means to address strengthen teachers' working conditions, rather than collective actions. And it enabled MTEA to pursue its independent interests, absent a political dimension. MTEA's narrowing interests didn't only affect its position within the statewide education politics, it also impacted the changing landscape within Milwaukee, we shall see in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: FESTER

“The Best Contract Ever Written”: The “Good” Strike of 1975 and the “Bad” Strike of 1977

“The strike was doomed to be fought and lost as an old, rather than a new form of politics.”

– Stuart Hall, *Hard Road to Renewal*, p. 205

“It is absurd to think of the mass strike as one act, one isolated action. The mass strike is rather the indication, the rallying idea, of a whole period of the class struggle lasting for years, perhaps for decades.”

– Rosa Luxemburg, “The Mass Strike: the political party and the trade unions,” (1906)

At six in the morning on a cold, dark January day in 1975, representatives of the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association (MTEA) gathered in the conference room of Milwaukee’s Plaza Hotel. They were discussing the contract negotiations between the MTEA bargaining team and the school administration that had taken place over the winter break. When teachers left for the holiday recess two weeks before, the union still hadn’t secured a contract, and tensions were running high. The meetings over the break made no progress. The time to merely give updates and reports on negotiations had passed, MTEA president Don Feilbach counseled the assembled teachers; it was time for action. Feilbach, a short man with thick-rimmed glasses and heavy-set eyes, was a former middle-school teacher who had quickly gravitated to MTEA leadership since its formation in the early 1960s. One of the first men to join MTEA, Feilbach succeeded MTEA’s first president, Eileen Cantwell and had served as leader for many years. Go to work as normal, Feilbach instructed Milwaukee teachers, but be ready to strike.³⁸⁰ This contract, Feilbach declared to the teachers, is the best thing that has ever happened to this community, the best thing to ever happen to Milwaukee children – it was, in fact, the best contract ever written. The school board would approve it – or

³⁸⁰ MTEA Building Representative meeting minutes, January 2, 1975. MTEA Archives.

they'd face Milwaukee's striking teachers. The building representatives, glowing with affirmation, applauded their president and bustled out of the meeting.³⁸¹

MTEA's near-exclusive pursuit of its contract demands, and the school board's relative obstinance, sufficiently motivated the Milwaukee teachers to conduct the union's first two strikes in the late 1970s. These strikes -- their build-up and their aftermath -- structured the political vision and identities sown by the teachers' union in key ways, the focus of this chapter. The significance of the strikes between 1975 and 1978 was augmented by two major shifts in Milwaukee's political landscape during this period. The first shift was economic. During the second half of the 1970s, rising inflation, fleeing industry and a hemorrhaging tax base nudged Milwaukee towards fiscal crisis.³⁸² Its schools, like its residents, were hard-pressed for funds. The second shift was racial. By 1975, Milwaukee's civil rights movement had matured from its nascent sparks in the 1960s into two robust and distinct channels: the legal battle for desegregated schools and Black educational nationalistic movements for Black community control of schools. When the federal courts finally ordered Milwaukee to desegregate its schools in 1976, big questions broke open among teacher unionists and Black community activists alike about how to distribute the schools' resources - including its teaching staff - to desegregate the schools.

The teachers' strikes of 1975 and 1977 each arose in reaction to these shifts and, in turn, they solidified the fomenting political divisions. The strikes' rapid succession calcified divisions in Milwaukee's political and economic landscapes and politically isolated the teachers' union from their community of fate, especially fellow taxpayers and families of color. This occurred in two key ways. First, the 1975 strike galvanized intra-class divisions by breaking the teachers' unions interests apart

³⁸¹ Ibid. The glowing with affirmation reflects a note in the minutes in which the BRs "affirmed their faith and trust in the bargaining team." This unilateral faith in the bargaining team is evidence of what some members critiqued as disproportionate power of the leadership of the union over its members.

³⁸² "Milwaukee, City, Suburbs, Face Tight Budgetary Squeeze," September 5th, 1975. *Milwaukee Journal*. Levine and Zipp, "A City at Risk: The Changing Social and Economic Context of Public Schooling in Milwaukee."

from the growing movement of aggrieved taxpayers struggling to handle spiking property taxes amidst economic decline. Whereas prior economic depressions had leveled factions within the working class nationally, the stagflation of the 1970s deepened divisions among the working class.³⁸³ These intra-class divisions spurred the Milwaukee's teachers' union to adopt a set of politics especially focused on their immediate material interests and short-term political objectives of white members.

Second, the 1977 strike exposed the racialized boundaries of teachers' short-term interests. While narrow interests had structured MTEA's politics and priorities since its formation in 1964, the 1977 strike revealed the extent to which MTEA was willing to act to defend this narrow definition of interests. The strike marked a new phase of political opportunism within the teachers' union that would not only drag into the 1977 strike, but more significantly, come to characterize MTEA's leadership for the next twenty-five years. The strike exposed the teachers' unions commitments to protecting of contractual rights for predominantly white teachers over and above the needs of racially equitable desegregation plans. For many teachers, the 1977 strike drew a line in the sand, forcing teachers and activists to choose which struggle they would align with: teachers' contract protections or desegregated schools.³⁸⁴

Yet, as I describe in the chapter's final section, while the teachers' union fractured the public into distinct groups of interests, these fractures also created space for a new alliance to form. A community group called People United for Quality Education and Integration, thus, emerged in 1976 as a multi-racial, pro-integration group. This group composed of community activists

³⁸³ Mike Davis, "The New Right's Road to Power," in *Prisoners of the American Dream* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2018), 184–85.

³⁸⁴ It is precisely this task of taking a position, staking a place in certain discourses or practices that forge identities, writes Stuart Hall. Stuart Hall, "Epilogue: Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life," in *Culture, Politics, Race and Diaspora: The Thought of Stuart Hall*, ed. Brian Meeks (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2007), 269–91.

demanded both racially just and high-quality integrated education, which they saw as intimately connected with teachers' rights. This group lay important planks for future activists and teachers unionists to come. Although the group dissolved by the end of the 1970s, many of its leading activists went on to become leaders of a reform caucus within the MTEA and founders of the critical education journal, *Rethinking Schools*.

Scholarship on public education in Milwaukee has critically illuminated that struggles for Black education reform in Milwaukee has been multiple rather than monolithic. Black activists have identified different goals and strategies at different points of time. At certain points in the city's history, activists have demanded integrated education and turned to the courts to achieve it. At other times, other activists have organized to create alternative and independent schools for students of color, and have been willing to work with non-traditional allies to erect such schools.³⁸⁵

Yet the Milwaukee teachers' union has not been subject to similar historical scrutiny and analysis during these conflicts. As such, little attention has been paid to the *contingent* and *particular* nature of political identities fostered by the teachers' union, particularly amidst these turbulent years. Absent such analysis, the political identities sown by the MTEA's have been heeded as constant and preordained character.³⁸⁶ My purpose here is to reflect on those particular habits of the Milwaukee teachers' union during this critical juncture, to denaturalize the political identities sown and seized by the MTEA during and after the 1975 and 1977 strikes. In doing so, I suggest the reactionary and defensive politics wrought by MTEA reflected less the universal nature of the MTEA, as critics of

³⁸⁵ Mikel Holt, *Not yet "Free at Last": The Unfinished Business of the Civil Rights Movement: Our Battle for School Choice* (Oakland, CA: ICS Press, 2000); Dougherty, *More Than One Struggle: The Evolution of Black School Reform In Milwaukee*; Dahlk, *Against the Wind: African Americans and the Schools in Milwaukee, 1963-2002*; Thomas Pedroni, *Market Movements: African American Involvement in School Voucher Reform* (New York: Routledge, 2007); James K. Nelsen, *Educating Milwaukee: How One City's History of Segregation and Struggle Shaped Its Schools* (Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2015).

³⁸⁶ Interview with Howard Fuller, February 26, 2017. Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

MTEA and teachers unions writ large purport, but specific responses at specific moments of time.³⁸⁷ Of course, my more fundamental aim of this chapter - indeed, the entire work - is to draw attention to how these particular circumstances arise, the forces that sustain them and the forces available to change them.

The 1975 Strike

In the winter of 1975, finances for Milwaukee public schools did not look good.³⁸⁸ A recently revised school funding formula had increased state aid to Milwaukee schools, but almost all of the appointed funds went to lowering property taxes rather than funding education programs.³⁸⁹ Just five years before, Milwaukee residents approved a bond referendum to finance construction for additional school buildings, willingly taking on an extra tax burden. But rather than resolving a financial problem it created a political one.³⁹⁰ That same year, 1970, the city reassessed property values, causing a number of Milwaukee property values to shoot up by as much as 25%, nearly overnight.³⁹¹ Taxpayers found themselves burdened by mounting taxes amidst a slogging economy.

Working people's financial struggles incited a growing public antipathy towards taxes. In 1972, the *Milwaukee Journal*, for example, ran a series of articles by University of Wisconsin economics professor Jon Udell, commissioned by a corporate-funded think tank, to write a regular chronicle analyzing and critiquing Wisconsin's tax policy, which Udell saw as anti-business. These

³⁸⁷ Loveless, "Conflicting Missions?: Teachers Unions and Educational Reform."

³⁸⁸ "Legislators Warn Board on Budget, *Milwaukee Journal*, January 10, 1975.

³⁸⁹ "Lucy Cuts Spell Big School Loss," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 30, 1975.

³⁹⁰ "Annual Financial Report of the Board of School Directors of the City of Milwaukee," June 30, 1975. Milwaukee, WI: Milwaukee Public Schools. The use of financial tools, such as bond, to avoid political struggles has been integral to the development of American political economy. For more on this development see: Sarah L. Quinn, *American Bonds: How Credit Markets Shaped a Nation* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2019).

³⁹¹ "An Introductory Study of the Milwaukee Public Schools: The Budget, Sources of Revenue and Laws," p. 9, January 1970, League of Women Voters of Milwaukee. Report 129, Box 5. League of Women Voters of Greater Milwaukee Collection, Milwaukee County Historical Society, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

reports were a major factor in mobilizing business associations, such as the Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce and the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce, to advocate for increased political power and economic protections for the state's corporations.³⁹² Their advocacy resulted in the state legislature adopting long-last business tax exemption, as well bestowed capital in the state with new political power, such as its own government bureau.³⁹³ Yet rather than encouraging corporate re-investment in the state and increasing employment, these corporate tax breaks did little to slow the flight of corporate manufacturing plants from Wisconsin to southern and off-shore locales, instead functioning as a “take the money and run” policy.³⁹⁴

Nonetheless, Udell's chronicles roused a sense of grievance among middle-class citizens about their tax load, which grew as the corporate share dwindled. For many, the *Milwaukee Journal's* chronicles on the state's economic policy offered citizens both an analytic frame that the state was responsible for their problems and a sense of legitimacy to their financial burdens. This framing enabled many to first articulate and then mobilize their frustrations into political demands for reduced state interference. Capital's political mobilization coupled with growing populist resentment of the state to lays seeds for new right mobilizations that would sweep across the globe in the late 1970s and hold dominance well into the 21st century.³⁹⁵

By 1975, the tax revolt that had started in the rural corners of Wisconsin three years earlier pushed its way into Milwaukee, spurring the formation of “taxpayer” affinity groups. One such group, the Wisconsin Citizens for Legal Reform, a Milwaukee group committed to libertarian causes,

³⁹² Roger Bybee, “The Role of Corporations,” in *It Started in Wisconsin*, ed. Mari Jo Buhle and Paul Buhle (New York: Verso, 2011), 127–43.

³⁹³ Jane L. Collins and H. Jacob Carlson, “State Phobia, Then and Now: Three Waves of Conflict over Wisconsin's Public Sector, 1930–2013,” *Social Science History* 42, no. 01 (2018): 57–80, <https://doi.org/10.1017/ssh.2017.37>.

³⁹⁴ Bybee, “The Role of Corporations.”

³⁹⁵ Stuart Hall, “The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism Among the Theorists,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1988); Michael W. Apple, *Educating the “Right” Way: Markets, Standards, God and Inequality*, Second (New York: Routledge, 2006).

became particularly incensed by their property tax increases. This group embodied the libertarian, anti-state politics of conservative populism. They seized the tools of “direct democracy” such as referendum, petitions and recalls as a means to perpetuate the power of dominant groups. Such maneuvers would be made most famous in California’s 1978 battle for Proposition 13, and subsequently prove to be an essential thrust of the conservative populism’s fringe spirit in both the late 1970s as well as its Tea Party resurgence in the early 2010s. We witness them here nascent in 1975 amidst deindustrializing Milwaukee, just as we witnessed similar tendencies in the early 1970s among rural Wisconsin farmers, per Chapter Four.³⁹⁶

In the winter of 1975, this group turned its attention to school finances. They argued that the taxpayer was getting robbed and cheated by public schools and their representatives. The Milwaukee school board soon became their key target. Members began organizing to recall all 15 members of the Milwaukee school board in the winter of 1975. They quickly circulated a petition for their demand and went to work gathering signatures, collecting large numbers by approaching residents at City Hall who trudged downtown to pay their taxes that winter. Within three weeks, the group had collected more than 34,000 signatures.³⁹⁷ Although their recall campaign was soon ruled to be procedurally illegal, the group’s underlying demands, a fiery mix of economic and racial anxiety and resentment, had been heard loud and clear.

Indeed, several board members even adopted the charge themselves. Days after the recall petitions were submitted, one school board member of seven years, Russell Darrow, quit, fed up with the constant pressures put on school boards. “We are rapidly becoming puppets to special interest forces. Johnny Q. Public is losing control to special interest groups,” he fumed upon his resignation. The special interests tormenting the school board were *not* the recall group of

³⁹⁶ See John H. Martin, “Justice and Efficiency under a Model of Estate Settlement,” *Virginia Law Review* 66, no. 4 (1980): 727–75; Davis, “The New Right’s Road to Power.”

³⁹⁷ “Leader of Recall Vows to Continue,” *Milwaukee Journal*, January 12, 1975.

exasperated taxpayers, Darrow stressed, nor were they the business and manufacturing firms that had sucked up the state's biggest tax cuts.³⁹⁸ Quite the opposite, Darrow claimed, the special interests overrunning the school board were the teachers' unions and racialized minorities. Days before Darrow's resignation, the citywide Bilingual Bicultural Education committee had requested a Latino person be appointed to a school board vacancy, likely contributing to the timing of Darrow's resignation.³⁹⁹ Slowly but surely, a particular representation of an aggrieved taxpayer -- white, property-owning individual, residing outside the city's inner core -- lumbered from its hiding as fringe specter to its stance as center-ring, political heavyweight.⁴⁰⁰ Catering to its demands meant not only reducing property tax loads, but also dissolving elements of the state that drove taxes up: public institutions, public workers and, especially, public assistance.

In response to the group's demands, school board members quickly espoused plans to control costs. One school board member herself proposed an austerity budget to lower taxes.⁴⁰¹ Another, Anthony Busalacchi, expressed his disappointment that the effort to recall the school board members had failed, citing a need to "clean the air."⁴⁰² Even the local newspapers contributed to the cause of the taxpayer, taking it on themselves to print details about the due date and collection locations for the school board recall petitions.⁴⁰³

The board's calls for austerity and their sympathy with the political identity of "the taxpayer" bristled the teachers' union. The austerity program had been used as rationale to cut teachers' wages

³⁹⁸ "Darrow Quits School Board," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 7, 1975.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ To be clear, bending democratic institutions to protect the financial and political interests of white, propertied men hardly comprised a new plotline of American politics in the 1970s, as even a cursory examination into the political ideology of slaveholding, founding fathers makes clear. However, the Keynesian accords post World-War II had tempered their demands, and something akin to semi-redistributive politics held political favor until the late 1960s. MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America*; Wolfgang Streeck, *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 2014).

⁴⁰¹ "School Panel to Consider Cost Saving," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 26, 1975.

⁴⁰² "Recall Death Disappoints Busalacchi," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 24, 1975.

⁴⁰³ "Recall Petitions Due by Friday," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 25, 1975.

and delay the contract negotiations. Yet MTEA's leadership did not interrogate the political project in which it took root -- that of protecting corporate political and economic power at the expense of public infrastructure, public workers and public services. If MTEA leaders detected the racial animosity embedded in the taxpayers' concerns -- predominantly white middle-class and suburban residents resented paying taxes to fund predominantly Black schools -- they said nothing. In the wake of the school board's scorn of pro-labor and pro-integration platforms, MTEA did not question why workers demanding living wages and working protections and people of color demanding equal education had been written off as "special interest" groups. Instead, MTEA leadership advocated for the "the best contract ever written," fighting exclusively to secure their own interests, without connecting such interests to a broader political framing. The union's simultaneous consent to the macro logics of education resource allocation while objecting to its immediate effects on teachers signaled a wobbling contradiction in the teachers' union power.⁴⁰⁴

To resolve this contradiction, MTEA took up what sociologists Claus Offe and Helmut Wiesensthal call a strategy of opportunism.⁴⁰⁵ Opportunism, according to Offe and Wiesensthal, is the "rational but unstable" tendency for organizations to: 1) put short-term goals ahead of long-term goals; 2) emphasize the quantitative criteria of success (recruit and mobilize "as many as possible" in order to achieve "as much as possible") rather than developing the qualitative strength of an organization, namely the formation and expression of collective identities. In pursuit of approving its contract -- MTEA's short term goal -- the organization did not challenge the looming threats to its long-term objectives -- progressively-financed, adequate public resources for schools, students and

⁴⁰⁴ MTEA's lack of political analysis lay in its apolitical genesis, discussed in the preceding chapters. Teachers had either explicitly rejected organizing with groups that offered more overt political analysis, as in MTU in the early 1960s, or had intentionally rejected relationships with more overtly political organizations, as in WEAC in the 1970s.

⁴⁰⁵ Offe and Wiesensthal, "Two Logics of Collective Action: Theoretical Notes on Social Class and Organizational Form."

teachers that were equitably distributed, especially to the predominantly Black schools in the city's inner core. Instead, the union leadership kept their focus on the individualistic interests of their members – each teachers' wages and benefits -- rather than expanding and maintaining the larger political consensus upon which both public schools and public workers' existence predicated.⁴⁰⁶

Turning to amicable external forces, such as a historically allied school board, to achieve their immediate demands was a rational action for MTEA. However, as Offe and Wiesenthal note, such a strategy is unstable. First, seeking protection from external sources can become a vulnerability, if the external forces change their favor. Secondly, and more profoundly, it abdicates the union's unique capacity to build collective power and collective identities, especially those grounded in defense of public schools and workers' rights. As the taxpayers mounted their concerns towards schools, its public employees, and its democratic governance, MTEA didn't seek to counter this fomenting political program. Instead, they aimed to secure quantitative, short-term gains where they could, approving contracts that maximized individuals' interests.

As such, when MTEA's building representatives gathered in mid-January 1975 to prepare for bargaining, the leadership of MTEA enumerated the lists of "good behavior" they had behaved in – politely requesting meetings with the administration, working in good faith, keeping schools functioning. The school board, on the other hand, had opposed the union at every turn, seemingly *wanting* the teachers to strike. MTEA leaders told the Milwaukee teachers they had two options remaining: to conduct a work slow-down, in which teachers eliminated all of their extracurricular participation from coaching duties to academic clubs; or, to strike. "If one doesn't work, the other will," Feilbach told the teachers. "We teachers have to stand up and prove what we want is rights."⁴⁰⁷ The next day, nearly 5000 teachers met in a large event hall and voted with an

⁴⁰⁶ By politics, I refer to the project of defining friend and enemy. See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), <https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226738840.001.0001>.

⁴⁰⁷ MTEA Building Representative meeting minutes, January 14, 1975. MTEA archives.

overwhelming majority to authorize a strike. The Milwaukee teachers reported to the picket-line instead of their classrooms for the next two weeks, until the school board finally approved their contract. Because of the board's relatively amenable response to the teachers' demands, many teachers considered MTEA's 1975 strike a success and historicized it as "the good strike."⁴⁰⁸ Teachers returned to work proud of their union and of the role they played in this collective endeavor. "I don't know if there's such a thing as a beautiful strike, but if so, we had one here," President Feilbach beamed to the teachers afterwards.⁴⁰⁹

Yet not all teachers felt so unequivocally pleased with the union's strike. Murmurs of concerns within a faction of the teachers' union signaled a much bigger problem of the educational landscape that wasn't addressed by the contract gains of the 1975 strike. To secure their 1975 contract, the union had rejected involuntary transfer – the school board's policy of unilaterally assigning teachers' school assignment. A number of Black teachers saw this as less a protection of teachers' rights, than a protection of institutional whiteness.⁴¹⁰ These Black teachers worried that the white teachers' objection to involuntary transfer would result in white teachers refusing to teach in predominantly Black schools. The real problem, Black teachers felt, was the substandard conditions of inner-city schools with poor quality curriculum materials, facilities and support staff – *not* enshrining teachers' "right" to flee these schools as a contractual right, as the union demanded. Despite their hesitations, many Black teachers nonetheless supported MTEA's strike in 1975.⁴¹¹ Still, their concerns signaled a bigger problem of the educational landscape. How could resources be

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with author, August 2, 2017.

⁴⁰⁹ MTEA Building Representative meeting minutes, February 12, 1975. MTEA archives.

⁴¹⁰ "Teachers' Strike Continues in Spite of Internal Conflicts," *The Milwaukee Star*, January 30, 1975.

⁴¹¹ Black teachers' tacit support of the 1975 strike likely drew upon a longer legacy of supporting the teachers' union. In 1970, for example, when Milwaukee teachers approached a possible strike, many Black teachers saw a strike as an important mechanism for securing resources for impoverished schools in the inner core. One Black teacher, for example, told the press "As a teacher in the inner city, a strike is necessary for some of the things in our schools." See *The Milwaukee Star*, December 26, 1970.

distributed in order to even out the vast racial and economic disparities that troubled Milwaukee's schools and neighborhoods? The union's contract demands certainly did not address the city's stark inequalities, nor the policy of neighborhood schools that let such inequalities fester.

In January 1976, the federal court case examining de facto segregation by the Milwaukee school board which had inched along for more than a decade, officially pronounced Milwaukee's schools as segregated. This ruling held the school board responsible for the "de facto" segregation – which the school board had previously used as a defense.⁴¹² The court ordered the Milwaukee school district to adopt an integration plan. This created a contradiction for school administrators and board members. On the one hand, courts mandated that Milwaukee address its segregated education facilities. Yet on the other hand, a recently failed plan for regional integration exposed just how deeply committed metropolitan Milwaukeeans were to "voluntary" integration plans. Forced integration from above, it seemed, would be resisted at all costs. Integration must be achieved by choice, officials determined, becoming, in essence, Milwaukee's first school choice program.⁴¹³

The 1977 "Bad" Strike

The Milwaukee teachers' union quickly became concerned about what desegregation orders would mean for teachers' contracts. In the spring of 1976, MTEA's executive board and building representatives held meetings to discuss the impacts of the faculty desegregation orders. Would teachers be able to retain their seniority rights under the new plan? Would teachers be involuntarily assigned to new schools? Faced with uncertainty on these questions, many teachers became flustered and scared. Near hysteria broke out at a faculty meeting in one school when a working document

⁴¹² For an examination of this discursive shift that occurred nationally, see Michael R. Glass, "From Sword to Shield to Myth: Facing the Facts of *De Facto* School Segregation," *Journal of Urban History* 44, no. 6 (2018): 1197–1226.

⁴¹³ Nelsen, "From No Choice to Forced Choice: A History of Educational Options in Milwaukee Public Schools."

about the desegregation plans was distributed. “Part of the reason I was on the sidewalk during the [1975] strike was to protect that seniority. Please don’t give it up,” pleaded one teacher to MTEA leadership. “By all means preserve the seniority and involuntary transfer causes,” begged another. “To me they are the most important items in the contract. They are the times for which I went on strike in January, 1975.”⁴¹⁴ “Teachers are afraid, insecure and bewildered,” still another teacher reflected. “They wonder what will happen to them. Will they be scattered to the four parts of the city?”⁴¹⁵

For many white teachers, voluntary transfer provided an important exit valve to flee working in predominantly Black, under-resourced inner-city schools. This contractual provision protected work-based white flight as a job right. Often, such transfer requests coupled with teachers’ home owner preferences. Because few white teachers lived in Milwaukee’s inner core, they often justified their transfer requests as a desire to work close to their homes. “One of the main reasons I bought my home in the city rather than a suburb,” one teacher explained, “was that it was a mile and a half away from my school. I have enjoyed the security of knowing I would never have a long drive.”⁴¹⁶

Connecting voluntary transfer protections with home ownership crystallized teachers’ contract demands within two burgeoning political currents. On the one hand, fusing voluntary transfer with home ownership both reflected and re-inscribed the hyper-segregated nature of Milwaukee’s “inner core” neighborhoods in which segregated neighborhoods and segregated schools created a pernicious feedback loop. On the other hand, entwining teachers’ demands for voluntary transfer with their home-owner status tapped into the city’s growing anxieties about a fleeing tax base. In the late 1970s, facing a fiscal decline and rapidly dwindling tax-base, the City of Milwaukee was indeed eager to secure employed, middle-class workforce and looked to teachers to

⁴¹⁴ “Viewpoint: Faculty Integration Concerns and Suggestions,” TEAM Newsletter, December 1976. MTEA Archives

⁴¹⁵ Ibid.

⁴¹⁶ “Viewpoint: Faculty Integration Concerns and Suggestions,” TEAM Newsletter, December 1976. MTEA Archives.

do so. Teachers understood this calculus and used it to their advantage, “If we give up seniority,” one teacher threatened, “there goes another tax-paying teacher right out of the city!”⁴¹⁷ The teachers looked to their union contract not simply to protect their wages and benefits but also their status as property owners.

Indeed the question of where teachers could and should live surged as a politically controversial topic in the mid 1970s in Milwaukee. Like a number of other cities during the mid 1970s facing rising unemployment and shrinking tax-base, calls to impose a residency requirement on municipal employees requiring them to live within the city limits began to circulate.⁴¹⁸ Originally proposed by the League of Women Voters of Greater Milwaukee in 1975, the teachers’ residency requirements were seen a means to keep the tax base in the city, reduce unemployment, encourage teachers to develop relations with students and families, especially families of color, and facilitate teachers’ personal investment in their schools.⁴¹⁹ These proposals inspired the school board to introduce residency requirements for new teachers as one of their contract demands in the upcoming 1977 bargaining session. MTEA strongly opposed this measure, who saw it as an insult to teachers’ personal freedoms.

However, MTEA’s opposition to the residency requirement took a backseat to their concerns about the impacts of the desegregation plan on their contract. MTEA leaders were miffed that their proposed plan for achieving faculty desegregation had been pushed aside in favor of the administration’s magnet school plans, which would bestow the administration with increased authority over staffing.⁴²⁰ The new specialty schools would require staff at the existing schools to be excised and new staff hired according to the administration’s selection criteria. MTEA leaders were

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ Peter K Eisinger, “Municipal Residency Requirements and the Local Economy,” *Social Science Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (1983): 85–96.

⁴¹⁹ League of Women Voters of Greater Milwaukee, Milwaukee Historical Society, Box 5 and Box 6.

⁴²⁰ TEAM newsletter, February 1977. MTEA archives.

not only vexed at the loss of seniority protections, they were also offended to have been excluded from the decision-making table. “These programs work because teachers and other staff members make them work,” an MTEA leader contended in a letter critiquing the school district’s top-down management style. For many teachers, the last straw came when the school board unilaterally voted in January 1977 to eliminate all references to class sizes in the contract that had expired December 31, 1976.⁴²¹ Excluding class size from the contract meant that teachers would not be able to bargain over a key aspect of their working conditions.

Pushed to yet another breaking point, MTEA sprang into action. For a brief moment the MTEA’s concerns dovetailed with community concerns. On February 1st, 1977, MTEA and a newly formed community group, People United for Integration Quality Education and Integration, both found themselves picketing the school administration before the board’s meeting that evening. Peopled United, a multi-racial, citywide group of community members committed to eponymous aims of integration and quality education, had formed in the fall of 1976 out of concern with racially unequal desegregation plan.⁴²²

On a February afternoon, MTEA teachers gathered to protest a forced bussing plan the school district had just passed. Bundled up in long winter coats and scarves wrapped around their faces, teachers and community members marches merged, if not unified in their demands, aligned by their enemy. People United members chanted “2-4-6-8, INTEGRATE, Don’t Segregate!” and “2-4-6-8, EDUCATE, Don’t Segregate.”⁴²³ Teachers held picket signs that read “Get serious, get settled” and “A contract now!” MTEA members passed out leaflets to parents titled “Milwaukee Teachers Want Something Money Can’t Buy.” The half sheet of paper explained the value of maximum class

⁴²¹ “Board Charged with Stalling, Surface Bargaining and ‘Bad Faith’ Negotiations,” TEAM newsletter, February 1977. MTEA archives.

⁴²² “History of People United,” n.d. Folder 1, Box 5, Series 2, More Than One Struggle Oral History Project Records, 1939-2004. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department.

⁴²³ “Chants for the Picket Line,” February 1, 1977. Folder 1, Box 5, Series 2, More Than One Struggle Oral History Project Records, 1939-2004. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department.

size for teachers and students alike and urged parents to support the teachers' contract demands. Without parents' help, the flyer warned, the teachers' union would be forced to deal with increasing education pressures by other means. Sans smaller classes, the teachers' union would turn to malpractice insurance, professional psychological and psychiatric services to cope with workplace tension, augmented workmen's compensation and even early retirement for those suffering from nervous disorders thanks to overpacked classrooms. A subtle threat loomed in the flyer's subtext: support our contract or watch your property taxes further increase.

Yet despite having a common enemy of an obstinate school board, MTEA made no effort to build lasting alliances with their fellow picketers. Instead they continued to view their contracts concerns as separate and independent from community demands for both integration and property tax relief. When MTEA's executive board met the week after the picket to discuss next steps – including whether to prepare for a strike authorization – no one mentioned the issue of Black students' forced bussing or the board's latest attempts to sidestep integration orders. Instead, in a brief twenty-five-minute meeting, the executive board breezed through a decision to set a strike authorization vote for the following month. The executive board of the union made no mention of the court-ordered desegregation suit, offered no consideration of the unfolding integration plans, no reference to community mobilizations that also had picketed the school board the week before.

Indeed, distance only seemed to grow between community mobilizations and the agitated union. Over the next month, as negotiations between the school board and MTEA continued to stall, the district's desegregation plan became a particular sticking point. The school board adhered to their demand for more staffing flexibility and pushed to relinquish seniority protections. MTEA recoiled defensively.⁴²⁴ "They want to mess up the whole seniority provision," growled Don

⁴²⁴ "Power Real Issue in School Talks," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 10, 1977.

Feilbach, the former MTEA president who now served as the chief of teacher negotiating team.⁴²⁵

While MTEA boasted of its support for integration, proudly captioning photos from the February 1 protest as unifying integration with the teachers' union, the specifics of their contract demands spurred friction - even flames- with the broader community and within the union.

Yet a number of Black teachers were frustrated by the union's lack of concern with racial inequalities and worried about its potential to block the finally-implemented desegregation suit. In response, they formed the Black Teachers' Caucus to challenge the MTEA's positions.⁴²⁶ Inspired by A. Phillip Randolph's work to unionize African Americans working as sleeping car porters in the 1920s, these teachers saw unions as a crucial tool of civil rights' struggles, understanding unions' unique capacity to address the interlocking forces of racial and economic inequality. Meeting in churches and out-of-school spaces, these teachers committed themselves to challenging the union to "get political." "We said we were going to be a pressure group within the MTEA, whether you like it or not," remembered caucus Clarence Nicholas, years later.⁴²⁷ The Black Teachers' Caucus developed a series of demands for the MTEA to adopt: affirmative action for new teacher hires; dual seniority lists to ensure equitable treatment for Black teachers during transfers and promotions; more Black representation in the MTEA executive board; changes to student discipline policies and programs for students with special needs, which they saw turning into "detention centers" for students, including many Blacks, who had difficulties in the regular classes.⁴²⁸ In short, the group

⁴²⁵ "Seniority Issue Troublesome," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 11, 1977.

⁴²⁶ Although the exact date of formation of the Black Teachers' Caucus is unknown, vague references to them exist as early as 1968 in MTEA's Building Representative minutes. However, their major mobilization did not occur until 1977.

⁴²⁷ Clarence Nicholas interview transcript, July 2, 1996, Folder 22, Box 2, Series 1, More Than One Struggle Oral History Project Records, 1939-2004. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department.

⁴²⁸ "Black Teachers to Ignore Strike," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 4, 1977.

advocated not simply for desegregation, which many groups including the MTEA purportedly supported, but for *equity* in desegregation.

The Black Teachers' Caucus exemplified what philosopher Nancy Fraser calls a subaltern counter-public, that is, a "discursive arena where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs."⁴²⁹ These arenas serve as spaces of withdrawal and regroupment, as well as bases for training grounds for agitational activities and ideological development. As such, subaltern counter-publics offer a means to counter the unjust participatory privileges enjoyed by members of the dominant social groups. Critically for Fraser, subaltern counter-publics are not means to "exit" debates concerning the public sphere, but rather to expand its boundaries of discourse. In Milwaukee, the Black Teachers' Caucus provided Blacks teachers a space to develop ideas and analyses independent of the pressures of the MTEA leadership, enabling them to push upon MTEA's narrow ideological framing. Unlike the aggrieved taxpayers, the Black Caucus did not seek corrective to their individual and immediate interests, but demanded a broad program of justice. None of the caucus members, for example, would individually benefit from the platform they demanded: a more democratically run union, racially equitable distribution of resources, school policies that kept kids in classrooms, instead of kicking them out.

Yet the Black Teachers' Caucus' attempts to challenge MTEA's framing rendered them prey to political attacks. Many non-caucus members, Black and white alike, reminded caucus members that Black teachers were outnumbered nine to one by whites, as if to undermine their legitimacy.⁴³⁰ Operating as a numerical minority affected the caucus' strategy in ways both big and small. In practical terms, it influenced the logistics of how they approached MTEA. Black Teachers' Caucus

⁴²⁹ Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 26, no. 25/26 (1990): 67, <https://doi.org/10.2307/466240>.

⁴³⁰ See Clarence Nichols interview, More Than One Struggle collection.

members would intentionally not sit together at MTEA meetings, understanding that together they could easily be brushed aside as a special interest faction; scattered they had a chance to be taken more seriously.

More fundamentally, many Black teachers who chose not to join the caucus viewed its efforts with a preordained sense of futility. They believed going up against the powerful union leadership, as the Black Caucus aspired, meant automatic defeat. Whether these beliefs were formed due to specific encounters with MTEA in particular, broader disenchantment with the labor movement's Jim Crow legacy, or a political ideology that conceived the means of justice through legal and institutional advances rather than labor struggle is a critical question and would offer much to understanding the currents of political and ideological formation in Milwaukee at this time. Unfortunately, its answer falls beyond the scope of scrutable inference from the sources gathered in this research.⁴³¹ Suffice it to say, however, that not all Black teachers found themselves actively aligned with the Black Teachers' Caucus, though their reasons for not joining were likely varied and more complex than absolute rejection of the caucus's mission.

MTEA's white leadership also dismissed the Black Teachers' Caucus for its small numbers. Jim Coulter, the executive director of the MTEA, brushed aside the caucus as a "minority of a minority" and not therefore integral to the teachers' deliberations.⁴³² The caucus's relative size made their issues unimportant to the leadership. Disregarding issues that did not constitute "majority of majority" interests was indeed a strange and inconsistent position for the MTEA to take. The union's day to day operations overwhelming revolved around addressing *individual* grievances and contract enforcement – for example, going at great lengths to defend a single teacher who was hit by a student or faced unfair discipline (see Chapter 3 for more on how physical defending MTEA

⁴³¹ Unfortunately, very few paper records exist of the Black Teachers' Caucus activities.

⁴³² "City Teachers Give Strike OK," *Milwaukee Journal*, March 15, 1977.

teachers from Black students became a constitutive issue of the union's purpose). Whereas Black teachers who chose not to join the caucus due to cynicism (Black teachers' relative minority position doomed their potential for change), the white leadership saw the small numbers as lack of credible position. These two positions created a pernicious feedback loop: MTEA's white leadership disregarded Black teachers' interests as a minority position; Black teachers felt discouraged to mobilize for their demands and many stayed to the periphery of the union. The union leadership disregarded the Black Teachers' Caucus concerns as the position of 'a minority of a minority' and thus beyond the purview of the union. This disregard was stained with racial ideology: Black teachers' interests were seen as separate from the union's interests.

