Our Union, Our City: Teacher Rebellion and Urban Change in Chicago and New York City

Peter M. Brogan

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the relationship between education restructuring in the K-12 sector, urban transformation, and the remaking of contemporary capitalism in the wake of the 2008 Great Recession. Through the use of the Extended Case Method (Burawoy 2009), it examines how and why the remaking of two global cities—Chicago and New York—has both shaped and been transformed by struggles amongst rank-and-file teachers in their fight against the corporate-backed dismantling and commodification of public schools. Exploring how teachers' unions have been affected by changes in particular cities and how different institutional contexts have altered the ability of teacher unions to challenge the corporate-led reform of public schools, the dissertation also examines how and why the contentious struggles over public education have been a key facet of urban change over the past 40 years, during which neoliberalism has ascended as the structuring political and economic logic of the United States.

The focus of this dissertation is the relationship between urban transformation (understood through a framework of neoliberalization and global city development) and the struggle of dissident rank-and file-teachers organizing both in and outside of their unions. The goal of this study is to understand *how neoliberalization and global city development both constrain and enable the possibilities for working-class organizations to transform the political and economic landscapes of contemporary capitalism.* The contradictions and potentials in rank-and-file teachers' efforts to transform their unions also help delineate possible routes for workers elsewhere looking to transform their unions, a necessary component of the creation of new forms of working-class power and politics and the construction of justice in the urban environment. Such transformation, it should be noted, is equally as necessary in order for teachers to improve both their work lives as professional educators and the learning environments of their students.

Dedicated to my grandmother, Mary McConnell, 1925-2011.

Acknowledgements

It is difficult to do justice to the many beautiful, smart, and passionate friends and comrades who have supported me throughout the years in which I completed the research and writing of this dissertation. I first came to the Geography Department at York University as a socialist, a labour activist, and a political economist. Before I started the PhD program I had never taken a single geography course in my life. I was bit by the "geography bug" while completing the Major Research Paper for my MA in Political Science at York two years earlier, when I discovered the wonderful scholarship of Neil Brenner on "new state spaces." Neil's work allowed me to expand my thinking about globalization and new configurations of state power in global capitalism, effectively exploding the false binary between the emphasis different critical scholars put on the persistent political and explanatory power of the national state versus globality and the transnational political institutions structuring contemporary capitalism, which has dominated debates on state theory and globalization for years.

Thus, while I began to develop a more nuanced, and spatial, reading of political economy prior to beginning the PhD, if it had not been for the guidance of my supervisor Steve Tufts and other professors and friends, Ranu Basu, Philip Kelley, and Valerie Preston, alongside my fellow graduate students comrades, especially those who like me were learning to become "proper geographers" (of the critical variety, of course) I would not have developed the deep appreciation I now have of the political necessity to think geographically about politics, the urban, movement struggles, and labour.

While always seeking to be critical (and generally feeling anxious about) answering the question of "how is your work on unions and cities geography?" I now feel more than comfortable addressing such a question. I attribute this entirely to the aforementioned people,

some of whom guided me along this path, and others who have walked it alongside me. Special mention and thanks needs to be given to David Hugill, Sara Jackson, Ryan Hackett, and Katie MacDonald. In the York University Geography Department, I would be remiss if I did not give a huge thanks to the Graduate Programme Assistant, Yvonne Yim, who has always provided timely assistance and support in helping me navigate the York bureaucracy (and helped me book rooms for various unions meeting and events, whenever said bureaucracy was slow to do so).

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Last, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my wife Karen Walker. Karen has not only been a huge source of love, encouragement, and support but has proven to be an amazingly brilliant person to talk unions, politics, and theory over the years. Her editorial hand has made this dissertation a far better piece of writing.

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List of Acronyms

AFT	American Federation of Teachers
AFL-CIO	American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations
CCC	Commercial Club of Chicago
CORE	Caucus of Rank-and-file Educators
CTU	Chicago Teachers Union
CPS	Chicago Public Schools
DOE	Department of Education
ESEA	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
GEM	Grassroots Education Movement
GPN	Global Production Networks
IASA	Improving America's Schools Act of 1994
ICE	Independent Coalition of Educators
ILO	International Labor Organization
MORE	Movement of Organized Rank-and-file Educators
NEA	National Education Association
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NLRA	National Labor Relations Act
NLRB	National Labor Relations Board
NYCoRE	New York Collective of Radical Educators
PEP	Panel on Education Policy
RTTP	Race to the Top
TFA	Teach for America
TIF	Tax Incremental Financing
TJC	Teachers for a Just Contract
TSJ	Teachers for Social Justice
UFT	United Federation of Teachers

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Part I: Foundations of the Analysis

Introduction

There is a war taking place in the United States today over the future of public education. On the one side, is the corporate-sponsored neoliberal education "reform" movement that attributes all of the nation's failings—poverty, inequality, and a decline in economic competitiveness in the world economy—to a crisis in public education; a crisis most acute in U.S. cities (Weiner 2012; Ravitch 2010; Ravitch 2013). On the other side are those whom the reformers view as the main culprits for this crisis—bad teachers and the unions that protect them from being fired. While what is happening in the United States is part of a broader global assault on public education, teachers, and their unions (Weiner and Compton 2008), it is just as importantly an urban phenomenon.

According to the corporate reformers, teachers' unions are only concerned with pursuing the narrow economic interests of their members at the cost of both the children entrusted to their care and the taxpayers who fund public schools. Neoliberal reformers contend that what is needed to address the failure of public schooling today is a standardized curriculum with "objective" instruments to measure student learning, and specifically *teacher performance* in order to develop the "best practices" for improving education outcomes. Teachers and youth, it is said, need to be held accountable. When students score poorly on state mandated tests, it is supposedly because of some kind of behavioral, cognitive, cultural, and/or linguistic deficit (Delpit 2006). In other words, they are missing the appropriate skills or knowledge. Following this logic, good teachers are those who use best practices to fix the deficit by providing the correct mix of knowledge and skills, and thereby improve test scores. Even the use of terms like "best

practice" indicates the extent to which neoclassical economic thinking dominates education policy discourse (Spring 2014). This narrative posits teacher unions as the most powerful political force obstructing a supposedly grassroots, parent-led movement for school choice and accountability.[1] And while what is happening in the United States is extreme in many respects, the fight over the future of public education is connected to a global struggle over what education will look like in the twenty-first century (Weiner and Compton 2008; Saltman 2009).

As a casual perusal of the mainstream press will attest, teachers and their unions enjoy the unfortunate privilege of being the primary target of the corporate attack on public education. Yet, depending upon whom one asks, teachers and their unions are either the "worm in the apple[2]," who, with too much power and influence over education policy, have driven down the quality of the American education system to such an extent that the national security of the country is in jeopardy,[3] or they continue to be held in high esteem and to be seen as underpaid and underappreciated. Teachers' unions, in contrast, are generally not viewed favorably even by those who hold "ordinary" teachers in high regard. As Dana Goldstein (2014, 1) observes, "No other profession operates under this level of political scrutiny, not even those, like policing or social work, that are also tasked with public welfare and are paid for with public funds." Goldstein compellingly argues that the "ineffective tenured teacher has emerged as a feared character, a vampiric type

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[1] A number of books have been published in recent years that make this argument, including Steven Brill's *Class Warfare: Inside the Fight to Fix America's School* (2012). These views can also been seen in the widely acclaimed documentary *Waiting for Superman* (Guggenheim 2010) and the more recent Hollywood dramatization staring Viola Davis and Maggie Gyllenhaal, *Won't Back Down* (Barnz 2012). *Newsweek* published a cover story in 2010 entitled, "Why We Must Fire Bad Teachers," which a single depicted a blackboard with phrase chalked over and over: "We must fire bad teachers" (Thomas 2010).
[2] For an example of this, see the book by Peter Brimelow (2003), *The Worm in the Apple: How the Teacher Unions Are Destroying American Education*.
[3] This framing was first developed in the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner 1983).

who sucks tax dollars into her bloated pension and health care plans, without much regard for the children under her care" (2014, 5). This caricature is not necessarily one that is widely believed by most people, but it remains a powerful trope underlying the debates on education policy in the United States today.

As I demonstrate in my analysis of the historical development and evolution of neoliberalization in Chicago and New York City, the transformation of public education has been essential to the process of reassertion of capitalist class power and white supremacy that characterizes broader transformations in the U.S. political-economic landscape over the past thirty years. Yet, neoliberalization and its ongoing mutations since the Great Recession of 2008 should be understood as working through an already deeply racialized U.S. capitalism that is built on genocide, dispossession and whose history is written in "letters of blood and fire," as Marx described the making of capitalism in *Capital Volume 1*, Chapter 26 (see also Dunbar-Ortiz 2014). As a recent report published by the Discount Foundation entitled *Black Workers Matter* (Thomas-Brietfeld et al. 2015, 1) succinctly puts it:

> From the founding of the United States, the black experience in this country has been defined by the fundamental contradiction posed by our system of racial capitalism. The "land of opportunity" has repeatedly excluded people of African descent from the American dream. Although the overt racial discrimination of the past is no longer sanctioned by law, the numerous recent high-profile murders of black people—especially at the hands of white police officers—have brought America's history of racist violence front and center once again. As the country grapples with that painful history and present, we must also address the long-standing, persistent, and growing economic disparities that particularly harm black workers and black communities. The crisis of economic inequality affecting black communities in the twenty-first century is urgent and demands increased attention and action. For if we think of black workers as the "miner's canary" of American democracy and our economy, then we all have a stake in supporting efforts to advance racial and economic justice… Organizing—community and worker organizing—is the only way for black workers to challenge the structural

racism that maintains and perpetuates black social, political, and economic inequity.

In this racially and economically unjust environment, schools and education workers play a central role in reproducing inequalities and as such must necessarily at the centre of any transformative organizing struggles for social and spatial justice.

The Problematic: Transformations in Urban Space, Contemporary Capitalism and Working-class Power

It is within this context that this dissertation seeks to tell the story of how and why the remaking of two global cities—Chicago and New York—has both shaped and been shaped by struggles amongst rank-and-file teachers in their fight against the corporate-backed dismantling and commodification of public schools. Beyond simply exploring how teachers' unions have been affected by changes in particular cities or how even these different institutional contexts have affected the ability of teacher unions to challenge the neoliberalization of public schools, *I examine how and why the contentious struggles over public education have been a key facet of urban transformation over the past 30-40 years during which neoliberalism has ascended as the structuring political and economic logic of contemporary capitalism. The main subject of analysis here is the relationship between urban transformation (understood chiefly through a framework of neoliberalization and global city development) and the struggle of dissident rank-and-file teachers who have been organizing both in and outside of their unions.* Employing a comparative-relational ethnography of these struggles in Chicago and New York I show how these urban education activists are both shaped by and in turn shape the urban landscape in profound ways.

I draw on two observation made by Marjorie Murphy's (1990) now classic history of U.S. teacher unionism, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT & NEA 1900-1980* as a spring board for this dissertation. The first is that teacher unionism in the United States can only be understood as a product of the vast growth and centralizations of urban public school systems that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The second is that although teacher unions, like other public employee unions, have developed historically as narrow economistic organizations, which Murphy contends is all that "our conservative society has allowed" (1990, 6), they are not necessarily so. Indeed, a central contention I hope to demonstrate is that teacher unions like all trade unions are rife with contradictory tendencies, rendering Murphy's first claim provides a hint at how crucially linked the historical development of teacher unionism is to urbanization. The second statement, on the limited and conservative nature of teacher unions, is something that I and the teacher activists at the center of my research in Chicago and New York City have sought to overturn. Indeed, a great deal of recent historical scholarship on urban teacher unions, (especially on the Communist-affiliated New York Teachers Union, disbanded in the early 1960s), demonstrates, there have always been politically left, social justice or class struggle alternatives to this kind of narrow economic teacher unionism Murphy wrongly asserts as a foregone conclusion (Clarence Taylor 2013; Perrillo 2012).

While I agree with those scholar-activists who argue that it is imperative to understand the global nature of the project to dismantle public education (Weiner and Compton 2008; Weiner 2012), we should also recognize that what is transpiring in the realm of public education is as much an urban phenomenon as it is a global one.[4] As

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[4] This is an argument that I think needs to be extended to understand contemporary capitalism more generally. This reading of the present configuration of capitalism draws heavily on the work of David

such, this dissertation sets out to explore the relationship between education restructuring in the K-12 sector, urban transformation and the remaking of contemporary capitalism in the wake of the 2008 Great Recession.

Drawing on work from heterodox scholarship in education, geography, political economy and labour studies alongside original empirical research that I conducted in Chicago and New York between May 2011 and September 2014, this dissertation argues that economic and political elites—acting through the state and other institutions like think tanks, lobby groups, policy consultants, venture philanthropists and global institutions like The World Bank—are seeking to destroy the last vestiges of universal institutions such as public schooling. Expanding the logic of the commodity and destroying any obstacles to doing so (such as trade unions and worker expectations that they deserve quality and accessible public institutions to begin with) is a defining tenet of neoliberalization, which itself is a mode of regulation and organization of economic relations that aims to expand capitalist accumulation. This objective is impossible without undermining the collective capacities of workers and the marginalized to struggle and to imagine that another world is possible.

But in order to advance the project of neoliberalization that in the United States has exacerbated deeply rooted forms of racism, segregation, and economic inequality, it is essential that the state and capitalists develop ways to manage or contain largely racialized sections of the poor and working-class (Alexander 2010; Lipman 2011b). The legitimation of political and economic relations has always been central to capitalism in

Harvey (Harvey 2010c; Harvey 2012) and the work of Neil Brenner (2004) and the collaborative work he has done with Jamie Peck, Nik Theodore in theorizing urban neoliberalism (2010). It likewise builds on the work of Henri Lefebvre, who was one of the first theorists to posit the necessity to understand the globalization of capitalism as an urban revolution (2003).

the United States, with unions and other social welfare provisions (including public schools) serving, at least in part, to integrate workers into both U.S. capitalism and the nation. They have historically operated in tandem with violent and coercive mechanisms, like the police, white lynch mobs, and prisons to generally keep racialized populations contained, rather than extend the privileges of the welfare state and full citizenship rights to racialized populations. These coercive, violent mechanisms of containment have served to preserve deeply entrenched patters of economic inequality and what Manning Marable terms the underdevelopment of Black America (Marable 2000; see also Leiman 2010). In Chapters 2 and 3 I elaborate how I understand the complexities of these relations between race and class within a dynamic capitalist structure in the United States.

For now, it is worth stressing my contention that the objective of racial containment is a central component of a resurgent neoliberal capitalism, which since the Great Recession of 2008 has increasingly become authoritarian and violent (Giroux 2004; Seymour 2014; Albo and Fanelli 2014). The political and economic actors that have sought to reboot capitalism in the wake of the economic crisis of 2008, I argue, are pursuing the restructuring of urban public school systems not only to expand capital accumulation to previously non-commodified areas of social life (e.g. in healthcare and education), but also to undermine the capacity for meaningful democratic engagement by the U.S. working class, and especially by those racialized people who have always been at the bottom of U.S. society.

From the dispossession of the indigenous peoples and enslavement of African people to contemporary forms of oppression experienced in housing, labour markets, and through the prison-industrial complex there are myriad mechanisms through which this

marginalization and exploitation has been produced (Alexander 2010; Sudbury 2014). Racial conflict in the United States is best viewed as overlaying or crosscutting with the antagonisms that exist between and within classes. Although class antagonism may appear to be abstract, while racial conflict may seem more visible and therefore concrete, it is not difficult to focus our analytical lens to see how racism and other forms of oppression intermingle with class (for example, in housing, in access to public space and institutions, in the labour market, etc.).

In this way, we can see how the capitalist mode of production in the United States is rooted in a hierarchical socioeconomic structure wherein racism, an extreme and violent form of hierarchy, is woven into the fabric of U.S.—and global—capitalism. This racist configuration of life is generally accepted as a common sense, in Gramscian terms, by many white Americans. Yet, while "bourgeois ideology now openly acknowledges racism" (Leiman 2010, 4–5) because it is too obvious to ignore, the fundamental exploitative dynamics of class in the United States generally remain hidden. In part, this is what makes the powerful framework of the 1% versus the 99% popularized by the Occupy Movement in 2011 and the Bernie Sanders Presidential campaign so important. Leiman (2010, 5) is further right to contend that:

> Racism is not a temporary deviation from America's democratic tradition, as some ahistorical, orthodox social scientists would claim; rather it is deeply embedded in the major institutions of capitalist society. It is predominantly a form of class exploitation, a necessary feature of a society organized on the basis of private appropriation of the means of production and private profit as the goal of economic activity. Despite many reforms, the basic social relations of our society remain worker subordination and capital domination.

The implications of this argument are crucial for any movements fighting against neoliberalism today, especially in how neoliberalization manifests through urban

education policy and practice. No progressive attempt to transform urban teacher unions today can be undertaken without an adequate attention to how schooling works to reinforce contemporary dynamics of class exploitation and racial oppression. But just as importantly, these struggles cannot hope to achieve sustained and transformative change in society if their focus is limited to public schooling or fighting for education justice alone.

I aim to demonstrate how the goals of neoliberal education restructuring, pursued under the guise of "education reform," are fairly straightforward, even if they are rarely made explicit: *to expand the rule of the market (and thus increase profits) and to contain those populations that the U.S. capitalist class views as disposable and dangerous (who are overwhelmingly Black, Latino, and poor whites).*[5] The process of rationalization through which the neoliberalization of education occurs across the globe and throughout U.S. cities is, like other aspects of neoliberalization and capitalist development, a highly variegated and uneven process. It is also highly contested by parents, students and educators, albeit unevenly. As Jamie Peck, Nik Theodore, and Neil Brenner (2010) have persistently argued, there is no pure end state of neoliberalism, except in the imagination of neoliberal ideologues. This is why I will follow Peck et. al. in the use of the term neoliberalization, which denotes a process rather than an end state or complete thing.

I further strive to elucidate some of the ways in which the collective struggle and action that teachers engage in to defend their rights as workers, to defend their students from the effects of neoliberal reforms, and also to transform public education more

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[5] While the veracity of this claim is difficult to prove, and is not the central task of this dissertation, I maintain that the effects of over 17 years of corporate-reform policies in Chicago and other cities like New Orleans and Detroit, allow one to make such bold claims and have been documented by other scholars, notably Pauline Lipman (2011b) and Kristin Buras (2014). But for a more general and theoretical exposition of a related argument about a "surplus population" see McIntyre, M. and Nast, H. J. (2011).

profoundly has contributed to substantially transforming their class consciousness and political subjectivities. Put differently, I aim to illuminate the process by which urban educators become radical.

This process of transforming political subjectivities as it intersects with the struggle over public education is strategically vital to any socialist or revolutionary political project of the left because the fight over the nature and future of public education is of paramount importance for both the opponents and the champions of democracy, equality and justice; schooling can either facilitate oppression and exploitation or it can interrupt it. For, without critical education—and that is not to say that all or even much of what transpires in U.S. public schools has been or is critical—genuine (participatory) democracy cannot exist. I am not arguing that all, or even most, public school teachers care about critical or radical pedagogy; in fact, there is a substantial body of research that would suggest otherwise (see Delpit 2006). What I do show in this dissertation is that through struggle, politics, and the learning that happens as a result of this activity, teachers and other public school workers can contribute to making schooling far more emancipatory and joyful than it is at present in the United States.

Hence, while we take stock of the actual state of education in U.S. urban centres and the effects of neoliberalization, it is vital that our thinking be informed by, and hopefully contribute to, the development of a critical pedagogy—which is the foundation of meaningful civic engagement and political agency. Without a literate population, which, beyond simply having the ability to adequately read and write, means, first, possessing the capacity to both understand and construct reasoned arguments based on a critical evaluation of evidence and logic, and second, possessing the ability to use these

skills to understand the power relations that structure all evidence and logic, a genuinely democratic society, in all spheres of life, is simply not possible. This is why, as Henry Giroux has argued in since his earliest books (1988; 1989), a fundamental mission of free-market zealots and right-wing extremists in the United States is to destroy any semblance of an education that promotes critical or analytical thought, empathy and compassion for others, and the questioning of authority and of the "facts" that constitute the mythology of the U.S. empire.

These "soft skills" are not valued or encouraged by the proponents of human-capital development and neoliberal education reform. In resistance to this, scholar-activists, public intellectuals, and movements of the left need to embrace a conception and practice of substantive democracy, "not merely as a mode of governance, but more importantly…as a means of dignifying people so they can become fully free to claim their moral and political agency" (Giroux 2013, 141–42). Indeed, an analytical vision close to this is at the center of much of the activism investigated in this dissertation.

Three central contentions underlie my thesis: First, that global cities have not only served as the experimental grounds for neoliberalization but also offer political and organizing opportunities—and challenges—that do not exist in other cities or in similarly globalizing urban agglomerations. For example, when workers shut down schools through strike action or target corporate developers or other power brokers in the city, they can have an effect that reaches way beyond the scale of the municipality (targets like the Commercial Club of Chicago, for example). This phenomena is theoretically tied to the argument that the urban is not simply a scale like any other, but that running through

such urban regions are networks and relations of power from the state, national, regional, and global scales (Tufts 2007; Kipfer 2009).

Second, I contend that unions in which there exist vibrant organizations of radical urban educators that exert pressure on their union's elected leadership and work for deeper transformation in the union, in the schools, and in the city most effectively resist the neoliberal assault on teachers, their unions, and public education. As Chicago journalist and socialist activist Lee Sustar (2012b, n.p.) insists, "Unless they're constantly engaged by an active rank-and-file, union officials will be under enormous pressure to accept the logic that they must accept the least bad of the options placed before them by employers, rather than mobilize their members to oppose all concessions." He further observes that, while most existing union reform groups are dynamic, they remain "too small and weak to be a counterweight to the pressure from capital and a driving force in their own right." In spite of the fact that most existing reform groups are not yet capable of transforming their own unions, much less the city, regional, or national labour movement, it is through such resistance, I argue, that the contemporary political-economic landscape of cities can be remade in a more egalitarian manner.

Third, the contest over school policy in U.S. cities as being at its core over the form the city will take, who will both live and prosper in it, who will enjoy the fruits of urban economic development, and who and how people will participate in the actual governance of the city. Put differently, whose right to the city[6] will be prioritized (Marcuse 2012)? As Peter Marcuse suggests, in analyzing the problem of whose right to the city will be actualized, in this dissertation I engage in a critical theory that exposes,

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[6] As Henri Lefebvre defined it, "the right to the city is like a battle cry and a demand. This right slowly meanders through the surprising detours of nostalgia and tourism, the return to the heart of the traditional city, and the call of existence or recently developed centralities" (1976, 158).

proposes, and politicizes urban life in contemporary capitalism. Moreover, I agree with Marcuse that, in undertaking this research as critical urban theory, it is important to acknowledge that "Some already have the right to the city, are running it now, have it well in hand…They are the financial powers, the real estate owners and speculators, the key political hierarchy of state power, the owners or the media" (2012, 32). As such, activist scholars or what I term solidarity researchers, should be more concerned with advancing the right of the city for those who are presently excluded from it (i.e. workers and poor people). In this it is vital that we understand "who is most deeply affected, who is likely to lead the fight, who will be most likely to support it, what will their reasons be?" Marcuse contends that it will be the "deprived and the discontent" that will lead the way in the fight for a different kind of city. While I generally agree with this claim, my research will show that trade unions, and more specifically teachers' unions, can play a strategically important role in extending their associational power and resources in this struggle, and in so doing, aid in producing the broader working-class capacities necessary for radically transformation of the urban landscape in the United States.

I make two core arguments in this dissertation: (1) *Examining the primary ways in which teachers have attempted to reinvent their unions so as to effectively contest education restructuring and injustice more generally yields insight on how a critical spatial analysis and bottom up unionism rooted in and outside the workplace have reconfigured urban working-class solidarity, collective power, and radical urban practice in two metropolitan spaces that have long been the sites of urban theory construction, research, and policy development, and; (2) While it would be expedient to think that we can isolate the correct techniques for union transformation and rank-and-file movement*

building and simply import or export them to other places, my comparative analysis of New York City teachers demonstrates that techniques of union transformation are context dependent and cannot be so easily transliterated across space as activists and scholars might hope. Often times, such techniques and organizing practices lose their meaning and thus their effectiveness when transferred into a new context.

The relational comparison of CORE/CTU and MORE/UFT demonstrates the need to develop a critical spatial imagination that understands and connects with the distinct geographies in which people work and live; more specifically, the spatial analysis that is needed is one that grapples with the shifting contours of the racialized and gendered political, economic, and cultural landscape within which we are embedded.

In exploring what I describes as a spatial justice unionism, forged in Chicago and to some extent in New York City, the analysis of the contradictions within, and potential of, attempts by rank-and-file teachers to transform their unions put forward in the following pages will help to delineate possible routes for teachers elsewhere looking to transform their unions, which, I argue, is necessary for the creation of new forms of working-class power and politics, and without which an egalitarian urbanization is impossible. In other words, while context matters and successful activist and union praxis does not so easily travel or translate neatly across space, my study does illuminate some important lessons for how unions and activists might do so. Such transformation is inextricable from teachers' attempts to improve both their work lives as professional educators and the learning environments of their students.

While this dissertation is primarily concerned with questions of activism, political economy, and education policy, it also acknowledges the crucial role of teachers' unions

in mediating and improving (or not, as is often the case) the everyday reality of teachers who do not necessarily view their unions as relevant or think of themselves as "political" people. As I have learned as both a researcher and an organizer, if a union cannot prove itself capable of defending members in what might be thought of as more economistic or narrow grounds, then there will not be much support for broader political and working-class struggles outside of the workplace.

In the analysis developed throughout the thesis I strive to strike a balance between a focus on the changing structural dynamics of urban change and contemporary capitalism with a deep concern for their relation to new forms of collective socio-spatial strategies and the agencies of organized labour in North America as reflected in the practices of rank-and-file public school teachers.

To set the scene more generally for my dissertation, it is useful to turn to Giroux once again, who so powerfully captures the present state of U.S. society and the normative direction that those who care about justice and democracy should be advocating as an alternative when he writes that:

> The United States has become Fortress America, and its gated banks, communities, hedge funds, and financial institutions have become oppressive silos of the rich and privileged designed to keep out disadvantaged and vulnerable populations. At the same time, millions of gated communities have been created against the will of their inhabitants, who have no passport to travel and are locked into *abandoned neighborhoods*, prisons, and other sites equivalent to human waste dumps. The walls of privilege need to be destroyed and the fortresses of containment eliminated, but this will not be done without the emergence of a new political discourse, a borderless pedagogy, and a host of public spheres and institutions that provide the formative culture, skills, and capacities that enable young and old alike to counter the ignorance discharged like a poison from the mouths of those corporate interests and anti-public intellectuals who prop up the authority of Fortress America and hyper-capitalism (2013, 142, my emphasis).

Of course, what Giroux does not make explicit here is that the people inside the fortress are mostly white, while those stuck in abandoned neighbourhoods, prisons, and yes, deplorable public schools that have been starved of resources are overwhelmingly people of colour.

More theoretically, the overall goal of this study is to understand *how neoliberalization and global city development both constrain and enable possibilities for working-class organizations to transform the political and economic landscapes of contemporary capitalism.* I investigate this through an analysis of the assault on public education and teacher unions, with the primary object of analysis the rank-and-file struggles of teachers[7] in Chicago and New York. More specifically, I am concerned with how rank-and-file teachers in two of the most dynamic, global cities in the United States are struggling to transform their unions into more democratic, member-driven and radical[8] forces for challenging the neoliberal agenda of dismantling public education and remaking cities for profits, over people.

The primary research question that frames this study is: *to what extent have the unique dynamics of neoliberalization and global city development in the United States— as examined through Chicago and New York City—enabled teachers to transform their unions and subsequently be more capable of contesting neoliberal education restructuring?* As Lois Weiner (2012) has argued, teacher unionism is experiencing a rebirth in the twenty-first century, although I would add that this rebirth is occurring

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[7] Although there are other public school workers involved in these organizations, such as para-professionals and social workers, my focus will primarily, although not exclusively, be on teachers because they are the dominant force in these unions and rank-and-file organizations, which in and of itself should be subjected to further analysis.

[8] By this I mean, making the struggle of the union about the broader interest of the working class instead of solely about the narrow economic interests of the members of the unions. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, this means breaking with the defining sectionalist structure that trade unions in the United States have come to embody over the past century.

primarily in large urban areas and in a highly uneven manner. It is this unevenness that makes the question of what factors have contributed to the successful renewal and reinvention of particular urban teachers' unions and their ability to push back against the assault on education so important. This geographically uneven renaissance of teacher unionism will be illuminated through a close examination of two of the most important cities in the United States, both from the perspective of the historical development of public education and teacher unionism as well as from the perspective of critical urban theory.

Some of the related questions explored in this dissertation include: (1) To what extent have the racialized and racist spatial organization of Chicago and New York—and the way in which the public school system has been historically organized, as well as restructured through neoliberalization—affected the political consciousness of teacher activists in Chicago and New York City? (2) To what extent do movement successes (however defined) impact the battle to defend and transform public education (along more critical or social justice oriented pedagogical lines)? (3) How have these struggles over urban education more broadly shifted the balance of power in different cities and across geographical scales beyond the particular municipality under examination? (4) If the "pioneering" neoliberal education reforms that have been implemented in Chicago and New York have been essential in the process of scaling up and out the neoliberal project in education and urban governance, as I argue they have, then how might we better understand working-class struggles, and successes or failures, in these cities as contributing to a more egalitarian, transformative urban future beyond neoliberalization and austerity?

While the CTU has been an incredible inspiration to many teachers and union dissidents in Chicago and elsewhere, as I explain in more detail, the CTU remains isolated within a fairly conservative union movement in the City of Chicago where teachers and workers more generally continue to be battered by Mayor Rahm Emanuel and neoliberal reformers. As of this writing, the CTU is preparing for another strike, three years after their renown and widely popular 2012 strike.

Because of this unrelenting barrage of attacks and the lack of transformation within any of the other large unions in the city, Chicago teachers, along with their union and community activist allies have failed to develop an effective alternative working-class politics in Chicago. Although as I will analyze in the conclusion, the CTU has been a leading organizational force in building a new quasi-independent (of the Democrats) working-class political formation called United Working Families. The CTU was also one of the few major unions in the city to lead a fight against Mayor Emanuel in the 2015 Mayoral election, joining many of their community allies in Black and Latino neighbourhoods across the city who had been so supportive of the teachers in their 2012 strike.

This state of affairs requires political allies and critical, albeit sympathetic scholars, to ask some more probing questions of the Chicago experience than those raised in the books that have been published in the aftermath of the 2012 strike, all of which attempt to draw out the lessons of their organizing model and successful albeit defensive 2012 strike. Otherwise, we do a disservice to the struggles of Chicago teachers, students, and their allies who have been fighting for education justice, as well as to the deeper question of what it will take to build the kind of radical, transformative unions and

movements needed today to not only stand up and fight back against austerity but push beyond the authoritarian and resurgent neoliberal capitalism that workers in the United States and across the world are confronting.

Thus, while we draw hope, inspiration, and lessons from Chicago's brave teachers, parents, and community members organizing in Chicago, like the Dyett Hunger Strikers who starved themselves for over 20 days in 2016 in order to pressure Emanuel to conceded to their demands to open a new high school in their neighbourhood, scholars and activists need to seriously think through why movements keep losing in spite of doing such amazing organizing and taking direct action to make another world. How, for example, should we understand the plight of the revitalized Chicago Teachers Union in 2016, four years after the heroic strike of 2012, the union is in stalled negotiations with Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Chicago Public Schools (CPS), having been unsuccessful in removing him from office in the recent Mayoral election? Negotiations are stalled and the CTU is on the precipice of an even bigger strike, calling on Chicagoans to "shut the city down," imploring "all concerned Chicago citizens" to skip work and boycott classrooms (T. Cox 2016).

It is worth noting that the CTU and SEIU Local 1 were virtually alone in opposing Emanuel's bid for re-election. In other words, five years after CORE's Karen Lewis became president of the CTU, the teachers' union remains a sterling example of radical union transformation but also remains a unique case insofar as similar internal transformations in other unions in Chicago or Illinois. I argue that, without radical transformations occurring in other unions, from which the construction of a politically independent left to organize across spatial, cultural, and social divides might emerge,

Chicago teachers and others fighting for education justice and systemic change will remain in a protracted defensive battle with too few allies and too many enemies.

Moreover, however one wants to categorize teachers[9]—as workers or middle-class professionals—teachers in Chicago have, through their union, been forging new working-class capacities across the city and beyond its territorial boundaries. Throughout the history of teacher unions in the United States, there has been a tension and a dialogue amongst teachers about their identities as professionals versus their identities as workers. As Steve Golin (2002, 3) writes in his book about the Newark teachers' strikes of the 1970s, "According to the dominant ideology, teachers were professionals, who belonged in the professional organization, the Association; if they joined a union, they lowered themselves to the level of other workers, became cogs in the AFL-CIO machine, and lost their professional identity." But many teachers have always challenged the rigid and politically constraining, sometimes conservatizing, false dichotomy of teacher-as-professional vs. teacher-as-worker. The teacher activists in Chicago and New York that are the subjects of this dissertation have, like many teacher radicals in the past, opted to deconstruct and reconstruct the idea of professionalism, an identity that, for teachers perhaps more than any other occupation, has been won through their collective struggles as workers and unionists. Historically, to embrace a union identity (and organization) over that of a professional association has meant to embrace conflict and struggle in the school system.

This seemingly contradictory relationship between professional and worker identity parallels that between the business union and social movement union approach.

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[9] I think categorization is less important to how we think about teachers, especially urban teachers, in class terms, which means putting more emphasis on understanding the contradictory, rather than the normative, implications of the proleterianization process.

While some teacher union activists historically have argued that the struggle should be restricted to fighting for teachers only, others have argued instead that the fight needs to be waged more broadly for all of the oppressed, especially children. Even those who considered themselves socialist, like former president of the UFT, Dave Selden, regarded a restricted fight to improve teachers' wages, benefits and working conditions as contributing in its own way to building a better society. But other teachers, like Bob Lowenstein in Newark, believed that other actors, especially students and parents, needed to be included in shaping the objectives of teachers' organizing. If not, teachers' unions will be more likely to function as vehicles for the integration of teachers into the disciplinary function of schooling.

It must also be acknowledged, however, that many of those who have gone into the profession of teaching have seen it as a step up within, or out of, the working class, a view that disparages those traditionally conceived of as belonging to the working class: industrial, blue collar, predominantly male, white workers. Adopting this perspective has also meant eschewing the traditional organizations (unions) and tactics (strikes) employed to improve wages and working conditions. Indeed, many teachers have historically viewed unionism as a threat to their professional status; conversely, many teacher unionists have viewed the identity/ideology of professionalism as limiting the teachers' militancy and working-class consciousness. Yet as Golin (2002, 21) notes with respect to Newark, and as I would extend to other places like Chicago and New York, "The argument that unionism made professionalism possible would become the Union's most important argument, especially with elementary school teachers."

It must be remembered too that many of the local affiliates of the professional association competing for union members with the AFT, the National Education Association (NEA), not only included administrators but were led by them, across scales and jurisdictions. As Golin states, "Only by giving up their sense of superiority, and joining blue-collar workers in the labor movement, could teachers actually improve their class status" (2002, 22). This is evidence that what is often presented as a stark dichotomy between "professional" vs. "worker" identify is a much more complicated, messy affair that is subject to change and to being mobilized discursively in a wide range of ways.

This dissertation project is located within a set of distinct, yet partially intersecting, bodies of scholarship that examine the political and economic geographies of contemporary capitalism: the transformation of state power and urban space; unions and work; and the remaking of public education in the United States. It draws on and is a contribution to contemporary debates in the fields of urban geography (i.e. the relationship between global city development, urban neoliberalization and working-class power); critical education studies (i.e. the relationship between the collective struggles of teachers, education restructuring, and critical pedagogy); and labour studies (especially that scholarship that addresses the problem of how best to transform unions into vehicles for radical social change and democratic workers' power).

A core dimension of this thesis explores a major area of research in the subfield of labour geography, that of the scalar configuration of worker action in the contemporary global economy. As Neil Coe (2013) among others has noted, much of this work has increasingly adopted a multiscalar approach to action and organizing rather than an

emphasis on "jumping scale" as *the* solution to taking on global corporations. This idea of "jumping scales," particularly of globalizing the organization of workers, has long been posited by scholars and labour activists alike as the panacea to trade union decline. And, as I argue, this contention is simultaneously, right, wrong, and more complicated. The two cases of Chicago and New York City teachers under examination here leads me to a similar conclusion about the usefulness of adopting a multiscalar approach. But my analysis also illustrates why understanding the particularities of the urban geography that different political actors, such as unions, operate within and continually reproduce is vital to understanding why certain cities or urban forms may lend themselves to struggles that have a more meaningful political and policy impact than do struggles in other cities.

In no way do I or the organizations analyzed in this study claim to have all the answers for how to get us from the world we currently have to the one that we want, something no *one* movement or struggle should or could be expected to do. However, I do show that organizations such as CORE in Chicago and the Movement of Rank-and-file Educators (MORE) in New York provide important, albeit contrasting, lessons for those interested in pushing beyond the age of austerity. Examining such organizations and what they have managed to accomplish, especially in the case of CORE and the CTU under its direction, will help activists and left scholars alike reframe the key political and strategic questions that have confronted the left, or movements for social and economic justice, in recent decades both with respect to social theory and political practice. These questions need to be addressed so that those scholars and movements interested in radical or revolutionary transformation of society might contribute to developing an alternative working-class politics and emancipatory urbanism.

Gallin (2013) makes a vital observation upon which a critical labour studies must be based. She insists that: "The project of contemporary capitalism is the destruction of the labour movement, in Europe, in North America and eventually everywhere else. Their project is the reorganization of world society without organized labour. What they want is a society of slaves." While this may be putting matters a bit hyperbolically, in essence I believe it is a correct assessment. Indeed, this is why David Harvey's (2010a) insistence that neoliberalism has fundamentally been a class project to reassert the power of capital against that of labour remains a crucial point to foreground in any analysis of the political and economic scene of global capitalism.

In addition to this important point, I would also stress that capital is seeking to extend the rule of commodity logic into the public sector both as a way to expand accumulation and to consolidate the ideological project of neoliberalization by decimating the last vestiges of the welfare state. In the United States and Canada, the bulk of trade union strength now rests the public sector. Hence it is clear that the public sector has become the frontline of class struggle. Drilling down even further, within the public sector, teachers and their unions receive the brunt of this attack. Unfortunately, only a few unions have been instrumental in developing effective ways of resisting the authoritarian and regressive tide of austerity politics—in spite of their national unions; the AFT and NEA have generally offered a lackluster response to these attacks, if not outright collaboration with neoliberalization and austerity. As labour geographer David Jordhus-Lier (2013) insist, an analysis of the unique agency of public sector workers, whose employer is the state, is an important next step for labour geography.

Drawing on Harvey's (2010c) *co-evolutionary theory of social change*—where he posits that there are a number of distinct yet interrelated and mutually constitutive social, political, economic, and cultural spheres of life activity necessary to think through in any consideration of systemic or revolutionary change—I believe that the struggle for education justice and for radical social transformation more broadly needs to become a movement in every sense of the word. The activism and organizing of the Chicago Teachers' Union, for example, should be understood as a leading actor in an ongoing movement, a living dynamic, messy process that evolves over time and space.

If CORE and the CTU cannot move within, across, and through the different spheres of activity, then the movement they have been helping to construct will not be able to successfully transform public education or "take back" Chicago for the working-class majority.[10] This means that CORE/CTU need to confront questions that many union reformers or dissidents of the past, such as the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), have sidestepped or ignored. Having said all this, it must be acknowledged that not only are there limits to what any trade union can do with respect to moving across various spheres of activity and developing an alternative working-class politics, but there are significant limitations to what any one union can accomplish if other unions in the city and country do not undertake similar internal transformations and commit to bolder political action than are currently the norm.

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[10] Although there is an actual labour-community coalition called "Take Back Chicago," I refer here to a deeper impulse amongst a wide array of labour and community organizations, like the CTU or their close ally the Grassroots Collaborative, who consistently articulate a desire to reclaim (take back) urban life from those whom they generally see as pursuing a pro-corporate, 1% strategy of economic and political development that ignores the plight of the majority of the working class and poor, largely Black and Brown, population in the city.

In much of the commentary written thus far on the transformation of the CTU and the 2012 strike, most observers are, on one hand, too quick to generalize/universalize the lessons, while on the other hand, failing to examine what we might learn from the ways that the political, economic, and cultural geography of Chicago has changed over the past 30 years or so. Put differently, how might we both "place" the experience of the tenacious Chicago teachers in forging a different kind of union *and* vision for education reform, while also drawing out general lessons for understanding how K-12 education workers and their allies can effectively contest the reproduction of, and further neoliberalization of, urban, public life?

In this dissertation, I tease out the relationships between corporate restructuring in the provision and governance of the public school systems in New York and Chicago and the influence that CORE and the CTU has had on reform efforts—and in particular on MORE—in New York, which is the center of U.S. global capitalism and also the largest school system in the United States. In doing this, I address some of what I see as the most important ways that the Chicago experience has influenced the formation and development of efforts to transform the largest, and I contend, politically most important local teachers' union in the United States, the United Federation of Teachers (UFT), which for over forty years has dictated the path of the AFT.

Overview of the Argument

This study is located at a political and economic conjuncture structured by three interrelated crises: (1) a crisis in neoliberal capitalism triggered by the collapse of the subprime mortgages market in the United States that resulted in the near collapse of the global financial system in 2008 and that led to what has since then been called the Great

Recession; (2) a crisis of public education in cities of all shapes and sizes across the United States, and; (3) a crisis of the political left and labour movements around the world, perhaps most dramatically embodied by a decline in the power of the trade unions in the United States (Dudzic and Reed 2014; Luce 2014; Rosenfeld 2014).

The United States stands out among developed countries for its vast disparities in educational opportunities by race and income (Darling-Hammond 2010; American Federation of Teachers 2013). Within the same state, for instance New York, wealthy districts often spend twice as much per student as low-income districts. These inequities result in large gaps in achievement, high school completion, and college access between low-income and affluent children and between children of color and white children. Rather than levelling the playing field, underfunded and low-quality schools reproduce and reinforce the very problems that communities comprised overwhelmingly of African American and Latina/o urban populations organize themselves to tackle—poverty, lack of access to decent jobs, over-incarceration, and a general political disempowerment (Fruchter et al. 2012). Instead of blaming teachers for these failings, as proponents of neoliberal reform do, it is of upmost importance to recognize that research on educational outcomes has for decades demonstrated that factors outside of school—family income, race and educational inequality—have the most impact on children's futures (Orfield and Lee 2005). Indeed, as Meagan Erickson (2015, 157) points out,

> Outside-of-school factors carry *at least twice the weight as school environments in predicting students' achievement*. Whether a child has significant early exposure to complex language from caregivers, access to medical care, and a physically and psychologically healthy home environment where resources like books and academic games are available has far greater influence on his or her educational outcomes than does any aspect of public schooling. This is one of the most consistent patterns uncovered by educational research of the past half

century: The socioeconomic status of a child's parents is one of the strongest predictors of his or her academic success.

This is not to say that what teachers and other school workers do in the classroom and individual school is not vital, but there are many of critical social and economic factors to consider in how to explain disparities in educational outcome.

As already suggested, neither union dynamics nor educational outcomes can be divorced from their particular geographies. With this in mind, I have selected to Chicago and New York, in large part because of my personal connections to people in both cities, but also because of the role they have played as global cities and site of production of urban scholarship and theory. Similarly, Chicago and New York are two similar, global urban centers in the United States, with hugely diverse populations and strong political and economic linkages to the global urban system. Yet, each city remains deeply segregated along racial lines. Both cities too have been subjected to an intense neoliberalization of their political economies and urban governance institutions, and have been laboratories for the development of neoliberal policy experiments, especially in the realm of public education (Lipman 2011b). Likewise, both Chicago and New York play central roles in the coordination of the global capitalist economy.

At the same time, each city has served as a cauldron of social movements that contest the variegated efforts of neoliberalization. Relatedly, both Chicago and New York have experienced massive deindustrialization and government cutbacks while their political economies shifted from ones driven by manufacturing of high value-added goods to economies fuelled largely by finance, investment, real estate, an expansion of business services, and an increased reliance on tourism. These shifts have been accompanied by a vast expansion in low-wage service sector work, in which the majority

of workers are African American and Latino. Analyzing this shift in more detail, (Kahle 2014) perceptively explains:

> One marked shift in the low-wage workforce is the increasing (re)concentration of Black, Latino, and Asian workers into low-wage jobs. In 1979, more than 75 percent of low-wage workers were white. Today, that percentage has dropped to just over 50 percent, but workers of color, and Latino workers in particular, have been funneled into low-wage jobs. From 1979 to 2013, Latino workers went from approximately 6 percent of the low-wage workforce to 26 percent. Black workers, who have historically been consigned to low-wage labor in the United States, did not see as dramatic a shift. Nonetheless, their presence, alongside a modest increase in the number of Asian workers concentrated in the low-wage workforce, increased slightly, while white presence as a percentage of the wage workforce dropped precipitously…These larger-scale processes, alongside other institutionalized forms of racial discrimination (particularly those that intersect with the criminal justice system) have concentrated African Americans in low-wage jobs. Blacks represent 11.2 percent of the employed population sixteen years and older, but they account for 16.4 percent of food servers, 18.5 percent of food preparation workers, and 15.6 percent of dishwashers.

This data reveals a deeply polarized and racialized U.S. capitalism, wherein work for most Americans, especially racialized populations, has been severely degraded. This flows in conjunction with other areas of life in which people of colour are suffering disproportionately. Without acknowledging these new realities public sector unions, and really the whole of organized labour in the United States, will not likely be able to reverse its decline.

Unions in both Chicago and New York City have had little success in organizing this low-wage workforce, although the SEIU supported "Fight for 15" campaign shows some promise. Yet each city has maintained a relatively high level of union density, especially compared to other metropolitan regions across the country. This is particularly the case with the public sector, where African Americans have had a greater success rate in securing decent employment than the national average, which has facilitated a substantial number of people to move into middle-class employment. That the teaching

profession has been an especially important avenue through which African Americans have exercised this upward mobility makes it vital to take note of the fact that neoliberal reforms have disproportionately led to more African American teachers losing their jobs.

Lastly, two other similarities between Chicago and New York worth observing are that both are home to two of the most powerful teacher unions in the country, and that each city has developed historically as multicultural and multiracial and has been the recipient of subsequent waves of settlers from Europe, Africa, and Asia, although the ethnic mix has been and continues to be different in each city (J. L. Abu-Lughod 1999; J. Abu-Lughod 2011, 27).

In order to comparatively analyze the potential for the revitalization of working-class organizations (and thus working-class power) within and between these global cities, this study engages with rank-and-file teacher activists in public schools in Chicago and New York. The teachers I am concerned with in this study have been working with broad groups of workers and community members in their cities, but have primarily been seeking to democratize their unions in order to transform them into organizations capable of, and willing to engage in, a creative, militant, and left social movement approach to the contestation of the corporatization of public education. Yet beyond the fight for education justice, these organizations have also dedicated themselves to struggling against the highly racist neoliberalization of their cities more generally. Socialists and other, largely young, teacher activists have been the force driving these new union reform groups to fight for a broader vision for their schools, their cities, and the world; Crucial to this vision is that it puts a class and antiracist analysis at its core.

As I will discuss in greater detail in the analysis of my case studies, these new dissident teacher union groups are proponents of social justice unionism or social movement unionism, a centerpiece of which is the construction of alliances with community groups, parents, and students. In exploring the stories of the more successful example of the CTU under the direction of CORE, I demonstrate not only why these relationships with grassroots community groups have been so important, but also why such alliances are so difficult to replicate in other urban contexts, such as New York. In so doing, I also highlight the limitations of having an overly voluntaristic conception of labour's agency or subjectivity. But equally important, this approach employs a critical spatial approach, which is why I deem it *spatial justice unionism.*

Teacher unions are major players in educational practices and policy debates, with the two large national federations, the AFT and NEA, expending vast amounts of resources on lobbying at both national and state scales of government. This is the primary method they have of doing politics or affecting policy. At a general level of analysis, it is important to understand that, as the legal representatives of teachers in the workplace, school districts and administrators generally accept unions as actors in the making of school and district policy. And with such high union density, membership in a union is practically a "universal aspect of teachers' occupational identity" (Bascia 1994, 1). Nowhere in the United States are workers organized as strongly as teachers (in terms of both density rates and the absolute numbers of teachers in unions), or where workers have so vast an amount of resources for organizing. Teachers are thus some of the most strategically placed to build a movement capable of contesting neoliberalization, not solely in education but in the public sector more broadly.

As I make clear in Chapter 4, it is vital to acknowledge—and interrogate the implications of—the fact that teachers' work is ideological work. By this I mean that teachers are not simply employees in a government bureaucracy but deal with ideas and are charged with cultivating the intellectual, social, cultural, and political faculties of a society's youth. I follow Apple (2004) in privileging the importance of seeking to understand teachers' ideological function for the reproduction of capitalism, as well as their potential to play a critical or emancipatory role. Put another way, while teachers have often played a disciplinary role in socializing students to the norms of capitalist society (as has public schooling more generally), there is nothing inevitable about what teachers do or how they work. As Stevenson (2010, 3) argues, "education [and teachers] have the power both to reproduce and to transform, and will always contain elements of both and be a struggle between both." Indeed, the potential to work in critical and transformative ways makes teachers an ongoing threat to the established social order. Stevenson (2010, 3–4) suggests that this danger is key to explaining why in recent years' teachers have been such a principal focus for demonization in the media and the targets of a "raft of policies that have as their key objective the control of teachers both individually and as an occupational group."