What exactly is racial ideology? Ideology, briefly, is the vocabulary of day to day action. It is the habits, actions and thoughts that sustain particular social arrangements.⁴³³ Racial ideology, thus, is the set of ideas that make "race" a salient social division, ordering relations of domination and subordination. As a biological category, of course, race bears little explanatory power for its historical social divisions. Rather *racism* – the racial ideology of oppression, exclusion and domination according to race – has made race a consequential social category. Race-making is fundamentally a process of "othering" people. One of the distinctions of whiteness as a racial category is to deny the very existence of whiteness as a race: the "other" generally forms in contrast to whiteness.

Although the Milwaukee teachers' union leadership likely saw itself "against" racism, they nonetheless displayed a distinct racial ideology. MTEA leadership viewed racial justice matters as separate from the union's "fundamental" economic and social concerns. This rendered Black teachers' struggles to "the backwaters of the primitive and pre-political," in the words of cultural

⁴³³ Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review*, no. 181 (1990): 110.

theorist Paul Gilroy, instead of positioning them as *constitutive* to struggles for justice, economic and otherwise that were the union's concerns.

However, operating according to this racial ideology while simultaneously decrying themselves as “anti-racist” proved to be an unstable posture for the teachers’ union. As the teachers moved closer to a strike in winter 1977, the contradictions broke through. When teachers gathered on the evening of Monday, March 14th, 1977 to decide whether to strike over the weakened seniority protections and jettisoned voluntary transfer rights, even more was at stake than the similar meeting that took place in 1975. Clarence Nichols and fellow Black Teachers’ Caucus members presented their demands to MTEA leadership and requested that their concerns be addressed before teachers decided to strike. Mr. Nicholas was interrupted by jeers and chants from the crowd of teachers. His request was brushed aside by MTEA’s leadership. Although the teachers approved a strike authorization that evening, nearly a quarter of the teachers voted against it; more than 1000 of the 4300 teachers present opposed the authorization, a significant rise in opposition since the strike two years before, when only 646 of the 3490 teachers opposed the strike.⁴³⁴ A majority of the city’s 800 Black teachers opposed MTEA’s strike call. “If they call a strike, we’ll have to continue teaching,” declared Lemuel Killings, a spokesman for the Black Teachers’ Caucus.⁴³⁵

Over the next three weeks, as MTEA build up for a strike, tension grew between white and Black teachers. Yet MTEA leadership pressed ahead with their strike plans. When the executive board, the executive council and union staff gathered for a special meeting on April 3rd, 1977 in the chandelier-crusted Astor Hotel on Milwaukee’s Eastside, they unanimously set a strike for four days later, April 7, 1977.⁴³⁶ They did not discuss the concerns raised by Black Teachers’ Caucus. Nor did they attempt to reach out to caucus members to broker alignment. The MTEA president even

⁴³⁴ “Teachers Vote 3-1 to Back Strike Call,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 15, 1977.

⁴³⁵ “Black Teachers to Ignore Strike,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 4, 1977.

⁴³⁶ MTEA Executive Board meeting minutes, April 3, 1977, MTEA archives.

declared he had no interest in meeting with the Caucus.⁴³⁷ When an African American teacher who taught at the same school as MTEA's chief negotiator asked him why the union had declared a strike, he reportedly pushed her aside, saying "I don't have time to answer that. You don't need to know that right now. Just get onto the picket line."⁴³⁸

When MTEA leaders called a strike, approximately one third of the 866 Black teachers did not abide the strike order. Crossing MTEA's picket line, these teachers continued to teach. Many of the Black teachers opposed the strike because they viewed it as doubling down on racist policies held by union and administration alike. "If you look beyond the economics of the strike and get to its roots, you'll see that racism is at the bottom of this whole mess," one Black teacher told one of Milwaukee's Black newspapers. "As members of MTEA, we have been given no voice, no power on the executive committee. ...None of our recommendations were even given consideration. So...why should we support this strike?" the teacher retorted.⁴³⁹ Teachers, especially Black teachers, who crossed the picket line were threatened and even attacked by striking teachers. The husband of one African-American teacher who chose not to strike reportedly would bring a gun with him when he dropped his wife off at work in the morning, so palpable and eminent was the threat of violence.⁴⁴⁰

Yet the decision to not participate in the strike may have been less principled for many teachers. One Black teacher who participated in the strike accused the teachers who didn't participate in as abstaining not thanks to solidarity with the Black Caucus but rather an interest in "green money." His quip suggested the non-striking teachers represented a murky melding of opportunism and inchoate ideological commitments. Even more significantly, it wasn't entirely clear that the Black Teachers' Caucus tactical strategy of crossing the picket line aligned with their goal of challenging

⁴³⁷ "Draft Position on Milwaukee Teachers' Strike," Folder 1, Box 5, Series 2, More Than One Struggle Oral History Project Records, 1939-2004. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department.

⁴³⁸ Interview with Donelle Johnson and Jim Copeland, January 17, 2017, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

⁴³⁹ *Milwaukee Community Journal*, April 13, 1977. Quoted in Dahlk, *Against the Wind*, p. 575.

⁴⁴⁰ "Striker Bias Claim," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 9, 1977.

and pressuring the dominant beliefs of the teachers' union. Their disengagement at a key moment of crisis allowed the MTEA leadership to disregard the valid issues raised by the caucus. Taken together, the fraught tactics and ideological ambiguity of non-striking Black teachers suggest a somewhat ambivalent character of the Black Teachers' Caucus, succumbing to the panoply of different beliefs and arguments surrounding the union at this time, especially disillusioned liberals and Black nationalists.

Yet it wasn't just members of the Black Teachers' Caucus that didn't support the MTEA's strike. Other would-be union allies were not moved to offer solidarity to the striking teachers. The union of school building service employees, for example, voted not to support the strike. During the unusually cold April, these custodial and building services employees chose to continue working despite the teachers' picket, keeping schools heated and clean and running. Because school buildings stayed open, the divisions between teachers who chose to strike and those who crossed the picket-line were allowed to fester and grow. Yet unlike the Black teachers who condemned the strike's interference with integration orders, the building service workers didn't support the strike because they had poor to nonexistent relations with MTEA. As one engineer reported, "The MTEA has never asked us for support. They have this idea that they should go it alone."⁴⁴¹ Other labor groups in Milwaukee took similar position. An industrial unionist in the Milwaukee County Labor Council, which MTEA chose not join, bluntly stated, "We haven't taken a stand for them so far. I don't see anything coming up that would make us change that."⁴⁴² While the Milwaukee County Labor Council passed a resolution condemning the school board's anti-union actions and bad faith

⁴⁴¹ "Labor No Ally for Teachers," *Milwaukee Journal*, April 15, 1977.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*

negotiations, it did not go so far as to support MTEA. “This is not an endorsement of the teacher strike, no sir,” stressed the council president, a West Allis firefighter.⁴⁴³

Indeed, the solidarity around the union crackled with uncertainty. Traditional liberal allies of the union on the school board aborted their support, seeing the union as interrupting desegregation. Conversely, many of the school board’s conservative members who often opposed the union stood behind the union in the strike, preferring to side with the predominantly white labor demands than the desegregation mandates. Progressive activists, too, divided among themselves on the issue. For example, twenty-three-year-old Bob Peterson, an activist and leader in the community, labor, antiwar group Wisconsin Alliance and one of the founding members of People United, supported the teachers’ strike on a principled alliance to workers’ rights. Yet, his fellow co-chair of People United, a Black woman and fellow activists named Clara White, disagreed with this position, citing the union’s racial reactionary defense of contract rights.⁴⁴⁴ These two seemingly irreconcilable positions – to support the strike or to support immediate desegregation – flustered People United, who became temporarily paralyzed.

The strike was both unpopular and violent. Conflicts between striking and non-striking teachers became physically; some sixty-eight people got arrested in the scuffles between striking and non-striking teachers.⁴⁴⁵ And, perhaps most dramatically, settling the union and school board’s disputes demanded intervention from John Gronouski, the court-appointed special master overseeing

⁴⁴³ Milwaukee’s industrial union’s opposition to the teachers’ strike may have been reflected the growing influence of the aggrieved taxpayer as a political identity that pervaded even labor unions. Residual resentment towards public employee unions festered in older, more conservative industrial and crafts unions, who saw the gains of public employees paid for by their own increases in taxes. See “Labor No Ally For Teachers,” *Milwaukee Journal*, April 15, 1977.

⁴⁴⁴ Miner, *Lessons from the Heartland: A Turbulent Half-Century of Public Education in an Iconic American City*, 97.

⁴⁴⁵ MTEA Executive Board meeting minutes, May 25, 1977. MTEA Archives, Milwaukee, Wisconsin; “MTEA Board to Negotiate on Wednesday,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 8, 1977.

Milwaukee's desegregation.⁴⁴⁶ "Every day... means less time the desegregation process will have to do its work," tutted Gronouski as the teachers' strike approached its second week. If the conflict was not settled soon, Gronouski declared he would be forced to ask Federal Judge John Reynolds to intervene in the strike, an option he very much viewed as a last resort.⁴⁴⁷ After extensive meetings with both the school board and the teachers' union, Gronouski proposed a plan amenable to both parties. In early May, exactly one month after the strike had been called, thanks to Gronouski's self-declared "great charm" and his willingness to sit down and muscle through writing a new contract, the strike got resolved.⁴⁴⁸

Teachers went back to work with their demands for seniority in-tact. Integrating the staff, according to the new contract, would rely on primarily voluntary transfers of staff. This contract contradicted the wishes of the Black Teachers' Caucus and as well as members of People United who understood voluntary integration plans to be tainted with racist ineffectiveness.⁴⁴⁹ The union leadership, for their part, felt they had compromised by agreeing to allow some involuntary transfers to staff specialty schools, the hallmark of Superintendent McMurrin's desegregation plan. In exchange, for the seniority protections, the teachers' union consented to the board's residency requirement. Starting that year, all new teachers hired by the district would have to live within the city limits.

Yet, while the union leadership seemed more or less satisfied with the contract procured by the strike, the results were ominous, with long-lasting effects in the union. Hard feelings wrought on the

⁴⁴⁶ All attempts prior had been made to resolve the strike; Governor Lucey travelled to Milwaukee in an unsuccessful attempt to negotiate the impasse. "Lucey Jawbones; Maier Quiet," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 7, 1977.

⁴⁴⁷ A self-described labor ally, Gronouski had no interest in calling in federal intervention to resolve labor disputes, citing historical precedents of botched federal interference in strikes as "the worst possible way" to settle a strike. See "Gronouski Seeks Strike Parley," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 28, 1977.

⁴⁴⁸ "Gronouski Used Muscle and Charm," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 7, 1977

⁴⁴⁹ "Draft Position on Milwaukee Teachers Strike," Folder 1, Box 5, Series 2, More Than One Struggle Oral History Project Records, 1939-2004. University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Libraries, Archives Department.

picket line stayed long after the strike ended, and in some cases, were never resolved.⁴⁵⁰ Teachers who had crossed the picket-line were barred from serving on union committees, effectively prohibiting a large number of Black teachers from union engagement. When an African-American non-striking teacher became president of the MTEA fifteen years later, she was still recalled by many of the union staff as a strikebreaker, her car tires slashed in the union parking lot one evening during her first week as president. Still, for many Black teachers, the strike sealed their disenchantment with MTEA and a cynical belief that change for Black students, teachers and families cannot happen in the union or in the schools but must be pursued outside of “the system.”

Perhaps what “the bad strike” foremost revealed was the absence of a robust program that was both pro-labor *and* anti-racist. The strike clarified competing and often incoherent political tendencies during the period in three significant ways. First, it calcified a separation of “Black interests” from “labor interests.” Second, it highlighted MTEA’s role as isolationists in broader community struggles, whose *raison d’être* became bulldozing contracts amenable to the predominantly white, increasingly suburban, teachers. And finally, it precipitated the work of a group of activists attempting to bridge the gap between labor protections and racial equity.

People United and the Pro-Labor, Pro-Integration program

As both Black activists and teachers’ unions began to recoil defensively into their respective camps, a group of activists emerged in Milwaukee as the anti-racist, pro-union organizers in the community called People United for Quality Education and Integration. Describing itself as a multi-racial activist organization “willing to fight for people’s rights,” People United was comprised of students, parents, teachers and concerned family members. Forming in 1976, amidst the stalled integration plans, this group of activists saw the struggle for equitable desegregation and quality

⁴⁵⁰ Interview with author, August 2, 2017.

education for all as essential components of social justice in Milwaukee. The group emphasized it was a multi-racial group, it was independent of the school board (therefore distinguishing it from groups like a number of board-appointed groups constituted to address integration orders in Milwaukee, such as the Committee of 100), and it sought direct action tactics to further its missions.

While these three features – a *multi-racial* group, *distinct* from school board or institutional apparatus, and interested in *direct action* tactics – distinguished it from other education reform groups in Milwaukee, perhaps what set it most apart was its rigorous attention to the ideological and political dimensions that undergirded struggles for Milwaukee public schools. Whereas other groups, such as MTEA, focused their attention to advancing short-term goals and actions specific to their agenda such as securing their contract, members of People United queried the repertoire of ideas and groups operating behind the specific actions and groups. “Our work is moving forward at a fast rate,” one internal memo gushed breathlessly in May 1977. “New ideological, political and organization questions unfold as rapidly as we get a handle on old ones.”⁴⁵¹

Indeed, tracing out these ideological and political dimensions of the struggle became among the key aims of People United’s work. The group developed a meticulous and self-conscious style of organizing. They drafted internal memos summarizing and reviewing each action. “We are using the scientific method in our work, laying out hypothesis, summing up our actions and reevaluating our strategy,” one memo noted. They regularly engaged in self-criticism and reflection in order to develop their own political understandings and effectiveness. “Every other week we choose one person in the committee to spend at least an half hour on in a criticism session,” one report explained. Each person would explain their history, and then “[go] into their strengths and weaknesses and how they see themselves developing.”⁴⁵²

⁴⁵¹ “Committee report of the Integration Front,” May 17, 1977. Folder 1, Box 5, Series 2, More Than One Struggle Collection. Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

⁴⁵² “Committee report of the Integration Front,” p. 3.

Members carefully studied the broad array of groups and actors that favored an end to segregation. In one document they produced, the activists created an ideological map of forces at play in the “Anti-Segregation United Front,” charting the left, center-left, center, center-right and right groups at play. Right groups, according to the document, saw their role “mediating conflict, liquidating the issue of racism, limiting mass participation and supporting assimilationist and unequal integration. Can facilitate into being objectively in favor of segregation.” Left groups, on the other hand, saw the link between racial and class questions and positioned mass mobilizations as key to success. The center forces, according to the chart, supported integration, but turned to legal and electoral means to advance it and saw integration as an isolated issue, distinct even from quality of education. The center-left groups, on the other hand, saw the importance of mass movements and possessed more political gumption. These groups, the People United chart noted, were willing to tell the rightist groups of the Anti-Segregation United Front “to go jump into the lake.”⁴⁵³ People United positioned itself on the left of the spectrum; MTEA was on the right, according to this group of radical activists, alongside the McMurrin administration and Gronouski special master of desegregation.

These habits of careful ideological analysis were incubated by People United’s loose affiliation with the Milwaukee Alliance, a socialist group that had recently formed as an offshoot of the Wisconsin Alliance, a worker-farmer-student coalition that formed in 1968.⁴⁵⁴ The Milwaukee Alliance saw attacking racism and the need for a quality education as the “right of all working and poor people,” as their key ideological agenda. From these two points, the group built a “mass line” – a programmatic agenda that united their understanding of the current struggle in terms of long-term

⁴⁵³ “The Anti-Segregation United Front,” April 12, 1977. Folder 1, Box 5, Series 2, More Than One Struggle Collection. Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

⁴⁵⁴ “The Split in the Milwaukee Alliance,” July 4, 1978. Accessed from <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-6/msu-split/split.htm>

class struggle with the concrete and specific needs of the current moment. While not all members of People United were Milwaukee Alliance members, the connection with the Milwaukee Alliance helped People United members to ground their activism within a larger theoretical and political program. This underpinning helped People United's work fend off the programmatic and political weaknesses of the teachers' union, whose vision seemed to increasingly narrow, eclipsing broader struggles.

People United viewed their integration efforts as part of larger political struggles for multi-racial socialism. They held regular political education sessions that linked theoretical study with the specific work of the group. One particular area of focus for the groups was examining Black educational nationalism. "We must understand Black nationalism further and understand its material basis, its positive and negative points and its strategy for Black liberation," the group noted.⁴⁵⁵ Through their study, People United understood that the drive for Black nationalism in Milwaukee emerged from first, dissatisfaction with the desegregation plan, particularly its unequal character that imposed the burden of the desegregation on Black students and families; and second, the tension that arose from the MTEA strike. Yet, the group opposed the line of "Black community control" over schools for three reasons. First, they held that Black nationalism's demands for community control of Black schools and the school board's racist segregationist policies would amount to little difference, given the existing power structure of racial capitalism. "The white capitalist power structures (on a national, state and local level) would still control resources for a necessary and successful school," the group cautioned. Second, they argued that it was only because of integration that school administration had been forced to improve inner city schools. Third, they believed that the program of Black nationalisms mistakenly divided working-class interests by race. Only through a racially

⁴⁵⁵ "Committee report of the Integration Front," p. 2. People United papers, Bob Peterson personal collection.

unified movement of people of all races, especially in the labor movement and civil rights movement, could real reforms “be wrestled from the capitalists,” People United concluded.⁴⁵⁶

This habit of consistently analyzing the balance of forces and contradictions helped the group to not only politically evolve, but also to determine their strategy in two key ways. First, their analysis helped the group recognize where they needed to articulate and communicate their position. This directed their propaganda strategy. While their ultimate publication goal was to create a “revolutionary newspaper” that addressed local, national and international issues in a pro-socialist, pro-revolution perspective, they settled for leaflets and pamphlets on specific topics.

In their “Workers and Integration” pamphlet, for example, they encouraged trade unionists to support bussing and integration efforts. This pamphlet attempted to connect the issues of racial division on the workplace to struggles in the classroom. “How can Blacks unite with white co-workers against a brutal company,” the leaflet queried, “when they know these workers don’t want to send their children to integrated schools?” Corporate profiteers depended upon divisions between Blacks and whites in order to secure their profits while cutting jobs and social services, the pamphlet insisted. “We will be helpless to defend ourselves unless we build a strong unity based on completely defeating racism.”⁴⁵⁷ What’s more, the pamphlet drew attention to corporate actors attempts to divide demands for quality education against the need lower taxes. “The choice for quality education for our children or lower taxes isn’t much of a choice,” they wrote. They demanded resources for schools from those best equipped to pay – banks, corporation and the rich – and called for a corporate income tax to fund improved Milwaukee public schools.⁴⁵⁸ Their propaganda infused rank-and-file activists’ sentiment into their analysis, and specifically called out MTEA’s leadership.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ “Milwaukee Workers and Integration,” People United papers, Bob Peterson personal collection.

⁴⁵⁸ “Letter to CC from IF 2ndary Leadership,” May 18, 1977. Folder 1, Box 5, Series 2, More Than One Struggle Collection. Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

“The union bureaucracy cannot be depended on to challenge educational segregation,” they wrote. “It is up to rank and file unionists, in alliance with other progressive people in the city to insure that desegregation and quality education are seen as two inseparable goals of the labor movement.”⁴⁵⁹

Secondly, People United’s analysis helped them to articulate a robust political program that spanned underneath the somewhat ambiguous flag of “integration.” As their work mapping the anti-segregation front revealed, not all forces working to end segregation had the same vision for what integration entailed. As such, People United introduced demands for quality education as an important qualifier of integration. “We recognize that integration by itself does not ensure ‘quality education,’” they stressed.⁴⁶⁰ Their vision of integration and quality education had two main components. First, they demanded racially equitable methods of desegregation. The first phase of Milwaukee’s desegregation had imposed the burden of integration upon on Black students, families and communities. People United rejected this method of “integration,” instead demanding an end to one-way bussing, a halt to all school closures and a prohibition on “spreading Black students out into the surrounding white schools so that they are a small and isolated minority” as a means to achieve integration.⁴⁶¹ Integration, they argued, must not be left to voluntary means but actively structured to be racially equitable. If schools must close, those in white neighborhoods should be closed first, and existing Black schools should be prioritized for rebuilding.⁴⁶²

Second, their vision of integration also advanced quality education and racial justice *within* schools. They called for massive support of bilingual and bicultural programs to support the 4,800 Latino students in Milwaukee public schools who did not speak English as a first language. They

⁴⁵⁹ “Letter to CC from IF 2ndary Leadership,” May 18, 1977. Folder 1, Box 5, Series 2, More Than One Struggle Collection. Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

⁴⁶⁰ “Recommendations for the Milwaukee Public Schools Integration Plan,” p. 1, May 3, 1976. Folder 1, Box 5, Series 2, More Than One Struggle Collection. Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

⁴⁶¹ Ibid.

⁴⁶² “Help Build Community Plan for Phase Three,” not dated. Folder 1, Box 5, Series 2, More Than One Struggle Collection. Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

also drew attention to internal school segregation practices of academic tracking. Of the 1492 students in the 1967-68 school year enrolled in “superior ability” secondary classes, only 16 were Black, amounting to barely one percent of the population, hardly proportionate with the nearly 19 percent of Black secondary students. People United especially decried the use of standardized tests to determine academic ability given such tests’ standardization based on white and middle-class norms – forty years before opt-out anti-standardized tests movements would become in vogue.⁴⁶³

They highlighted the racially unjust suspensions rates of Milwaukee public schools. In 1978, they organized a public hearing on the topic and prepared a report analyzing the number of suspensions at the city’s middle and high schools. Their data revealed that Black students were suspended at three times the rate of white students. The findings showed that predominantly white schools that had been recently desegregated had a significant spike in suspensions, while schools that had been desegregated prior to the court order, “stable desegregation,” in their parlance, had far fewer suspensions. They highlighted that white students from poor neighborhoods also faced significantly higher suspension rates than students at predominantly white, suburban schools.⁴⁶⁴ As such, People United demanded a district wide program to reform discipline and lower suspension rates, especially for Black students. Other tenets of People United’s quality education demands included curricular reform. They demanded courses addressing histories and cultures of Blacks, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Native Americans, women and workers as a consistent element of the curriculum from elementary school and high school. This curriculum “should be far more than just one semester and should be implemented in the form of new courses and integration into current course, such as social studies and literature,” the group declared.⁴⁶⁵ They called for smaller class sizes and adequate

⁴⁶³ “Recommendations for the Milwaukee Public School Integration Plan,” p. 3.

⁴⁶⁴ “Public Hearing on Suspensions” flyer, p. 2. May 20, 1978. Folder 1, Box 5, Series 2, More Than One Struggle Collection. Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

⁴⁶⁵ “Recommendations for the Milwaukee Public School Integration Plan,” p. 3.

funding for remedial courses and centers.⁴⁶⁶ Unwilling to rely on courts and legal orders, People United organized speak outs, pickets and rallies to demand their quality integration program.

Yet obstacles to People United's vision abounded, even – especially – among fellow members of the “anti-segregation united front.” Opportunists, actors who seize “tactical opportunities without any regard to principle,” became a particular thorn in the side of People United's progress, particularly “labor bureaucrats” and “community opportunists.”⁴⁶⁷ Because People United's program for integration and quality education drew from careful study of both community need *and* ideological principles of multi-racial socialism, they found themselves repeatedly frustrated by fellow desegregation activist groups they deemed to be opportunistic. According to People United's analysis, opportunists started off progressive but put personal interests ahead of the movement. They failed to rely on mass mobilizations “except when expedient, and were financially dependent on the “bourgeois power structure.”⁴⁶⁸ They played on reactionary sentiments of the masses, and stooped to low tactical blows like attacking other groups and allies to secure their influence. Finally, preserving the influence of their organizations and leaders constituted their key aim of struggle, rather working to build a “principled united front.”⁴⁶⁹

Opportunistic labor bureaucrats such as the MTEA leadership, People United charged, were willing to revert to racism in order to maintain their survival. A week after MTEA's 1977 strike, members of People United conducted “fairly intensive social investigation” to assess the tangled relations of class struggle and racism revealed by the strike.⁴⁷⁰ They concluded that MTEA leadership

⁴⁶⁶ “Help Build Community Plan for Phase Three.”

⁴⁶⁷ Peter Nettle, quoted in Claus Offe and Helmut Wessenthal, “Two Logics of Collective Action: Theoretical Notes on Social Class and Organizational Form,” in *Political Power and Social Theory*, ed. Maurice Zeitlin (JAI Press, 1980), 214.;

⁴⁶⁸ “People United/Triple O Sum-Up,” p. 1. July 31, 1977. Folder 1, Box 5, Series 2, More Than One Struggle Collection. Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

⁴⁶⁹ “People United/Triple O Sum-Up,” p. 1.

⁴⁷⁰ “Draft Position on Milwaukee Teachers Strike,” n.d. Folder 1, Box 5, Series 2, More Than One Struggle Collection. Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

was mostly unresponsive to the rank and file and community needs, and instead supported some of the racist attitudes held by teachers. In the face of the school board's attempt to assert "management rights," MTEA leadership subordinated their tacit commitments to desegregation and quality education to the pathologically narrow "teacher interests," such as seniority and transfer rights. What's more, their endorsement of voluntary integration plans troubled People United, who recognized voluntary integration as the prey of racist ineffectiveness.⁴⁷¹ MTEA's opportunism meant People United did not see its leadership as an ally. Yet the group's commitments to the rights of labor and high quality public education, meant they were unwilling to abandon the critical space of the teachers' union from their struggles. As such, in the years to come, it would become an arena to deepen their work and build stronger networks.

Although People United continued to stay active through the end of the 1970s, their work took on a much more defensive character, essentially operating as a pressure group to the school board to ensure equity in desegregation efforts. They especially took up defending against school closures in predominantly Black neighborhoods. By the end of the decade, their activities trickled to a halt and the group slowly dissolved. Activists like Bob Peterson shifted their energy from community activist groups of People United to more work more directly embedded in schools. Peterson, for example, began working as an educational paraprofessional in desegregation school support teams. "I realized that while People United had 'fought the good fight' and had played an important role as a staunch anti-racist pole within the broader desegregation movement," reflected founding member Bob Peterson ruefully years later, "we ultimately failed to contest for real power. ... We never seriously confronted the issue of how to gain sufficient positions of power to more effectively affect policy."⁴⁷²

⁴⁷¹ Bob Peterson, "Beginning with the Birds: The Making of an Activist," 2010, 305.

Though in the short-term People United may not have fundamentally affected the course of events in Milwaukee, individuals from the group, especially Peterson, were only just beginning their work to demand high quality, multi-racial public education in Milwaukee. Changes within schools, Peterson realized, would best come from within teachers' unions, not just outside. In the coming decades, Peterson and a group of other progressive teachers would set their sights on reforming the Milwaukee teachers' union.

Conclusion

In the early 1970s, MTEA spurned solidarity with statewide teachers' union movement in order to maintain full control over the union's contract negotiations. Yet, as this chapter reveals, the pursuit of those contracts in the late 1970s additionally fractured alliances within the union itself. The union's near-exclusive pursuit of bread-and-butter contract provisions was built on racist ideology about what issues and whose voices mattered. MTEA established itself as an organization that neither nurtured nor supported progressive and transformative visions for either schools or society. MTEA's leadership developed an opportunistic frame for the union's action – to operate along established and recognized channels so as to a) ensure the survival of the union and b) avoid disrupting the broader structures which form those channels to begin with. This opportunistic and narrow purview meant that concerned activists had to turn to other organizational spaces to develop and incubate radical visions for education. Yet soon, many of these activists would return to the union, this time ready to take on the very opportunistic framework upon which it had established its dominance.

PART II

Chapter Six: RE-THINK

“To Fight Well for Teachers:” Rethinking MTEA, 1980-2000

“We have certainly still to speak of the ‘dominant’ and the ‘effective’, and in these senses of the hegemonic. But we find that we have also to speak, and indeed with further differentiation of each, of the ‘residual’ and the ‘emergent.’”

--Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 122.⁴⁷³

Overview

In the 1980s, public education in Milwaukee came under growing pressures. Desegregation attempts in Milwaukee had neither improved educational quality, nor ameliorated segregated schooling facilities. Many frustrated students, parents, educators and community members were eager for alternatives. As economic sociologist Albert Hirschman theorized, faced with an unresponsive organization, individuals have two primary forms of power to leverage change. They can either leave (exit) an organization, or they can publicly articulate (voice) their concerns, hoping critique stimulates reform.⁴⁷⁴ In a post-desegregation ruling Milwaukee, activists on the right chose “exit” as the means to navigate the irresponsive school district. These critics of Milwaukee Public Schools sought to develop school choice programs, in order to provide predominantly low-income, families of color a means to exit the school district. Rather than reform public education in Milwaukee, they fought for means to exit it. On the political left, activists and educators relied on the strategy of “voice,” that is public critique, to attempt to change the practices and priorities of both the Milwaukee school board administration and the teachers’ union. They developed progressive groups within the union to demand greater union democracy and more attention to

⁴⁷³ Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 122.

⁴⁷⁴ Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty; Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

issues outside of wages and benefit. A group of such activists founded a radical educational journal, *Rethinking Schools*, that reported on local and national issues relating to struggles over public education, of both practical, theoretical and political concern. Between union caucus reforms and the progressive education journal, these activists sought to build apparatuses capable of amplifying their voice, and thus their influence, to improve public education in Milwaukee.

The 1980s and 1990s in Milwaukee are not remembered for their period of progressive awakening. Indeed, during these decades, conservative policy actors in Milwaukee engineered experiments in welfare reform and school vouchers that would go on to become national models. Yet, as this chapter shows, amidst a landscape increasingly unsupportive of public education, educators and activists in Milwaukee began laying seeds for new movements in public education to take root. As I argue in this chapter, these educators' efforts represented, in cultural theorist Raymond Williams's terms, the development of the *emergent* culture of educational critique, postulating new meanings, values, and relationships that were both oppositional and alterative to the *dominant* cultural structures of the educational administration, politicians and financial elites, and the *residual* cultural of the "old guard" teachers' union. Just as Milwaukee's welfare and voucher experiments would get cast across the nation, the efforts of progressive teacher activists, too, would provide a leading voice in growing national calls for social justice teacher unionism. Yet, as Williams reminds, emerging culture forms in contradictory and incomplete ways, threatened to be incorporated or disbanded as an element of the residual culture. Just *how* the emerging calls for a new social justice teachers' unionism would respond to such challenges would remain to be seen.

MPS' Response to Desegregation Mandates

The changes that took place in 1980s and 1990 in Milwaukee occurred amidst the backdrop of a weak state-led response to Milwaukee's segregated and unequal public schools. Under court

order from the 1976 desegregation ruling, the Milwaukee Public Schools unrolled two programs to desegregate schools. One was a magnet program in which inner city schools, many in predominantly Black neighborhoods, were closed and re-opened as “specialty” schools, offering boutique curricula such as language immersion or creative arts. School district officials hoped these magnet schools program would promote *intradistrict* desegregation, attracting white families to attend schools in predominantly neighborhoods and curb white flight out of the district. The second program, called Chapter 220, sought to promote *interdistrict* desegregation by busing minority children to suburban schools, and allowing white suburban children to attend MPS schools. To avoid the political anathema of “forced” integration, these two programs function as state-sponsored choice programs, inducing families to voluntarily integrate the schools of the nation’s most segregated city.

However, neither program significantly addressed racial integration, much less improved educational quality for poor children and children of color. Instead, they created a new system of economic segregation, in which children who faced more poverty and instability attended traditional MPS schools, and students with more resources and stability attended suburban or specialty schools. The magnet schools program did not stop the tide of white flight, and white family enrollment dropped out of the city. Between 1970 and 1980, white student enrollment in MPS dropped 48%.⁴⁷⁵ And bussing quickly revealed itself as an expensive and inefficient program that put the burden of desegregation on Black students and families. Black and brown students would spend hours every week commuting to school districts that, in some cases, their families were not allowed to buy homes, due to racial covenants. While MPS received state aid for Chapter 220, its obligation to bus students out of the district reduced the instructional funds available.⁴⁷⁶ The district’s response to desegregation left many hopes for educational quality and racial equity unfulfilled. It did not address

⁴⁷⁵ George Mitchell, “An Evaluation of State-Financed School Integration in Metropolitan Milwaukee” (Milwaukee, WI, 1989).

⁴⁷⁶ Mitchell, 2.

either the root causes of racial segregation or inequality. Instead, its effects were two fold. First, its half solutions allowed the problems of unequal and inadequate education to fester, attracting new critics and forces in motions. And, second, by addressing segregation and inequality through state-sponsored voluntary choice plans, it established the precedent of “choice” and “exit” as the means to resolve inequality.

MTEA, Business Unionism and the Response to Desegregation

In the face of these challenges, MTEA leadership offered neither strong alternatives nor defined opposition. Instead, they clung on to their historically-formed understanding of power: their contractual protections. We can call their efforts a form of residual culture, in Raymond William’s framing. Residual cultures are effectively formed in the past, but still have some effect on the present. They operate both at a distance from the dominant culture, and also partially incorporated by it. For much of MTEA’s history, the protection and defense of teachers’ contracts were the historically necessary apparatus that ensured teachers’ equal treatment and fair protection. The old guard’s defense of the contract was an historically informed definition of teachers’ power. Yet over time, the teachers’ unions reliance nearly exclusive reliance on its contract facilitated the union’s incorporation into the dominant structure. Rather than challenging the dominant order, the teachers’ unions focus on contract protections fostered its evolution as a business model of union.

Business unionism is the fundamentally conservative mode of unionism in which unions enable and endorse social relations structured by capital’s dominance. Their primary task becomes negotiating the price of dominance through contracts, securing benefits for a very limited section of the working class.⁴⁷⁷ The bread and butter protections of a contract are the most important thing for a business model of union. On the one hand, a business approach wrought wage gains and benefits

⁴⁷⁷ Moody, *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism*, 15.

for many teachers. Yet, as we shall see, this selective and relative prosperity was built on an increasingly narrow set of practices, in which the active participation of union membership became increasingly less important. What's more, it left aside growing conditions of social inequality that would come to fester over time.

In 1981, in part because of the state-sponsored choice options rolled out by MPS and white flight out of the city, enrollment dropped in Milwaukee public schools. Between 1970 and 1981, student enrollment dipped from 133,606 to 87,356. This triggered a budget shortfall for MPS.⁴⁷⁸ Teachers faced the most significant layoffs in MPS history. In spite of massive teacher job losses, causing classrooms to swell and students to lose instructors, the union did not address the problem of weakened public schools. They did not address the problems of white flight, unequal aid to Milwaukee, or declining enrollment.

Instead, MTEA saw their role as providing, individual benefits counseling to affected educators – helping them file for unemployment or benefits continuation – *not* collectively organizing a public response to oppose the district's decision to layoff educators. When one teacher who had been laid off called the union and asked when the meeting of educators who had received lay-off notices would take place, the union staff person said, "Well, what would you like to know? What can we help you with?" "That's not the point," responded the teacher, Bob Peterson. "Why don't you call a meeting of the people who were laid off?" The staff responded that the union's job was to help members receive services, asking once again, "What questions can we answer for you right now?" Implicit in the union staff's automated response was that the union did not see itself responsible for organizing members to collectively challenge the problem. A number of teachers were flummoxed by the union's ironclad commitment to maintain professional control over the

⁴⁷⁸ Don Weimer, "An Opportunity Lost: Affirmative Action vs. Seniority in the Milwaukee School System." Unpublished manuscript, 1981. Peterson papers.

union, at the expense of member-driven political and workplace organizing. “Most building representatives [union stewards] couldn’t believe that the staff had refused to call meeting of the laid-off teachers,” wrote Peterson in his memoirs. “It was the first, albeit small, crack I saw in the blind confidence many building representatives had in the union leadership, which was concentrated in the professional staff and a small group of elected leaders.”⁴⁷⁹

When the union did choose to address the mass lay-offs, their response was reactionary and defensive, further alienating Black activists and community members from the teachers’ union. To comply with the 1976 court-ordered desegregation ruling, MPS had included race as a criteria when considering layoffs, in order to maintain racial balance of teaching faculty. Instead of straight seniority, MPS planned to lay teachers off according to “super seniority” in which white teachers were laid off before Black teachers. Straight seniority, also known as “last hired, first fired,” would have disproportionately affected Black educators, many of whom were hired in the wake of the desegregation and affirmative action expansion. According to MPS’ definition, Asian and Latino teachers were defined as white, problematically causing many teachers of color to not be retained amidst layoffs.