Moreover, teacher unions are seen as problematic because of their potential to organize resistance to these disciplinary and controlling pressures. The unions' "traditional defense of teacher autonomy," insofar as it ensures they seek to challenge attempts by the state to tighten control and encourage conformity," offers the "prospect of 'interrupting' (Apple 2006) the trajectory of neo-liberal restructuring" (B. Stevenson 2010, 8). In other words, if teachers' unions link the fight against the corporate attack on

public education to their historical struggle to expand and protect the control they have over their work, this synthesis might serve as an important and effective articulation through which the reverse neoliberalization of public schooling because creating a "flexible," inexperienced, workforce with little autonomy to direct their work is so essential to all dimensions of the neoliberal agenda in education.

Moreover, I would expand this more general point about the potential for trade unions to engage in radical transformative action because unions play an essential role in reproducing capitalism—in terms of stabilizing production, being partners in economic growth, training the workforce, and perhaps most importantly, managing discontent—but *unions are at the same time sites of struggle, capacity building, and learning.* As such they hold great potential to be vehicles for working-class struggle and power. Chapter 3 addresses this issue in both theoretical and historical terms.

As the late Marxist education scholar-activist Jean Anyon (2005, 11) quite rightly insists, "schools can play crucial roles in raising critical questions about, and building movements to challenge, both the ways in which the economy now functions unequally and the ways in which, say, the politics of race operate in every one of our [U.S.] institutions…schools are sites of conflict. Extending this argument, this study explores how teachers' activism has contributed to making schools and unions play such crucial roles and to building social movements that have had a transformative impact on the political and economic landscapes of urbanization.

In this dissertation I adopt Kenneth J. Saltman's (2009, 51) understanding of the corporatization of schools as involving both the "privatization of public schools and the transformation of public schools on the model of the corporation" The corporatization of

public schools shifts economic and cultural control from public to private interests. In addition to privatization, corporatization involves applying a corporate model of organization to institutions (e.g. schools and healthcare) that had previously not been oriented to the maximization of profit and growth. Such corporate organization is typically hierarchical, if not authoritarian, and in fact shares an organizational form more closely resembling the military than democratic institution of civic life (2009, 53). It is vital to understand that this corporatization is an articulation of neoliberal capitalism, although the idea that public schooling should be governed according to a business model predates the development of neoliberalism.[11]

Originality, Importance of Contribution, and Implications

The five principal scholarly contributions this dissertation makes are: (1) an elaboration of the ways in which the remaking of K-12 public education has been central to global city development and to the mutations of neoliberalization, and conversely, how these geographical, political and economic processes structure unique political possibilities for workers to contest neoliberalization; (2) an exploration of how to effectively construct community-labour alliances, as built between teacher unionists and grassroots organizations of parents, and students who struggle to transform public education; (3) the focus on teacher activists and the micro-politics within unions aids the development of a more nuanced theory of how workers, as active subjects, shape urban landscapes and education policy; (4) evidence that a membership driven, *spatial justice teacher unionism* is crucial for turning the tide against the neoliberal "reform"

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[11] I use here neoliberalization rather than neoliberalism to foreground the fact that the term refers to a highly variegated and geographically uneven process of the restructuring of political and economic geographies of contemporary capitalism, and should be understood as contextually embedded in the "inherited institutional frameworks, policy regimes, regulatory practices and political struggles," of different social formations (N. Brenner and Theodore 2002b, 351).

(dismantling) of public education; and lastly (5) an elucidation of the ways in which these struggles relate to wider efforts in the construction of a more emancipatory and egalitarian reconfiguration of urban and education policy.

While I acknowledge that one of the most glaring limitations of labour geography has been its central focus on trade unions—the traditional and dominant form of workers' organizations—a principal contention of this dissertation is that trade unions continue to play a strategic role in building workers' capacities to radically transform society. My theory of trade unions centers the contention that fights for social justice occur inside unions as well as through unions. All unions are sites of struggle as members seek to shape the strategies, tactics, and overall vision of the union. Yet, it is vital that we move our analysis away from "the union," and recognize that unions are complicated and dynamic organizations within which there are competing demands and positions (e.g. amongst members, staff, elected leaders) that determine what union strategy and policy is and the manner in which such policy is expressed through union actions.

And as Lydia Savage (2006) observes in regards to the debates on scale in labour geography, although geographers have produced a vibrant literature that explores the relationships between the scales at which trade unions operate and how they influence and contest the economic and political policies of corporations and different institutions of the state, they have generally been less interested in examining the internal scalar dynamics of union institutions, which have quite distinct dynamics of power, authority, and decision-making.

As suggested above, few studies in labour geography have focused on "white-collar" or public sector workers such as teachers. And as critical education scholar Bascia

(1994) notes, much of the earlier research that examined the role of teachers' unions reflected the perspectives of union leaders, policy makers, and educational researchers, which prompted her to investigate how rank-and-file teachers understood themselves in relation to their union and what they desired it to do for their lives as professional workers. While Bascia has done some important work in investigating the perspective of rank-and-file teachers, neither her work nor other scholarship on teacher unionism has adequately elucidated the connections between the radical transformation of the political economy of capitalism and urban space that this project set-out to do. Following Noel Castree's (2007) suggestion for research in labour geography, this study develops a rich understanding of worker agency, through a robust conception of, and engagement with, the state rescaling/restructuring, urban transformation, and teacher unionism.

Outline of the Thesis

Part I of this dissertation explores scholarship in economic geography, political economy, urban geography, education policy, and labour studies (Chapters 1, 2, and 3) in order to set the stage for two empirical cases on CORE and the CTU in Chicago, and MORE and the UFT in New York. In reviewing the relevant literature in these fields, I sketch out the theoretical framework and historical, geographical, and political context through which I analyze education policy, urban change, and rank-and-file education workers in Chicago and New York. Part II of this dissertation then draws on this framework to elucidate my empirical research in Chicago and New York, which allows me to rethink my theoretical understanding of urban change, neoliberalization, and the possibilities for transforming teacher unionism. Below is a summary outline of each chapter.

Chapter 1 has three objectives: First, I briefly elaborate an understanding of how Marx's dialectical approach has informed the research and writing of this study. After this, I provide a brief discussion of how antiracist and feminist scholarship and practice has informed my ontology, epistemology, and research design. After then locating myself in the research, I move on to a discussion of the methodological approach to social inquiry that I have used to conduct my research, which I am calling *solidarity research*. My solidarity research orientation led me to develop a critical ethnographic research design. In particular, the work of Michael Burawoy's *Extended Case Method* has been my primary influence. Second, I outline the comparative relational research design by which I conducted the study.[12]

Chapter 2 outlines the present conjuncture of contemporary capitalism and in particular how the U.S. labour movement has come to find itself in the sad state of affairs that it presently faces, where only a tiny fraction of the working class—in both the private and public sectors of the economy—are unionized. Relatedly, this chapter explains why the labour movement is at a historical low point in terms of political influence and power to affect public policy (Rosenfeld 2014). I then turn to a discussion of how this snapshot of the present state of capitalism and the U.S. labour movement relate to contemporary urbanization. Precisely, I focus on the changing contours of urban neoliberalization and global city development. While I recognize that grasping all of these incredibly complicated processes and how they relate to each other is a herculean task, I limit my analysis here to what I deem to be the most pertinent elements of these dynamic processes, which is necessary in order to understand the struggles of school teachers in

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[12] This conception of solidarity research is influenced most by the work of Staughton Lynd (2015) and his conception of solidarity unionism.

Chicago and New York. I conclude this chapter with a brief discussion of my conception of class and class struggle, which will greatly illuminate my later analysis of struggles in Chicago and New York.

Chapter 3 has two purposes: the first is to sketch a theoretical framework and snapshot of how urban public schooling works in the United States. It does this by examining scholarship in the historical, sociological, and geographical literature on education in order to interrogate liberal myths and capitalist realities of actually existing schools in the United States. In reviewing some of the most pertinent literature on education, I follow Ira Katznelson's (1985a) in seeking to reinsert the working class and their various organizations (especially unions and professional associations) into the historical-geographical development of "schooling for all" in the United States. The emphasis on agency of workers in Katznelson's work, as well as in other education research, especially research that falls within a critical pedagogy framework (for example Giroux 1983; 1988; Freire 1970) dovetails nicely with the labour geography project. Moving beyond sketching out my theory of schooling in the United States, I then extend this discussion by putting the theoretical framework developed in this and previous chapters to work to examine the concrete development in corporate school reform in relation to the wider development of urban neoliberalism in Chicago and New York. In this chapter I strive to provide a historical-geographical snapshot of how neoliberal education policy has developed in, and importantly, between both cities. In doing so, I hope to offer a useful analytical understanding of the social forces—and actors—structuring the neoliberalization of public schooling, and urban governance more generally, in two of America's great cities.

Chapter 5 opens the second part of the dissertation by exploring the rhythms and dynamics of a rank-and-file movement in the CTU that was born out of the chaos and pain wrought by neoliberal reform in Chicago's public school system. It draws on over a year of ethnographic fieldwork, analyses of union communication, policy documents, reports, and other communications from both the CTU and the dissident left caucus of rank-and-file reformers, CORE, which, since 2008, has been working to transform their union and build a broader, citywide movement for education justice.

Chapter 6 then turns to an analysis of the UFT in New York City—which is the most powerful teacher's local affiliate of the AFT. I explore how the CORE model has influenced rank-and-file efforts in New York by bringing together a deeply fragmented left into a more coherent and effective opposition under the organizational banner of MORE. In many respects, this chapter argues, radically transforming the UFT into a militant social movement union would be extremely difficult, but, given how much power the local has in dictating policy of the national federation, would have implications beyond mere inspiration. It would shatter the foundations of an undemocratic, accommodationist teacher unionism that has been an obstacle to building an alternative social justice unionism and working-class politics across scales, including globally through the international union federation, Education International (EI).

In both Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 I attempt to weave an analysis of the historical-geographical development of teacher unionism in the United States into the narrative. While I am able to provide only a very partial account of the history of U.S. teacher unions here, at its core this historical geography is also an urban story. It draws on both the historical scholarship on teacher unions and other relevant work in Critical Education

scholarship in order to move from a historical-geographical understanding of the development of teacher unions to a picture of the primary challenges and possibilities confronting teachers and their unions today.

I then conclude the dissertation by providing a summation of what I deem the most valuable lessons—both political and theoretical—are to be drawn from the relational comparison of urban transformation, neoliberalism, and rank-and-file teacher activism in Chicago and New York. The experiences of education restructuring and struggle that this dissertation explores offer valuable insight into how to think about the nexus between urban transformation, education, unions, and working-class politics, but there are also a number of major limitations of the research and analysis, some of which I hope to resolve through future research. I offer some final thoughts on both the limitations of the project and some possible future research trajectories of this work.

Chapter 1: Social Inquiry and Solidarity Research

Dialectics is not a rock-ribbed triad of thesis-antithesis-synthesis that serves as an all-purpose explanation; nor does it provide a formula that enables us to prove or predict anything; nor is it the motor force of history. The dialectic, as such, explains nothing, proves nothing, predicts nothing, and causes nothing to happen. Rather, dialectics is a way of thinking that brings into focus the full range of changes and interactions that occur in the world. As part of this, it includes how to organize a reality viewed in this manner for purposes of study and how to present the results of what one finds to others, most of whom do not think dialectically.

> Bertell Ollman *Dance of the Dialectics: Steps in Marx's Method* (2003, 12)

1.1 Introduction

This chapter sets the stage for my study by outlining the theoretical paradigm that has shaped my research design and methodology, an approach I am calling solidarity research. It is organized into three sections. First, I present a brief exegesis of Marx's dialectical method, which has informed the research design and analysis developed in this dissertation. In this way, I make explicit my ontological and epistemological position, from which I construct an appropriate research design to study the nexus of urbanization, public schooling and working-class power as expressed through teacher activism. Following the lead of Bertell Ollman (2003), my discussion of Marx's dialectical method emphasizes his method of abstraction and philosophy of internal relations, which most clearly distinguishes dialectics from other popular paradigms in the social sciences, like critical realism.[13] How one approaches the more practical work of defining a research question, collecting and analyzing data, and writing up the results or presenting an analysis to the world are deeply embedded in these philosophical matters.

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[13] See Ollman (2003) and Cox (2013) for an elaboration of where these two paradigms differ and why Marx's dialectical method is superior for understanding our world.

In the second section of this chapter, I locate myself as a researcher and activist. Here I explain both the intellectual and political motivations that led me to embark on this research project and how my positionality influenced the research design. Explicating one's own positionality is a tricky business. Often people do so as a way to foreground their pre-analytic vision of the world and the various dimensions of privilege they may embody as a result of the way their class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality is read by society. After positioning oneself as a way to problematize the researcher as a subject, acknowledging one's privilege often serves nothing more than a perfunctory purpose, after which more "serious" research and analysis can be conducted. I consciously and earnestly seek to do more than this by continuing to reflect on the ways in which my positionality has influenced my research process, analysis, and writing throughout the dissertation. After locating myself in the project, I then attempt to disentangle the implications—political, theoretical, and methodological—of approaching the research and writing of this dissertation as scholar-activist who sees himself as contributing to movements for radical change through the production of what I identify as oppositional knowledge and solidarity research.

In the third section I detail the research design I used for this project and the variety of methods used to gather and analyze my data. I conclude with some brief observations on the challenges and limitations of the methods employed and their efficacy in unraveling the tangled and multifaceted relationships between urban transformation, education restructuring in the K-12 sector, and rank-and-file activism within U.S. teacher unions.

Although my research draws on a great deal of quantitative data, for instance statistics on employment, union density, and educational outcomes, the overall approach in this study is qualitative. While there are critical quantitative methods that would no doubt enrich and complement the data and analysis in my dissertation, I have opted for a qualitative, and more specifically ethnographic, approach because I believe it is best suited to developing an understanding of the complexity of work and urban life, and the rank-and-file teacher activism I desired to understand. A qualitative approach is most appropriate for an investigation into the nuances of change and the lived experience of working people and the urban fabric, all those messy and complex pluralities from which quantitative studies must abstract. Yet, I should say my understanding of many facets of U.S. political economy, education, and urbanization would be greatly limited if not for the rich quantitative research that I draw on to compliment my ethnographic analysis. Moreover, as I return to discuss in Chapter 4 on the CTU, there is a great deal that critical Geographic Information Systems (GIS) can bring to both the study of labour and organizing itself, areas I hope to explore in future research.

On a related but slightly different note, the experience I gained while conducting this research has reinforced my preconceived notion that the most effective and *partisan* modes of research in solidarity with workers contrasts starkly with more traditional, positivist and empiricist academic modes of research (Haiven and Khasnabish 2014b). This contention flows most keenly from my central belief in the power of human agency, by which I mean the capacity of people to contribute individually and collectively to the transformation of the social and physical world, congruent with the sub-discipline of labour geography, the traditions of Action Research (for example Livingstone and

Sawchuk 2004; Fals Borda 2006), Critical Pedagogy (for example Shor 1992; Freire 1970; Giroux 2011; Ayers 2010), and the autonomist or the Italian workerist (operaismo) tradition of Marxism (for example Wright 2002).

Some elaboration is necessary, however, when it comes to research on organized labour. I place myself firmly in the camp of work-based learning researchers, which is an approach to research that engages directly with workers and their organizations (especially trade unions) both as a methodological and epistemological point of departure. This approach commits to producing knowledge and contributing to learning that "should enhance working people's individual and collective agency in the social world and also in the process of representing that world" (Livingstone and Sawchuk 2004, 28).

Following the lead of critical education scholars, this dissertation seeks to both "bear witness to negativity and document spaces for counter-hegemonic work" (Apple, Au, and Gandin 2009, 7). Moreover, it is similarly vital to be clear that I have conducted this research as someone who understands himself as an activist-scholar, engaging in what Paul Routledge (2010) describes as partisan participation or what Rachel Pain (2006, 251) calls counter-policy research, which not only resists hegemonic state policies but offers critiques and alternatives to them.

1.2 Marxist Dialectics, the Black Radical Tradition, and Socialist Feminism

At the core of every science is a search for relations, especially relations that are not immediately obvious, and in studying capitalism Marx uncovers relations between what is, what could be, what *shouldn't* be, and what can be done about it all. He finds all this, first of all, because it is there, but what permits him to find it—while most students of capitalism only come up with the appearances (mislabelled as "facts")—is his dialectical method. It is dialectics, and Marx's dialectics in particular, that not only allows but requires him to knit together what most others consign to separate mental compartments.

Bertell Ollman, *Dance of the Dialectics: Steps in Marx's Method* (2003, 2).

This study follows Marx's dialectical approach to understanding capitalism, both politically and analytically. In particular, I am concerned with deriving an understanding of working-class resistance in order to aid in efforts not simply to understand the world but to change it. But what exactly is the world, according to this view, and how might critical scholars conduct rigorous social research in order to change it? Beyond Marx himself, I draw on more contemporary Marxist scholarship in geography and in other disciplines, on heterodox scholarship that examines work and employment practices, organized labour, the dynamics of state power, and urbanization, as well as on critical studies of education (to analyze education policies, the role of schooling in contemporary capitalist America and the role of education and learning within trade unions). It is important to note at the outset that particular strands of anti-racist, feminist Marxism (especially the work of J. Brenner 2000; Bannerji 1995) have shaped my thinking and politics, and subsequently, the methods of social inquiry that I have employed to conduct this study. How these theories have done so will be made clear later in this chapter and throughout the dissertation.

Situating my work within a Marxist paradigm principally means that I understand *all knowledge production as a political act*. More specifically, rejecting any pretense of "objective" or "neutral" knowledge, which locates the research somehow outside of social relations, observing the world from a god's eye view, all research and intellectual work more broadly is embedded within class relations, class struggle, and capitalist accumulation. And these relations are themselves constituted through a web of mutually reinforcing, multiple, and complicated relations of power and markers of social

differences that are not *reducible* to a one-dimensional notion of class, however they might be mediated through class.

Being a Marxist scholar means that I privilege a theoretical explanation that deploys these fundamental categories and processes of analysis, and that I approach my research project using a dialectical mode of inquiry. From the vantage point of a geographer, such an explicit mode of dialectical inquiry is necessary in order to reconcile the way in which experience is lived and acted out in place with how this experience relates to, and is embedded in, political and economic practices that are operative across broad spatial scales. Politically, staking out such a position means producing knowledge that helps to clarify the institutions and social relations that constitute capitalism, so that the exploited and oppressed may more effectively contest and transform the world.

For Marx, the world is made up of constantly changing, mutually dependent processes that interconnect or internally relate to each other. Focusing on the ways in which such processes interconnect allows us to grasp the key patterns of how capitalism functions. Within the interconnections between things or processes we can find their preconditions and all of their future possibilities, along with anything else that may affect them at the particular moment under examination (Ollman 2003, 4). Marx viewed the dialectic as both critical and revolutionary at its core. "It is revolutionary," Ollman explains, "because it helps us to see the present as a moment through which our society is passing, because it forces us to examine where it has come from and where it is heading as part of learning what it is, and because it enables us to grasp that *as agents as well as victims in this process*, in which everyone and everything are connected, we have the power to affect it" (Ollman 2003, 4–5 my emphasis). Similarly, in their book on Marxism

and social movements, Cox and Nilsen (2014, 100) write that one of Marx's most fundamental insights is that, in grasping that capitalism has developed historically through class struggle, which is to say through collective human practice, Marx highlights the possibility of ending capitalism through collective human practice, which is to say through the collective agency of real human beings.

Closely following on these insights, and as the historian Robin D.G. Kelley (1996) reminds us, three decades before E.P. Thompson did so in *The Making of the English Working Class (2013)*, W.E.B. Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction* (1935) and C.L.R. James's study of the Haitian Revolution, *Black Jacobins* (1963), develop an incredibly rich historical *and* theoretical analysis of revolution, resistance, and the making of new working classes that emerged from the destruction of slavery. This important work charts how new classes and political subjectivities developed out of the barbarities of colonialism and slavery and, in so doing, partially explains the evolution of race and racism in the United States and Europe. Du Bois and James constructed this historical and theoretical scholarship in critical dialogue with Marxism but in the process forged important new theories and methodologies[14] for investigating these matters that challenge the core components of the Western intellectual tradition (Bogues 2014). In James' first preface to *The Black Jacobins,* we gain important insights into this reconstructed Marxist approach when James points out that he

> has sought not only to analyse, but to demonstrate their movement, the economic forces of the age; their moulding of society and politics, of men in the mass and individual men; the powerful reaction of these on their environment…[T]he analysis is the science and the demonstration the art which is history. (quoted in Bogues 2014, 154)

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[14] For example, recovering the experiences of the marginalized through an engagement/reinterpretation of the archives from the perspective of those who had been marginalized.

Thus we can see why Kelley (1996) insists that *The Black Jacobins* and *Black Reconstruction* provide the foundation for new social and labour history from below. But this work in the Black radical tradition likewise opened up new ways of thinking critically about the history—and geography—of Western revolutions by centering race, culture, and the agency of Black people (slaves and former slaves) in the making of their own histories, which in turn was only possibly through the development of a critical epistemology. The exploitation of Black labour, Du Bois and contemporary historians like Kelley and Manning Marable (2000) demonstrate, has been the foundation of the United States as an *empire state*.[15] Challenging more orthodox Marxist historical narratives by illustrating how systems of Black labour based on racial oppression relate to the exploitation of in the United States, Bakan and Dua (2014, 146) maintain, creates a "unique set of complications for the Marxist notion of revolutionary agency of the advanced proletariat in modern capitalism." According to Du Bois and James (Bogues 2014), slaves and ex-slaves should now be viewed as a new black proletariat and must be understood as comprised of subjects that actively resist, sometime in quite subtle or hidden ways, sometimes in outright rebellion, their conditions of exploitation and oppression.

As Kelley (1996, 5) argues, "Black Reconstruction may still be the most powerful reminder of how fundamental race is for understanding American culture and politics." C.L.R. James (quoted in R. Kelley 1996, 6) similarly insists that scholars pay attention to things like the memories that African slaves preserved while in bondage, which allowed

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[15] See Jung (2015) for a compelling elaboration of the argument that the United States has never in fact been a nation-state, but since its foundation has been an empire-state. He provides a brilliant reading of one U.S. state institution, the Supreme Court, to make this case. This argument is very much congruent with much of the work in the Black radical tradition of historical scholarship, as well as the recently published *An Indigenous Peoples History of the United States* (2014) by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz.

them to create a world "in the quarters bordering the cane field, the social meaning ascribed to skin color, the cultural and religious conflicts within African-descendent communities," all of these things were as important as backbreaking slave labour and the lash in explaining what allowed the Haitian Revolution to be successful.

While some might object here that Marx did address the relationship between African slavery and primitive accumulation of capital in *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1963), Bogues (2014, 160) observes that *The Black Jacobins* "reconfigures this relationship, placing colonialism and plantation slavery both at the rosy dawn of the accumulation process and central to nineteenth century economic development." Similarly, Du Bois (quoted in Bogues 2014, 157) was committed to writing a history that would yield theoretical and political insights into racial oppression and democracy in the United States and to producing intellectual work that might forge "a social memory," to help "solve or transcend the race problem, rather than simply getting rid of it." This scholarship helps us see slaves and ex-slaves as workers and as human beings with the capacity for struggle and revolutionary transformation and the ability to govern themselves. In analyzing slavery as both a system of property ownership and of labour exploitation—as a special form of domination—Du Bois provides us with an alternative conception of freedom and revolutionary possibilities than is found traditional accounts of slavery in the United States.

Thus, Marxism, as it has been developed by radical Black scholars from W.E.B. Du Bois and C.L.R. James to more contemporary scholar-activists like Robin Kelley and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, helps us to denaturalize race, racism, and white supremacy. It illuminates a historical materialism that views race and racism as central to the making of

capitalism, just as socialist feminists have rightly insisted on viewing gender and patriarchy as co-constitutive of capitalist social relations (Holmstrom 2002). These theoretical reconfigurations of Marxism do not reduce racial and gender oppression to class in the last instance but rather view class as central to any explanation of social reality conceptualized as always encompassing other aspects of social difference, such that gender, race, sexuality are "inseparably and systematically related" to class (Holmstrom 2002, 2). Put differently, this perspective understands class as something that is always gendered and raced. For example, as Holmstrom (2002, 8) contends, "the increasingly female and minority composition of the workforce [in the United States] makes it more apparent that sharp splits between class oppression and sex or race oppression, or between the workplace and community issues, are untenable practically and theoretically." While in the abstract we might agree that class is the only system of domination that is constitutive of capitalism (Meiksins Wood 2002), when we start to examine the historical-geographical development of capitalism we cannot do so without also seeing how race and gender have always been essential elements in how the social relations of capitalism have developed in concrete social formations like the United States.

In other words, while capitalism may in theory be able to live without racist and gender violence, in practice it has proved not to be structurally indifferent, to draw on Ellen Meiksins Wood's (2002, 291) argument, to the "social identities of the people it exploits." That being said, Wood (2002, 291) is not wrong to argue that forms of extra-economic oppression like racism and gender-based violence or marginalization can serve to obscure class and class exploitation and thereby "make capitalism particularly effective

and flexible in using them as ideological cover." This is not simply a matter of capitalists fooling workers or a problem of false consciousness, so much as it is people feeling the material and emotional effects of race, sexuality, gender more acutely, rather than understanding these affects as forms of class violence in capitalist society.

Taken together, socialist feminism and the Black radical tradition help us see the future as a choice, as something that must be struggled over. In addition to allowing us to reimagine the political economy of U.S. capitalism—and the role that patriarchy, race, white supremacy, colonialism, and Black workers have played in its foundation and its ongoing reproduction. This work helps us grapple with questions of collective action and political strategy. As I will discuss in more depth in the next chapter, the Black radical and socialist feminist traditions are vital to a labour geography approach because of the importance they place in looking to the ideas and practices of workers—broadly conceived of as including the realms of production and social reproduction—themselves to understand struggles, transformations in political subjectivities, and possibilities for radical change. In pursuing these questions as a researcher, the dialectical method of enquiry employed in this work helps us to better understand or question the kinds of changes that are already occurring as well as what changes may still be possible. As Bertolt Brecht (1968, 60) maintained, the dialectic is revolutionary because it allows us to pose questions in such a way as to make effective change possible.

Deploying a dialectical approach to the question of how people build class solidarity without suppressing or ignoring differences, for example, involves exploring how workers go about constructing solidarity through differences—by which I mean

different kinds of oppressions as well as different identities—rather than in spite of them.

As Kelley (1997, 122–24, my emphasis) argues:

> One way to conceive of alliances across race and gender is as a set of 'affiliations,' of building unity by supporting and perhaps even participating in other peoples' struggles for social justice. Basically, that old fashioned IWW slogan, 'An injury to one is an injury to all!'...African American social movements have been practicing this principle for a very long time...Attempts to 'transcend' (read: outgrow) our race and sex do not make for a unified working-class. What does is recognition of the multiplicity of experiences and perspectives and a willingness to fight on all fronts-irrespective of what 'the majority' thinks...*It is in the struggle that one learns about power and how it operates, and that one can imagine different world*

This contention lies at the heart of the Solidarity Research approach I outline below. Marxism thus reconceived allows us to critically grasp our role in these processes, at least up until now. As Ollman points out, there is no need to advocate class struggle, nor to opt into it, as is typically believed, because class struggle is in actuality the sum total of the contradictions between workers and capitalists, which means that in one way or another we are already involved in class struggle, all the time, whether conscious of it or not. But by becoming self-aware of this fact, we may be able to get on the right side of the struggle in a more effective manner (Ollman 2003, 20) by thinking through and developing the most effective political organizations and strategies for advancing class struggle and transformative social movements. The essential point to make here is that the subject matter of Marxism is not simply society, but society conceived of relationally (Ollman 2003, 25). Dialectics seeks to understand how society is a totality of relational processes and connections are always changing as the historical geography of our world is produced through an interaction of class struggle from above and from below.

Marx's (1970, 293–94) method begins from what he calls the "real concrete" (the world as it presents itself to us) and then moves through a process of "abstraction" (in

which he analytically disassembles this whole into the mental units that we use to think about it) to the "thought concrete" (the process by which he then reconstitutes these different units so that we can grasp the whole in the mind). Another way of understanding the "real concrete" is as the messy world in which we actually live, contradictions, confusions and all. The thought concrete on the other hand, is Marx's reconstruction of that world theoretically which he then presents in his writings, such as *Capital Volume I* (Ollman 2003, 61). Put still another way, Marx (2001, 57) sought to abstract things "as they really are and happen," so that how they happen and appear are both part of what they actually are. How capital appears, functions, and develops is all a part of what it is and what it might become. In contrast to the dominant view in the social sciences, according to which things are said to exist and undergo real change, and in which these two processes are logically distinct, for Marx's method of abstraction "every historical social form is in fluid movement, and therefore takes into account its transient nature not less than its momentary existence" (quoted in Ollman 2003, 20).

Accordingly, "*history refers not simply to time past but to time future*" (Ollman 2003, 65). In this same way we might understand geography not simply as the spaces in which we happen to be located in any given time, as pre-given, absolute Cartesian space, but rather as those spaces that structure our lives and world views which we are remaking every day, in one way or another. That is to say, whatever something develops into is in a fundamental way part of what it already is and what it once was. As Ollman explains, "All of Marx's main abstractions—labor, value, commodity, money, et cetera—incorporate process, becoming, history in just this way" (2003, 66).

As alluded to above, the ontological, epistemological and methodological orientation of this project is just as importantly informed by socialist feminist readings of Marx as it is by the Black Marxist and antiracist scholars discussed above.[16] Scholars in this tradition have long argued that critical research needs to more explicitly recognize that relationships of power (class, race, gender, sexuality) are not additive components but instead intersect and interlock with other identities and social relations (Valentine 1997). In the past two decades' feminist geographers and scholars from other disciplines such as sociology have attempted to highlight the intersections of social identities and what the radical sociologist Himani Bannerji (2014, 127) refers to as *ensembles of unequal social relations and institutions* that constitute actually existing capitalism. "Though appearing," Bannerji contends, "to be highly specific, the social relations are not stand-alone structures or forms, like buildings that are connected through roads–they are complexly involved social formations…these social relations are like the ingredients in each brick that make up the house. They are embedded in the design of the whole society that we live in. They in-form the overall social formation, what Marx called 'the mode of production,' shaping and modifying specific life forms–in other words our social habitat. While we live in this habitat, it also lives in us, expressing the dominant ethos. People and their social life are both internal and external to each other; they cannot be separated out as self-contained relations and forms."

In other words, we cannot pull out race from gender in any particular institution or person any more than we could pull out the blue from the yellow after the two have been mixed as green. And such a fusion, Bannerji tells us, can "only be 'known' through

a critical epistemology, but it cannot be experienced or inhabited as segmented realities of class, patriarchy, or racialization. This does not mean, as already noted, that a particular individual or group will not feel and understand oppression and marginalization on the basis of one or more particular facets of their social identities, in a given time and place, as how they understand themselves and their struggle for dignity and respect. It does mean that there are many aspects of our identities and the social relations that structure our world than we might understand in any concrete place and time.

Similarly to Bannerji, feminist geographers Preston and McLafferty (1999) argue that gender, race, and class should be understood as mutually constituted, rather than separate in our understanding of labour and residential segregation. The concept of intersectionality suggests that we no longer view forms of oppression as multiplicative or additive—that is, that we do not operate as if one form of oppression can be added onto another. Such an approach fails to adequately capture the lived experiences of people's lives, which, like their identities, should not be viewed as static or fixed but as dynamic, as always subject to change depending upon a wide array of historical, geographical, and social dynamics. It likewise fails to explain how these dynamics and processes work to shape the political, economic, and cultural geographies in which we are embedded.

Within geographical scholarship, this concept of intersectionality has helped bring to the fore the complexities of identities, the way they configure the various power geometries of contemporary capitalism (Massey 1991), and the ways in which these are influenced by and implicated in place-making. Related to this concept of intersectionality, and emerging from debates in the critical literature on education, and specifically relating to issues of conflict and contradiction within and between racial,

gender, sexual, and class dynamics, McCarthy and Apple (1988) advocate what they call a "nonsynchronous parallelist" framework for understanding issues of race, class, and gender. This approach recognizes the intense and contradictory interactions within and among various dynamics of exploitation and domination and insists that critical educators and scholars be less reductive in the assumptions we make in our social-geographical investigations of the world.

A socialist feminist and antiracist approach systematically refines what I think is the most radical and rigorous paradigm for analyzing the complex organism of modern society, Marx's dialectical method. In focusing on unpacking the social and historical dynamics that structure how goods and services are produced, exchanged, and distributed under capitalism, Marxists attempt to account in a systematic way for the driving dynamics of capitalism as the system through which we organize the bulk of our social activities, and in particular those relating to production and reproduction. In this endeavor, Marxism seeks to understand not only the present as it has emerged historically and geographically, but also its possible and likely futures and alternative spaces.

According to this dialectical approach, reality is not simply constituted by surface appearances that can be grasped in any immediate sense by the five senses. In order to comprehend any process or phenomenon we must know something about how it initially formed, how it has evolved, and where it might fit into the larger system of interacting social relations that it is a part of. Because of how easy it is to fall back into concerning oneself with appearances, we need to do more than simply recognize this.

Dialectics transforms the common sense ideas we might hold about the nature of things (as entities that have distinct histories and external connection with other things)

into an alternative notion of process (constituted by its historical evolution and possible futures) and relation (constituted by its connection to other relations within these processes). Consequently, how we abstract from, or sketch boundaries around, particular processes and relations—such as the transformation of the U.S. working class and its relation to white supremacy and left politics—is crucial to a critical social science. Ontologically, the qualities that we perceive with our senses actually exist, but the conceptual boundaries we draw and the distinctions we make to interpret what we perceive (i.e. where one thing ends and the next begins in space and time) are socially and spatially constructed. In Ollman's words, "However great the influence of what the world is on how we draw these boundaries, it is ultimately we who draw the boundaries, and people coming from different cultures and from different philosophical traditions can and do draw them differently" (2003, 13–14).

In addition to a way of viewing the world, Marx's dialectical method is just as importantly a guide for how to investigate it, how to organize one's research results, and ultimately how to present research findings to a particular audience. In contrast to other theoretical approaches to social investigation, in which one typically begins with some small part of the social world and seeks to establish how it is connected to other such parts of an institution or social structure in an attempt to reconstruct the larger whole, dialectical research takes the whole, the system, as its point of departure, at least as much of it as one understands, then proceeds to an exploration of the part, which is then used to better understand the totality. In this way we can better grasp how the part works and where it fits in relation to the whole, which in turn will provide us with a better understanding of the whole from which one has begun (Ollman 2003, 14).

In accordance with this approach, then, the next chapter will elaborate a theoretical framework of contemporary capitalism, urbanization, and rank-and-file union struggles to transform the U.S. trade union movement. From this framework and the geo-historical sketch of organized labour in the United States, I will proceed to examine education restructuring and teacher unionism in Chicago and New York, extending this same method of abstraction and dialectical analysis.

With the above in mind, this study should be understood as principally focused on the levels of the meso and the concrete. As Neil Brenner (2004) notes, we should understand the meso level as referring to those relatively durable institutional arrangements, regulatory frameworks, and territorial configurations that undergird distinct periods of historical and geographical development. It is distinct from the abstract in that it seeks to illuminate the historically specific forms that underlie, and thus are the precondition of, an articulation with more abstract processes of the system—capital accumulation, state regulation, and politics, through which public policy is constructed and operationalized. Thus while "considerable institutional diversity and geographical unevenness may obtain among distinct national, regional, or local contexts within such encompassing modes of development, the meso level reveals the underlying regularities that tie together these variegated contexts within a shared historical-geographical configuration" (N. Brenner 2004, 21–22). Brenner identifies the concrete level as being concerned with the contextually specific analysis of political economic and territorial assemblages through which everyday social reproduction unfolds. It is at this level that the difference between distinct national, regional, and local modes of organizing capitalist

relations, and educational policies, practices, and institutions, can be observed most coherently.

Lastly, I want to foreground Steve Herbert's (2010) suggestion that we emphasize on "perpetually tacking back and forth between theory and data." For, as Herbert contends, the "critical issue is…how well we conduct the conversation between our theoretical concepts and the data we uncover" and that rather than being overly concerned with having a commitment to any particular theoretical or methodological starting point we should instead have "a religious willingness to remain open to experiences in the field and to reconsider continually our theoretical presuppositions" (2010, 74). In doing so it is vital to ground theory in observation, interaction, analysis, and interpretation. Put another way, we need to make theory "accountable to fieldwork" (Limb and Dwyer 2001, 11). Such an approach is congruent with dialectics although like any theoretical paradigm one can find work that is overly rigid and fails to be so accountable.

Ultimately, geographers and other critical researchers must commit to actively engaging, through diverse means and methods, the empirical worlds we investigate. In turn, this requires deploying a creative and often open-ended approach to what was once called processes of data collection. We need to be wildly open to having our theoretical and political assumptions turned upside down. Because qualitative research lacks the "rigour and validity familiar from quantitative approaches, because qualitative geographers often interact directly and significantly with the people they study, qualitative research is done through the embodied qualitative researcher who must come to terms with her or his own situatedness, as well as the partiality of the research itself"

(DeLyser et al. 2010, 22). As a result of this I will now turn to locating myself, as a research, in this project.

1.3 Locating Myself in the Research Process

What does it mean to locate oneself epistemologically as an antiracist and socialist feminist researcher? Following the lead of feminist geographers Bondi and Davidson (2005), the chief objective of epistemological location is to rethink the relations between social location and place. In the first instance, this approach means that the researcher/writer must acknowledge that the intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity and other markers of difference shape our experiences, and thus all that we do as researchers and writers. The processes through which these differences become embodied in an individual are inherently rooted in the construction of place, but also in the ways in which we are exploited and oppressed within contemporary capitalist society. Research suggests that the recursive relationship between place and social identities is viscid and not easily transformed (Jackson, Crang, and Dwyer 2004; Bondi and Davidson 2005).

Thus, in addition to a Marxist dialectical approach, the methods chosen to do this research are premised on a socialist feminist perspective that seek to destabilize assumptions about the ways in which gender and the devaluing of "women's work" (from caring for children and elders to performing others aspects of emotional labour, both in the home and outside it) figure into how we think about teaching, organized labour, and the attacks on teachers' unions in the United States. At the same time, I move beyond a narrow focus on gender alone to understand how it overlaps with, and mutually constitutes (differently across space and time), the ensemble of unequal social relations

that constitute our world (J. Brenner 2000; Bakan and Dua 2014; Bannerji 1995). As Haiven and Khasnabish (2014b, 203) write, "critically understanding one's own social location as a product of structured power relations that by their very nature implicate others across space and time in a complex calculus of privilege and exploitation" is a crucial task for solidarity researchers.

How race, place, and space intersect or overlap in difference periods and different territories can only be uncovered through empirical research (V. Preston and McLafferty 1999). Labour market segmentation, residential segregation, and segregation in public schools, for example, must take account of the ways in which aspects of difference, like gender, sexuality and race, always constitute class; these are not three distinct aspects of difference with logics of their own. Equally important to an antiracist socialist feminist approach is the recognition of the researcher's positionality as a critical factor in shaping research.

Yet, as radical feminist scholars have long observed, being explicit about one's positionality means more than simply taking account of the particular space that you occupy. Rather, it necessitates that research be *engaged, active, and contested*. In this, we can see why one of the most important critical strategies to emerge from feminist research is the notion and practice of reflexivity. Researchers deploy reflexivity as a way to avoid the production of supposedly universal and neutral knowledge (Rose 1997). Put another way, reflexivity is a mechanism to develop situated knowledge that avoids the god-trick (Haraway 1991). Such an orientation might also allow researchers to grasp the less obvious contradictions that run through the ensemble of unequal social relations, those hidden dynamics of oppression and practices of marginalization present in both

what is being researched (e.g. within the relationship between global city development and new, highly contested, forms of racial segregation) and in the research process itself.

In the vein of placing myself in the research process and amongst the findings, rather than assuming the scientific perspective of the researcher as disembodied, neutral, and detached observer, I will briefly outline where I am coming from and where I am located in this research project. This is especially important for geographical research, because as Desyler et al. (2010, 6) observe, "Methodologically, the discipline of geography has a long and troubling history of using the figure of the detached observer, untrammeled by the social relations of the field and the academy, in ways that hide colonial, gendered and racialized forms of knowledge (Bondi and Domosh 1992)." Critical geographers, both those who use quantitative and qualitative methodologies, seek to study people, places, and social phenomena in context as much as possible. In doing so, we strive to not only validate our own perspectives—given that everyone has certain ideas about how the world works—but also illuminate the lives of those we are doing research with, paying special attention to how and why they interpret and act in the world in the way that they do. In researching such processes, it is essential to provide adequate opportunity and resources for those with whom we are engaging as research participants in order to allow participants to fully contribute their perspectives to the research process and any analysis that results from it. I discuss in more detail how I have tried to do this below.

All research, whether carried out through interviews, focus groups, archival research, or participant observation, is a process of collecting and constructing empirical data. And, as suggested in my introduction, the motivations behind this research were

born out of my activist experience and desire to contribute to an oppositional knowledge production for radical social change. Hence it is important that I acknowledge that I come to this research as someone who is read as a white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, and able-bodied man. It is also important to say that I am an uninvited settler on unceded Indigenous territory. While I come from a very poor, working-class family in New York, and, with over a hundred thousand dollars in student loan debt and no secure, well-paying employment on my immediate horizon, continue to be poor, my academic achievement does provide me with the possibility of the grand illusion of a middle-class lifestyle. I also have gained enough cultural capital to pass in middle-class and upper class settings without raising the suspicion that I might not actually belong.

It is important to account for one's privileges not out of a politics of apology but because it can allow for the kind of reflexivity in the research and knowledge production process, as well as in the kinds political engagement, that I seek to cultivate. Doing so helps me and those who read this work to better understand the choices made in this project, the voices and perspectives listened to, and inevitably given more prominence, in my narrative and explanation, how I engaged with my research participants, and the literature, and the sources I consult in this study. All of these things are unavoidably influenced by the way in which my situated identity and body have been oriented towards particular imaginaries and by what the economist Joseph Schumpeter (2009, 41) calls a "pre-analytic vision" of the world; one's *Weltanschauug*. As Kirby, Greaves, and Reid (2006) argue, how researchers go about conducting research has everything to do with how we see and interpret the world.

From the outset of this research I have been a partisan of the rank-and-file dissidents in Chicago and New York who have been striving to transform their unions in order to push back, and beyond, the forces of neoliberalization. My initial interest in examining the relationship between urban transformation in North American global cities and the question of what challenges and possibilities exist for the revitalization of working-class power derives from my varied experience as a student activist, a trade unionist, independent journalist, educator, staff union organizer, and activist. These experiences have allowed me to navigate and think through some of the significant contradictions of both public schooling and trade unionism in the United States. At the same time these experiences cannot be untangled from my intellectual and academic development as a political economist and radical human geographer, which has enriched and realigned my engagement in social movement struggles. In particular, this mutually constitutive political and intellectual evolution has sharpened the kinds of political, strategic, and organizational questions that I have been most preoccupied with as an activist and the theoretical questions that I have taken up as a geographer, particularly the question of how we think about urbanization today and how we conceptualize space and place to better understand capitalism, the lives of work and workers, and question of power, resistance, and political strategy for the left more broadly.

I am a product of the New York City public schools, having attended both primary and secondary school in Queens and Brooklyn up until I dropped out of Frankly K. Lane High School in 1996 at the age of 16. Therefore, I have an intimate knowledge of how public schools are failing many of those who are in most need of support in the urban centres of the United States. As a working-class poor kid raised by a single mother with

teachers may have said we were bad kids, but 'Who died and made them God?' My friends and I were losers and nobodies to the teachers but a very big Somebody all together, a Somebody that was strengthened by acts of resistance. Together resisters reinforce their knowledge that real smarts are measured by things other than what the classroom offers…". Like Jensen and her friends in small town Minnesota in the 1960s, and like many working-class kids today, my friends and I shared an intuitive grasp that the scholastic cards were stacked against us, and we resisted making ourselves "vulnerable by trying to select" our success from that particular deck. We were also akin to what Jay McLeod calls "Hallway Hangers" in his book *Ain't No Makin' It* (2009), which studied groups of teen boys from a low-income housing project in an unnamed Northeastern city. McLeod describes Hallway Hangers as "the tough kids who thought school was bullshit, expected little out of life, and weren't about to 'kiss anyone's ass'" (quoted in B. Jensen 2012, 123). Like many working-class kids, we defined ourselves by resistance to the established order. As Jensen continues (2012, 34), in contrast to the other group in McLeod's study, the "Brothers," who bought into the American Dream achievement ideology that working hard in school would lead to "good, clean jobs" and "making it", the "Hallway Hanger saw school as worthless and insulting to their personal and collective dignity. They had a profound sense of loyalty to their groups," and this strong group solidarity served as the glue that held the group together so maintaining a strong connection to the rules that framed this group identity was essential. The Hallway Hangers "did not believe that if they worked hard in school, got good grades, and graduated from high school that they would do any better in life. Rather, they believed deep human bonds within their tightly knit group would help them through life. Working-

class kids most often choose to stay connected with their friends, and their cultures, over the development of skills that would be useful in academic and professional settings" (B. Jensen 2012, 123).

Further, Jenson writes, "From our point of view, challenging teachers and skipping or sleeping through classes were acts of daring that brought admiration. They were rebellions against authorities we disliked. It was heroism to fight the system. We regarded school as jail, and, indeed, that is just how it functioned for us. If heroism in middle-class terms means breaking away from the crowd and creating an outstanding individual accomplishment, in working-class terms it is staying solidly within one's community and bravely resisting invaders who threaten it…there was no doubt about it, for kids like us school was about submission, not personal advancement. The more battles I went through with school authorities, the more I was reinforced in my belief that school was jail." Unlike middle-class kids who, "develop a sense of entitlement before and within schools that allow them to later blossom in academics, sports, music, mathematics, art, and much more," "my friends and I did not see school as a stage upon which we could rise and shine, a place where we could actualize our abilities." This attitude follows middle-class kids into adulthood, where they will "expect and seek personally meaningful and publicly recognized work" (2012, 125–26).

Like Jensen, I pursued a divergent course from most of my working-class friends by trying to attain these skills a few years after dropping out of high school in 1996, having not adopted, at least to some extent, the dominant notion that education would lead to getting a well-paying, "good, clean job," rather than the series of crummy jobs that I had taken since dropping out. Yet, I know that I will retain a small core of these

friends and the values that I developed as part of this community of resistance for the rest of my life.

It was not until I was 19 that I began to think seriously about attending university, motivated primarily, like many working-class students pursuing postsecondary education today, by the notion that education would be a pathway to a better future, a genuine mechanism to move upward on the socio-economic ladder. Yet, it was not until my second year at a community college in Long Island, New York, Nassau Community College (NCC), that I became skeptical of this idea and politically active in collective struggles for change.

At NCC my eyes opened not simply to the myriad number of injustices in the world, but more importantly, to the connection between my own experiences and the violent and exploitative global capitalist system, especially the realities of U.S. empire and the historical and contemporary social movements that have organized to resist and unmake this system. I wanted to be a part of this resistance and came to see developing a critical mind and practice of knowledge as absolutely essential to any emancipatory project. I wanted to know history and theory not for their own sake, but so that I might in some small way contribute to struggles more thoughtfully, and more effectively. I wanted what Cynthia Kaufmann (2003) calls ideas for action.

Bracketing many of the different life and activist experiences I had while an undergraduate student and a union organizer, a path that I embarked on after graduating from Queens College at the City University of New York (CUNY), I managed to acquire some work as a substitute teacher in the South Bronx and Brooklyn, at high schools similar to the one I had attended as a student. These schools were located in low-income,

largely African American and Latino neighbourhoods and had been starved of resources for many years. As a result, they failed to provide much of anything for students, at least as far as I could see at the time. In fact, as a substitute I found the school's administration expected me to do little more than maintain order and discipline in the classroom. Viewing these classrooms from the other side of the looking glass from my own life as a student was an incredibly jarring experience that provided me with deeper insight into and appreciation for the work that urban teachers do, especially for those who work in schools that primarily serve poor and working-class kids of colour.

While I continued to view the public school system as a vital site for left organizing and recognize how important it was to have smart, caring, and politically committed leftists become teachers, having these difficult classroom experiences, in conjunction with observing good friends who were teaching full time in similar schools receive such little support from their union in trying to improve conditions for students and teachers alike led me to decide against pursuing a full time career as a public school teacher in New York City. Instead I chose to continue on an academic path, albeit in a university that was renowned for critical Marxist and radical theory. Following the completion of my Master's degree at York University, I was employed in a number of union positions, in contract teaching in labour education, and, briefly, as a doorman on the Upper East Side of Manhattan.

However, considering that I was only employed in such a marginal teaching position for a short period of time, I approach both my New York and Chicago cases not as a teacher or union member in either school system but as an academic with personal and political relationships in both cities seeking to write an activist ethnography that

contributes to the efforts of rank-and-file dissidents to transform their respective unions. I believe this allows me to maintain a certain critical distance and perspective that activists and members embroiled in the movements of both unions and cities may not be able to achieve.

Thus, I see this research as following in the vein of engaged or action-oriented (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 2) qualitative research that walks the "delicate lines between sympathy for and engagement with those we study while avoiding uncritical cheerleading even as we work through the awkward positions and issues of engaging with those— often but not always—in positions of power whose practice we might wish to critique" (DeLyser et al. 2010, 8). While I did not engage with those in positions of institutional power in terms of municipal government, business, or the network of think tanks and other organizations that champion corporate education reform, in this study I have engaged with elected leaders and staff of unions and community organizations in Chicago and New York. In some ways, balancing relationships and critical engagement with those you are more sympathetic to politically is more difficult than doing so with people and organizations you despise.

Expanding on a recent argument made by urban geographer Andy Merrifield (2014, ix), I seek to put neoliberal education reform and urban teacher unions in the United States under scrutiny in order to better understand contemporary capitalism and the new urban question[17] theoretically, so that its opponents (myself included) may

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[17] Central to Merrifield's (2014, x) argument, in *The New Urban Question*, is that contemporary urban change should be understood as a process of neo-Haussmanization, which "signifies a new rift on an old tale of urban development, of divide and rule through urban change, of altering and upscaling the urban physical environment to alter the social and political environment. What happened to mid-nineteenth-century Paris is now happening globally, not only in big capital cities and orchestrated by powerful city and national political economic forces, but in all cities, orchestrated by transnational financial and corporate elites everywhere, endorsed by their respective national governments." And, while "these class forces in

effectively challenge the system politically, by "advancing ongoing activism and militancy, offering a theory that dialogues with politics, as well as a politics that dialogues with theory. Here concepts and activism mutually reinforce one another—or at least try to." I look at a concept like spatial imagination or spatial justice, for example, not primarily to analyze teacher activism for an academic audience, but because these concepts offer something useful as tools for activists on the ground. and in taking them up in their organizing work, activists offer new ways to rethink our concepts deployed in academic research. I elaborate my thinking on urban geography and how urbanization relates to education restructuring and teacher union activism in more detail in the next chapter, as well as in Chapters 4 and 5.

Being a partisan researcher has certainly shaped in significant ways my interpretation and understanding of urban change in Chicago and New York City, the dynamics of their respective teacher unions, and the efforts of rank-and-file dissidents to challenge their own unions (both leaders and the wider membership) to more effectively confront the neoliberal restructuring of their schools and cities. Moreover, choosing to identify as a solidarity researcher and positioning my project in the way that I have was practical in that it allowed me to gain access to participants and dissident leaders of these struggles, as well as to the spaces in which they have been building their movements. At the same time, taking such a partisan position has made it difficult to gain access to others groups within the union, especially the leadership of New York's UFT. Likewise, while it was not an intended focus of this research to interview proponents of corporate education reform or to gain access to those spaces where such policies are formulated and

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and out of government aren't always consciously conspiring, they nonetheless create a global orthodoxy, one that's both creating and tearing apart a new urban fabric, one that clothes the whole wide world".

advanced, situating myself in this manner made it difficult to achieve access to such people and places.

In keeping with this orientation, I embrace the turn in critical social science scholarship that rejects the simplistic subjective-objective dichotomy once imposed on researchers because the analysis of the social world and lived experience, both for researchers and participants, requires an empirically grounded and necessarily subjective orientation that foregrounds the researcher's politics or worldview (Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Haraway 1991). Because of this inclination, critical ethnography seemed to best suit my desire to understand the different ways that people make sense of their world as they perceive it, while also recognizing both the materiality that underlies and structures these perceptions and my own immersion in the world, as a sensuous, embodied researcher and political actor. Such a self-reflexive understanding of one's own positionality allows for a more rigorous research design and analysis of the data gathered than studies framed by positivistic goals of objectivity and impartiality (K. B. Jensen and Glasmeier 2010). Subsequently, I have strived to conduct research that spans multiple axes of difference so that I might learn as much with others as from them.

It is important to say something here about how context and causality should be integrated. First, context is that field within which all social-spatial activity occurs, in which life is lived. Put another way, context is shaped by and shapes powerful political, economic, cultural, and social (all of which are constituted spatially) processes that mediate the ways in which people and places are continuously produced. It is the ocean within which individual and collective actors swim—always fluid and dynamic, ever changing, yet durable and powerful. Causality, on the other hand, is the way that the

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world, including context, changes in response to activities of human agency, relations, connections, networks, and experiences. The distinct ways in which these processes intersect across space and time require us to posit people as knowledgeable subjects (to varying degrees) who always shape their own identities, power, meanings, and places— often within socio-spatial contexts that are, however, not entirely of their own making. There are always limitations and constraints on agency, especially within a capitalist world such our own.

These concerns relate to questions of how we might understand places as simultaneously constituted by a range of unique characteristics and diverse experiences and as always standing in relation to a multitude of connections and commonalities with other places (Massey 2005; Cope 2010). Moreover, attempts to integrate context and causality have always been to one degree or another a major task within the discipline of geography, perhaps more keenly than in other social sciences.[18] Yet, importantly, as Cope (2010, 38) insists, "it was increasingly the wise women in geography who used emerging feminist perspectives to bring context and causality together in fresh ways (see Women and Geography Study Group 1984 for early examples); to push for critiques and analysis of masculinist assumptions about geography, 'science', and society; and to reshape both qualitative and quantitative research in the discipline." This critique remains essential for thinking through our assumptions, especially for male researchers, as we search for adequate understanding of context and causality in our research inquiries.

Interestingly, feminism in the discipline of geography did not gain much traction until the 1980s. When it did, many geographers came to see it as a means to shine a

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[18] For a thorough review of the diversity of geographical practices and methods in the twentieth century in Britain, the US, and a host of other countries, see Cresswell (2012).

critical lens on many of the taken-for-granted social and spatial assumptions of the discipline and within qualitative research more generally—prevalent even amongst those who fancied themselves radical or critical scholars. These insights have only taken hold in the discipline, to the extent that they have, through some significant personal and professional struggles.

In addition to critical self-reflection on positionality and methodology, what I draw most from feminism is its insistence that researchers put more value on listening to people, especially to women, queer people, and workers of color whose knowledge is generally devalued, if not ignored in wider U.S. society. Only through listening and a self-reflexive engagement might researchers begin to explain what is going on in their lives and in their worlds.

Power relations shape not only everything that we study and write about, but also saturate every aspect of our research; the personal is political. If we conceive of geographical knowledge as constituted by a range of embodied practices (including traveling, seeing, collecting, recording, mapping, and narrative), the topic of fieldwork is difficult to escape. As geographer Jennifer Hyndman (2010) argues, we should not think of the field as simply something that is "out there." Instead, we should view the field as always in the process of being constructed, both through physical movement—passage through an airport to another city or country, for instance—and through myriad forms of cultural work in other places. The field is produced locally through human (spatial) practices of fieldwork, and discursively through texts and images (Driver 2001, 12–13).

1.4 Solidarity Research

An emphasis on the political and public intersections of research practice in the discipline of geography has become both commonplace and contested (Davies and Dwyer 2008, 399). And there is no shortage of contemporary scholarship in human geography that, seeking at a minimum to do research that is socially relevant and, in one way or another, engaged in an ethical manner with the particular community under investigation, strives to conduct a critical geographic praxis, action research, and policy-oriented research. I adopt here what Kitchin and Fuller identify as a *critical geographical praxis*. More generally, following the insistence of feminist scholars, we should seek to cultivate, "an academic praxis that is emancipatory and empowering for the participants in the research" (Fuller and Kitchin 2004, 3; see also J. P. Jones, Nast, and Roberts 1997). As Stuart Aitken (2010) urges, what is vital for critical research is that it be conducted with particular attention to the ethic of care. A key element of the research conducted in this dissertation might also be labeled *counter-policy research* insofar it offers a critique of state policy as a tool for resistance (Pain 2006, 251). While I think many researchers earnestly attempt to engage in research that has an emancipatory and empowering impact on their research subjects, this is not so easily accomplished. Thus, although I hope that those I worked with during this research may have gotten some use out of the work I have done as a researcher and political ally, I doubt if any of them would actually describe my particular research project as empowering or emancipatory for them as participants.

With this honest reflection in mind, I want to take a step beyond the conception of a critical geographical praxis just elaborated to identify this dissertation project as a form

of what I am calling *Solidarity Research*.[19] This mode of research can be likened to what Livingstone and Sawchuk (2004, 30) describe as doing research "the hard way" in the sense that it is "deeply personal and politically engaged work" because of the degree with which it is conducted with care and perseverance. In contrast to predominant images of workers as some combination of passive, apathetic, hopeless or complacent, this methodology seeks to begin from a place of mutual respect between the researcher and those they are researching with, forged before, during and after data collection. Equally important is that researchers following this methodological approach be open to learning as researchers throughout the entire process. This means that the researcher needs to be as open as possible to being challenged by interview participants or other actors encountered in the field, which may generate not only interesting data but entirely new research questions or methods of investigation.

My inspiration for identifying my research approach as solidarity research comes in part from the socialist historian and activist, Staughton Lynd, and his conception of *solidarity unionism* (Lynd and Grubacic 2008; Lynd 2015), as well as from work by the radical geographer David Featherstone (2008; 2012). The key word here is solidarity. Solidarity has been at the heart of the historical struggles of the working class and of a wide variety of social movements throughout the world. We can understand solidarity as that quality with which people feel that, by acting in the interest of others or by binding their fate to that of other people, whether on the basis of class, gender, race, ethnicity, or any other facet of difference that constitutes a person's identity they may more effectively

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[19] While my conception of solidarity research is related and complimentary to the one elaborated and deployed by Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish (2014b)—which seeks to "convoke" social movement actors by bringing them together in dialogue and debate so as to push their political work and radical imaginations forward, it was developed through an engagement with other literatures and movement experiences.

oppose inequality, exploitation, and oppression.[20] As Featherstone (2012, 5) contends, "Solidarity is a central practice of the political left. It is indispensable to the activity of radical social and political movements. It has, however, rarely been the subject of sustained theorization, reflection or investigation." He defines solidarity as "a relation forged through political struggle which seeks to challenge forms of oppression. To develop a sustained engagement with the formation, force and importance of solidarity involves engaging with a set of key theoretical challenges." Accordingly, solidarity should be understood as a transformative relation that has is vital to the construction of "relations between places, activists, diverse social groups" (2012, 5–6). Thus, in seeking to understand how teachers in the United States, a relatively privileged group of workers in comparison to many, build solidarity with each other and with less well-off urban workers, it is necessary conduct research as a process of solidarity building itself.

While solidarity can be produced through an amalgamation of existing identities and power relations, it is just as often forged through the active creation of new ways of relating among people. In his book on the subject of solidarity, Featherstone makes the powerful argument that solidarities shaped from below are a vital force in the quest to remake the world in more socially just or egalitarian ways. A whole range of activities and mobilizing practices adopted by workers and their organizations function to construct solidarities. Like Featherstone (2012, 4), who strives "to animate accounts of the political left in both the past and the present" by analyzing how workers have constructed solidarity across time and space, I strive towards this same objective in exploring the

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[20] There is, of course, a dark side of solidarity that has been forged and mobilized for many different uses by elite and middling classes. But these forms of solidarity are not necessary to explore for the purpose of elaborating my conception of solidarity research.

dynamic relationship between urban transformation, education policy, and teacher activism.

And just as solidarities are constructed through uneven power relations and geographies, so too might solidarity research be produced in a similar vein in order to play an active role in shaping political contestation and contributing to a social movement policy transfer, or diffusion of activist ideas and movement repertoires across places, one capable of being attuned to how the uniqueness of place has shaped activist practices. In this way, solidarity research, like the active creation of new solidarities, can be part of the process of politicization. Solidarity researchers can contribute to constructing useful connections between movement actors in different places, so as to expand their fight against common enemies, and thereby create or expand new political terrains and possibilities. In the same way that researchers need to think about solidarity politically, by which Featherstone (2012, 7–8) means that we view it "as a political relation that shapes different ways of challenging oppression and inequalities," we should think about how our research practices might deepen bonds of solidarity between ourselves and participants but also between participants and each other, some of whom may be separated by great geographical as well as social locations.

I take from Lynd another concept useful for thinking about the kind of work that I describe as solidarity research. This is the practice of accompaniment, which is a form of political engagement that Lynd and his wife Alice adopted during their time in Central America in the 1980s. It is meant to describe the way in which the Lynds wished to relate to the poor, to draftees and soldiers, to African Americans and other marginalized groups, to prisoners, to workers and others resisting U.S. imperialism. Lynd (2012, 1) contrasts

this idea to what labour activists and many others have thought of as "organizing," an approach, Lynd describes, as when "Person A decided what it would be desirable for person B to think and do, and then seeks to bring about that predetermined result." He calls this organizing approach mistaken and superficial because it results in a "complex and restrictive institutional environment that stands in the way of creative and spontaneous action from below, or…a situation such that when the organizer leaves, some of the worst aspects of the way things were before reassert themselves" (2012, 1). *Accompaniment*, in contrast, is an elastic concept. Quoting Dr. Paul Farmer, co-founder of Partners In Health, Lynd (2012, 2) writes that, "To accompany someone is to go somewhere with him or her, to break bread together, to be present on a journey with a beginning and an end." Farmer, Lynd writes, "indicates that we're almost never sure about the end." Lynd goes on to provide a useful quote from Farmer:

> There's an element of mystery, of openness, in accompaniment. I'll go with you and support you on your journey where it leads. I'll keep you company and share your fate for a while. And by "a while," I don't mean a little while. Accompaniment is much more about sticking with a task until it's deemed completed by the person or people being accompanied, rather than by the accompagnateur. (Farmer, quoted in Lynd 2012, 2)

And this is the way in which I have sought to conduct this ethnographic study of urban change and teacher activism in Chicago and New York. Accompaniment as solidarity research might best be understood as an encounter between multiple experts that generate knowledge together.

Historian Robin D. G. Kelley's (2002) call to embrace "poetic knowledge" constitutes another way I have approached this research, insisting as it does that scholars view activism as a form of both politics and knowledge production. Kelley invites us to look at social movement activists as generators of knowledge, as authors of their own story, and as dreamers of a better world. This is a dramatically different approach from

the one taken by Social Movement Theory, and from left scholars who, writing about movements, often understand emerging forms of struggle from inside their own preconceptions. By taking a more open approach to research on and with social movements we might understand activism on a far deeper level, one that grasps the reality of what social movements truly offer, and their importance in shifting our social, cultural, geographical, and political assumptions. This is what scholar-activists like Chris Dixon (2014) and others have called movement-relevant theory. The aim of this kind of theory is to develop research and analysis that recognizes activists as equals in the process of producing theory, while also conducting research that puts the "needs of movements at its heart." Elaborating what such an approach might look like, Chris Dixon and Dennis Bevington (2005), write:

> To produce movement-relevant theory, it is not enough simply to identify with a movement or study a movement. Instead, there is a distinct process that involves dynamic engagement with movements in the formulation, production, refinement, and application of the research. Moreover, the researcher need not and in fact should not have a detached relation to the movement. Rather, the researcher's connection to the movement provides important incentives to produce more accurate information, regardless of whether the researchers is studying a favored movement or its opponents.

An imperative of solidarity research is thus to practice what one preaches; by being engaged in the process of producing ideas for action, solidarity researchers build strong bonds of solidarity with those people with whom they are conducting research, or whom they accompany. In some ways, solidarity research is akin to veteran organizer of the Black Freedom struggle, Ella Baker's theory of organizing: The organizer goes out among the people, listens, and works on whatever the people themselves have proposed (Ransby 2003). Further, much like the fierce joy that comes from successful collective action derived through the constructions of solidarity, one can derive an immense amount

of pleasure from doing solidarity research that aids in some small measure with real, collective working-class struggles.

In the context of the U.S. labour movement, Lynd understands solidarity unionism as existing, to some extent, in the period preceding the passage of what was at the time new labour law, and preceding the creation of the CIO in 1935, a period in which workers turned to each other, rather than national unions, for support, and organized from below on the basis of solidarity. Thus, he concludes that, "the problems with CIO unionism did not begin with class collaboration during World War II or the anti-Communist witch hunts after the war, but with the very first contracts in steel and auto, when trade union bureaucrats voluntarily gave up the right to strike" (Lynd and Grubacic 2008, 32). Summing up his ideas on the labour movement, Lynd wrote a short book called *Solidarity Unionism: Rebuilding the Labor Movement from Below* (2015). While I do not agree with the entirety of his historical account of the U.S. union movement, these ideas about solidarity unionism are useful for both the kind of research practice I engage with in this dissertation as well as for efforts to transform trade unions and left politics today.

The essential ideas of solidarity unionism are rather simple: instead of relying on laws, government agencies, or unions that have morphed into distant and cold institutions no longer controlled by the workers they purport to represent, workers need to look primarily to one another to achieve their goals. Sometimes there is a quite literal geographic distance between the average worker and his or her union, which has long since abandoned union organization at the scale of the workplace. This move away from solidarity unionism weakens unions because, when an anti-union employer violates the legally protected rights of an employee, collective direct action is likely to resolve

problems more rapidly than pursuing a resolution through the grievance/arbitration process or by filing a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB). This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

While I strive to ground my analysis of present struggles in their historical-geographical context, I am not a historian but a social scientist who is deeply concerned with understanding how race, class, and gender (and difference more generally) function to prevent the successful construction of alternative and successful radical transformation so that I can contribute to those movement struggles seeking to make a socially just, egalitarian world. I follow geographer Laura Pulido's (2006, 9) contention that there is not simply one kind of racism but multiple forms and expressions of racism, which can vary greatly, and thus need to be explored from multiple vantage points. Likewise, while I am deeply sympathetic to the activists I interviewed and worked with in Chicago and New York, I have strived to be critical, while honoring my responsibility to represent accurately what informants told me, by contextualizing their comments and pointing out contradictions, shortcomings, or limitations to what they were doing or did. In so doing I am being ethical and hopefully useful to those activists who have shared their time and world with me.

1.5 The Extended Case Method (ECM)

In order to engage in solidarity research for this project I have turned to critical ethnography as my methodology, more specifically to what sociologist Michael Burawoy (2009) calls the *Extended Case Method (ECM)*. Similar to some of the principles of solidarity research discussed above, the central concern of critical ethnography is to conduct research aimed at societal change and increased cultural understanding between

different social groups. The overall ethnographic predicament is to produce theories and concepts that "destabilize the world we seek to comprehend" (Burawoy 2009, 19). In contrast to the positivist claim that in order for research to be valid it must be conducted from some kind of imagined Archimedean overlook, ethnography has established that the "immersed and situated view points from the thick of things" can be a much richer vantage point for understanding the world.

According to Burawoy, the principle element of the ECM is that theory is not there for us to discover but to revise, not there to be deconstructed but reconstructed. The objective of theory is "not to be boringly right but brilliantly wrong…theory exists to be extended in the face of external anomalies and internal contradictions" (Burawoy 2009, 13). This then requires that we be open to having our core assumptions challenged during the course of research.

The central principles of the ECM are as follows: (1) the extension of the observer into the community being studied, wherein the researcher joins participants in the daily activities of their lives as carried out in their space and their time; (2) observations need to be extended over time and space; time in the field needs to be long enough so that we may discern the social processes that give integrity to the site; (3) the extension of micro-processes to macro-forces, with a particular focus on how the latter shapes and is shaped by the former; (4) the extension of theory, which might also be understood as a reworking of the theory we began with after thinking through how it worked in our ethnographic data collection and analysis. Accordingly, researchers must acknowledge that, from the start, theory guides our interactions with others in the field, which allows us to identify relevant forces beyond our specific research site/s. As Burawoy (2009, 17) writes,

"Whether theory is lay or academic, it turns the site into a case that gives meaning to the site beyond its own particularity." In other words, theory can both be used to understand how social activity shaped a particular place, but it can also be extended to help us understand other places and activity as well, depending upon what the research is exploring.

Whereas positive science proposes to insulate subject from object, I adopt here a methodology that is situated within a reflexive science that "elevates dialogue as its defining principle and intersubjectivity between participant and observer as its premise. It enjoins what positive science separates: participant and observer, knowledge and social situation, situation and its field of location, folk theory and academic theory" (Burawoy 2009, 43). Such a focus on the production of knowledge through the mutual interactions between participants and the ethnographer is crucial for understanding what makes critical ethnography so unique. This approach fits well with my epistemic and substantive location as a Marxist scholar-activist involved in union organizing and in broader movements for radical social transformation. It is an especially apt choice for my study because ethnography is the most effective method by which to undertake a careful treatment of the processes and practices of everyday life and of how these processes constitute urban life, experience, structures of work, and the formation of activist subjectivities within urban spaces. I share Burawoy's belief that Marxism and ethnography can indeed be partners, but are by no means necessarily or unproblematically so. Far too often Marxism is stuck in the clouds of abstraction and macro processes, just as ethnography can sometimes be glued to the ground myopically focused on untangling the meanings of a particular place or institution that ethnographers

neglect to relate their understanding to a structural analysis of broader political, economic, or cultural processes. My analysis in later chapters of how teachers have sought to organize with parents and community activists through, and beyond, their unions against the destructive neoliberalization of their school systems—and their cities more broadly—will demonstrate how we can synthesize these two valuable traditions.

Of equal importance to my study is the call George Marcus (1995) issues for a *multi-sited ethnography*. Similarly, one of the key proponents of reflexive ethnography, James Clifford (quoted in Conway 2004, 299) argues for forms of "multilocale" ethnography that reflect the "transnational political, economic and cultural forces that traverse and constitute local or regional worlds." Both suggestions make sense for my proposed study because they allow for the researcher to develop a relational understanding of different places and peoples as the flow with and connect to each other.

More generally, critical ethnography is best suited to research interested in social change because it seeks to understand the micro-dynamics of the everyday with macro-structures of domination and exploitation. This method takes context as its point of departure and makes every effort to thematize our presence in the world we study. Following Amit-Talai and Lustiger-Thaler (1994) and Janet Conway (2004, 48), it is crucial to conduct ethnographic studies within a global framework that develops a "critical consciousness of capitalist restructuring as determining major contours of urban life" in the twenty-first century. "Contemporary multi-site and trans-local ethnographies draw our attention to how studying a culture is no longer about simply going 'there' and studying 'it,' because 'it' is 'simultaneously planetary and, refracted through the shards of vernacular cultural practices, profoundly parochial" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003, 151).

In conducting research in this way, our sense of the spatiality of the field shifts, becoming more encompassing and entangled across scales, temporalities, and movements, which should cause us to rethink out notion of and relation to the spaces of ethnographic fieldwork and the connections that constitute and flow between different sites (DeLyser et al. 2010, 11).

For the purpose of this research, I employ a relational understanding of space and place because this is essential for conducting comparative case studies as they are shaped in relation to each other. In my research, the primary relational comparison I am focused on is rank-and-file teacher activism between Chicago and New York City. Such a spatialized, ethnographic approach differs fundamentally from one that posits different cases as local variants of a more general phenomenon (Yin 2013). In contrast to comparing pre-existing objects, events, identities or places, this approach, in keeping with Marxist dialects, focuses on how practices in the interconnected arenas of everyday life constitute relations between objects, events, identities, or places.

Considering that all activities have to take place somewhere, space is an essential constitutive element of everything that we do as human beings. Space is related in seemingly banal ways to all of our daily activities to such an extent in fact that it might seem not worthy of acknowledgement. And yet, because space is produced and reproduced in uneven and differentiated ways, places always differ in important ways from one another. Subsequently, it is vital that researchers investigate why and how spatial difference and the inequalities in power that result from, or perhaps more aptly, through it develop, evolve, and get reproduced.

In conducting investigations into the significance of place within a research project such as the one I have pursued on the geographical political economy of urban education and teacher activism, it is important to recognize that relationally articulated moments and spatialities within networks of social relations and a multitude of understanding that exists in many different places constitute any given place (Massey 1994, 66). Put differently, processes that "transect multiple scales, and are constituted out of the spatial and temporal relations between differently scaled and embedded processes" such as capitalist finance or urbanization, for instance, should be understood as essential in the construction of places (DeLyser et al. 2010, 2010).

1.6 Toward a Critical and Relational Comparative Study

Comparative work can expand theoretical understanding of a great many social processes and relationship not only because it helps in explaining the existence and significance of similarities and differences between the cases but also because it illuminates how complex processes such as urbanization is a multiscalar and complex phenomenon which can work to constitute multiple case studies in a relational manner with each other, such that the success or failure of a public policy or social movement campaign, for instance, may radically affect a similar policy or campaign elsewhere (Herbert 2010). A comparative strategy allows the researcher to highlight processes that stretch across locales—in this case, the study is focused on how teachers and their unions have figured into global city development strategies, and resistance of teacher union activists against the neoliberal restructuring of public education and the city more generally. While such comparative research can yield incredibly rich findings and be an exciting endeavor, it is also a daunting and challenging task. This is especially the case

when the project is for a PhD dissertation, which, in most cases, does not allow the researcher a sufficient amount of time or finances to engage in fieldwork for more than two cases. And even with two cases, one does not typically have an adequate amount of time or funding to dwell in the field and build deep relationships of trust and solidarity with research partners. This is especially the case if your field sites are not in the same city in which you live, work, and study.

When I embarked on the research for this study, I was intent on conducting what George Marcus (1995) and others have called a relational comparative study (Ward 2010).[21] And so I have. But a few points about the unique nature of this comparison and what I have sought to do, given both my time and financial constraints for engaging in fieldwork, need to be stated. First, because I had only one year to conduct the bulk of my fieldwork, I decided early on to drop my proposed case study of Los Angeles and teacher activism there. Since I began this project, the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) has seen an intense level of rank-and-file transformation in alliance with, and modeled on, CORE and the CTU (Vasquez 2015). Leaving aside this third case, at least for the moment, allowed me to spend approximately eight to ten months in Chicago, where I had never been but where I had some good friends and political comrades that were teachers active in CORE. When it came to the New York case, I assumed that, because I am a native New Yorker who has a good sense of the politics and labour movement of the city through my own participation in it, I could get away with spending closer to three to four months there to do my ethnographic fieldwork. Yet, as is widely recognized, once you are in the field even the best-laid plans have a tendency to shift by necessity, if not get

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[21] In contrast to a typical comparative case study approach, a relational comparative study as elaborated on by Marcus (1995).

entirely discarded. In actuality I spent approximately six months in New York, at different times, conducting fieldwork.

But the more time I spent in Chicago the more it appeared as if a major struggle was on the verge of erupting between the CTU and newly elected Democratic mayor, Rahm Emanuel. And it was clear that this conflict would have massive implications for the broader fight against corporate education reform in the United States. As a result, it became apparent to me that the story of CORE and the Chicago teachers was going to be the "rock star" of my dissertation. And so they are. For instance, once I arrived in New York and began to connect with teachers and other education activists in the city in my initial research visit, one theme that reoccurred in all fifteen teacher and education activist interviews I conducted in New York was that CORE and the CTU would be the leading light in my study precisely because they had become *the* model example of union transformation for teachers (and arguably trade union dissidents more widely) in New York City, Newark, Los Angeles, and elsewhere.

Indeed, in the summer of 2012, activists in New York were in the initial stages of forming what would become MORE. And not only was their name an explicit reference to CORE, but they had been in contact with CORE leaders, some of whom came to speak to their New York counterparts. Activists from New York in turn visited Chicago to learn more directly from the experience there and as an expression of solidarity and support. Worth noting is that these visits between New York and Chicago teachers had occurred before, during, and after the September CTU strike in 2012. It is likewise important to be clear that a good part of the strong connection between the two groups of reformers emerged in no small measure from the very positive role played by the International

Socialist Organization (ISO) and other socialist groups, primarily Solidarity (of which I had been a member prior to moving to Toronto to pursue my PhD). Indeed, it was primarily the connections I had built as a socialist activist in Solidarity and the rank-and-file network *Labor Notes* that allowed me to find participants for my study and that secured me a special kind of access to activist spaces, which may have been much more difficult to gain had I been approaching people as a complete stranger.

With respect to my New York City case study, there is a serious amount of historical research that is yet to be done on the UFT, and in particular on the dynamics of the left within it, which is central to its development. Additionally, there is a need for more original political economic research on schooling in New York City and New York State as it relates to the neoliberalization of public education in the United States more generally. I do some of this work in this thesis, but acknowledge that more rigorous data collection and analysis is beyond the scope of the current work and will need to be conducted at a later date by me and other researchers.

While the empirical case of rank-and-file teachers under investigation allows me to tackle a core problematic of labour geography—worker agency—I am more concerned in this study *with exploring the question of what kinds of institutional or structural power may be gained through the transformations in urban space in Chicago and New York, as well as what we can learn about working-class strategy—a seriously neglected topic in labour geography and radical geography more generally—from the cases of rank-and-file struggle that I analyze here*. Not only have public sector workers and teachers' unions in particular been neglected in labour geography, so too have the micro politics within

unions and the scale of the rank-and-file likewise been largely ignored. This study hopes to remedy this neglect.

There is a deep connection between the problem of labour's agency and the role that educational institutions play in either facilitating or containing this agency, both that which happens (or does not) in formal institutions like schools and that which happens within social movements. Following a dialectical approach means that I seek to not simply identify the similarities and differences between my objects of comparison but to show how they are more general forms of capitalist urbanization and class struggle.

1.7 Research Design and Data Sources

The bulk of the original research in my study derives from data from semi-structured interviews and participant observation. I conducted forty-five interviews in total—thirty in Chicago and fifteen in New York City—with teachers (active in and outside of the union), elected union officers, union staff, and activists from the community-based organizations that have been organizing with teachers around education in the city. In addition, I examined a variety of policy documents, position papers and studies from municipal, state and federal governments, unions, and other relevant community organizations. I selected these methods to meet each of the objectives outlined in the introduction. The methods should be seen as overlapping and informing all five objectives stated above. Attempting to know a phenomenon "from the inside," as I do in this study, required selecting methods based on "openness, emotional engagement, and the development of a potentially long term and trusting relationship between the researcher and the participant (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 634). Thus, the methods selected for this project reflected a desire to be a part of the research process

alongside participants. The methods selected also encouraged a co-production of knowledge through the interview structure used in conversation between the researcher and research participant.

Semi- Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used in order to gain insights from participants and experts on the historical geography of the teachers' unions in Chicago and New York, specifically how these cities have served as places of experimentation and policy innovation in the corporate-led reform of public education. They have also been critical in addressing how CORE and MORE emerged and what these organizations are doing to transform their unions. Of similar importance, they have aided me in grasping the alliances teacher activists in both cities have built with the community-based groups who are struggling alongside teachers to defend and transform public schools and their cities.

Most of my interviews, in both Chicago and New York, were conducted either in small coffee shops or in bars, although five were conducted in the classrooms where participants teach on a daily basis. This is important to note because at "the level of methodological practice, simply paying heed to where we conduct our interviews and focus groups is hugely influential to the kinds of knowledge we create, even if printing those insights may lead to challenges at the level of ethical practice" (DeLyser et al. 2010). These spaces proved conducive to making participants feel comfortable, especially if we were drinking beers together. Many of my informal interviews or conversations happened either at bars or restaurants too, or at protest events (rallies, picket lines, marches, etc.).

I employed *purposeful sampling and snowball sampling*. Purposive sampling involves the use of the researcher's specific knowledge or expertise in the deliberate selection of interview participants on the basis of some common and favourable characteristic. Employing the snowball technique involves identifying interview subjects of interest by communicating with key informants and obtaining their recommendations for contacting other persons. Each interviewee was contacted via telephone or email to set up an interview time and location. The aim of each interview was not to be representative but to understand how individuals make sense of an experience (Valentine 1997). Purposive sampling and the snowball technique were used to clearly identify sets of individuals involved in organizing in defense of teachers and public education. The advantage to using purposive sampling is that knowledgeable subjects selected as interviewees generate rich amounts of data for in-depth analyses related to the central issue of study. Interviewees would often suggest or directly connect me with other individuals to interview.

All interviews lasted between sixty to ninety minutes, with most questions reflecting both the particular area of the participant's expertise and his or her general knowledge or interest in broader concerns related to the subject of the dissertation. For interview questions that were broader and more open-ended, sequencing flowed logically from one set of ideas to another (Kvale 1996). Though I did not undertake a study guided completely by grounded theory, some of my research questions had no obvious hypothesis and were more open-ended than others. While I had prepared a set of questions in advance, the interviews progressed in a conversational manner and thereby allowed for significant opportunity to explore pertinent issues as they arose. In general,

the adaptable nature of such interviews enabled me to probe for particular themes and for each participant's unique experience (Valentine 1997; Longhurst 2003). The open-ended nature of questions gave individual participants room to express their perspectives and also enabled them to direct the interview toward subjects and themes they deemed important or relevant. Additionally, as the interview progressed and new ideas pertinent to understanding the research topic emerged, I adapted interview agendas to reflect unexpected insights. Perhaps most importantly, semi-structured interviews put *human agency* at the center of movement analysis. "Qualitative interviews are a window into the everyday worlds of activists," Ragin (quoted in Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 634) writes, "and they generate representations that embody the subjects' voices, minimizing, at least as much as possible, the voice of the researcher." In amplifying the voices of participants in the interview, I also offered challenging questions and prompts when it seemed like such things were called for, but ultimately allowed the participant to steer the interview towards the direction he or she deemed most relevant for me to understand.

More specifically, interviews were conducted with teachers who are active members in each rank-and-file reform group, as well as with elected officers and staff in each union. In addition, every effort was made to interview a select number of people who were active members of the groups from the community-based and parent organizations working in alliance with members of CORE and MORE. Data was recorded in two ways. First, the interview was recorded with a digital audio recording device and later transcribed for analysis. Second, notes were taken throughout the interview, as well as upon completion of the interview. Interpreting, condensing, categorizing, and structuring meaning through narratives gave meaning to the interview

transcription and notes (Kvale 1996). Please refer to *Appendix A* for the interview protocol that was used. Once I completed transcription of an interview, I then sent it to the participant so that he or she could review it and clarify or elaborate anything that was said in the interview. While I did not receive a huge amount of comments from most participants in response to their transcripts, I believe this proved to be a useful and ethical practice that further cemented the trust participants had in me as a researcher. Similarly, I have made presentations to and have had extensive conversations with rank-and-file members of the CTU and UFT on the topic of my work, and have circulated published articles that resulted from this research.

Participant Observation

I attended well over 20 union and caucus meetings, as well as dozens of actions—what might be identified in the social movement literature as protest events— in Chicago and New York for the purpose of observation and political support. Observation in day-to-day settings, at different times and in different locations, provides a richer picture *in situ* than interviews alone. My hope was that ideas about the political dynamics, notions of crisis and their meanings, and strategies for transforming the union and contesting the neoliberalization of education would emerge from my subjects during interviews and participant observation (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011).

With regard to observation, it is important to reiterate that there is no such thing as the detached observer operating from a neutral position as investigator: "the observer's presence can never be erased" Denzin and Lincoln (2005, 634). I agree with Denzin and Lincoln's suggestion that observers should engage as collaborative participants in action inquiry settings. No matter how we approach our research, we are always simultaneously

participant and observer because we cannot escape the fact that we live in the world we study. The techniques of participant observation simply make us acutely aware of this existential and ethical conundrum. Moreover, we should understand the process of observation as tentative, situational, and strongly shaped by existing power structures and shifts in gendered identity.

As Watson and Till argue (2010, 129), participant observation requires that researchers "pay close attention to, and sometimes partake in, everyday geographies so they can become familiar with how social spaces are constituted in various settings." Indeed, it is only through participating with others in their own settings, sometimes familiar and sometimes not, that a better understanding of the lived, sensed, experienced, and emotional world can be gained by ethnographers (Watson and Till 2010, 129–30; Crang and Cook 2007). An example of the participation I engaged in was helping to distribute information to the public at a demonstration over school closings. Participant-observation is an absolutely crucial compliment to interviewing because, as Watson and Till (2010, 129–30) note, "in many cases, interviewees cannot report upon what they 'do'—for 'doings' are often unconscious or unarticulated practices."

These data collection instruments have served to familiarize me with aspects of the production of New York and Chicago as global cities, how neoliberalization of public schooling has developed in these cities, the dynamic ways in which teachers have attempted to transform their unions into progressive organizations, and how my research subjects view their sources of power.

Document Analysis

In order to gather information about global city development strategy and the historical-geographical evolution of neoliberalism in Chicago and New York, along with how teachers and community-based activists have contested these processes, I examined a range of documents. In turning to documents—from union and caucus communications and policy briefs, to reports, newspaper articles, YouTube, and Facebook posts—I was able to develop a richer understanding of the changing materiality of urban space. This method fits well with seeing urban places as constantly shifting articulations of social relations that, existing over time, produce material forms. These investigations are centered on facts but offer theoretical explanations for various historical events (Aronowitz 2014, 135; Johnson and Christensen 2008) based on nuanced data about people, meanings, events, ideas, and places that have influenced and shaped the present. There were a number of data sources from which to draw on. Primary sources included public records, reports, government documents, newspaper editorials and stories, union news sources, communications and policy papers of the union, as well as photos of union events and actions (Berg 2008).

1.8 Concluding Remarks

In summary, this chapter has covered a lot of intellectual ground in order to provide insight into the theoretical framework, political commitments, intellectual influences, and life experiences that have motivated the research for this project. Specifically, I have outlined how what I call solidarity research intersects with the Extended Case Method and how I have drawn on the two to construct an appropriate

research design for my study of urban change, education policy, and teacher union activism in Chicago and New York City.

Chapter 2: Organized Labour and Rank-and-File Rebellion in an Urban World

American unions now confine themselves to workplace issues such as job security, benefits, and individual grievance fights and operate mostly within the collective bargaining agreement. With few exceptions, they have surrendered the strike weapon and other forms of direct action. They take part in electoral politics, but they do not use their political influence to tackle social issues like housing, education, food prices, consumer debt, or the debacle of soaring student debt. Just as they rarely fight the employers directly, they almost never demand that the Democrats they support adhere to labor's agenda. Instead, they have adopted a stance of cooperation and have been integrated into the economic and political status quo…few unions view themselves as responsible for the totality of workers' lives, even those of their own members and member households. Nor do they see themselves as an independent economic and political force.

<div style="text-align:right">

Stanley Aronowitz, *The Death and Life of American Labor: Toward a New Worker's Movement* (2014, 135)

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What matters most of all is surely whether people engage in effe*ctive action*. And if actions are politically effective, we might want to pinpoint the conditions for their effectiveness. Not because those conditions are 'rights,' but because politically effective action is the crux of building any progressive movement. …The new urban question signifies nothing less than the battle to invent another, upgraded notion of 'collective consumption,' a public prophylactic to the private parasites lurking in our midst.

<div style="text-align:right">

Andy Merrifield, *The New Urban Question* (2014, xviii)

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2.1 Introduction

U.S. trade unions in the twenty-first century are in a dire situation; they face the very real prospect of becoming extinct in the next decade if they do not radically reinvent themselves. While conservative enemies of unions might disagree, arguing instead that today's unions have entirely too much power in society—and need to be relieved of it post haste—the majority of sympathetic studies of organized labour typically begin with the premise of crisis and the need for union renewal (Fletcher Jr. and Gapasin 2008; Getman 2010; Rosenfeld 2014; Moody 2007). Some radical scholars have even argued that trade unions have become either totally irrelevant to the majority of working-class people or are otherwise so deeply integrated into the institutional socio-legal framework

of contemporary capitalism as to be immune from attempts to transform them into effective vehicles of working-class struggle and transformative organizing. As a result, some suggest, those interested in achieving a more socially just, democratic, and egalitarian world should shift their scholarly focus and political energy into alternative forms of working-class struggle (LaTour 2013; Ness 2014). Others argue that while trade unions remain important institutions for helping workers attain some immediate economic benefits (e.g. higher wages, benefits, some modicum of job security), the political left, or more specifically those who identify as some variant of anti-capitalist, should not waste their energies on trying to reorient unions towards broader anti-systemic transformation because the built-in pressures towards a narrow economism and reformism make it impossible for unions to pursue radical objectives. Instead, these scholars argue, anti-capitalist radicals would do better to focus on building a revolutionary communist party or political instrument of one form or another (Badiou 2010; Moufawad-Paul 2014; Harnecker 2007) around which anti-systemic struggles can be forged, and through which the working-class majority might be politically engaged.[22]

Without taking up these different positions here, my examination of the best examples of union practice and rank-and file-struggles within unions located in advanced

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[22] For example, Jane Latour (2013) argues that there is a fundamental contradiction between the core value/practice of trade unions—working-class solidarity—and the institutional structure of unions. The former, declaring that an injury to one is an injury to all, fights for the broader interests of the working class. The latter dictates that unions represent their members more narrowly, and perhaps their particular sector more broadly. Latour (2013, 282) concludes her article by contending that, "Bottom up or top down labor in its current configuration is incapable of organizing the millions of working people now outside the ranks of labor, making common cause with the broad swatch of allies that working people need in order to change the balance of power, and presenting a sufficiently intelligent and muscular challenge to the capitalist forces aligned in assault against the working class. Reform efforts that stay with the current union structure and paradigms are doomed to failure." There is a whole range of examples in the scholarship concerned with social movements, self-espoused "Revolutionary Marxists," and anarchists, but for an otherwise excellent new collection from labour studies, see Immanuel Ness' (2014) book, *New Forms of Worker Organization: The Syndicalist and Autonomist Restoration of Class Struggle Unionism*.

capitalist economies today evidences the claim that even when unions do everything that radical activists and sympathetic left academics suggest is necessary for the revitalization of organized labour—taking militant action, organizing community support for their campaigns, engaging in comprehensive research, organizing a communications plan to attain sympathetic media coverage and public support—unions are still most often unable to preserve previous gains (e.g. keep their plants open, stop layoffs, budget cuts, or school closings). Much less are they able to push beyond such defensive fights to enlarge the political terrain of struggle for workers and the oppressed.

This inability to hold the line in even these most defensive and supposedly narrow economic fights indicates a reduction in the power of organized labour in an era of global capitalism, an era in which we have seen governmental deregulation (more properly understood as reregulation in the interests of corporations) of capital flows, and the privatization of state infrastructure, which has both caused and resulted in a resurgence of the power of business (Harvey 2010a). Moreover, today employers across industrial sectors are generally more mobile than their workers, with a greater capacity to implement or threaten workers with the outsourcing of their operations either to a neighbouring city, state, or country with little or no penalty from state regulation. In the process employers and governments play different groups of workers in and between places off against each other (2013b, xxiv; Bronfenbrenner 2009). In fact, different levels of government—sometimes with the support of unions and other local boosters—often provide businesses with a financial incentive to relocate to their geographic locale.[23]

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[23] Interrogating the nature of the place-based alliances that are forged between workers and businesses was one of the earliest areas in which Andrew Herod (1991; 1994) developed emergent debates in the field of labour geography.

As labour historian Nelson Lichtenstein (2013a, xxiv) argues in his latest book on U.S. unions, "To write a history of labor in the last hundred years…requires both a probe into the character of working-class mentality and an understanding of the shifting contours of the economy and the structure of American politics."[24] So too is this required for the writing of an adequate labour geography, which, while focusing on the question of agency, has at times neglected the question of working-class mentality or working-class subjectivity and the politics of workers these different subjectivities spawn (J. Fine 2006b; Tattersall 2010b; Rutherford 2010). The labour geography approach developed over the 1990s and early 2000s was a minor, albeit critical, corrective to Marxist economic geography's failure to seriously examine the actual lives of workers and how they collectively struggle to remake—and sometimes, although less often, to unmake—capitalist geographies. In elaborating this corrective through empirical research and theorizing, labour geographers, however, have generally neglected working-class organizations other than trade unions and a rigorous political economic analysis of how the changing dynamics of capitalism and state power have been refashioned through the self-activity of workers in struggle. This is especially true when those struggles are part of a broader social movement that contests class projects from above, such as urban renewal aimed at clearing out poor, racialized communities so as to attract wealthier and whiter populations.

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[24] Of course, what is missing from this statement is any sense of how these processes are constituted spatially and why geography is important to understanding them, but this geographical lens will be brought in soon enough. For now, it is as important to note that in our search for a deeper understanding of labour's agency, labour geographers have not done much to more broadly/deeply grasp working-class mentality or subjectivity.

As I discuss in more detail below, much of the work on organized labour in the city focuses on labour's turn to organizing with "community" allies, which it sees as an innovative strategic choice aimed at rebuilding a specific union's power or winning an individual campaign. In particular, this line of research pays special attention to isolating and analyzing the factors that have contributed to making labour-community coalitions successful in some cities rather than others (J. Fine 2006b; Tattersall 2010b; Black 2012).

After reviewing some of the key works in the sociological, political-economic, and geographic research on organized labour, *the central argument I make in this chapter is that we need to move beyond this limited analytical and political focus in order to develop an analysis of the geography of urban transformation in contemporary capitalism and how these processes relate to the activities of trade unions and the efforts of rank-and-file workers to transform them. Put differently, this chapter explores the socio-spatial dialectic of urbanism and labour activism.* More specifically, this chapter makes a case for what I call, drawing on the work of radical geographer Edward Soja (2010), *spatial justice unionism*. It is important to note here that the activists I interviewed or spent time with as part of this research project do not always explicitly recognize this critical geographical or spatial imaginary as such, which does not, I maintain, detract from its value to activism. While many of these participants explicitly identify with social justice unionism and social movement unionism, the phrase spatial justice unionism would likely strike them as quite alien. Nevertheless, I contend that, whether recognized by activists, such an imaginary or lens on union praxis is present and is essential.

Recent debates on the nature of critical urban theory fail to center radical, transformative urban praxis. For those who identify as scholars *and* activists, there is a need to develop a spatial understanding of the urban as not simply a static site of struggle but as an active element that in important ways structures or constitutes social activity— and in particular how injustice and struggles against it remake the urban environment (Soja 2010). Activist-scholars need to theoretically and empirically account for how the urban itself is an objective of political struggle, whether movements explicitly think in these terms or not. The struggle over the built environment of the city, the geographical scales that unions prioritize, how unions build—or do not, as the case may be—liveable and accessible cities for workers, and how inequality, racism in housing, labour markets, and public schools operate to structure urban space today, need to be accounted for in our search for a more radical, transformative union and urban praxis. Doing so means cultivating spatial justice unionism as one key component of a different kind of working-class politics.

The chapter is organized in three sections. The first examines the political-economic context of workers and unions in the United States. Here I develop my analysis of both the external and internal challenges that U.S. labour unions confront today. In doing so, I draw on some of the most pertinent literature focused on explaining the underlying causes of union crisis and prospects for renewal. From labour law, capital mobility, ideology, the increasingly sophisticated anti-union ("union prevention") industry that has developed since the 1980s, the reorganization of workplaces and the dramatic changes in labour markets that have occurred alongside it to the institutional and contradictory organizational form that trade unions have taken historically, including the

lack of democracy and member engagement presently characterizing most of today's unions in the United States, the obstacles that confront organized labour are massive. I present here only a brief overview and interrogation of the literature that addresses these questions.

The second section provides an overview of what thinking geographically about capitalism and the urban implies for the fate of organized labour today. As mentioned above, a critical spatial lens is vital for the development of comprehensive and rigorous investigations into the study of working-class power in general and rank-and-file reform movements within unions in particular.

In the third and final section of the chapter, I examine scholarship in labour geography, urban studies, and other research across the social sciences that, insofar as it addresses class—as it is mutually constituted by race and gender—agency, and unions, is most relevant to outlining a conceptual framework for examining the rank-and-file struggles of teachers in Chicago and New York. Since this dissertation not only focuses on trade unions but, more specifically, on rank-and-file organizations that have arisen to transform them, the discussion will be primarily centered on what Kim Moody has identified as *the rank-and-file strategy*. I hope to show here why the rank-and-file strategy remains vital for both researchers to investigate and for activists to pursue and learn from in their attempts to fight capitalism and the neoliberalization of public education that has become so essential to it in the past two decades.

In reviewing these literatures and movements, I elaborate the analytical framework employed in this study to understand unions, activism, and class struggle on the U.S. urban scene today—however complex, uneven, and variegated it might be. This

chapter draws primarily on Marxist and other heterodox scholarship from across the social sciences. It is here that I sketch out my conception of how I think we should both understand and investigate working-class (and trade union) power and tease out what it means to treat unions and rank-and-file movements as important political actors in their own right. I explain why unions have access to certain forms of power that other social movements or civil society organizations do not. For example, in addition to being the largest and most well-resourced organizations that workers have access to for representing their interests, their rootedness in the workplace bestows upon unions a unique capacity to disrupt the underlying system of capitalist production and circulation—including the state and ideological apparatuses that allow this system to function (Silver 2003). Indeed, this is what imbues certain public sector unions, like those that represent education workers, with so much potential power (Johnston 1994).

Lastly I explain that the crisis of organized labour is due, at least in part, to the asymmetrical relationship that exists in terms of the scale at which unions are organized compared to the scale of both contemporary corporations, state power, and the administration of public services. More specifically, there is a mismatch of sorts between the scale/s at which most union organizing takes place (e.g. at the scale of the firm or at best that of the sector) and the rescaling of state power, industrial relations, and production that has been at the center of the different phases of the neoliberalization of the U.S. political-economy and that has been a much more dynamic multiscalar process than is often recognized in the literature on neoliberalism and global capitalism.[25] Within

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[25] While by no means unique to their scholarship, Leo Panitch and Sam Gindin's *The Making of Global Capitalism* (2012) says virtually nothing about what is happening at sub-national scales or how the broader macroeconomic and institutional changes that they document so meticulously articulate with different scales of governance—especially at municipal and new regional scales.

the historical development of these dynamic transformations of the political economies and state structures/spaces of U.S. capitalism, priority has been given on an ongoing basis by policy makers, if not by scholars, to transforming municipalities and metropolitan regions.