MTEA, however, opposed this interpretation of seniority. They did not want race to be a factor in lay-offs, out of concern that it not only violated the contract, but it would affect the “morale of staff” – meaning the morale of *white* staff. In 1981, MTEA brought a suit to court, claiming MPS’s layoff procedures violated MTEA’s contractual protections of seniority.⁴⁸⁰ After a drawn-out court ruling, the courts ruled in the union’s favor, re-instating straight seniority over racially-balanced seniority. The episode further broke trust with Black community members and MTEA, who already found themselves on shaky ground with Black community activists after the

⁴⁷⁹ Peterson, “Beginning with the Birds: The Making of an Activist,” 35.

⁴⁸⁰ Wisconsin Employment Relations Committee, “MTEA vs Milwaukee School Board: Findings of Fact, Conclusions of Law and Declaratory Ruling,” Case No. 194. April, 1989.

1977 strike, discussed in Chapter Five. MTEA's seniority systems, explained Milwaukee Black community leader Mikel Holt was an "obvious affront [that] lingered in the minds of many Black people."⁴⁸¹ Furthermore, very few teachers had any say or discussion in the decision to bring the suit forward – many didn't even know it was happening.⁴⁸² While the school district's plan to address the segregated school system was incomplete and surely warranted critique, MTEA's point of critical engagement did little to address the major issue of improving either teaching or learning conditions in MPS. Instead, its actions furthered mistrust between communities and public schools, adding to the growing belief that the teachers' unions prioritized their bureaucratic apparatus more than educational needs of the community. This sentiment would become an important argument taken up by union critics and private school advocates, who were slowly building their critiques of public schools and developing plans for private ones.

Exit: Critiquing MPS from the Right and the rise of School Choice

In the mid 1980s, Milwaukee's business community began to develop a special focus on educational quality. While this had been an issue among community activists, especially Black community activists for decades, by the early 1980s, it became a major point of concern among influential business elites, albeit for different reasons. As the economy slowed after the 1970s economic downturn, local business groups worried about the state's economic capacity and workforce development. "Unless we make full use of our human resources," one economist told the state legislature's special committee on economic development in 1982, "we'll be strangled by the shortage of types of labor skills."⁴⁸³ In 1984, Democratic Governor Tony Earl commissioned a

⁴⁸¹ Holt, *Not yet "Free at Last": The Unfinished Business of the Civil Rights Movement: Our Battle for School Choice*, 3.

⁴⁸² Peterson, "Beginning with the Birds: The Making of an Activist," 36.

⁴⁸³ Quoted in Dahlk, *Against the Wind: African Americans and the Schools in Milwaukee, 1963-2002*, 421. This interpretation of economic capacity, of course, reflects the view that economic productivity is a result of

report to study the conditions of Milwaukee public schools. On the heels of the 1983 *The Nation at Risk* study which brought national attention to an issue of “failing schools,” the Governor’s Study Commission on the Quality of Education in the Metropolitan Milwaukee Public Schools similarly turned to Milwaukee schools with an eye towards declining quality.⁴⁸⁴ The Commission, quickly dubbed the Mitchell Commission after chairperson George Mitchell, a former business journalist and Milwaukee real estate developer, had 27 members, including local business and education leaders. Drawing from research directed by UW-Madison professor John Witte, the main conclusions of the report highlighted disparities between Milwaukee Public Schools and the surrounding suburbs. Not surprisingly, the report cast MPS in poor light. Milwaukee students faced more poverty, had less parental involvement, worse grades, more absences and lower graduation rates than their suburban peers. These reports effectively framed the public conversation that MPS – not concentrated poverty and regional inequality – was failing its students.

If the Mitchell Commission sparked the conversation around Milwaukee’s declining education quality, business groups in Milwaukee took the lead in drawing its conclusions. Spurred in part by the Mitchell Commission, business leaders’ attention shifted from the effective management of declining resources, a major focus of the 1970s, to the matter of declining educational quality by the mid 1980s. Milwaukee’s primary business association, Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of

individuals’ capacity and training, not systemic redistribution or balance of resources. See Wright, *Understanding Class*, 2015.

⁴⁸⁴ A major impetus of Governor Earl’s study commission came from a member of his administration, Howard Fuller, who vocally demanded a moratorium on desegregation discussions in Milwaukee in favor of shifting the conversation towards a public appraisal of MPS quality, writ large. Fuller, who was appointed to the commission, wanted the public school system held accountable and saw the commission as something of a first step towards a referendum on the district. Dahlk, *Against the Wind: African Americans and the Schools in Milwaukee, 1963-2002*, 423.

Commerce (MMAC), became especially concerned with declining graduation rates of MPS.⁴⁸⁵ In 1989, MMAC, along with the Greater Milwaukee Committee – a powerful group of business elites in the city – formed the Greater Milwaukee Education Trust, with the aims of leveraging business communities’ support to strengthen schools. These groups began to develop concerted discussions and agendas for developing privatization initiatives within and around public schools.⁴⁸⁶ For example, using funds from the Bradley Foundation, the group sponsored a “loan an executive” program to Milwaukee Public Schools, in an effort to bring stronger business management techniques to public institutions.⁴⁸⁷ Although the teachers’ union was initially invited to attend this group, within three years they were disinvited, as the group shifted its focus from supporting public education to “scrapping public education,” as Milwaukee mayor John Norquist urged.⁴⁸⁸

However, neither Norquist nor the Trust was alone in calling for the wholesale abandonment of public education.⁴⁸⁹ Rather, their statements echoed a broader policy ideology program cohering globally, nationally and, acutely, in Milwaukee during the mid 1980s. This program held the private market as the most efficient purveyor of human needs, and looked to dissolve regulations. A chief proponent of this new ideology was the Milwaukee-based Bradley Foundation. The Bradley Foundation was originally founded as philanthropic arm of Allen-Bradley, a Milwaukee-based electronic and radio manufacturing company.⁴⁹⁰ For the first three decades of its existence, it operated as a sleepy and regional philanthropy, funding mostly uncontroversial projects

⁴⁸⁵ James Cibulka and Frederick Olson, “The Organization of the Milwaukee Public School System,” in *Seeds of Crisis: Public Schooling in Milwaukee since 1920*, ed. John Rury and Frank Cassell (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 94.

⁴⁸⁶ Bruce Murphy and Terrance Falk, “A Loss of Trust,” *Milwaukee Magazine*, November 1994.

⁴⁸⁷ “Year in Review: One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward,” *Rethinking Schools* 6, no. 4 (1992).

⁴⁸⁸ MTEA Building Representatives meeting minutes, February 8, 1989. “Year in Review: One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward.” Ann Bradley, “Milwaukee May’s Call to Scrap Public Schools Stirs Furor,” *Education Week*, January 15, 1992; Murphy and Falk, “A Loss of Trust.”

⁴⁸⁹ Kenneth Lamke, “Mayor Sees End of Urban Schools,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 2, 1992.

⁴⁹⁰ John Gurda, *The Bradley Legacy: Lynde and Harry Bradley, Their Company, and Their Foundation* (Milwaukee, WI: The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, 1992).

such as local arts initiatives and efforts to preventing cruelty to animals in the Milwaukee area.⁴⁹¹ In 1985, the Allen-Bradley company was bought out by the Rockwell International Corporation for \$1.6 billion.⁴⁹² Nearly overnight, the Foundation's assets jumped from less than \$14 million to \$290 million.⁴⁹³ The Bradley brothers had long been active in far-right political projects – they were early founders of the John Birch Society, but such interests had never been an explicit aim of their philanthropy. However, the extra injection of capital in 1985 emboldened the Foundation to more formally invest in its political ambitions.

In a matter of months, the Bradley Foundation's laid the foundational infrastructure of a budding national conservative movement. In 1985, the Bradley Foundation recruited Michael Joyce as its director. Joyce, the former head of fellow conservative foundation Olin Foundation, was a keen strategist and zealot free-market neoconservative. His vision for the Bradley Foundation represented a new alignment of rightists tendencies, the mashing of traditional cultural conservatism committed to “family values” alongside critiques of government, “the nanny state” and state-funded social services.⁴⁹⁴ In 1980, prior to Bradley Foundation's transformation, less than three percent of the foundation's grants addressed public policy; by 1990, 60 percent did.⁴⁹⁵ With Joyce at the helm, the Bradley Foundation shifted from funding programs to funding ideas, a crucial shift not just the Bradley Foundation, but philanthropy broadly.⁴⁹⁶ Yet what distinguished Bradley Foundation from

⁴⁹¹ Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires behind the Rise of the Radical Right*, 143.

⁴⁹² Phil Wilayto, “The Feeding Trough: The Bradley Foundation, ‘The Bell Curve’ & the Real Story behind W-2, Wisconsin's National Model for Welfare Reform” (Milwaukee, WI, 1997), 12.

⁴⁹³ Miner, Barbara. “The Power and the Money: Bradley Foundation Bankrolls Conservative Agenda.” *Rethinking Schools*, 1994, vol 8., no. 3.

⁴⁹⁴ Apple, *Educating the “Right” Way: Markets, Standards, God and Inequality*; Miner, *Lessons from the Heartland: A Turbulent Half-Century of Public Education in an Iconic American City*, 162.

⁴⁹⁵ John J Miller, “Strategic Investment in Ideas: How Two Foundations Reshaped America,” *The Philanthropy Roundtable*, 2003, 38.

⁴⁹⁶ Joyce faced pushback from many of the Bradley Foundation's board of directors during his first months with the foundation, as he argued to shift from investing in profits to policy ideas. Joyce found the businessmen frustratingly preoccupied with short-term gains and losses. They viewed success “in terms they understand best, namely, input and output ratios and profit and loss statements,” he wrote in a letter to his mentor, Irving Kristol, a man considered to be the godfather of neoconservatism, “It frequently happens that

its sister foundations was Bradley Foundation's commitment to building both an ideological agenda and investing in their local implementation.⁴⁹⁷ In the late 1980s, school choice and welfare reform became their key areas of focus, and Milwaukee became the arena of execution.

In 1986, the Bradley Foundation made its first investment in school choice politics. It granted \$75,000 to Terry Moe and John Chubb, via the liberal Brookings Institute, to write a book formalizing their critique of public education systems and issuing a call to replace them with market-based school choice programs. "We believe existing institutions cannot solve the problem," wrote Chubb and Moe in *Politics, Markets and America's Schools*, "because they *are* the problem."⁴⁹⁸ Market-based school choice programs, according to Chubb and Moe, were nothing less than a panacea. "The whole point," they declared, "is to free the schools from these disabling constraints by sweeping away the old institutions and replacing them with new ones. Taken seriously, choice is not a system-preserving reform. It is a revolutionary reform that introduces a new system of public education."⁴⁹⁹ In part because of the book's publication by the liberal Brookings Institute, it provided ideological bedrock for the conservative choice movement to expand into the realm of liberal technocrats. Thus in the early 1990s, free-market policy ideas like school choice moved out of the domain of free enterprise conservatives economists like Milton Friedman and James Buchanan,

business people are unaccustomed to thinking politically," Joyce continued. "Bradley's Board needs to understand as grant-makers they can play an important role in framing the intellectual debate as long as they are willing to be patient and put some intellectual effort into learning about the ideas that affect our political and intellectual existence." Joyce proved to be right. Memo from Michael Joyce to Irving Kristol, August 30, 1988. Irving Kristol Collection, Box 12, Folder 24, WHS.

⁴⁹⁷ While the Bradley Foundation offers a vivid example of rightists' commitment to investing in the infrastructure of ideas, it is far from the exclusive case. See, for example, Mayer, *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires behind the Rise of the Radical Right*; MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America*; Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan*.

⁴⁹⁸ J. E. Chubb and T. M. Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1990), 3.

⁴⁹⁹ Chubb and Moe, 217.

and into the domain of mainstream policy thought; *Politics, Markets and Schools* represented this shift.⁵⁰⁰

Chubb and Moe's ideas guided the school choice policy program unfolding in Milwaukee. In 1987, the Bradley Foundation founded the Wisconsin Public Research Institute (WPRI), a conservative free-market think-tank aimed to shape public opinion and policy in the state. With an annual budget of \$500,000 thanks to Bradley Foundation funds, WPRI opened its doors as a two-person shop -- a director and an administrative assistant.⁵⁰¹ The direction hired out survey experts and pollsters to conduct opinion research on popular and controversial issues, focusing especially on welfare and education reform. WPRI used these poll results to shape policy debates and arguments, quickly gaining the ear of conservative leaders, including Governor Tommy Thompson, who used WPRI poll findings as he refashioned Wisconsin's welfare program.⁵⁰² With the help of George Mitchell and his wife Susan, WPRI issued a series of reports documenting the failures of MPS, with unambiguous titles such as, "Why MPS Doesn't Work."⁵⁰³ WPRI also published a 1989 prelude their 1990 book by Chubb and Moe called "Educational Choice: Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about Mediocrity in American Education and What Can Be Done About It." These documents

⁵⁰⁰ Apple, *Educating the "Right" Way: Markets, Standards, God and Inequality*.

⁵⁰¹ Gilbert, Craig. "Feud for thought: new think tank makes news in a hurry," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, January 25, 1988.

⁵⁰² This proved to both a vicious and a void policy feedback loop, in which polls were used to gather uninformed hypotheses, base suspicions and specious rumors in order to craft policy. In the particular case of welfare reform, WPRI reported that many Wisconsin residents were concerned that Chicagoans were travelling to Wisconsin – in some cases, just for a day – to collect welfare benefits, which were more generously provided than in Illinois. Such urban legends, siphoned through the gilded expertise of "pollsters," were used as a major charge for Governor Thompson's sweeping welfare reform, which began experimentally in 1986 and was officially signed into law in 1996. See L.M. Mead, *Government Matters: Welfare Reform in Wisconsin* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004). Miller, "Strategic Investment in Ideas: How Two Foundations Reshaped America."

⁵⁰³ Kurt Chandler, "Us vs. Them, Them vs. Us," *Milwaukee Magazine* (Milwaukee, November 2002).

helped translate Chubb and Moe's broad findings to Milwaukee's specific context.⁵⁰⁴ Even more so, WPRI reports capitalized upon brewing discontent with Milwaukee Public Schools among key groups. The Bradley Foundation set the table for school choice in Milwaukee; the business actors, Black activists and religious school leaders that sat down turned the table into a movement.

In the face of declining educational quality and an unresponsive teachers' union, many Milwaukee families chose the "exit" option for their children. This choice, however, was reserved for upper class, predominantly white families, as exercising this option was incumbent on the financial means to relocate to the suburbs, or pay tuition for private schools. As many Black activists pointed out, this created a system of school choice for wealthy, predominantly white families, and a system of forced captivity in substandard quality education for poor families, predominantly of color. Howard Fuller, Milwaukee educational activist, former superintendent and leading advocate of school vouchers explained, wealthy families are able to make the choice to send their children to whatever school they want – poor families don't have that choice. "The reality is, as long as this system remains closed, as long as we continue to depend on the bureaucracy to make change, instead of empowering people to make their own change, ain't going to be a whole lot of change for our kids," explained Fuller.⁵⁰⁵ Many Black community activists, led in part by Fuller, began pushing for publicly-funded alternatives for Black children as a means to exit the public school system.

⁵⁰⁴ Dahlk, *Against the Wind: African Americans and the Schools in Milwaukee, 1963-2002*, 471. In 1985, just before Joyce came to Bradley Foundation and WPRI opened its doors, the then-Democratic governor Tony Earl commissioned a report studying educational quality in metropolitan Milwaukee. The Governor's Study Commission on the Quality of Education in the Metropolitan Milwaukee public Schools, quickly dubbed the Mitchell Commission after its chairperson, George Mitchell, a Milwaukee real estate developer. These reports highlighted the disparities between Milwaukee Public Schools and the surrounding suburbs. Milwaukee students faced more poverty, had less parental involvement, worse grades, more absences and lower graduation rates than their suburban peers.

⁵⁰⁵ Oral History Interview with Howard Fuller, December 14, 1996. Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007) in the Southern Oral History Program Collection, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina. 1996.

In 1990, school vouchers became a publicly-sponsored program, granting nearly 1000 Milwaukee families the option to “exit” Milwaukee public schools. Black community activists, including Fuller, journalist Mikel Holt and especially the former welfare recipient, single mother, Black Democrat assemblyperson, Polly Williams, worked with conservative foundations and advocacy groups, such as the Bradley Foundation and its subsidiary groups to pass the Milwaukee Parental Choice program. This program offered publicly-funded tuition vouchers for approximately 1000 Milwaukee students, whose families had an income no greater than 175% of the federal poverty level. “This is truly an historic occasion,” declared Polly Williams after the vote. “What makes this occasion even more significant is the fact that we had to go up against the labor union, MPS and even the Department of Public Instruction. But our parents fought all the way and now there is light at the end of the tunnel.”⁵⁰⁶ A major shift in the educational landscape had taken place: school vouchers had become a reality. Not only did vouchers have a financial impact on Milwaukee public schools – subsidies for vouchers drained money for public schools – they also provided a rallying point for a growing conservative movement, which sought to expand its influence in the courts, media, electoral politics, and economic policy. “Once we make common cause on an issue like school choice,” confided Clint Bolick, the libertarian attorney who co-founded the Koch-funded Institute for Justice and defended Milwaukee’s school choice program, “other pieces of the puzzle seem to follow logically.”⁵⁰⁷

Voice: Critiquing MPS from the Left, the rise of progressive educators’ caucuses

In mid 1980s, another group of activists, predominantly teachers, were also concerned with MPS, especially its troubling educational program for children of color. They were disturbed by

⁵⁰⁶ Holt, *Not yet “Free at Last”: The Unfinished Business of the Civil Rights Movement: Our Battle for School Choice*, 76.

⁵⁰⁷ Quoted in Steven Teles, *The Rise of the Conservative Legal Movement: The Battle for Control of the Law* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008), 239.

insufficiently funded schools in Black neighborhoods, crowded classrooms, and curriculum that was increasingly scripted and narrow. However, they took their criticism in a different direction. Instead of advocating for means to “exit” the public education system, these groups of activists opted for “voice” and sought way to strengthen MPS by critiquing it *and* defending public education. Unlike the teachers’ union who assumed a tepid and apolitical response that became reactionary, this group sought actively to address the broader political context surrounding public schools. These teachers sought to actively differentiate themselves from both the conservative conclusion to “scrap” public schools, and the union’s position to abdicate political engagement. They set to work building the apparatuses capable of amplifying their voice, both within the union and outside of it. Their efforts constituted what Raymond Williams refers to as an emergent culture, a break from both the residual cultures and dominant cultures. They constituted an attempt to articulate both alternatives and opposition to the dominant order.

Educators United and Concerned Milwaukee Educators

Within MTEA, this group of progressive teachers wanted to provide a counter-pole to the narrow political conversations offered by the established union leadership. They were frustrated by MTEA’s top-down decision-making, its heavy reliance on staff to execute the union’s priorities, its stifled democratic deliberation and its myopically narrow concerns with the contract over and above all of teachers’ interest. In 1982, they formed Educators United, a caucus committed to making the union more democratic and engaged with the broader community.⁵⁰⁸ One of their first concerns was to address the lack of Black history taught in schools. They proposed a Martin Luther King Jr. writing contest to give MPS students as an opportunity to reflection on racism and racial justice in their daily lives. Two members of Educators United, Donelle Johnson, a white fifth grade teacher,

⁵⁰⁸ Peterson, “Beginning with the Birds: The Making of an Activist,” 34.

and Paulette Copeland, an African American reading specialist, took the lead in organizing the first contest, titled, “Imagine a Dream – imagine a dream that you and Dr. King would have for Milwaukee and the world.”⁵⁰⁹ In addition to fostering conversations among students, they hoped it would attract sympathetic teachers to join Educators United and get involved with a progressive caucus of fellow teachers. When members of Educators United asked MTEA executive board to sponsor the contest, they refused, “concerned about “who was behind the caucus.” However, when the group presented their proposal to fellow members at a building representatives meeting, it was unanimously approved. The new caucus had its first win. The contest marked one of the first instances that the union actively hosted conversations about racial injustice, beyond asserting their own defensiveness and myopic contract protection.

As Donelle Johnson explained, MTEA executive board’s initial resistance to proposal like the writing contest was precisely the reason why these teachers saw the need to form a progressive caucus. Teachers had little power over the union. “The staff kept everything closed-mouth...[teachers] didn’t get to pick the agenda.” Johnson explained. “The big thing too was that our constitution - the MTEA constitution - talks about two-fold objectives. And that’s the meat and potatoes. The money, the pay, the working conditions, and all that. But the other part was the education of the children in Milwaukee and it always felt to us like that was the part that was left out. Let alone, heaven forbid, we be in the community and be visible.” Educators United, by contrast, wanted to build relationships with communities. “The community, especially the Black community, the people of color, and the Hispanic too, I think, saw us as the enemy,” Johnson described.⁵¹⁰ Educators United wanted to change that. In 1994, Educators United evolved into Concerned Milwaukee Educators, who aspired to be a multiracial caucus, visible to the community and

⁵⁰⁹ Peterson, 75.

⁵¹⁰ Interview with author, January 11, 2017. Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

accountable to the community's needs.⁵¹¹ "That was our goal," Johnson reflected. In addition to organizing community needs, Educators United and Concerned Milwaukee Educators wanted to address the pedagogy and curriculum that was at the center of teachers' work. "Curriculum is what is in teachers' heads," African American educator Asa Hilliard told a group of Milwaukee teachers at a African American history workshop.⁵¹² This caucus wanted to change what was inside of teachers' heads. In addition to pushing the union, they also needed an organ of critique and analysis. They began to work closely with the newly forming journal, *Rethinking Schools*.

Rethinking Schools

In 1985, a small group of nine people, mostly teachers and community activists, many of whom were involved with Educators United, were troubled by the racist and unequal education they observed around them. They decided to start a critical education reading group to better understand the political and economic arrangements that troubled public education. Their first – and last - text was Henry Giroux's *Theory and Resistance in Education*. However, they quickly realized their interests lay less in theorizing the struggles of public education, but rather telling the real stories of how such struggles were unfolding. "As progressive activists, some of us were tired of trooping down to the school board and testifying, only to be ignored," Bob Peterson, one of the reading group leaders and former member of People United for Quality Education. "We wanted to go on the *offensive* both politically and analytically. We were bored with the [MTEA] union newsletter, *The Sharpener*, appalled at the superficial education coverage from Milwaukee's daily newspapers, and viewed most academic education journals as irrelevant."⁵¹³ They decided to start a publication of their own.

⁵¹¹ "Year in Review," *Rethinking Schools* 7, no. 4 (1993).

⁵¹² Peterson, "Beginning with the Birds: The Making of an Activist," 76.

⁵¹³ Peterson, 80.

The teachers desired a forum to both criticize public schools, and to call for their revitalization— not their eradication, the conclusion drawn by conservative critics. They wanted an outlet to address curricular issues – problematizing the increasingly scripted and narrow curriculum, and offering resources for anti-racist, multicultural curriculum. They aimed to be both theoretically and practically engaged, and grounded in the policy issues affecting Milwaukee classrooms and communities. The initial core group of teachers included David Levine, Peterson’s housemate at that point; Rita Tenorio, a bilingual educator in MPS who would later work with Peterson to start La Escuela Fratney, Wisconsin’s first bilingual school; Bob Lowe, an educational historian at Marquette University; Cynthia Ellwood, an educational scholar. Tony Baez, a community activists and leader of bilingual education and Peter Murrell, a high school teacher, also played important roles. After many hours of discussion and debate (who should their audience be, what constituted a quality article, should they be a clearing house for all progressive education issues, or have a more focused lens on social justice vision), in November 1986, they settled on the articles that would become the first issue of *Rethinking School*. On Peterson’s kitchen table, with a bottle of rubber cement and an Apple IIe computer, the first issue of *Rethinking Schools* was born.⁵¹⁴

Over the next decades, *Rethinking Schools* served as a flag pole to draw together overlapping waves of progressive activists concerned with union reform, implementing progressive curriculum and bilingual education, and addressing racially disproportionate Black suspensions. The newspaper’s vigorous opposition to curricula reform like single basal readers, outcome-based education and standards testing for kindergarten.⁵¹⁵ MTEA teachers were a key audience of *Rethinking Schools* – the production deadline for the journal’s first issue was the 1986 MTEA conference; they wanted the journal to be out in time to share with teachers’ discussion, and

⁵¹⁴ Peterson, 87.

⁵¹⁵ Priscilla Ahlgren, “Teachers Achieve Change through Own Newspaper,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 15, 1990.

regularly distributed the paper at building representative meetings.⁵¹⁶ Many *Rethinking Schools* organizers were active leaders in MTEA’s reform efforts. Working on *Rethinking Schools* enabled these teachers to cohere their ideas and analyses about how the union – and MPS – could be reformed. And, *Rethinking Schools*, in turn ran a number of important stories about union efforts – at times critical of its leadership and at times supportive of its efforts. These progressive flanks were committed to critiquing the shortcomings of the public school system, defending its existence, and calling for its improvement. But the ground around them was changing fast. New political pressures built up, not just to create vouchers and choice programs, but to constrict the public schools.

Breaking Points in the Public Schools

By the late 1980s, Milwaukee schools faced new problems. Enrollment had steadily ticked up over the decade and schools had become overcrowded.⁵¹⁷ Class sizes swelled. Existing buildings didn’t have enough classroom spaces. Yet, under the desegregation mandates, while traditional schools burst at the seams without improvements, specialty schools continued to expand, with more and more furnishings. One city-wide specialty school, for example, had 100 fewer students than Ninth Street school on the city’s predominantly Black neighborhood, yet was allocated four times as much space for its “specialty” curriculum – two art rooms, two music rooms, and a kiln.⁵¹⁸ Despite the real need for increased education funding for public schools, especially in predominantly Black neighborhoods, Governor Tommy Thompson pledged little financial support to Milwaukee public schools. The Governor’s 1988 budget would revise the school aid formula, negatively impacting districts like Milwaukee with high costs and low tax bases. It imposed a freeze on school district taxing and spending for 1988-89 and cost controls thereafter. The Governor also proposed a

⁵¹⁶ Peterson, “Beginning with the Birds: The Making of an Activist,” 87.

⁵¹⁷ “2019–20 Superintendent’s Proposed Budget: Informational Section,” 2019, 4B – 25.

⁵¹⁸ Bob Peterson, “Shortage of 1,685 Classrooms Raises Many Questions,” *Rethinking Schools* 3, no. 1 (1988).

voucher system that would allow 1000 MPS students to attend private, parochial and public schools throughout Milwaukee County at MPS' expense.

Property Tax Crisis and Reactions to Residency Requirements

The governor's major political concern was containing rising property taxes and assuaging voters' anger around their growing property tax burden. Between 1975 and 1988, property taxes in Wisconsin had risen 134%. During these same years, manufacturing taxes fell from 11.3% to 6.5%.⁵¹⁹ Yet very little public political discussion centered on increasing taxes for manufacturers. Instead, most discussion focused on reducing property taxes and containing costs. The state teachers' union, WEAC, proposed a sales tax to increase funds for schools, in an effort to maintain political palatability.

Schools were in a particular bind. They were one of the few city and county institutions that were required by law to seek voter approval before making capital improvements. Whereas the county could install new sewers or build more jails without first obtaining voters' approval, schools had to appeal to voters for permission to expand their facilities. Despite schools' desperate needs, property owners were reluctant to elect to tax themselves more – especially for Milwaukee's school district that was predominantly attended by children of color. The system of funding schools through referendum and property taxes enabled a racist logic to undergird resource redistribution, permitting predominantly white voters to withhold funds needed for the “undeserving” communities of color, living in poverty. In addition, funding schools through property taxes enabled corporations and manufacturers to see their tax rates lower, while homeowners watched theirs spike.

⁵¹⁹ Dave Weingrod, “Who’s Going to Pay for Our Schools?,” *Rethinking Schools* 2, no. 1 (1987).

In addition to racist sentiment, the reliance on property tax reflected a political landscape that was hamstrung by what sociologists Erik Wright and Joel Rogers call a “demand constraint.”⁵²⁰ Demand constraints refer to the real and perceived limits people can demand from their government under capitalism. Within capitalism, the state prioritizes and protects the interest of private firms, casting them as public interest.⁵²¹ Though schools needed funds and homeowners needed property tax relief, demands to increase manufacturing and capital gains taxes were constrained by the short-term priorities of those firms and the state’s commitment to assuaging capital’s needs.

Yet one of the functions of unions is precisely to mediate and intervene in this demand constraint – pushing back its horizon and re-arranging its elements such that new policies can flow from capitals’ needs. However, the Milwaukee teachers’ union did not use its power in this way. When one teacher proposed that MTEA develop a mobilizing plan for MTEA members to address funding disparities, the MTEA president, Don Feilbach, seemed taken aback. Feilbach had been a leader of MTEA for several decades, and was considered by many of a new group of teachers to be a ringleader of the “old guard.” The teacher had proposed that MTEA teachers organized against MPS budgets, urging MTEA teachers to draft an open letter to the citizens of Milwaukee, take out radio ads, picket the Governor at his next visit to Milwaukee and join a rally planned by WEAC. Feilbach, perhaps a touch defensive, said that MTEA staff and leaders was already considering possible activities in this area, though he did not elaborate what, when or how. The teacher said he thought the actions should be involuntary – the union should compel teachers to struggle to defend and improve public education – and his motion failed.⁵²² MTEA teachers did not mobilize its members to take action against the economic chokehold being placed around public schools.

⁵²⁰ Erik Olin Wright and Joel Rogers, *American Society: How It Really Works* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), 343–45.

⁵²¹ For an insightful discussion of the effects of “demand constraints” in schools and public education, see Apple, *Education and Power*.

⁵²² MTEA Building Representatives meeting, February 10, 1988. MTEA Archives.

Instead, the legislative item that really stirred Milwaukee teachers to action was a proposed bill to eliminate teachers' residency requirement. As we saw earlier, beginning in the late 1970s, Milwaukee teachers were required to live in the city of Milwaukee as a condition of their employment. Deeply unpopular with many teachers, the possibility of residency requirements' removal energized MTEA leaders and members to take actions. It was regularly a priority of member issue surveys and focus groups.⁵²³ MTEA devoted a significant amount of its legislative and lobbying clout to repealing residency, even seeking support from WEAC.⁵²⁴ "To be told that [teachers] have to live in a particular community is something that most of our members see as an insult," WEAC president Richard Collins declared MTEA's efforts. "It's just another one of those things that tells teachers they are being treated as second class citizens."⁵²⁵

Yet, the progressive factions of teachers affiliated with *Rethinking Schools* and Concerned Milwaukee Educators saw residency as an important social and economic principal that should be upheld. "Some of us think that having an attachment to the city is very important," stated a Juneau high-school teacher, "The fact that I teach in Milwaukee and have children in Milwaukee schools means that I care what my building looks like." What's more, the issue cleaved along racial lines. Paulette Copeland, an African American reading teacher and active in Educators United, reported that a number of African-American teachers felt that the increasing number of African American students in the district contributed to some teachers' desires to leave the city, where their children can attend suburban schools. Residency requirements provided a way for teachers to not only financially support the tax base that funded their salaries, but also to be more integrally linked to

⁵²³ Building Representative Focus Group, September 13, 1989, MTEA archives.

⁵²⁴ MTEA Building Representatives meeting, March 8 1989; January 10, 1990; April 11, 1990. MTEA Archives;

⁵²⁵ Curtis Lawrence, "Residency Rule Divides Teachers," *Milwaukee Journal*, October 10, 1993.

communities. “Our union already has a negative perception as a whole,” Copeland told the *Milwaukee Journal*. “They think of us as being out just for the concerns of teachers.”⁵²⁶

The issue of teacher residency would continue to divide teachers for most of the decade, providing among the few legislative concerns that drew significant teacher outcry. Defense of residency, in particular, led a group of more traditional unionists to form a counter faction, challenging the direction of Concerned Milwaukee Educators called New Directions.

MTEA's Internal Organization

For many teachers, the rise of external threats to public education, such as vouchers and privatization, brought into focus the limitations of MTEA's leadership model. MTEA's style of unionism relied heavily on professional staff to execute the priorities of MTEA's executive director and executive board. When union members attempted to introduce political issues or concerns into the union discussion, the president would frequently bat them aside. When building representatives were presented with the recommendations of MTEA's Political Action Committee for nominations, a number of teachers raised concerns with the nomination process as well as its results. For example, one teacher said he was concerned that the union was endorsing a candidate who had previously been opposed to integration. Feilbach responded saying the candidate was not opposed to integration, and that was the end of discussion.⁵²⁷ Feilbach made a special point of announcing that *Rethinking Schools*, which was handed out at many building representative meetings was *not* an MTEA publication and “should not be assumed that positions taken by the publication were the same as MTEA.”⁵²⁸

⁵²⁶ Lawrence.

⁵²⁷ MTEA Building Representatives meeting, March 8 1989. MTEA Archives.

⁵²⁸ MTEA Building Representatives meeting, December 12, 1990. MTEA Archives.

In addition to suppressing political discussion – much less possibilities of militant action – the existing leadership struggled to recognize equal membership of many of fellow members. In 1989, a number of educator assistants – many of whom were women of color – wanted to be constitutionally enabled to vote for MTEA’s officers. Although educator assistants, often called aides, comprised 25% of MTEA membership, they held only 2% of the officer positions. Their bargaining union was separate and subordinated from the main teacher bargaining unit; their contract had to be ratified by the teacher-controlled executive board for final approval, although they were not allowed to vote for MTEA officers that sat on the executive board. They were, as one aide asserted at the May 1989 building representative meeting on the subject, second class citizens.⁵²⁹ The teachers’ union has all the clout, one teacher acknowledged, until aides are fully enfranchised that two-tiered system will continue. While a number of teachers supported the measure to fully enfranchise aides to vote for officer positions, citing the need for a coherent and unified union, the majority of teachers opposed. The motion failed by a 85-62 margin, the issue punted to a study committee. It would be nearly thirty years before aides would gain the right to not just vote for MTEA officers, but to serve as MTEA officers.⁵³⁰

Thanks to the combined work of *Rethinking Schools* and union activism, the progressive caucus in Milwaukee, now called “Concerned Milwaukee Educators” successfully ran a slate of candidates in the 1991 MTEA officer elections. *Rethinking Schools* reported their election to be one of the biggest grassroots organizing successes of the year. As the editorial staff explained, “The slate’s platform of increasing member participation in the union and encouraging the union to work more actively in alliance with parent and community groups holds out promise for the future.”⁵³¹

⁵²⁹ MTEA Building Representatives meeting minutes, May 24, 1989. MTEA Archives.

⁵³⁰ This constitutional amendment was made at the May 10th, 2017 MTEA building representatives meeting.

⁵³¹ “The Year in Review: A Rethinking Schools Analysis,” *Rethinking Schools* 5, no. 4 (1991): 3.

1993 Tide Changes

But even the ascent of the progressive leadership in MTEA could not stem the major ground changes happening around public education. In addition to the advent of school vouchers, major alterations in public education financing were underway. In the early 1990s, Governor Thompson began following through on his promises to cap property taxes. In 1993, Thompson passed historic legislation placing revenue limits on school districts. This legislation prohibited local districts from taxing residents to fund schools without first getting voter approval through referendum. The revenue limits institutionalized unequal funding formulas in which high-poverty, low-property value districts lost the most aid. The legislation also prohibited school boards from using their taxing authority to raise funds to meet their communities specific needs, explicitly restricting teachers' salaries through a law called the Qualified Economic Offer (QEO).⁵³²

The funding limits especially impacted Milwaukee. Milwaukee public schools educated a high number of children living in poverty – 44% of MPS students came from families receiving welfare, nearly four times the state average. Yet because of changes in state aid allocation, in which high poverty districts lost aid, MPS faced nearly \$33 million budget shortfall, forcing Milwaukee public schools to close four year old kindergarten, lay off teachers, eliminate drivers' education, cut down on case managers and enact other cost controlling measures. The Democratic mayor of Milwaukee began to echo the growing conservative consensus that school choice programs, such as publicly-funded private charter schools and school vouchers, were the best way to address Milwaukee's education needs. The school district was in crisis, and the political leadership had no vision to address its short-term needs, much less a long-term proposal to address funding equity, tax structures, and the needs of under-resourced communities.