2.2 The Economic Context of Workers and Unions Today

Not long ago mainstream economists were singing the praises of a time when free markets and free trade would, after spreading across the globe, inevitably lead to the creation of a vast number of new jobs and an increased standard of living for people everywhere. And while the globalization of the economy has certainly led to a massive increase in wealth in terms of a steady increase in gross domestic product per capita for most national economies, we only need to scratch the surface to see that most of the world's workers are less economically secure, if not in entirely degraded and desperate conditions (Luce 2014; McNally 2011). For instance, in the United States—the biggest economy on the planet—unemployment, including long-term unemployment, is at levels not seen since the Great Depression in the 1930s. And while we have seen improvements in recent years in the aggregate, African American unemployment remains at Depression era levels. That being said, standard unemployment data does not include all of those who are marginally employed in various ways (working part-time or stuck in temporary or seasonal work) when they would rather be full-time or those who have simply given up their search for employment ("discouraged workers").[26] This is quite revealing given that the United States is the heart of the system of global capitalism today (Panitch and Gindin 2012). If we look at other economies around the globe, it becomes apparent that

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[26] A 2012 report found that over half of new college graduates were either unemployed or working in jobs that did not require a college degree (Wething, Sabadish, and Shierholz 2012).

this story is not unique to the United States. In particular, youth unemployment has skyrocketed since the Great Recession began in 2008, affecting nearly 13% of young people across the planet (73.8 million under 25 are officially unemployed).

Beyond young workers, the ILO's International Labour Office (2013) found that the total number of people throughout the world without jobs in 2012 was 197, 000 000. This represents nearly 6% of the world's formal labour market. If we dig a little deeper, we see that since 2008 approximately 39, 000 000 people have dropped out of the labour market entirely (not including all of those who work part-time or are underemployed), which means that unemployment is actually much higher. Sadly, the ILO predicts this situation will only worsen in the coming years. Alongside this unemployment and underemployment is a vast expansion of both precarious, degraded employment—with little or no job security—and stagnant or falling averages wages; at the same time labour productivity has continued to rise (International Labour Office 2013).

While things have only gotten worse since the economic crisis broke in 2007 (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2013), Morgan Stanley chief economist Stephen Roach (2007) observed in 2007: "The pendulum of economic power is at unsustainable extremes in the developed world. For a broad collection of major industrial economies—the United States, the Euro zone, Japan, Canada and the U.K.— the share of economic rewards going to labour stands at a historical low of less than 54% of national income—down from 56% in 2001. Meanwhile, the share going to corporate profits stands at a record high of nearly 16% - a striking increase from the 10% reading five years ago." In other words, while productivity has recovered, generating huge profits

for capital, it is workers around the world who have continued to receive less of a share in these profits, and as a result have grown poorer.

In order to understand the underlying dynamics structuring this bleak economic context the world's workers now confront, major historical and geographical changes that have been occurring in contemporary capitalism need to be examined. In particular, I will focus on the U.S. economy and the evolution of neoliberalization, which began in earnest in the mid-to-late 1970s and early 1980s, although as Panitch and Gindin (2012) have compellingly argued we can begin to see neoliberal tendencies developing with the U.S. state as early as the 1950s. In particular, the opening of previously protected industries to competition abroad that has been a central component of what is typically described as globalization has had a massive impact, generally negative, on workers and on the socio-spatial structure of the U.S. economy.

Beginning in about 1974 we start to see in the United States an onset of stagnant growth combined with rising prices, which motivated the Federal Reserve Bank to sharply increase borrowing costs. This in turn led to a significant rise in unemployment. And as it always does, unemployment undermined the bargaining leverage of workers because employers could more easily replace employees. This also meant that employers were better positioned to adapt to reduced output during strikes or other job actions when demand for their products was low. For their part, workers were risking more by being active in any unionization efforts or other behaviour an employer might deem as "trouble making" in a slack labour market because employer retaliation might land any pro-union workers a spot at the back of the hiring queue.

This difficult economic climate collided with the deregulation of previously protected industries (e.g., trucking and telecommunications) and rapid expansion in overseas competition, most notably from Japan and other East Asian economies. This growing competition in turn led many employers to launch aggressive, disciplined, and comprehensive attacks on their employees and the unions that represented them or those that sought to represent them. At the same time, while some employers used these changes as an excuse to drive down labour costs vis-à-vis disciplining workers, speeding up production, incorporating new technologies into the production and distribution process, and attempting to dismantle the unions that represented their workers, other employers genuinely witnessed a decline in profits and were less able to adapt to global competition and the pace of economic changes. Formerly protected industries that had now been opened through deregulation helped to shift employment patterns in the U.S. economy—to the detriment of organized labour. As radical economist William K. Tabb (2012, 10) observes, "Ever since the 1980s the fashion has been to make companies as lean as possible, outsourcing all but your core competencies, expanding your just-in-time supplier system around the globe, loading up on debt to 'leverage' your balance sheet." Indeed, as I will discuss later, we can even see this lean production and just-in-time set up at the center of the neoliberal agenda in education with the restructuring of teacher's work (through standardized testing and scripted curricula) and a shift to alternative teacher training programs (e.g. Teach for America (TFA) and an increasing number of local variants).

The traditional strongholds of labour in the Northeast and Midwest of the United States have been hollowed out; industrial restructuring, deindustrialization, and a

dramatic shift to employment in the service sector, much of it low-wage employment in retail, hospitality, and fast food, have resulted in major job losses and community devastation. In some places there has also been a significant shift towards high-tech industries. These were sectors that organized labour had little successful experience in organizing. And as Moody (2007) and Aronowitz (2014) observe, before being relocated to Mexico or elsewhere in the Global South, much of this work was shifted to the U.S. South, a region where unions have failed miserably and where racism is more firmly entrenched in labour and housing markets. Indeed, the failure of labour to successfully organize is often attributed, I think correctly, to its unwillingness to seriously center antiracism in its organizing strategies (Moody 2007).

Yet, as Jake Rosenfeld (2014, 19) explains in his book, *What Unions No Longer Do*, "[g]iven the differential growth rates between the union and non-union sectors, even an enormous organizing push within existing union strongholds was unlikely to arrest membership loses—employment gains outside of unionized industries were just too high…. As economist Henry Farber and sociologists Bruce Western conclude in their investigation of the causes of labour decline, 'The quantity of organizing activity required to make a substantial difference in the steady state unionization rate is simply staggering'." These observations speak to the urgent need for unions to radically rethink everything that they have been doing in the past 30 years, if not since the post-World War II consolidation of contract unionism (Aronowitz 2014). Rosenfeld is no doubt correct that, given the severe decline in the geographical center of U.S. unionism, unions need to expand their organizing scope into the Southeast and Southwest (the so-called Sunbelt) of the United States. Suburbanization also constitutes an essential component of the story of

deindustrialization, changing dynamics of the racial order, and economic restructuring more broadly. The path of industry, for example, has generally moved from cities, to suburbs, to the rural Midwest, to the Sunbelt, to Mexico and Canada, and, more recently, to East Asia. The retail revolution initiated by Wal-Mart, whose growth has been both facilitated by and accelerated the globalization of production/distribution networks, low-wage employment, and a general attack on the welfare state, has driven much of this mobility (Lichtenstein 2006).[27]

Beyond the decline in numbers of union membership exist broader indicators of the decline in power and influence of organized labour in the United States. During the 1950s and 1960s, for example, many non-union employers in the private sector would regularly match union wage rates, benefits, and working conditions, albeit typically as a preventative measure against unionization. In more recent years, however, this dynamic has reversed due to increased competition driving down both wages and working standards amongst the remaining unionized firms in the private sector. This has led many unions to increasingly negotiate concessions at the bargaining table, surrendering those hard-won gains of past memberships struggles.

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[27] As one notable report by the McKinsey consulting firm showed, 25% of the gains in productivity in the U.S. economy between 1995 and 2000 derived from Walmart (B. Lewis et al. 2001).

Figure 1

Number of work stoppages involving 1,000 or more workers for at least one shift, 1947–2013

Work stoppages

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Figure 2

Average annual major work stoppages, 1971-2010, by decade

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016a.

As labour lawyer and activist Joe Burns (2015) rightly observes, since the 1970s large-scale strikes—which most scholars concede are the most historically significant articulation of workers' power and leverage—are now virtually non-existent. And when

they do occur, such as at Kohler in Wisconsin, where over a 2,000 manufacturing workers

have been out on strike since November 16, 2015, they do not receive a degree of

attention—or more importantly support—that would allow them to win. As I discuss in

more detail below, reviving the strike, as Burns advocates, will be a key component to

rebuilding the labour movement, although how this is done will need to be part of not

simply union transformation or labour law reform but of a much more creative and

broader movement building project for the American working class. As Lichtenstein

(2013b, 32–33, my emphasis) argues:

> The most significant factor in undermining the ability of American unions to defend values distinct from that of capital was the intensification of competitive pressures. There are two issues here. First, *competition has an asymmetric class impact. When particular businesses lose out to more effective competitors, capital as a class emerged stronger. For workers, however, competition undermines their most vital asset – their solidarity – and so leaves them weaker as a class*. Second, the emphasis on being competitive implies strengthening American corporations and sacrificing or undermining specifically worker concerns. This also applies to public sector workers, where the argument is that too much spending on social services and public sector wages diverts resources from and damages, private sector competitiveness…*What is crucial…is that unions have all too often internalized competitiveness as a goal rather than treating it as a real-work constraint that may call for tactical retreats and demand responses beyond collective bargaining*. Once making concessions becomes central to protecting jobs in the name of the 'new reality', unions themselves become vehicles for lowering the expectations as well as disciplining recalcitrant workers. This effectively shuts the door to discussing alternatives…union leaders have all too often come to play a disturbing role in socializing workers into accepting the limits imposed by the constraints of competitiveness.

Any sober discussion of unions needs to heed Lichtenstein's important

observation that unions have on the whole internalized the intensified capitalist logic of

competiveness into their praxis and as a result have for too long served to socialize

workers to the new reality of concessions and austerity. Rank-and-file movements must

blow the doors that have been erected against any alternative course to that pursued as a

result of internalizing competitiveness in this manner off their hinges. Any union renewal thus needs to focus on reversing this course by making it the mission of the labour movement to raise expectations and raise hell, as Jane McAlevey (2012) rightly insists.

While we take stock of both their decline and continued relevance, it is important to acknowledge that trade unions everywhere—especially in the advanced capitalist economies—have been experiencing attrition in their membership and influence, in large part because they confront a complicated set of external and internal challenges to defending past gains and winning improvement for those they represent. Indeed, one of the most contested questions amongst unions and the revolutionary left historically has been *whom unions should seek to represent and for what should they fight* (for example, should unions be advocating solely for the workers in their craft, at the workplace, in their industry of employment, in their neighbourhood or city, or for the entire working class). Is it possible, or likely, that unions can be remade into revolutionary organizations through which workers can organize to transform society from top to bottom, or to unmake capitalism and make a socialist or communist society? Or will they simply be sectionalist institutions, at best, that work to secure minor reforms and improvements, thereby mitigating the worst excesses of capitalist exploitations? The answers to these questions have always been contested and remain so today.[28]

The external challenges that face unions in the United States and elsewhere in the advanced capitalist world are structured by what has become in the past 30 years, if not since the passing of the 1847 Taft-Hartley Act in the United States, an extremely hostile

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[28] For an important treatment of the revolutionary syndicalist tradition and how various activists who identified with it sought to organize to build unions capable of enacting revolutionary transformation, see the cross-national comparative study by the Marxist industrial relations scholar Ralph Darlington, *Radical Unionism: The Rise and Fall of Revolutionary Syndicalism* (2013).

political and legal environment for workers.[29] In the United States the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), which unions have relied on since its creation in 1935, has not kept pace with corporate restructuring because it continues to focus on the enterprise level even though corporations and workplaces have been dramatically reconfigured. Corporate decision-making largely takes place at an international scale—although typically with the decision-making centers of corporate power physically grounded in global cities—while the production process has been fragmented through multiple changes to corporate structures and the outsourcing of production and services that occurs in global production/distribution networks stretching across multiple countries (Coe et al. 2010).

Hence, with U.S. industrial relations now decentralized and business strategies such as outsourcing and enterprise-based employment regulation altered, unions have significantly lost their capacity to temper wage competition among workers in different places and even frequently within the same workplace. One need look no further than the North American auto sector to see a prime example of how different and multiple tiers of employment have developed within the same shop and across different locations, with the United Autoworkers Union (UAW) and the union formerly known as Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) acting as chief collaborators in the process (Shotwell 2012). We might see the U.S. and Canadian post-secondary sector, in which an increasing majority of courses are taught by low-paid contingent academic faculty, as an additional example of a multi-tiered wage structure. And even amongst the full-time faculty in the U.S.

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[29] It is because of such a hostile environment, in which employers can hire "replacement workers" in the event of a strike and in which unions typically face massive financial penalties if they violate any number of legal restrictions placed on them because of the Taft-Hartley Act that some have critiqued Burn's call for a revival of strikes as unrealistic (Milkman and Ott 2014, 4).

knowledge factory we witness further tiers being built into the system through the creation of a strata of highly paid research super stars and a much wider pool of traditional tenured faculty who, with their adjunct/contract colleagues below them, do the bulk of undergraduate teaching (Aronowitz 2000).

Although social democratic parties across the world have moved away from their base in organized labour, the Democratic Party in the United States, the closest thing there is to a social democratic party, must be given credit for putting the most distance between itself and the unions. Although labour's leaders do not register this new reality, at least if their unwillingness to carve out an independent political strategy is any indicator, it has similarly contributed to weakening the power of organized labour. In other words, the relationships among capital, labour, and the state have radically changed in the past 30 years, during which we have witnessed the unfolding of a number of different phases of the neoliberalization of the U.S. political economy and everyday life (Bezanson 2010).

While it is the combination of these factors which has resulted in a crisis for organized labour, and led some unions to experiment with new strategies and tactics for confronting their declining political power and the ascendancy of the influence of employers on public policy and the economy, it is imperative to acknowledge that from its earliest days neoliberalization has sought to undermine the power of, if not entirely eliminate, trade unions. And this is because, while it is certainly true that unions have evolved since the end of World War II as institutions that both serve to integrate workers into capitalism and erode the militancy of workers through contract unionism and the legal framework of grievances and arbitration, trade unions still harbour the most

potential to allow workers to contest and reverse neoliberalization through the advancement of political and economic alternatives more favourable to working people. Even compromised, accommodationist unions promote collectivity, which is anathema to neoliberalism.

Figure 3.

Union Membership's Steady Decline
Percentage of employed workers who are union members

2014
11.1%

Sources: unionstats.com (1973-2003);
Bureau of Labor Statistics (2004-14)

Note: 1982 statistics unavailable
The Wall Street Journal

Source: Trottman 2014.

As is clear from the above graphic published in the *Wall Street Journal*, by reporter Melanie Trottman (2014), U.S. unions have been on a steady slide since the 1970s, evidenced by the fact that they have lost millions of members. This is a product of capital's political assault on working-class people of all races and ethnicities, an assault that has included and been a result of massive industrial restructuring. In an unusually candid recognition of this fact, current AFL-CIO President, Richard Trumka (quoted in Milkman and Ott 2014), asserted in 2013 that "The AFL-CIO's door has to be—and will be open to any worker or group of workers who wants to organize and build power in the

workplace….Our institutions, our unions, will experiment, will adapt to this new age."[30]

Of course, the proof of the seriousness of such rhetoric is revealed by Trumpka's (and

other union leaders') failure to direct resources towards operationalizing such

transformative experiments. And at the same time that we have witnessed a vast decrease

in union membership—both in absolute numbers and as a percentage of the workforce in

the U.S. economy—which has contributed to a similarly steady erosion in labour's ability

to effectively influence public policy, U.S. unions still retain nearly fifteen million

members and are the largest, most diverse workers' organizations in the country

(Rosenfeld 2014; Luce 2014; Yates 2009).[31] In the public sector, however, union density

is much stronger (35.9% in 2012), maintaining relative stability over recent decades

(Milkman and Ott 2014).

Turning for a moment to a higher level of abstraction, sociologist Beverly Silver's

(2003, 10) important account of workers' movements since the 1870s, influenced by Karl

Polanyi's classic work on the socio-historical development of capitalism, *The Great

Transformation*, compellingly argues that we need to understand the changes discussed

above as part of "a constant flux between a crises of legitimacy and a crisis of

profitability in capitalism…." At the center of this formulation is the recognition that

labour is a pseudo commodity, which means that, in contrast to other commodities (goods

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[30] But also see Steve Early's (2013) critical evaluation of the AFL-CIO's supposed openness to experimentation and partnerships with alternative workers' organizations. The AFL-CIO does have formal partnerships with the National Day Laborers Organization, the National Domestic Workers United, and Taxi Workers Alliance, which have been issued an official charter of affiliation by the federation.

[31] By 2012, only 11.2% of U.S. wage and salary earners were members of unions, with a decrease in the private sector to 6.6%. This pattern of decline in the strength of organized labour is not limited to the United States, of course. Similar trends of declining membership, declining union influence, and increasingly hostile employers and governments have been occurring in Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Australia (Tattersall 2010a). As Rosenfeld (2014) notes, declining membership rates are not solely an American phenomenon. In some countries, unions have witnessed a steeper decline than in the United States (See Figure 1.1, 2014, 12). Canada's unionization rate, for instance, in 2009 was 21% below its peak in the early 1980s.

or services produced by wage labour for exchange on a market), labour is a living, thinking organism that reproduces itself in a relatively autonomous manner from capital. As a result, there is a constant tension within capitalism between attempts by employers to treat workers as "true commodities," produced solely under the imperatives of capital, and attempts by workers to decommodify their labour power. A crisis of legitimacy results as capital seeks to transform workers into surplus value producing automatons; a crisis of profitability results when workers attempt to take back more of their labour time, or the surplus produced in that time (Silver 2003, 16–20; Peck 1996). If it is to accumulate successfully, capital constantly has to find new ways of solving this tension between legitimacy and profitability.

In her analysis, Silver introduces the useful concept of *boundary drawing* to show how temporary solutions to these tensions may be developed. For Silver, boundary drawing refers to who is "cut in" and who is "cut out" when compromises are made over the partial decommodification of labour. In other words, what is crucial for any analysis of labour is the question of which categorical boundaries will be placed around different groups of workers, according some certain rights whilst denying those rights to others. Here it is useful to pause to remind ourselves that in the U.S. context those who have typically been cut out have been racialized workers, women, domestic workers, migrant farmer workers, and others employed in less traditional or non-standard forms of labour; forms of labour, it must be noted, which are often gendered as "women's work," because they involving caring or domestic forms of work.

According to Silver there are three interconnecting mechanisms that have historically characterized boundary-drawing strategies: (1) the first is done vis-à-vis

segmentation in labour markets, which is an endeavor primarily pursued by capital. This process of segmentation means, for instance, that some workers may find themselves labeled temporary (as opposed to permanent), peripheral (as opposed to core), secondary (as opposed to primary); (2) the bounding of citizenship, pursued mainly by states, is the next strategy. Citizenship guarantees that some workers will have access to a whole set of rights to which non-citizens are denied; (3) Lastly, workers and their various organizations—like trade unions—build a range of different types of boundaries that produce and fortify exclusionary identities on the basis of class, craft, ethnicity, gender, race, sexuality, and other markers of difference. As a consequence of this boundary drawing, some groups of workers (citizens, male, unionized, and "skilled," for example) may be able to attain a relative degree of privilege compared to other workers. This may then imbue workers who, based on some of the aforementioned boundaries, have been able to extract greater material benefits with a certain degree of loyalty to the system, while those other, sometimes literally second-class, citizens may become increasingly angry, frustrated, and alienated from both the system and their fellow workers. Such boundary drawing serves as a classic divide-and-conquer process for the purposes of controlling workers and preventing the construction of a strong unified opposition to capital's rule (Bezuidenhout and Webster 2010, 368). But it can also help us understand why the Black Power movement and similar revolutionary nationalist organizations of racialized people who advocated for building strong revolutionary organizations in their workplaces and in their communities to fight for self-determination as opposed to building multiracial socialist organizations, like the Communist Party or the Socialist

Party before it in the early and mid-twentieth century (or what Laura Pulido calls the Third World Left), emerged in the 1970s (Surkin and Georgakas 2012).

Less clear in Silver's conceptual formulation and deployment of boundary drawing is the fact that these boundaries are not only social, but also spatial insofar as they are subject to transformation through social contestation and negotiation. Although boundary drawing may join particular groups of workers to the economic system and dominant racial order, as has been the case for many white workers in the United States throughout its history, the struggle to decommodify labour can breakdown these boundaries and reshape loyalties both amongst workers and between particular groups of workers and what C. Wright Mills referred to as the prevailing set up, which includes all the social, cultural, and political institutions that reproduce capitalism. In this way, such struggles will invariably lead to either, or both, a crisis of profitability or a crisis of legitimacy (L. Cox and Nilsen 2014).

Silver argues in response to this that capital has historically endeavoured to achieve a multitude of fixes to this central crisis tendency intrinsic to capitalism. Building on Harvey's work, the first is a spatial fix, which is effective but only temporarily, as spatial fixes often create new contradictions, such as a proletarianization of people where capital has relocated. This new group of workers will then engage in struggle against the new forms of capitalist exploitation that they find themselves subject to, which illustrates how this solution merely delays crises of profitability. The second fix is technological, by which we see an introduction of technologies into the production process and a reorganization of work and production itself so as to move away from a reliance on human labour power and consequently a weakening of the potential power of the workers

who remain. The third is a product fix, in which we see capital shift its operations to producing entirely different commodities or services in a market that is less crowded. Lastly, capital always has the option of completely withdrawing from production altogether and opting to partake in more speculative financial activities, thus giving us a financial fix (Silver 2003; Harvey 2006a).

It is crucial to recognize that all of these fixes, not just when capital flees to a new location, implicate space. Hence, even when a firm adopts new technological fixes, in situ, such a solution will likely affect the particular locale in which production is located in significant ways. For instance, labour saving technological changes may result in increased local unemployment, which may in turn have all kinds of implications within families and the local community. Importantly, such changes can serve to discipline local and regional labour markets beyond the particular locale that undergoes these changes (Bezuidenhout and Webster 2010, 369).

Yet, Silver's work, like much other writing on organized labour, does not adequately address how the restructuring and rescaling of state institutions contributes centrally in molding the options and socio-spatial fixes for both capital and labour. We need empirical investigation and theoretical work to disrupt such a capital-centric and insufficiently political analysis in order to grasp the complex ways in which the changing activities of trade union organizations in different places interact with the state and capital to negotiate the landscape for boundary drawing and for shaping the variegated spatial fixes available to both capital and labour. It is vital that we develop a conceptualization of how capital—working through and around the state—builds economic landscapes in ways that not only discipline labour but in which labour might leverage the contradictions

of these processes in order to challenge capital's attempts at making a spatial fix at the expense of workers. While the workings of Transnational Corporations (TNCs), technological transformations, and the transnationalization of global production and trade are all central to the story of globalization, the chief institutions or authors responsible for reterritoralizing and rescaling global capitalism are states (Panitch and Gindin 2012; Robinson 2005). Here it is necessary to briefly unpack what we mean when we talk about capitalism and the state.

Most fundamentally, capitalism is a system of organizing social relations through which economic resources are allocated, controlled, and used. This mode of production or economic structure is rooted in the dispossession, exploitation, and alienation of the majority of the world's population to the benefit of the owning class, a tiny minority, along with an increasingly declining smaller professional-managerial class (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 2013).

Under capitalism the means of production are privately owned, workers are compelled to sell their labour power in order to survive, and all production is oriented towards profit-maximization through exchange on the market. Capitalism is continuously reproduced by means of the ongoing dispossession of people of their means of subsistence (land, food, shelter, technology) and the transformation of these things into commodities to be exchanged in a marketplace for money. Key to this system of organizing social relations (of which the organization of economic activities is one, albeit central, aspect) is that individuals and companies in a capitalist society privately own property and in particular what Marx calls the means of production (those things that are necessary in order for us to do work and produce commodities). Without the means to

sustain ourselves or to create anything we may need for our own use, the majority of people are forced to sell the one thing we all have, our ability to work, our labour power.

Thus under capitalism our labour is not our own since we are forced to exchange it for a wage so that we can purchase what we need to survive (or what we have been led to believe will make us happier and less alienated), and, in selling our labour power in this way, we are alienated from our capacities to make and create—*to do*—according to our own desires. Our work and its products no longer belong to us. At the same time, the few people who have come to own the means of production, and the managers they have hired to run their operations, profit from this work; by appropriating the difference between what we produce and that which we are paid, capitalists exploit us and makes a profit for their own benefit.

And as we have learned from Marx, if capitalism does not expand ceaselessly, it will go into crisis. Through this expansion, more and more of the world's population and aspects of life become incorporated into the logic of commodity production, which separates people from their means of subsistence and forces them to work for wages. More and more of our lives are in turn transformed into nothing more than commodities, alien objects to be sold for a profit, commodities that we are often compelled to buy ourselves. This unremitting expansion of capitalist relations leaves a disastrous trail of blood and misery in its wake in the form of degraded ecosystems around the planet as natural resources are extracted at an incredibly rapid pace, a process wherein pollution and destruction are treated simply as an "externality," or an irrelevant by-product of the dynamics of profit-making under capitalist production. Similarly, the transportation and

logistics industry that makes global capitalism possible and brings commodities to our doors is killing the planet (Kovel 2007).[32]

Capitalism, including its neoliberal variant, would not be possible without the state. First and foremost, the state should be understood as a cluster of institutions that in a generally coherent manner have the administrative capacity to impose binding rules and regulations on a particular territory in order to govern the population that resides in this territory by some kind of authority structure, territory which capital seeks to produce in order to suit its interests. In contrast, a nation is a significant grouping of people who have a shared culture and historical legacy (Mann 1986; Anderson 1991; Coe, Kelly, and Yeung 2013).

Any discussion of the state needs to be clear about the scalar language employed to think about it (Keil and Mahon 2009). While the state is generally understood as existing as a national-level structure, in actuality it is a much more dynamic and multi-scalar organizational cluster of institutions and power relations that necessarily function through different tiers of government institutions and people. States should fundamentally be understood as institutions established for the governance of political and economic activity in a given territory, territory that is not given but typically made through extreme violence, especially if we are talking about a colonial settler state like the U.S. or Canada (Cowen 2014; N. Brenner et al. 2003).

State power should therefore be understood by means of an analysis of those constellations of institutions (made up of a mix of different social relations) that have an effective capacity to impose rules and regulate social relations over the territory for these

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[32] This paragraph draws heavily on Harry Cleaver's (2000) *Reading Capital Politically*; Silvia Federici's (2004) *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*; Karl Marx's (2010b) *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*; and David Harvey's (2010b) *Enigma of Capital*.

purposes. Such capacities depend on a plethora of things, from information and communications infrastructure, police, courts, and various types of administrative bureaucracies to an ideological commitment of its citizens to obey its rules and commands (the latter includes institutions like public schools that help develop such commitments), and, following Weber, state power is dependent on having the monopoly over the legitimate use of coercion. It is important, however, to recognize that different states have different capacities to act in the global system, as evidenced by the different responses to the 2008 financial crisis. Think, for example, about the difference between the U.S.'s and UK's ability to respond to the crisis compared to that of Greece and Ireland, which in 2010 had to be bailed out by external powers at extremely high political and economic costs to the working people of those countries. How states intervene in the global economy and in national economies creates new forms of uneven development and reproduces older ones, as well as greatly impacts the distribution of economic activity within their own borders.

Focusing this discussion of state power and capitalism to a less abstract level of analysis, the waves of industrial restructuring that have occurred in North America since the 1980s—in particular the outsourcing of components—has meant that one group of workers has generally won at the expense of another group somewhere else (where the jobs have been relocated). Hence, the new configurations of production and supply networks of global capitalism have often led workers in particular places to gain more potential power vis-à-vis their place in the production/distribution chain or Global Production Network (GPN).

What is meant by this is that workers at some nodes in GPNs, or other sites of production/distribution/coordination in the landscape of contemporary capitalism (such as global cities or new city-regions which intersect with GPNs), emerge with potentially *more structural* power since they can now shut down a large number of assemblers and critical "choke points" in the global economy, thereby making the capacity of workers to disrupt capitalist production—including the social reproduction of labour— much more significant in some places as compared to others. And if the shrinking size of workplaces has created challenges to unionization in manufacturing, which it no doubt has, then we should also recognize that a number of new opportunities for organizing and effective struggle have opened up in the service sector, where the average size of workplaces has actually expanded (Lichtenstein 2013b). In particular, transportation and logistics have emerged as even greater spaces for workers to leverage power through association and collective action in the new global economy (Cowen 2014; Moody 2007).

Intersecting with all of these changes is a dual crisis of liberal or social democratic reformism's capacity to adequately address either the economic crisis that broke in 2008 or the deeper contradictions or structural crisis of contemporary capitalism (Mészáros 2010). Similarly, the kinds of substantial political alternatives that are being posed by existing labour and grassroots movements to the failures of liberalism (in the U.S. context) or social democracy (elsewhere in the advanced capitalist economies) are limited. As discussed further in my concluding chapter, the ways in which community and labour organizations—including the CTU—poured their support behind a tepid liberal Democrat like Jesus "Chuy" Garcia in the mayoral race against Mayor Rahm Emanuel is a glaring example of this failing (Field Notes, April 2015).

On the one hand, Obama and the Democrats have failed to address the economic crisis, in particular the persistent high levels of unemployment—and the less frequently discussed underemployment—rates that still hover in the region of 15-20% despite the economic recovery that is said to have been taking place since 2012. If anything, the Obama administration and Democrats more generally have doubled down on neoliberal policies and austerity politics, such as maintaining/expanding corporate tax cuts and slashing social programs in order to balance the federal budget on the backs of working people, pushing forward new free trade deals, which have always been more about expanding the power of corporations than promoting "free trade." As Charles Post (2009) argues, the "Democratic Party's willingness to concede additional budget cuts, including to "entitlement" programs like Social Security and Medicare, to the Republicans to avoid a federal government shutdown and raise the debt ceiling demonstrates, once again, the Democrats' commitment to neo-liberalism." Such concessions are made worse when we consider that organized labour and the social movement organizations that possess some resources and an actual social base have failed to mobilize the working-class majority in the United States in support of the rather limited reformist agenda of these organizations. Instead of organizing against the ongoing occupations and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan—and the U.S. war budget more generally—which would free up funds for a genuinely universal, single-payer health care system, or to improve and expand public services more generally, the official leaders of organized labour have maintained their commitments to Obama and the Democrats, making only marginal efforts to organize unorganized workers and to construct alliances with alternative worker organizations and grassroots movements (Early 2013). Indeed, we can view the decision of most of the

national trade union leadership to support Hillary Clinton against Bernie Sanders to be the 2016 Democratic Presidential candidate, with little to no input from the rank-and-file, as further evidence of this disastrous orientation.

As a number of critical journalists and scholars demonstrate (Seymour 2014; Albo and Fanelli 2014; Fanelli and Brogan 2014; McNally 2011; Peck 2012), the reason that the economic situation for workers has become so dismal is because the dominant policy solution has been austerity; Across the political spectrum austerity has been the default mode of addressing these issues in the public policy realms. In the U.S., for instance, as in Canada and elsewhere in the advanced capitalist world, this has meant an emboldened radicalism from conservatives as new pressures to privatize public services, in particular healthcare, pensions, and public education, coalesce with efforts to implement so-called right-to-work laws and the removal of public sector collective bargaining rights. This restructuring, however, is not solely a matter of Republican and Conservative class war in jurisdictions like New Jersey, Wisconsin, Indiana, Alberta and Newfoundland and Labrador, but has been deepened and extended by Liberals and (social) Democrats in regions like New York, California, Massachusetts, Ontario, and Nova Scotia. Work for welfare initiatives, the weakening of employment standards legislation, attacks against social assistance minimums and the erosion of progressive taxation, once deemed central to the New Deal in the United States, are now deemed extravagant entitlements allegedly unaffordable in a new age of global capitalism (Workman 2009; Fanelli and Evans 2013; Panitch and Gindin 2012).

The public sector, especially unionized workers, has become a prime target of restructuring as capital and the state seek to create new spaces for accumulation. These

new pressures have traversed scales of public administration, ushering in what can otherwise be termed an era of permanent austerity. Despite capitalist class and state militancy, however, public sector unions have been unable to stop, let alone reverse, decades of combined and uneven austerity (Albo and Evans 2010; Ross and Savage 2013; Lichtenstein 2013b; Albo and Fanelli 2014). Indicative of labour's ongoing defeats, successes have now been reduced to limiting the extent of concessions in their various guises.

Regardless of the political party or coalition in power, governments at all scales have sought to further discipline workers to the imperatives of capital amidst a hardening of neoliberalism. With evermore authoritarianism and coercion, the state has come to lead in narrowing the field of free collective bargaining, suspending trade union rights, and implementing an aggressive program of dispossession. Absent the collective capacities— or the political imagination and will—required to stop, let alone reverse, these measures, unions have reached an impasse; unable to translate militancy into an alternative ideological perspective and political and economic program, they desperately continue to hang on to previous gains, which look increasingly insecure and fragile.

This raises important concerns about limitations which unions alone are powerless to overcome. For instance, an alternative to these austerity measures is to look for more income on the revenue side. Yet as Tabb notes, this is not simply a question of economics, but of politics. In the past three decades we have seen the share of total taxes paid by the U.S. corporate sector vastly decline, with tax reforms disproportionately lowering how much money the extremely wealthy pay to the government. As Democratic presidential hopeful, Senator Bernie Sanders, rightly insists, corporations are sitting on $2 trillion

dollars "in cash waiting for demand for their products to pick up. There current profits were high, thanks to downsizing, plant closings, and layoffs, but they saw no reason to expand production and hire more employees. Taxes collected in the United States account for only 2.1% of GDP (well below the 3.5% average for the richer countries that are members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development)" (quoted in Tabb 2012, 4).

And as a number of recent studies demonstrate, unions have historically been the most important institutions to counter income inequality by fighting for workers' rights, both at the workplace and in the realm of public policy (Rosenfeld 2014, 68–83; Luce 2014, 39–42). Importantly, the fiercer the industrial battles have been, usually over wages and working conditions, the more effective workers have been in achieving favourable public policy outcomes. Luce (2014, 10–11) correctly contends that, "Unions may be one of the only institutions capable of correcting the great imbalances in today's global economy. Even some conservative analysts see that the growing inequality between wealthy and poor creates an unstable situation, a risk for massive unrest, and weak aggregate demand."[33] She rightly argues throughout her new book that the labour movement "represents one of the best options for generating the dialogue needed, and the organizing required, to create a more sustainable model" for the billions of working people throughout the world who "otherwise have little power and few resources" (Luce

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[33] Drawing on a 2002 study from the World Bank, Luce (2014, 11) states that "countries with higher union density have lower wage inequality. Aidt and Tzannator (2004) also found that while greater collective bargaining coverage alone can correlate with higher unemployment, countries with highly coordinated collective bargaining (such as the Scandinavian countries) are more likely to have lower unemployment and less persistent periods of unemployment, as well as stronger productivity growth (Aidt and Tzannator 2004)."

2014, 12). This makes the weakness or decline of unions today even more serious because they have failed to adequately address this crisis for workers.

Throughout late twentieth century and during the first fifteen years of the twenty-first, however, we have witnessed the precipitous decline of labour movement densities across the globe. For example, according to a recent report by the Economic Policy Institute (Mishel 2012), between 1973 and 2011 the share of workers in the US represented by unions declined from 26.7% to 13.1%. And public sector workers now make up more than half of all unionized workers in the United States. Statistics also show a decline in union militancy (Moody 2007) and power at the bargaining table, leading to a global "crisis of unionism" (Luce 2014). As Lichtenstein (2013b, 16) observes, "This means that unions in the United States represent a lower proportion of all workers than in any other industrial democracy in the world. If 1953 is taken as the proportional apogee of U.S. trade unionism in the twentieth century, then organized labor is only one-third as strong today as it was forty years ago, only a quarter as strong in the private sector."

This historical perspective on the decline in union membership is vital to any discussion of labour's present and possible future. Providing both a historical and comparative account, Luce (2014, 6–7) notes that, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), "density rates fell in 20 countries form 1970 to 2003, increasing in only four (Belgium, Finland, and Sweden)" and, while comparable statistics for non-OECD countries do not exist, the New Unionism Network has complied data from the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and U.S. State Department to monitor union membership for 94 countries since 2000 that demonstrates that union membership has increased in 50 of these countries, while declining in only 32. Of these nations six are

relatively stable but do not allow unions. Luce perceptively observes that this "suggests that the phenomenon of declining union power is not as universal as some might believe, yet "growth in members did not translate to increases in union density in all cases, suggesting that unions are not keeping pace with a growing workforce." In the United States and elsewhere, however, there have been some exceptions to this trend. For example, across the world teachers' unions retain relatively high union density and significant political influence at multiple scales of government. And as indicated by an increase in rank-and-file organizing and activism in recent years, many teachers and education workers are once again looking to the strike and grassroots organizing—in and outside of the workplace—as a way to exercise their power. I discuss in greater detail the significance and implications of the strike for developing working-class capacities, power, and for transforming political subjectivities later in this chapter and in my discussion in Chapter 4 of the Chicago teachers' 2012 strike. Before getting there, more needs to be said about the general contours of the world in which workers, and teachers more specifically, are struggling.

Beginning in the 1970s, political and economic trends that occurred throughout the advanced capitalist world led to the consolidation of more uniform conditions for unions and workers within and across different national territories. In particular, the severe economic recession that hit in 1973-4 unleashed a wave of economic instability and stagflation throughout much of the world, setting the stage for an acceleration of attacks on unions and workers' collective rights that has been essential to the ongoing neoliberalization of political, economic, and cultural life.

It is vital to note here that *neoliberalism is both an ideology and a practice*. It was in this context that critiques of the post-World War II Keynesian state and economic order arose, from both the left and the right. Unfortunately, neoliberal proponents of an expanded "free market" capitalism would win the day in this period, as Keynesianism failed to generate enough capital investment, which by the late 1960s had slowed down significantly, resulting in sharp declines in overall economic growth and job creation (Panitch and Gindin 2012). If only the economy could be made to be friendlier to investors and finance, neoliberals argue, investment would be renewed and the economy would stabilize. To achieve such a business friendly environment, it would be necessary to reregulate economic activity such that it is easier to invest or run a business. This has largely meant getting rid of all so-called rigidities in the labour market—like workplace regulation and union influence—and in financial markets, repealing the Glass-Stegall Act, for example, which maintained a separation between commercial and investment banking since the Great Depression of 1929. While neoliberal policy in practice often diverges greatly from its theory, it has generally been marked by a shift away from social protections and worker rights towards the reregulation of labour and capital markets to the advantage of property owners and investors. From the 1970s to the 2000s, neoliberalism spread—unevenly and never smoothly or completely—throughout the globe—first as ideology, then as political program (Peck 2012; Harvey 2010a; D. S. Jones 2012).

At the same time as we acknowledge these changes, any discussion of the modern U.S. industrial relations system and organized labour's role within it since World War II needs to recognize and seriously think through the analytical and political implication of

the fact that U.S. employers and key elements in both the Democratic and Republican parties never actually made peace with organized labour (Lee 2014; Davis 2007). Aggressive and hostile treatment of unions by business is not a post-1970s phenomenon. And neither was this hostility limited to companies in labour-intensive sectors of the economy or regions like the U.S. south.

In other words, in contrast to a common historical narrative, the notion that there was some kind of labour-management accord in the early post-World War II years is misleading. At best the relationship between unions and capitalists should be viewed as an armed truce, punctuated by frequent episodes of costly industrial conflict.[34] At the same time, it is important to recognize that, while there was a great deal of rank-and-file militancy against the dictates of U.S. employers, unions as institutions and the officials who ran them, often in an undemocratic manner, became wedded to a political and legal system of collective bargaining and contract unionism that would curb the power of shop-floor activism in exchange for higher wages and benefits. And it was this institutionalization in the form of an increasingly narrow contract union model that is perhaps the biggest impediment to organized labour becoming or leading the kind of working-class political movement that is needed today (Aronowitz 2014). So as not to give the impression that this was entirely a top-down affair, it should be acknowledged

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[34] "Even during the 1950s and 1960s the existence of a labor-management accord was highly suspected, especially if such a concordant was thought to bulwark the postwar hegemony of a New Deal political and economic order. This view has been sustained by a new generation of historians who are self-conscious students of American capitalism and in particular the culture, ideology, and economic programs of those in business and politics who never made peace with either the New Deal or the new unionism that arose in the 1930s and 1940s" (Lichtenstein and Shermer 2012, xv). See also Kim Philips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal* (2010) and Elizabeth Tandy Shermer's *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics* (2013) for excellent analyses of ideologically motivated businessmen set out to destroy labour and the New Deal, alongside right-wing academics and publicists.

that many union members who were benefiting materially from these arrangements, who were overwhelmingly white, were perfectly fine with this arrangement.

Like public education in the United States, unions have been attacked by a mendacious and cynical rhetorical strategy in which anti-union advocates appropriated the language that gained power through the activities of the civil rights movements, which in fact emerged in opposition to longstanding anti-union Southern business interests (some of whom would become key funders and champions of the anti-union National Right-to-Work Committee) and used it to mobilize against unions. It was only in the mid-1960s, however, that advocates of so-called right-to-work laws would shift their rhetorical strategy from a focus on natural law to justifications grounded in civil rights constitutionalism. As the legal historian Sophia Lee (2014) observes in an essay reviewing right-to-work legislation, conservative anti-union lawyers and propagandists went from describing the legal struggle for right-to-work laws as inherently natural to being akin to that which not only drove the civil rights impulse but was in fact an essential component of the civil rights movement. Remarkably, at the same time as Southern politicians from both parties were deploying race coded arguments to attack social welfare programs and crime in the 1970s, advocates of right-to-work were testing this new strategy of invoking the discourse of civil rights, a discourse that had so effectively been developed and used by the Black Freedom movement in the 1950s and 1960s to win a number of important political and legal victories for African American workers. Put another way, the very same rights talk that had, a couple of decades earlier, been marshalled in the struggle against racial injustice and oppression have now been mobilized as a potent weapon against the trade union movement and public education, as

I demonstrate in Chapter 3 (Lichtenstein and Shermer 2012, xiii–xiv). A similar discursive, and to a lesser extent legal, strategy has been taken up by corporate education reform advocates in the effort to break teacher unions and privatize public schooling in the United States. These forms of legal and linguistic manipulations are, of course, only part of the story of union decline and the attack on worker rights. Equally, if not more important, has been direct employer opposition to union organizing.

Indeed, although the globalization—specifically the *rescaling and reterritorializing*—of the capitalist economy, along with other structural transformations in work and the labour process, has had deleterious effects on union power, especially in the U.S. manufacturing sector, the inability of unions to organize and grow in the now much larger and important service sector—which includes hotels, restaurants, warehousing, Information Technology (IT), and banking—is largely a product of a dysfunctional legal system that systemically undermines workers and their unions, employer hostility, and a failure of the unions to more creatively concern themselves with racism and the everyday lives of workers outside of the workplace, in these sectors or elsewhere. Interestingly, the work of Tami Friedman (2008) perceptively shows that when industry shifted from the unionized North to the right-to-work states of the rural South, conservative ideas about taxes, unions, and how government should regulate work often moved in the opposite direction, which in effect Southernized managerial ideology in Northern communities and states, where liberalism had once been most vibrant. Donald Critchlow and Nancy MacLean (2009) argue along similar lines that the growing national influence of a Southernized Republican Party has been felt in the realm of economic ideas and policy.

In *The Right and Labor in America: Politics, Ideology, and Imagination* (2012) edited by Lichtenstein and Shermer, a number of leading U.S. labour historians convincingly demonstrate that the anti-union discourse that has advanced to former union strongholds like Michigan and Wisconsin originated in the South and only became influential in other parts of the country and at a national scale in the 1970s. As Lichtenstein (2002, 179) observes, "Their critique of the labor movement was all the more potent because it was never merely an argument for the reduction of labor costs in a single firm or industry; rather it was part of a much larger ideological attack upon the entire legal and political structures erected by the New Deal. The consequences of such conservative influence and ideas become apparent both in the dysfunctional character of American labor law and in the aggressive anti-unionism that has become so pervasive among employers as well as in some state legislatures dominated by twenty-first-century Republicans."

And it is the deeper, more dangerous ideological attack that most unions, including both officials and member activists, have failed to come to grips with politically. Importantly, Lichtenstein cites three recently published studies of militant union struggles in the United States that resulted in failed strikes neither because the unions did not build adequate solidarity and community alliances—which they did successfully, to varying degrees—nor because the union leadership and rank-and-file were not committed to pushing forward with militant action—which they were—but because labour's solidarity was overwhelmed in the end by the legal and organizational

arsenal of intransigent employers.[35] The important conclusion to draw from this analysis is that, even when unions and workers engage in new kinds of creative militancy and build inter-union solidarity among different kinds of workers who may have previously been at odds with each other, management may still prove willing to provoke and fight against such strike actions so that it can slash labour costs, maintain and expand its power to transform the work regime, and sometimes simply break the union (Lichtenstein and Shermer 2012, xvii). I return to this point in later chapters on the Chicago and New York cases.

Unfortunately, if perhaps not unexpectedly, the U.S. labour movement has had an especially difficult time re-establishing a sense of legitimacy and functionality in both the wider political economy and the world of workplace governance. While sympathetic labour economists like Richard Freeman and Barry Bluestone (2007), along with most union leaders, compellingly argue that unionism generates positive employment effects, such as decreasing quit-rates, raising job tenure, and increasing productivity and skill levels, such arguments have garnered little assent in the corporate or political worlds, not unsurprisingly. While only a few years ago there were some troubling indications of a drop in public support for unions recent data from Gallop suggests that there is greater support for unions in the United States today, as illustrated in the following graph of recent polling data.

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[35] The works Lichtenstein cites (written by historian Leon Fink, the writing pair of Steve Ashby and C.J. Hawkings, and Chris Rhomber in his book on the 1995 Detroit newspaper strike) focus on failed strikes in the 1990s.

Figure 4. Approval of Labour Unions in the United States, 1936-2012

Do you approve or disapprove of labor unions?

■ % Approve

80

75
72   71
70
              66
61   64   60   60   60   58
              63
60   58
              60
55
50   53
              48
40

'36 '40 '44 '48 '52 '56 '60 '64 '68 '72 '76 '80 '84 '88 '92 '96 '00 '04 '08 '12

GALLUP

Source: Saad 2015.

 Still other survey data indicates that most workers in the United States and Canada, if given the option, would still chose to join a union. Harvard economist Richard Freeman (2007) has shown in his *Worker Representation Survey* that the proportion of U.S. workers who say they would join a union increased during the period from the 1980s until 2005, during which time a majority of workers said that they would join a union if they could, while more than three-quarters of workers said they would prefer some form of representation in the workplace.

 As the discussion so far suggests, there are a number of different, yet interconnected, processes that explain why organized labour in the United States has devolved in such spectacular fashion. Typical explanations focus on the importance of each process in different ways, on economic globalization or neoliberalism, domestic U.S. anti-radicalism, business hostility, and an unfriendly legal and political environment for unions. These are, of course, only some of the external factors usually deployed to explain organized labour's decline in power and influence. There are also those processes or factors internal to the trade union movement, such as the sectionalist structure of the

unions themselves, the integration of unions into the political-economic system that curbs radical anti-systemic organizing—a system into which unions in turn integrate workers— the bureaucratization of unions, their lack of democracy, or some combination of these factors with a rank-and-file conservatism that results from a thoroughly bought off "labour aristocracy" in the centers of capitalism.[36]

2.3 Why Worry about Geography in the Study of Work, Unions, and Resistance in Contemporary Capitalism?

Before examining further both the external and internal challenges that structure the state of the unions in the United States today, it is worth elaborating what a critical geographical lens brings to our analysis of capitalism, work, organized labour, and rank-and-file activism. Beyond asserting that social activity is spatial, wherein space is produced rather than simply given (Massey 1994, 22; Massey 1995, 3–4) and that the reproduction of labour needs to happen in a particular geographic location (Herod 2001) how should we conceive of the spatiality of capitalism and trade unions?

The work of geographers Doreen Massey (1995), David Harvey (2006a) and Neil Smith (1996; 2008) informs the theoretical framework this dissertation employs to understand contemporary capitalism (which is a *globalizing and urban* system structuring political, economic, and social relations) and the struggles of rank-and-file workers' movements in the urban centers of the United States. Of paramount importance to this scholarship is Henri Lefebvre's meta-philosophy of space. Beginning with Lefebvre these scholars contribute significantly to reworking and spatializing a Marxist understanding of

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[36] For a blistering critique of this thesis, see Charles Post (2006) "The Myth of the Labour Aristocracy" in which he systemically shows why both the class formulation and contemporary variants of the labour aristocracy thesis fail to explain why workers in advanced capitalist economies have so seldom acted in more radical or revolutionary ways.

capitalism. The concepts most useful to the theoretical framework this study adopts, which I use to both frame my research questions and methods and to understand the empirical research conducted to address the question of working-class power and urban transformation, include: the *socio-spatial dialectic and spatial justice* (Soja 2010; 1996) the *uneven development* intrinsic to capitalism (Smith 2008) the *politics of place and the spatial division of labour* (Massey 1995); and Jamie Peck's (1996) foundational theoretical and empirical research on workplaces and labour markets, as well as his work on urban neoliberalization and efforts by workers and their advocates to regulate labour markets "from the bottom up" (Peck 2010).

Beyond simply a spatial lens, I contend that we need an urban lens for thinking about rank-and-file rebellions within organized labour in the United States today, in part because it is within urban spaces that the bulk of the planet's population might best come to understand their experience as predominantly structured by contradictions between the reduction of social relations to the bare economy of life experienced through contemporary capitalism and their material and emotional needs and desires that emerge outside of and against this reduction. Moreover, it is through the struggle to confront these contradictions and produce different forms of urban space that workers may forge the solidarity and transformative movements to cultivate genuine human development.

Some of the scholars cited above—Lefebvre, Harvey, Massey, and Smith—creatively use Marx's largely aspatial theoretical work on capital to elaborate powerful critiques of the capitalist production of space, and relatedly the reification of space in consciousness. This scholarship allows us to read and marshal Marx's work in a robust manner. At a higher level of abstraction, Marxist urban theory allows us to move from a

conception of space as a set of relations between things, such as the built environment of the city, to a conception of space as sets of relations between living, breathing people, who are constantly struggling to remake the urban environment according to different class interests. Although Marx's magnum opus, *Capital,* deals only with production in space, the movement in these volumes from the appearance of things to the underlying social relations in their historically determined form allows us to elaborate a theory for demystifying the seemingly thing-like nature of space (Lefebvre 1991). This broad thrust against the objectification and naturalization of historically produced socio-spatial relations is necessary for any critical analysis of the urban fabric of capitalism. If we accept Marx's point on commodity fetishism, and correspondingly the common sense notion that space is constituted as a set of relations between things, then we are already drawn to an understanding, as Lefebvre (1991, 83) puts it, of space as "impl[ying], contain[ing] and dissimulate[ing] social relationships." Social space is a materialization of "social being," a process whereby social relations "project themselves into a space, becoming inscribed there, and in the process producing that space itself" (Lefebvre 1991, 116). Put differently, space is what we make it, although, to paraphrase Marx, not always in the way that we might like as it is produced through struggles and contentious projects, both from above and from below (L. Cox and Nilsen 2014).

Moving from this more general discussion of Marxist conceptions of the production of space to how scholars have deployed this theoretical corpus to construct a vibrant body of scholarship that spatializes the study of work, employment, labour unions, and resistance. Economic geographers, especially those who identify with the sub-field of labour geography, have been at the forefront of contributing to this

framework and research agenda (Herod 2001). Drawing on a longstanding axiom within the tradition of radical human geography, this work begins form the premise that space is a constitutive element in how capitalism operates and how social relations are structured more generally. This notion that spatial relations are essential constitutive elements of capitalism—and that the production of space in particular ways, and not others, has been core to capitalism's very survival—is perhaps most forcibly explored by Henri Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* (1991) and in David Harvey's *The Limits to Capital* (2006b), wherein Harvey argues that the dynamics of capitalism as a mode of production are predicated on the production and reproduction of a differentiated yet integrated space economy. Harvey contends that a chief limitation of Marx's work is his failure to more explicitly develop a historical geographical materialist understanding of capitalism. Importantly, as the British Marxist theorist Alex Callinicos (2006) observes, Harvey's is not an additive approach to understanding capitalism, wherein we simply add space as yet another factor to our intellectual toolbox, but is more rigorous because he begins from the basic analytical principles for investigating the nature of capitalism, which positions the geographically uneven economic landscapes that it produces as central—instead of tangential—to the accumulation process that drives capitalism forward.

This insight is deeply shaped by Lefebvre's theory of the production of space, which strives to bridge physical space (nature), mental space (formal abstractions about space), and social space (the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination). According to Lefebvre the process of producing space, and the product or thing that is produced, social space itself, present themselves as two aspects of a whole, not as two separate ideas or elements. If, in accord with dialectics, we are to

shift our thinking from conceiving of "things in space" to conceiving of the actual production of space, our theoretical understanding must capture the generative process of space. Lefebvre was likewise concerned with the inherent spatiality of the state as a territorial-institutional form (Lefebvre 2009). Moreover, the production of space and landscapes are central to the social relations of everyday life and work. Drawing his inspiration from Lefebvre, Harvey, and Neil Smith, the preeminent labour geographer Andrew Herod seeks to examine the significance of geographical scale in the process of how workers create their own scalar fixes,[37] how they organize social and spatial activities at particular geographical resolutions and at various times and how the organization of social life at one particular scale impacts how it functions at another.

Such an approach proves invaluable in understanding the restructuring of public schools, the formation and transformation of the global city, and the ways in which teachers and their unions have been actively engaged in these processes. We might best understand how the productions of space mediate and influence, and is in turn transformed through, social practices, so that in turn we can adequately grasp to what extent *the spatial is an aspect of social practice*, as it articulates with the subjectivity of the actors engaged in social practice. In other words, what is important to understand is that the correspondence between social relations and the production of space is not a linear process, or one without contradictions and residues that open the possibility for barriers, acts of resistance, and forms of radical spatial-political praxis.

Many of the recent developments in critical geography and urban theory that have sought to advanced our theoretical understanding of the role space plays in structuring

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[37] Herod (1997) argues that workers require their own 'spatial fixes' so as to reproduce themselves, and that production and struggle over geographical scale is central to this process.

contemporary capitalism, and more generally, of how social life is organized not just

socially, but always geographically, have only begun to be taken up in a serious manner

by scholars of industrial relations, work, and organized labour. Unfortunately, in the

discipline of geography, while engagement with critical scholarship in labour history,

industrial relations, labour studies, and the political economy of work and employment

has been increasing, there is still too little conversation in the discipline with these strains

of research, despite efforts of geographers like Jamie Peck, Lynda McDowell, Jane Wills,

Steven Tufts, Lydia Savage, and Andrew Herod (McGrath-Champ, Herod, and Rainnie

2010). Although some may argue that geography has never really been off the agenda in

comparative studies of work and organized labour:

> What is different about the contemporary '(re) assertion of space in critical social theory' (Soja, 1989) is that it is marked by a much deeper interrogation of the role of space in economic and political praxis. Such interrogations, then, do not merely seek to understand how economic and political processes play out *across* space – a rather naïve 'geography is important because everywhere is different' approach. Rather, recent conceptual developments have argued for a more profound appreciation of issues of geography wherein the economic landscape is conceived of not simply as a reflection of the social relations of life or as a passive 'stage' upon which such relations play out but, instead, as *constitutive* of social praxis, as something with which social actors such as workers, unions, employers and the state must actively engage. Such developments, in the words of Doreen Massey (1984, p.4), argue that spatial patterns are 'not just an outcome [of social relations but are] part of the explanation' thereof." (McGrath-Champ, Herod, and Rainnie 2010, 2)

In other words, neither workers nor capitalists are passive elements in the

geographies of social relations; both actively construct the world around them, although

not always in the precise ways that they would like. Significant here is the insight that

comparative research needs to move beyond studies of how labour struggles and

political-economic processes merely play out differently across space. The control of

space and place is thus crucial to the way that jobs are exported, created, lost, and fought

over. Like all social activity, social movement activism and other forms of resistance is embedded in geography, but geography is also a key object of struggle as workers and employers seek to make space in particular, and conflicting, ways. Thinking geographically enriches our understanding of labour activism and is necessary in a more practical sense for advancing struggles for a more socially just alternative economic landscape.

Moreover, as the invaluable work of Doreen Massey demonstrates, our attachment to and sense of place deeply shapes, if not radically determines, people and movements. Making a politics of/in place means that as analysts and political actors we endeavour to grasp the extent and nature of how locally rooted traditions and institutions serve as the basis for solidarity in an era when places are now more than ever constituted by globally unequal power relations structuring our world and the lives and work of people who always live and work in place, somewhere. As Jane Wills (2013, 142) reminds us, such an understanding of place developed by Massey is the foundation for political organization and solidarity, both in and beyond place; this is vital to bridging the particular with the universal in struggles for freedom and the radical transformation of the world. "While our geographical moorings might be time-limited or relatively unstable," Wills contends, "we still live in places that provide opportunities for interaction with our neighbours, with the potential to forge a sense of shared interests in relation to place. Geography might be the glue that can bind us together." In making this point, Wills highlights a crucial aspect of what geography, and Massey's older work on the progressive potential of a politics in place, might still retain for thinking and acting against injustice, exploitation, and oppression.

Put differently, as a number of studies in labour geography demonstrate, the rootedness of labour may, at times, and under certain circumstances, allow workers and their families, friends, and neighbors to create distinctive local communities, cultures, and organizations, or to use their location in global supply chains as a point of leverage against their employers. In such circumstances workers can draw on the location and the kinds of places that they have created together as a source of power in the class struggle. Capital and labor, however, create different varieties of place consciousness, both progressive and reactionary. For example, while capital often seeks temporary spaces for profitable production, for workers these spaces are also places in which to live, and thus places within which they have considerable individual and collective cultural investment.

In contrast to widely held beliefs in mainstream industrial relations and economic scholarship, when capital and labour collide in the labour market they do not do so on an equal footing. In a capitalist economy, workers must sell their labour power in order to survive, to "earn a living." Taken as a whole, employers have discretion over whether, how, when, and *where* to use this labour power. The structure of the relationship is thus unequal. Trade unions and collective action have been the key mechanisms through which workers challenge and therefore alter this relationship.

The where, or the geography, in the above formulation is not so entirely at the discretion of capital; many political, social, and practical challenges often get in the way of allowing capital to move its operations anywhere it might choose, however, capital's typically much greater geographic mobility, compared to labour's generally immobility, is indeed a source of great power. Particular forms of place consciousness and local politics may emerge as part of the process of creating such communities, cultures, and

organizations (Storper and Walker 1989; Hudson 2000)—importantly, the place consciousness that emerges from this may result in the forging of either a progressive or reactionary politics. Beynon and Hudson (1993, 82) capture the dynamic well in observing that capital seeks a "temporary space for profitable production, whereas for workers spaces are different from and more than this—they are places in which to live, places in which they have considerable individual and collective cultural investment." These authors further argue that, whereas space is the domain of capital, places are the meaningful situations or those particular spaces carved out and established by labour. While this formulation no doubt puts things too simply, and, I think, concedes too much power to capital to command space, it provides a useful starting point for understanding the socio-spatial configuration of contemporary capitalism and the ways in which place might be understood to be a rich site or basis for workers to forge the bonds of solidarity necessary in order to alter the inequitable power relationships intrinsic to capitalism. In forging such solidarity workers often develop and extend what Featherstone (2012, 18) calls *maps of grievances*, which is simply an analytical and political tool through which "workers understand the who, what, and where of their problems to describe the "dynamic practices through which political activity makes sense of and brings into contestation relations of power." Yet, place-based identities or consciousness may also lead to a reactionary and dangerous politics, not simply through forging alliances with employers that obscure class conflict, but in producing violent xenophobic responses to outsiders.

The labour studies scholarship in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada that has in the late 1990s and 2000s attempted to grapple with the struggle of

organized labour *in* the city largely ignores both the importance of *place* and the question of *scale* in processes of neoliberal capitalist restructuring and the ways in which this restructuring has been a fundamentally urban process. Consequently, this literature on organized labour does not address what a critical spatial understanding might mean for rank-and-file organizing, both inside and outside of trade unions. Similarly, most studies in labour geography neglect the internal dynamics of unions and the role that rank-and-file members play in shaping the primary institutions, their unions, through which labour articulates its agency.[38]

Stepping back from this point for now it is useful to more specifically identify the key strains of geographical research on work and labour that have consolidated as a robust sub-field of the discipline over the past two decades. This research often begins by drawing distinctions between space and place—where the former is viewed as a fairly abstract creation of social forces while the latter is used to refer to specific locales within a landscape that is imbued with historical meaning (P. J. Taylor 1999). Other foundational ideas in this field range from Massey's (1995) work on the "spatial division of labour," originally published in 1984, a concept she developed to understand how the social division of labour articulates geographically, through empirical studies on the ways in which labour markets are geographically structured (Peck 1996), to the argument that social actors' spatial embeddedness and "locality dependence" (K. R. Cox and Mair 1988) to a large extent determines their economic and political praxis in important ways . These are just some of the ways that labour geographers have sought to bring a vibrant

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[38] There are of course some excellent exceptions to this within more recent contributions in labour geography, which treat unions as complex, differentiated institutions that are themselves vital spaces of contention. Similarly, some of this work has begun to take the activities and agency of rank-and-file unionism more seriously. This work will be discussed later in this chapter.

spatial lens to bear on their investigation and conceptualization to the study of work, employment, and resistance.

The historical roots of this mode of geographical analysis of labour emerged in the early 1990s when a number of radical human geographers, including Don Mitchell, Andrew Herod, Leyla Vural, Rebecca Johns, and others set out a distinct new research agenda that insisted on the necessity to begin research with an examination of the concrete and messy realities of the actual lives of workers and class struggle. This new approach established the theoretical, empirical, and political significance of viewing workers as active producers of social space and of the political, economic, and cultural geographies of contemporary capitalism.

The labour geography approach takes it as axiomatic that the geography of contemporary capitalism matters to workers and, likewise, that workers matter to this geography. Geography has a constitutive role to play for working people (and for all of the social relations that structure our lives). And whether it is acknowledged or understood, geography structures the possibilities for how workers may change the terms and conditions of their employment and their lives more broadly. Stating this in more theoretical terms, social actors are geographically embedded, quite often in contradictory ways, and this embeddedness in turn shapes the possibilities for social action. The common thread in this literature is an explicit focus on the spatiality of employment relations and labour struggles. As Don Mitchell (2995, 95) puts it, "Politically and empirically labor geography is concerned with putting flesh—and social will and intentionality—on the theoretical bones of radical geography, refocusing radical geography with two main goals: showing how people make their own geographies, even

if not under the conditions of their own choosing (to paraphrase Marx); and showing what this making of geography means to the people who do it."

While not seeking to displace capital entirely from the research agenda, or to presume equal power relations, I adopt Herod's (1997; 2001) position that labour geography should consider a closer analysis of the social and spatial practices of workers the principle task of its research agenda. This is not to say that the agency of labour is all that we should focus on in our investigation of the changing economic, cultural, and political landscapes that constitute contemporary capitalism. To do so would be to simply exchange a primary concentration on capital with one on labour in our investigations into the geography of capitalism. Indeed, this has been a major limitation of much labour studies scholarship. Both capital and workers struggle, sometimes against one another and sometimes within their own ranks, and as I suggest above, sometimes in place-based collaboration with each other against workers and capital elsewhere. The goal of all of these struggles is simply to "make space in particular ways to ensure their own self-reproduction and survival," and for workers sometimes that means surviving "as workers in a capitalist society" (Herod 1997, 2). While we might hope, as socialist and radical scholar-activists, that workers' and their movement concentrated more on unmaking capitalism, there is no way to achieve such a radical ambition if we do not conduct research into the often contradictory and messy realities of what workers actually believe and do.

Critical commentary in the field of radical geography argues that the agency labour geographers lend to workers is often under-theorized and premature. Don Mitchell (2011, 567), for example, compellingly argues that labour geography research needs to be

more attuned to the materiality of the world in which labour exists, rather than narrowly focused on labour's activities and power to change its geographies. That is, as we seek to see how workers create economic spaces and landscapes, we must also closely examine those spaces and landscapes that they do not make, at least in any basic sense, but in which they find themselves and must live and work—those landscapes that are, through struggles and the exercise of power, produced not for them but for others, those landscape that make "a new kind of community all but impossible." Even harsher is Raju Das' (2012, 21) critique that "agency has often been used as a quasi-empirical category: a tool to describe how labor is making a difference to the spatial organization of capitalism, here and there. Agency in opposition to capital's own existence, agency in collaboration with capital, and agency involved in gaining concessions, without challenging capitalist class relations, are all problematically put together." Put differently, simply focusing on the activities of workers *within* capitalism as a way to highlight the significance of labour's agency does not get us very far, analytically or politically, if we operate with a conception of agency that captures any and all things that workers might do. Coe and Jordhus-Lier (2011, 14) largely dismiss these concerns and continue to focus on "developing more precise concepts for describing the politics of work." Their goal is to theorize agency more rigorously, and in so doing they usefully turn to Cindi Katz's (2004) typology of agency—resilience (adaptive, getting by), reworking (shifting distribution systems), and resistance (changing the forces of production, balance of power) (see also Bergene, Endresen, and Knutsen 2010). They understand labor agency to be both *embedded and constrained* (Coe 2013) while others conceptualize any

meaningful labor agency as a distinct force that is autonomous and independent from capital.

Despite these more nuanced conceptualizations of agency, a fundamental question remains of exactly whose agency is being conceptualized? Recent scholarship conceives of agency and consciousness (or subjectively more broadly) as being shaped by a whole range of contingent factors, structural locations, identities, and ideology. For instance, Bergene et al (2010) suggest that all of these elements may come together and form a "chaotic consciousness" amongst workers, which unions and other political organizations that workers construct to shape their economic landscape can effectively navigate and transcend.

Thus, while these critiques of labour geography are important, it is likewise necessary to say that Herod's corrective to an overly structuralist economic geography is in actuality a minor but, in my evaluation, necessary revision to the field of heterodox economic geography. At the same time, it is important to note that Herod's (2007, 143) critique of Marx's conception of labour is off the mark in significant ways. For example, unlike Adam Smith's "labour in general," Marx's "abstract labour" is a socially and historically specific category. Since Marx (1967, 1:41) considered his conceptualization of the dual concrete/abstract character of commodity-producing labour to be the "pivot on which a clear comprehension of political economy turns," and among his most important contributions to the critique of political economy, it is well worth developing the argument if only through a highly compressed and programmatic presentation.

Following Marx, the British labour geographer Jane Wills (1996, 354) compellingly argues that workers themselves, however, forge union traditions in

conditions not necessarily of their own choosing. She further contends that union "practices arise as workers seek to respond to the conditions in which they find themselves, drawing upon the organizational resources and established 'repertoires' of collective action they have built up over time (Tarrow 2011)." In this sense, workers are making their own trade union history, and the geography of trade union organization reflects that creative agency as it develops over time and space in a variety of ways. Crucially, Wills (1996, 355, my emphasis) adds that class organizations fundamentally entail geographical and historical relationships, and geographically and historically constitute political and organizational traditions: *"Location makes a difference to historical process, not only because social relations are specific to particular places, but also because places are interconnected by networks of social relations stretching across space, from the nearest neighbor to the most distant location."* This point about the interconnection of places by social relations that criss-cross with different institutions and forms of power must be foregrounded in any analysis of the agency, politics, strategy, and tactics of workers.

We can see then how unions and collective action have been the key mechanisms for workers to make changes in the economic landscape, and that both have been central objects of study in labour geography. Jane Wills and others illuminate some of the ways in which various collective practices, cultures, and ideas are constructed in particular places and how these traditions are translated across space. In spite of this, within early research on unions, most labour geographers failed to differentiate between workers as individuals and workers as collective actors—working predominantly through trade unions. As such, while a major empirical focus in labour geography has been on the

relevance of unions, and how they deploy changing strategies and tactics in different places and across scales, the micro-politics of power and geographies of struggle *within* unions has not often been emphasized (Savage 1998). While one of the identified limits of labour geography has been its institutional focus on trade unions, researchers have begun to expand the horizons of labour geography by conducting research into low-wage/no-wage geographies and alternative workers' organizations, as well as to give greater focus to labor geographies outside of the advanced capitalist economies and to the flows of migrant workers between and within the Global North and Global South. Similarly, I believe my study on teacher unions and rank-and-file organization as they articulate with global city development opens up some new pathways for labour geography research.

The conceptual analysis sketched out above will prove vital in understanding how Chicago and New York teacher unions have developed as key political and economic actors in the remaking of their cities. Likewise, an urban labour geography framework, by uncovering how the fight for social, economic, and education justice needs to be a fight for spatial justice, will help grapple with the changing terrain within which rank-and-file teachers struggle to transform their unions, their cities, and their lives.

In arguing for an approach that views workers as active social and spatial agents, it is important to remember that accounts of agency which do not recognize the realities of power degenerate into a naïve voluntarism. This is an especially important point given that labour unions today act as more progressive interest groups than elements of a genuine workers' movement as defined by legal scholar Julius Getman (2010, 12), who observes that "A movement requires activating and using the energies of workers. It

means fostering solidarity across unions and occupations. It requires leaders who are willing to trust and who are committed to sharing power with the union's rank-and-file." As the following discussion illustrates, organized labour in the United States has not been a movement for some time, but that does not mean it cannot become one again.

Of special significance for my study is Wills' (2008) argument that for working-class politics to be effective it is necessary that labour struggle not limit itself to any particular workplace or industry. Moreover, as Amanda Tattersall (2010b) argues, union transformation is more likely when unions and community organizations develop broad and deep connections with each other through coalition work. In a similar vein, Wills and Simms (2004) demonstrate how unions can be more successful in their campaigns when they build reciprocal alliances with grassroots, community-based organization. Indeed, constructing such alliance is a key weapon in the struggle to reverse labour decline because it deepens relationships with allies outside of workplaces, helps reframe what unions do and how they are understood in the public more broadly, and if done right, labour-community coalition work can help create high participation unionism. Such an understanding is of paramount importance to the radical urban educators this study focuses on.

As I develop in later chapters, although I generally agree with these propositions, prioritizing the construction of a strong culture of solidarity (Fantasia 1988) by which workers develop bonds with each other through *experiences of collective struggle in the workplace* remains pivotal to union organizing. Following this logic, organization in the workplace remains even more vital when that workplace is a public neighborhood school because schools are located in each neighbourhood across a city, and in the most

devastated parts of town are often the only public space, potential community space available to residents and workers alike. Thus, as Jane McAlevey (2012) argues, instead of abandoning the workplace for some idealized notion of "community unionism," unions need to rekindle an action-oriented militancy and organization in their workplaces that can be extended out into broader organizing outside of the workplace. As I discuss in my case study analyses it is possible and useful to do this while also bringing radical grassroots organizing techniques and allies into the workplace. What is important here is that labour unions move towards what McAlevey describes as *whole worker organizing*, by which she means unions must organize at the workplace, where people spend so much of their lives, but recognize that, just as our lives do not begin and end at the workplace, neither must the organizing to expand workers' power end there.

2.4 Working, Living and Rebelling in an Urban World

Of equal importance to the changes in the political economy of capitalism discussed above is the ever-changing and expanding urban fabric that structures the economic context workers and their unions confront today; the contemporary capitalist space-economy is a profoundly urban phenomenon. As Soja and Kanai (2007) observe:

> More than ever before, it can be said that the Earth's entire surface is urbanized to some degree, from the Siberian tundra to the Brazilian rainforest to the icecap of Antarctica, perhaps even to the world's oceans and the atmosphere we breath. Of course, this does not mean there are dense agglomerations everywhere, but the major features of urbanism as a way of life—from the play of market forces and the effect of administrative regulations, to popular cultural practices and practical geopolitics—are becoming ubiquitous. To a degree not seen before, no one on Earth is outside the sphere of influence of urban industrial capitalism. The extended urbanization of the world opens up new ways of understanding the globalization of capital, labour and culture, and the forces that have led to the formation of a new mode of capitalist development.

Another useful way to put this is that capitalism has globalized through not just a revolution in logistics, communications, and information technology but through a process of urbanization that connects even the most remote, seemingly rural parts of the world to the urban agglomerations of capitalist power. One does not have to live in Brooklyn or downtown Toronto to be in some way living an urban life, just as one does not have to live in those places to have been influenced by blockbuster Hollywood movies or hip hop from the South Bronx.

Hence *this chapter, and dissertation more generally, is not simply a study of workers in cities, but is a focused investigation into rank-and-file rebellion in an urban world*. But, what does this actually mean? Summarizing Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, Andy Merrifield (2006, xiii) observes, "We are workers, producing our own factory just by walking down the street." In other words, urban space should be viewed as something alive and dynamic, something that workers actively produce and reproduce in distinct ways through our everyday mundane practices and labour. Indeed, in "The Right to the City" (1996), Lefebvre invokes the working-class, according to Harvey (2012, xiii), as the agent of revolutionary transformation in a rather different way than Marxists had previously done in tacitly suggesting "that the revolutionary working class was constituted out of urban rather than exclusively factory workers. This, he later observed, is a very different kind of class formation—fragmented and divided, multiple in its aims and needs, more often itinerant, disorganized and fluid rather than solidly implanted." Harvey (2012, 3) agrees with this thesis and extends this view by insisting that the "logic behind Lefebvre's position has intensified in our own times," due to the fact that most of

the factories in advanced capitalist economies have "either disappeared or been so diminished as to decimate the classical industrial working class."

The important and continuously expanding labour of making and sustaining urban life is performed to a greater extent each day by insecure, usually part-time and unorganized low-wage workers. The so-called precariat has displaced the traditional proletariat. Yet, I would be cautious about the rush to seize on this category of the precariat as some new revolutionary class because, as socialist, labour historian Bryan Palmer (2012) compellingly argues, the normal condition of working classes around the world has been precarious and degraded work and life. The chief objective of neoliberalization has been to roll-back workers' power and gains to make precarity the norm once again.

Following Merrifield (2014, 1), who in turn is extending Lefebvre's ideas, I use the phrase urban fabric or urban world rather than city because this formulation better captures how urbanization "stretches to envelop everywhere, irrespective of whether we see it physically embodied in bricks and mortar, in steel and concrete, in stuff we tend to normally associate with the constitution of cities." This of course does not mean that every place is urbanized in the same way, but does mean that there are increasingly few places on earth that are not in some manner affected or tied to wider processes of urbanization, and capitalist urbanization more specifically. Hence, we should view the urban as both an abstract and more concrete lens through which to grasp the urbanization of the world.[39]And while I agree with Merrifield and other urban scholars (N. Brenner 2014) that we need a theoretical explication of what the "it" is when we use the word

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[39] I will not review here the debates that raged in urban studies in the 1970s on how best to define the urban or what exactly a city is and why it should command the attention of critical scholars. See Merrifield's Chapter 1, "Whither Urban Studies," in *The New Urban Question* (2014).

urban or city, I begin from the supposition that Merrifield (2014, 1) describes as an obvious rejoinder to the question of why studying the urban or cities is vital for radical scholars: the urban "plays a special role under capitalism—indeed it was important in the birth of capitalism itself. The city assumes a twin role: an engine for capital accumulation, on the one hand, and a site for social/class struggle, on the other. It is crucial for the expansion of capitalism and for overthrowing capitalism. It is a theoretical object of curiosity because it is a political subject of necessity." And global cities such as New York and Chicago have come to serve as even more important and strategic sites for the coordination of global capitalism, beyond the accumulation that happens in those cities themselves (Sassen 2013; N. Brenner and Keil 2006). This in turn, I argue, opens up distinct possibilities for struggles from below to leverage particular contradictions of their urban environment to advance their interests and challenge processes of neoliberalization, and possibly capitalism itself.

Indeed, cities have, from their earliest beginnings, arisen through a geographical and social concentration of surplus product, making the process of urbanization fundamentally a class phenomenon, of one kind or another, because surpluses have always been extracted from one group and from somewhere, while a much smaller group of people control how surpluses are used and distributed (Harvey 2012, 5). The particular dynamic by which this situation persists under capitalism, as Marx shows us, is driven by the perpetual search for surplus value. "But to produce surplus value," Harvey (2012, 5–6, my emphasis) writes, "capitalists have to produce a surplus product," and this means that "capitalism is perpetually producing the surplus product that urbanization requires. The reverse relation also holds. *Capitalism needs urbanization to absorb the surplus*

products it perpetually produces. In this way an inner connection emerges between the development of capitalism and urbanization…. The politics of capitalism are affected by the perpetual need to find profitable terrains for capital surplus production and absorption. In this the capitalist faces a number of obstacles to continuous and trouble-free expansion." Urbanization for Harvey (2012, 7) has, then, played a vital role in circumventing the obstacles that arise in the course of capital seeking to expand accumulation (including the scarcity of labour, unionization, and an overly high wages) insofar as it has served (like military expenditures) functioned as a mechanism for absorbing the surplus product produced by capital in its never ending quest for surplus value.

While a number of important studies, from the Annals school of historical sociology (Braudel 1992) to the important historical sociology of Michael Mann (1986), demonstrate the importance of cities and of urbanization more generally to capitalism, global cities research has most fundamentally shown how some global or globalizing urban agglomerations—the paradigmatic cases being New York, London, and Tokyo— have at different moments served important, and differentiated, strategic functions in the world capitalist economy and urban system through which it operates. In the new Global Division of Labour (GDL), the "geographical and functional organization of the global economy," note Soja and Kanai (2007, 152), "has come to hinge around a new power hierarchy of financial command centers, led by the three great 'capitals of capital', London, New York and Tokyo, and buttressed by a growing number of ever more interconnected and synergetic global cities." This research suggests that in seizing on the strategic targets and possible structural leverage points available in such cities, workers

may also be able to extract greater amounts of wealth from all of the accumulations that happens both in and through global city networks, as opposed to the options available to workers in Detroit or Cleveland. I return to this point below.

As noted in a recent editorial (*Jacobin* 2015), "[t]hroughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the city was home to socialist ambitions, to mass politics that aimed to change the world. But these days it is more likely to be championed by technocrats like Michael Bloomberg and Edward Glaeser, or blogged about at outlets like CityLab whose vision of urban life is more concerned with disruptive solutions than class struggle." But absent a powerful left movements working to transform the realm of possibility at a structural level, these authors are right to contend that, "playfulness and spontaneity have proved easily coopted and commodified" (*Jacobin* 2015). For instance, in the so-called creative city, it is the owning classes, the 1 %, that break down barriers between work and leisure, encouraging us to value experience, reject routine, and treat urban space as a giant playground to be explored while many city residents languish in low-wage precarious employment, much of which facilitates the activities of, and produces the urban playground of, the super-rich.

Moreover, as Harvey's work, like that of other critical urbanists, so compellingly demonstrates, urbanization has been essential to the historical development of capitalism and its ongoing reproduction and mutations; because the "forces of capital and its innumerable allies must relentlessly mobilize to periodically revolutionize urban life, then class struggles of some sort, no matter whether they are explicitly recognized as such, are inevitably involved…An important strategic political question then follows*: To what degree should anti-capitalist struggles explicitly focus and organize on the broad*

terrain of the city and the urban? And if they should do so, then how and exactly why?"

(Harvey 2012, 115, my emphasis). There is, Harvey continues, undercurrents of disaffection permeating cities in our world, dying, sometimes quite literally, to be expressed. However, as Harvey (2012, 116) concludes:

> The traditional city has been killed by rampant capitalist development, a victim of the never-ending need to dispose of over accumulating capital driving towards endless and sprawling urban growth no matter what the social, environmental, or political consequences. Our political task, Lefebvre suggests, is to imagine and reconstitute a totally different kind of city out of the disgusting mess of a globalizing, urbanizing capital run amok. But that cannot occur without the creation of a vigorous anticaptialist movement that focuses on the transformation of daily urban life as its goal…Only when politics focus on the production and reproduction of urban life as the central labor process out of which revolutionary impulses arise will it be possible to mobilize anti-capitalist struggles capable of radically transforming daily life. Only when it is understood that those who build and sustain urban life have a primary claim to that which they have produced, and that one of their claims is to the unalienated right to make a city more after their own heart's desire, will we arrive at a politics of the urban that will make sense. 'The city may be dead,' Lefebvre seems to say, but "long live the city!"

At the same time, might certain urban agglomerations have characteristics that are more conducive to grassroots actions than others? For instance, Harvey claims that the centrality of public squares like Tahir and Syntagma, lend themselves to being barricaded and reclaimed by the masses more so than do the streets of London or Los Angeles. While this may be correct in some respects, it does not then explain why there have been some amazingly successful struggles and experiments in the City of Los Angeles, while we have also seen crushing movement defeats that were centered around public squares, such as Tahir. Yet, the way that different built urban environments facilitate certain forms of activism and insurgency would explain why the guardians of the prevailing the political and economic status quo have so often sought to reorganize urban infrastructure and urban life more generally such that they might better control restive populations (e.g.

Haussmann's infamous redesign of the boulevards in Paris to prevent working-class insurrection). Indeed, we have seen such a re-engineering occur in the inner cities of the United States as a response to the urban uprising of the 1960s vis-à-vis the construction of major physical highway barriers, "moats, in effect," between, "the citadels of high-value downtown property and impoverished inner-city neighborhoods" (Harvey 2014, 117). One wonders what urban planners might dream up in the wake of the most recent Black uprisings in Fergusson, Missouri, and Baltimore, Maryland.

The urban fabric is thus a pivotal space of capital accumulation, control, and planning, on the one hand, and on the other, an essential site of political action and revolt of workers and the poor. Yet, as Harvey reminds us, the "physical and social re-engineering and territorial organization of these sites is a weapon in political struggles. In the same way that, in military operations, the choice and shaping of the terrain of action plays an important role in determining who wins, so it is with popular protests and political movements in urban settings" (2014, 117–18). A truly critical spatial imagination or approach within social movement struggle would need to pay more serious attention to the ways in which the urban battlefield is being reconfigured. The restructuring of schools is a key part of this reconfiguration, but there is much more going on here that needs to be investigated.

Another vital observation, often neglected in more celebratory accounts of recent upsurges of social movement struggle, is that, given the rapid pace, volatility, and geographically uneven manner in which these movements have exploded (and disappeared) over the past two decades—including the anti-war demonstrations of 2003, the immigrant workers' rights movement in the United States in 2006, no less than the

revolts in the French suburbs in 2005, and the more recent Occupy Movement that burst on to the scene in 2011—there has been a failure to critically understand the trajectories of these movements. The tumultuous history and impacts of the anti-globalization movement that was at its peak in the Global North in the late 1990s is similarly indicative of the fact that we live in rather distinct and qualitatively different moment of anti-capitalist struggle than experienced even 15 years ago.

In *Rebel Cities* (2012)*,* Harvey convincingly argues that all of these diverse movements and instances of social movement activity are not simply side effects of global or universal human aspirations but are products of the "urban process and the urban experience—the qualities of daily urban life—under capitalism that, in itself, has the potential to ground anti-capitalist struggles." And we should as such view struggles within and over the city, and over the qualities and prospects of urban living, as essential to anti-capitalist politics—and, I would add, to the plight of organized labour and workers' power more specifically.

At the same time, it is crucial that we understand that no alternative to neoliberal globalization will be "delivered to us from on high," because it must derive from *within "multiple local spaces—urban space in particular—conjoining into a broader movement*," the product of working-class self-activity, I would add. "It is here," Harvey continues, "that the contradictions faced by capitalists as they search for monopoly rent assume a certain structural significance. By seeking to trade on value of authenticity, locality, history, culture, collective memories, and tradition they [capitalists and the institutions that they work through] open a space for political thought and action within which socialist alternatives can be both devised and pursued" (2012, 112, my emphasis).

Lastly, Harvey touches on something essential when he contends that recent instances of urban protest and rebellion reflect a longing for the restoration of the centrality of the city which has been destroyed, or, if not the centrality of the city per se, a longing for a place where we can come together to articulate our collective cries and demands (2012, xvii).[40]

But, as Michelle Buckley argues, urban or labour scholars rarely explore the ways in which labour literally contributes to the construction of capitalist urbanization— and what this means both empirically and theoretically. While Buckley's (2014, 339) work focuses on the role of migrant wage labour in the production of aggregate changes in the physical, "materially produced components of the urban landscape, and even more specifically, [on] ... forms of urban construction that entail the use of waged labour and the productive circulation of capital," the ways in which teachers and their unions contribute to the remaking or reproduction of capitalist urbanization, including not only its physical landscapes but its particular kinds of labour markets, neighborhoods, and political subjectivities more broadly in the urban fabric, is similarly underexplored.

2.5 The State of the Unions: External Challenges

Let us continue to advance our discussion above about the state of U.S. labour unions by unpacking the external challenges that they confront in the present conjuncture. Luce and other contemporary U.S. labour scholars convincingly argue that the trends in declining wages, increases in unemployment, and the overall decline in union power, as defined by the ability of unions to defend past gains, make improvements, and have a positive impact on public policies that benefit workers are related to longer-term trends connected with the rise and consolidation of neoliberal policies. The consolidation and accumulation of more than thirty years of these policies has resulted in a profound

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[40] See also Tufts (2007).

transformation of governments at all scales, including a certain rescaling and reterritorialization of state power, as Neil Brenner (2004) and others demonstrate. This shift in the dominant policy paradigm and corresponding radical reconfiguration of state power has occurred over the course of three decades in a geographically uneven, variegated, and contingent process of *the neoliberalization of contemporary capitalism*.

While Stephen Ball (2012) is right to warn us about how we use a slippery and chaotic concept like neoliberalism, which has been defined in a myriad of ways and used to explain many different phenomena, I believe the concept still adequately captures the ideology and practice structuring the dominant mode of regulating contemporary capitalism. For example, while proponents of neoliberalism are united in their unwavering belief in the power of the market and competition as a solution for all realms of life, and in the individual as ultimately responsible for his or her own lot in life, neoliberalism has in practice meant a radical restructuring of the regulatory functions of governments, including a devolution in responsibility and authority to the local scale (when expedient), a dismantling of many rules and practices that leant power to workers and unions while reregulating laws and governance in a direction that provides employers with greater power.

Relatedly, Luce (2014, 12) reminds us that we should not allow ourselves to deploy some amorphous notion of globalization as the central problem for unions, but neoliberal globalization. The expansion of neoliberalization in politics, economics, popular culture, public policy, and trade union responses that has occurred around the world since the 1970s has meant that workers in different countries now confront similar conditions. In spite of the prismatic and uneven nature of how neoliberalization has

developed and been reworked since the Great Recession of 2008, *one unifying constant of this paradigm has been a consolidation, reassertion, and expansion of capitalist power across space and spheres of life* (Harvey 2010b). For instance, while there may be differences related to the strength, historical formation, and legacies of unions, similar trends can be observed across different national economies in terms of corporate restructuring, privatization of formerly public or quasi-public institutions and industries, declining labour and living standards, and expansion in informal or contingent employment. Perhaps most importantly, all of these changes have been made possible by a profound reconfiguration of state power, in particular at the local or municipal scale, which gives states more responsibility with fewer resources to adequately attend to them.

The most important changes to take place with respect to corporate restructuring have been the result of changes in regulations that allow corporations to consolidate power, vis-à-vis mergers and acquisitions for example (Dicken 2015). The Great Recession has proved to be a "good crisis" for large corporations, notes *The Financial Times* in 2011, because "they used it to make their operations leaner and boost productivity while piling up cheap finance" (quoted in Tabb 2012, 3). "It was," Tabb notes, "a bleak recovery, seen from a working-class perspective, with continued exceedingly high levels of sustained unemployment." Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that, while the Great Recession and the bailouts to the financial sector might be the most startling example of government-assisted robbery led by bankers in world history, the recovery has been balanced on the backs of workers through austerity policies, brought about in part through the demonization of public sector workers.

Thus, while we take stock of this bleak reality, it is important to heed Moody's (2014) observation that, although the working class is no doubt a heterogeneous, diverse lot, when we include all of the dependents of waged labour (those who are reliant on selling their labour power in order to survive), including the continuously expanding reserve army of labor (which includes many working as self-employed), the working class might well amount to a majority of the planet's population for the first time in history. Equally worthy of note is that this expansion of the working class has occurred in a highly uneven manner. As the ILO (2013, 4) describes it, "Paid employment appears to be growing everywhere (with the exception of Latin America) and has been expanding particularly rapidly in East Asia." Hence, in its impulse to expand and draw in to its orbit more and more types of labour and commodities, capital continues to incorporate more of the world's rural population into the production of surplus value and into the conditions described above. Such a shift would seem to confirm Marx's argument in *Capital Volume I* that, even as the mass of labour's subsistence grows compared to the surplus value produced, or in relative terms, labour-power's value will continue to decline. This will in turn result in an ever widening chasm between the life situation of workers and that of capitalists in terms of the expansion of wealth, time, space, and opportunity that results from this shift in value that has grown significantly since the Great Recession of 2008. As the ILO (2013, 28) states: "We show that over the period 1995-2007 average wages lagged behind the growth in GDP per capita, which we interpret as an indication that increases in productivity have failed to translate fully into higher wages. We also show that the recent period, characterized by growing economic integration, has seen a decline in the share of GDP distribution to wages." This means, Moody (2014, 17) explains, that

the rate of exploitation has increased on a global scale, in particular in the heartlands of capitalism. In the U.S. corporate sector, for example, between 1979 and 2010 capital's share of U.S. national income rose from 18.8% to 26.2%.

These trends, however, have given rise to an increase in worker resistance, most notably in China (Ren, Li, and Friedman 2016). Thus, as commodification and market logic have expanded to most of the globe—including in previously protected areas like healthcare and education in the United States and Canada—with a corresponding increase in total wealth, this has led to a less secure, precarious, and generally bleak landscape for the majority of the world's workers.[41] As a copious amount of research illustrates, the neoliberalization of economies across the world has translated into greater job insecurity, flat or declining wages, and a large spike in inequality (Tabb 2012; Lapavitsas 2014). While employers have gained rights through so-called free trade deals, which are more about expanding corporate power across space and less about facilitating free trade, per se, vis-à-vis the reregulation of industry, and employment law, which leaves workers in a weaker position to defend themselves individually and collectively, and the deregulation of capital controls, governments of all political persuasions, with some notable exceptions, have failed to champion workers' interests.

The United States has now gone through three jobless recoveries in a row. Between 1999 and 2009 there has been zero net job creation and median household income fell by 5%. In addition, real wages have stagnated for four decades. Exceeding the past four recessions combined, approximately eight and half million jobs were lost in the U.S. during the Great Recession. We have witnessed in this period an exodus of

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[41] As the only self-proclaimed socialist US Senator, Bernie Sanders, observes, "It's not only that the rich are getting richer. The very, very rich are getting richer. In the last 25 years, we have seen 80 percent of all the new income going to the top percent" (quoted in Tabb 2012, 4).

"discouraged workers" from the labour market, which has prevented the official U.S. unemployment rate from climbing, but unemployment continued to rise in the months following the official recovery data. At the same time, those who have been lucky enough to find employment have taken jobs for lower pay, with few or no benefits, and that are less secure. As Tabb (2012, 5) observes, "The crisis exposed underlying structural changes in the U.S. political economy and world system, changes that interact in complex ways and suggest that American workers will experience income and employment problems well into the future, even with the worst months of the recession behind them and renewed hiring." Although there have been some marginal improvements in official employment rates in the United States, including in New York and Chicago, many workers are not being counted and those who are counted as employed have not seen their wages keep pace with inflation. Thus, U.S. workers and the poor continue to be excluded from what there has been of an economic recovery since 2008.

On a more general level, technological changes, especially in communications and logistics, along with the globalization of production and finance and the increasingly widespread capacity of employers to reset employment contracts so that employers are no longer tied to worker pay but to productivity, have resulted in employment that is less well remunerated and less secure (Cowen 2014; DiFazio and Aronowitz 2010). For example, the ability to reset or cancel employment contracts has been occurring in an especially novel and disturbing manner in U.S. cities such as Detroit, with the appointments of emergency financial managers who are granted power by state legislatures to override the authority both of elected governments and the collective agreements they have bargained with their employees (Tabb 2015). Lastly, intensified

competition and workers' dependence on their companies has dramatically weakened class solidarities, as did two-tier wages within the workplace, a massive concession that many unions have accepted, generally in exchange for what have often proved to be quite empty promises of job security.

The changes I describe taking place in the contemporary capitalist economy cannot be understood adequately unless we examine the pivotal role that finance has come to play in contemporary capitalism and the restructuring of state power (Bryan and Rafferty 2006; Panitch and Gindin 2012; Lapavitsas 2014); Specifically, we need to understand how finance evolved into such a dominant force structuring how economies work in an era of global neoliberalism, and how financialization has played such an essential role in producing the realities workers face across the globe today. Finance restructures state power, for instance, not only by exerting an instrumental influence in electoral politics, or because of the staff that move back and forth between holding essential positions on Wall Street and important ones as policy makers or lobbyists (Nichols and McChesney 2013), although this is certainly part of the explanation. But more importantly is that fact that regulators have structural incentives to be lax in their duties, motivated in no small part by a desire to retain the confidence of the business community, of bond rating agencies, and to encourage investor optimism, all in order to support the capital accumulation process. Regulating industry too severely, unless the regulations are themselves directed towards the expansion of profit, is no longer a guiding imperative of public policy. Put differently, we should not view this transformation in the regulatory or public policy landscape of capitalism as merely a result of corporate money in politics but instead situate these changes as fundamental

shifts in the political and economic institutions that constitute global capitalism. The transformation has occurred as governments across scales and territories have become more dependent over the past thirty to forty years on the private sector to create jobs, on business taxes to bankroll social programs, and on economic growth to keep the electorate happy.

While these structural dynamics significantly shape and constrain what any given government of the day can do, the more important questions revolve around how unions, social movements, and other political actors concerned with reconfiguring these structures for the purpose of implementing progressive public policy, or policy that will allow working people to thrive, might transform state capacities to do so. The choice is whether the burden will fall onto labour or capital. Thus, all workers across the world have had to confront the changing role of the state since the ascendance of neoliberalism. Structural limitations and state capacities, importantly, are always subject to contestation and change from below.

2.6 Neoliberalism, Precarious Work, and Austerity

In both practice and political ideology, neoliberalism is many-sided and has transformed not only politics, economics, and public policy in the United States but also culture and the everyday lives of workers across the country. What I am most concerned with, however, is how neoliberalism as a broad set of macroeconomic policies, a worldview, and an approach to public policy structures the fields of action for organized labour in U.S. cities. Neoliberalism's intellectual roots—ideational and ideological—can be found in classical liberalism and the economic writing of Von Mises, Hayek, and Friedman (D. S. Jones 2012; Harvey 2010b; Peck 2010).

Although neoliberalism was an offspring of the Great Depression, it rose to prominence in the context of the capitalist economic downturn of the 1970s. Neoliberalization became entrenched as the dominant economic discourse as a consequence of the failures of the prior system—the Keynesian welfare state in the Global North and the developmentalist state in the Global South—and because of the extremely effective political and intellectual organization of the capitalist classes around the planet (Robinson 2005; Prashad 2008; Panitch and Gindin 2012). Having developed in the shadows of Keynesianism, neoliberalism's most vocal expositors took the long-established constitutive core of liberal ideas and refashioned them. This core of ideas, then, can iterate in historically specific forms. This aspect of neoliberalism has made it possible that the intellectual inspiration and policy developments of neoliberalism have been multidimensional and heterogeneous across time and space since it first began to emerge in the post-war institutional structure of the U.S. political economy (Peck 2010). Neoliberalism is the latest set of socio-spatial and institutional configurations in the ongoing development of global capitalism, or in the conflicting tendencies toward destruction and creation that comprise capitalism (N. Brenner and Theodore 2002b).[42]

As a political project, neoliberalism is characterized most centrally by a capitalist class and state offensive which aims to roll-back the collective gains made by labour in the quarter-century proceeding World War II, and at the same time roll-out new forms of commodification (Peck and Tickell 2002; N. Brenner and Theodore 2003; N. Brenner and Theodore 2005; Harvey 2010a). In this regard, neoliberalism is a politically guided, yet

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[42] The destructive aspects of neoliberalism are constituted by the removal of Keynesian institutions (e.g., trade unions, public housing and public spaces) and redistributive policies (e.g. welfare, food stamps, etc.), while the creative component of it rests in the establishment of new practices and institutions to extend and reproduce neoliberalism into the future (public private partnerships and workfare policies are two good examples).

frequently—even if often inadequately—contested process that has successfully altered the balance of class forces in favour of capital at the expense of labour. As Ray Hudson (2001) observes, capital can be thought of as trying to disorganize labour by means of segmenting labour markets according to gender, race, sexuality, ethnicity, and other markers of difference; conversely, labour seeks to traverse these differences to organize itself, through unions and other organizations, to improve conditions in the labour market, at work, and sometimes in society more broadly. This restructuring has had especially harmful consequences for the delivery of public services, the workers who deliver those services, and the users of those services.

Within the context of an increasingly urbanized planet, cities and wider metropolitan regions—urban agglomerations of varying sizes and characteristics—have become pivotal sites for the elaboration of neoliberal projects. However, cities are much more than merely petri dishes of ideological and institutional experimentation for neoliberalism. They are also important places for mass rebellion and collective action, wherein a range of anti-systemic, left organizing, and alternative visions for urban life, which challenge the narrow policy parameters of neoliberalism and structural constraints of capitalism, may develop (Merrifield 2013; Merrifield 2014; Harvey 2014; Leitner, Peck, and Sheppard 2007).

Importantly, the neoliberal restructuring of labour markets, municipal governments, public services, civic culture, and political life is not simply the result of extra-local and local economic pressures, but a socio-spatial, historical, and political process that has fundamentally altered the relationship between the state, market, and society. Indeed, there is hardly any sphere of life that has not been touched or

transformed by neoliberalization in some way or another. As the subsequent chapters on public school teachers in Chicago and New York City show, politicians from both political parties, and the champions of corporate "reform" at whose behest they work so diligently, have effectively operated through the state—at multiple scales of governance—to deepen and extend market imperatives by degrading labour and making paid-employment more precarious (Doussard 2013) as well as by privatizing public services like education, healthcare, and social services.[43]

Given that undermining trade union rights and freedoms has been of paramount importance to this project of neoliberalization (Panitch and Swartz 2008; Ross and Savage 2013), state and local governments are implementing a broad program of what Peck (2012) describes as "austerity urbanism," which in some cases drives a fiscal crisis at the municipal scale. Although municipal fiscal crises have been a recurring problem for three decades due to the fact that fiscal capacities have not kept pace with increased pressures for service demands and with an expanding process of urbanization, this process of neoliberal urbanism has escalated over the past decade as tax-shifting for competitiveness and reductions to social services, no less than the current economic crisis, have combined to intensify neoliberal urbanism and the socio-spatial, economic inequalities that have come along with it (Hackworth 2007).