⁵³² Jack Norman, "Funding Our Future: An Adequacy Model for Wisconsin School," 2002.

When long-time Milwaukee education activist and Black community leader, Howard Fuller, became superintendent in 1991, many people hoped he would be able to provide necessary changes to strengthen Milwaukee public schools. Fuller's previous alliances with the Mitchell Commission convinced some conservative activists to temporarily suspend their critiques of MPS when Fuller assumed the superintendent's office.⁵³³ Within his first two years as superintendent, Fuller proposed a comprehensive building plan to improve MPS infrastructure. Calling for smaller class sizes, more resources for subjects such as art, music and computer science, Fuller sought to bring MPS schools equal to those of the surrounding suburbs. As a cost-saving measure, Fuller proposed contracting a number of educational responsibilities to community organizations.

His plan raised questions from all sides. Many elected officials, such as Mayor Norquist, decried the plan as too costly. Some teachers and activists, supportive of calls for more funding for schools and expanded building services, wondered just what was meant by "community organizations," and if private facilities would promote both equity and academic achievement? Despite some of these unresolved questions, many community activists, including *Rethinking Schools* editorial staff, pressed to support the plan. "Opponents complain that the Fuller proposal will increase property taxes," they remarked. "Why don't they join those forces with those who want to make public schooling less dependent on property taxes and work to change the current tax structures that benefit the rich and corporations? Why not help build the movement necessary to change federal budget priorities away from military spending and toward increased social spending?"⁵³⁴ These activists saw the plan as opening towards more equitable school funding.

But in 1993, when the building plan went up for a referendum in an attempt to bring more resources in MPS, instead of drawing forces together to support public schools, it revealed a major

⁵³³ Murphy and Falk, "A Loss of Trust."

⁵³⁴ "Support Fuller's Building Proposal," *Rethinking Schools* 6, no. 3 (1992): 2.

fissure in public education's base of support. Legal restrictions prevented Fuller from doing much more than simply announcing the referendum, prohibiting him from advocating for its necessity. The proposal garnered only weak support from would-be allies, such as the teachers' union. At the time of the referendum, the district had not approved a single contract of any of its 13 bargaining units, making it hard to leverage the support of MPS employees. But even more significantly, Milwaukee taxpayers proved unwilling to raise their taxes in order to improve public schools, revealing a racialized boundary around taxation and school finances. Sixty-eight percent of the voting age population in the city was white, 73 percent of MPS children were students of color. The higher the percentage of white people living in a voting district, the higher the percentage of no votes. In Milwaukee's overwhelmingly white 11th and 13th districts on the city's south side, 92% and 93% of voters rejected the referendum. By contrast, the more people of color living in a district, the higher the yes votes were. When the referendum failed, for many, it suggested the need to approach a new strategy. In the face of the referendum's defeat, MPS officials, including Fuller, turned to privatization schemes, such as charters, vouchers and contracting, in order to address education needs.⁵³⁵ Fuller doubled down on a wage freeze he had implemented to MPS educators the year before, offending and frustrating the union, who felt they had been punished for the failed referendum.

What's more, in MTEA the progressive slate lost the elections in the spring of 1993. Old guard leaderships assumed control over the union, although slightly rebranded. Capitalizing on

⁵³⁵ When I spoke to many of school choice architects in 2017, they acknowledged the unwillingness of white taxpayers to finance education for children of color, or children living poverty had not been resolved by school choice programs. Indeed, as school choice architects struggled to build the statewide political will to increase the amount of per-pupil state aid for choice programs, many realized that Wisconsin legislators who had initially voted to support Milwaukee's choice program did so because they thought it would be the cheaper way to educate Milwaukee's low-income children, especially children of color – not because they were ideologically committed to the superiority of private education, or racially-just education options. Author interview with Tim Sheehy, February 8, 2017. See *Rethinking Schools* for a full discussion about the private contracting plans brokered by MPS during this time.

teachers' defensiveness after both wage freezes and political lambasting, this group of MTEA teachers called themselves "New Direction," in an attempt to steer the union away from the priorities of the progressive slate. "Teachers care about residency! Our Hero will be the person who gets rid of residency!" read one of their flyers.⁵³⁶ As this flyer articulated, the most important political issue for teachers was repealing residency. And teachers wanted someone who would magically take it away for them, rather than inducing teachers to organize themselves for more financial and political support of public schools. Concerned Milwaukee Educators' vision for greater racial equity within schools and stronger relationships with communities around schools fell by the wayside.

Within a few months of the new union leadership's election, a major friction between MTEA and MPS took place. Under Fuller's leadership, MPS had opened two African American immersion schools to be staffed predominantly by African American teachers. This staffing altered the maximum and minimum number of African American teachers in each school identified by the desegregation lawsuit and established in the MTEA contract. Although no white teachers had expressed interests in those jobs, MTEA filed a grievance against the schools staffing priorities for a contract violation. When the case ended up in the hands of an arbitrator, the courts ruled in MTEA's favor. Once again, MTEA sent a message that the educational needs of African American and Latino communities were less important than protecting the law and the letter of their contract. Watching from the sidelines, *Rethinking Schools* editors wondered, "Will the union circle its wagons and use the contract as an excuse to inflexibly reject reform proposals? Will all teachers be smeared with the brush of the union's seeming indifference to the crisis facing our children, or will the union leader build alliances with community, religious and labor groups to demand far-reaching reforms

⁵³⁶ "Is Our President Committed to Getting Rid of Residency" New Directions caucus flier. Bob Peterson papers.

that public schools are truly worthy of support? Will they come to understand that protecting the rights of teachers and ensuring all our children a quality education?”⁵³⁷

MTEA’s recalcitrant stance had two effects. First, it drove Fuller and his allies to forcefully denounce MTEA specifically and teachers’ unions generally. In 1995, Fuller quit midway through his term, citing his frustrations with the teachers’ union as rationale.⁵³⁸ After resigning as superintendent of MPS, Fuller went on to become a national school choice leader. Building strategic alliances with non-traditional allies, like the conservative Bradley Foundation and the Walton family, Fuller assembled a complex and contradictory network of actors interested in advancing school choice, despite their divergent motivations.

Second, MTEA’s recalcitrance revitalized the calls to reform the teachers’ union. In 1994, Bob Peterson, MTEA activist and *Rethinking Schools* editor, issued a call to reform teachers’ unions in the pages of *Rethinking Schools*. If teachers’ unions hope to positively influence education, he argued, they must reconsider their traditional stances on seniority, teacher evaluation, tenure, school governance. They must recommit themselves to broader social issues confronting schools. “Some people will view it heresy even to suggest such discussion. Within certain Milwaukee circles I will no doubt be labeled as ‘anti-union,’” Peterson acknowledged. “But attacking the messenger has never been a useful strategy for coping with change. A committed trade unionist should be open to such discussion.”⁵³⁹ Peterson’s call quickly brought together alliances nationally. The following fall, he joined forces with more than two dozen educators nationally to release a seven point program calling for “social justice unionism.”

However, Peterson’s vision for re-inventing social justice teacher unionism was up against a growing narrative of teachers and teachers’ unions as greedy, lazy, “worms in the apple” special

⁵³⁷ “Year in Review.”

⁵³⁸ “Milwaukee School Superintendent Is Resigning,” *New York Times*, April 20, 1995.

⁵³⁹ Bob Peterson, “Which Side Are You On,” *Rethinking Schools* 8, no. 1 (1993).

interests groups.⁵⁴⁰ In the 1990s, mainstream media presented a very different portrait of teachers' concerns and the work of teachers' unions and took a number of its key framing from Milwaukee. In 1991, the media company NBC arranged to wire a camera to a student at North Division High school, the predominantly Black school on Milwaukee's north side, and captured video footage of a teacher making disparaging remarks about school's student population, and scenes of students playing dice in a classroom, while teachers idly looked on.⁵⁴¹ Additional accounts surfaced of teachers' flagrant mercenary disciplinary approaches, such as one teacher who held a child's face in a toilet, another teacher who made a child wear a dunce cap. Media accounts of each of these cases focused on teachers' unions defense of the teachers in question. Dr. Fuller, the district superintendent at this time, became incensed and publicly began mobilizing against the teachers' union, coining the phrase the "dance of the lemons," to describe inadequate teachers' travels from classroom to classroom.⁵⁴²

By the mid 1990s, the rising threat of school privatization, budget cuts and the growing negative publicity on teachers and teachers' unions stirred a new awakening among MTEA factions. As pressure grew around Milwaukee public schools -- including a 1992 legislative proposal to grant the Milwaukee School Board the power to close schools deemed "failing" -- MTEA and WEAC began to work more closely together.⁵⁴³ In 1994, they formally re-affiliated. Their reunification marked a new awareness within MTEA's leadership of the need to address the political and economic conditions surrounding public schools, not simply address wages and benefits. In the

⁵⁴⁰ Moe, *Special Interest: Teachers Unions and America's Public Schools*; Peter Brimelow, *The Worm in the Apple: How the Teacher Unions Are Destroying American Education* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

⁵⁴¹ Daniel Nelsen, Arbitration Dispute between MTEA and Milwaukee Board of School Directors: Thomas Clark suspension case, Case 237 (1992).

⁵⁴² Howard Fuller, *No Struggle, No Progress: A Warrior's Life from Black Power to Education Reform* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2014).

⁵⁴³ In 1990, MTEA entered a two-year interaction agreement with WEAC that politically allied the two organizations, while retaining their financial independence and organizational autonomy. See MTEA Building Representative minutes, March 1990, MTEA archives.

words of one MTEA teacher leader, MTEA realized “we were not going to be able to take this [voucher movement] on if this was going to become a national issue. And ... we were warned that this isn't going to stop here, this is going to grow and grow and grow...”⁵⁴⁴ Shortly after the reaffiliation, Don Ernest, a long time executive director of the union and member of the “old guard” staff leadership, retired. Many speculated his retirement was spurred by the rising discontent with the “old guard” style unionism, of which he had been a long-term leader. (In the 1977 strike discussed in Chapter Five, Ernest had been arrested for physically blocking non-striking teachers, many of whom were Black, from entering school buildings.⁵⁴⁵) His resignation marked a new chapter in the union, including among the “New Directions” caucus. Shortly thereafter, the New Directions leadership formally announced its commitment to improving public schools and commitment to education reform. Among the program’s platforms, the initiative would agree to contract modifications in order to support school-based reform, an attempt to correct the community anger and frustration at African American immersion schools.

However, just stating a commitment to new priorities was hardly the same thing as organizing to make them happen. Many teachers, especially those in the progressive caucus, worried these orations were too little, too late. As Mike Langyel, long-time progressive activist, *Rethinking Schools* founder, early member of Educators United and CME, grumbled, “I think it was probably more important to change, probably 5,10,15 years ago. If we would have done it then, our house would be in order.”⁵⁴⁶ Even the *Milwaukee Journal*, hardly an ally of progressive education reform, watched with interest. “Right now the union is a big part of the problem of a dysfunctional school system,” quipped an editorial. “Will union leaders now pursue the enlightened course?”⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁴ Interview with author, August 2, 2017.

⁵⁴⁵ Curtis Lawrence, “Hard-Line Director of Teachers Union Resigns,” *Milwaukee Journal*, March 31, 1994.

⁵⁴⁶ Curtis Lawrence, “Union Vows Change but Clings to Past,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, November 21, 1995.

⁵⁴⁷ “Teachers Get a Chance for Change,” *Milwaukee Journal*, April 1, 1994.

A New Kind of Unionism?

The journey towards an “enlightened course of action,” catalyzed around teachers’ professional development. Distressed by the growing portrayal of teachers’ unions as protectors of bad teachers -- rather than defenders of due process -- members of both factions wanted to seriously address the issue of professional quality. Members of New Directions and CME worked together to develop a peer evaluation program, in which veteran teachers mentored, supported and counseled new teachers. Their work aligned with new vision of teacher unionism was coming into focus nationally.

In 1997, NEA president Bob Chase issued a statement formally calling for teachers’ unions to let go of their industrial union mindset, in which administrators and teachers are antagonistic, towards a model of teacher unionism that puts teachers responsible for education quality. “It is our job as a union to improve those teachers or, failing that,” Chase told the National Press Club, “get them out of the classroom.”⁵⁴⁸ As Chase explained, the new vision of unionism demanded “putting issues of school quality front and center at the bargaining table, collaborating actively with management on an agenda of school reform, involving teachers and other school employees in organizing their school for teachers.” In addition to working closely with school boards and parents to ensure educational quality, the NEA president declared teachers unions should work with the business community to help prepare a competent and literate future workforce, as well as with the Clinton administration’s vision for 21st century schools. Chase’s vision reflected the vision of

⁵⁴⁸ Bob Chase, “The New NEA: Reinventing Teacher Unions for a New Era,” speech excerpted in *Rethinking Schools* 11, no. 3 (1997).

professional teacher unionism articulated in scholars Charles Kerchner and Julia Koppich's account of teacher union professionalism.⁵⁴⁹

In Milwaukee, Chase's statement sparked debate. Union leaders affiliated with the old guard leadership walked out of the NEA convention on the discussion. "We are opposed to a system that puts a teacher in the role of firing other teachers," seethed MTEA's assistant director to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*.⁵⁵⁰ Other, including Paulette Copeland, an early member of Educators United and CME leader, supported this vision. Copeland used part of Chase's call in her campaign materials when she ran for president of MTEA. In 1997, Copeland won the union presidency election, becoming the first African American woman to serve as MTEA president. Fellow MTEA progressive activist Bob Peterson and *Rethinking Schools* co-founder, used Chase's comments to develop more forcefully his vision of social justice unionism. As he described, social justice unionism stood in contrast to industrial model unionism *and* professionalism unionism. Industrial unions, in Peterson's characterization, exclusively defend the legal rights of teachers and take a hand-off approach on virtually every other issue, including teacher quality. Professional unions attempt to look beyond the self-interest of teachers to enhance the well-being of schools and children's needs and implement internal control mechanisms like peer evaluation to do such. Social justice unions, Peterson argued, went a step further. "Under a social justice union model, the scope of accountability goes even further and includes parents and community."⁵⁵¹ In particular, a social justice union must address race and racism endemic to schools, actively calling for multicultural and anti-racist training for educators and must work to build political coalitions with communities of color. Like a three-legged stool, Peterson explained, social justice unions rest on three supports:

⁵⁴⁹ Charles T Kerchner and Julia Koppich, *A Union of Professionals: Labor Relations and Educational Reform* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993).

⁵⁵⁰ Joe Williams, "Local Teachers Resist Peer Review," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, July 10, 1997.

⁵⁵¹ Bob Peterson, "A New Vision of Teacher Unionism," *Rethinking Schools* 11, no. 4 (1997).

bread and butter issues like wages and benefits; professional concerns around teaching and learning; and social justice issues in the community and curriculum.⁵⁵² The first model of social justice teachers' unionism was underway.

But was Peterson's vision of social justice unionism strategically and theoretically correct? Should teachers' "bread and butter" issues be separated from social justice concerns? Ought teachers' unions abandon the tools of industrial unions, such as strikes, in favor of more amicable relationships with administrators? Would social justice issues be accepted by teachers as a core function of teachers' unions? Or would that third stool leg, per Peterson's framing, be snapped off as pressure from more expedient and urgent issues grew? Such concerns were echoed by teachers across the country, who were troubled by the rejection of industrial model of organizing, in favor of "social justice" priorities that may, in effect, erode workers' basic rights. "Wages, benefits, and working conditions may be represented as crude economic issues," a teacher presciently wrote to *Rethinking Schools*. "But the private sector "free market" knows very well that when teachers take on these issues, they are more than merely economic. Such struggles have put teachers in a position of control where we can assert our democratic voice and vision."⁵⁵³

Another teacher, Lois Weiner, offered an important reframing of Peterson's concept in a letter to the editor. "It's critical to understand that the unions today aren't bad because they're too combative, too confrontation, too 'industrial'" Weiner wrote. "They're just bad unions, in most cases bureaucratic shells. To fight well for teachers they'd have to be more democratic and active as organization. To win on big issues, they'd have to develop solid relations with parent and advocacy groups that want to improve schools. ... The new teachers' union has nothing to say about this problem because it's given up on struggle. But teachers will have to struggle as worker and citizens

⁵⁵² Bob Peterson, "A Revitalized Teacher Union Movement: Reflections from the Field," *Rethinking Schools* 29, no. 2 (2015).

⁵⁵³ Mariellen Cardella, "Industrial Unionism' Is Not a Pejorative!," *Rethinking Schools* 13, no. 1 (1998).

to not only rethink schools but actually change them.”⁵⁵⁴ Weiner’s call for teachers to struggle as an important component of unionism, professional, industrial or otherwise, made an important clarification.⁵⁵⁵ The *form* of union activity – that is, how unionists pursue their demands, be it contracts, negotiations, protests or strikes – both diverged from *and* informed the *content* of union’s concerns – teachers’ wage interests alongside their professional needs and community alliances. To see union’s concerns with social justice as separate from its capacity to bargain, to strike, or to forge solidarity, was perhaps to misapprehend the unique power of a union.

Conclusion

This chapter chronicles the political struggles within MTEA during the 1980s and 1990s. As the political ground around Milwaukee Public Schools became increasingly unstable, it became clear to a number of teachers that the union could no longer afford to merely concern itself with its narrow interests. These teachers believed the teachers’ union needed to confront the changing political conditions head-on, with the hopes of changing them. Their vision for the union challenged the old guard model of teacher unionism. Through the progressive education journal *Rethinking Schools*, and an informal caucus of progressive educators within the union, Milwaukee teachers began advancing a program of social justice unionism. More than an organizing model, this program challenged the *ideological* models of teachers’ unionism, pushing unions to make social justice issues a central program of the union’s agenda. But would changing the messaging and motto of teachers’ unions be enough to reform the ground on which they stood? Would these teachers’ architectural blueprint of social justice unionism be able to withstand the structural assaults on public education that would accelerate over the coming decade? And would this tendency within the union to have

⁵⁵⁴ Lois Weiner, “Teachers Unions Not ‘Too Industrial,’” *Rethinking Schools* 13, no. 1 (1998): 23.

⁵⁵⁵ Dr. Weiner has since expanded this thinking and analysis. Lois Weiner, *The Future of Our Schools: Teachers Unions and Social Justice* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012).

the muscle power to actually build their vision? The next chapter takes up these questions. I look to broad community coalitions to defend public education that catalyzed in 2009 in response to a mayoral takeover, and I trace how these community coalitions strengthened and complicated efforts within the teachers' union.

Chapter Seven: RE-FORM

“None of this, The savior is coming, business:” Milwaukee’s progressive movement for public education, 2009-2017

“However much one cursed at the time, one realized afterwards that one had been in contact with something strange and valuable. One had been in a community where hope was more normal than apathy or cynicism.”

-- George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, p. 79

“Basically, keep moving until it’s called dancing.”

--Nick Sturm, “Lettuce”

Introduction

On a Saturday morning in January 2017 in a church basement just north of Milwaukee’s downtown, the day after President Donald Trump’s inauguration, two African American women in their sixties were busy setting up folding chairs and tables, laying out stacks of papers, readying a projector for a community forum they were about to host. Across the country, this was a morning of resistance. From Alaska to Washington D.C., millions had bundled up – many wearing oddly-shaped, pink hats – to march against ascending misogyny, racism and corporate greed recently installed in the Oval Office. Over the past decade, rising inequality had spurred waves of protests, from the Wisconsin Uprising to Occupy Wall Street to Black Lives Matter. Heretofore those actions had been seen as distinct and separated from one another. In 2017, the magnification and multiplication of demands collided into an amalgam of new energy; for many, this was their first

participation in any kind of direct political actions.⁵⁵⁶ Populist energy on the left and the right surged as people fought to take politics back for themselves.⁵⁵⁷

Unlike the bullhorns and crowds and posters of the Women’s march that emerged that morning, to dissipate by afternoon, Gail Hicks and Marva Herndon’s resistance had been a slow, quiet project of years. In the basements of their own homes and in community buildings -- like the church basement they were setting up that morning -- Hicks and Herndon have investigated educational privatization in Milwaukee and educated their community about its effects. They have studied the tangle of money and politics exacted at the hands of Democrats and Republicans, white businessmen and Black community leaders alike. They examine documents, request information, attend public meetings. They ask questions, draft flyers and pamphlets, publicize what they learn. They are committed to understanding how educational privatization strangles resources away from public schools, while clearing a path for private interests. Armed with this information, they educate their communities about what they see happening. One such community education session is happening this Saturday morning at the Philadelphia Baptist Church. “You can’t protest what you’re not aware of,” Gail tells the audience, a mash of twenty or so people of all ages and races, that has gathered in the basement that morning.⁵⁵⁸

This chapter looks at the progressive, education-oriented coalition in Milwaukee that arose amidst bipartisan calls to expand private vouchers and charters and to remove the democratic governance structures of public education, from school boards to unions. I look at two aggressive attacks on public education in Milwaukee and Wisconsin – the 2009 proposal for mayoral takeover

⁵⁵⁶ Charlotte Alter, “Marchers Say They’re Going to Stay Active in Politics,” *Time Magazine*, January 2017, <http://time.com/4642488/womens-march-washington-dc-donald-trump-action>.

⁵⁵⁷ This identification of a ‘populism moment’ heeds Chantal Mouffe’s definition, who writes, “We can speak of a ‘populist moment’ when under the pressure of political or socioeconomic transformations, the dominant hegemony is being destabilized by the multiplication of unsatisfied demands.” Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (New York: Verso, 2018), 11.

⁵⁵⁸ Fieldnotes, January 21, 2017.

of Milwaukee public schools and the 2011 Act 10 legislation which curtailed public-sector unions' rights – and examine how each attack catalyzed a progressive, community-driven response. A 2009 bipartisan proposal to conduct a mayoral takeover of the Milwaukee school board spurred the formation of activist-oriented community coalition to resist the plan. After successfully defeated the 2009 takeover proposal, the community coalition did not dissolve, but rather continued and expanded its work of defending public schools in Milwaukee and fighting privatization. The coalition's efforts in 2009, I argue, prodded the Milwaukee teachers' union to take action against the mayoral takeover, ultimately causing its failure. What's more the progressive momentum generated by the coalition encouraged the re-organization of the Milwaukee teachers' union, as progressive activists took over union leadership and steered the union s a business model of “bread and butter” union towards a “social justice” union, especially in light of union's curtailed bargaining powers in the aftermath of Wisconsin Act 10.

Whereas much of the existing literature on community coalitions and unions assumes labor unions as the primary catalyst of community coalitions, I argue the opposite took place in Milwaukee: an emboldened community coalition re-ignited a militant, “social justice” teachers' union.⁵⁵⁹ To be sure, as Chapter Six documents, the ideological architecture of this “social justice” teachers' union had slowly been assembling for two decades prior. But the efforts struggled to manifest beyond leadership scuffles and rhetorical calls for more active and community-oriented

⁵⁵⁹ Bruce Nissen, “The Effectiveness and Limits of Labor-Community Coalitions: Evidence from South Florida,” *Labor Studies Journal* 29, no. 1 (2004): 67–88; Janice Fine, “Community Unions and the Revival of the American Labor Movement,” *Politics & Society* 33, no. 1 (2005): 153–99, doi:10.1177/0032329204272553; Simon Black, “Community Unionism without the Community? Lessons from Labor-Community Coalitions in the Canadian Child Care Sector,” 2018, doi:10.1177/0160449X18763442; Amanda Tattersall, “Coalitions and Community Unionism Effective Union-Community Collaboration” 21, no. 4 (2008): 415–32, doi:10.1108/09534810810884821; Kim Moody, *US Labor in Trouble and Transition: The Failure of Reform from above, the Promise of Revival from Below* (New York: Verso, 2007); Jon Shelton, “Compulsory Unionism and Its Critics: The National Right to Work Committee, Teacher Unions, and the Defeat of Labor Law Reform in 1978,” *Journal of Policy History* 29, no. 3 (2017): 378–402, doi:10.1017/S0898030617000161.

engagement. The partnership that formed in 2009 between the Milwaukee teachers' union and the community coalition, now known as Schools and Communities United (SCU), has strengthened the respective activist aims of both groups. Yet, as I explore in the final section, this strategy contains limitations and contradictions. Strong ties with community partnership encouraged the union to adopt mobilizing and advocacy strategies — rather than labor's primary mechanism of withholding labor — to resist budget cuts and expanding education privatization. The independent strength of the community coalition may have created a false division between intra-district problems, such as curriculum, wages, and class sizes, considered the default domain of the union, and extra-district problems, such as charter authorization and funding, considered the domain of the community groups. While apportioning struggles for public education into separate spheres has extended the influence of the progressive struggle in education, this strategy may have disabled activists to attend to the fundamental interconnections between the problems within schools and the problems around schools. What's more, it may have confused the unique and distinct powers of community and labor to address these problems. Still, the work of this coalition has emboldened the teachers' union and helped generate a broad, multi-pronged movement for public education.

Communities Resisting School Choice

Gail Hicks and Marva Herndon are both key leaders in Milwaukee's progressive education coalition. Retired African American, long-time Milwaukee residents, Hicks and Herndon are the founding – and only – members of Women Committed to an Informed Community. Women Informed concerns itself with the spread of voucher and choice schools that have opened in Milwaukee, especially the city's predominantly Black northside, and the lack of transparent information about the motives and quality of these schools. Over the past decade, Hicks and Herndon have watched a rash of “choice” schools pop up in strip malls, service stations, warehouses

in their neighborhoods. Running on state-funded enrollment dollars, these schools may stay open for a few months or a few years, just long enough until the entrepreneurs find more profitable ventures elsewhere. Hicks and Herndon have listened to high-profile community members – many of them who they grew up alongside, such as Howard Fuller – tell the world these schools are the remedy of racial inequalities in education.

But Hicks and Herndon see a different story: “hustler academies,” in their words, schools that are “busy closing up, opening up, closing up, opening up”, as the school leaders make hand over fist in enrollment dollars or private foundation money.⁵⁶⁰ These “fly-by-night” schools often possess little academic orientation, employ staff with little to no education background, have scant capacity to attend to children’s education needs. Frequently, they cannot sustain either students’ needs or their own organizational needs. Hicks and Herndon have gathered a trove of stories of children with special education needs who get kicked out of schools, or schools that shut down months after opening. They watched families get tossed around by these schools, all the while public schools lose millions of dollars in funding. Meanwhile, they see supposed-community advocates getting bought off by the education privatizers. An appalling number of once-defenders of public education have since become the paid advocates of school choice, calling for charter and vouchers expansion. For example, in spring 2019, former Milwaukee School Board president Michael Bonds was charged in federal court for receiving financial kickbacks from charter schools he had authorized in his role as school board member. Though Bonds was once active in the 2009 struggles to resist mayoral takeover, he since used his authority as a school board director to oversee charter school expansion. Another school board member, Wendall Harris, (one of the chairs of the 2009 Coalition to Stop the Mayoral Takeover) has since supported charter school co-location – the practice of operating charter schools within existing public school buildings -- and expansion. In his 2019 school board campaign,

⁵⁶⁰ Interview with author, February 1, 2017.

it came to light that he received campaign contributions from pro-choice groups beyond the legal limit for campaign contributions.⁵⁶¹

Alarmed by what they've seen, Hicks and Herndon have taken it upon themselves to track down the web of mercenary interests behind school choice and to share the news with their community. "The public needs to know the good, the bad and the ugly about charter schools," Hicks told *The Shepherd Express* in 2015. "You are giving up your rights when you attend a charter school, your right to special education, your right to complain, your right to elect a school board. Parents find out far too late there's usually a private business of some sort in the background."⁵⁶²

This kind of educational effort is exactly what they are doing that Saturday morning at the Philadelphia Baptist Church. They've laid out a dozen handouts on a folding table: flyers for an upcoming school board candidate forum, newspaper articles about voucher scandals, pages and pages of spreadsheets of enrollment and financial information of Milwaukee's voucher and charter schools, a diagram explanation of the Milwaukee choice program, a pamphlet titled, "Making a decision about where to send your child to school." They have also included a graphic Marva designed that reads, "Don't Let the Dominoes Fall." If MPS goes bankrupt, the handout explains, the city of Milwaukee will go down with it; the City backs most of MPS' bonds. "Well, what's the solution?" Marva asks the assembled crowd. She doesn't wait for an answer. "Grab a voice, grab a picket sign. Run for office, run the snakes out. With privatization you give up your voice. This community has never spoken up for themselves ... Join a group, do something.... None of this, *The*

⁵⁶¹ Annysa Johnson, "MPS Candidate Forced to Return Contribution from Pro- School-Choice Business Lobby That Exceeded Limit," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, March 28, 2019; Annysa Johnson, "Michael Bonds, Former MPS Board President, Accused of Taking Kickbacks from Charter School Execs," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, April 11, 2019; Emily Files, "Controversy Shadows MPS Decision On Carmen Charter School Contract," *Wisconsin Public Radio*, January 23, 2019, <https://www.wuwm.com/post/controversy-shadows-mps-decision-carmen-charter-school-contract>.

⁵⁶² Lisa Kaiser, "Should Publicly Funded City Charter Schools' Files Be Opened to Taxpayer Scrutiny?," *The Shepherd Express*, December 15, 2015.

savior is coming, business.”⁵⁶³ Gail emphasizes Marva’s conclusion. “We need to organize. We *need* to *organize*.” A member of the audience, the president of a group called Parents for Public Schools, raises her hand to tell the audience about recently proposed legislation to strip the school board and give all the power to the governor. Gail holds her heads in her hands as the woman talks. When she sits back up, she speaks slowly. “Silence breeds consent. When you’ve said nothing, you give them the power.”⁵⁶⁴

Though on paper Hicks and Herndon are retired, their mornings, afternoons and evenings are packed with meetings: city council meetings, community organizing meetings, NAACP meetings, anti-privatization working group meetings, meetings with disenfranchised parents, meetings with reporters or, like myself, curious pupils. A former employee of Harley Davidson, Marva spent her career working as a computer programmer, one of the first Black women programmers in the state. She wears metal-framed glasses, hoop earrings and neatly coiffed hair, occasionally swapping out her cardigan for a Black Harley-Davidson hoodie. She speaks slowly and deliberately and her large, dimpled cheeks pull easily into a broad smile. Marva describes herself as “good with computers” and “a heavy reader.” Gail grins at me, eyes twinkling, “And I spend a lot of time frolicking out in the community.” A retired special education teacher, Gail has big, striking eyes, a mischievous sparkle lurking just behind their seriousness. While Gail is the feisty to Marva’s steady, they each bear a deep sense of care and concern for their community. While “out frolicking,” Gail often catches wind of new schools opening or closing, new venture or deal brokered, a child who has been unfairly removed from a school. She watches everything, notes “who’s talking to who, how they’re interacting with each other, stuff like that.”⁵⁶⁵ When she returns home, she calls Marva to tell her

⁵⁶³ During fall of 2018, Marva herself decided to run for Milwaukee school board. On April 2, 2019, she won her election by 27 votes.

⁵⁶⁴ Fieldnotes by author, January 21, 2017.

⁵⁶⁵ Interview with author, February 1, 2017.

what she's heard. Marva will boot up her computer and begin researching the operation in question. Marva and Gail's son and daughter married each other a few years ago; they have a grandchild together they also care for. They laugh and poke fun of each other, anointing nicknames to their associates ("Smart Nephew"; "Young Nephew"; "Huggy Bear") and themselves. They grin and tell me they occasionally call themselves the Snoop Sisters.

"So how did you guys start doing what you're doing?" I asked them one afternoon, sitting at a booth inside a Denny's on Milwaukee's northwest side.

"Oh, we never intended to do this," Marva tells me, reaching for sweetener for her coffee.

"No. Never." Gail says. "It was an accident," she laughs. "We went to a meeting, wasn't it?"

"Yeah, that's how it was," said Marva. "We was always acting, she in her neighborhood and me in mine... I'm always getting into crap."

As long-term neighborhood activists, they quickly became concerned with the proliferation of voucher schools opening and closing around them. "We'd do the research and start connecting the dots and then it just got worse, you know?" Gail explained to me. They began looking into how these schools got authorized and opened. They attended city council meetings to learn the approval process of many of these schools. They studied the schools' financials. When they'd gather enough information, they'd meet in Marva's basement and fire up a projector to map out everything they were seeing. Occasionally they'd make an appointment to tour a school, giving them the opportunity to ask the tough questions such as, Where is the school library? Is there an outdoor play space that is not also a parking lot? Or, if the school had a religious affiliation, they would ask the director to specify exactly what religious teachings they followed, a question that proved to be a surprising stumper for many.⁵⁶⁶ Quickly, they put together a portrait of the school choice movement: a convoluted network of rich business interests looking to make a dollar, not open a school system.

⁵⁶⁶ Ruth Conniff, "Voucher School Tour," *The Progressive*, August 2014.

They began attending Common Council meetings, Milwaukee's city government law-making body, to contest the continued authorization and approval of charter schools. Yet, they were troubled to learn that the Charter School Review Committee (CSRC) held its meetings not in public spaces, but in the private offices of the Institute for Transformation of Learning (ITL), a center run by Howard Fuller at Marquette University and funded by the Bradley Foundation. These meetings convened in private, with neither agenda nor minutes of past proceedings made available.

What's more, many members of the CSRC had conflicts of interests with the schools they were in charge of approving. Common Council president Willie Hines, for example, approved a charter of school run and operated by his brother. During a Council meeting in 2012 slated to authorize the charter school QUEST, Hicks and Herndon wanted to raise their concerns about the school's inadequate financing, lack of licensed teachers and insufficient technology. However, the school was backed by Howard Fuller and the ITL. How could the school be independently assessed, given the fact that not only were Fuller and his wife board members of the school, but the supposedly-independent city body that authorized charters was staffed by a number of Fuller's employees? Yet Council president Hines barred Hicks and Herndon from speaking. "This is a public hearing for the applicants," Hines reprimands. "This is not a public hearing for those of you in the audience."⁵⁶⁷ When Hicks and Herndon contested, Hines called security on them and had them removed from the meeting. For Hicks and Herndon, they are fighting not just private and school choice proponents, but state officials whose who fail to resist and denounce these actors, in both the city's common council and in the Milwaukee school board. "These guys are the culprits," Herndon

⁵⁶⁷ Lisa Kaiser, "City Officials Limit Public Comment on Charter Schools," *The Shepherd Express*, December 13, 2012, <https://shepherdexpress.com/news/features/city-officials-limit-public-comment-charter-schools/#/questions/>.

hisses, as she names the school board members and city council members who have both approved charter expansion, “They could stop this.”⁵⁶⁸

What’s more, Herndon and Hicks are fighting against the dominant understanding that school choice represents a racial justice struggle. This brings them face-to-face with many powerful interests in Milwaukee, including Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce (MMAC) and Howard Fuller. (These groups are so powerful and intertwined in Milwaukee, and Hicks and Herndon’s challenge to them is so pointed, their families have considered getting them personal security details.) “You know, what’s upsetting is when you see Howard Fuller and many other African Americans of so-called power, selling the good things about charters and vouchers and they’re making millions off them,” Hicks tells me.

As African-American women born and raised in Milwaukee, Hicks and Herndon are not only Fuller’s contemporaries; they are his female foils. Where Fuller has the backing of corporate foundations, Hicks and Herndon stand with community coalitions. Whereas Fuller sees education justice as a matter of preparing children of color for college, Hicks and Herndon see it as a function of robust democratic equality. Whereas Fuller negotiates with political and economic elites behind closed doors to authorize and fund charter schools, Hicks and Herndon call for transparent and open meetings. Whereas Fuller has made profitable sums from his work in educational reform in Milwaukee, Hicks and Herndon do their work without financial remuneration – intentionally so.⁵⁶⁹ “We don’t take money from any one,” Marva bluntly told the January 2017 community forum. “Our social security funds [our work]. We ARE NOT bought.” Hicks and Herndon present a bottom-up

⁵⁶⁸ Fieldnotes, January 21, 2017.

⁵⁶⁹ For example, in 1995, Fuller was appointed the director of the Bradley Foundation-funded Institute on Transformation of Learning, housed at Marquette University. Between 1995 and 2011, the Bradley Foundation gave \$1.7 million dollars to fund the institute. Erica Ladson, “Community Voice or Captive of the Right?: The Black Alliance for Educational Options” (Washington D.C., 2003).

solution for addressing schools, powered by strong community alliances and commitments from working people. Fuller presents a top-down one, funded and directed by elites.