In an effort to reduce service costs, many public sector employers have adopted a neoliberal approach to employment, which has been accomplished through the temporary and discretional use of employment layoffs, labour intensification, the denial of benefits, and retrenchment of wages. This approach has included the curtailment of free collective bargaining rights, management strategies that promote "multi-skilling," continuous re-

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[43] For an excellent overview of this, see Chapter 7 in Burns (2015).

training, performance-based pay (more commonly called merit pay in education), and tightly controlled managerial practices that enhanced workplace supervision (DiFazio and Aronowitz 2010; Jordhus-Lier 2012).

Related to these shifts in public sector employment relations, we should heed the insistence of feminist and antiracist political economists on a focus on those key dimensions of neoliberal policies that often go unaccounted for in racial and gender-blind analyses of labour and neoliberalism (Weeks 2011). For example, neoliberal policies have promoted the privatization of social services and a lack of support for child care which, in the context of persisting gendered divisions of labour, have increased the demands on women's responsibilities in the home (Vosko, MacDonald, and Campbell 2009; Bezanson 2010; J. Brenner 2011). Moreover, women have always been more or less half of the working class, yet their place in the working class, as in society more broadly, has changed dramatically since Marx's discussion of the value of a worker's labour power in relation to that needed to adequately support the worker's family.

Similarly, the attack on teachers' work in the United States and elsewhere stems from a highly feminized undervaluing of teaching as a form of care work (Weiner 2012). Neoliberal policies more broadly have reproduced patterns of gendered labour market inequality through transforming income security policies premised on the male income earner model of paid employment. This dynamic serves to further individuate responsibility by ignoring how complex socio-spatial, historical, and structural relations constrain the space for choice and shape subjectivity. Of similar significance, racial and ethnic divisions—*with white supremacy underlying or structuring the political economic process from which they result*—are deeply embedded in the institutional, political, and

economic structure of U.S. society and in the evolution of capitalism and its neoliberal variant across the country (Cazenave 2011; Dunbar-Ortiz 2014). The racial and ethnic composition of the U.S working class has shifted dramatically, in large part due to heavy migration from the global south, especially Latin America. The number of Latino/as in the civilian workforce increased from a little over six million in 1980 to nearly twenty-three million by 2010. As Moody (2014, 12) notes, this "inevitably rubs up against the pre-existing forms of racial and ethnic prejudice and hierarchy bred by slavery, nationalism, and imperialism." This in turn creates new forms of divisions amongst the working class and, as a result, new problems for organizing, which have only recently been addressed by U.S. unions. Alternative worker organizations, on the other hand, have been engaging in some highly creative and effective forms of organization to address these workers (Ness 2010; 2014).

It is not economic competition alone that results in the ongoing reproduction of both racial attitudes and evolving forms of racism. Hierarchies based on race and other markers of difference like able-bodiedness, gender, and sexuality permeate many aspects of life in the United States, and not simply in the labour market. The influx of migration in recent years should thus be viewed as colliding with these pre-existing, dynamic hierarchies of difference, especially along racial lines. And this collision has generally been to the detriment of immigrants, who are perceived by many white working-class Americans as a threat not only in terms of competition over jobs but also in other areas of life such as housing and schooling.

Like geographer Laura Pulido (2006), I view the struggle for a united working-class politics and consciousness as capable of opening up possibilities to bring various

racial and ethnic groups together and contribute to a larger movement for social and economic justice. Much of Pulido's (2006, 2) book, *Black, Brown, Yellow and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles*, can be read as an attempt to understand how previous generations of people of colour have "struggled with the tensions inherent in building an antiracist and anticapitalist movement." Two of the most important concepts that Pulido adopts in her analysis of the Third World Left in Los Angeles are: that racial hierarchies evolve over time and different spaces; and the relational nature of differential forms of racialization. For example, in her discussion of the Black Panther Party (BPP), Pulido (2006, 6) notes that its focus on survival programs to serve the people and on self-defence against police brutality and other forms of white violence was rooted in seeking emancipation from "the distinct racialization of African Americans and their particular class and racial position in U.S. cities during the 1960s and 1970s." Not only were urban Blacks an impoverished population in need of basic resources, but also as the Other upon which whiteness was founded, which has kept Black people at the bottom the racial hierarchy in the United States, Blacks have also been viewed as a persistent threat to white supremacy that has served to fortify U.S. capitalism. It has also meant that Blacks have been seen as a dangerous population in need of containment.

Equally important, and related to the above point, is the intensified individuation of economic risk that is an essential characteristic of neoliberalization, whereby economic and political processes that promote the commodification of all aspects of social life, including relations of social reproduction, constitute subjects (Teelucksingh and Galabuzi 2005). This is especially pertinent to women and racialized groups employed in the

public sector where the most gains have been made and labour market segmentation is less pronounced than in similar private sector work.

As neoliberal policies weaken labour market protections and income security protections, they exacerbate longstanding patterns of labour market inequities, and thus intensify patterns of racialized labour market inequality. Racialized groups are disproportionately represented in low-income occupations across the labour market, and overall employment earnings for racialized groups that are below the Canadian average reflect these employment patterns (Kazemipur and Halli 2001; Galabuzi 2006). In addition, the deeper entrenchment of ethnic, racial, and gender-based inequalities rooted in (or structured through) fundamentally antagonistic class relations has increasingly neoliberalized public policy. Likewise, as social services become gradually more market-dependent, the burden increasingly falls on historically racialized groups, women, and immigrants to occupy the most precarious labour market positions and to suffer disproportionately from public service cutbacks around care work, because women generally still do the bulk of unpaid care work in the United States and Canada (Boris and Klein 2012).

2.7 The State of the Unions: Internal Challenges

This hostile, anti-worker environment analyzed in the previous section has forced most unions across the United States, and in many other parts of the world as well, to rethink and re-evaluate their role and objectives in protecting working people. Since the mid-1990s, debates within unions and amongst labour activists, researchers, and educators have considered how unions might advance the conditions of their members and whether achieving this objective necessarily requires a more fundamental

confrontation with the political and economic logic that underpins this crisis for unions (Bronfenbrenner et al. 1998; Fantasia and Voss 2004; Kumar and Schenk 2006; Milkman 2006; Tattersall 2010b; Hyman 2007). Unfortunately, some unions in this context have stubbornly clung to a narrow business union vision and practice, while others have turned to an "organizing" and social union approach, However, as Ross (2012) persuasively argues, while many unions claim to be organizing or social unions, their practice is typically of a more mixed variety.

However, to the extent that some unions can accurately be understood as predominantly adhering to a form of business unionism, their engagement in electoral politics and public policy aims mainly at addressing such narrow industrial concerns that it has largely wedded them to an alliance with the Democratic Party that has gotten them nowhere. Even when the Democrats, under President Obama, took control of the White House and majority control of the Senate they did little to advance the interest of workers and their unions. In part this can be explained by the wider shift to the political right on the part of both political parties and U.S. society more generally, but it is also due to internal transformations in the Democratic Party, specifically the evolution of the Democratic Leadership Council that expanded a pro-corporate, neoliberal perspective, personified by former President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore (Davis 1986; Selfa 2008).

This political orientation of organized labour is in part a legacy of how most unions have acted politically in the Post-War era, when they had higher density, and subsequently did not generally see the need to build broader community relationships to achieve influence, much less pursue an independent political path built around a labour

party of some sort.[44] This practice, however, often resulted in a declining rate of return because, beginning in the 1980s, it would leave unions with shrinking levels of public support and subsequently in a far weaker position to adequately address the rescaling and reconfigurations of state power that have accompanied and facilitated a resurgent employer offensive and an overall consolidation of right-wing forces in the United States.

It is important to recognize that the gains made by unionized workers in the postwar period, secured by accepting a narrow model of contract unionism that sacrificed the right to strike during the life of a contract, have left unions vulnerable to concessions—especially with respect to rules and procedures governing the workplace—in order to try to preserve the important economic gains that they achieved for their members on wages and benefits. Not only were many sections of the working class, especially women and racialized workers, left behind through neglect, but, in agreeing to operate within an increasingly legalized labour control regime of the U.S. industrial relations system, unions by and large gave up their influence on workplace governance and the introduction of new labour displacing technologies (DiFazio and Aronowitz 2010).

And the lack of any significant counter response by workers and their unions to the concerted assault on labour launched by employers and governments in the 1970s and 1980s that ushered in a new era of neoliberalism lends some legitimacy to the claim that neoliberalism has been the most successful ideology in world history. As Gindin (2013, 30) argues, neoliberalism as ideology has been "given decisive weight by the material changes neoliberalism [as practice] wrought in people's lives, above all by extending and

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[44] For the most systematic and rigorous analysis of why the US labour movement failed to build their own political party or carve out a more independent political orientation, rather than working through the Democrats, see Mike Davis' (1986) book, *Prisoners of the American Dream.*

deepening the commodification of labour." In so doing, *neoliberalization has likewise severely undermined what people expect from work and from their governments*.

Without developing any viable collective vision and practical mechanisms, or organizations and movements that they view as capable of achieving a more democratic and egalitarian world (what used to be thought of as the pursuit of the good life), workers will continue to rely on any number of individualized survival and coping mechanisms. As Aronowitz (2014) has recently argued in *The Death and Life of American Labour: Toward a New Workers' Movement*, we need a new labour movement driven by, and capable of, cultivating the radical imagination so that we may truly create a better world for working-class people in the United States.

Putting aside for the moment the monumental external political and economic challenges facing organized labour, it is vital to grasp how unions themselves are responsible for this state of affairs. As suggested above, U.S. unions have accomplished a great deal in the postwar period through the acceptance, if not celebration, of collective bargaining and contract unionism. At the same time, they have done remarkably little to stymie the marginalization and weakening of their organizations in the past 30-40 years under neoliberalization. Put differently, unions have been entirely too ready to accept the economic and political processes that have been foundational to roll back and roll out (and now roll-with-it[45]) periods of neoliberalism—from industrial restructuring (the incorporation of technological changes into the labour process of formerly key industries in the U.S. economy) to the rise of the service sector and the unions' inability to

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[45] This third concept has been forward by Roger Keil (2009). As Keil explains, "Roll-with-it neoliberalization captures the normalization of governmentalities associated with the neoliberal social formation and its emerging crises." At the same time, it is crucial to acknowledge that we continue to witness forms of "roll over" neoliberalism, as neoliberal politics and policy changes continue to be advanced over the often quite powerful struggles of social movements.

effectively organize all of the lost souls who are stuck at its lowest end (or the higher end for that matter).

In other words, what unions have done, or failed to do, should be the center of any attempt to explain the crisis that organized labour now confronts (Gindin 2013, 31). I posit that these internal challenges can be best understood in relation to the internal structure, culture, and power dynamics of those who run unions, often in an autocratic fashion, which include: first, how the left (by which I mean radicals and revolutionaries of various stripes, including socialists, communists, and anarchists) were pushed out of the unions during the Cold War; and second, the broader political dynamics affecting labour leaders and rank-and-file members, including the lack of any real political left in the United States that might help push unions in a more *transformative* and *anticapitalist* direction. Some of the most significant mistakes made by the trade union leadership in the United States include: a failure to adapt to a changing economy and labour force, and to the rescaling and restructuring of state power and industry described above; a propensity toward corruption of various forms that flows from a major deficit in democracy and membership engagement; a significant dependence by some unions (especially in the construction industry) on limiting the labour supply, thereby excluding workers from the workforce and the unions in order to gain power in their sector vis-à-vis their employers; a failure to make better use of the union's resources (in terms of organizing, communication, education, research, and electoral politics); and a failure to forge a more coherent, multiscalar strategic plan for the entire labour movement to address its increasingly weakened position in the U.S. political economy.

While unions remain the primary institutions for workers to fight against exploitation and injustice, they also have a number of inherent constraints or limitations that an independent political left movement, with roots in and outside of the labour movement, might challenge and overcome. For instance, as Michael Yates (2009) observes, unions often replicate divisions that presently exist within the working class, and society more broadly. A predominantly male or white union will not necessarily understand why it is important to challenge sexism, gender segregation, or racism. Likewise, because unions are largely defensive organizations involved in the day-to-day business of representing workers in capitalism, they are prone to accept this way of organizing economic life as a fact of life that can be made more tolerable but not dismantled or transformed; that is, unions generally strive for the best deal possible for the members under the prevailing political and economic set up that is capitalism. This acceptance of capitalism, in one guise or another, is the prevailing ideology of most unions in the United States and Canada. Unfortunately, U.S. labour leaders not only accept the system, but they often collaborate with employers to undercut efforts of workers in the United States and internationally to forge radical labour organizations (Scipes 2011).

Deeply related to these internal challenges are the questions posed above relating to what role union leaders and rank-and-file activists believe unions should play in the world today. For example, should unions, seeing their role as being largely responsible for negotiating with employers through a collective bargaining process, and working through bodies like the NLRB, continue to practice a more narrow or even rebranded

version of business unionism[46]? Or alternatively, should member activists, through implementing a vision and practice marked by an institutional structure and strategic focus towards the radical transformation of society and achieving the good life for the working-class majority, seek to make their unions more ambitious, creative organs of working-class struggle? In other words, should unionists in the twenty-first century choose resistance or collaboration?

Labour and social democratic parties—including the Democratic Party in the United States, at the center-right end of the social democratic political spectrum—have become neoliberalized, consistently proving themselves, when in power, to be stewards of capital, rather than advocates of workers (Gindin 2013, 32; Schmidt and Evans 2012). These parties, once viewed by many as the political representatives of the working class, today opt to distance themselves from their working-class and trade union base. Indeed, most unions refuse to offer any left challenge to the Democrats, as evidenced in the 2016 Presidential election in which all of the large national union federations have opted to support Hilary Clinton over the Senator from Vermont, Bernie Sanders, who is a self-identified socialist and the only independent member of the U.S. Senate. In their uncritical support for the Democratic Party machine, with the exception of some local unions, U.S. unions allow themselves to operate as junior partners in the ongoing production of uneven geographical development, and in the process further undermine

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[46] Business unionism has been the dominant description that labour studies scholars and many activists use to describe the reigning mode of union practice/praxis, whereby a union maintains a narrow economic focus on "bread and butter" issues and servicing. It is also a model of unionism with a rigidly hierarchical leadership structure, usually lacking spaces or mechanisms for members to engage in the life of the union or influence what it does. The central argument made by critical scholars and activists against a business union practice is that: "Unions that are narrowly focused on their dues base, rather than building the power of the working class, are unlikely to mobilize the energy, resources, cross-union cooperation, community support and strategic creativity needed to unionize in these more difficult times" (Gindin 2013, 32).

the power of organized labour.[47] This continued support is especially disconcerting and problematic considering the Democrats' failure to support organized labour's most recent attempts at labour law reform during the first term of the Obama administration, when there was a Democratic majority in the Senate.[48] Lastly, labour's continued support for the Democrats has made it difficult to engage in experimentation with the formation of alternative working-class political organizations. In this, the experience of the most recent attempt to build a U.S. labour party independently of the Democrats is instructive (Dudzic and Reed 2014).

All of these factors have led unions in the United States, as well as in Canada and the United Kingdom, to a certain degree of soul searching, seeking out new strategies to either maintain what power they have left in the realm of formal political influence and in the economy, or strive to increase their power through both a variety of creative and confrontational means and also undemocratic collaborative partnerships with employers and governments (Ross and Savage 2012; Simms, Holgate, and Heery 2012; Getman 2010).

Political economists Greg Albo and Bryan Evans (2010) rightly insist that we need a sober assessment of the limitations and constraints of the labour movement and the left in Canada and the United States. They are no doubt correct when they write: "Our unions and much of the leadership have lost faith in the capacity of workers to imagine and struggle for a different world." This loss of faith has resulted in union leaders often

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[47] As will be made clear later in this chapter, while the terms conservative and neoliberal are often used interchangeably, they are two distinct forms of political practice. The point here is that both political orientations lead union leaderships to fear their membership and to engage in a mode of union praxis that keeps members disorganized and passive.

[48] For the best analysis of this failure in historical perspective see Selfa (2012), Early (2011), and Davis (2007).

being preoccupied with managing the decline of working-class living standards and freedoms rather than with taking the lead in the re-creation of an effective labour movement that could help forge a new socialist politics. Unfortunately, most union members likely hold similar opinions of their unions. In part this reflects the important observation of Aronowitz (2014), with which this chapter opens: that even the limited reforms unions have historically been able to extract from capital are in danger of being lost as unions increasingly mirror their class enemy, which in many instances today is seen as a partner.[49]

In a number of recent articles, Sam Gindin (2012) observes that sophisticated PR campaigns or dire warnings about the political right and the crisis of organized labour will neither mobilize unemployed, non-unionized workers nor many of those already in unions. Besides being beaten down by the past 40 years of neoliberal political, economic, and cultural attacks and restructuring, Gindin maintains that the greatest limitation of unions today is that they are structured around representing particular groups of workers, especially those whose employment is grounded in the standard employment relationship, rather than a broad class interest. And unless unions begin to show through action—rather than slick advertisements alone—that all of their demands and struggles aim at improving the lives of working-class people as a whole, unions and those they represent will remain isolated and vulnerable, whether they retain the dues check-off or not.

Some unions have moved away from the historically important strategy of controlling or limiting the supply of labour through winning contracts that either only allow employers to hire union workers or that mandate workers join the union once hired

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[49] For one especially influential union leader's account where this argument is made, see Andy Stern's book, *A Country that Works* (2008).

and have shifted to a more inclusive model, representing skilled and unskilled alike. Besides the problem of sectionalism that Gindin rightly highlights, U.S. and Canadian unions have always been wedded to the idea of closed borders, an idea that entails limited immigration flows, tight restrictions on capital outflow, and a fixity of jobs within the territorial confines of the nation (Luce 2014, 28). It is likewise crucial to acknowledge that, within a majority of unions, including those that operate at the local or workplace scale, most members have little room or ability to exercise their own political agency within either the workplace or their own union in a free, open, and transparent manner (Early 2013). With all of the discussion in labour geography of labour's agency, this observation has seldom been acknowledged, much less explored.[50]

In order to help investigate these questions—a major objective of this dissertation writ large—this section of the chapter will summarize and evaluate the ways in which radical thinkers and activists have conceptualized unions, from Marx and Engels' work to that of contemporary political economy and other critical research on organized labour from across the social sciences. Because there is too much historical, sociological, and geographical literature for me to comprehensively address trade unions and the evolving labour question in the United States, much less globally, the work discussed here is a highly selective and partial review. Moreover, because the primary unit of analysis of this dissertation is *urban rank-and-file organizations* that operate primarily within unions, this review will focus heavily on the rank-and-file strategy and a selection of what I deem to

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[50] There are some excellent exceptions, of course. Lydia Savage (2006) highlighted this issue a number of years ago, and Ian Macdonald (2011) similarly points out how some of the major weaknesses in Herod's pioneering articles flow from his lack of attention to the internal dynamics of the International Longshore Association (ILA), which represents port workers on the east coast of the United States. Macdonald's rigorous focus on the internal life of hotel and transit workers' unions in Toronto and New York serves as an important corrective.

be the most important movements to emerge during and since the long 1970s (A. Brenner, R. Brenner, and Winslow 2010).

In proceeding in this manner, I advance the argument that it is necessary to go beyond the central problematic of U.S. and Canadian Labour Studies, *union renewal,* which, in spite of having been explored in some critically important ways by labour studies scholars, was always a somewhat limited and problematic analytical and political focus. Like other critics of this literature, I argue that the ideas of renewal and crisis fail to adequately capture the current state of the U.S. trade unions today (I. T. MacDonald 2011; Fanelli and Evans 2013; Aronowitz 2014).

The structural shifts discussed above, which have dramatically remade labour unions and the political-economic landscape in which they are embedded in North America over the past two decades, have led to shifts in strategy, including new organizing experiments, bargaining practices and outcomes, and political strategies that have in some cases led to transformations of unions. As Macdonald (2011, 213) illustrates, however, many of these changes have led to a, "contradictory reconstitution of organized labour along neoliberal lines and the impasse of the renewal project. While I think Macdonald's assessment is partially correct, depending upon the sector and union under examination, and that it is necessary to interrupt a clean conceptual divide between crisis and renewal, to argue that organized labour is totally subsumed within neoliberalism is a politically dangerous overstatement. Put differently, while Macdonald is correct to interrogate the myriad ways in which U.S. and Canadian unions collaborate with neoliberal urban economic development, and with the continuous production of uneven development, I think he bends the stick too far in his assessment of the extent to

which U.S. and Canadian unions have become neoliberalized, especially at the municipal scale. This scholarship does, however, effectively document some of the more glaring contradictions that have emerged within organized labour as unions have sought to adapt and transform themselves in the reconfigured landscapes of neoliberal capitalism. In this respect, it helps us understand why a hospitality union local like UNITE-HERE in Chicago, which represents primarily poor workers of colour, would support a neoliberal like Rahm Emanuel in the 2015 elections.

Moreover, as Gindin (2013, 28) cogently argues, the most significant weakness with the union renewal literature that developed in the late 1990s and early 2000s is that it fails to pay enough critical attention to the "capitalist context that leaves workers enmeshed in a dependence on private capital accumulation: capital does the investing, organizes production, manifests the application of science and technology, provides jobs and generates the growth and tax revenue for social programs and public employment. The understandable inclination of workers with only their labour power to sell is to accommodate to this naturalized reality, and this is expressed in the union form as the instrumental mechanisms to meet their needs." Historically, what has been required to push unions to act for the class as a whole, rather than for the workers they represent as a union, is radical elements inside and outside of unions. Thus, although unions have historically served as important vehicles for raising wages and improving working conditions, in most countries today they have grown too weak to effectively do so. In general, unions have sought to standardize wages and conditions between different locations, to create a "common rule" (Ellem 2010, 352). Carrying out this task, however, has differed in urgency according to the nature of that which is produced and the

particularities of the labour market in which it is produced, as industrial relations scholars from Sidney and Beatrice Webb (2011) onwards have shown.

Following John Allen's (2003) important theoretical work on understanding power geographically, I develop these ideas by analyzing how the power of unions is constituted, challenged, and changed by locating their multiple sites, forms, and sources of power geographically. With respect to the role that a particular place may play in union renewal, or the reconstruction of workers' power more broadly, a number of scholars (Savage 2006; Wills and Simms 2004) demonstrate the importance of constructing new spatial strategies for union organizing to match the new forms of work, especially that of the precarious non-standard variety. Interestingly, as Ellem (2010) shows, this scholarship is just as important for re-examining the more classic economic sectors, like heavy manufacturing and resource extraction, as it is for striving to develop appropriate strategies for organizing in new economic sectors and locations.

All of the external challenges discussed earlier are clearly geographical processes, even if much labour studies and industrial relations scholarship does not analyze them as such. From attacks in the workplace, urban retrenchment, austerity, and radical legal/political challenges to the very right of unions to engage in free collective bargaining, unions everywhere have had to address a multitude of intersecting problems that traverse different scales—the global restructuring and increased competition between firms in their industries, the devastating impacts that these processes have had on their members (including the loss of members) and on members of local communities around the world. Workers and their unions have had to confront these problems as they articulate through scale-specific arguments about the inevitability of globalization, and

with it increased competition, job loss, the decentralized nature of industrial relations, and the passage of anti-union legislation at the state, and increasingly municipal, scales of government.

To refocus the discussion on how best to conceptualize trade unions, let us turn now to the work of the preeminent Marxist industrial relations scholar, Richard Hyman, who, like Gindin, argues that while unions have been, since their inception, central vehicles of the struggle of some workers against some employers, it remain to be seen how they might constitute institutions or agents of a class struggle for systemic transformation, particularly given that, in many countries, unions are in a state of decline such that they represent less and less of their nation's workers. Yet, as indicated already, there are indeed few alternative workers' organizations that have the resources, membership base, and structural leverage of unions, which makes it difficult to envisage a movement for social transformation in which unions are not a central component. This does not mean, however, that actually existing unions are able or willing to take on such a transformative and leadership role.

The failure of most of organized labour to take advantage of the political opening that accompanied the most severe crisis of capitalism since the 1930s is indeed a sobering lesson, especially since it has resulted in the ruling classes across the world shifting the blame onto public sector workers, their unions, and an overly generous welfare state in order to push through austerity measures and a revamped project of neoliberalization (Hyman 2012, 153). With their increasingly narrow vision and fragmented structure, unions have been no match for the offenses of employers, especially when the state is the employer. Yet it is necessary to note that unions, since they are not themselves

revolutionary organizations, are only a component, albeit a central one, of building a socialist or anti-systemic movement whose goal is to move beyond capitalism.

When many writers and commentators refer to "the union," as though it were one thing, we need to ask what is this thing we call "the union?" As Sheila Cohen (2006) notes, the union is in fact at least two contradictory things: *institution* and *movement*. The leadership and staff that constitute the bureaucracy are bound to protect the institution, a role that typically results in a cautious, if not outright conservative, union practice. Moreover, official union leadership, in the role that it plays as negotiator and guardian of the collective bargaining agreement, finds itself in a position somewhere between the employer and the union's membership. And this position of privilege, as well as whatever perks arise from being in such a leadership position (often the most pleasing being monetary but also a reprieve from the shop floor) is enshrined by law. Further, as Moody (2014, x, my emphasis) writes, the, "need to fight for…the existence of unions in the first place are rooted in the contradictions of the capital-labor relationship, that is, in the reality of exploitation that originates in the workplace and in capital's constant push for increased relative surplus value. Thus, *in good times and bad, there is a tension between the union as institution and as movement."*

Union leadership and staff are often pulled toward defending the union as institution, which often means doing everything within their power to avoid strikes, to stay within the law, and to abide by the contract, even when the employer bends or breaks it. Importantly, it is not simply or always a matter of leaders betraying members but of the contradictory role that union officials occupy both as leaders of workers and as mediators between labour and capital. In bending to the later, unions officials have been called

"managers of discontent" (Bramble 1996). We should not, however, take this to mean that all union officials are the same, nor that all members are dying to become militants if only the leadership would resource them to do so. Indeed, a union's members are not always more politically radical or militant than their leadership in their view of what their union should be doing to represent their interests. It is the beauty and the curse of unions to have a membership that is generally not based on some mutually held political beliefs or values but on a shared employer. Sometimes, in fact, a union's leadership is to the left of its members on many issues—as has been the case to some extent in the CTU since CORE came to leadership in 2008. Union officials are not always successful in achieving their objectives because ordinary, rank-and-file members are central actors in this socio-spatial dialectic.

Analogous to Marx's understanding of the commodity, a deeper examination of the union as institution yields a conception of unions as much more complex social organisms than their critics, even sympathetic left-wing ones, often give them credit for. Union officials who, in the course of running the union, tend to have more dealings with management than with members have a tendency to insulate themselves from the influence of members so as maintain a stable bargaining relationship. This then results in distinct forms of bureaucratic rule. U.S. unions, for example, have spawned complex administrative apparatuses for the management of vast benefit programs, which have been termed a "private welfare state." In addition, the elaborate, legalistic contracts that govern the employment relations of unionized workers engender further layers of institutional insulations. This results in an even wider array of challenges for member-driven, democratic unionism.

In spite of all this, however, members continue to have needs, desires, and expectations that often stretch beyond what the leadership asserts as pragmatic from its perspective. These layers of bureaucracy and insulation become a barrier—however not insurmountable—for members seeking to realize democratic control of the union. However union officials may see themselves or their politics, in their institutional capacity their practice is shaped by a particular legal and political framework that makes it difficult to pursue a radical, even member driven agenda. For example, if members take action during the life of an agreement, a wildcat action usually deemed illegal, elected officials and staff are legally bound to discipline the membership and get them in line. Beyond this, however, union officials have financial incentives (their salaries and perks) to serve as protectors of the union as institution and of what has become its very reason for being, the collective bargaining relationship.

This, in part, helps explain why a majority of high-level U.S union officials persist in thinking, whether consciously or not, in narrow business union terms. Among other things, this means that these union officials envision the bargaining relationship—rather than the outcome—as the chief priority of the union. The contract that this relationship produces is viewed as sacrosanct, with labour politics "incarcerated in the prison of the Democratic Party" (Moody 2014, x). The trade-off made in the postwar years between management rights and no-strike clauses greatly limits the options of union leaders and of what kinds of actions the rank-and-file can legally engage in to solve workplace problems or in support of a broader political issue. Consequently, it is "precisely in the battle between labor and capital that the fight against bureaucracy and the norms of business unionism becomes a necessity. As contradictory organizations of

class struggle, unions embody a dialectic between bureaucratization and rebellion from below" (Moody 2014, xi).[51] This is crucial to remember when addressing the progressive or revolutionary potential of labour unions today.

In his 1844 book, *Conditions of the Working Class in England*, Engels (quoted in Moody 2014, 14–15, my emphasis) was the first to observe that unions, or "combinations" as they were called, were the dominant means of resisting capitalist exploitation. Strikes were, he writes, "the military school of the workingmen in which they prepare themselves for the great struggle which cannot be avoided." He further notes that, "as schools of war, the Unions are unexcelled." Marx and Engels quite explicitly denounced the absence of trade unions in the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) in their 1875 *Critique of the Gotha Program*. In this text they identified unions as "*the real class organization of the proletariat*." Similarly, in the *Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx argued that workers would come to be organized as a class through strikes and union activity. Their battles he termed a "veritable civil war." In fact, Marx and Engels were the first socialists to view unions as central to class struggle and subsequently to the fight for socialism.

While it cannot be ignored that Marx and Engels would later go on to critique the conservatism of the British trade unions, Hal Draper rightly points out that they continued to see unions as "central to their view of building class organization and consciousness" (Moody 2014, 84). As such, it was no coincidence that unions would play a key role in founding the International Workingmen's Association.

Revolutionary syndicalists have likewise tended to understand unions as essential vehicles in the struggle to achieve both immediate and long-term goals for workers. They

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[51] See also Aronowitz (2014); Burns (2015); Camfield (2013).

believed, on the one hand, that the *raison d'être* of unions is the organization of workers against employers (although not necessarily limited to any given workplace); standing at the very point where class struggle arises, workers, through their unions, organize directly against the class enemy. This has historically meant that activists with a revolutionary syndicalist orientation, in struggling against specific employers, have strived to seize every opportunity to defend and improve workers' wages, hours, and conditions of work.

On the other hand, syndicalists have long argued that unions could be transformed into *militant and revolutionary* organizations dedicated to fighting for the entire working class with the overall objective of overthrowing capitalism and establishing a new society. Victor Griffuelhe's speech at the CGT's 1906 Ameins congress reflects this dual conception of unions as both an organ of struggle and an instrument of revolutionary change: "In its day-to-day demands, syndicalism seeks the co-ordination of workers' efforts…by achieving immediate improvements…this task is only one aspect of the work of syndicalism; it prepares for complete emancipation which can only be realized by expropriating the capitalist class" (Darlington 2013, 28). Thus, revolutionary syndicalists usefully understood unions as organizations serving resistance, revolution, and, in the future, the reorganization of production and distribution. But, "syndicalists also recognized that the union could constitute instruments of revolution only if they fostered and developed the collective power and militant spirit of the workers…. Success in this endeavor depended not on the negotiating skills of the centralized, bureaucratic and asset-conscious officials who dominated existing reformist trade unions, who contented themselves with wringing short-term concessions for workers and 'whose sole purpose in life seems to be apologizing for and defending the capitalist system of exploitation.'"

This is why syndicalists have always opposed the way in which collective bargaining serves as a mechanism to both incorporate union officials and to create a system that makes it difficult, if not impossible, for ordinary workers to meaningfully engage in the new legal process that regulates labour relations. Such a process has no doubt effectively lead the majority of unions to accommodate rather than contest the employer offensive and economic restructuring that has been the centerpiece of neoliberalism (Darlington 2013, 17–18).

Related to, and in part inheritor of, the revolutionary syndicalist approach, the rank-and-file orientation, in its conception of, and practical relationship to, unions, generally stresses the revolutionary potential that unions possess in their capacity to facilitate the self-activity of the working class. In doing so, the rank-and-file tradition insists that workers learn primarily through action. And because revolution is imagined as flowing principally from the actions of workers themselves, both revolutionary syndicalists and later adherents of a rank-and-file orientation assume that socialists or radicals broadly conceived need to do no more than expose workers to the injustices of the system through collective action in and beyond the confines of the workplace (Darlington 2013, 19). This last contention should definitely be subject to critique; it assumes too natural a progression in the political radicalization of workers simply through action, leaving little room for workers to transform themselves through other forms of political organization or education.

Both these traditions have historically been concerned largely with the issues workers confront on a daily basis in the workplace; however, this has not meant that the movements have remained within the horizon of economic issues in a narrow sense.

Some of the best syndicalist and rank-and-file militants throughout the twentieth century have been working-class intellectuals who have rarely had much formal education. Whether we are talking about revolutionary syndicalists from the early twentieth century or those who raised hell in the 1970s in auto plants across the United States, many leading activists were familiar with anarchist and Marxist theory, which deeply informed their activism. This was in large part because working-class education was important to a minority of committed syndicalists (Darlington 2013, 20; Moody 2014).

A key difference between the revolutionary syndicalists of the early twentieth century and most of those who have pursued a rank-and-file strategy within unions since the 1970s is the explicit call made by the former for unions to be revolutionary—to serve as the chief political instruments of the working class to end capitalism and to build an alternative political-economic system with working people in command. Leading British syndicalist Tom Mann, who insists that "The object of the unions is to wage the Class War and take every opportunity of scoring against the enemy" (quoted in Darlington 2013, 21), articulates one important example of this perspective. In the process of battling to improve their immediate conditions of employment, workers necessarily come to understand that the power of the capitalist class rests on its ownership and control of the means of production. Thus, workers come to understand the conflict as wider than those that might exist between any one set of employers and their workers, as a conflict between the two contending classes, capital and labour. But although waging such class struggle can obtain important day-to-day concessions, this will not, in itself, free the workers from the relentless process of capitalist exploitation. This view of the world led many syndicalists to conclude that only a total revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist

social, economic, and political system can realize the emancipation of the working class, wherein the establishment of a society based on the common ownership and control of the means of production would be necessary (Darlington 2013, 22).

In terms of electoral or parliamentary politics, rank-and-file activists have not so much gravitated towards a stark rejection of engaging in the sphere of electoral politics in the United States, whether at a municipal, state, or federal scale (either through running their own candidates or seeking legislative reforms through the capitalist state), as ignored it. Electoral or parliamentary politics do not offer anything of real importance for revolutionary rank-and-file activists, who, believing that social reforms will not alter the fundamental property relations, in many respects correctly identify the power that workers have as being located in our ability to grind the system of production and distribution to a halt through mass action.

Rejecting entirely the idea held by parliamentary socialists that a new social order can only be built through the capture of political power and achieved by political and not industrial action, revolutionary syndicalists maintained that the "real power within society was economic, and only by gaining control of industries through direct action at the point of production could workers change society in their interests. Political action alone would never abolish the capitalist economic system" (Darlington 2013, 23). While this point may at first seem a bit removed from where the majority of unions are at today in terms of their political investments in the Democratic Party in the United States, these old orientations and views on workers' power, particularly on how best to create widespread political and economic change, remain highly relevant for how we understand both the internal and external challenges facing unions today and those groups of rank-

and-file dissidents that seek to fundamentally change them. As will be discussed in Chapter 5 and in the Conclusion, these tensions and contrasting orientations became acutely sharp in the municipal elections respectively in New York in 2013-2014 and in Chicago in 2014-2015.

In contrast to political parties, syndicalists contended, I think somewhat incorrectly, that unions group people according to their class interests, with no regard to values or political beliefs. According to this view, all that union members share with each other is an employer or industry, which translates into experiencing a common condition of exploitation. And while not all members experience the same forms of exploitation and marginalization, all enter in to a collective relationship with their fellow workers forced on them by the class struggle itself. The beautiful and frustrating thing is that, while political parties or activist organizations may be associations of choice, unions are more associations of necessity. Syndicalists long ago recognized unions as unique in their capacity to allow workers to move beyond their political differences and bind together as a united fighting force in the struggle against their employer, and against class exploitation more broadly.

The rank-and-file orientation that many socialists, radicals, and militant union activists, and to some extent the syndicalist movements that preceded them, have adopted since the long 1970s draws from this that union activists should not introduce explicit political ideas about socialism or anti-capitalism more broadly into the union. Such ideologies are not necessary, so the thinking went, because, to effectively bring pressure to bear on employers over wages and working conditions, unions, and the radicals within them, must organize as many workers as possible on the basis of their common "non-

controversial" economic interests. Workers of all views necessarily comprise unions, which means that to introduce any larger politics or ideology is to risk division, which in turn may hinder mass action and weaken the union in the face of employers (Darlington 2013, 26). This last contention, while certainly problematic on a number of levels, has been the overriding belief of many who have, since the 1970s, adopted the rank-and-file strategy.

Seeking to mobilize the power of workers as a class through the unions, syndicalists argue that unions would need to be reconstituted on a class and revolutionary basis. In this all syndicalists agreed because they held, I think correctly, that the existing trade unions were "too sectional in their structure, too collaborationists in their policy and too oligarchic in their government to act as agencies of revolutionary transition. But there were fundamental disagreements on the strategy of reconstruction" (Darlington 2013, 31). Syndicalists in France and the UK, for instance, adopted what they called a strategy of "*boring from within,*" or working within the existing trade union movement with the objective of transforming the character and aims of trade unions toward a revolutionary orientation. In contrast, syndicalists in the United States saw the option of building alternative, revolutionary unions as the only viable option because of the problematic nature of the craft unions, who were, even then, so thoroughly wedded to business unionism that American syndicalists saw them as "class collaborationists" under the banner of the AFL. And so they advocated a strategy referred to as "dual unionism," in which they would create independent revolutionary unions to compete against what existed as the AFL.

The rank-and-file strategy that I am interested in here also carries with it from the syndicalist tradition a dedication to *direct action*, believing that it is only through collective action, directly by, for, and of the workers themselves within the economic arena of the workplace that the working class may achieve emancipation. We can understand direct action to include any step workers take (traditionally at the point of production) that aims to improve wages and conditions and reduce hours. It has traditionally encompassed conventional strikes, intermittent strikes, work to rule, sabotage, sit-downs, and the general strike.

Ex-IWW leader William Z. Foster's (1947, 19) description of the problem of bureaucratization that arises from contract unionism captures some vital dynamics that apply today just as when he uttered these words in 1912:

> Even the most cursory examination of labour history will show that…these [union leaders], either through the innate conservatism of officialdom, fear of jeopardizing the rich funds in their care, or downright treachery, ordinarily use their great powers to prevent strikes or to drive their unions' members back to work after they have struck in concert with other workers…Syndicalist have noted this universal baneful influence of centralized power in labour unions and have learned that if the workers are ever to strike together they must first conquer the right to strike from their labour union officials.

Flowing from the above analysis, syndicalists sought to resist the consolidation of bureaucratic and reformist tendencies of unions, which they correctly feared would more generally undermine the fighting spirit of the workers. The teacher union dissidents discussed in these pages are seeking to do likewise today.

2.8. The Strategic Importance of Strong Workplace Organization

Trade unions in the United States and most parts of the advanced capitalist world have historically focused on the scale of workplace organizations, backed by national union structures. I contend that constructing strong workplace organization is

foundational to a revitalized labour movement if for no other reason than because the workplace, where surplus value is extracted from wage-labour and where workers spend so much of our lives, is the foundation of capitalist exploitation. At the same time, scholars and union activists are right to argue that *solely* focusing on the workplace as the site of struggle limits trade union power because, as corporate power has grown and become more transnationalized in the past few decades, along with corporate restructuring—and especially a shift away from non-standard forms of employment—and the development of other transnational economic practices, it has become increasingly necessary to locate the workplace in this wider spatial architecture of capital.

The context of neoliberal capitalism presents the construction of new spatial relationships amongst unions and other social movement organizations themselves as a key imperative. More specifically, as a number of scholars insist (McCallum 2013; Cumbers, Routledge, and Nativel 2008; Routledge and Cumbers 2009), unions need to develop deeper and qualitatively different relationships across national borders than the leadership/staff level relationships that exist presently in order to reverse attempts by capital to gain spatial leverage over workers. Some unions have seen positive outcomes result from campaigns that effectively organize to affect employer profiles negatively, which has necessitated moving beyond, without necessarily abandoning, the workplace through concerted, sincere efforts to engage with non-union allies. For instance, unions and grassroots community allies in the public sector can build campaigns that strongly critique the use of public money to stimulate, at most, employment and services of poor quality. Such strategies are invariably geographically contingent.

Crucial here is that organizing in the workplace relates to a wider set of networks at the local, urban, regional, national, and transnational scales; to the extent that these campaigns have been successful, they owe their victories in no small part to the specific relationships that unions are able to form in place with other community-based organizations, from radical grassroots groups and neighborhood associations to religious institutions, faith communities, and sometimes local politicians and other stakeholders (Tufts 2007). As McCallum (2013) and others highlight in their research into the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), which in the past decade has been engaged in building international campaigns—to differing degrees anchored in local communities—unions have successfully target transnational firms in the security and contract cleaning industries by deploying strategic research and global agreements organized between a number of different unions and employers in the sector. In particular, the union has come to identify through its research and organizing the emergence of global cities as key sites in the refashioning of labour markets in the property service sector. SEIU and its global partners have arrived at such a conclusion because in this sector it is difficult to map the supply chain of any one firm, making it more rational to organize across employers within the strategic node of a global city (major ports are another example of one such strategic node in the global economy). A different non-union form of organization that also illustrates such a strategy by bringing together unions, academics, and community organizations of different stripes to organize the global city is the Greater London Citizens Council in the UK (Wills et al. 2010, 384). And yet, it is crucial to think through why it is that trade union organization *at* the workplace, with union representatives— shop stewards and other worker leaders—as the frontline activists, usually, but not

always, has played such a major role in the past 100 years in recruiting, retaining, and representing members at work. In the United States and elsewhere these activists have been the life-blood of organized labour.

These activities, and the workplace or union local that emerges through them, can be understood as the socio-spatial infrastructure of union organization necessary for representing the members, distributing information, upholding union democracy, and mobilizing for action. In the years since the 1970s, however, the economic, political, and cultural factors that sustained this model of trade union organization have changed almost beyond recognition. As discussed above, due to public hostility, direct legislation, and the impacts of privatization, it is now much more difficult to maintain union organization strong enough to effect workplace change, at least for those unions who have not abandoned workplace change and control to management in exchange for promises (often false) of job security (Juravich 2007).

Moody (2014) persuasively argues that the objective of rank-and-file movements should not be limited to replacing one leadership group with another but must instead strive for the transformation of the union from the ground up. According to Moody, socialists or anti-capitalist activists more broadly should aid such efforts by playing an important leadership role from within rank-and-file struggles, rather than critiquing or dismissing what unions do, or fail to do, from the outside.

The role that socialist and other radical anti-capitalists can play within, as opposed to outside, organized labour has been only marginally considered in the union renewal literature[52]. Against labour studies scholars who argue for a more top-down, staff

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[52] See Fantasia and Voss (2004) for an illustration of those who argue for the necessity of an outside catalyst in the guise of social movement activists turned full-time union staff.

driven model of union transformation, advocates of a rank-and-file strategy demonstrate why member-driven social movement unionism is essential; "democracy is power" (Parker and Gruelle 1999) and democratization needs to begin in the workplace with strong organization *and* accountable worker leaders. Similarly, Fairbrother (1994, 109) concludes from his earlier research that union democracy is both the condition for and the means to socialist organization and practice.

Because it is at the scale of the workplace that we can, following the older argument of revolutionary syndicalists, find the ultimate source of working-class power, it is at the workplace that direct democracy or worker control can be actualized more immediately. While this might be too sweeping of a claim, especially in light of the above discussion of the restructured nature of production and corporate power, there continues to be something vital about prioritizing the workplace in union organizing, however differently that might need to be though through today, given the increasingly fragmented nature of workplaces in many areas of the economy, in relation to other tactical and strategic considerations. *Because it is on the basis of democratizing the workplace that further democratization of society may be possible, it cannot simply be overlooked or neglected as a pivotal site of struggle*. Union democracy, however, needs to move beyond simply putting members at the center of the day-to-day activities of the union and of key strategic decisions to address the "potential divisions within the unions and the working class as a whole" (Moody 2014, xi). Yet, as I show in the analysis of my case studies in Chicago and New York, these matters cannot be addressed without putting members at the center of the union and organizing among and between different sections of the working class, in, outside, and across workplaces and community spaces.

While it may be easy to explain organized labour's travails in the United States by focusing on how powerful capital is and how hegemonic market or neoliberal ideology is amongst workers—and much of the union leadership—the internal failures and fissures within unions themselves, especially around the importance of organizing at the workplace, is equally vital for our analysis, and any strategic considerations, of unions. Indeed, much contemporary labour studies scholarship that, in proposing that labour needs a more concerted turn to community, has been quick to abandon the workplace and the power that can be harnessed there by workers largely ignores the role that socialists, communists, and other far left radicals have played within the union movement to organize strong community alliances from a position of strong workplace strength. Clarence Taylor's (2010) excellent book on teacher unionism in New York City during the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, for example, powerfully demonstrates the important role that communists played in building a strong, community-based, social justice unionism. And finally sociologists Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin (2003) deploy the kinds of statistical data eschewed by most labour historians in order to reach a similar conclusion: those unions most often identified as Communist-led were highly effective shop-floor advocates for worker rights and power.

Just as important, but at a more general level of analysis, Sheila Cohen (2006), in her discussion of the decline of workers' power and the possibilities that exist for getting it back, illuminates a useful approach to understanding the political potential of working-class struggles that seem, at first blush, "insufficiently radical." Cohen (2006, 2) argues that immersion in the raw politics of class conflict, although "rarely sought by those involved," is often a life changing experience for many and the shortest road to political

awareness for workers without the luxury of a formal political education. The means by which existing campaigns, whether a militant strike or a citywide campaign for a living wage, may go beyond a struggle for particular reforms or economistic demands depends largely on the transformations that occur in the course of the struggle.

It therefore seems reasonable to ask that radical geographers and scholars working in solidarity with workers investigate how specific forms of strategic learning and political consciousness develop over the course of campaigns and struggles. Through this focus, scholars can illuminate the complexities—warts and all—of how movements and their participants reflexively evolve. In advancing our understanding of particular struggles, this analytical focus can point to more effective ways to organize future movements. This focus does not require us to presume that anti-capitalist politics motivates workers who engage in struggle. What it does obligate us to do is to ask certain questions of these workers and their movements. How existing campaigns, be they a militant strike or a citywide campaign for a living wage, may go beyond a struggle for particular reforms or economic demands depends largely on the transformations that occur in the course of the struggle.

However, in adopting such an approach to unions and rank-and-file activism, it is important to begin from the proposition that, although the new energy that has infused much of organized labor in the last decade or so, and that is taken up with great fanfare in the renewal literature, exists, the unfortunate fact that the majority of union activism aims at defending the status quo remains. As Luce (2014, 17) observes, union "efforts to preserve jobs and wage structures are the near universal subject of most major collective bargaining negotiations. Union contract settlements, even in an era of remarkably low

inflation and unemployment, barely raise the living standards of those covered by their provisions."

In a context in which most trade unionists become members without exercising any agency, and in which extraordinary agency is required to form unions, it perhaps makes more sense to investigate how unions structure working-class agency and capacity, by which we might better understand how unions both constrain and enable collective struggles of workers, both through and beyond their unions. For example, unions are structured by the state, by internal relations between officials and members, and by their geographical placement in the sphere of production. The state structures unions through labour laws and regulations that both constrain and enable collective action. Indeed, these laws and regulations proscribe particular kinds of actions, like mid-contract work stoppages, sympathy and recognition strikes, and secondary boycotts, all the while sustaining the fiscal basis of trade union organization through closed shop and dues check-off provisions, which, as noted above, have been under severe political attack in a number of states. In addition to other structures including wage labour itself and the separation between mental and manual labour, state regulation plays a role in reproducing a structure of internal relations within unions that divides the officialdom from the rank and file (Camfield 2011; Hyman 1975). Insofar as the function of representation characterizes these internal relations, union officials must articulate and promote the interests of the membership or a significant portion thereof. This relation of representation mediates the agency that workers exert through union structures in ways that are partly determined by the interests of officials in the reproduction of a position of

relative privilege and autonomy from the discipline of wage labour and also by the strategic, conceptual, and charismatic qualities required of leadership.

2.9. Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have reviewed some of what I deem to be the most pertinent discussions in the scholarly literature on union decline, renewal, labour geography, critical urban theory, and class struggle, especially that scholarship which examines rank-and-file worker activism. As I have, I hope, demonstrated, while some of this work highlights the importance of rank-and-file activism to a process of union renewal, much of this work has a profoundly limited or non-existent geographical and political economic understanding of U.S. trade unions and the situation that they find themselves confronting today. Just as importantly, this failure to appreciate a critical political economic or spatial analysis of organized labour has led many researchers to poorly grasp the significance of the relationship between urban transformation—what some have dubbed planetary urbanization (Merrifield 2014; N. Brenner 2014)—and the dynamics of working-class struggle, and trade unions in particular, in the United States.