Hick's and Herndon do not only present different class analyses than Fuller; they also evince different gendered orientations to coalition building. Their work evinces what labor historian Alice Kessler-Harris describes as the "tactics of moral suasion." In her examination of women's labor coalitions at the turn of the century, Kessler-Harris notes that women's historic exclusion from the workplace and subordination from workers' associations meant that women often lacked economic power or political voice adopted by trade unionists. As such, their efforts to struggle for better rights and working conditions embraced different methods. Women's "tactics of struggle," writes Kessler-Harris, "reflected the knowledge that moral outrage, not economic pressure, was [women's] trump card."⁵⁷⁰ Despite formal leadership or organizational structures, women trade unionists at the turn of the century developed organizing strategies that amplified their power sources – community bonds and moral authority – to achieve their goals. Nearly one hundred years later, Marva and Gail, also women organizers operating outside of formal organization structures, did similarly. Absent the money and political resources of their adversaries, Hicks and Herndon nurtured and sustained community bonds through forums such as these to channel moral outrage and indignation – necessary fuel for the struggles ahead.⁵⁷¹

Yet Hicks and Herndon depart from Fuller's vision not only in the aims of education, but its fundamental capacity to address inequality. While Fuller sees improving educational access for children of color as key to solving racial inequalities, Hicks and Herndon see the structural inequalities bearing upon people living in poverty or people of color as requiring independent, even primary, attention. As they frequently highlight, sending more and more children to receive higher

⁵⁷⁰ Alice Kessler-Harris, *Gendering Labor History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 55.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*

education doesn't magically solve the structural inequalities in their communities, particularly given the massive evacuation of jobs from Milwaukee. Without adequate jobs, how can parents have the resources to send their children to college, they ask challenging Fuller's vision of college preparation.⁵⁷² Corporate interests, such as MMAC, "claim to want to help our babies. ... Just put some jobs in our community, put some resources in our community," Gail tells a community forum gathered in NAACP's basement meeting space one spring evening.⁵⁷³ As they argue, turning to school choice to solve structural inequalities misdiagnoses the root problem of racial and economic injustice.

What's more, the proliferation of state-funded charter schools has created a superfluous cottage industry. State funds and grants to open charter schools have become among the few sources of income in the city. In 2019, a person interested in starting a charter is eligible to receive up to \$150,000 in "planning and implementation" funds from the Department of Public Instruction – even if they never end up opening a school.⁵⁷⁴ At a public hearing about a 2014 bill proposed to expand charter school authorization, Hicks explained to state legislators the \$1 million dollars of grant funds made available to charter school entrepreneurs that she and Herndon had uncovered in their research. "The reason why we call it the new hustler academies," she told the legislators, "is because, as you know, there's no employment in the city of Milwaukee. And this is an opportunity for people to get money. And it's on the backs of the children. The children are the ones that are suffering from this."⁵⁷⁵ Hicks and Herndon's argument is critical. In 2009, the joblessness rate in Milwaukee reached its all-time historic high; 53.3 percent of Black males in Milwaukee had no

⁵⁷² Bruce Thompson, "Do "No Excuses" Charter Schools Work?," *Urban Milwaukee*, November 11, 2016.

⁵⁷³ Fieldnotes, May 9, 2017.

⁵⁷⁴ "Wisconsin Charter School Grant Applications Available," Wisconsin Department of Instruction, January 30, 2018. <https://dpi.wi.gov/news/dpi-connected/wisconsin-charter-school-grant-applications-available>

⁵⁷⁵ Gail Hicks testimony to Wisconsin Assembly Urban Education Committee hearing on AB 549, January 9, 2014. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urzRf44azbM>

work.⁵⁷⁶ One of the school choice movement's self-acclamations is that, unlike public school bureaucracies and especially greedy teachers' unions, school choice is "about the children." Yet Hicks and Herndon's research debunks the movement's main story of its self. School choice is driven by the material self-interests of the schools' operators, over and above what is best for children.

Today, Hicks and Herndon join forces with the group Schools and Communities United (SCU), a progressive coalition committed to defending and improving public schools that grew out of the 2009 attempt to takeover the mayoral school district. That fight in 2009 sparked a new community struggle, as I will explain in the following sections.

Political Attack: The 2009 Mayoral Takeover Attempt

Hicks and Herndon first got started fighting school privatization in 2009, when the Democratic mayor of Milwaukee and Democratic governor began toying with proposals to eliminate the school board of Milwaukee public schools. In the fall of 2009, what had been a quiet war waging Milwaukee public schools for nearly two decades broke into a boisterous battle. In late August 2009, Democratic Governor Jim Doyle announced a plan to authorize the Milwaukee mayor to operate and oversee MPS, rather than the elected school board. Earlier that spring, McKinsey & Co., a high-profile management consulting firm, had issued a 103-page report analyzing MPS' financial trends, at Doyle and Barrett's behest. "The Milwaukee Public School District faces substantial academic and financial challenges," the report asserted. "At a time when new strategies and investments are needed to improve student performance, MPS' financial situation is increasingly precarious."⁵⁷⁷ To address the district's pending financial collapse and its academic woes, the McKinsey findings urged

⁵⁷⁶ Marc V Levine, "The Crisis Deepens : Black Male Joblessness in Milwaukee, 2009," 2010.

⁵⁷⁷ "Toward a Stronger Milwaukee Public Schools," 2009.

the school district to cut employees' health insurance benefits, including eliminating health insurance coverage for part-time employees. The report made recommendations such as offering pre-packaged meals for students and hiring lower-paid food service employees as a way of pursuing "improved efficiencies." For the Milwaukee mayor and state governor this report as became a warrant for their recommendations to issue a mayoral takeover of the school district. "We absolutely have to turn up the heat on this system," declared Barret upon the release of the McKinsey report.⁵⁷⁸

Doyle and Barrett's proposed legislation authorized Milwaukee's mayor, rather than the elected 9-member school board, to appoint Milwaukee's superintendent, determine the school district's budget and fiscal issues, curriculum, facility decisions and collective bargaining, all the previous duties of the elected school board. The superintendent would have new powers to control the schools and their operating, including breaking schools into new districts, opening or closing new schools, and giving the superintendent permission to sell school buildings. Milwaukee's powerful business lobby and school choice leaders, MMAC, strongly backed the proposal. (Indeed, they had reportedly met with the mayor and the governor for several years to discuss a proposal along these lines).⁵⁷⁹ When the proposal was publicly announced, members of Milwaukee's business community vocally supported and stood behind the plan, including MMAC and the Greater Milwaukee Committee. Mayor Tom Barrett speculated that if passed, he would seriously consider appointing a businessperson, not an educator, as superintendent.⁵⁸⁰ In addition, the proposal was backed by a bipartisan swath of Milwaukee representatives, including Democrats Lena Taylor, Jason Fields, Jon Richards, Pedro Colón and Jeff Pale. Their support for mayoral control stemmed from "there is no alternative" reasoning that pervaded; taking control of the school district was the only

⁵⁷⁸ Alan Borsuk, "Study Finds Millions in Waste at Milwaukee Public Schools," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, April 9, 2009.

⁵⁷⁹ Lisa Kaiser, "Wall Street hedge fund managers find a toehold in Wisconsin," *Shepherd Express*, January 10, 2010.

⁵⁸⁰ Joel McNally, "Baffling Political Battle," *The Shepherd Express*, 2009.

way of dealing with the large swath of problems facing MPS and its growing Black-white achievement gap. Accountability by way of top-down political control and business-style management was the only way out, these supporters argued.

The rationale for mayoral takeover was layered with urgency and national momentum by President Obama's Race to The Top (RTTT) initiative. Obama's signature education policy that awarded funding to schools that had adopted high-accountability reforms, like implementing performance pay for teachers, closing low-performing schools and opening more privately-managed charters. In Wisconsin, Governor Doyle and Milwaukee mayor Tom Barrett declared Wisconsin would not be eligible for RTTT funds if they didn't assume mayoral control over MPS, though this rumor was soon debunked by local politicians and even Secretary of Education Arne Duncan himself.⁵⁸¹

In addition to Democratic elected officials and the media, State Superintendent Tony Evers also joined the powerful elite pushing for a takeover. Shortly after the public hearing in which the public overwhelmingly spoke their opposition to the takeover plan, Evers announced he would withhold federal Title I funds to MPS unless they sought serious reorganization.⁵⁸² His announcement aligned him with the chorus of the "education reformers" who saw those defending public schools as being content with public schools as defenders of the "status quo."⁵⁸³ All to say, the logic of conservative education "reform" ran deep: even the state superintendent decried

⁵⁸¹ Though Arne Duncan was highly supportive of mayoral control, it was *not* a criteria of RTTT funds. Although Governor Jim Doyle and Milwaukee mayor Tom Barrett claimed this falsehood as warrant for their proposal for mayoral takeover of Milwaukee public schools, Milwaukee Congresswoman Gwen Moore wrote a letter to Duncan requesting clarification. In Duncan's response to Moore, he unequivocally stated mayoral control was not an eligibility criteria for RTTT. Moore, Gwen, "Let's have a real MPS debate," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, September, 26, 2009. Letter from Milwaukee Board of School Directors Michael Bonds to Governor Jim Doyle, January 18, 2010. Bob Peterson personal papers.

⁵⁸² Letter to MPS District Administrator Andrekopoulos from State Superintendent of Public Instruction, "Notice of Decision to Reduce Administrative Funds and Defer Programmatic Funds Under 20 U.S.C. § 6311 through 6339," Feb. 2010.

⁵⁸³ Evers press release, February 4, 2010. Peterson personal papers.

Milwaukee public schools as failing and in need of drastic reform, such as financial sanctions and governance takeover, to resolve the problems of Milwaukee public schools.

This was not, in fact, the first time a Wisconsin governor had attempted to take-over the Milwaukee public schools. In 1998, Republican Governor Thompson had proposed a state takeover of Milwaukee public schools and to replace the school board with a three-person committee, appointed by the governor.⁵⁸⁴ Although MTEA opposed this proposition, they did not call for massive teacher activism or engagement about the issue, nor did significant community coalitions to defend the school board arise. Yet a decade later, when a Democratic governor proposed an eerily similar plan, debates around public education had shifted drastically to the right. Whereas the advent of vouchers in Milwaukee had caused shock and controversy in 1990, by 2009 the proliferating varieties of school choice had taken place with either little reaction or outright celebration by mainstream politicians on both the left and the right.. By 2009, school choice programs had become practically a mantle of mainstream Democrats at the national, state and local level. Many saw President Barack Obama’s education policy, Race to the Top, for example, as merely an extension of a corporate-style education model legislated by preceding conservatives.⁵⁸⁵

Nationally, the push to takeover public schools from Democrats *and* Republicans marked the emergence of the “post-politics” period, in the formulation of theorist Chantal Mouffe. The post-politics era blurs the political frontier between the left and the right, as both mainstream political tendencies accept the dictates of financial capitalism and state retrenchment.⁵⁸⁶ As Mouffe explains,

⁵⁸⁴ Joe Williams, “MPS Given Two Years, or Else,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, January 21, 1997. MTEA is noted as opposing this issue; however, there is no mention of the bill or MTEA’s opposition in its teacher publications, such as *The Sharpener*.

⁵⁸⁵ Elizabeth Todd-Breland, *A Political Education: Black Politics and Education Reform in Chicago Since the 1960s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 221. Gillian Russom, “Obama’s Neoliberal Agenda for Education,” in *Education and Capitalism: Struggles for Learning and Liberation*, ed. Jeff Bale and Sarah Knopp (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 109–34. Diane Ravitch, *Reign of Error: The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America’s Public Schools*, First (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013).

⁵⁸⁶ Mouffe, *For a Left Populism*, 17.

the era of “post-politics” bleeds into a period of “post-democracy,” in which corporate interests overpower virtually all other groups, thereby eliminating democracy’s mandates for equality and popular sovereignty. Previous political divisions of left vs. right divides are more poignantly expressed by economic boundary of “top” vs. “bottom”, or “haves” vs “have-nots.” In 2009 in Milwaukee, the post politics era attempted to break full display in Milwaukee in 2009, as corporate-backed education plans positioned themselves to wash away democratic control of the school board. Yet not all in Milwaukee were ready to cede either their democratic institutions or their political power to the mandates of the corporate-backed political class.

Resist and Re-energize: The Coalition to Stop the 2009 Mayoral Takeover

In Milwaukee, financial and political elites’ calls to take-over the public schools and eliminate the democratically-elected school board did not fly with many Milwaukee residents unwilling to let go of their democracy. How did a broad coalition of Milwaukeeans come together to resist and ultimately stop the plans for a mayoral takeover, that had financial and political backing of national, state and local elites, and what were its effects?

Almost immediately after Barrett and Doyle announced their plans to takeover, a group of concerned educators, parents and community activists, including Gail Hicks and Marva Herndon, sprang into action. NAACP President Wendell Harris and Bob Peterson, a 5th grade teacher, member of Educators for Social Justice Network (ENSJ) and long-time Milwaukee education

activist chaired the coalition.⁵⁸⁷ The coalition rejected the framing that reducing democratic control of MPS would solve the school district's problems. As Milwaukee Congresswoman Gwen Moore wrote in September 2009, "There's no question that Milwaukee Public Schools district has challenges to overcome; not a person this debate would argue otherwise." Yet she presented different causes of these problems than a democratically elected school board. As she wrote in op-ed in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, "MPS's achievement gap and a 69% graduation rate are borne of our vicious cycles of poverty, joblessness, skyrocketing teen pregnancy rate and the perverted public policies that send millions of Milwaukee's state education dollars to the suburbs," Moore declared.⁵⁸⁸ Taking over the democratically elected school board did little to address these fundamental problems.

The concerned activists quickly circulated a petition to stop the takeover, bringing in more than two dozen groups to join their efforts – the largest education coalition the city had seen since the 1970s desegregation battles. The Coalition to Stop the Takeover, as they called themselves, did not agree on all points or even all strategies. When the coalition encountered strategy or priority differences, Peterson would often quote civil rights activist Bernice Johnson: If you're in a coalition and you're comfortable, your coalition isn't broad enough.

The group developed three points of unity to guide their work: oppose the takeover; protect voter rights; and invest in parent and community involvement in our schools. Operating as a

⁵⁸⁷ Founded in 2008 with the help of *Rethinking Schools*, ENSJ is a network of activist educators from southeastern Wisconsin committed to anti-racist, anti-bias education training. One of their first projects involved working with the NAACP to halt a \$4.8 million textbook adoption. That campaign brought in a number of other community groups, including the YWCA and Milwaukee Area Jewish Committee, and ultimately led to the adoption of a more progressive textbook series and allocation of \$500,000 federal stimulus funds to start an initiative within MPS called CLEaR Justice: Addressing Class, Language, Ethnicity and Race. This campaign forged relationships and momentum that helped the Coalition to Stop the Takeover hit the ground running. "Report on the Coalition to Stop the Takeover," November 28, 2009. Bob Peterson personal papers. Peterson, Bob. "Teach students the whole history of our country," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, September 14, 2008.

⁵⁸⁸ Gwen Moore, "Let's have a real MPS debate," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Sept. 26, 2009.

decentered unity – that is, a broad alliance of progressive groups, with multiple voices and subject positions sans an “official” bureaucratic party line –enabled ample room for debate and disagreement within the coalition, while still working towards their shared principles.⁵⁸⁹

Fundamentally, members of the coalition wanted more democracy for Milwaukee and its public schools – not less. “While we know that the Milwaukee Public Schools need improvement,” the coalition wrote in its initial documents. “We believe that taking away the right of the people to elect our school board representatives hurts democracy and does not contribute to MPS students’ academic success.”⁵⁹⁰ In an op-ed printed in the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Milwaukee NAACP executive committee member, Henry Hamilton and Christine Neumann-Ortiz, executive director of the immigrant rights’ group Voces de la Frontera, explained the explicit racial justice struggle over voting rights embedded in the Coalition’s mission. “The struggle for voting rights for African Americans and Latinos has been a long and courageous struggle; achieved in the face of beatings, bombings, and loss of life by people of conscience of all races. We owe too great a debt to those who struggled before us to allow intrusions upon our voting rights in exchange for a reckless pursuit of one-time federal dollars.”⁵⁹¹

First and foremost, the coalition disputed the McKinsey-sanctioned takeover of Milwaukee public schools. They disputed McKinsey’s findings, and the rationale it generated to takeover the schools. Progressive Milwaukee school board members Larry Miller and Jennifer Morales offered a biting critique of McKinsey’s report. First, they condemned the priorities and practices McKinsey & Co., a firm they declared has been “criticized around the globe for generating reports which recommend anti-worker and anti-consumer policy changes that threaten public health and public

⁵⁸⁹ For more on a decentered unity, see Michael W. Apple, *Official Knowledge: Democratic Education in a Conservative Age*, 3rd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014).

⁵⁹⁰ Peterson, Bob, “Report on mayoral control struggle” November 28, 2009. Bob Peterson personal papers.

⁵⁹¹ Hamilton, Henry and Christine Neumann-Ortiz, “In takeover, your vote silenced.” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, Nov. 23, 2009.

accountability, often merely to increase profits for shareholders.”⁵⁹² Why, these board members queried, should the fiscal bottom-line be what motivates schooling decisions? Such focus detrimentally overlooks the social, academic and health needs of Milwaukee students and families. “While it is essential for MPS to use the public money wisely and efficiently, our bottom line is education,” they fired back.

Second, they called attention to the savage savings strategies proposed by the report, namely firing and cutting benefits to MPS’ most vulnerable workers, most of whom are disproportionately workers of color and low-wage workers. “In a city where the unemployment rate for African American men is around 60%,” the directors wrote, “these cuts would make a key problem facing our MPS families worse.” Third, they noted the report’s emphasis on structural displacement, rather than structural transformation. Nearly one-fourth of McKinsey’s cost-saving recommendations, they noted, came from cutting off health-insurance from MPS employees, effectively pushing those employees on to the publicly-funded health insurance program for low-income people. “This is a mere displacement of a public finance burden, not a savings,” they wrote. A more profound call to transform the district’s health care costs, for example, would have been a call for a federally funded, public health care insurance program.

Finally, the takeover coalition highlighted that the call for a mayoral takeover was a kind of “victim blaming” that overlooked the governor and mayor’s responsibility in maintaining poor conditions for public education. The mayor and governor’s call for takeover not only threatened the democratic and public nature of MPS, it side-stepped their own culpability. As state governor and mayor of the state’s largest city, these elected leaders had done little to address Milwaukee’s broken economy, jobless rate, vast income inequalities and failing city urban structures. Instead, they put the

⁵⁹² “Statement of Jennifer Morales and Larry Miller on the McKinsey report and possible mayoral takeover of Milwaukee Public Schools.” Bob Peterson personal papers.

onus on the MPS to solve these problems. When that strategy proved ineffective, Barret and Doyle called to remove the democratically elected school board, disenfranchising the city's large population of people of color from having a say over school governance.

These arguments formed the basis of the coalition's rejection of the takeover plan. They quickly got to work to challenge the dominant ideas touted by McKinsey, Barrett and Doyle about the problems with Milwaukee public schools. The Coalition began meeting weekly, developing plans and formulating actions. Their first task was to conduct popular political education about the bill and its effects. They held public forums, drafted op-eds, wrote and disseminated FAQs about the takeover plan. They petitioned county supervisors to oppose the legislation. They also engaged in direct action. They picketed the homes of Democratic representatives Lena Taylor and Pedro Colón, who had supported the takeover plan. They protested the lack of open, democratic debate around the proposal, which had theretofore occurred behind closed doors of political elites in Madison and Milwaukee. "We demand that any legislative hearing on the mayoral takeover be held in the city of Milwaukee at a time when parents and community members can attend," declared one activist while picketing in front of Lena Taylor's home.⁵⁹³

The activists eventually won a legislative hearing in Milwaukee about the proposed plan, giving Milwaukeeans their first opportunity to give comments, feedback and ask questions on their home turf. However, it became increasingly clear that the forces the coalition had previously assumed were their allies – or at least neutral – in the struggle for public schools were in fact supportive of the takeover. The mainstream media, for example, didn't report on any of the coalition's activity and in fact actively distorted the facts. For example, when hundreds of people crowded into the Milwaukee Public Schools auditorium for 11 hours on January 5th, 2009 at the

⁵⁹³ "Allen's comments," November 14, 2009 picket at Sen. Lena Taylor's house. Bob Peterson's private papers.

Legislative hearing on the takeover plan, the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* reported that “members of the public at the hearing were fairly evenly divided”⁵⁹⁴ Yet official records from the event reveal that 20 people spoke in favor of mayoral takeover, while 81 people spoke against it; and 79 people registered official support for the hearing, while 218 people registered opposition.⁵⁹⁵

Yet the Coalition realized it was not enough to be opposed to the takeover; they must put forward the vision of schools they wanted. Developing an aspirational platform for the coalition had two important functions. First, it provided an internal organizing tool to broaden and deepen the coalition’s work. Articulating a shared vision for Milwaukee public schools forged unity among what had been previously-disparate forces. “Among the benefits of our growing coalition,” the coalition decided at a “Next Steps” working group on September 21, 2009, “are the bonds that are being forged between groups and individuals who don’t usually talk about school issues with each other. It is our hope that after we defeat the takeover proposal, there will be enough momentum for us to continue to build strong support in favor of a community/educator plan to improve the Milwaukee Public Schools.”⁵⁹⁶ This proposal wasn’t simply to become an inventory of wishes, but instead must reflect and articulate the deeper principles that grounded their visions for public schools. “We agreed that such a plan cannot be a laundry list – although as we worked on necessary components of what a community/educator reform platform should be, it did become somewhat list-like,” they wrote in one meeting’s report, “We need to have our proposal based on key principles/concepts that are easily understood and supported by the vast majority of people in this community.”⁵⁹⁷

Second, developing a document schools created by and for teachers, parents and community members that presented a vision for public became an important external organizing tool in and of

⁵⁹⁴ Amy Hetzner in *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, January 6, 2009.

⁵⁹⁵ Senate Record of Committee Hearings, Senate Bill 405, January 5, 2010.

⁵⁹⁶ “Report of the Workgroup on Next Steps,” Sept 21, 2009. Bob Peterson’s personal papers.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

itself. The Coalition used their program and vision for public schools to organize and influence other groups to join, such as the Milwaukee teachers' union and sympathetic state senators. After several months of workshopping and drafting, the Coalition release a program, eponymously titled, "Next Steps for Improving Education and Reducing the Achievement Gap for MPS Students after Defeating a Mayoral Takeover." Their plan demanded high quality curriculum for all students, including social studies education, full arts music and dance, physical education and health programs for all, and early childhood programs. To improve Milwaukee public schools, the coalition proposed small class sizes; continual improvement in the skills of teachers and principals, including expanding the teacher peer-mentoring program, TEAM; better service of English Language Learners and Special Education students; and ending tenure for administrators. They also called for greater parent involvement in schools, including hiring full-time paid, parent organizers, greater collaboration with city, state and federal officials to improve housing and increase residential stability, opening schools as community centers, and addressing the existing, inadequate and inequitable funding system.

The Coalition's plan emboldened the teachers' union to act in kind. In late October 2009, MTEA proposed its own plan to address improving Milwaukee public schools, called The Opportunity Plan.⁵⁹⁸ Using much of the Coalition's same demands, and even the same language, MTEA's plan called on MPS to lower class sizes, hire fulltime parent organizers, and open schools as full-service community centers. Yet what distinguished MTEA's plan from the Coalition's plan was the platform from which they delivered it. The Coalition, as a community network, could mobilize, advocate and influence people, but their structural power was indirect. They could lead pickets and protests, they could foment solidarity, they could popularize analyses and demands – all

⁵⁹⁸ "Milwaukee Opportunity Plan: Ensuring Quality Public Schools," MTEA, October 21, 2009, Peterson personal papers.

critical components of social action. But they did not possess a direct lever of influence to force change. MTEA, as a union, possessed such influence.

How do unions differ from community groups? First, membership in a union is not based on personal interest, preference, or identity but rather sheer structural necessity: one must sell their labor power to an employer.⁵⁹⁹ Unlike a community organization which grows its membership by attracting outsiders to develop affinities with the group, the constituency of a union is formed simply by people who work at a particular job to make their living. Because of rather unselective criteria, workers may or may not share personal or political interests— their relationship is simply that they are both paid by the same employer. Thus, the project of creating solidarities and developing organizational and political objectives in a union differs sharply from other interest-based groups.

Second, union membership is bounded and exclusive: all workers in any given firm are eligible to be part of a union, but only those workers are eligible to join. As such, there is a set and known number of people who can be active in a union. This makes it possible to test and measure workers' support, what labor theorist Jane McAlevey calls developing “super majorities.”⁶⁰⁰ Generating supermajorities – more than 90% support for a given policy or action – emboldens labor unions to conduct high-risk activities, such as striking, with the confidence that they will win.

Because of the two reasons noted above – workers' structural position as labor supply and their capacity to form super-majorities – unions have a unique collective action lever: they can strike. While community groups can organize protests or rallies or pickets, they do not have the same power to withhold labor, and thus don't have the same power to, in the words of MTEA leader Amy Mizialko, shut it down.

⁵⁹⁹ Claus Offe and Helmut Wessenthal, “Two Logics of Collective Action: Theoretical Notes on Social Class and Organizational Form,” in *Political Power and Social Theory*, ed. Maurice Zeitlin (JAI Press, 1980), 67–116.

⁶⁰⁰ Jane McAlevey, *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 18.

Yet, postwar labor accords have meant that unions swapped out their power to strike in exchange for collective bargaining rights, pursuing contract protections over picket lines.⁶⁰¹ In Milwaukee in 2010, whereas the community coalition could argue and influence their ideas, the teachers' union had the authority to bargain over their demands. Many of the Opportunity Plan's proposals had been incorporated in the union's negotiations, as they determined bargained over their 2009-2012 contract.⁶⁰² The MTEA's executive board passed a resolution opposing the mayoral takeover. Thanks to the combination of union and community opposition, by January 2010, the supporting legislators scrapped their proposal for mayoral takeover proposal. Although activists breathed a sigh of relief, Milwaukee public school teachers, parents and advocates knew the fight was far from over.

Shortly after it became clear the takeover plan was dead in the water, MTEA set to work solidifying activist and organizing model into the union's groundworks. No matter how the electoral winds would blow during that fall's midterms and gubernatorial elections, when Mayor Barrett would face off against Milwaukee County Executive Scott Walker, MTEA leaders knew that it was up to the union and community activists to fight for public education. Long-time Milwaukee teacher union activist and then MTEA president Mike Langyel said, "People in Milwaukee who were involved in fighting the mayoral takeover were interested in things that went beyond [the takeover]. And, that was mobilizing people and bringing people together for a stronger grassroots, pro-labor, pro-democratic, anti-racist city organization."⁶⁰³

⁶⁰¹ Nelson Lichtenstein, "From Corporatism to Collective Bargaining: Organized Labor and the Eclipse of Social Democracy in the Postwar Era," in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, ed. Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 122-52; Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*, Jon K. Shelton, "Against the Public: Teacher Strikes and the Decline of Liberalism, 1968-1981" (University of Maryland, College Park, 2013).

⁶⁰² Interview with Mike Langyel, August 2 2017. Amy Hetzner, "Alternative to Mayoral Takeover = No MPS Superintendent," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 21, 2009, <http://archive.jsonline.com/blogs/news/65198007.html>.

⁶⁰³ Interview with author, August 2, 2017.

Defeating the takeover plan was only a preliminary step, a precondition, for the Coalition's vision for public schools. Their organizing had revealed and set in motion their collective aspirations for MPS: smaller class sizes, art classes, community centers in schools, paid parent organizers, better housing policies to reduce student mobility, an equitable funding system. Now that the Coalition had defeated the proposal, the real work could begin.⁶⁰⁴ That February, MTEA established for the first time in the union's history an organizing working group. This group would be "a key step toward proposing organizing culture within the union," reported in *The Sharpener*, MTEA's newsletter, "and to position our union to respond to future budget cuts."⁶⁰⁵ They would have no idea just how necessary that would become.

Attack 2: Act 10

Between 2009 and 2011, an ascending conservative movement gathered momentum around the country. The Democratic sweep in 2008 prompted conservative networks mobilize for the 2010 mid-term elections. The newly formed Tea Party tendency, backed by radical right philanthropies such as David and Charles Koch, promoted and heavily fund candidates in the 2010 mid-term elections, including Scott Walker's gubernatorial campaign in Wisconsin. These politicians held "big government" social programs, their employees and their beneficiaries as responsible for people's economic woes. Upon the *Citizens United* ruling, millions of dollars of "dark money" rolled into Governor Walker's campaign funds that fall. Walker won his 2010 election, and brought a Republican legislative majority with him. Wisconsin became a beaming beacon for the state-focused conservative movements.

⁶⁰⁴ The process Langyel identifies, in which attacking the common adversary of the "takeover plan" enabled a new political subject – the people – to form mirrors precisely Mouffe's formulation of a populist construction. Establishing "a political frontier separating the 'we' from the 'they', which is decisive in the construction of a 'people,'" writes Mouffe. Mouffe, *For a Left Populism*, 63.

⁶⁰⁵ *The Sharpener*, 2009-10. Issue #15. MTEA archives.

Part of the conservative movements' success was due to an insufficient counter program offered by forces on the left. Democrats in Wisconsin and nationally failed to offer voters a sufficiently different – much less compelling -- political program than Republicans. Like Republicans, Democrats in the state had adopted a general program of austerity, through cuts to public employees, public education, public pensions, and other public services.⁶⁰⁶ Walker's Democratic challenger, Tom Barrett, had left a sour taste in many Milwaukeean's mouths. As mayor of Milwaukee, Barrett had been a chief proponent of taking over MPS, and had made significant cuts to city employees' pensions and paychecks. Unable to significantly distinguish between the Democratic and Republican visions for Wisconsin, many voters chose to sit the election out. Only 49% of Wisconsin's eligible voters made it to the polls in November 2010, down from the 58% of voter participation rate in the 2006 midterm elections.⁶⁰⁷ The combination of a lack of motivated progressive electorate coupled with high levels of conservative campaign contributions tipped Wisconsin to Republican control; in November 2010, Barrett lost his campaign and Scott Walker, a sworn opponent of public sector workers, became the state's governor. Mere weeks after coming into office, Governor Walker proposed Wisconsin Act 10, informally known as the Budget Repair Bill, which cut back public sector union collective bargaining rights in order to address a purported budget fall. What had been chipping raids on public education broke into all-out war.

At 9pm on Tuesday, February 15, 2011, just days after Governor Walker had announced his Budget Repair Bill, Amy Mizialko, a special education teacher in Milwaukee Public Schools, got a phone call. "Come to the union office right now," her co-worker breathlessly demanded. "We're

⁶⁰⁶ Andrew Sernatinger, "Capitalist Crisis and the Wisconsin Uprising," in *Wisconsin Uprising: Labor Fights Back*, ed. M.D. Yates (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2011).

⁶⁰⁷ "Nearly 50 Percent of Eligible Voters Turned out for a Relatively Trouble-Free Election," 2010, <http://gab.wi.gov/node/1411>.

having an emergency meeting.” Amy was dumbfounded. An emergency *union* meeting? At 9 o’clock on a Tuesday night? In the middle of winter? She had never heard of such a thing. Amy had been a MTEA building representative for a few years, but most of the meetings she had attended had revolved around discussions about which classrooms needed new tables and chairs, how recess duty was getting staffed, and monitoring excessive paper use – hardly issues that warranted an emergency night-time meetings. Puzzled, Amy grabbed her coat and car keys and raced down Vliet Street to the union hall. She rushed into the basement and was stunned by what she saw. 80 fellow teachers crammed into folding chairs under the florescent lights, and the room buzzed with tension and confusion.

Walker’s attack on the collective bargaining rights transitioned the anti-public education movement to entirely different terrain. No longer the death by a thousand cuts of budget cuts and revenue caps of previous state leadership, Walker’s reduction of union rights was an attempt to topple the power base of public education and the left’s most important countervailing power source. Conservatives had long held that unions, especially teachers’ unions, were glorified special interest groups for Democrats.⁶⁰⁸ Knee-capping them was seen as attempt to reduce one of the last bulwarks blocking conservatives’ control. What’s more, breaking apart public sector unions from private sector unions, Walker boasted, was the key to dividing and conquering the labor movement.⁶⁰⁹ What would teachers do?

In the MTEA basement, teachers looked to one another, fear flashing in their eyes. “I had never thought before that moment that we just *wouldn’t* exist,” Amy told me. What were they going to do, teachers implored one another. Amy looked to the union president, Mike Langyel, for cues. But he offered little guidance. Nervous and flustered, Langyel seemed even more perplexed than his

⁶⁰⁸ Moe, *Special Interest: Teachers Unions and America’s Public Schools*.

⁶⁰⁹ Aaron, Blake, “Scott Walker said budget strategy in Wisconsin was ‘divide and conquer.’” *Washington Post*, May 11, 2012.

fellow teachers: he had neither called the meeting nor had any additional information about the bill.⁶¹⁰ The teachers wanted to do something, but Langyel was reticent. Striking wasn't legal, he told them; teachers couldn't just *take* a job action. Let's wait and see what happens, he offered. Let's see what the state union officials tell us to do.⁶¹¹ A number of teachers caught each others' eyes, puzzled by this plan. Many of these teachers had been active in the 2009 Coalition to Stop the Takeover and had first-handedly experienced the power of standing up and fighting back -- with or without elected leadership's guidance.

When the MTEA meeting ended after 30 minutes or so, a group of 40 or so teachers, including Mizialko and many members of ENSJ, left the MTEA building and drove to the Rethinking Schools office a few miles away. Quickly, these teachers came up with a plan. They would get as many people as possible to call in sick to school the next day and together, to go to the State Capital in Madison to protest. It was late, especially for a group of teachers on a school night, and they moved fast. For the next hour, they contacted as many people as they could. Punching in number after number on their flip phones -- these were the days before group text messaging -- Amy and the other teachers told as many as they could they were going to Madison the next day. They needed, in Amy's words, to shut this down.

When Amy got home late that night, she went into her husband's office and opened up the computer. In the dark room, her screen blazed with Facebook messages and chats from fellow teachers, scared and worried about what to do. Do they abandon their classrooms to go to Madison

⁶¹⁰ Only minutes before, in fact, a colleague had phoned him to telling him to come to the union office immediately. "You better get down here. Teachers have called an emergency meeting, and there are probably 80 people in the basement right now," she had told him. Interview with author, December 16, 2009.

⁶¹¹ This was an auspicious plan for a number of reasons, not least of which was the fact that the state union leadership had just days before effectively sold out MPS. Three days before Scott Walker dropped Act 10, WEAC president Mary Bell announced her own plan to implement performance pay for teachers and to break up the MPS school district into smaller district -- a plan that had next to zero support from rank-and-file teacher unionists, particularly in Milwaukee. Many Milwaukee teachers -- understandably -- had little confidence in the state teacher union leadership.

to protest? Even without an official order from their union? Amy, hunched over the computer, began responding furiously. “Here’s what you do,” she typed. “You call in. You shut it down.” People were afraid, but Amy knew they could tip. “Here’s what the worst thing that’s gonna happen. They’re gonna write you a letter of reprimand,” she told her colleagues. “And if they do, you tell them to put that in the front of your *fucking* file. Like, that’s a badge of courage. You take that.” These teachers’ conviction and willingness to act — in spite of directives of their local and state leadership, and at potential personal and professional expense — marked the significance of the moment. Teachers wanted to fight for their schools, not under bureaucratic directive, but because they were not willing to accept the alternative.

The teachers’ bottom-up movement continued to gain momentum. Two days after Amy and her fellow teachers around the state took over the State Capitol building, the state teachers’ union president Mary Bell called all teachers to the capitol building to protest the bill. The ensuing occupation of the Capitol lasted two weeks and drew crowds of thousands and attracted international attention. High-schoolers marched out of schools. Private sector unionists stood shoulder to shoulder with the public sector. Police and firefighters, who had been explicitly excluded from the bill’s reach, joined the picket lines. Cars driving around the Capitol Square regularly honked syncopated accompaniment to the popular chant, *This Is What Democracy Looks Like! Beep – beep – beep -- beebbeep- beep beep!* The solidarity, the direct action, the verve stunned all, even seasoned activists. Above all the movement was a fire that burned from the bottom up, beginning with the courage of rank and file teachers like Amy, and slowly convincing local and state union leaders and, eventually, 14 state senators who dramatically fled the state in a last-ditch effort to subvert the bill’s passage. Yet despite the historic uprising, the bill passed and ushered in a biannual budget with unprecedented cuts to the state’s aid in public education. Wisconsin unions entered a new age. Membership in public sector unions trickled to drops. The state teachers’ union lost over fifty

percent of its membership. In 2016, it sold its stately headquarters and moved into shared office space, their army of lobbyists reduced to one. Despite the galvanizing mobilization earlier that winter, by spring, it seemed, teachers' unions were on their last legs.

Fight Back: Re-building MTEA

While unionists elsewhere in the wrung their hands in despair, Milwaukee teachers began re-assessing their power. Just months after Walker's bill passed, Bob Peterson, long-time Milwaukee progressive education activist, founder of Rethinking Schools and co-chair of the Coalition to Stop the Takeover, was voted president of MTEA. Immediately, he launched a campaign to "Re-Imagine" MTEA. In lieu of collective bargaining, Peterson declared, MTEA will turn to collective action. As the teachers' contract increasingly became an unstable source of teachers' power, Peterson doubled down on his call for unions to move beyond the narrow scope of contracts alone, which he first espoused in the early 1990s in *Rethinking Schools*. Peterson described his vision of social justice teachers' unionism as having three pillars or, in his more modest parlance, stool-legs: teachers' bread and butter issues, such as wages and benefits; teaching and learning quality that affirmed teachers' roles as professionals; and, social justice in the community and in the curriculum. Although Peterson penned this vision for teachers' unionism nearly two decades before, his new position as union president and the dramatic policy context gave him a new platform and authority to put this vision into motion.⁶¹²

Among labor theorists and historians, collective bargaining has often been seen as tool for mitigating class conflict rather than re-configuring class relations. Scholars on both the left and right

⁶¹² The year before Peterson was elected to leadership, MTEA's executive board agreed to adopt the three legs of social justice unionism Peterson and other educators had developed. But, agreeing in rhetoric to a principle is not the same thing as actually changing habits and putting new ideas into practice. Despite the union's rhetorical agreement to social justice unionism, little concrete actions took place. Bob Peterson, "A Revitalized Teacher Union Movement: Reflections from the Field," *Rethinking Schools* 29, no. 2 (2015).

conclude that any initial germ of political unrest that sparked unions would be eventually be sloughed away by the instantiation of negotiation teams. Mainstream labor economist Frederick Harbison, for example, accepted collective bargaining as a “bulwark of democratic capitalism,” because it “provides a drainage channel for the specific dissatisfactions and frustrations which workers experience on the job.” Seymour Martin Lipset concluded the modern labor agreement was the principal instrument of class collaboration between the trade unions and corporations,” a means to “strengthens, rather than, weakens, capitalist relations of production.”⁶¹³ As unions increasingly relied on collective bargaining and legal instruments to resolve disputes, they outgrew their superfluous ideologies and donned the “mature” posture of business unionism. Unions were destined to drop their politics.

MTEA and its legacy was no exception, as Peterson reflected:

[MTEA] had focused narrowly on contract bargaining and enforcement, with the staff playing the role of insurance agents who would intervene on members’ behalf to solve their problems...It was a co-dependent relationship – members didn’t have to do much more than make a call to have their problems taken care of, and staff didn’t have to go out and do the hard work of organizing members, except for occasional mobilizations at contract time. The importance of parent/community alliances was downplayed, and the union took the attitude that it was not their responsibility – but rather the administration’s – to ensure quality education.⁶¹⁴

If labor theorists’ thesis that collective bargaining eviscerated unions of their fight,

Peterson’s call to reimagine the Milwaukee teachers’ union offered a feisty addendum. Precisely the moment when Wisconsin unions sought to lose their collective bargaining tools, Peterson’s vision for the union, coupled with organizing chops, re-injected it with vigor. They would not wither away sans collective bargaining – they would come back to life, stronger than before.

Just weeks before he was elected MTEA president, Bob Peterson spoke to a union gathering. “In fifteen months, our teacher contract expires,” he warned his fellow teachers, “We will

⁶¹³ Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin, *Left Out: Reds and America’s Industrial Unions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 127–28.

⁶¹⁴ Peterson, “A Revitalized Teacher Union Movement: Reflections from the Field.”

then be forced to live in a no-contract world. To prepare for that eventuality, within the next ten months we need to be in such a strong position with community and parent partners that we can help shape the decision the school board.”⁶¹⁵ Once elected, Peterson followed through on that order. Within the first six months of Peterson and the union leadership voted to release two teachers to head up a new teaching and learning department, an educational assistant organizer, and two teachers to become full time organizers. What’s more, Peterson sought to make the union less reliant on staff, and more reliant on their own organizing capacities.

Unsurprisingly, many of the union staff actively opposed Peterson’s vision. They excluded him from staff meetings and sent the union newsletter to print before he could offer feedback or suggestions. But the elections that ushered Peterson to union presidency had also brought in a slim majority of like-minded progressives to the 22-member executive board. Although Peterson’s ideas were contested – even willfully opposed – he and his informal slate had just enough of a majority to set to work. In a bold move, Peterson and his allies decided they had to bargain a new contract with the union staff. This staff, in Peterson’s words, “encouraged the professional staff that didn’t want to adapt to a new organizing vision to leave.”⁶¹⁶ All but one of the existing professional staff left.⁶¹⁷ For a union that had relied on its staff to conduct most of its affairs since its inception, this was a daring and controversial move.

Many teachers did not want to transition to a new model of unionism, out of habit, or alliance to long-time personal friendships with staff. Even more were nervous to change the union’s mission and program amidst the existential uncertainties wrought by Act 10 in 2011. The union staff

⁶¹⁵ Peterson remarks, “Why MPS teachers need to support the MPS children’s campaign,” Milwaukee, Wisconsin, March 20, 2012.

⁶¹⁶ Peterson, “A Revitalized Teacher Union Movement: Reflections from the Field.” This

⁶¹⁷ Unsurprisingly, MTEA’s rapid and radical “cleaning house” of professional staff that occurred following Act 10 generated significant acrimony for many in the union. For a response from a former union staffer, see Valerie Strauss, “How Teachers Unions Must Change — by a Union Leader Update with Response),” *Washington Post*, February 15, 2015.

had long assumed the role of negotiation and contract expert -- without them, would teachers' contracts and benefits be protected? As one veteran teacher unionist told me, the loss of long-time staff meant "there is nobody down at the union office that has the knowledge base that can help you. They have one staff person that does all the misconducts and grievances, and also takes care of the health benefits I know more than she knows. That's not right. . . . I'm not saying social justice unionism is wrong. I don't think you can put all your eggs in one basket and that's my perspective."⁶¹⁸

Yet MTEA's new leadership slate was not dissuaded by these doubts. They simply meant there was more work to do empower members to lead their own union. Shortly after Peterson became president, he recruited Amy Mizialko to be a teacher-released organizer position. And Amy joined the union leadership building a new vision for the union and MPS. "Yes, we're going to be working for the bread and butter issues of our members, but we're also going to be the people that lead on the professional practice end of the work," she told me. "We're the experts, we work with kids every day. We know what good practice is and we're not interested in practice that is motivated by, like, obedience and compliance and top-down reform. We're interested in practice that is dedicated to the emancipation and justice of students and guaranteeing that there is some sort of joy in fucking learning in a classroom, that kids have a *right* to that." This was the vision guiding the new union.

Among their first tasks was simply making sure members could re-join the union; one of the biggest changes Act 10 wrought was its changes to recertification requirements. In a strange set of events, MTEA's last contract prior to Act 10 covered a longer-than-usual time period and would not

⁶¹⁸ Interview with author, January 11, 2017.

expire until June 2012.⁶¹⁹ This gave MTEA a year to prepare for their new, post-contract world. This became an unforeseen boon for MTEA's survival. Under Act 10, for a union to legally certify to be able to bargain with the state, each local must hold an *annual* certification election in which fifty one percent of the eligible union members approved the union. Every year, the union would have to conduct an election in which more than half of the bargaining unit affirmed their choice to be a member of MTEA. This posed an onerous organizing burden on most locals, consuming the bulk of their attention with simply conducting re-certification elections rather than engaging in other struggles.⁶²⁰ While Act 10 practically zeroed other locals' membership nearly overnight, MTEA's delayed contract expiration gave union leaders time to prepare for the re-certification mandates. They set up an innovative online and phone certification vote system. They hosted phone banking parties to bring members together to recertify their union and embarked in intensive public education awareness campaigns to alert members to the campaign. "Not voting is a no vote," MTEA tweeted to its members. In 2013, the first year of the union's mandated recertification vote, of the 74 percent of teachers who voted in the election, 99 percent voted to rejoin their union.⁶²¹ In the subsequent years, union membership has increased.

⁶¹⁹ Former MTEA president Mike Langyel spoke to me at length about his decision to press ahead with a concessionary contract. According to his calculations, things were "going to go south very quickly" after that "bone-crushing mayoral takeover thing with Barrett." He told me: "Internally within our union, people were recommending, Do not do a deal. Do not do a bargain now. ... But I said, to myself, I just have a bad feeling about this. So, I convinced people to accept their concessionary contract. If you go back and look at our contract documents, we had about two years of a pay freeze, and we also gave up a lot of money in terms of health care concessions. That was a concessionary contract. My thinking was to buy two years to get us ready for the onslaught. And, that's what was my honest thinking. ...So, that was one of the best things I ever did in my life." Interview with author, August 2, 2017.

⁶²⁰ A useful comparison to highlight the burden of these recertification contracts is to consider if a politician, say Governor Walker, were held to the same standards. In that situation, the governor would have to win fifty one percent of the votes of all eligible voters, each year of his term in order to maintain the position. Not only would campaigning and conducting these elections this consume all of the administration's time and resources, it would be an impossible threshold to cross.

⁶²¹ See Appendix B.

But simply signing members up was only the first step. MTEA began a bold organizing plan. They implemented a cohort training model to develop organizing and leadership in school buildings known as “Union Strong.” Teachers from across the district regularly gathered in the union’s conference room after school to discuss organizing strategies and skills at the building level. Much of these trainings focused on the fundamentals of organizing, such as how to have conversations with other teachers about building problems. As executive director Lauren Baker told me, workplace conversations, in which teachers realize they are both not alone *and* have power to do things, were the fundamentals of the union’s strength. Even when the teachers didn’t win every issue, that level of working together became the union’s major strategy. But developing this kind of awareness and sense of agency is as much a skill as a mindset. The union became a place where teachers could learn both. As Baker told me, the union began “teaching people that and giving people those basic organizing. . . . How to have those conversations with people about membership. How to have conversations with people about the union. How to look at issues in terms of what we can organize around the buildings.”⁶²² This was union power.

This shift in *how* the union formed its power also impacted *what* the union saw as its domain of power. Arenas that had previously been background issues for the union took center stage, such as the political and economic context of public education, especially in Milwaukee. MTEA works with national groups, such as *Labor Notes* and the *Center for Popular Democracy* to arm students both with the practical organizing skills, but also the empower themselves with political analysis. “Working in public education is political,” then-vice president Amy Mizialko told her fellow teachers during one union strong meeting in 2017, a 180-degree shift from her predecessors’ orations. “It’s a fight about our taxes, it’s a fight about our communities, it’s a fight about what our kids are going to

⁶²² Interview with author, March 6, 2017.

do, what they're going to learn. ... Whether we want it to be political or not, we are. And our union is engaged ... we have a voice and power that move us forward.”⁶²³

In 2015, Republicans in the Wisconsin Legislature again attempted a takeover attempt at Milwaukee public schools, this time as a state level takeover, by way of a proposal called the Opportunity Schools and Partnership Plan (OSPP). Following national trends to impose state takeovers of underfunded, large urban school districts with high numbers of students of color, the OSPP would identify “failing schools” to be closed as public schools and re-opened as private charter schools.⁶²⁴ Immediately, MTEA sprung into action. They called for each school to form a school defense committee, a group of parents, students, educators, community members, local leaders, faith- and neighborhood-based associations, and businesspeople “who are willing to get involved at YOUR school to oppose the MPS takeover plan.”⁶²⁵ That fall, defense committees gathered in schools, passing out information about research on the harms of school takeovers in places like New Orleans, Newark and Detroit. Through that winter and fall, MTEA held walk-ins at their schools, inviting community members to show their support for public schools. Thanks to MTEA’s efforts, the OSPP plan become popularly known as “the takeover plan.” By fall of 2016, it had crumbled to the ground. As executive director Lauren Baker told me, the OSPP “became ‘the takeover.’ We did that, *we* did that. And it’s an indication of the fact that we created a social movement and social consciousness of about what this plan was actually doing to the Black and the brown children and their families who expect to have a public school in their neighborhood.” In 2017, members of MTEA joked about organizing a campaign called “Already against the next takeover.”

⁶²³ Union Strong cohort meeting, fieldnotes observation, March 29, 2017.

⁶²⁴ Domingo Morel, *Takeover: Race, Education, and American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Lisa Kaiser, “New State Law Will Lead to the Privatization of Some MPS Schools,” *Shepherd Express*, September 1, 2015.

⁶²⁵ “Form a School Defense Committee,” *The Advocate*, August 2015. MTEA Archives.

Additionally, MTEA leaders began to look at racial and economic justice *within* the union. After Act 10, MTEA foregrounded the work of educational assistants (EAs), the unsung, low-wage workers, predominantly women of color, who provide vital classroom support to both students and teachers, yet who often work several jobs to make ends meet, living paycheck to paycheck. After Act 10, MTEA focused on the needs of these workers. In 2014, MTEA embarked on a campaign to raise EA wages to \$15 an hour. As part of this campaign, MTEA organized school board members to spend a day walking in the shoes of EA members, to see and feel what life is like for someone earning \$12/hour. On the appointed day at 5am, Lauren Baker, MTEA's former executive director, picked up school board members at their homes to bring them to EA's first shift job, then to their second, and even third. Thanks to MTEA's campaign, EAs saw important wage increases. What's more, in 2017, MTEA also made a small but radical change to its by-laws, allowing for the first time in the union's existence for educational assistants to hold union officer positions (they had previously only been allowed to serve as officers in their own sub-unit).⁶²⁶ With near unanimous support, MTEA representatives voted to ensure the organization's most vulnerable members had the power to lead the organization, bringing rank-and-file democracy to a new level in the union. "When we see our movement produce change like that especially in an era like this," Baker told me, "people remember that all politics is local. And that you can do things locally that improve people's lives and build power."⁶²⁷

Arming teachers with an analysis of the political and economic context surrounding Milwaukee public schools made clear to teachers the real and omnipresent threat of privatization that loomed around their work. Hardly abstract or academic matters, these forces impacted the day to day work of teachers and threatened the livelihood of their schools. Declining enrollment and

⁶²⁶ Fieldnotes, MTEA representative assembly, May 10, 2017.

⁶²⁷ Interview with author, March 6, 2017.

dwindling funding encouraged the union to dream up a new plan for schools. Under Peterson's leadership, MTEA also began actively working to develop a robust community schools program in Milwaukee. Community schools are schools that are deeply embedded in communities that provide wrap-around services for families and neighbors. Community organizers work with parents, students and community to identify and implement the kind of programming, services, and spaces they envision for their school.⁶²⁸ At a national community schools institute MTEA hosted in 2017, Peterson told the attendees "Classrooms should be the laboratories of social justice. Schools should be the greenhouses of democracy. ... the anchors the community, the places where people come together to not only fight for our kids but places where they come together," Peterson told teachers from around the country who gathered in Milwaukee's "Community Schools Institute" it hosted in 2017. Community schools are not a top-down educational reform; their success depends upon rich community organization. MTEA works hard to foster its relationship with community organizations, especially Schools and Communities United (SCU), the group that grew out of the 2009 Coalition to Stop the Takeover.

The Struggle Continues: Schools and Communities United

But what of the community coalition that helped build an onramp for MTEA's renewed activism? After the Coalition to Stop the Takeover's success in 2009, they continued to struggle for progressive education in Milwaukee, forming a new organization to foreground their aspirational vision for Milwaukee public schools, known as Schools and Communities United (SCU).⁶²⁹ While MTEA has focused on changing its internal culture and the practices *within* schools, Schools and Communities United (SCU) has focused on supporting the conditions *around* schools, such as

⁶²⁸ John Rogers, "Community Schools: Lessons from the Past and Present. Los Angeles" (Los Angeles, 1998).

fighting school closures, leading protests at legislative hearings, hosting forums to educate the public on the overlapping interests of money and politics in education.⁶³⁰ Members of SCU belong to MTEA, the NAACP, Voces de la Frontera, an immigrants-rights group, the ACLU, and MICAH, an inter-faith alliance. They meet monthly in MTEA's conference room. As the chair of SCU explained to me, "SCU isn't really an entity. It's like a gathering space."⁶³¹ It is a big-tent of progressive groups that have overlapping but not identical interests in public schools, democratic processes and strong communities. While these lofty points of unity have enabled a broad and committed coalition, at times the billowing abstraction makes it difficult for the group to agree on immediate tasks. There are three things members of SCU want: more public school funding, private interests to divest from public education, and a clear meeting agenda.

The steering group that meets monthly is a friendly, sometimes squabbly, group of activists who have spent many years together fighting for public education in Milwaukee, including Gail Hicks and Marva Herndon and Larry Hoffman. (Hoffman sometimes calls himself the Men's Auxiliary chapter of Gail and Marva's group, Women Informed). Larry is a retired educator and educational researcher. He has painstakingly taken notes – by hand – on SCU's meetings for the past several years, sometimes to the great frustration to himself and others. The frequent cross talk at meetings often flusters him: as he scrambles to write down one point, someone has already fired off a quick retort. A white man in his sixties, Hoffman wears eyeglasses and usually a baseball cap, once white, now browning, jammed on his head. As he takes notes, he pushes his eyeglasses to his

⁶³⁰ Talk radio became a surprisingly important venue for these forums. During my research, I was surprised to frequently encounter references to conservative talk as an explanation of the ascending conservatism in the Milwaukee area. During my period of data collection, SCU worked with Citizen Action of Milwaukee to launch a progressive talk radio station, with specific programming to discussing the politics of public education in Milwaukee. Gail and Marva often appear as guests on the show. For more on the role of mass media in fomenting political ideologies, see: Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*, 2003.

⁶³¹ Interview with author, January 17, 2019.

forehead, where they nestle precariously between brows and the cap's brim. He brings files and files with him to meetings – what he jokingly calls his rolling office – and seldom looks up from his stacks of paper, unless he wants to learn more about a point someone has just said, in which case he cups both his hands behind his ears, hunches forward and peers with intense focus at the speaker in question.

Larry's role as note-taker, many acknowledge, has kept SCU together and functioning, giving the group continuity to their actions and enabling it to develop plans and distribute tasks. But Larry sometimes grows weary of carrying the burden and gets irritated at the disproportionate responsibility he bears. At one SCU meeting, the chair of the meeting asks Larry if he has any minutes to provide. Larry retorts, "I sent them out over email but I didn't get any feedback on them. Even though there were blanks that I indicated I didn't get, and I need to fill out." Doug, an older gentleman who is a retired union organizer, pushes back his chair, grins and says teasingly, "Maybe that's because they are so damn good." Larry stares at him with impatience. "They are not! There are blanks!" The chair regards Larry tenderly. She says, "That's fair, Larry. We all need to commit to reading the minutes before the next meeting, okay?" Everyone murmurs tepid yeses, and Larry sits back in his chair, temporarily assuaged.

Today the heart-beat of SCU group is its "Anti-Privatization Working Group," a gaggle of half a dozen or so retirees, including Gail, Marva and Larry, that often meets after SCU meetings. The working group has taken on the role of monitoring the swath of private interests that swoop around the fringes of the public school system. They research Milwaukee school finances and contracts, as well as conflicts of interests among charter school operators and city authorizers. The work that Gail and Marva used to take on as individuals has since become the work of the anti-privatization group, both increasing their capacity and granting Gail and Marva organizational backing in their efforts.

At one meeting, the group gathered for lunch at Vietnamese buffet on Milwaukee's northside. Larry passes out the agenda for the meeting he has drafted. Lately, Larry has been feeling confused about the direction and strategy of their anti-privatization work and wants more theoretical grounding.⁶³² Just what is the basis for this privatization drive, he asks the group. He has sketched out four main positions to understand the movement the group fights against. First, he lists *conservative ideology*, espoused by Tea Party politicians like Ron Johnson and Dale Kooyenga, who want everything to be market based and believe that any private school is better than a government school. Second, there is the *minority empowerment ideology*, held by Black activists like Mikel Holt and Ron Taki, which declares school choice as a means of improving educational options for children of color who have been historically underserved by public schools. Third, there is the *realist position* held by the Charter School Review Committee and the Children's research center. These groups claim that given the same money as public schools, choice schools can perform in about the same range as public schools. Finally, Larry notes, Fuller, former Milwaukee superintendent, Black educational activist and currently leader of Milwaukee's school choice movement, is an expert in all three positions and espouses whichever one resonates with his audience at the time.

One group member impatiently asks Larry what this is all about. Larry sighs, doubt settling across his face. "The more I realize about the African American experience, the more I realize how naive I've been. I don't want to fight African Americans who want the best for their kids," he tells the group. Gail sits directly across from Larry. She looks at Larry and speaks slowly and clearly, but fiercely. She says, "What African Americans are you referring to for the best for their kids?" Larry

⁶³² Two months prior to this meeting, Larry and Fuller got into a verbal confrontation, when Larry attempted to attend a BAEO meeting to learn more about their school choice support. Larry attended the meeting by himself, without any back-up from Gail or Marva or other SCU members, Fuller purportedly went ballistic on Larry, using Larry's skepticism about school choice as an opportunity to grandstand about the needs for Black community control of education options. This episode likely shook Larry, and cast doubts on his analysis.

stumbles to answer Gail's query. She continues. "Are the schools the best things for the children and their communities? You need to look at what these schools are, and how they are opening. Don't doubt yourself, Larry. You can't understand the African American plight," she gestures to her and Marva at this point, the only Black people at the table. "You're not going to understand that, it's not your experience. But you don't need to doubt your own experiences." At this point, Marva jumps in. "For me, the big thing is the giving up public property to private interests. Why are you taking that away from me? You want to hold us down? Miseducate us, and give us schools without legal guidelines?"⁶³³

Their discussion morphs into a billowing debate on liberalism, racial economics and Trumpism. A retired priest who is part of the group gives a brief explanation of Chilean economics doctrine and Milton Friedman's experiment with school choice in Chile during Pinochet's dictatorship, which leads to a discussion about members of former president Bush's education cabinet. Larry gets up and makes another trip to the buffet. Doug says, "I don't disagree with anything that is being said right now, but let's move on." Larry returns to the table and eats quietly. One member looks at his watch. Another says, "We have too much philosophy right now. How do we deal with Fuller?"

This meandering, squawky conversation is, in fact, the heart-beat of the anti-privatization work. The tension between analyzing the forces at play and acting upon them causes the group, at times, to stutter. The landscape of school choice that surrounds them is so tangled and changes so rapidly, the group struggles to chart their path and to maintain both a principled and relevant compass in their work. The blurred alliance between the state and the market make it difficult for the group to confidently leverage their critique of educational privatization. Does it come from outside, or inside? The conflicts of interests between charter school operators and authorizers are

⁶³³ Anti-privatization work group meeting, fieldnotes, March 2, 2017.

certainly unethical, but are they illegal, wonders the working group. And how do they critique charter schools when even Milwaukee Public Schools has itself conceded key ground, also functioning as a charter school authorizer? “We need a smoking gun,” Dave, a retired social worker, says. “If we can divorce Fuller from the Charter School Review Committee, then it might not exist.” Marva nods at what Dave says, but nudges the group towards a new direction. “We also need to address MPS and the authorizing process,” she says. “We’re always concentrating on the city, but there’s the district, too.” The others at the table agree with Marva and begin brainstorming how to track down this information and begin to pressure the school district to become more transparent with its own charter school authorization processes. The group is both energized and disoriented by the many, overlapping targets. SCU and its anti-privatization group tracks down facts, develop plans, challenge powers, get confused. They are subject to one another’s personalities, doubts and distractions. And yet without this group, the privatization forces would burgeon entirely unchecked. These scrappy soldiers are the defenders of Milwaukee Public Schools, rangy and brave.

Still, the group occasionally struggles to understand their power to motivate and influence change. They understand their limited structural influence as a community organization rather than, say, a labor union. “We can cry and scream and shout,” bemoaned Dave at the working group’s lunch meeting, “but I think we’re still going to be shut out because we don’t have a power base. It’s no wonder that the [charter authorization committee] is the noblesse oblige that it is. . . . In the past year, there really hasn’t been an issue we’ve moved on.” Many people nod mournfully. Dave continued, “I mean, we have numbers. MTEA has 5000 members. Other groups are large too.” “NAACP has over 1000,” Gail notes. SCU, which recently hired an organizer, needs to draw in all of these groups, Dave insists. Marva leans back and says, “Well, it’s up to us to make that happen.”

Gaps and Contradictions

MTEA's partnership with SCU has enabled a degree of "divide and conquer" in the groups' strategy. Generally speaking, the work of analyzing and mapping Milwaukee's education privatization movement has fallen on the shoulders of SCU, specifically its anti-privatization working group, while MTEA can hustle turn out to events. This has generated a permeable division of duties amongst the "popular front" of progressive education activists. SCU generates analysis about education privatization surrounding schools and community outreach; MTEA provides brawn and the threat of shut-down.

On the one hand, this division has been propitious. SCU's leadership has enabled MTEA to concentrate on other important aims, such as their own internal organization and issues that fall squarely within the classroom, such as curriculum, rather than the issues that ravage the boundaries of the schoolhouse. Especially since Act 10, in which teachers are governed by a handbook by a bargaining contract and recertification demands exhaust much of the union's energy and resources, internal organizing has been a key issue for MTEA. Similarly, the interdependence of MTEA and SCU has put necessary muscle behind SCU's discoveries.

For example, in 2018, thanks to SCU's research, MTEA president Amy Mizialko, filed a formal complaint with the City of Milwaukee's Ethics Board, alleging a conflict of interest between the Charter School Review Committee and Howard Fuller. The City awarded Fuller and his Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University a \$630,000 contract to direct the operations of the City Charter School Review Committee (CSRC). As MTEA reported to its members, "The contract renewal would engage Fuller and ITL to provide services administering the operation of the CSRC – the same government body responsible for authorizing and evaluating

Fuller's own private charter school, Milwaukee Collegiate Academy."⁶³⁴ What's more, as retirees, many of the anti-privatization working group activists see themselves as being somewhat protected from the threat of being "bought off" by the agents they are critiquing.

Yet on the other hand, apportioning the duties of fighting privatization to the anti-privatization work group perhaps may have disabled some of these struggles from rooting within MTEA. As MTEA's premier community partner, many of the struggles about school privatization which SCU has helped kindle have come into MTEA only secondarily. As former MTEA executive director Lauren Baker told me, SCU's work around the takeover plans took tremendous pressure off MTEA from developing that organizing plan and building community support.

Yet the cost of this is two-fold. One, it potentially disables teacher activists from developing long-term strategies to oppose the threat of privatization. In recent years, MTEA has developed acute, defensive reactions to the immediate effects of privatization. For example, in 2015, pending another district takeover plan and the threat of more school closures, MTEA teachers formed "school defense" communities at schools facing imminent threat of closure. MTEA teachers organized "walk-ins" at more than 100 schools, in which parents community members gathered in schools to learn about the potential threats to public education posed by the takeover. The resistance MTEA musters is acute, specific and immediate; the general, broad and long-term threats faced by MTEA rarely become center-stage issues of MTEA. This creates a secondary effect: because teachers themselves are not taking on the primary issues of school privatization that gnaw

⁶³⁴ Zombor, Melissa, "MTEA Files City Code of Ethics Complaint Against Howard Fuller and the Institute for the Transformation of Learning" *MTEA News*, Sept. 27, 2018. <https://mtea.weac.org/2018/09/27/mtea-files-city-code-of-ethics-complaint-against-howard-fuller-and-the-institute-for-the-transformation-of-learning/>

away at MPS, they are weakly positioned to exact union's unique structural power to withhold their labor.⁶³⁵

Despite MTEA's important win, the analysis it offered during that struggle may have limited its demands for future struggles. MTEA rejected the district's framing that budget shortfalls must fall on teachers and instead targeted administrative pay. "Milwaukee educators are outraged to hear the news of excessive pay raises to some of the highest paid MPS administrators while our students suffer," declared president Kim Schroeder in a public statement. "It is unconscionable that the same individuals who crafted a budget increasing class sizes and reducing the number of school counselors, social workers, and librarians handed out hefty backdoor raises to the most highly paid administrators in the District."⁶³⁶ Yet this framing overlooks the more fundamental problems facing Milwaukee public schools such as: historically low state aid, charter and choice schools that siphon public funds away from public schools, minimal taxes of corporations, and zero regulation of corporations that fled Milwaukee over the past four decades, leaving the city and its residents financially plundered. Although MTEA's critique of administrators' six-figure salaries and large raises amidst cutting student services and educator's pay was certainly warranted, it perhaps missed the larger point. MPS could zero out all of their administrators' salary lines, and it would barely dent the \$30 million budget short fall. While MTEA won their demands to halt budget cuts, the bigger problems of a high-poverty school district facing declining enrollment and insufficient state and federal funds, persisted.

⁶³⁵ Joe Burns, *Strike Back: Using the Militant Tactics of Labor's Past to Reignite Public Sector Unionism Today* (Brooklyn, NY: Ig Publishing, 2014); Herbert Kitschelt and Helmut Wiewenthal, "Organization and Mass Action in the Political Works of Rosa Luxemburg," *Politics & Society* 9, no. 2 (1979): 153–202, doi:10.1177/003232928000900202; J. McAlevey, "The Crisis of New Labor and Alinsky's Legacy: Revisiting the Role of the Organic Grassroots Leaders in Building Powerful Organizations and Movements," *Politics & Society* 43, no. 3 (2015): 415–41, doi:10.1177/0032329215584767.

⁶³⁶ Zombor, Melissa. "MTEA Slams Backdoor Raises to MPS Administrators," MTEA News, January 3, 2018. <http://mtea.weac.org/2018/01/03/mtea-slams-backdoor-raises-to-mps-administrators/>

Whether by design or default, MTEA's analysis and demands focused on intra-district funding problems, while SCU's anti-privatization working group developed an analysis of extra-district funding problems, such as City of Milwaukee-authorized charter schools. Each group develops its independent analysis and plan of action, and their spheres of influence remain somewhat separate. Yet the problems they respectively address are fundamentally interconnected. The task of both the union and SCU is to develop structural analysis, a theory of transformation and a plan of action. The analysis must address the root causes of the problems facing public schools, including the economic conditions that surround schools. The theory of transformation must draw upon unions' unique power to withhold its labor *and* its natural alliances with community groups. Absent all, the possibilities of real social transformation will remain out of reach. Does functioning as a self-consciously "social justice union" export the tasks of struggling for economic and racial justice to partner groups, instead of becoming a core component of the union's work?

Conclusion

Amidst the growing crises facing Milwaukee public schools, a broad coalition to fight for public education has emerged. This coalition has united with tendencies within the teachers' union. Together, they have successfully to defend three different takeover attempts on Milwaukee public schools. This coalition has done much to re-invigorate community demand for public schools and has been a crucial partner in the union's efforts to build greater community alliances. However it remains to be seen if the community coalition and the union's "social justice" program can combine to yield a sufficiently robust program capable of leading and sustaining offensive struggles for schools and communities.

Effective community-based strategies to defend and improve public education must both be grounded in community issues *and* root in work sites -- of educators and community members alike.

As Ira Katznelson writes in his historical exploration of urban politics, one of the fundamental features of contemporary capitalism is its success at bifurcating “work” and “community” into separate spheres. Schools especially, his research chronicles, developed in isolation from other political arena, artificially buffering them from housing struggles, industrial conflicts and other sites of friction in urban politics. They were to be not only institutionally disconnected from other key urban arenas, but they were also politically neutralized by implementing layers of organizational complexity, thereby diffusing the role of the state in the school system. Struggles to overcome this contradiction of capitalism, in which the workplace and the community are artificially separated, demands an organizational strategy that systematically brings both together. Katznelson writes:

Community-based strategies for social change in the United States cannot succeed unless they pay attention to the country’s special pattern of class formation; to the split in the practical consciousness of American workers between the language and practices of a politics of work and those of a politics of community. If we do not self-consciously understand and address this key feature of our urban-class inheritance, we shall continue to play a losing game whose very rules will remain obscure.⁶³⁷

While developing strategic relationships and engaging in symbolic protests are important steps towards building this kind of alliance, it is not a substitute for building strategic power in the worksite.⁶³⁸ Uniting with community groups in public-facing events is an important step – especially as those groups are led by women and people of color with deep connections to schools. But it does not replace the necessity of doing the deep work of organizing teachers at their worksite, such that organizing itself bridges educators’ class-based identities with their community-based ones. Absent this dimension of unionism, the teachers’ union will be operating with restraints on its firepower, unable to sufficiently mount work issues with community ones.

⁶³⁷ Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 194.

⁶³⁸This is a point also echoed by labor theorist Jane McAlevey in J. McAlevey, “The Crisis of New Labor and Alinsky’s Legacy: Revisiting the Role of the Organic Grassroots Leaders in Building Powerful Organizations and Movements,” *Politics & Society* 43, no. 3 (2015): 415–41, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329215584767>.

Conclusion

“Plot, the absolute line between two points which I've always despised. Not for literary reasons, but because it takes all hope away. Everyone, real or invented, deserves the open destiny of life.”

--Grace Paley, *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute* (1974)

One summer evening several years ago, I found myself in a colleague's backyard, sipping a cocktail alongside a scholar nationally renowned in academic and policy circles. It was an informal gathering; bistro lights dangled around us, music drifted across the yard. The evening's conversation, like the atmosphere, was warm, friendly and inclusive. At one point, this noted scholar turned to me and politely inquired what I was studying. I explained I was writing about the political evolution of Wisconsin's first and largest teachers' union local, a union that has grown alongside entrenched racial segregation in the city's schools as well as the emergence of what is now the nation's oldest and largest voucher program. I recall saying something about examining the racial politics of the union in order to better understand how the union's narrow, racially-defined interests had contributed to the rise of the voucher movement in the city.

“Sounds familiar,” the scholar chuckled sympathetically. “Sometimes learning the history of organized labor is like going to the auto-mechanic. You don't *actually* want to know what's under the hood – and it may be better for everyone if you don't try to look. You just want to get that car back on the road, as fast and safe as possible.” I tittered nervously and fiddled with the ice cubes melting in my glass. What was this person saying? Should I have not “looked under the hood” – whatever that meant? Was I being advised by the preeminent scholar sipping a Moscow mule next to me to abort my dissertation, bury my tracks as quickly as possible? I happened to know this person identified as a liberal and a union supporter, even serving in union leadership in a prior chapter of life. I suspected these comments were offered charitably, words of wisdom imparted from a senior scholar to a novice to keep my eyes on the horizon in service of the Bigger Aims, such as labor's survival. Just a few weeks prior, the Supreme Court had ruled against public-sector unions dues

collection process in *Janus vs. AFSCME*. Many of us feared we were watching unions' slow death. Perhaps this scholar believed the best way to protect unions, as they teetered on the brink of extinction, was to de-emphasize their unsavory histories and to re-emphasize their strengths. On the one hand, this made sense to me. Criticizing a wounded beast – especially one under the gunights of well-funded opponents – hardly seems the best way to lead it towards health and vitality.

And yet, I did not fully agree. Do not the feeble deserve correct diagnoses? Does not the science of healing demand precise and unflinching analyses of the cause of disease, as a requisite for remedy? Shouldn't we, researchers and activists alike, *want* to look under the hood? For me, this instinct motivated my dissertation research.⁶³⁹ I wanted to know how unions had broken solidarities in addition to building them. While I initially approached my research topic curious to learn about anti-racist, progressively-engaged unionism, often called social justice unionism, I soon realized that understanding the path towards social justice unionism demanded the converse: why and how did unions sustain themselves as narrowly-focused, economistic organizations? To take seriously the power of workers' consciousness and revolutionary potential, one must also engage with their prejudicial fears, their reactionary and resistant solidarities, and their counter-revolutionary fervors. What interests, identities and conjunctures sustained a vision for a union? And could those identities, that vision, become otherwise? If so, how?