Thus, while the chapter agrees with those who argue that there is a profound crisis in the politics of U.S. trade unions (Rosenfeld 2014) and those who argue that limitations, in particular the narrow sectionalist, economistic outlook on the problems workers face and how to address them, inhere in the contemporary form of trade unions (Ness 2014; Aronowitz 2014), I have nonetheless sought to highlight why trade unions remain pivotal organizations for workers and for rank-and-file organization and struggles. Through organization, both in and outside of the unions, rank-and-file activism can transform both the practice and institutional structure of trade unions. Only through the expansion and

deepening of rank-and-file rebellions will organized labour be able to adequately resolve the contradictions that beset labour agency as it is structured by traditional trade union organization and urban practices that work—or do not work—within neoliberal accumulation strategies. In so doing, I have sketched out in this chapter the conceptual framework I use to analyze organized labour and rank-and-file activism in Chicago and New York City respectively in Chapters 5 and 6.

Moreover, although I agree with other labour scholars (Fletcher and Hurd 1998) that we need to push against and beyond the false binary of "business" versus "social" unionism, I follow Tufts (2010, 88) in his contention that we need to embed our conceptual framework of unions in deep theoretical accounts of evolving labour-capital-state relations. A key premise of this chapter has been that, as we strive to understand the wider social, political, and economic factors that have led to the crisis facing the U.S. labour movement today, it is just as vital that we pay close attention to the internal life of unions so that we may both understand the source of union decline and, as solidarity researchers, contribute to reversing it. As Jane Latour (2013, 278) argues, we "need to diagnose the internal contradictions, structural impediments, the culture of entitlements, and other institutional obstacles that prevent organized labour from living up to its potential and its promise."

Focusing on the internal dynamics within unions and the politics and practice of rank-and-file reformers yields a unique perspective on the central theoretical concern of labour geography, that of worker agency, but also on how unions might be transformed into vehicles for the creation of spatial justice. In particular, this analytical focus illuminates why the question of agency must also be a question of multiple and

contentious agencies in the making that are formed and reformed through a process of struggle.

Finally, it is crucial to remember Marx's wise point that people make their own history—and geographies—certainly not just as they please, but neither as their academic advisors envisage. Strategic learning within organized labour is a product of collective debate and collective struggle. In this process, the most useful contribution of academics is to elaborate the right questions, not to short-circuit the collective search for answers.

Chapter 3: Geographies of Education Reform and Urban Neoliberalism in Chicago and New York City

So, that Chicago wouldn't end up like a Detroit or a Cincinnati, and I mean specifically end up with a larger African-American poor population, the city decided that they needed to, I was going to say whiten up the city, but it's probably more green up the city, more money to get, in order to get people to want to live in Chicago…Alongside with the cleansing or the dismantling of the public housing in Chicago the schools closed. So you got rid of the schools and you got rid of the housing. So, that's my theory. We're working on trying to make this a wealthier city, a world-class city they call it, you know...And in the meantime let's make some money out of it. The selling of property, the selling of the schools, the Chicago Public schools is an easy way to do that. Turning them into public-private schools, you know, charters, the busting of the unions. You gotta bust the unions because the unions are the ones that are going to be fighting it, you know. So it was all planned and it's being carried out. And, in recent history, I don't want to sound conceded, but in recent history, CORE was one of the first groups to be able to pull people together and get out into the streets and fight. Has it done much good? I feel better about things. Has it made a big difference? Maybe it slowed it [the transformation effected by these policies] down. Cause up until about three years ago the city, this is the way it works: here you, we make this announcement, we're going to have a community meeting, ok. People show up great, but we're not going to tell you, maybe a day or two before that there's going to be this meeting and this is your opportunity to talk against some policy, some school closing, something. And then they, the board would have a meeting and say that, ok it passed anyway.

Chicago Teacher and founding member of CORE (CH1 Interview, May 2011)

3.1 Introduction

Education scholars and geographers have in recent years been collaborating and developing a rich sub-field of education geography (Chris Taylor 2009). In taking a spatial turn in critical education scholarship, researchers have typically approached their inquiries through a socio-temporal lens that draws on the works of Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Pierre Bourdieu, Edward Soja, and others to expand the sociological study of education by insisting on the different ways in which "space matters" to the study of education (Ferrare and Apple 2010, 209–10). Geographers have described spaces of

education as "rich subjects of critical geographical analysis," especially as "neoliberal reforms… are transforming the spaces, subjectivities, and power relations of education" (McCreary, Basu, and Godlewska 2013, 255). A critical spatial approach to issues of education has indeed illuminated many issues, even though within the discipline of geography education is a relatively young field. Luckily, a number of education scholars outside the discipline have deployed theoretical tools from critical spatial theory to analyze a wide array of problems, examining such issues as the globalization of educational policy; the uneven distribution of educational provision, outcomes and resources, school closings and communities in decline; education reform and the planning, restructuring and governance of educational institutions, the relationship between capitalist urbanization, crisis, and race (Basu 2010).

There has not been, however, much of an engagement in this literature with the dynamics and activity of teachers' unions, or the role urban educators have played in these larger processes, whether in collaboration or contestation with neoliberalism. Nor has there been an attempt to examine *education spaces as spaces of work*, thereby integrating insights from labour geography into the analysis of the spatialities of education. Following the lead of Claudia Hanson Thiem (2009, 155), I adopt here a strategically decentered and outward-looking geography of education that "deliberately situates its object(s) of analysis relative to broader research programs (i.e. beyond the sector)," in which "educational systems, institutions, and practices become useful, if not essential, foundations for a variety of theory-building projects." In other words, I develop an analysis of education as it relates to wider political, economic, and social processes,

which in turn will yield greater insight not just into education policy and practice but also theory into social transformation more generally.

All debates or discussions on public policy are in reality debates over the nature of what our society will look like and how our political and economic institutions will get us from the present way of organizing life to more egalitarian, just futures and geographies. As I suggest in my introduction, this claim is perhaps nowhere more accurate than in the realm of education policy. Education policy does not, or at least should not, merely pertain to immediate problems and policy outcomes in terms of standardized test scores or efficiency. As Stephen Ball (2013) has observed, because most people in the United States will spend at least a decade of their formative years in schools, of one variety or another, it is schools that should be understood as the most important institutions of socialization outside of the immediate family.

Nonetheless, unlike the socialization that happens within one's family, policy makers have a more direct ability to mold what transpires in public schools, how they are governed, and how they are funded. Although there are critical scholars that have contended that the socialization that occurs in any school is by definition authoritarian, others have maintained that some form of socialization is required in all societies (for example, Illich 1971). Although socialization clearly takes place in an increasingly expansive universe of public and private places, schools remain essential institutions in process of social and political life. As a result, we should view schools—with their assigned task of shaping the values and world-views of future citizens and workers—as a vital site of political struggle (Gutmann 1987; Harvey 1989).

In order to better understand the transformation that constitutes corporate education reform in the United States—and particularly how and where it fits into wider processes of urban neoliberalization and its changing socio-spatial configurations—this chapter will proceed in the following manner. First, I provide a brief theoretical overview of public schooling under capitalism. In the second and third sections I develop a more focused analysis of education restructuring in Chicago and New York City in relation to both this more general historical and conceptual discussion on public schooling and to how neoliberalization has developed in these two cities. It is here that I provide a sustained exploration of the key social, spatial, political, and economic changes that have transformed both cities, around which the neoliberalization of public schooling has unfolded.

Educational restructuring in Chicago and New York needs to be understood within the context of the deep shifts that have occurred in the global political economy analyzed in the previous chapter. These shifts have been the product of politics and have had a devastating impact on Black and Brown working-class communities, resulting in waves of "targeted abandonment" (Harvey 1989), dispossession, and new forms of social control as an increasingly deindustrialized New York and Chicago pursued a global city development path driven by finance, tourism, and real estate (Sassen 2001).

The central argument I make in this chapter is that *the education reforms which constitute the neoliberal agenda in K-12 public education must be put into a context in which they are part of a bundle of other neoliberal policies aimed at competitive city building, whereby public services and public infrastructure under neoliberalism are increasingly concerned with producing a profitable urban territory as opposed to*

addressing the differential needs of working-class residents. This chapter probes the question of whether or not the urban accumulation strategies out of which these education reform policies emerge open up a spatial basis of some kind through which teachers' unions and their allies might leverage greater influence over public policy and politics more generally. In part, I follow Jason Hackworth's (2007) contention that we can develop a profound understanding of both contemporary urbanism and neoliberalism through an examination of the various empirical fragments that exist today. As such, this chapter aims to address how and why Chicago and New York have pioneered a neoliberal path in K-12 education and the material consequences for doing so.

Transformations in education policy, I contend, have been central to—and grasping these policies will yield insight about—broader processes of neoliberalization in both cities. In striving to better understand how the public system of education in the United States may be strengthened and democratized, I outline how corporate education reform articulates with broader socio-spatial, cultural, and political-economic processes of neoliberalization in Chicago and New York City.

Of similar importance to my thesis is Ranu Basu's contention that the "city-school relationship is also intrinsically linked to the planning and sustainability of urban regions through the quality and vibrancy of its educational institutions. Cities provide the context for communities of difference and have brought educational institutions to the forefront of these debates as sites of empowerment and social cohesion" (Basu 2010, 874). While we recognize that both schools—and, as argued in the previous chapter, unions—are sites of contention, struggle, and emancipatory possibilities, we should heed the analyses of critical education scholars who have long argued that in capitalist social formations

educational spaces tend to serve as, "sites of cultural and social reproduction succumbing to dominant class values systems" (Basu 2010, 875). Indeed, one of the central contentions of this chapter is that the relegation of the educational sphere to the logics of the market and maximization of profit reflected in calls for privatization, accountability, choice, and the streamlining of the production of knowledge into professional, technical, and vocational training for workers, makes clear that the neoliberal project for public schools functions to manipulate workers into complacency to the dominant capitalist system more effectively than the liberal model of schooling that has been dominant in the United States and Canada throughout the twentieth century.

Even with respect to how public schooling has functioned since its creation in the United States in the late nineteenth century, critical scholars, especially those operating within a classical Marxist tradition, like Bowles and Gintis, argue that public schools serve specifically to socialize students as complacent and pliable citizens and employees within capitalism. According to this line of thinking, schools, first, tend to support the processes of capitalist accumulation and authority by stratifying students and fostering particular kinds of consciousness and behaviours. Secondly, and relatedly, schools also serve as key mechanisms for the legitimation of ideologies of freedom, individualism, and meritocratic equality, in spite of the deep racial, gender, and class inequities that exist in the school system. And thirdly, schools operate as sites for the production, distribution, and consumption of knowledge, skills, and hegemonic culture. Indeed, this analysis seems to be more correct than not, and so I share the contention of John Bellamy Foster (2011) that this work constitutes a useful springboard from which to develop an analysis of how the political economy of schooling functions in the United State today even if

these three functions of schooling may at times work against each other (Apple, Au, and Gandin 2009).

Of equal importance to the theory of education I elaborate in this chapter is the hope and possibility that can be drawn from an examination of the struggles that occur in these spaces. For, as Basu (2010, 875) reminds us, despite the challenge of marginality, "scholars have shown that the collective consciousness and political agency generated within spaces of education can also provide a public venue for social struggle and transformation." In this vein, this chapter charts the challenges faced by urban educators and their unions and illuminates the possibilities that emerge through this resistance. As Kenneth Saltman (2009) argues, the alternative curricula and school models that are being developed within struggles may provide us with the means to theorize and challenge the very exploitation of labour that schools have historically prepared students to submit to. While not the main focus of this study, such alternatives are being advanced in both Chicago and New York.

Put differently, Saltman (2009, 92, my emphasis) rightly insists, "Though public schools do often serve as ideological state apparatuses, they are nonetheless open to the possibility of being remade in democratic ways because ownership and control of such schools remain public and stays within the realm of public debate and oversight…*the question is how to strengthen and further democratize a public system* that needs to be understood as a crucial place for the making of critical democratic citizens." This kind of structural, yet open, understanding of education and the role of public schools lies at the core of my theoretical understanding of education in the United States.

3.2 The Corporate Education Deform Agenda

In the corridors of business, think-tanks and government offices, public schools and universities are increasingly viewed as lucrative spaces for economic investment. Indeed, the industry that has been built around standardized testing and the implementation of systems of high stakes "accountability" for U.S. teachers and school administrators, when combined with the expansion of charter schools, is estimated to grow to approximately $163 billion in the next 10 years. This is equivalent to about 20% of the current K-12 education budget in the United States (Koyama 2010; Bellamy Foster 2011). The manufactures of standardized tests, textbooks, and test prep materials, like Pearson and McGraw-Hill, gorge themselves at the public trough as they receive a steady stream of government contracts worth millions of dollars. In part, this explains why these companies spend so much to influence government policy (Strauss 2015). While this is but one particular part of the education industry, it appears to be the most profitable; the increasingly standardized curriculum that is due in large part to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that have been introduced under the Obama administration requires new materials each year as more grade levels are required to take tests (Lamphere and Super 2012). While the CCSS was paid for largely by the Gates Foundation and education service firms like Pearson, it has been copyrighted by the Council of Chief State Officers and the National Governors Associations, which are quasi-government institutions that are insulated from public accountability and democratic control. So, while CCSS is imposed on states and local school districts, in effect serving as the bedrock of the entire high-stakes standardized testing regime, neither the federal or state

governments, nor the teaching profession, have any control of Common Core (Bellamy Foster 2016).

Alongside this section of the corporate education industry, what Bellamy Foster (2016, 4) describes as the "apex of finance monopoly capital," we have witnessed in the past two decades a vast expansion in privatization through contracting out of work in public schools in Chicago, New York, and across the nation. As former reporter for the Chicago-based magazine *Catalyst*, Sarah Karp (2015) observes, "Public schools have long outsourced certain services, covering, for instance, transportation and meals. These days, however, numerous jobs are handled by companies, from custodians and nurses and recess monitors. Even instruction is sometimes out-sourced, often through computers via education software. Not to mention that currently more than a fifth of Chicago's public schools are run entirely by private entities in the form of charter schools or contract schools." State governments have facilitated this particular form of privatization by, oddly enough, stipulating that schools can only legally be operated as not-for-profits. As now disgraced—and recently indicted—former CEO of Chicago Public Schools, Barbara Byrd-Bennett (who was appointed after the 2012 CTU strike), shows, there is no shortage of creative ways through which for-profit companies are allowed to run, or make large sums of money from, the school system in Chicago. For example, schools have often been run de facto by for-profit enterprises through a nestled system of sub-contracting wherein CPS buries their contractors within the contracts of non-profit organizations. The U.S. Department of Education's federal grant competitions, *Race to the Top (RTTP)* and School Improvement Grants, vastly expanded contracting after 2009. Karp (2015) explains: "Under U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan's 'School Improvement Grants,'

the $3.5 billion initiative to improve the nation's bottom 5 percent of schools, [included] among the ways to qualify for funding: Work with outside companies or organizations." Karp (2015) makes a closely related key observation by noting, "when federal dollars are directed to schools through one-time grants, the funds are less likely to reach the classroom through such investments as reducing class size or adding counsellors or social workers. Because a grant is a one-time cash infusion, it cannot be spent for continuing operating expenses; hiring contractors to help with staff development becomes an appealing use for the money." Thus we can see how government actors at different scales expand capital accumulation in public education through an array of nefarious mechanisms (Picciano and Spring 2012).

These developments exacerbate what education scholars have critiqued as the propensity for educational spaces in capitalist nations to serve as "sites of cultural and social reproduction succumbing to dominant class values systems" (Basu 2010, 875). Of similar importance, education geographers and those employing a critical spatial lens have demonstrated how neoliberal education reform policy, insofar as it leads not simply to a struggle over geographic spaces but to a struggle over social spaces and the discourses used to construct them, must be viewed not only as a spatial project but as an educational one.

The neoliberal framework of public policy and economics views education solely as a private investment that parents make in their children or that an individual makes in him or herself so as to better compete in the labour market. This economizing[53] of education discourse and policy has its intellectual and political roots in the Chicago

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[53] As Joel Spring (2014, 1–2) defines it, economization refers to the "increasing involvement of economists in education research, the evaluation of the effectiveness of schools and family life according to cost/benefit analyses, and the promotion of school choice in a competitive marketplace."

School of Economics, and in particular in the work of Milton Friedman, who introduced the idea of school choice in an essay published in 1955, and elaborated more fully on this idea in his infamous book, *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962). Yet, it would be his pupil, Gary Becker (1980; 2000), who would most fully elaborate the theory of human capital development and apply market logic to public education.

And while it is no doubt correct that education policy in the United States has constantly walked a fine line between preparing workers for the labour market and producing subjects capable of participating as democratic citizens—a project that has always been highly racialized, gendered, exclusionary, and geographically irregular—contemporary restructuring barely feigns any commitment to the liberal model of educating a democratic citizenry (Sears 2003). Instead it focuses rhetorically (if not substantially) on "human capital development" as the principal objective of schooling (Lipman 2011b; Spring 2014). Yet, I would suggest, many of the policies and practices that constitute neoliberalization in education are not aimed at preparing students for the labour market at all—because, as discussed earlier, the majority of available jobs are low-wage/low-skill and require little formal education. Indeed, I concur with scholars who argue that a central motivation of corporate education policy has been the social containment of the overwhelmingly racialized populations and communities that comprise what is thought of by economic and political elites in U.S. cities as a surplus of humanity (Buras 2014; Lipman 2011b).

3.3 A Brief Overview of Marxist Theories of Public Schooling

Stepping back from the analysis of how neoliberalization has transformed public education in the United States, it is useful to expand briefly on how Marxist theory can

help us understand the role that public schooling has served in capitalist societies. Generally, Marxist theorists of education and social reproduction[54] agree that states and capital have historically developed schooling in capitalist societies for the primary purpose of reproducing capitalist relations, as well as the ideology and culture of the ruling classes. Yet, when we examine the actual history of public education in the United States and elsewhere, and the messy reality of what occurs within schools today, we can clearly see that this functionalist account was never so neat. No historical account of schools or theory of how schools operate and what purpose they serve would be complete without looking at what students, teachers, parents, and a plethora of other groups have done to create and transform public schooling (Katznelson and Weir 1985b). Put differently, because "concrete human praxis may either reproduce or transform" society, radical political struggle on the part of students and workers inside and outside of educational institutions possess the potential to remake schools into spaces for emancipation and genuine forms of human development (Morrow and Torres 1995, 32).

The key dissimilarities between various Marxist theories of education revolve around the differences between rigid and overly structuralist, static models and more fluid frameworks that conceptualize schooling as emerging through the dialectic of agency and structure (Morrow and Torres 1995, 35). Rootedness in a deterministic conception of the base-superstructure model of capitalism, which posits a fairly simple reproductive relationship between capitalism and schools, characterizes the former (Bowles and Gintis 2011), whereas the ways in which human agency can disrupt, or at least complicate, the relationship between schools and capitalism, and at the same time foreground the

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[54] The concept of social reproduction originates in Marx's (1967, 1:724) statement that not only does capitalism produce commodities and surplus value, capitalist production "also produces and reproduces the capitalist relation; on the one side the capitalist, on the other the wage laborer."

importance of domination and struggle based on the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and other markers of difference that structure class exploitation and the struggles it engenders, characterize the latter, which are more open. Some present this divide as one between "Scientific Marxism" and "Critical" or "Open Marxism"; the latter stressing the importance of human agency and critiques the positivism, determinism, and structuralism of the former, while Scientific Marxism critiques Critical Marxism for being overly voluntarist and idealist (Morrow and Torres 1995, 125–26).

Each of these two schools of Marxist thought is present in the debate on schooling. The contention that educational systems should be transformed, for example, into emancipatory rather than oppressive institutions is common across Marxist thought on education. However, structural-functionalists such as Bowles and Gintis argue that any effort to remake schools *within* capitalism in ways that do not correspond with the prevailing economic order are doomed to fail because the economic base determines schooling. Conversely, schooling, even if rendered emancipatory through struggle, cannot impact the economy. In contrast, Gramsci (2011), and subsequently, neo-Gramscians like Giroux (1983; 2011), argue that schools, which aid in the reproduction of capitalism and its hegemony, are a crucial aspect of civil society. Thus, any radical or socialist activity should see schools as a similarly important site of struggle for waging what Gramsci describes as a "war of position" within the political, social, and cultural institutions that structure capitalist hegemony.

Before elaborating on this line of neo-Gramscian thought in education, it is useful to continue to discuss earlier Marxist scholarship that was the first to fully elucidate a structuralist conceptualization of how schools serve to reproduce capitalism. In this

regard, the work of Louis Althusser (2001) is paramount. Althusser views the school system as a key component of what he calls the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), which by and large is a constellation of different institutions that function to reproduce capitalism through ideology. Yet these institutions also employ methods of repression and violence. According to Althusser, schools teach children both their class role in capitalist society and the ideology of the ruling class; however, this function of schools in reproducing capitalism both economically and culturally is hidden and cloaked. Althusser's work, first published in 1970, has been highly influential on subsequent Marxist theorizations.

The most important example of this influence, already mentioned, is the "correspondence principle" developed by the U.S. economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis in their seminal work, *Schooling in Capitalist America*, originally published in 1977 (2011). Important differences exist, however, between Althusser's theory of schools and that developed by Bowles and Gintis. In their early work, Bowles and Gintis are far more economistic and deterministic than Althusser and fail to incorporate any real conceptualization of the state or politics within their theory of schooling in capitalist America. Althusser, on the other hand, argues that the material base was only "determinant in the last instance." In formulating it thus, he ascribes a significant role to the state and to politics more generally in molding schools and other components of the ISA.

The correspondence principle posits that "changes in the structure of education are associated historically with changes in the social organization of production" (Bowles and Gintis 2011, 224), because the function of the public school system is to reproduce

and socialize workers according to the requirements of the capitalist economy. For example, if the economy or mode of production undergoes a dramatic shift (e.g. from Fordism to post-Fordism), then the school system must likewise transform so that it can then produce the new type(s) of workers and social division of labour necessary to meet the needs of the reconfigured mode of production. The loss of harmony between schooling and production occurs regularly as production changes, so *capital* intervenes both directly and indirectly, with mechanistic regularity, to restructure the form and social relations of schooling, because non-correspondence cannot be tolerated for long. These characteristics of the school system result from the fact that schools, because they are located within the totality of capitalist social relations, cannot be significantly overcome without a socialist revolution (Bowles and Gintis 2011).

The ideological function of the school system within liberal societies is directed at the production of citizens that accept their position in the social division of labour, the power of the capitalist class to govern the economy, the hierarchy of the workplace, and the coexistence of political democracy alongside economic authoritarianism. In order to gain this consent, students must internalize what appears as common sense: that they live in a meritocracy in which anyone can climb the socioeconomic ladder if they work hard and become appropriately educated. The school system accomplishes all of these requirements through the use of a grading system to legitimize the social inequality that schools reproduce and through enforcing a hierarchical structure between students and teachers/administrators in order to produce citizens/workers/subjects accustomed to the alienation and oppression inherent in capitalist production.

Importantly, Bowles and Gintis (2011) extend these contentions to argue that the efforts of "liberal" reformers in the 1960s to make schools places of freedom and learning that improve the lives of students and the wellbeing of society cannot succeed until the capitalist economy is replaced through a revolutionary socialist transformation. Moreover, they claim that economic status is largely inherited regardless of the level of education obtained and that IQ is unimportant in this process of inheritance. They furthermore contend that *schools focus on teaching behaviours rather than skills, in part because behaviour determines market success.* While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to more fully unpack all of these contentions, they certainly warrant further analysis and should be brought into any discussion of what educational change of any kind can achieve so long as capitalism remains the dominant mode of organizing our lives.

Critics of the correspondence principle claim that it lacks complexity and does not adequately take into account historical discontinuities in the relationship between production and education (P. MacDonald 1988). Moreover, they argue, it fails to acknowledge the importance of non-class-based forms of oppression, such as race, sexuality, and gender. And in staking out such a stark economistic and deterministic hypothesis on schooling in capitalist society, Bowles and Gintis disregard the relative autonomy and agency of states, schools, teachers, and students in producing, reproducing, changing, and resisting the content and structure of schooling (Katznelson and Weir 1985b).

Finally, critiques of the correspondence principle rightly charge that it fails to engage with theories of consciousness or subjectivity, culture, ideology, hegemony,

counter-hegemony, and resistance in schools and in society more broadly (Apple 1983; Giroux 1983). In so doing, Bowles and Gintis likewise fails to subject to criticism the role that race, racism—and white supremacy more generally—have played in the historical development and transformation of public schooling in the United States.

This is, indeed, a major deficiency because schools have been one of the most important battle grounds in the shifting dynamics of the racial order in the United States, serving both to subjugate racialized people and to constitute places where racialized, primarily African American, teachers and elders have sought to empower and prepare Black children for survival in a capitalist United States structured by white supremacy (Buras 2014). I will return to an analysis of how race and racism fit into the evolution of public schooling in the United States and neoliberalization in Chicago and New York shortly.

These critiques are correct to point out that the correspondence principle cannot explain resistance to, and contradictions within, school reform. This is because it neglects the relative autonomy of schools from the social relations of capitalism. The correspondence model also pays inadequate attention to the leading role of the state—and in particular a conception of the state as an arena of politics and struggle—in restructuring education. In part this is a result of a notion implicit within the correspondence approach that suggests that restructuring, resulting from underlying economic imperatives and due to the interventions of capital, occurs in a somewhat spontaneous fashion. These inadequacies of the correspondence thesis, I contend, are the by-products of its tendency to treat the school system, as well as the capitalist state in general, as an epiphenomenon of the economic base. Thus, Bowles and Gintis

erroneously claim that schools, students, and teachers are destined to fulfill particular roles in the capitalist economy due to their objective class location and function, which in turn overlooks resistance within schools and among students and teachers against the structure and practices of capitalism. Although the work of Bowles and Gintis has played a valuable role in demystifying schooling in capitalist society, and provides a useful place to begin our analysis of public education in the United States today, their hyper-structuralist and functionalist approach does not fully allow for change from within the school system or capitalism more generally.

Overall, Bowles and Gintis ignore both politics and struggles around the state, questions of racism, and the processes of production and social reproduction within capitalism. This is why they cannot account for the variety of educational policies, the contradictions between these policies, and the needs of the particular capitalist mode of production and accumulation at certain times and within certain spaces.

Attempting to attend to the shortcomings of their original conceptualization, Bowles and Gintis (1981, 21) move away from a vulgar base/superstructure model, which views schools and states as part of the superstructure of capitalism, towards a conception of schools and states as sites with their own social dynamics, and subsequently their own possibilities that cannot be determined in a simplistic manner by the overarching social relations of capitalism. Bowles and Gintis, then, propose that states, families, and modes of production be conceived as "*sites of social practice.*"

At the same time, they claim that socialist discourse is too idealistic and that progressive social change can only occur within the discourse of liberalism. Bowles and Gintis (1981, 24) assert that the primary contradiction that afflicts the education system is

that education is involved in both the site of the state, where rights are vested in persons, and site of the capitalist production process, where rights are vested in property. The capitalist state, then, is not necessarily a site of domination, but is instrumental in realizing democratic socialism (Bowles and Gintis 1981). They go so far as to say that democratic socialism is a combination of the liberal discourse of individual rights and "appeals for solidarity and co-operation" (1981, 28).

The notion of "sites of social practice" provides some autonomy for, and agency in, schools; however, it continues to maintain the determinism of the original model in that it fails to engage concepts and theories of relative autonomy, struggle, hegemony, culture, and counter-hegemony. Moreover, in making their revised case, Bowles and Gintis continue to subscribe to spontaneous correspondence without state intervention. But, as my discussion of U.S. education policy below illustrates, the state is deeply involved in any restructuring of the public school system.

While I think Bowles and Gintis are right to move away from the base/superstructure variant of Marxism, they shift to an erroneous pluralistic conception of the state as a site where different groups struggle for power and the majority rules. Not only does this confuse the state with government, but this view ignores the move by states toward authoritarianism in recent decades as well as the fact that various state institutions (for example, the judiciary, central banks, and the military) are not structured according to liberal democratic principles but rather in an authoritarian manner (Poulantzas 1978). Finally, while a government may be formally democratic, most liberal state institutions, like those in the United States and Canada, are significantly non-

democratic. As William I. Robinson argues, we would do better to understand these states as a form of polyarchy.[55]

Another troubling and regressive change found in the revised work of Bowles and Gintis on public schooling is their contention that, because it is too idealistic to want to replace liberal discourse with socialist discourse, socialists should simply work within, and deliver on the promises of, liberal democracy. This reification of liberal discourse fits with their pluralist view of the state. In contrast, Poulantzas (1978) convincingly argues that liberal discourse and ideology benefit the ruling classes because they atomize and individualize people while hiding the exploitation of workers. Thus, subordinate classes and groups in capitalist society cannot rely on liberal discourse for emancipation. It is idealistic, and I would add politically naïve, for Bowles and Gintis to believe otherwise. This is an important point not simply as a critique of these particular authors but because it could as easily be applied to many contemporary scholars of education, such as Diane Ravitch, as well as to many of the progressive reform struggles that surround schools today, which are similarly hampered by such a liberal framework.

Therefore, neither the original nor the revised correspondence model can explain contradictions, inconsistencies, and resistance in schooling under capitalism and the role of the state in motivating and attempting to implement and enforce school reforms according to the requirements of capital accumulation. Moreover, the regression resulting

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[55] Robinson (2014, 230) borrows the term "polyarchy'" from Robert Dahl and extends it in his analysis of U.S. "democracy promotion." By invoking it, Robinson argues that when the kind of democracy practiced and advocated by the U.S. government is actually one of "elite rule by transnational capitalists and agents or allies, in which the participation of the masses is limited to choosing among competing elites in tightly controlled elections… Polyarchy claims to be a process conception of democracy – procedurally free elections. But the claim is antinomious, since social and economic democracy is explicitly excluded yet implicitly included."

in Bowles and Gintis' shift towards liberal discourse and the pluralist conception of the state nullifies the progress they made by adding a significant degree of complexity to the correspondence principle.

With this critique in mind, I contend that any improved Marxist theory of public schooling must account for the predominant political, ideological, material, and structural forces, struggles, and contradictions in a given conjuncture and social formation in order to avoid determinism, economism, and idealism. *The main structural contradiction that exists within public schools in the United States today is that between the relative autonomy of schools and the structural power of capital.*

A related dynamic that needs to be figured into our analysis is that of race and racism within schools; the relation between the neoliberalization of public schools and the transformation in racialized capitalism that feminizes, and thereby devalues, teachers' work, which most acutely affects elementary teachers who are charged with instructing and caring for young children, should be more fully integrated into our overarching understanding of public education in the United States today. It must be acknowledged that, given the role they play in society in reproducing labour power and socializing/disciplining young people, schools, both as sites of ideological reproduction and vital public spaces in neighborhoods across every city, are especially valuable socio-spatial terrains of struggle for the working class.

3.4 The Contemporary Landscape of Public Schooling in the United States

Many conservatives, including former President George W. Bush, acknowledge the problem of growing economic inequality in the United States. Driving this rising inequality, for Bush and other conservatives, is "an economy that increasingly rewards

education and skills because of that education" (Marsh 2011, 3). Commenting on his speech, the *Washington Post* (Abramowitz and Montgomery 2007) observed that "Bush's remarks were an unremarkable statement about what many economists accept as common wisdom," which says that rising economic inequality is due to differences in education that people bring to the labour market. *The view that education has the capacity to make or break lives traverses the political spectrum.* For instance, President Barack Obama and one of his former chief economic advisors, Lawrence H. Summers, hold the same faith in the power of education to alleviate poverty and economic inequality, claiming that "the most serious domestic problem in the United States today is the widening gap between the children of the rich and the children of the poor. And education is the most powerful weapon we have to address that problem" (quoted in Marsh 2011, 14).

This corresponds well with a recently published OECD report that argues that, since the Great Recession of 2007-2008, education and training have been key contributing factors in national economic recovery (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2013). Also in this vein, Bill Gates (quoted in Marsh 2011, 15) observed in 2009 that "the fact is that education holds the key to personal and national economic well-being, now more than at any time in our history." Gates has used his foundation to dedicate hundreds of millions of dollars to the cause of "saving" the U.S. education system by dismantling it and putting it back together according to a privatized, corporate model with high stakes standardized testing as both its foundation and central mechanism for achieving this new system. Although education in the United States has long been held up as the great equalizer, U.S. public schooling today actually does more to perpetuate class and racial inequality than to ameliorate it.

This does not mean that the project of public education should be abandoned. Because as John Marsh (2011, 15) insists, "Inequality does not begin or end at school. The idea that school creates it, or that schooling can put an end to it, is a fantasy that should be dismissed once and for all." As an English scholar and adult educator, Marsh has written perhaps the most thorough debunking of this narrative of education as the panacea for economic inequality and all of society's ills. In *Class Dismissed: Why We Cannot Teach Or Learn Our Way Out Of Inequality* (2011), Marsh vigorously demonstrates how and why politicians, economists, and a host of think-tanks and non-profits, along with many academics, tirelessly peddle the line that education is the panacea for alleviating poverty and economic inequality. In *Class Dismissed* Marsh brings a wide range of qualitative and quantitative research to bear to illustrate how and why this explanation falls flat. Marsh argues that this focus on education is more an expression of capitalist apologetics than scientific explanation rooted in quality research. *Class Dismissed* exhaustively documents why such a focus on graduating more students from university is not only misguided but, in placing an emphasis on education as the primary mechanism for achieving social and economic prosperity, is a dead end. Not only will more accessible and better education—however the latter is defined—not adequately address the deep problems of poverty and inequality in the United States, but *this obsession with education as the gateway to social and economic mobility serves to obfuscate the underlying systemic failures of capitalism*. Marsh forcefully, and with a wide variety of meticulously researched sources, makes the case that economic inequality and poverty are rooted in economics and politics, not education (or the lack thereof). Arguing that what happens in classrooms across America is still important, Marsh (2011,

202) writes: "Equality of educational opportunity may not lead to greater equality of outcomes, but that does not mean it has no value."

The notion underlying much contemporary public policy, that education is the cure-all for social ills and can thus substitute for a genuine federal job creation policy, for instance, came to dominate discussions about "opportunity, prosperity and poverty in American life" (Marsh 2011, 21) and pushed out of the debate different ways that Americans once imagined they could advance in society (e.g. through collective struggle and a more expansive welfare state).

Despite a plethora of evidence to the contrary, many Americans continue to believe that they (and anyone) should be able to learn their way out of poverty. This belief in the transformative power of education flows, Marsh compellingly argues, from a desire held by many people to believe that we live in a just world, in which people get what they deserve if they work hard enough and apply themselves in school. While this assertion may be valid, Marsh makes little effort to offer supporting evidence or interrogate the cultural mechanisms through which such an ideology takes root in the American scene. While neither Marsh nor I would go so far as to argue that educational outcomes are not hugely important for improving the quality of someone's life—and his or her prospects for greater success in the labour market—all of the best economic and sociological research on the relationship between educational outcomes and economic inequality clearly demonstrates that the best way to improve the former is by first decreasing poverty and inequality.

Every day in the United States approximately 50 million school-aged children, out of 75 million, attend public K-12 schools. Of these nearly 1.3 million children attend

public pre-K schools. This massive operation employs close to 3.1 million full-time teachers, along with many substitute teachers, paraprofessionals, speech pathologists, nurses, guidance councillors, bus drivers, custodians, skilled trades people, and cafeteria workers. A network of traditional neighbourhood schools, charters, and public-private partnerships comprises this massive system of public education.

At the core of the neoliberal governance of these large urban school systems is the replacement of democratically elected school boards with mayoral-appointed bodies, the demand for union "flexibility," an increase in charters, merit pay schemes, and new evaluation systems for teachers tied to "value-added metrics" of student evaluations based on standardized tests. These new teacher evaluation systems have been used to undermine seniority rights and make it easier to fire teachers.

These trends have disproportionately targeted veteran teachers, and in particular African American teachers (Buras 2014; Payne 2008). This is not because they are poorly performing or ineffective teachers. It is because these teachers are more experienced and better paid. As I discuss in more detail below, while school districts claim to be attempting to attract more Black and Latino teachers, the data actually shows that over the past decade both districts in Chicago and New York City have hired fewer teachers of color at the same time as school closings and charter expansion have resulted in greater job losses for them (Casey et al., 2015).

Figure 5. Student Enrollment and Teacher Force by Race and Ethnicity

School Year	Percent Minority Population in U.S.	Total Student Enrollment	Percent Minority Students	Total Teacher Force	Percent Minority Teachers
1987-88	23.1	45,220,593	27.3	2,630,335	12.4
1990-91	24.3	44,777,577	30.3	2,915,774	12.8
1993-94	25.6	46,592,207	31.5	2,939,659	12.8
1999-00	28.1	50,629,075	35.4	3,451,316	15
2004-05	32.1	52,375,110	38.1	3,717,998	16.3
2007-08	34.4	53,644,872	40.6	3,894,065	16.5
2011-12	37	53,988,330	44.1	3,850,058	17.3
Percent Change 1987-2012	13.9	19.0	16.8	46,0	4.9

Source: Casey et al., 2015.

Figure 6.

Race and Ethnicity of Teachers in Major U.S. Cities, 2012

Source: Casey et al., 2015.

Coeval with these serious changes affecting racialized educators is a dramatic reorganization of school governance that should be viewed as a corporatization of governance. In addition to this shift towards mayoral control, first implemented in Chicago in 1995, there has been an increase in the appointment of corporate CEOs—typically with little or no background in education—to the nation's largest urban school districts, from New York to New Orleans. Indeed, a key tenet of the corporate education

reform movement has been to disparage those with actual backgrounds and experience in education while at the same time elevating to positions of power and prominence those from the world of business. Moreover, there has been a vast expansion in corporate actors and venture philanthropists dictating school district policies (Saltman 2010). Many of the "innovations" of neoliberal school reform reflect what Melamed (2006 My emphasis) refers to as the *"official anti-racism"* of the neoliberal state as manifest in charter school reforms. Such discourses merge hegemonic racial representations with market ideologies to orient neoliberal subjects away from collectivity and radical critique and towards taking individual responsibility for the risks and harms created by the dynamics of racial capitalism.

The federal law driving the neoliberalization of schools in the United States is the Obama administration's *Race to the Top* (RTTP), which is an amped up version of Bush's *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB). This legislation encourages states, through the promise of increased federal funding, to promote policies based on the logics of markets and competition, yet also under the banner of school choice and accountability based on high-stakes standardized testing. These policies are largely derivative of earlier reforms developed chiefly by the Gates Foundation and the Commercial Club of Chicago (CCC), among other non-state political actors who first rolled these policies out in Chicago during the 1990s.

The trajectory of these policies has led to an injection of competition for funds between traditional neighbourhood schools and privately run, publicly funded, charter schools. As their name implies, charter schools are granted a charter by a local public school district and receive the same money from the district (which garners its money

from local property taxes in combination with state and federal funds) to operate a school in the district not governed by the local school board or subject to the same rules and regulations—including any collective bargaining agreements between a district and unions representing teachers in public schools. Like other so-called "choice" schools, such as specialized magnate high schools, charters typically have an admissions policy that results in them enrolling far fewer low-income kids, students with special needs, and English-language learners. Charters can be for-profit or not, depending on state law. And typically students need to apply or win a lottery to achieve admittance because there are generally more applicants than there are available spots in the school. And while some charter schools have been effective in raising student scores and do indeed provide high quality, sometimes even quite radical, education, on the whole the charter market is dominated by large enterprises that have not improved educational outcomes for students in relation to traditional neighbourhood public schools. To the extent that charters do perform better according to testing metrics, it is often because they have pushed out the most difficult students, such as the ones mentioned above, retaining only those can be trained to perform according to narrow standardized metrics of success. On the whole, however, the constellation of policies and practices that constitute the neoliberalization of public schools has not led to any significant improvements in test scores or graduation rates in Chicago or anywhere else in the nation (Au 2009).

It is worth restating the point made above, that education policy also deploys curricular and pedagogical mechanisms for socialization (Shor 1992) insofar as it teaches us who, what, and how we should be as we navigate precarious material landscapes and complex "imagined worlds" (Appadurai 2013). Within urban schools in particular, Black

and Latino children are overwhelmingly subjected to the daily humiliation of attending schools that are more like jails—with police and metal detectors—than what we have typically understood as schools. There has been a clear shift from schools preparing students for the labour market, even for low-wage work, to schools preparing students—again, largely racialized students—for a world of surveillance, discipline, and harsh punishment. As a group of New York City public school students observed in a 2015 Change.org petition ("Put an End to Metal Detectors in Public Schools" 2016) that contested this new reality,

> The majority of students in New York City schools are Black and Latino. Metal detectors in schools contribute to the idea that Black and Latino teenagers should be treated like criminals. When passing through metal detectors students feel hassled, uncomfortable, annoyed, and that their rights are being violated. Metal detectors in schools break the connection between students, teachers, and school administrators and contribute to a distrust of authority (quoted in Erickson 2015).

In the late 1990s I was one of these students who had to endure going through a metal detector every day to the predominantly Black and Latino high school I attended in East New York, Brooklyn. Today, of those students in New York who have to pass through a metal detector each day, 82% of them are Black and Latino, in a district where they comprise approximately 70% of New York City's student population (Erickson 2015, 15). What is important to note here is that, while we can plainly see how damaging this kind of socialization can be to young people, the contradictions of such practices and how they encourage resistance and a general lack of trust in authority and institutions that have historically worked, at least in part, to legitimize the social order is revealing.

Before venturing any further into a discussion of how these disciplinary neoliberal policies manifest and are transformed in/through the urban geography of New York City or Chicago, it is important to grasp that federal education policy as both an end and a

means of neoliberalization: It is an end insofar as the policy instruments of, for instance, RTTP, and NCLB before it (e.g. increased technological investment, testing regimes, punitive accountability mechanisms, and charter school proliferation), have facilitated the expansion of a vastly under-regulated private sector in education. In the process, companies in this new sector yield massive profits for what Diane Ravitch (Ravitch 2010, n.p.) aptly refers to as "the billionaire boys club," or what has also been described as the "education industrial complex." At the same time, federal education policy is a means of neoliberalization insofar as political and economic elites around the country wield it to reshape the spatial, political-economic, and discursive dimensions of urban life. Beyond simply transforming schooling and educational outcomes, federal education policy serves a vital function in the ongoing production of urban space and the values, orientations, and habits of the people who live in cities. Because education policy works on, and is worked upon by, the built environment and its social meaning—through either underfunding those schools in poor, largely racialized neighbourhoods as a means to contain poor, predominantly racialized people who live there or to aid in the gentrification process by creating specialized schools to attract or retain white professionals and "knowledge workers" into a neighbourhood (Bloomfield Cucchiara 2013)—education policy should be viewed through a critical urban lens.

Richard Florida (2014) has been leading the charge—and making a lot of money as a consultant doing so—in propagating the erroneous notion that these kinds of professional, "creative" workers with their skills, style, and expendable income are essential to revitalizing a city's economy. Yet, as Peck (2005) argues, "For all their performative display of liberal cultural innovation, creativity strategies barely disrupt

extant urban-policy orthodoxies, based on interlocal competition, place marketing, property- and market-led development, gentrification and normalized socio-spatial inequality. More than this, these increasingly prevalent strategies extend and recodify entrenched tendencies in neoliberal urban politics, seductively repackaging them in the soft-focus terms of cultural policy." Thus, rather than serving as a solution to urban economic problems these so-called creative strategies for urban renewal have proven to do more to entrench poverty and marginalization while providing a flimsy intellectual cover for expanding gentrification and neoliberal policies.

It is essential to analyze the ways in which these processes of corporate education reform intersect with other urban policies like mixed-housing, new policing and legal policies that effectively banish certain working-class, poor, and racialized populations, and other policies aimed at urban renewal, the key to which for neoliberal policy adherents is making an urban region more economically integrated and competitive. Research should seek to clarify why and how these policies disproportionately exploit and oppress working-class and poor, racialized people and places, not only out of a moral imperative to those communities most adversely affected but because of what is to be gleaned from understanding the socio-spatial actors, motivations, objectives, and likely outcomes of neoliberal urban school reform as it intersects with economic development and other "fast policies" circulating as tools in the construction of ever more leaner and meaner urban landscapes for capital (Peck and Theodore 2015). Lastly, in periods of economic crisis, like the one we have been living through since the Great Recession of 2008, education policy has revealed itself as an essential arena in the clash between capital's need to expand accumulation and its need for legitimation, which often exist in

contradictory tension.

Put another way, capitalism, as the extraction and hoarding of surplus value or profit, has accumulation needs. For example, in the present moment of neoliberal capitalism in the United States, capital requires certain social conditions such as a vast quantity of low wage workers and an unemployed surplus population alongside them to help suppress wages and increase profits, on the one hand, and a comparatively smaller group of highly educated workers for both the high tech sector and for finance and business services, on the other (Harvey 2014). Yet simultaneously, the inequality, suffering, and violence that this kind of system perpetuates can be a threat to capitalism—perhaps no better example exists than the most recent uprising of Black youth in Baltimore (Vullimay 2015). The by-products of this system of violence and inequality are especially troubling from the perspective of those governing and benefiting from current policies if and when those who suffer the brunt of existing policies begin to view their situations as rooted in a racist capitalist system such as continues to exist in the contemporary United States. While schooling is increasingly more directly serving accumulation, it is imperative to recognize that schools are public institutions set up historically not merely for the purpose of capitalist accumulation but to attend to capitalism's legitimation needs, however workers might have desired otherwise (Katznelson and Weir 1985b). Of course, as should be clear, this has dramatically changed in the past 20-30 years with the expansion of the commodity form or market logic into public education (Apple 1983; Ball 2012).

In this context we can understand how current education policies are a means to open up new markets to absorb surplus capital and infrastructure, and to provide an outlet

for surplus state capacity (Gilmore 2007) by "regulating" the poor and flexibilizing labour through a variety of disciplinary techniques (Piven and Cloward 1993; Soss, Fording, and Schram 2011). It is because of such imperatives that education policies and even schools themselves seem to have taken on new roles in the creative destruction/reconstruction of urban space. As I will discuss in more detail in my analysis of how these processes have worked on the ground in Chicago and New York, education remains intimately related to processes *of disinvestment and accumulation by* dispossession (Smith 1996; Harvey 2003; M. Fine and Ruglis 2009). Schools have served as instruments for the devaluation of urban neighbourhoods and also as part of the infrastructure of gentrification as those neighbourhoods are "renewed" (Buras 2014; Lipman 2011b).

Federal education policy has, since the 1970s, operated as an important mechanism through which the neoliberal state advances and protects processes of capital accumulation. In understanding federal education policy in this context, we can see how federal education policies reflect and work to co-constitute race and class. Put differently, public schools are a critical component of the state apparatus wherein racial ideology converges with economics. As I suggest in my analysis of the effects of standardized testing, the ideological and the material combine through policy discourses, allocations, and mandates (Leonardo 2009), to produce certain conditions and structures and to represent them in ways that reinforce existing race and class hierarchies in U.S. society (Hagopian 2014). As such, critical policy analysis, at any scale, needs to situate education policy within the larger political, economic, and socio-spatial dynamics that constantly refashion the relationship between capitalism and racism.

As Jean Anyon (2011) consistently argues, schools reflect and perpetuate race and class inequality due to the fact that they emerge from a rhetoric of capitalist logic and racial ideology that structures society so as to inextricably link schooling to broader inequities in the distribution of wealth and power. Disguising policy discourse in a rhetoric of equal opportunity, civil rights, efficiency, human capital development, and global competitiveness, policymakers articulate a discourse that both engages people from historically marginalized populations and orients them towards new forms of precarious labour, prolonged unemployment, individualism, consumption, and cultural politics (Pedroni 2007).

As noted above, educational policy sits within a larger discourse that represents mass education as the solution to poverty and urban decline. Yet, like many of the other supposedly anti-poverty social policies over the past 40 years, education policy has failed to achieve anything close to a sustained decline in urban poverty. Instead, in creating and distinguishing between the deserving parts of the city or privileged populations (professional, overwhelmingly white, middle-class) and groups of people and places in the city deemed unworthy of quality public services or dignity, including those who have been dispossesses through underfunding in schools, public housing, or lack of jobs, it operates discursively to interpolate new racial subjects, in Althusser's terms.

As the welfare state came under attack in the 1970s, resulting in the neoliberal rollback of social welfare policies discussed earlier, educational policies and discourses shifted, with policy makers presenting schools as having a different purpose. The policies that have been rolled out since this period have come to alter the ways that schools (1) operate as sites to protect, produce, and reproduce race and class hierarchies (Anyon

1997; J. Preston 2007; Leonardo and Grubb 2014), (2) divert public funds into private hands (Fabricant and Fine 2012), and (3) utilize the symbolic content of education for the purpose of disciplining individuals and groups (Ball 1994; Foucault 1995) into conformity with changing conditions in the racialized political economy.

Since the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in which the federal government ruled segregated schools unconstitutional and began to pursue a controversial, contested, and as yet incomplete effort to integrate schools, education policy, historically the purview of state and local governments, has become more fully integrated into national politics. Ten years after the *Brown* decision in 1965, federal education policy linked racial justice to economic opportunity within what Melamed (2006) refers to as the "liberal race paradigm," in which the state acknowledges racial discrimination and inequality as problems, but opts to address these inequities through a largely symbolic framework for race reform based in what Melamed (2006, 2) characterizes as "abstract equality, market individualism, and inclusive civic nationalism."

Passed by Congress in 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that emerged out of this liberal race paradigm articulated notions of equity and opportunity so as to rationalize increased federal intervention in, and funding of, public education. Education became an integral part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, whereby the incorporation of poor African Americans and Latinos into the labour market was seen as hinging on equal access to educational resources. Equal access was difficult to attain, however, because of the deeply entrenched, accumulated historical, sociological, and geographical effects of racial segregation, the effects of which are most

pronounced through housing/rental markets, which in turn create inequities in school funding because they are so heavily tied to property wealth in a given district.