Over the course of the next months as I researched and wrote my dissertation, I often received other similar comments when describing my project to strangers. These well-meaning souls would kindly inform me I was documenting unions' obvious, even endemic, features. "Well that's just the history of unions writ large," they offered. (These people were very kind to give me the answer to my dissertation, and I will be sure to thank them, should I encounter them again.) Yet, it

⁶³⁹ My faith in the power of diagnosis and critique as critical elements of emancipatory social science is indebted to Erik Olin Wright. See Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (New York: Verso, 2010), 10–29.

was precisely because this racist, business unionism seemed *both* commonplace *and* unjust that I wanted to examine it. What had stabilized this accord? Certainly, some skeptical readers may conclude my research does little beyond chronicling the obvious: union bureaucracy breeds racism; racism bleeds into bureaucracy that, when coupled, can undermine a union's narrow projects as well as its visionary ones. Nevertheless, I persisted. I wanted to figure out just why unions had acted this way, and to understand the consequences of such actions. I hoped to establish more dimension and texture to the explain commonplace assumptions, to peel back the wallpaper of the mind. I wanted, to paraphrase Francis Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, to understand why unjust arrangements came to be seen as natural -- so that they may become less natural and more just.⁶⁴⁰ I wanted to know how things could change.

**

What I Found

And what did my research reveal? On the one hand, I found what I suspected: narrow definitions of teachers' interests aided institutional racism that, in turn, undermined both teachers' unions and public education. The Milwaukee teachers' union (MTEA)'s adherence to seniority provisions, for example, cut against movements for school integration on multiple levels, in multiple time periods. As I explore in Part I of the dissertation, the union's refusal to support civil rights' groups demands for integrated schools in the 1960s established its commitment to "law and order" over and above more expansive requirements of justice. What effectively spurred Milwaukee teachers to seek collective bargaining rights in 1963 – thereby converting their professional association into a union – was the predominantly white teachers' growing fear of Black students in the classroom, and desire for greater physical control over these students. These predominantly

⁶⁴⁰ Frances Fox Piven and R. A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

white teachers believed collective bargaining could secure enhanced corporal punishment rights for teachers, stronger powers for teachers to remove “disruptive” students from the classrooms and greater protections for teachers from “student attackers” in the city’s predominantly Black schools. For these teachers, the union was not a mechanism to develop solidarity and collective action, but a means to cohere their self-interests into a program of action. The union’s commitment to its own narrowly – and racially – defined interests ultimately alienated MTEA from many Black teachers, as well as families of color and civil rights groups. These same interests also drove MTEA out of broader teacher labor federations; in 1974 MTEA disaffiliated from Wisconsin’s state union. It operated as an independent union during the heyday of both national surges in teachers’ union militancy and public sector unionism *and* the ascent of neoliberal restructuring of the state, public education and, eventually, labor.⁶⁴¹ MTEA’s choice to disengage from the state labor federation altered the course of state teachers’ unions strategy and politics, as Chapter Four explains; absent the weight of the state’s largest local behind it, the state federation was forced to adopt increasingly bureaucratic levers of power, rather pursuing job-based direct actions, especially strikes. For MTEA, disaffiliating meant that MTEA could pursue its aims of “local control” absent challenges from a higher power or broader body.

Yet these findings did not completely answer my questions. *Why* did teachers’ unions take these positions? As I dug deeper into the union’s history as well as the shifting accords of the welfare state and public education, racism alone proved to be an unsatisfying answer to this question. This is not to say that racism was not a dominant factor in shaping the union’s stance on many consequential issues; I believe it was. However, what the teachers’ union articulated as racism

⁶⁴¹ Joseph a. McCartin, “A Wagner Act for Public Employees: Labor’s Deferred Dream and the Rise of Conservatism, 1970-1976,” *The Journal of American History* 95, no. June (2008): 123–48; Jon Shelton, *Teacher Strike!: Public Education and the Making of a New American Political Order* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2017); Mary Compton and Lois Weiner, eds., *The Global Assault on Teaching, Teachers and Their Unions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

was often generated from their own complicated position within the broader structure of the welfare state. My research offers three important nuances to our understanding of teachers' unions' reactionary position observed between the 1960s and 1990s.

First, for the first half of the 20th century, many Milwaukee teachers struggled to see themselves as workers, much less to see the work of education itself in political terms. As such, they struggled to forge alliances with other labor groups, including the state and national teachers' union, and other groups concerned with improving public education. As Chapter Two documents, until the mid 1960s, Milwaukee teachers had two choices of associations to join: a union (MTU), affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) or the professional association (MTEA), affiliated with the National Education Association, (NEA). MTEA distinguished itself from MTU by declaring itself less political, less likely to interfere with teachers' professionalism⁶⁴² by intertwining teachers' work with the programs of labor and community groups, as MTU sought. When Wisconsin legalized the right for public workers to form unions in 1959, teachers of both the professional association and the union saw the right to collectively bargaining as an important source of power. Yet only one group could be the teachers' representative agent, forcing MTU and MTEA to duel for representation rights. This initial premise sowed a contradictory accord into the teachers' collective identity: they became a union by selecting the professional association to represent them. This formation set an expectation for teachers that MTEA would first and foremost protect their rights as teachers, and secondarily forge connections with labor federations and community groups.⁶⁴² Milwaukee teachers' foundational premise of unionizing presented a limited framework

⁶⁴² I am not certainly arguing that had teachers successfully unionized under the AFT-affiliated union that future alliances with community groups and Black activists would have automatically formed. Indeed, the most famous fracture point between predominantly white teachers and Black community activists, the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville strike took place under the AFT-local, United Federation of Teachers. However, had the Milwaukee teachers show more willingness to broach broader political conditions of public education and

for teachers' identities as workers, disabled their willingness to engage in solidarity and political struggles and enabling teachers' interest to be defined in narrow terms.

Second, Milwaukee teachers' opposition to civil rights' initiatives coincided with the changing nature of the welfare state, specifically the postwar transition from the New Deal to the Great Society and War on Poverty programs. Whereas the New Deal programs to address inequality had focused on economic structures, such as jobs and income, the Great Society programs aimed to provide educational, cultural and social opportunities as a means to address poverty. This reflected a national shift in political and social scientific thinking away from analyzing inequalities in terms of structures and towards analyzing through individual disposition. These ideas became especially popularized by the zeitgeist of 1960s "culture of poverty" thesis, which asserted that poverty was not caused by structural conditions, such as unemployment or low wage work, but rather from the attitudes and dispositions of the poor.⁶⁴³ Under this light, schools became a key mechanism towards solving poverty. Educators would teach the poor out of their poor-making dispositions and attitudes. To showcase education's role in the Great Society, in 1965 the federal government established the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the premier federal intervention in educational policy. While the aims of this program were varied, the lion's share of its efforts went towards developing compensatory education programs. These programs were not designed, explains historian Harvey Kantor, "to change the operation of the labor market but to help those on the bottom of society acquire the skills and attitude they needed to compete more successfully in it."⁶⁴⁴

Teachers, thus, became the agents responsible for "re-culturing" people living poverty, the solutions to poverty. Yet, despite the federal government's new expectations that schools enact

the city's political economy, broadly, it is possible they could have formed alliances with other associations, and forged a different path.

⁶⁴³ Kantor and Lowe, "Educationalizing the Welfare State and Privatizing Education."

⁶⁴⁴ Harvey Kantor, "Education, Social Reform, and the State: ESEA and Federal Education Policy in the 1960s," *American Journal of Education* 100, no. 1 (1991): 58.

compensatory education programs to solve poverty, state and local control of schools meant the federal government had little authority to implement programs beyond offering financial incentives. In practical terms, however, teachers were offered little meaningful support or training to conduct this work. Nor did they refute the “culture of poverty” rationale and framing. Instead, the Milwaukee teachers doubled down on its pathologizing thesis, calling for programs to separate the disrupters or build different facilities for students deemed in need of compensatory education. In the face of growing populations of students living in poverty, many of whom were children of color, the Milwaukee teachers turned to their union to demand stronger corporal punishment rights. Teachers sought more control over their workplaces, both by increasing their physical power over students, as explored in Chapter Three, and also their contractual workplace protections, such as seniority rights, as explored in Chapter Five. I am far from the first person to observe that teachers’ calls for greater discipline functioned as a form of racial control. While others have drawn attention to teachers’ demands for greater discipline as embedded within growing school bureaucracies, my work situates teachers’ calls for discipline as partially a product of their contradictory position within the welfare state.

Third, my research suggests that teachers’ unions narrow interests functioned as an attempt to redefine the gendered politics of care. True, the teachers’ union’s turn towards contractual protections to establish their power aided racially unequal practices in the school district. Yet, in a certain light, their actions can be read as an effort to assert an important political boundary. Their narrow interests were a means to reject the assumption that as members of a caring profession, teachers had an infinite capacity to give to others with little to no cost to themselves. As a historically feminized profession, teachers’ wages were often kept artificially low. This stemmed from a number of factors, one of which was the prevailing – and false – belief that women were “naturally” inclined to care for others and, thus, warranted less compensation for their work.

Teachers' unions evolved partially as a rejection of that formulation – and a means to demand more money for the work of teaching.⁶⁴⁵ In this regard, teacher' unions constructed a formal limit against the expectations for teachers' to unceasingly care for others. Of course, that this boundary formed in racialized terms in Milwaukee is critical. Defending their own interests and needs as a feminized workforce with finite capacities to care others meant that any white teachers reacted *against* demands for racial justice, rather than joining in a broader movement to expand funding for public education. It is important to note that many Black teachers, in Milwaukee and elsewhere, often reacted in the opposite manner – working to form alliances with community groups to increase educational access and equality. In those cases, teachers were more inclined to see their commitments as standing *with* communities of color, rather than standing against them.⁶⁴⁶ Although teachers may have attempted to redefine the politics of care, the predominantly white Milwaukee teachers' also imputed a racist logic into that politics. As a result, many activists of color in Milwaukee would come to assume, rightly or not, that the mostly-white public school teachers' union did not care about children of color.

Why It Matters

Why does historically understanding the rationale for teachers' unions seemingly-narrow and racist interests matter? I submit three reasons for consideration. First, exploring this history brings to light the contradictory position of teachers' unions. Like other public-sector unions, they are both

⁶⁴⁵ The Chicago Teachers' Union brings a different history of the evolution of teachers' unions to light, in which teachers were as much struggling for more control over increasingly centralized schools, as well as pressuring the state to enforce greater redistribution to schools. Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA 1900-1989*; Rousmaniere, *Citizen Teacher: The Life and Leadership of Margaret Haley*; M Lazerson, "Teachers Organize: What Margaret Haley Lost," *History of Education Society* 24, no. 2 (1984): 261–70, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/367959>.

⁶⁴⁶ Michele Foster, "The Politics of Race: Through the Eyes of African-American Teachers," *The Journal of Education* 172, no. 3 (1990): 123–41. Elizabeth Todd-Breland, *A Political Education: Black Politics and Education Reform in Chicago Since the 1960s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

agents of the welfare state, and *subjects* of it.⁶⁴⁷ As its *agents*, teachers must educate children and prepare them for productive futures. In the postwar Great Society, education and job preparation were upheld as poverty's solvent; teachers, thus, became charged with enacting welfare state. As *subjects* of the welfare state, teachers' working conditions, legal rights and wages are determined by the state's priorities to public education as well as to public sector employees. They are intrinsically tied to state bureaucracy *and* the public good.

Teachers' unions' contradictory location distinguishes them from traditional private sector unions, whose interests are often fulfilled through the labor market alone, by demanding higher prices for their own commodified labor, and thus possess less direct claims on either the "the public good" or the state. For better and worse, public workers' movements can be considered, in the words of sociologist Paul Johnston, "the quintessential state-making movement."⁶⁴⁸ Public workers are uniquely positioned to become the scape goats of state problems *and* to build alliances that defend and define public needs. Yet the "public good" in which teachers' unions are invested is itself a site of political conflict, deeply marked by gender, class and race. For whom, by whom, and how is the public good defined? This question cannot be answered definitively or objectively: it is determined by struggles for power and harnessed by social movements.⁶⁴⁹ This work, thus, seeks to conceptualize teachers' unions' as vital participants and authors of that struggles, definers of "the public good," and makers of the state – at the same time they are its subjects. This framing brings to

⁶⁴⁷ My interpretation of teachers' unions as both agents and subjects hails from Rick Fantasia's brilliant discussion of class consciousness. Rick Fantasia, *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action and Contemporary American Workers* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), 3–24, esp. p. 10. This point is also raised by Burns, *Strike Back: Using the Militant Tactics of Labor's Past to Reignite Public Sector Unionism Today*.

⁶⁴⁸ Paul Johnston, *Success While Others Fail: Social Movement Unionism and the Public Workplace* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1994), 14.

⁶⁴⁹ Nancy Fraser, "Talking about Needs: Interpretive Contests as Political Conflicts in Welfare-State Societies," *Ethics* 99, no. 2 (1989): 291–313, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2381436>.

light both the historical and political dimensions of teachers' unions, as well as suggest their active role in shaping the political economy of education.

Second, historically conceptualizing teachers' unions helps us to understand the consequences of teachers' unions narrowly defined interests. Just what effect did the Milwaukee teachers' unions narrowly defined interests have on their own organization, but also public education more broadly? Although narrowly-defined interests allowed MTEA to secure strong contracts for its teachers in the short-term, they crippled teachers' capacity to build broader political movements that defended public schools in the long-term. Through its pursuit of short-term success, MTEA rendered itself vulnerable to the rising tide of education privatization that swept through Milwaukee in the decades to come.

The consequence of MTEA's meager regard for racial justice, alongside the Milwaukee Public School administration and the state more broadly, meant that Black parents and activists looked elsewhere – namely, the private market -- to find solutions to the problem of segregated and inferior schools for children of color. In 1990, the nation's first school voucher program opened in Milwaukee. It was created with political and financial support of three key groups: conservative philanthropists, ideologically committed to free-market enterprises; religious evangelicals who saw vouchers as a means to skirt laws preventing state aid for religious schools; and Black community leaders in search of alternatives to the legacy of educational inequality in Milwaukee Public Schools. The combination of racial justice demands and heavy private investment made the Milwaukee voucher experiment a political triumph in its early years. It became a nucleus to incubate a national movement for school choice, adopted by conservatives and liberals alike. Throughout the 2000s, as I document in Chapter Seven, the conservative education movement expanded educational privatization in the city. Top-level Democrats soon joined the calls to expand school choice programs, and even called for the takeover of the public school system itself. Between 1990 and

2010, the conservative flank of the school choice movement aligned with other conservative groups in the state and national, generating networks and momentum capable of securing the state legislature and governorship. By 2011, public sector unions in Wisconsin found themselves under attack. While my research does not draw a straight line from the Milwaukee teachers' unions rejection of civil rights programs to the rise of vouchers and then the deterioration of unions themselves, it exposes how the union's narrow interests created an opening for conservative groups to take hold.

Yet for all these negative hardships wrought by the legacy of Milwaukee's teachers' business unionism, it also contributed to a third, more hopeful consequence; it catalyzed the formation of a group of progressive teachers who saw their role as unionists integrally connected to fights for communities and schools, and especially fighting for racial justice. This group would prove instrumental in re-defining the union's priorities away from business model unionism towards "social justice unionism."

In the early 1980s, these teachers sought to build a project that both defended public education and sought to re-improve it. They were critical of MTEA's traditional leadership model, but also opposed to calls to privatize education. As I document in Part II of my dissertation, these activists created an informal caucus with MTEA that sought to bring democratic, member-driven decision-making to the center of the union.⁶⁵⁰ For more than two decades, they fought to break the reliance on staff to execute the leadership's priorities, and wanted the union to actively address the racism that eroded public education. To augment their work, in 1986 these educators, along with other community activists, laid out the pages of the first issue of *Rethinking Schools*, now a nationally circulating publication and leading voice in progressive educational reform. Its early issues

⁶⁵⁰ For a fantastic analysis on the role of social justice caucuses, see Asselin, "Tensions, Dilemmas, and Radical Possibility in Democratizing Teacher Unions: Stories of Two Social Justice Caucuses in New York City and Philadelphia."

chronicled Milwaukee's specific challenges, from curriculum adopted by the school board, to the union's negotiations, to city politics. In the late 1990s, Milwaukee teacher Bob Peterson reflected on his experiences working with community activists and fellow teachers to struggle for a more democratic union and school system, and published in *Rethinking Schools* a national call to re-think teachers' unions as social justice unions.⁶⁵¹ Peterson's vision of social justice unionism rested on three tenets: fighting for bread and butter issues, fighting for teachers' as professionals, and fighting for social justice matters in schools and beyond. In MTEA, Peterson's reform slate vied for control of the union, with moderate successes over the late 1990s and 2000s. Throughout the late 2000s, as Milwaukee public schools increasingly came under threat of takeover, Peterson and his allies worked closely with community groups to protest, and ultimately thwart, the proposed plans. Was Peterson's call for social justice unionism coming into being?

In 2011, just after Walker passed Act 10, Bob Peterson was elected MTEA president.⁶⁵² Immediately Peterson and his allies set to work re-organizing their union. In lieu of collective bargaining, Peterson declared, MTEA will embrace collective action. Instead of contract protections, Peterson proclaimed community alliances would be the means to fight for stronger schools and classrooms. Since that time, the union's program as a social justice union has blossomed. Milwaukee teachers have fought against and defeated proposals for mayoral control *and* a 2016 state takeover attempt – the only school district in the country to have defeated multiple takeover attempts. Their

⁶⁵¹ Peterson is both a veteran activist and community leader who has participated in several decades of struggle for Milwaukee Public Schools, and his longevity and vitality make him an important character in my story. But he is also an avid writer, publisher and aspiring archivist, who has managed to save and file a tremendous number of papers (much to his wife's frustration at their shared space). That he has effectively curated a personal archive of political struggles in Milwaukee creates a great resource. But it also generates important questions about the politics of the archive. The story I am able to tell is very much a product of the papers he was able to gather and collect, the spaces he was able to enter and deem significant to archive its key artifacts, and the fact that he was willing to share them with me. His archival avocations has significantly impacted the center of gravity of the story I have produced.

⁶⁵² Labor sociologist Ian Robinson asserts this trend may be more typical than aberrant. External political crises such as Act 10 can often serve to catalyze union reform, provided internal leadership exists ready to steer it on such a path I. Robinson, "Neoliberal Restructuring and U.S. Unions: Toward Social Movement Unionism?," *Critical Sociology* 26, no. 1–2 (January 1, 2000): 109–38, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08969205000260010701>.

struggles to defend public education are explicitly framed in terms of *enfranchising* communities of color with high-quality, well-funded public and democratically-operated schools. This commitment drives their work social justice work. Working with community coalitions, the teachers have mobilized to oppose unregulated charter school expansion. They have successfully advocated to build a community schools program that provides wraparound services for students and families and operates through community decision-making, *not* by command of private management companies. Teachers have joined with students to fight against more police in schools, demanding instead more funding for educational resources. MTEA is not, in other words, who it was not very long ago.⁶⁵³

One February 2017 weekend, for example, in anticipation of Gov. Walker's 2017 budget and its slashes to public education, MTEA hosted a community "art build" to make banners, signs, parachutes for the upcoming protests. A local graphic designer, a thirty-something Latino man with bright, warm eyes, tells me some of his artist friends asked him to join. "It's a good-use of my built-up rage," he smiles at me. Music streams in the background, steaming boxes of pizza continually appear, children shriek and run across the room. One elementary student shows me their hand-drawn sign, bright scribbles that read, "\$9999 for Schools." Dozens of screen-printed canvases hang-dry from a clothesline stretched across the room, fluttering like a prayer flag. One sign reads "Public Schools Are The Heart of Democracy," a stylized schoolhouse bursting from the chambers of a heart whose muscle fibers, upon closer inspection, are actually fields of wild flowers. Another says, "Organize Students Workers and Immigrants," with a woodblock image of people huddled under an umbrella; deep chisel marks groove their faces, so they look human and weary and fierce. Like the struggle has made them strong.

**

Questions and Contradictions

⁶⁵³ Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

Yet for all MTEA's evolution as a social justice union, important questions remain. Exactly how integrated are the union's "social justice" priorities to its other efforts? In Peterson's model of social justice unionism, social justice concerns are one of three legs of a stool. While this brings attention to the critical importance of social movement work to a union's mission it, perhaps artificially, separates it as an element distinct from two concerns, of wages and benefits and professional development. This runs one of two risks. First, it may result in union's social justice work assuming an "extracurricular" position to union's other matters. Teachers can pick and choose if they want to be involved in such interests, rather than fundamentally intertwining them from the union's priorities. An elective form of social justice engagement changes the nature of a union, from a broad labor organization, in which all workers are eligible for membership, regardless of interests, to a self-selecting group of activists. While community activism plays an important role in union development, as my work and others have shown, they are insufficient substitutes for the structural power capacities of broad-based union actions, in which all members participate.⁶⁵⁴

And secondly, it may shift the nature of union's actions toward cultivating "top-down" community alliances at the expense of developing "bottom-up" organizing power. Union leaders and nonprofit leaders collaborating to hold an event, for example, is not the same as members of an organization collectively determining key issues, and then building a broad base of power to advance them. That form of organizing power, when aimed towards public goods, can build alliances to forcefully demand public needs.⁶⁵⁵ "Fuzzy social justice unionism" writes labor scholar Joe Burns, obfuscates unions' critical power to withhold labor and to organize members and the community in

⁶⁵⁴ Uetrict and Eidlin, "U.S. Union Revitalization and the Missing 'Militant Minority'"; Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin, *Left Out: Reds and America's Industrial Unions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Burns, *Strike Back: Using the Militant Tactics of Labor's Past to Reignite Public Sector Unionism Today*; Katznelson, *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States*.

⁶⁵⁵ Burns, *Strike Back: Using the Militant Tactics of Labor's Past to Reignite Public Sector Unionism Today*, 72.

order to build that level of power.⁶⁵⁶ A strike, one might note, has radically different power than a rally or a protest. As labor historian Nelson Lichtenstein puts it, “if unions became just voluntary associations that are politically active, why are they unions?”⁶⁵⁷ While teachers’ unions may have historically used elements of their structural power to narrow interests, these are hardly the predetermined powers of industrial union methods. Indeed, as a new wave of teacher strikes takes place, teachers’ unions may be increasingly using their structural position to both define and demand critical elements of the public good.⁶⁵⁸

**

Movements Towards Hope

It is a good problem that, today, when people talk about teachers’ strikes they want to talk about success. They may reference Los Angeles’ teachers’ victorious demands for charter school moratoriums, for fewer cops in schools, for legal support for immigrant families, for more social workers, nurses and librarians. They may mention the critical solidarity of West Virginia bus drivers whose support of striking teachers shut down the school system faster than administrators could say “Those teachers are right.” People’s eyes may brighten when they talk about taxing billionaires in order to fund small class sizes, art classes and playgrounds with grass for all children

No doubt, these are successes. But what makes each of these victories a success isn’t simply that teachers got the thing they demanded – the raise, the moratorium, the better funding plan. They are successes because mobilizing for each aim created and nurtured space for future movements to

⁶⁵⁶ Using a strike as an organizing tool in and of itself, that is, to build bottom-up supermajority coalitions capable of winning massive actions, such as strikes, is why labor theorist Jane McAlevey calls strike ‘the ultimate structure test.’ See Jane McAlevey, “The Strike as the Ultimate Structure Test,” *Catalyst* 2, no. 3 (2018); Jane McAlevey, *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁶⁵⁷ Abby Rapoport, “Labor’s Plan B,” *The American Prospect*, 2013, <http://prospect.org/article/labors-plan-b>.

⁶⁵⁸ Lois Weiner, *The Future of Our Schools: Teachers Unions and Social Justice* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012); Peter Brogan, “Getting to the CORE of the Chicago Teachers’ Union Transformation,” *Studies in Social Justice* 8, no. 2 (2014): 145–64; Uetricht and Eidlin, “U.S. Union Revitalization and the Missing ‘Militant Minority’”; P. Gutstein, E. & Lipman, “The Rebirth of the Chicago Teachers Union and Possibilities for a Counterhegemonic Education Movement,” *Monthly Review* 65, no. 2 (2013): 1–12.

grow. Each action created opportunities to bring people together, to deepen solidarities. Each demand made a vibrant dream for a better world more possible.⁶⁵⁹

This, however, is not the same thing as winning – a union can succeed in these terms even when winning the short-term outcome is out of reach. Conversely, a union can fail in these movement aims but win their short-term goals. The early generation of MTEA won strong contracts for its teachers, but sacrificed broad solidarity and political analyses. Though MTEA lost key labor rights in 2011, they re-established their power to organize movements, to ferment ideas and analyses of a better world, to build bonds among disparate elements. Over three decades of political attacks on public schools and unions, Milwaukee teachers have slowly and persistently developed the ideological architecture of social justice unionism. Their ideas have fertilized movements for progressive education across the country. Despite their short-term defeats, Milwaukee teacher unionists continue to build the ground work for future public education movements take grow. They remind us: it is not laws that make unions strong; it is people dreaming and fighting together that make unions strong.⁶⁶⁰

**

Conclusion

In some regards, this dissertation offers a biography of the Milwaukee teachers' union. Like a biographer, I have strived to craft a story from the scrolling din of daily records. Like a biographer, I have charted the birth, maturity and death attempts on my subject. Yet my efforts as a biographer are crude. More lumpy than sweeping, my account of the Milwaukee teachers' union hardly offers a

⁶⁵⁹ Or, as Karl Marx famously wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*: “Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever-expanding union of the workers.” I’m grateful to Adrienne Pagac for bringing this reference to my attention.

⁶⁶⁰ Eleni Schirmer, “After Act 10: How Milwaukee Teachers Fought Back,” *Dissent*, 2019.

comprehensive portrait of the union's priorities or practices. What I have left out is far greater than what I have included. Instead, I have constructed a chronicle of select ruptures, a nodal map of breaking points in a union's history, perhaps akin to telling a life story by one's fractured bones. While this style may capture dramatic, even consequential pivots, it scarcely enables one to understand the daily choices, complexities and contingencies that comprise a life.

Still, elements of the aims of biography are well-suited for my goals. Like a biography, I have examined the particulars of MTEA in order to understand the broader social forces of the time. "No social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey," wrote C. Wright Mills, suggesting that biography and history animate "the sociological imagination," his famous formulation for the task of understanding one's place within the world.⁶⁶¹ Focusing on select rupture moments for MTEA and Milwaukee's public education has enabled me to center the bigger questions I was after. How do collective ideologies and identities shape organizations? How, in turn, do organizations shape collective ideologies and identities? What do teachers' unions suggest to us about the gendered and racialized form of the welfare state, how it has formed and how it must be re-formed? Tracing the evolution of the Milwaukee teachers' union has permitted me to examine these bigger questions.

But can a biography be written of a union? A biography is, after all, the story of a person's life. A union, by definition, gathers *many* people's lives. The union itself is little more than a shell – a container to assemble members, who in turn exercise choices and construct visions that give the union its character. A union, theorist Antonio Gramsci reminds us, is not predetermined phenomena. Rather, it "*becomes* a determinate institution, that is, it assumes a definite historical form to the extent that the strength and will of the workers who are its members impress a policy and

⁶⁶¹ C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 6.

propose an aim that define it.”⁶⁶² Given a union’s existential dependence upon the multiplicity of persons and contradictory wills that bring it into form, is it possible at all to write a biography of a union itself? The story of the unions is more than the story of its key leaders, as individuals or even aggregated. In my research, I quickly discovered individual characters who drove large parts of the union’s history – Lauri Wynn, Don Feilbach, Bob Peterson – and I spent time trying to piece together their role in the union. But my focal point rested beyond these influential leaders themselves, beyond even an aggregate portrait of their work. I wanted to tell the biography of the union itself, and the space it held open as a way to understand welfare state’s commitment to public education and professional care workers, from the point of view of people who were both formed by the welfare state and ruled by it. But what kind of story is the story of a shell?

In her essay, “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction,” science fiction writer Ursula Le Guin challenges the model of narrative of “heroes” and “action” in which daring and singular individuals enact great deeds that are relayed to the reader with dramatic tension. This style of story-telling, Le Guin supposes, derives from hunting and gathering times; hunters and hunting made for far better story-telling than gatherers and gathering. She writes,

It is hard to tell a really gripping tale of how I wrested a wild-oat seed from its husk, and then another, and then another, and then another, and then another, and then I scratched my gnat bites, and Oob said something funny, and we went to the creek and got a drink and watched newts for a while, and then I found another patch of oats, . . . No, it does not compare, it cannot compete with how I thrust my spear deep into the titanic hairy flank while Oob, impaled on one huge sweeping tusk, writhed screaming. . . . But it isn’t their story. It’s his.⁶⁶³

To address this problem, Le Guin proposes rethinking the basis of narrative. She suggests moving towards a container theory of narrative, a container being “a thing that holds something

⁶⁶² Antonio Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgasc (Baltimore, Maryland: Project Muse, 2014), 92.

⁶⁶³ Ursula LeGuin, “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction,” in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Harold Fromm heryll Glotfelty (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 149–50.

else.” This proposed mode of story-telling places gatherers and gathering – *not* hunters and hunting – at the center of narrative action. As such, containers become the vital mechanism that drives this style narrative: they are the thing that enables the act of gathering to build meaning. “I now propose the bottle as the hero,” Le Guin declares. After all, she impishly asserts, would societies be able to form without vessels to hold water, baskets to gather roots and seeds? “What’s the use of digging up a lot of potatoes,” she retorts, “if you have nothing to lug the ones you can’t eat home in?”

This theoretical re-framing brings to light a different side of heroism and villainism. It centers not the acts of conquering, battling, killing – but rather of archiving, saving, tending, readying for tomorrow. These narratives are not driven by any one person. Instead, they valorize how space gets held open and the acts that make futures possible. Container narratives possess fewer triumphs and more failed missions. They will be less driven by conflict, or even harmony, but rather by “continuing process,” writes Le Guin. They offer the story of one vessel pouring into another, one stream joining another and then another, either to trickle away or to flow towards the sea. The river’s motion is less about the particulars of the water in any particular place, but how the river bed manages to either steer water’s path or yield to its surging.⁶⁶⁴ Container narratives, as such, offer a way to understand how history becomes present, to encourage us to see how present may find its way to a more flourishing future.

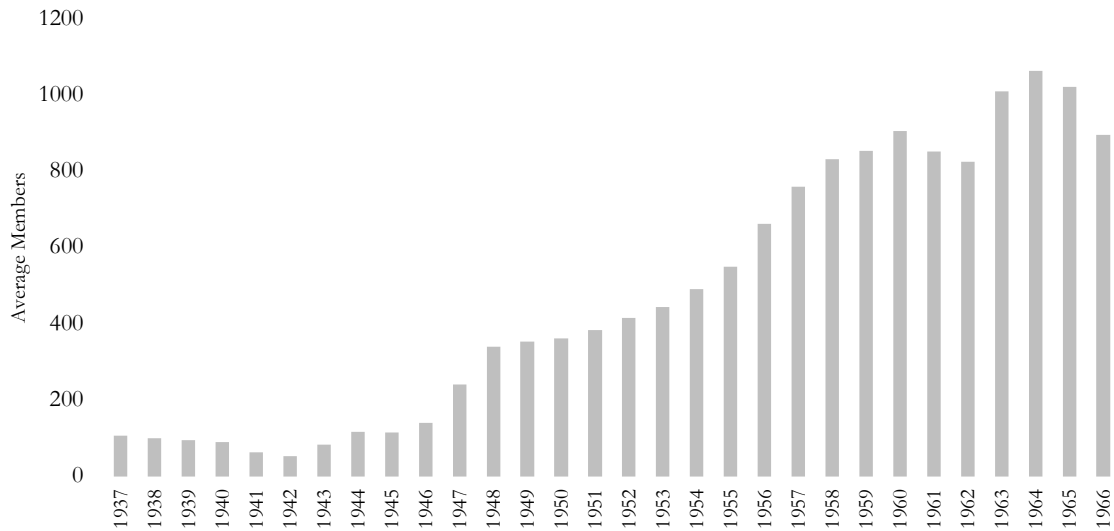
And what is a union if not a container? It is not the product of one hero or even a group of them – it is a vessel. It offers a space for people and their ideas to gather, for values to be planted, perhaps even to flourish. It is not static; it hosts movements, and a union itself gets formed by

⁶⁶⁴ The writer Toni Morrison beautifully describes this movement of water as a form of “remembering,” suggesting a similar kind of narrative capacity in which “continuing process” drives narrative. She writes, “Occasionally the river floods these places. ‘Floods’ is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was.” Quoted in Toni Morrison, “The Site of Memory,” in *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, ed. William Zinsser, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 99. Whereas Morrison describes this kind of filling in as a way to understand the connection *from present to past*, especially in historical fiction and memoir, Le Guin’s orients writers to consider how these narratives might be used to speculate *from present towards future*.

movements. When I started this project, I wanted to understand this movement across time, how one era of unionism poured into another, the costs of this inheritance, the resources it has generated. I wanted to know how teachers' unions, especially in Wisconsin, became so targeted and so feeble at one and the same moment. And I wanted to see what new possible paths were available. The striking thing I found was less the magnitude of my subject's triumphs or even its failures, but its longevity. In an era such as now, in a place such as Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in which both public education and public sector unions have been choked of vital resources and rights, simply fighting to exist has demanded solidarity and struggles, though both have occurred in contradictory, even oppositional ways. The aims of future struggles depend on how that space gets kept open and what elements it holds. My work, in this light, is wholly provisional and partial: the rest will be authored by the future.

Appendices

Appendix A: Milwaukee Teachers' Union Membership, Yearly Average



Data Source: Local 252 Per Caps, AFT Collections Inventory Part II, Series XII, Box 14, Folder 252. Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University.

Appendix B: Annual Recertification Results

MTEA Annual Recertification Election Results, Teachers

Year	Unit Population	Votes Cast	Yes Votes	No Votes	Percent Voted	Percent Voted Yes
2013	5114	3763	3728	35	73.6%	99.1%
2014	5120	3769	3736	33	73.6%	99.1%
2015	5206	3834	3808	25	73.6%	99.3%
2016	5042	3333	3300	33	66.1%	99.0%
2017	4997	3945	3920	25	78.9%	99.4%
2018	4802	3969	3934	35	82.7%	99.1%

MTEA Annual Recertification Election Results, Education Assistants

Year	Unit Population	Votes Cast	Yes Votes	No Votes	Percent Voted	Percent Voted Yes
2013	1467	885	875	10	60.3%	98.9%
2014	1618	991	988	3	61.2%	99.7%
2015	1686	1011	1006	5	60.0%	99.5%
2016	1828	1149	1144	5	62.9%	99.6%
2017	1832	1170	1163	7	63.9%	99.4%
2018	1794	1227	1217	10	68.4%	99.2%

Data Source: Annual Recertification Election Results, Wisconsin Employment Relations Council.

Bibliography

ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS

Private Collections

Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association. Union archives. Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Peterson, Robert. Personal collection. Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Rethinking Schools. Papers. Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Public Collections

American Federation of Teachers' collection. Papers. Walter Reuther archive. Wayne State University. Detroit, Michigan.

Barbee, Lloyd. Papers. Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Governor's Task Force on Educational Finance and Property Tax Reform. Papers. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

More Than One Struggle collection. Papers. Golda Meir Library, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

National Education Association collection. Papers. George Washington University, Washington D.C.

Wisconsin Educational Association. Papers. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

Wisconsin Educational Association. Oral histories. Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

WORKS CITED

- “2019–20 Superintendent’s Proposed Budget: Informational Section,” 2019.
- Acker, S. “Chapter 3: Gender and Teachers’ Work.” *Review of Research in Education* 21 (1995): 99–162.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X021001099>.
- Ahlgren, Priscilla. “Teachers Achieve Change through Own Newspaper.” *The Milwaukee Journal*,
 October 15, 1990.
- Anderson, Arvid. “Labor Relations in the Public Service.” *Wisconsin Law Review*, 1961, 601–35.
<http://136.145.11.55:85/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=M39M6019A7116.5010&profile=sl-3&source=~!uprbib&view=subscriptionssummary&uri=full=3100001~!101284~!14&ri=1&aspect=subtab168&menu=search&ipp=20&spp=20&staffonly=&term=collective+bargaining+public+sector&inde>.
- Apple, Michael W. “Does Education Have Independent Power? Bernstein and the Question of Relative Autonomy.” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 23, no. April 2015 (2002): 607–16.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/0142569022000038459>.
- . *Educating the “Right” Way: Markets, Standards, God and Inequality*. Second. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- . *Education and Power*. Second. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- . *Teachers and Texts: A Political Economy of Class and Gender Relations in Education*. New York: Routledge, 1986.
- . “The Absent Presence of Race in Educational Reform.” *Race Ethnicity and Education* 2, no. 1 (1999): 9–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1361332990020102>.
- Apple, Michael W. “Work, Gender and Teaching.” *Teachers College Record* 84, no. 3 (1983): 611–28.

- Ashby, Steven K, and Robert Bruno. *A Fight for the Soul of Public Education: The Story of the Chicago Teachers' Strike*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016.
- Asselin, Chloe. "Tensions, Dilemmas, and Radical Possibility in Democratizing Teacher Unions: Stories of Two Social Justice Caucuses in New York City and Philadelphia," 2019.
- "Attitudes and Opinions of Milwaukee Public School Teachers in Central City Schools." Milwaukee Board of School Directors, 1965.
- Ball, Stephen J. *Global Education Inc.: New Policy Networks and the Neo-Liberal Imaginary*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Bartley, Numan V. *The Rise of Massive Resistance: Race and Politics in the South during the 1950's*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999.
- Baruch, Steven. "Factors Affecting the Process of Curriculum Formation in the Milwaukee Public Schools, July 1955 to June 1976." University of Wisconsin -- Milwaukee, 1982.
- Bascia, Nina. "Teacher Unions and Educational Reform." In *International Handbook on Educational Change*, edited by A. Hargreaves, A. Lieberman, M Mullan, and D Hopkins. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998.
- Bascia, Nina, and Pamela Osmond. "Teacher Unions and Educational Reform: A Research Review." *National Education Association*. Washington D.C., 2012.
- <http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/recordDetail?accno=ED293837>.
- Battistoni, Alyssa. "Spadework: On Political Organizing." *N+1*, 2019.
- Bednarek, David. "Teachers' Local Opposes WEAC." *Milwaukee Journal*, 1974.
- Beilke, Dustin. *Wisconsin Education Association Council: A History*. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Education Association Council, 2001.
- Berger, Meta. *A Milwaukee Woman's Life on the Left: The Autobiography of Meta Berger /*. Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 2001.

- Bradley, Ann. "Milwaukee May's Call to Scrap Public Schools Stirs Furor." *Education Week*, January 15, 1992.
- Brimelow, Peter. *The Worm in the Apple: How the Teacher Unions Are Destroying American Education*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003.
- Brinkley, Alan. "The New Deal and the Idea of the State." In *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, edited by Steven Fraser and Gary Gerstle. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- Brogan, Peter. "Getting to the CORE of the Chicago Teachers' Union Transformation." *Studies in Social Justice* 8, no. 2 (2014): 145–64.
- Brown, Michael K. "Bargaining for Social Rights: Unions and the Reemergence of Welfare Capitalism, 1945-1952." *Political Science Quarterly* 112, no. 4 (1997): 645–74.
- Brown, Wendy. *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2076648>.
- Buhle, Paul. *Taking Care of Business: Samuel Gompers, George Meany, Lane Kirkland, and the Tragedy of American Labor*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999.
- Burch, Patricia. *Hidden Markets: The New Education Privatization*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Burns, Joe. *Strike Back: Using the Militant Tactics of Labor's Past to Reignite Public Sector Unionism Today*. Brooklyn, NY: Ig Publishing, 2014.
- Bybee, Roger. "The Role of Corporations." In *It Started in Wisconsin*, edited by Mari Jo Buhle and Paul Buhle, 127–43. New York: Verso, 2011.
- Carter, Susan B. "Incentives and Rewards to Teaching." In *American Teachers: History of a Profession at Work*, edited by Donald Warren, 49–63. New York: Macmillian Publishing Company, 1989.
- Chandler, Kurt. "Us vs. Them, Them vs. Us." *Milwaukee Magazine*. Milwaukee, November 2002. https://www.milwaukeeemag.com/usvs_themthemvs_us/.

- Chubb, J. E., and T. M. Moe. *Politics, Markets, and America's Schools*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1990.
- Cibulka, James, and Frederick Olson. "The Organization of the Milwaukee Public School System." In *Seeds of Crisis: Public Schooling in Milwaukee since 1920*, edited by John Rury and Frank Cassell, 73–109. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993.
- Clear, Delbert K. "The Milwaukee Teachers' Education Association." Milwaukee, WI, 1990.
- Clifford, Geraldine Joncich. "Man/Woman/Teacher: Gender, Family, and Career in American Educational History." In *American Teachers: History of a Profession at Work*, edited by Donald Warren, 293–343. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989.
- Cobble, Dorothy Sue. *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Cohen, Joshua, and Joel Rogers. "Secondary Associations and Democratic Governance." *Associations and Democracy* 20, no. 4 (1992): 393–472.
- Collins, Jane L., and H. Jacob Carlson. "State Phobia, Then and Now: Three Waves of Conflict over Wisconsin's Public Sector, 1930–2013." *Social Science History* 42, no. 01 (2018): 57–80. <https://doi.org/10.1017/ssh.2017.37>.
- Collins, Jane L., and Victoria Mayer. *Both Hands Tied: Welfare Reform and the Race to the Bottom in the Low-Wage Labor Market*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.
- Combahee River Collective. "A Black Feminist Statement." *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism*, 1978, 362–72. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203357071>.
- "Comparative Analysis of 2011-13 Biennial Budget Bill," 2011.
- Connell, Tula A. *Conservative Counterrevolution: Challenging Liberalism in 1950s Milwaukee*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016.
- Cox, Oliver Cromwell. *Caste, Class, and Race: A Study of Structural Dynamics*. New York: Doubleday,

1948.

Cramer, Katherine. *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness and the Rise of Scott Walker*. Chicago:

University of Chicago Press, 2016.

Cucchiara, Maia, and E V A Gold. "Contracts , Choice , and Customer Service : Marketization and

Public Engagement in Education" 113, no. 11 (2001): 2460–2502.

Dahlk, Bill. *Against the Wind: African Americans and the Schools in Milwaukee, 1963-2002*. Milwaukee, WI:

Marquette University Press, 2010.

Davis, Mike. *Prisoners of the American Dream*. Verson, 1986.

———. "The Barren Marriage of American Labour and the Democratic Party." *New Left Review* 124 (1980): 43–84.

———. "The New Right's Road to Power." In *Prisoners of the American Dream*, 161–86. Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2018.

———. "Why the US Working Class Is Different." *New Left Review*, 1980, 3–44.

Dawson, Michael C. "Hidden in Plain Sight: A Note on Legitimation Crises and the Racial Order."

Critical Historical Studies, no. Spring (2016): 143–61.

Denning, Michael. "Wageless Life." *New Left Review* 66 (2010): 79–97.

Desmond, Matthew. "Relational Ethnography." *Theory and Society* 43, no. 5 (2014): 547–79.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11186-014-9232-5>.

Dougherty, Jack. "Bridging the Gap between Urban, Suburban, and Educational History." In

Rethinking the History of American Education, edited by William Reese and John Rury, 245–60, 2007.

———. *More Than One Struggle : The Evolution of Black School Reform In Milwaukee*. Chapel Hill, N.C.:

University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

———. "'That's When We Were Marching for Jobs': Black Teachers and the Early Civil Rights

- Movement in Milwaukee.” *History of Education Society* 38, no. 2 (1998): 121–41.
- Eimer, Stuart. “From ‘Business Unionism’ to ‘Social Movement Unionism’: The Case of the AFL-CIO Milwaukee County Labor Council.” *Labor Studies Journal* 24, no. 2 (1999): 63–81.
- Eisinger, Peter K. “Municipal Residency Requirements and the Local Economy.” *Social Science Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (1983): 85–96.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa. “Manifesto for a Relational Sociology.” *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 2 (1997): 281–317.
- Ewing, Eve. *Ghosts in the Schoolyard: Racism and School Closings on Chicago’s South Side*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.
- Fantasia, Rick. *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action and Contemporary American Workers*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988.
- Feurer, Rosemary, and Chad Pearson. *Against Labor: How U.S. Employers Organized to Defeat Union Activism*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017.
- Fields, Barbara Jeanne. “Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America.” *New Left Review*, no. 181 (1990): 95–118.
- Fields, Karen, and Barbara Fields. *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life*. New York: Verso, 2012.
- Foster, Stuart J. “Red Alert!: The National Education Association Confronts the ‘Red Scare’ in American Public Schools, 1947-1954.” *Education and Culture* 14, no. 2 (1997): 1–16.
- Fraser, Nancy. “After the Family Wage: A Postindustrial Thought Experiment.” In *Fortunes of Feminism: From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis*. London: Verso, 2013.
- . “Behind Marx’s Hidden Abode: For an Expanded Conception of Capitalism.” *New Left Review*, 2014, 55–72.
- . “Contradictions of Capital and Care.” *New Left Review* 100, no. July Aug 2016 (2016): 99–

117.

- . “From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a ‘Post-Socialist’ Age.” *New Left Review*, no. 212 (1995): 68–93. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470756119.ch54>.
- . “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy.” *Social Text* 26, no. 25/26 (1990): 56. <https://doi.org/10.2307/466240>.
- . “Talking about Needs: Interpretive Contests as Political Conflicts in Welfare-State Societies.” *Ethics* 99, no. 2 (1989): 291–313. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2381436>.
- Fraser, Nancy, and Linda Gordon. “A Genealogy of Dependency : Tracing a Keyword of the U . S . Welfare State.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 19, no. 2 (1994): 309–36.
- Fuller, Howard. *No Struggle, No Progress: A Warrior’s Life from Black Power to Education Reform*. Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2014.
- “General City News.” *Milwaukee Journal*. April 20, 1894.
- Geske, Terry G. “The Politics of Reforming School Finance in Wisconsin.” University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1975.
- Geske, Terry G., and Richard A. Rossmiller. “The Politics Of School Fiscal Reform In Wisconsin.” *Journal of Education Finance* 2, no. 4 (1977): 513–32.
- Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. *Golden Gulag: Prison, Surplus, Crisis and Opposition in Globalizing California*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007.
- Glass, Michael R. “From Sword to Shield to Myth: Facing the Facts of *De Facto* School Segregation.” *Journal of Urban History* 44, no. 6 (2018): 1197–1226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144216675473>.
- Glenn, Evelyn Nakano. “From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 18, no. 1 (1992): 1–43.

- . *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Goldfield, Michael. “Worker Insurgency, Radical Organization, and New Deal Labor Legislation.” *The American Political Science Review* 83, no. 4 (1989): 1257–82.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1961668>.
- Gordon, Leah. *From Power to Prejudice: The Rise of Racial Individualism in Midcentury America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015.
- . “If Opportunity Is Not Enough: Coleman and His Critics in the Era of Equality of Results.” *History of Education Quarterly* 57, no. 04 (2017): 601–15.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2017.34>.
- . “The Question of Prejudice: Social Science, Education, and the Struggle to Define ‘The Race Problem’ in Mid-Century America, 1935-1965.” University of Pennsylvania, 2008.
- Gornick, Vivian. *The Romance of American Communism*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1977.
- Gottschalk, Marie. *The Shadow Welfare State: Labor, Business, and the Politics of Health Care in the United States*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000.
- Gramsci, Antonio. “Soviets in Italy.” *New Left Review*, 1968, 28–58.
- Green, T. L., Sánchez, J., & Germain, E. “Communities and School Ratings: Examining Geography of Opportunity in an Urban School District Located in a Resource-Rich City.” *The Urban Review* 49, no. 5 (2017): 777–804.
- Greene, Julie, Bruce Laurie, and Eric Arneson, eds. *Labor Histories: Class, Politics, and the Working Class Experience*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998.
- Gurda, John. *The Bradley Legacy: Lynde and Harry Bradley, Their Company, and Their Foundation*. Milwaukee, WI: The Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation, 1992.
- Gutstein, E. & Lipman, P. “The Rebirth of the Chicago Teachers Union and Possibilities for a

- Counterhegemonic Education Movement.” *Monthly Review* 65, no. 2 (2013): 1–12.
- Hacker, J. S. *The Divided Welfare State : The Battle over Public and Private Social Benefits in the United States*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- Hall, S. “Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance.” *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, 1996, 16–60.
- Hall, Stuart. “Epilogue: Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life.” In *Culture, Politics, Race and Diaspora: The Thought of Stuart Hall*, edited by Brian Meeks, 269–91. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2007.
- . “Gramsci and Us.” In *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and Crisis of the Left*, 161–74. New York: Verso, 1988.
- . “The Battle for Socialist Ideas in the 1980s.” In *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and Crisis of the Left*, 177–95. New York: Verso, 1990.
- . “The Problem of Ideology-Marxism without Guarantees.” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (June 1, 1986): 28–44. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019685998601000203>.
- . “The Toad in the Garden: Thatcherism Among the Theorists.” In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1988.
- . “What Is This ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?” *Social Justice* 20, no. 1 (1993): 104–14. <https://doi.org/10.2307/29766735>.
- “High School Salaries: Several of Teachers to Get More Pay.” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 25, 1892.
- Hinant, Mike. “Hortonville Case Opinions Are ‘Cautious.’” *Appleton Post-Crescent*, June 20, 1976.
- Hirschman, Albert O. *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty; Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970.
- Holt, Mikel. *Not yet ‘Free at Last’: The Unfinished Business of the Civil Rights Movement : Our Battle for*

School Choice. Oakland, CA: ICS Press, 2000.

Holter, Darryl. "Sources of CIO Success: The New Deal Years in Milwaukee." *Labor History* 29, no. 2 (1988): 199–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00236568800890111>.

———, ed. "The Hortonville Teachers' Strike of 1974." In *Workers and Unions in Wisconsin: A Labor History Anthology*, 240–43. Madison, WI: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1999.

Hosmanek, Joh. "A Descriptive Analysis of Teacher Union Tactics and the Acceptability of Alternative Techniques for Resolving Union-School Board Disputes." Marquette University, 1975.

"How the Koch Brothers Helped Scott Walker," 2015.

Ingrassia, Paul. "Star of Snow Belt." *Wall Street Journal*, September 16, 1977.

<https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543067001043>.

Jacoby, Daniel F, and Keith Nitta. "The Bellevue Teachers Strike and Its Implications for the Future of Postindustrial Reform Unionism." *Educational Policy* 26, no. 4 (2012): 533–63.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904811417585>.

Johnson, Lauri. "'Making Democracy Real': Teacher Union and Community Activism to Promote Diversity in the New York City Public Schools .," *Urban Education* 37, no. 5 (2002): 566–87.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085902238674>.

Johnson, Susan Moore, and Susan M Kardos. "Reform Bargaining and Its Promise for School Improvement." In *Conflicting Missions? Teachers Unions and Educational Reform*, edited by Tom Loveless, 7–46. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000.

Johnston, Paul. *Success While Others Fail: Social Movement Unionism and the Public Workplace*. Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1994.

Jones, Patrick D. *The Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.

- Kaestle, Carl, and Marshall Smith. "The Federal Role in Elementary and Secondary Education, 1940-1980." *Harvard Educational Review* 52, no. 4 (1982): 384–408.
- Kaminsky, Ilya. *Deaf Republic: Poems*. Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2019.
- Kantor, Harvey. "Education, Social Reform, and the State: ESEA and Federal Education Policy in the 1960s." *American Journal of Education* 100, no. 1 (1991): 47–83.
- . "From the New Deal to the Great Society." *Educational Researcher* 24, no. 3 (1995): 4–11.
- Kantor, Harvey, and Robert Lowe. "Educationalizing the Welfare State and Privatizing Education." In *Closing the Opportunity Gap: What America Must Do to Give Every Child an Even Chance*, edited by Prudence Carter, 25–39. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- . "No Child Left Behind and the Devolution of Responsibility for Equal Opportunity." *Harvard Educational Review* 76, no. 4 (2006): 474–502.
- Karpinski, Carol F. *"A Visible Company of Professionals": African Americans and the National Education Association during the Civil Rights Movement*. New York: Peter Lang, 2008.
- Katz, Harold A. "Two Decades of State Labor Legislation 1937-1957." *The University of Chicago Law Review* 25, no. 109- (1957).
- Katznelson, Ira. *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.
- . "Was the Great Society a Lost Opportunity?" In *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, edited by Gray Gerstle and Steve Fraser. Princeton University Press, 1989.
- . *When Affirmative Action Was White. When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005.
- Katznelson, Ira, and Margaret Weir. *Schooling for All: Class, Race and the Decline of the Democratic Ideal*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1985.
- Kelley, Robin D. G. *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists during the Great Depression*. Chapel Hill:

- University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
- Kelley, Robin D.G. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002.
- Kerchner, Charles, and Douglas Mitchell. *The Changing Idea of a Teachers' Union*. New York: Falmer Press, 1988.
- Kerchner, Charles T, and Julia Koppich. *A Union of Professionals: Labor Relations and Educational Reform*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1993.
- Kessler-Harris, Alice. *Gendering Labor History*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006.
- Klein, Jennifer. *For All These Rights: Business, Labor, and the Shaping of America's Public-Private Welfare State*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006.
- Krage, Jermitt. *Memories of a Grateful Past, 1830-1965*. Montello, WI: White Spruce Publishing, 2016.
- Kretchmar, Kerry, Beth Sondel, and Joe J. Ferrare. "Mapping the Terrain: Teach For America, Charter School Reform, and Corporate Sponsorship." *Journal of Education Policy* 29 (2013): 742–759.
- Kritek, William J., and Delbert K. Clear. "Teachers and Principals in the Milwaukee Public Schools." In *Seeds of Crisis: Public Schooling in Milwaukee since 1920*, edited by John L. Rury and Frank A. Cassell. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993.
- Ladson, Erica. "Community Voice or Captive of the Right?: The Black Alliance for Educational Options." Washington D.C., 2003.
- Lamke, Kenneth. "Mayor Sees End of Urban Schools." *Milwaukee Sentinel*, January 2, 1992.
- Lassiter, Matthew D. "Schools and Housing in Metropolitan History : An Introduction." *Journal of Urban History* 38, no. 2 (2012): 195–204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0096144211427111>.
- Lawrence, Curtis. "Hard-Line Director of Teachers Union Resigns." *Milwaukee Journal*, March 31, 1994.
- . "Residency Rule Divides Teachers." *Milwaukee Journal*, October 10, 1993.

- . “Union Vows Change but Clings to Past.” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, November 21, 1995.
- Lazerson, M. “Teachers Organize: What Margaret Haley Lost.” *History of Education Society* 24, no. 2 (1984): 261–70. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/367959>.
- LeRoy, Erik. “The Egalitarian Roots of the Education Article of the Wisconsin Constitution: Old History, New Interpretation, *Buse v. Smith* Criticized.” *Wisconsin Law Review*, 1981, 1325–60. <https://doi.org/10.3366/ajicl.2011.0005>.
- Levine, David. “The Milwaukee Platoon School Battle: Lessons for Activist Teachers.” *Urban Review* 34, no. 1 (2002): 47–69. <https://doi.org/Article>.
- Levine, Marc V., and John F. Zipp. “A City at Risk: The Changing Social and Economic Context of Public Schooling in Milwaukee.” In *Seeds of Crisis: Public Schooling in Milwaukee since 1920*, edited by John L. Rury and Frank A. Cassell, 42–72. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993.
- Lewis, Oscar. “The Culture of Poverty.” In *Understanding Poverty: Perspectives from the Social Sciences*, edited by Daniel Patrick Moynihan. New York: Basic Books, 1969.
- Lichtenstein, Nelson. “From Corporatism to Collective Bargaining: Organized Labor and the Eclipse of Social Democracy in the Postwar Era.” In *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, edited by Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle, 122–52. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- . *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Lieberman, Myron. *The Teachers Unions: How They Sabotage Educational Reform and Why*. San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2000.
- Lipman, Pauline. “Urban Education as Racialized State Violence: What Is the Role of Higher Education?” In *24th Annual Conference of the Coalition for Urban and Metropolitan Universities*.

- Chicago, Illinois, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.18060/22929>.
- Loveless, Tom, ed. "Conflicting Missions?: Teachers Unions and Educational Reform." Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000.
- Lowe, Robert. "The New Unionism and the Very Old." *Education Week* 17, no. 29 (April 1998): 46–50.
- Lubienski, Christopher, and Jack Dougherty. "Mapping Educational Opportunity : Spatial Analysis and School Choices" 115, no. AUGUST (2009): 485–91.
- Lyken-Segosebe, Dawn, and Serena E. Hinz. "The Politics of Parental Involvement: How Opportunity Hoarding and Prying Shape Educational Opportunity." *Peabody Journal of Education* 90, no. 1 (2015): 93–112.
- MacLean, Nancy. *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America*. New York: Viking, 2017.
- . "The Conservative Quest to 'Make Democracy Safe for the World': Privatization as the Sequel to Massive Resistance." In *The Long Civil Rights Movement: Histories, Politics, Memories*. Chapel Hill, N.C., 2009.
- Maier, Henry. *The Mayor Who Made Milwaukee Famous: An Autobiography*. Lanham, Maryland: Madison Books, 1993.
- Marshall, Gordon. "Some Remarks on the Study of Working-Class Consciousness." *Politics & Society* 12, no. 3 (1983): 263–301.
- Martin, Isaac William. *The Permanent Tax Revolt: How the Property Tax Transformed American Politics*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008.
- Martin, John H. "Justice and Efficiency under a Model of Estate Settlement." *Virginia Law Review* 66, no. 4 (1980): 727–75.
- Maton, Rhinnanon. "WE Learn Together: Philadelphia Educators Putting Social Justice Unionism

- Principles into Practice.” *Workplace: A Journal for Academic Labor* 26 (2016): 5–19.
- Mayer, Jane. *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires behind the Rise of the Radical Right*. New York: Doubleday, 2016.
- Mayers, Jeff. “Lobbying: Wisconsin’s Growth Industry.” *Wisconsin Interest*, no. Spring (2004): 23–28.
- McAlevy, J. “The Crisis of New Labor and Alinsky’s Legacy: Revisiting the Role of the Organic Grassroots Leaders in Building Powerful Organizations and Movements.” *Politics & Society* 43, no. 3 (2015): 415–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329215584767>.
- McAlevy, Jane. *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- McCartin, Joseph a. “A Wagner Act for Public Employees: Labor’s Deferred Dream and the Rise of Conservatism, 1970-1976.” *The Journal of American History* 95, no. June (2008): 123–48.
- McCartin, Joseph A., and Jean-Christian Vinel. “Compulsory Unionism?: Sylvester Petro and the Career of an Anti-Union Idea, 1957-1987.” In *The Right and Labor in America: Politics, Ideology and Imagination*, 226–51. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.
- Mccartin, Joseph A. “Bargaining for the Common Good.” *Dissent* 63, no. 2 (2016): 128–35.
- Mead, L.M. *Government Matters: Welfare Reform in Wisconsin*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.
- Melucci, Alberto. “Getting Involved: Identity and Mobilization in Social Movements.” *International Social Movement Research* 1 (1988): 329–48.
- . “The Process of Collective Identity.” In *Social Movements and Culture*, edited by Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans, 41–63. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995.
- Mertz, Adam. “The 1974 Hortonville Teachers’s Strike and the Public Sector Labor Dilemma.” *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 2015, 1–13.
- Meyer, Stephen. “Stalin over Wisconsin”: *The Making and Unmaking of Militant Unionism, 1900-1950*. New

- Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992.
- Miller, John J. “Strategic Investment in Ideas: How Two Foundations Reshaped America.” *The Philanthropy Roundtable*, 2003.
- “Milwaukee School Superintendent Is Resigning.” *New York Times*, April 20, 1995.
- Miner, Barbara. *Lessons from the Heartland: A Turbulent Half-Century of Public Education in an Iconic American City*. New York: The New Press, 2013.
- Mitchell, George. “An Evaluation of State-Financed School Integration in Metropolitan Milwaukee.” Milwaukee, WI, 1989.
- Mizruchi, Mark S. *The Fracturing of the American Corporate Elite*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.4159/harvard.9780674075368>.
- Moe, Terry. *Special Interest: Teachers Unions and America’s Public Schools*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2011.
- Moody, Kim. *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism*. New York: Verso, 1988.
- Morel, Domingo. *Takeover: Race, Education, and American Democracy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Mukherji, S. Ani. “Reds Among the Sewer Socialists and McCarthyites: The Communist Party in Milwaukee.” *American Communist History* 16, no. 3–4 (2017): 112–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14743892.2017.1331302>.
- Murphy, Bruce, and Terrance Falk. “A Loss of Trust.” *Milwaukee Magazine*, November 1994.
- Murphy, Marjorie. *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA 1900-1989*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Nacker, Roger M. “A Short History of Economic Development in Wisconsin And the Rise of Professional Economic Development,” 2000.
- Nelsen, Daniel. Arbitration Dispute between MTEA and Milwaukee Board of School Directors:

- Thomas Clark suspension case, Case 237 (1992).
- Nelsen, James K. *Educating Milwaukee: How One City's History of Segregation and Struggle Shaped Its Schools*. Madison, WI: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2015.
- . "From No Choice to Forced Choice: A History of Educational Options in Milwaukee Public Schools." University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, 2012.
- Norman, Jack. "Funding Our Future: An Adequacy Model for Wisconsin School," 2002.
- O'Connor, Alice. *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Offe, Claus, and Helmut Wiesenthal. "Two Logics of Collective Action: Theoretical Notes on Social Class and Organizational Form." In *Political Power and Social Theory*, edited by Maurice Zeitlin, 67–116. JAI Press, 1980.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States*. New York: Routledge, 2015.
- Pedroni, Thomas. *Market Movements: African American Involvement in School Voucher Reform*. New York: Routledge, 2007.
- Perillo, Jonna. *Uncivil Rights: Teachers, Unions, and Race In the Battle for School Equity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.
- Perlstein, Daniel H. *Justice, Justice: School Politics and the Eclipse of Liberalism*. New York: Peter Lang, 2004.
- Peterson, Bob. "A Revitalized Teacher Union Movement: Reflections from the Field." *Rethinking Schools* 29, no. 2 (2015).
- . "Beginning with the Birds: The Making of an Activist," 2010.
- . "Justice and Survival: Rethinking Teacher Union Strategy." In *Transforming Teacher Unions: Fighting for Better Schools and Social Justice*, 11–19. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, 1999.
- . "Shortage of 1,685 Classrooms Raises Many Questions." *Rethinking Schools* 3, no. 1 (1988).

———. “Transforming Teacher Unions in a Post-Janus World.” *Rethinking Schools* 32, no. 4 (2018).

———. “Which Side Are You On.” *Rethinking Schools* 8, no. 1 (1993).

Phillips-Fein, Kim. *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009.

Piven, Frances Fox. “Militant Civil Servants in New York City.” *Trans-Action* 7, no. 1 (1969): 24–28.

Podair, Jerald E. *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

Podair, Jerald E. *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

Polletta, Francesca, and James M Jasper. “Collective Identity and Social Movements.” *Annual Review of Sociology* 27, no. 2001 (2001): 283–305.

“Proceedings of the Milwaukee Board of Directors.” August 5, 1919.

Quinn, Sarah L. *American Bonds: How Credit Markets Shaped a Nation*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2019.

Reese, William J. ““Partisans of the Proletariat”: The Socialist Working Class and the Milwaukee Schools, 1890-1920.” *History of Education Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1981): 3–50.

Rickford, Russell, and Marable Manning. “A . Philip Randolph and the Foundations of Black American Socialism.” In *Beyond Boundaries : The Manning Marable Reader*, 175–93. New York: Routledge, 2016.

Robinson, Cedric. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Rosario, Aenone. “Local, State Teachers Association Split Seen.” *Milwaukee Courier*, May 11, 1974.

Rosenfeld, Jake. *What Unions No Longer Do*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014.

Rousmaniere, Kate. *Citizen Teacher: The Life and Leadership of Margaret Haley*. Albany, New York: State

University of New York Press, 2005.

———. *City Teachers: Teaching and School Reform in Historical Perspective*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1997.

Rury, John L. “Who Became Teachers? The Social Characteristics of Teachers in American History.” In *American Teachers: History of a Profession at Work*, edited by Donald Warren, 7–48. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989.

Rury, John L, and Jeffrey E Mirel. *The Political Economy of Urban Education. Review of Research in Education*. Vol. 22, 1997. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1167374>.

Saatcioglu, Argun, and John L. Rury. “Suburban Advantage: Opportunity Hoarding and Secondary Attainment in the Postwar Metropolitan North.” *American Journal of Education* 117, no. 3 (2011): 307–42.

Saltzman, GM. “A Progressive Experiment: The Evolution of Wisconsin’s Collective Bargaining Legislation for Local Government Employees.” *Journal of Collective Negotiations in the Public Sector* 15, no. 1 (1986): 1–25.
<http://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&btnG=Search&q=intitle:A+Progressive+Experiment+the+Evolution+of+Wisconsin’s+Collective+Bargaining+Legislation+for+Local+Government+Employees#0>.

Sapiro, Virginia. “The Gender Basis of American Social Policy.” In *Women, The State and Welfare*, edited by Linda Gordon, 36–54. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990.

Schirmer, Eleni. “After Act 10 : How Milwaukee Teachers Fought Back.” *Dissent*, 2019.

Schirmer, Eleni, and Michael W. Apple. “(Un)Chaining Democracy: An Essay Review of Nancy MacLean’s History of the Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America.” *Education Review*, January 2018.

Schirmer, Eleni Brelis. “When Solidarity Doesn’t Quite Strike: The 1974 Hortonville, Wisconsin

- Teachers' Strike and the Rise of Neoliberalism." *Gender and Education* 29, no. 1 (2016): 8–27.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2016.1197381>.
- Schmitt, Carl. *The Concept of the Political*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.
<https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226738840.001.0001>.
- Scott, Janelle, and Jennifer Holme. "The Political Economy of Market-Based Educational Policies: Race and Reform in Urban School Districts, 1915 to 2016." *Review of Research in Education* 40, no. March (2016): 250–97. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X16681001>.
- Shelton, Jon. *Teacher Strike!: Public Education and the Making of a New American Political Order*. Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2017.
- Shelton, Jon K. "‘Against the Public’: Teacher Strikes and the Decline of Liberalism, 1968-1981." University of Maryland, College Park, 2013.
- Shippo, Dorothy. *School Reform, Corporate Style: Chicago, 1880-2000*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2006.
- Slater, Joseph. *Public Workers: Government Unions, the Law and the State, 1900-1962*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004.
- Smith, Kevin D. "From Socialism to Racism: The Politics of Class and Identity in Postwar Milwaukee." *Michigan Historical Review* 29, no. 1 (2003): 71–95.
- Sneiderman, Marilyn, and Secky Fascione. "Going on Offense during Challenging Times." *New Labor Forum* 1, no. January (2018): 54–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1095796017745036>.
- Snyder, Thomas D. "120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait," 1993.
- Solnit, Rebecca. *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016.
- Stark, John O. "A History of the Property Tax and Property Tax Relief," 1992.
- Stein, Jason, Patrick Marley, and Lee Bergquist. "Walker's Budget Cuts Would Touch Most Wisconsinites." *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, March 1, 2011.

- Stepan-Norris, Judith. "The Making of Union Democracy." *Social Forces* 76, no. 2 (1997): 475–510.
- Stepan-Norris, Judith, and Maurice Zeitlin. *Left Out: Reds and America's Industrial Unions*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Streeck, Wolfgang. *Buying Time: The Delayed Crisis of Democratic Capitalism*. New York: Verso, 2014.
- "Support Fuller's Building Proposal." *Rethinking Schools* 6, no. 3 (1992): 2.
- Tarrow, Sidney. *Power in Movement: Social Movement, Collective Action and Politics*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Taylor, Clarence. *Reds at the Blackboard: Communism, Civil Rights and the New York City Teachers Union*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
- Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta. *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Home Ownership*. University of North Carolina Press, 2019.
- "Teacher Picketing Injunction Asked." *The Racine Journal Times*, April 18, 1974.
- "Teachers' Local Urged to Drop Out." *Milwaukee Journal*, March 14, 1974.
- "Teachers Break from WEA Seen." *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, March 14, 1974.
- "Teachers Get a Chance for Change." *Milwaukee Journal*, April 1, 1994.
- Teitelbaum, Kenneth. *Schooling for Good Rebels: Socialist Education for Children in the United States, 1900-1920*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993.
- Teles, Steven. *The Rise of the Conservative Legal Movement: The Battle for Control of the Law*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Teresa, Benjamin F., and Ryan M. Good. "Speculative Charter School Growth in the Case of UNO Charter School Network in Chicago." *Urban Affairs Review*, 2017.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087417703487>.
- "The Year in Review: A Rethinking Schools Analysis." *Rethinking Schools* 5, no. 4 (1991): 3.
- Therborn, Goran. *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology*. London: Verso, 1980.

- Tilly, Charles. *Durable Inequality*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998.
- Trotter, Joe William. *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007.
- Trotter, Joe William Jr. "Epilogue." In *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-45*, Second., 283–98. Champaign, IL: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2007.
- Uetricht, Micah, and Barry Eidlin. "U.S. Union Revitalization and the Missing 'Militant Minority.'" *Labor Studies Journal* 44, no. 1 (2019): 36–59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0160449X19828470>.
- Uetricht, Michael. *Strike for America*. New York: Verso, 2014.
- Umhoefer, Dave. "For Unions in Wisconsin, a Fast and Hard Fall since Act 10." *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*. October 9, 2016. <https://projects.jsonline.com/news/2016/11/27/for-unions-in-wisconsin-fast-and-hard-fall-since-act-10.html>.
- Urban, Wayne. *Why Teachers Organized*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982.
- Warren, Mark E. *Democracy and Association*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001.
- Weimer, Don. "An Opportunity Lost: Affirmative Action vs. Seniority in the Milwaukee School System." Unpublished manuscript, 1981.
- Weiner, Lois. "Teachers, Unions, and School Reform: Examining Margaret Haley's Vision." *Educational Foundations*, 10(3), 85-96. Chicago." *Educational Foundations* 10, no. 3 (1996): 85–96.
- . "Teachers Unions Not 'Too Industrial.'" *Rethinking Schools* 13, no. 1 (1998): 23.
- . *The Future of Our Schools: Teachers Unions and Social Justice*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012.
- Weingrod, Dave. "Who's Going to Pay for Our Schools?" *Rethinking Schools* 2, no. 1 (1987).
- Wheeler-Bell, Quentin. "Broken Glass: The Social Evil of Urban Poverty and a Critical Education." *Educational Policy*, 2018, 1–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904818755467>.
- Wilayto, Phil. "The Feeding Trough: The Bradley Foundation, 'The Bell Curve' & the Real Story

- behind W-2, Wisconsin's National Model for Welfare Reform." Milwaukee, WI, 1997.
- Williams, Joe. *Cheating Our Kids: How Politics and Greed Ruin Education*, 2005.
- . "Local Teachers Resist Peer Review." *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, July 10, 1997.
- Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Wilson, William J. *When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor*. New York: Vintage Books, 1997.
- Windham, Lane. *Knocking on - Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide*. Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2017.
- Wright, EO. "The Class Analysis of Poverty." In *Interrogating Inequality*, 32–50. Verso, 1994.
- <http://baywood.metapress.com/index/WYRM630N8M6V7851.pdf>.
- . "Working-Class Power, Capitalist-Class Interests, and Class Compromise." *American Journal of Sociology* 105, no. 4 (2000): 957–1002.
- . "Working-Class Power, Capitalist-Class Interests, and Class Compromise." *American Journal of Sociology* 105, no. 4 (2000): 957–1002. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/3003886>.
- Wright, Erik Olin. *Envisioning Real Utopias*. New York: Verso, 2010.
- . "Understanding Class." *New Left Review* 60 (2009): 101–16.
- . *Understanding Class*. Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2015.
- Wright, Erik Olin, and Joel Rogers. *American Society: How It Really Works*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011.
- "Year in Review: One Step Forward, Two Steps Backward." *Rethinking Schools* 6, no. 4 (1992).
- "Year in Review." *Rethinking Schools* 7, no. 4 (1993).
- Zeidler, Frank. "Public Servants as Organized Labor." *The Municipality*, 1972.