Set up, ostensibly, as a way to combat these inequities, ESEA promotes compensatory funding for schools as a way to target poverty by providing additional resources for disadvantaged students and monitoring states to ensure educational equity (McGuinn 2006). It is important to recognize here that ESEA never sought to change how labour markets operate or how those suffering the most disadvantages from inequities and the uncertainties of poverty might better traverse these challenges. Instead, ESEA was an attempt to allow those on the margins to develop their human capital, so that they might better participate in the capitalist economy, by providing them with better opportunities in the labour market. This is the essence of the liberal race paradigm that structured Johnson's War on Poverty and subsequent liberal policy experiments (Kantor and Lowe 2006). Thus, guaranteed equitable investment in human capital emerged as an imagined federal policy solution to poverty. Like other welfare programs of the late 1960s, ESEA and Title I did not seek out a radical transformation of racial capitalist structures but rather emerged as an institutionalized investment in human capital that was part of a constellation of "governmental programs designed to moderate widespread political unrest among the black poor" (Piven and Cloward 1993, 337).

Throughout the 1970s, as living conditions worsened for poor people of colour living in the urban core, decentralizing education claimed to be an organizational strategy that could improve educational outcomes by focusing on the relationship between the governance of individual schools and the delivery of educational services. State education expenditures and Title I funds did not increase in proportion to the growth of

concentrated poverty in the city (Brown 2007). Thus, when school choice emerged as the premier solution for addressing educational inequities, especially for poor, racialized people, it surfaced at the intersection of macro and local-level economic transformations that were bringing about profound dislocations and mass unemployment at the same time that austerity and the growing tendencies towards investment in gentrification and central business district development were shifting allocation priorities.

All of these shifts in policy and politics resulted in a marked disinvestment in urban education. While disinvestment, austerity, and mass incarceration devastated neighbourhoods in the urban core, decentralization institutionalized autonomy as a way of holding neighbourhood schools more accountable for producing improved educational outcomes. This mix of racialized political economic and educational policy development set the stage for the evolution of the high stakes accountability and charter school reforms that were rolled out in the subsequent decades.

Educational crises of the 1980s occurred in conjuncture with deepening economic crises, the so-called war on drugs, and the restructuring of state and local political economies. The 1980s witnessed massive cuts to social welfare and urban infrastructure accompanied by increased government spending on militarization and mass incarceration. Simultaneously, more and more public money was siphoned off into the private sector. For instance, in 1980, $.20 of every dollar in city tax revenue went to debt servicing. In 1982, New York lost hundreds of millions in federal aid due to Reagan's budget cuts (Apple 1983). High levels of unemployment and inflation arose as the manufacturing base declined as New York City's economy was restructured around technological and electronic production, as well as finance, investment, and real estate (FIRE) and their

attendant service sectors (Sassen 2001). Job creation was reconfigured as, "offering investment subsidies" while construction was "stimulated by interest-rate subsidies and property tax abatements" (Tabb 1982, 14). The city's economy was thus substantially transformed and the instability this produced reverberated throughout its streets and its schools. As Tabb (1982, 10) puts it, crises "are about restructuring, a process of uneven development in which decay and growth are part of a single reality." And such tendencies are intrinsic to capitalism (Robinson 2014; Shaikh 2016).

As reported in the *New York Times,* in the early 1980s, Mayor Koch closed 40 schools in the impoverished areas of Hunts Point and the South Bronx. Schools became part of an approach to balancing the budget that Koch called "planned shrinkage": what was "shrinking" in this approach was "the city's investment in such facilities as school buildings and in projects to rehabilitate deteriorated areas" (Smothers quoted in Moody 2007). Between FY 1980 and FY 1981, there were 7,907 municipal layoffs, 5,098 of which were from the Board of Education. In FY 1982, there were another 3,921 layoffs, 2,091 of which were from the Board of Education (Tabb 1982; Moody 2007).

Thus, during the shift to FIRE and a service economy, decentralized school districts were being hollowed out just as they were attacked for being an inefficient drain on the city budget and not improving student performances. The city's public schools came to be known as "dropout factories" due to their 41.9% annual dropout rate (compared to the average national rate of 25%). Yet due to the structural adjustment visited upon the city by the Municipal Assistance Corporation (MAC) and the Emergency Financial Control Board (EFCB), the city's schools were underfunded by both the city and the state. New York City schools were enrolling 34% of the state's students, yet

receiving 30% of state funds allocated for education. Further, the schools were overcrowded and had unusually high concentrations of poor students with high needs, low academic skills, and who were thus in need of an array of costly additional resources (M. Fine 1991). In 1985, 20% of New York City children lived at or below the poverty line, and these students attended schools with ever-increasing class sizes. Between 1973 and 1983, student-teacher ratios increased by 27%, and class size grew by 16.6%.

As is the case with Chicago, one of the central strategies for building a competitive global city has been to redirect funds away from working-class and predominantly Black and Brown neighbourhoods towards investment in central business district development, office space development, gentrification projects, mega-project developments, as well as subsidizing low property assessments and tax abatements for real estate developers. Thus, in the wake of New York's fiscal crisis in the 1970s austerity emerged alongside disinvestment. And because New York's tax cuts diminished its revenues, the city fired thousands of municipal workers and slashed much needed services to its most impoverished neighborhoods. Poor African Americans and Latinos suffered disproportionately at the hands of the city's tripartite disinvestment-reinvestment-austerity strategy.

Decentralization of the school system took place at the same time that infrastructure—not just the housing stock, roads, and transit, but also the neighborhood schools—in the urban core that was home overwhelmingly to poor racialized people deteriorated. As a result, public schools serving African American and Latino students in the 1970s and 1980s tended to have "transient and ineffective teachers and administrators, overcrowded and deteriorating facilities, and fewer resources than schools

in working-class white communities (CTU Communications 2013, 16).

Since the 1980s, an economic or market discourse within discussions of education policy has grown substantially, in large measure due to the concerted effort of a wide array of corporate elites, economists, and neoliberal think tanks that, proliferating ideas about education crisis, have been urging policy makers to move towards a corporate model that gives students and parents more choice. The nascent demand to educate students for the kind of labour force needed by a rapidly changing and unstable global economy would soon become the standard call. Schools are now more than ever viewed as invaluable institutional sites in the preparation of future generations for the "knowledge economy," and technological knowledge and skills are seen as crucial to participation in the globalized workforce. This reformulation of the purposes of education gained major momentum in 1983 with the publication of *A Nation at Risk,* which would then be followed by a series of similarly influential reports, underwritten by corporations and venture philanthropists, all of which espoused the crucial connections between education and the global economy.

One such example is *Action For Excellence*: *A Comprehensive Plan to Improve Our Nation's Schools*, also published in 1983. This report concentrated its analysis on the need to develop a stronger role for business in setting objectives of U.S. public education. This report was authored by The Task Force on Education for Economic Growth and funded by 15 corporations and foundations, including Aetna Life & Casualty Insurance Foundation, AT&T, Control Data, Dow Chemical, Xerox, Texas Instruments, RCA, Ford Motor Company, and IBM. Yet another report, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century*, published in 1986 by the Carnegie Foundation on Education and the Economy,

similarly expanded market rhetoric with its insistence that a greater emphasis be placed

on preparing students to participate in the labour market and the promotion of workplace

productivity (Spring 2014).

In part, I argue, this radical shift in education policy should be situated in relation

to a major change in the federal government's approach to employment. For example, in

1982 President Reagan dismantled what had been a fairly successful job creation

program, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Administration (CETA), and

replaced it with a job-training program. In spite of evidence suggesting a dearth of jobs,

the federal government embraced a policymaking orientation grounded in the notion that

there were ample jobs available but people were just not educated well enough to work

them. The federal government has maintained this position ever since, and it underlies not

only its economic and social welfare policies, but its education policies as well. As a

result, the innovations promised by school choice and competition, which have been

envisioned as educational solutions to economic problems, and this developing social

imaginary (Appadurai 1996) found a home in the education platforms and policies of the

Clinton and Bush Jr. administrations. If urban public schools could not solve the problem

of the culture of poverty and thereby provide upward mobility to racialized people, then,

it was claimed, the market could.

And in 1989, when George H.W. Bush became president, he convened a national

summit of governors to develop a set of educational goals to address these issues. The

resulting proposal, *America 2000* (U.S. Department of Education 1991), would inform

education policy under presidents Clinton, Bush Jr., and Obama. The goals included the

following: By the year 2000, American students would rank first in the world in math and

science; the U.S. would have a graduation rate of at least 90%; all children would master difficult subject matter; all adults would be literate and ready to compete in the global economy; every school would be free of drugs, alcohol, and violence (Ravitch 2010).

Education reform, dressed as an exaggerated version of the American Dream for all, should in part, then, be understood as a discursive tool for constructing a race and class-blind frame for thinking about and treating social and economic problems that are in fact based in dynamics of class and race: Between 1983 and 1989, the top 20% of the U.S. population captured approximately 99% of the growth in wealth, while the bottom 80% gained just over 1% and also suffered the overwhelming majority of income declines during this same period. Moreover, the poverty rate for African American children under three years of age was 52% in 1990, for Latino children it was 42%, but the poverty rate for White children under three was 15%. Yet in 1991, school choice and the institutionalization of competition in education emerged, once again, at the national level as an education reform strategy that saw itself as a solution to problems created by the political economy (Lipman 1998; Anyon 1997).

Against the view that the "hope" and "despair" of individuals produced success or failure in the job market, the livelihoods of poor racialized people in the 1980s and 1990s was "reshaped by profound macroeconomic and social changes caused by a massive restructuring of the U.S. economy, with a dramatic shift to predominantly post-industrial reality for most of the U.S., at least outside of the South" (Lipman 1998, 8). Though the achievement gap had decreased by 50% between 1970 and the mid 1980s, it increased between 1990 and 1994. By 1996, African Americans had the lowest composite ACT and SAT scores of any racial or ethnic group in the nation. The argument that increased

investment in education correlated to increased wealth was misleading at best. For instance, education was not solving the problem of disproportionate unemployment among African Americans. By 1994, only 40% of African American high school graduates not in college were employed, compared to 72% of white graduates (Lipman 1998, 8).

In spite of the fact that no evidence exists to support the belief that deteriorating education—whether measured in terms of fewer years spent in school, falling achievement levels, or demographics of the workforce—is the cause of the falling wages of U.S. workers, federal public policy maintains that education is the key to success in the global economy. Federal education policy frames economic problems, at the individual level, as the result of poor choices and cultural deficits, and at a quasi-structural level, as systemic educational failures. The innovations spurred by school choice, in contrast, are presented as crucial weapons in the war against the culture of poverty. Market mechanisms are coercive treatments for the culture of poverty. By vanquishing what Bush Sr. refers to as the "darkness" that haunts poor people of colour, school choice, it is argued, will reinvigorate the lagging production of human capital.

Education policy under the Clinton and Bush Jr. administrations was very much about integrating education into a wider set of ideological commitments. Education became linked to the expansion of the free market, the reduction of government responsibility for the economic and social welfare of citizens, the reinforcement of competition (not only among schools, but in the labour market more broadly), the creation of a workforce with low expectations in terms of economic security, and the popularization of racially coded social Darwinist notions about educational achievement

and success (Apple 2006).

These ideologies congealed around a discourse and set of policies that defined

education as job training for the global economy, not coincidently at the same time that

mass incarceration became the sponge for absorbing and removing surplus populations

and malcontents from cities around the United States, again overwhelmingly Black and

Latino (Gilmore 2007; Alexander 2010). According to every U.S. president since Reagan,

education-as-training was a solution to a perceived surplus of unfilled jobs; this

perception persisted in spite of the fact that there was actually a deficit of medium and

high wage jobs and that "at any given time there are far more unemployed people than

there are job openings" (Anyon 2011). At the same time, Clinton thoroughly

deconstructed the welfare system in 1996 with the passing of the *Personal Responsibility*

and Work Opportunity Act, which among other things eliminated supports for poor and

working-class families, and intensified the war on drugs. As Quadagno (1994) observes,

many in the white middle income bracket saw welfare as a transfer of wealth from their

race and class to undeserving poor, racialized people. Under Clinton, welfare, like

education, was ostensibly transformed into preparation for the workforce through the

development of "workfare," a policy that required welfare recipients to take on dead-end,

menial labour that provided them with little in the way of marketable skills or social

capital (Peck 2001).

Signed into law in 1994, Clinton's *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* was in some

ways a precursor to Obama's RTTP. It provided states with an additional $1.3 billion in

federal money, but linked this money to mandates as a means of expanding federal, top-

down control over education at the local level. States were paid to write their own

academic standards and pick their own tests, but would be held accountable for

achievement (Ravitch 2010). Clinton's 1994 reauthorization of ESEA—*The Improving*

America's Schools Act (IASA)—introduced several changes to Title I allocation. Prior to

these changes, the federal government would allocate funds to states based on the number

of low-income children in each county, and each state's per-pupil expenditures (Odden

and Picus 2000). Further, Title I funds were formerly distributed to states, which would

then redistribute them to districts based on the overall poverty level in individual

counties. As of 1994, however, allocation would be based on the number children in each

individual district who qualify for free and reduced price lunch. Schools with a rate of at

least 75% of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch, as a measure of low

income, would be entitled to Title I funds, with leftover funds then being distributed to

schools with lower poverty rates. As a result, struggling public school districts were

encouraged to disinvest in their highest poverty schools by a loophole through which

funds could be redistributed to a wider array of schools in the district (Ravitch 2010). The

cost of programs in the poorest schools could be driven down by using cheap services

from private sector providers, old textbooks, and through general infrastructural neglect,

thereby freeing up Title I allocations and allowing impoverished districts to stretch their

funding to better off schools. Hence, the structure of Title I allocations incentivized

disinvestment in the poorest schools.

Furthermore, in most states, school districts that educate the largest number of

poor and minority students have fewer state and local dollars to spend per student than

districts with the least number of poor and minority students (Anyon 2005, 63). In New

York, for instance, low-poverty districts have approximately $2,152 more to spend per

student than high poverty districts, as "low urban property tax receipts and insufficient additional school financing" impoverish schools in the urban core" (Anyon 2005, 63). At the same time that macroeconomic policies were resulting in the targeted abandonment (Harvey 1989) of the urban core, IASA and NCLB were encouraging targeted investment in school choice as means to improve impoverished schools. The material conditions produced by federal abandonment of the urban core, as manifested in its deteriorating schools and other infrastructure, were drawn on as ideological justifications for further disinvestment, restructuring, and dispossession vis-à-vis market-driven, corporate education reforms like testing, accountability, and school choice (Anyon 1997; Anyon 2011).

Education reform has thus redirected much-needed public funds out of impoverished neighborhoods to private sector providers. IASA doubled federal funding for charter schools to $100 million. IASA also paved the way for the more sweeping corporate reforms of NCLB by mandating that: (1) States develop standards; (2) Schools use assessments aligned with those standards; and (3) Schools be held accountable to produce Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) reports based on student performance on these standardized tests. Two billion dollars was earmarked for the start-up and implementation of these reforms.[56] IASA also, to the boon of the school choice movement and other private sector providers, deregulated the use of federal funds as a mechanism to promote local flexibility and school improvement. In his 1997 proclamation "America Goes Back

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[56] These reports provide accountability metrics for schools, districts, and states on student performance, in accordance with Title I of the NCLB, the current version of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. As Education Week (2011, n.p.) notes, however, "AYP…is not a new concept; it was introduced into federal law in the ESEA's 1994 reauthorization." Under NCLB, AYP is used to determine if schools are effectively educating their students. States are required, according to this law, to use a single accountability system for public schools to determine whether all students, as well as individual subgroups.

to School," President Clinton (1997) argued that, "every school and every State should adopt rigorous national standards" with "national tests" in the third, fourth, and eighth grades, on the one hand, while "expand[ing] school choice and accountability in public education," on the other. Clinton called on a partnership of public and private sector entities, including the military, to help "America's young people grow into responsible and productive citizens." IASA institutionalized the rhetoric linking choice to learning by formalizing it into a set of goals related to charter school proliferation. The Act asserted a causal relationship between charter school proliferation and improved student performance on standardized tests.

With respect to charter school expansion, the state makes its alignment quite clear. The way to improve student achievement is, first, to encourage educational innovation and entrepreneurialism through deregulation, and second, to scale upwards and outwards in such a way that competition provokes public schools to follow suit or else lose their market share of students. Thus the explicit purpose of the act was to expand national understanding of the charter schools model through giving financial assistance for the design and initial implementation of charter schools. In accordance with this objective, no more than 10% of funding would be set aside for the design and dissemination of model State charter school laws and model contracts, nor would additional funds be used towards other means of authorizing and monitoring the performance of charter schools. Under IASA, charter school development, promotion, and proliferation have gone hand in hand.

In sum, federal education policy in the 1990s laid important material and ideological groundwork for the neoliberalization of public education in the United States

in subsequent years. This policy paradigm has continued to be expanded in a variety of ways across school districts throughout the country, primarily under the guise of offering choices to parents and students and holding teachers accountable through high-stakes testing, codified through the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Though NCLB would intensify both federal intervention and the corporate reform of education, the continuity between NCLB and earlier iterations of ESEA, particularly the roll out of neoliberal school reforms in standards, testing, accountability, and choice, is often overlooked.

In accordance with the massive rollout of neoliberal federal policies that foster creative destruction and accumulation by dispossession, charter schools have evolved since the mid-1990s as the central mechanism for privatizing public schooling. While small groups of activists piloted charter schools, and in some places still operate as small progressive educational institutions, the charter market is dominated by large chains and for-profit Education Management Organizations (EMOs). As Tom Pedroni (2007) and Pauline Lipman (2011b) demonstrate, parents and educators trying to navigate precarious landscapes of post-industrial urban devastation spearheaded the early experimental phase of school choice in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet, in the 1990s the charter school experiment was "swept up…by a movement organized to promote an ambitious alternative to public schools" (Fabricant and Fine 2012, 19). Free market intellectuals and politicians, prominent think tanks, hedge fund investors, and all manner of corporate elites have wholeheartedly put their weight behind the movement, as these groups congealed around school choice as an educational agenda for solving the social and economic problems of urban regeneration and economic development.

From the above discussion it is clear why Ravitch (2010) contends that federal education policies have made schooling into a "joyless experience for most American children, especially in grades three through eight," where several weeks of each year are dedicated to preparing for standardized tests. And while the disaggregated achievement data produced as a result of NCLB and RTTP usefully reveals which students are succeeding, at least by narrow and inadequate metrics, Lipman (2011b, 47) is right to argue that, "the accountability discourse [obfuscates] the underlying structural and ideological [reasons for] the disparities in urban public schools," which include: "grossly inequitable allocation of resources, Eurocentric and racist curricula, racial segregation, criminalization, [little] space for genuine participation of communities [who are] most affected, and cultural marginalization and [psychological bombardment of] working-class students of color." It has been important for critical researchers as well as those groups organizing against corporate reform policies to carefully marshal the evidence, in a sense turning it on its head with a sharp analysis of the data itself as well as the framework through which it is analyzed by policy makers, in order to deconstruct the claims that proliferate in the accountability discourse.

3.5 The Neoliberalization of Public Schooling

In sum, a lens of school choice, accountability, competition, and a corporate model of governance that assures all of these elements articulates the neoliberalization of public schooling. This new paradigm of education reform treats public education as part of the production relations that Edward Soja (1989, 78) describes as "simultaneously social and spatial." Indeed, the ideology of school choice is premised on the belief that when education is treated as a good within a consumer market, parents and students, as

consumers, will make rational decisions about which products and services (curricula, teachers, and schools) best serve their needs. This opportunity is thought to be denied them under the traditional system of public education. This market approach is now firmly entrenched at all levels of the public education system in the United States, often being launched at the municipal scale prior to being scaled up and out to other jurisdictions. Indeed, many policies that were first developed at the municipal scale 10 to 20 years ago have been extended at the national scale through federal policies like NCLB and RTTP.

And, with the exception perhaps of Milwaukee, vouchers never gained any serious momentum in the way Milton Friedman or Ronald Reagan might have liked. Yet the market ideology underlying vouchers has flourished, advancing through the proliferation of the charter school movement. In the 1990s and 2000s, school choice was reinvented in a way that gripped the social imaginations of both federal policymakers and a significant number of African American and Latino parents (Pedroni 2007). Charter schools as public-private partnerships (P3s), and corporate models of governance, have broad support across the political spectrum as a way to improve education by means of market logic and corporate practices (Saltman 2010). At the same time, neoliberalism has more generally moved from the fringes of economic thinking to the center, where it has reoriented social and economic policy in a variety of arenas, the most worrisome of which are education and healthcare.

This transformation in the policy landscape of education has been a result of 40 years of efforts on the part of the political right and corporate reformers, who have quite successfully propagated the idea amongst a wide range of constituencies—from

policymakers to poor racialized parents in urban communities—that charter schools provide greater choice and give students a competitive edge in the economy, and society more broadly. A great deal of research on charter schools and educational outcomes as measured by standardized testing and high school completion, however, appears to demonstrate precisely the opposite: school choice vis-à-vis charters actually exacerbates an already-stratified public education system based on socio-economic status and race (Brogan 2013; Apple, Au, and Gandin 2009; Lipman 2005; Au 2009; Perrillo 2012).

Discussing the U.S. context, critical education scholar Kenneth Saltman (2009 but see also Saltman 2012) correctly observes that, "In education, neoliberalism has taken hold with tremendous force, remaking educational common sense and pushing forward the privatization and deregulation agendas….Neoliberalism appears as the now common sense framing of education exclusively through presumed ideals of upward individual economic mobility…and the social ideals of global economic competition."

We should understand corporatization as an expression of neoliberalization whose major objective is to reduce the purpose of schooling for narrow economic ends and to inject corporate governance practices into the administration of school systems. This reflects the more general point made by urban geographer Jason Hackworth (2007, 11) that "Neoliberalism has become naturalized as the 'only' choice available to cities in the United States and elsewhere." And yet, while it seems indisputable that neoliberalism is the dominant approach to education reform in the United States, it should not be assumed that there is a monolithic process that implants every part of the neoliberal agenda in lockstep. This is not the case in any realm of public policy. Rather, existing institutional structures always mediate the process of neoliberalization or corporate education reform,

and this conditions which parts of the neoliberal agenda are put in place and how. Susan Robertson (2000, 36) argues that, in any country, a distinct set of institutional structures and practices are central to determining what is educationally feasible within a social formation today. Furthermore, Robertson brilliantly analyzes how and why the restructuring of teacher's work has been central to a broader global project of neoliberalizing public education, led in part by institutions of global economic governance like the World Bank and the Organization of Economic and Cooperative Development (OECD).

A discourse of market failure has given way to one that centers the supposed failures of government and public institutions (Andrew Cumbers 2012). This particular discourse of failure has been especially instrumental in propagating neoliberal education restructuring. According to this logic, failures typical of markets have now been overshadowed by the inefficiency, inequity, and corruption of governments that try to regulate outside of a market mechanism. The discourse of government failure has justified the rollback of interventions, while the notion of market failure has virtually disappeared from policy dialogue (urban or otherwise). Good governance at the municipal level is now largely defined by the ability of formal government to "assist…collaborate with or function like…the corporate community" (Hackworth 2007, 10). Perhaps this is nowhere more glaringly obvious than in the transformation of K-12 public school governance over the past 30 years.

Critical spatial scholars have focused on the different ways in which broad social policies reshape urban spaces, theorizing that the human occupation of space is what leads to its hegemonic "air of neutrality" (Lefebvre and Enders 1976), which misleads a

space's own occupants into accepting the socio-spatial layout of the city as given, unchangeable, and detached from the policies and politics that have arranged it. Identifying an issue as a problem for which there is a manufactured solution works to introduce neoliberal policies that rearrange human-occupied space (Peck and Tickell 2002, 398). Critiques of the linguistic manner through which the campaigns of neoliberal policies are carried out suggest that a rhetoric of inevitability that resonates with free market values of competition and success contextualizes space. This acceptance of inevitability such that it appears to be common sense leads to mass acquiescence to subjugating policies; within the neoliberal rhetorical framework, the spaces described as failures and the people within those spaces impede a city's economic growth. This framework has become so ingrained in the hegemonic machinery that makes and implements education policy in the United States that those who are critical of such policies (which include school choice via charter expansion, high-stakes testing, mayoral control, etc.) are characterized as standing in the way of progress and individual freedom; they are defending a "status quo" system that is failing the most vulnerable populations in the city.

Like other "mechanisms of neoliberal localization," the re-representation of the city via the spaces of public schooling centers "entrepreneurial discourses and representations focused on the need for revitalization" (N. Brenner and Theodore 2002a, 372), which in turn shapes a city's spatial identity. Codified in standardized test results and widely disseminated through the news media, the constant reification of hegemonic school labels naturalizes school spaces as ones of success or failure (Klaf 2013, 296–99). The most dominant voices in the politics of place carry out this process of naturalization,

which has intense socio-spatial implications for cities insofar as it effectively creates a "geography of 'good' and 'bad' schools" (Klaf 2013, 296).

The instrumentalization of school choice policy—like neoliberalism more generally (Peck and Tickell 2002)—is thus very much a spatial strategy. The manner in which schools are defined within the debate determines or justifies how school choice is applied, or resisted. One effective way to transmit a neighbourhood's school identity to city residents is through news media. For example, if residents city-wide are accustomed to reading about failing schools and violence in a specific neighbourhood, that neighbourhood and its schools become a space of pathology that necessitates immediate action in order to reverse the trajectory of downwards spiralling (Lipman 2007). Conversely, if a school is constantly reported as a space of success, this school becomes the goal of spatial production or reproduction as district leaders and policy makers, either in the same district or in different jurisdictions, seek to replicate the supposed success story.

The above point relates to the need to continually interrogate *education as an imagined policy solution* (Anyon 2011) that pins structural crises on the supposed deficits of racialized people and they neighbourhoods where they live. As neoliberal social and economic policy disciplines labour and attempts to contain opposition to what Dorothy Smith describes as the relations of ruling or austerity measures and the expansion of low-wage jobs that have exacerbated situations of concentrated poverty among poor racialized people in urban neighborhoods, people continue to organize and fight back.

Yet, deficit ideologies and the educational policies that embody them have rationalized the disequalizing effects of neoliberal restructuring of the political economy

(Delpit 2006). Critiquing education as an apparatus of the racialized neoliberal state is therefore essential to grasping educational inequality, the uneven distribution of wealth in New York and Chicago, and the relationship of education policy to the development of a new kind of urbanism in the United States (Merrifield and Swyngedouw 1996; Smith 1996; Lipman 2011b).

According to the choice paradigm, traditional public schooling appears as coercive; the government, with its monopoly over schools, mandates and enforces regulations and bureaucratic obstructions which inhibit the development of the kinds of educational innovations needed to create equal opportunity, upward mobility, and global economic dominance for the U.S. Further, charter school proponents claim that charters provide greater freedom in the form of flexibility in innovation by teachers and school leaders, and free choice for parents (consumers) in the educational marketplace. In reality, however, inserting market practices into education coerces all schools into taking particular measures, which are often detrimental to a more critical or progressive education, in order to stay competitive and thus survive. Like the factories of Marx's time, schools are forced to increase productivity and cut costs in order to gain the competitive edge that allows them to retain students. These imperatives were among the key accumulation strategies of capitalism in the nineteenth century and remain so today. Increased productivity and cost-cutting drive outsourcing, wage suppression, mechanization, as well as attacks on unions, healthcare benefits, and pensions.

3.6 Global Chicago and Educational Apartheid

The fact that Chicago is two cities—one wealthy and the other very, very poor is hardly an issue of debate. There are many factors that have contributed to this condition, some out of the control of the citizenry, some within our control. A global economy and its implications for jobs and economic stability are largely out of our control. The public

policies of our local government however, are certainly within our control in a representative democracy. For example, Mayor Rahm Emanuel has closed over 50 public schools in our poorest neighborhoods on the South and West sides, while making plans to open nearly as many charter schools. Policies like these, and there are plenty more examples, widen an already large color and wealth gap within our city. Elected representatives who, through votes and action, support the institutionalization and continuity of inequalities should and can be held accountable by an educated citizenry.

Constance Mixon, "A Tale of Two Cities: Why the UIC Faculty Strike Matters"
The Chicago Sun-Times, February 18, (2014)

Chicago plays a vital role in the coordination of global capitalism and has served as a laboratory for the development of urban neoliberalism. Yet whilst Chicago has developed into a global city following the general contours of neoliberal restructuring, it retains its distinct geography, history, and political style. Chicago, like a number of other metropolitan governments seeking to become global or to become more deeply integrated into the transnational capitalist economy, has provided overly generous subsidies to transnational firms in order to woo them into investing in the city by either opening up a factory or relocating their headquarters to Chicago (for example, $56 million was spent in March 2001 to get Boeing to relocate from its long time base of operations in Seattle, which brought a whopping 450 jobs to Chicago!) (Moberg, Simpson, and Mixon 2013, 34).

But as Moberg (2013, 34) observes, "what looks like a paradigmatic tale of the emergence of a new Chicago economy is not so clear and simple." Boeing after all is a manufacturing company. And Chicago still retains the largest number of manufacturing jobs of any U.S. metropolis. "The city's rooster of corporate headquarters remains mixed, despite optimistic projections that Boeing heralded the beginning of a new era. Starting in 1998, Chicago had lost a string of [corporate] headquarters," which relocated to other

cities (e.g. Amoco, Ameritech). And worthy of note, corporate headquarters were as likely to be located in the suburbs of the city as its downtown.

Depending on the source, Chicago has been ranked first or second in the nation for having the highest number of business service workers. And although the city retains a lingering rust-belt image, in recent years Chicago has become home to a high number of high tech firms and their workers, tying with Washington D.C. for the highest number of IT jobs. Yet, at the same time Chicago also ranks much lower when you compare the proportion of all workers in the high tech sector to the proportion of workers in services. Additionally, the city also lags behind other large urban regions in terms of business innovation and economic growth (Bennett 2010; Moberg, Simpson, and Mixon 2013). As Moberg (2013, 167) observes, "The wired world, analysts like Saskia Sassen [citing *Global City*] have argued, does not eliminate the need for personal contacts among the decision-makers, professional advisors, and technical elite of the business world. Consequently, certain key cities-especially in their traditional cores-were likely to be centers of corporate control for the global economy. Yet just as cities like Chicago were gearing up to compete for global-city status, growing indications hinted that many highly skilled, business professional jobs—computer programmers, software engineers, architects, securities analysts, and others—could be outsourced to India, China and other lower-wage locations, as were manufacturing jobs before them." While Chicago's economy is most certainly increasingly globalized, and continues to serve as a vital financial and logistical hub for global capital, it remains a less important global city than New York, London, or Tokyo. While not without its problems in terms of categorization

and the merits of ranking global cities, Figure 12 provides an illustration of how the top tier global cities stack up against each other.

Figure 7. Global Economic Power Index

Rank	Global Economic Power Index (Martin Prosperity Institute)	Global City Competitiveness Index (The Economist)	Global Cities Index (AT Kearney)	Global Financial Centers Index	Global City GDP 2025 (McKinsey Global Institute)
1	Tokyo	New York	New York	London	New York
2	New York	London	London	New York	Tokyo
3	London	Singapore	Paris	Hong Kong	Shanghai
4	Chicago	Paris (tie)	Tokyo	Singapore	London
5	Paris	Hong Kong (tie)	Hong Kong	Tokyo	Beijing
6	Boston	Tokyo	Los Angeles	Zurich	Los Angeles
7	Hong Kong	Zurich	Chicago	Chicago	Paris
8	Osaka	Washington DC	Seoul	Shanghai	Chicago
9	Washington, DC (tie)	Chicago	Brussels	Seoul	Rhine-Ruhr
10	Seoul (tie)	Boston	Washington DC	Toronto	Shenzhen

Source: Florida 2012.

The closing of public schools and their replacement with charters has been essential to the gentrification and the wider political economic model of global city development in Chicago, which from Mayor Richard M. Daley to Mayor Rahm Emanuel is aimed at expanding Chicago's global reach and making it an attractive arena for transnational capital to sink roots. One mechanism that has accompanied/facilitated such actions is Tax Incremental Financing (TIF). TIF has been used in Chicago to siphon money out of poor, largely African American and Latino, neighbourhoods and put it instead towards the redevelopment of the downtown Loop district. TIF is a tax scheme that is supposed to be used for economic development in "blighted areas," but in Chicago has instead served as a slush fund for the mayor to pursue a downtown-focused development strategy, giving millions to such struggling businesses as Hyatt Hotels and

the Chicago Board of Trade (Weber and Goddeeris 2007).[57] As Amisha Patel (Field Note, September 10, 2012), director of the Grassroots Collaborative, observed on the first day of the 2012 CTU strike, it is the current conditions in Chicago schools that are really disruptive: "I'm talking about the disruption of not having air conditioning, or not having libraries in their schools.…When CPS closes their schools instead of investing in the schools, that's what's disruptive to students. And when CPS forces students in classrooms with 35 or 40 other children, that's what's long-term disruptive for our children."

In developing an analysis of these processes, it is crucial to foreground and interrogate how *white supremacy* has structured the historical-geographical development of U.S. capitalism and urban school systems. The education policy under examination here has contributed to gentrification, a process that his resulted in the displacement of largely low-income African American and Latino communities in Chicago and in other U.S. cities (Lipman 2011a, 51–56). *The displacement and management of these populations and the territories where they live, work, and attend school has been a central objective and result of education restructuring in Chicago.*

Moreover, it is important to pay close attention to the ways in which race and racism operate in both the actual constitution of the crisis in education in U.S. cities and in this process of neoliberal restructuring, justified by its proponents on the basis that such reform is needed to address historical inequities in educational provision and outcomes for African American and Latino students. In acknowledging how corporate reformers deploy such discourses, we should situate our analysis in the reality of how public schools disproportionately fail African American and Latino youth and

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[57] Joravsky (2011) of the *Chicago Reader* has done a spectacular job of uncovering the ways in which the city government of Chicago has used TIF money to build "global Chicago" at the expense of its most exploited and marginalized populations and neighbourhoods.

communities. Kozol (2005), for example, has shown that the U.S. public school system continues to be racially stratified. The Chicago Teachers Union (The Chicago Teachers Union 2012a, iv) describes the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) as an "apartheid-like system" that "denies resources to the neediest schools, uses discipline policies with a disproportionate harm on students of color, and enacts policies that increase the concentrations of students in high poverty and racially segregated schools." Of all the African American students who attend CPS schools, "55% attend schools so segregated that both African American students and free/reduced [FRL] lunch eligible students comprise 90% or more of the population. Another 14% attend schools with the same level of racial segregation but somewhat lower levels of FRL eligibility" (The Chicago Teachers Union 2012a, 15). Thus we can see that what Lipman (2005, 380; but see also Nightingale 2012) identifies as the "new forms of [racial] segregation and dislocation" evident in the gross inequality of who is able to access urban space and the purpose for which it is used is an embodiment of the contradictions of global Chicago. As with housing policy and real estate markets, education policy in Chicago has been pivotal to the production of these new forms of segregation.

Further research by the CTU demonstrates that the policies implemented by CPS over the past 17 years have been devastating for the majority of African American and Latino students and their families in Chicago. The union makes a compelling case for "smaller class sizes, a robust, well-rounded curriculum, and in-school services that address [students'] social, emotional, intellectual and health needs." It argues that all "students deserve culturally-sensitive, non-biased, and equitable education" (The Chicago

Teachers Union 2012a, 5). Indeed, this agenda was at the centre of the teachers' strike that took place from September 10 through 18, 2012.

"While Chicago remains the most racially segregated city in the United States, even after undergoing the second largest decline in segregation among all major U.S. cities over the last 12 years (Vigdor and Glaeser 2012, 5)" the major corporate power houses in the world economy who have been advancing the globalization of production and financialization nonetheless view Chicago as one of the most important global cities in the world. (A.T. Kearney 2010). As Janet Abu-Lughod (2007, 45–47) observes although Chicago has been,

> relatively but not completely free of major direct racial confrontations or riots since 1968…this is no firm indicator that racial tensions in the city have mysteriously been resolved. Rather, the evidence suggests that in the interim, the 'combatants' increasingly have reached a *modus vivendi*, maintained largely through their separation in geographic and political space. For the most part, minorities are confined to specific sections of the city and, more recently, have come to constitute pluralities in a handful of isolated towns within Cook County…And in place of direct confrontations, it appears that the strategies and tactics of localized 'race wars' at the margins of black settlement have shifted. The weapons are now largely: (1) selective public and private economic investment and disinvestment strategies that have marginalized or even removed a substantial proportion of poor blacks from the productive economy; and (2) the selective deployment of public powers to 'reconquer' space in portions of the city center (an expanding Loop and the northern and northwestern quadrants) for 'whiter' residential, institutional, and finance/business uses.

From this description it becomes clear why it makes sense to talk about these largely Black areas in Chicago as zones of targeted abandonment and why political and economic elites might see the need for mechanisms of social containment. Yet, missing from this analytical description of segregation in contemporary Chicago is how, in spite of the devastation that has been wrought on these parts of the city and the communities

that live there, people are building deep relationships within and across place in order to fight for justice.

Drawing strength from these communities and the place-based relationships that have been developed between teachers, parents, and community members in many of these abandoned neighbourhoods, CTU President, Karen Lewis, said in her first public speech since being treated for a brain tumor in 2014, which had forced her to pull back from her union responsibilities: "They want 'Stepford Teachers' and 'Children of the Corn'—kids who are compliant and will not challenge authority or the system on eradicating inequality, poverty and injustice" (quoted in FitzPatrick 2015).

These policy "innovations" of education reform at the federal scale discussed above have boomeranged back to Chicago as the Commercial Club of Chicago's (CCC) 2009 report on student performance in Chicago schools, *Still Left Behind*, became the blueprint for city policy. The report advocates "tough-minded" teacher evaluations and "broad outsourcing of the management of failing schools to independent organizations" (Commercial Club of Chicago 2009, 4). In line with earlier policies rolled out under Arne Duncan's tenure as CEO of the Chicago school system, where 60 "failing" schools were closed or turned around, with many reopened as charters, this report resulted in an additional 17 schools being closed or "turned around" in 2011-2012.

Based on the business model of turnarounds, where a "specialist" takes over an underperforming company and fires all senior management in order to bring in a fresh new crop with a different set of loyalties, when CPS carries out a turnaround, it fires not just the teachers and administrative staff but all of the adult staff in the building in order to bring in new staff. It then proceeds to impose the latest policy innovations for school

improvement on the new staff (Lipman 2011a, 51). Educational restructuring in Chicago also entails consolidating schools (where multiple schools share the same building) or phasing-out a school over a number of years. The latter is enacted on the schools that CPS has identified as low-enrollment or underperforming. This includes, according to critics, a number of successful neighbourhood schools (Lipman 2011a, 51). 2012-2013 not only saw a continuation of this deplorable tradition of closing schools but also had the unfortunate privilege of setting a national record with 50 schools closed.

School closings in Chicago have led to increased neighbourhood instability and spikes in violence, as children have been transferred out of their own neighbourhoods, usually to schools that are not performing much better than those they previously attended. Indeed, as Lipman (Lipman 2011a, 54) shows, school closings have destroyed some of the last "anchors in their communities" and contributed further to the displacement of predominantly African American and Latino kids, as well as African American veteran teachers. As Leslie T. Fenwick (quoted in Strauss 2013) observes:

> Corporate education reform policies are "not designed to cure what ails under-performing schools. They are designed to shift tax dollars away from schools serving black and poor students; displace authentic black educational leadership; and erode national commitment to the ideal of public education." In most urban centers like Washington D.C. and Prince George's County, black political leadership does not have independent access to the capital that drives land development. These resources are still controlled by white male economic elites. Additionally, black elected local officials by necessity must interact with state and national officials. The overwhelming majority of these officials are white males who often enact policies and create funding streams benefiting their interests and not the local black community's interests. The authors of *The Color of School Reform* affirm this assertion in their study of school reform in Baltimore, Detroit and Atlanta. They found: Many key figures promoting broad efficiency-oriented reform initiatives [for urban schools] were whites who either lived in the suburbs or sent their children to private schools (Henig et al, 2010).

Since socio-spatial production is often directly related to state and market powers, the layout of human-occupied space that contextualizes our sense of spatial belonging—while in constant flux—is an artifact that reflects and usually serves the state and the predominant mode of production (E. W. Soja 1989, 87). As Lipman (2007, 167) again observes, thousands of Chicago's students and families who were shuffled, displaced, and disrupted by Renaissance 2010

> experienced rather abruptly the reality that space exists as a commodity that is controlled by those who control production. For example, after Chicago's Austin Community Academy High School was shut down by Ren2010 in 2005—with short notice given to parents and students—the majority of the African-American students who had gone to this school were shuttled across town to a majority Latino Clemente High School, the designated receiving school for displaced Austin High students. In a city where high school students are strategically aware of territorial street gangs, the influx of students from racially different communities resulted in severe tensions at Clemente High. Reports about Clemente's spike in violence started frequenting newspapers; Chicago residents could read about 40-student schoolyard brawls, chokings, stabbings, and even parents beaten up while visiting the school.

Thus, Ren2010, a policy co-authored by Chicago's elite business community, mandated a sudden change in spatial identity that went against both the seemingly natural order of the previously known education system and the socially constructed sense of belonging of Austin residents.

The desire to breakdown schooling to the most basic tasks of literacy and numeracy required for low-wage employment is vital to understanding the neoliberal restructuring of public education. Moreover, the ways in which draconian disciplinary policies and military schools have disproportionately targeted poor African American children in particular, leaving them to rot in resource-starved neighbourhood schools, is the underbelly of global city development in Chicago (Lipman 2009). Acknowledging the stark reality that CPS students are 86% low-income and 87% African American or Latino,

the CTU has powerfully argued that "CPS has a moral and ethical responsibility to put school-level policies in place to mitigate racial and economic inequities" (Chicago Teachers Union 2012a, 11). In making this reality a focal point of their resistance against the neoliberal project in education, which included the first teachers' strike in 25 years, the CTU effectively tapped into some of the bubbling contradictions of global Chicago.

3.7 Neoliberal Education Deform in the Big Apple

Like Chicago, New York City has witnessed drastic and experimental education reform over the past decade, especially under billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who, after being first elected in 2002, took over the education system, disbanding its elected board and pushing forward a program of reforms under the title *Children First*. In addition to centralizing power in the mayor's hand these major reforms pushed forward by Bloomberg would see over 100 schools closed, with scores of charters opened in their place, as well as an array of other troubling changes in teacher's work, school budgeting, principal power, and disciplinary measures (Fullan and Boyle 2014).

Bitter battles over public-private partnerships in education and the place of the private sector more generally in educational policy and practice currently embroil the public schools in New York City. Assuming office in 2014 on a mildly left-populist platform, Mayor Bill de Blasio has in important ways sought to slow down the growth of charters, appointed an actual educator as Chancellor of the Department of Education, Carmen Fariña, and in general has sought to chart a different direction from Bloomberg in education and in his relationship to the UFT and other municipal unions. The recent battle between Mayor de Blasio and both charter school proponents and Governor Cuomo in Albany resulted in a windfall for charters, despite de Blasio's best efforts to slow, if not

entirely stop, their growth (Decker and Darville 2015). Cuomo passed legislation that requires the city to find and pay for space for new and expanding charter schools. If the city cannot provide space of its own, i.e. through co-locating charters within public school buildings that it already owns, it will have to pay the charters' rent itself. Only after the city has spent more than $40 million on rent will the state begin to contribute (Hernández 2014). According to the New York City Charter Center, there are now 205 charter schools in New York City serving 95,000 children, with 43,000 families on the waiting list (R. Ford 2015).

According to Julie Cavanagh of the Movement of Rank-and-file Educators (MORE), the "social justice caucus" of the UFT, once the city's charter school student population grows from its current 6% to 10% in the coming years, the city may well find itself in the midst of a financial crisis, as the amount of public money funnelled into charters will prevent the city from being able to finance its traditional public schools. How do Cuomo's protections and advocacy for charter schools relate to the economic organization of New York, and to U.S. society more generally? How do these mandates relate to neoliberal projects of capital accumulation of the past and present? How might this move advance the interests of the elite classes over those of the working class and the poor? How are charter school co-locations and the policies that mandate and implement them complicit in the creation and maintenance of inequality? Who benefits? Who is harmed?

In order to understand corporate education reform in New York and address these questions, we should begin by situating school decentralization within the context of the fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s and the structural adjustments visited upon the city in its

aftermath. The charter school movement in New York emerged out of this restructuring, and education policy in New York more generally continues to be part of a constellation of broad policy shifts and discourses that characterize the interlocking attacks on the welfare state and racial justice, and the concomitant emergence and advancement of neoliberal projects of capital accumulation, the restoration and maintenance of elite class power, and racial control.

Choice, competition, marketplace, and accountability—these are the buzzwords that characterized the reforms under the Bloomberg administration, with Joe Klein as Chancellor of the Department of Education. Sadly, these ideas have become the foundation for much of the national educational reform movement. The principles and strategies underpinning the changes implemented under the Bloomberg-Klein regime were, in part, extrapolated from Mayor Bloomberg's corporate sector experience.

The mayor and his administration have restructured the public school system into what is referred to as a portfolio district, which allegedly promotes choice, autonomy, and accountability as the most effective and efficient ways to reduce the school system's substantial racial achievement gap and improve the quality of education for all the city's students. As a consequence, districts across the country have replicated the restructuring that has occurred in New York, and the New York City school system is often defined as the nation's foremost exemplar of a portfolio district. As one sympathetic report defines them, portfolio districts are "built for continuous improvement through expansion and imitation of the highest-performing schools, closure and replacement of the lowest-performing, and constant search for new ideas" (Hill et al. 2009).

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Klein and Bloomberg oversaw a

radical transformation of the New York City Department of Education into a portfolio management district in which the primary responsibility of the DOE was not to provide curricula or direct support to schools but instead to create a marketplace through which strong schools could be created and replicated and failing schools could be closed.

In our efforts to understand this shift in educational policy and practice, it is useful to once again turn to Lipman's (2011a, 125) argument that charter school proliferation is rooted in "the unfulfilled aims of civil rights strategies" and is "dialectically related to this country's historical disinvestment in communities of color." In the analysis that follows, I elaborate on and extend my discussion of charters in Chicago by situating the emergence and proliferation of charter schools in New York within changes in the racialized dynamics of the city's political economy.

School choice and marketization, the discourses and policy reforms behind the rapid expansion of charter schools, are bound up in the gradual transformation of New York City by large-scale projects of neoliberal urbanization (N. Brenner and Theodore 2002a; Hackworth 2007) and the mix of abandonment, disinvestment, dispossession, and racialized social control that such a transformation has entailed. Put differently, the continuity of school choice and marketization with the transformation of New York into a neoliberal city made possible the rapid increase in the number of charter schools that occurred under NCLB and the Bloomberg administration.

As suggested above, the emergence of the neoliberal city has been accompanied by a growth in wealth and income inequality (Lipman 2007). A recent report by the Economic Policy Institute (Sommeiller and Price 2015) demonstrates that across the United States, the wealthiest 1% earned 53.9% of the total increase in income between

1979 and 2007. In the same period, their average income grew by 200.5%, while the average income of the bottom 99% grew by a mere 19.9%. A growth in income inequality was particularly pronounced in New York State, where the top 1% captured 67.6% of all income growth between 1979 and 2007. The top 1% captured 11.5% of income in 1979 and 32.6% in 2007. This trend reverses the decline in the share of income held by the top 1% between 1928 and 1979, when, in New York, the top 1%'s share of income decreased by 17.9%. In 2011, New York, along with Connecticut, had the largest gap between the average incomes of the top 1% and those of the bottom 99%, with the top 1% taking home average incomes approximately 40 times those of the bottom 99%.

A common rhetorical trope of the neoliberal education reformers has been to invoke the Civil Rights movement to justify their actions. Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education since 2009, called on Martin Luther King Jr. to support the education reformers' agenda in a 2010 interview that he did with Joel Klein, who at the time was the Chancellor of Education in New York City. King, Duncan claimed, "explained in his powerful *Letter from Birmingham Jail* why the civil rights movement could not wait," because "America today cannot wait to transform education. We've been far too complacent and too passive. We have perpetuated poverty and social failure for far too long. The need is urgent and the time for change is now" (quoted in Yohuru 2015). Reflecting a similar sentiment, Klein has often argued that "neither resources nor demography is destiny in the classroom" (quoted in Strauss 2012) and the New York City Department of Education has invested heavily in school choice to achieve the goal of transforming education, remaking the high school choice system to increase the scope and equity of student assignment to high schools. Yet a new study by the Annenberg

Institute for School Reform at Brown University (Fruchter et al. 2012) reveals that the college readiness of New York City high school graduates remains significantly correlated with the neighbourhood where kids live. More specifically, the racial composition and average income of a student's home neighbourhood is a strong indicator of their chance of graduating high school ready for college. The gaps between neighbourhoods are vast.[58]

Charters emerged historically, at least in part, out of a highly localized form of structural adjustment visited upon New York City in the form of municipal austerity that was imposed after 1973. Corporate elites and the state responded to the city's fiscal crisis in the 1970s in a similar manner to the current practices of global economic governance institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank when they bail out fiscally stressed developing nations in order to discipline labour, slash public expenditures, cut taxes on elites and business, and open up new and deregulated markets.

This is quite literally a battle over space. A major result of how Mayor de Blasio was outmanoeuvred in Albany by Governor Cuomo and the charter lobby is something called co-locations, in which public schools literally lose space in their buildings to charters. As Nona Willis-Aronowitz (2014) explains regarding the most recent legislation passed:

> The deal requires the city to provide rent-free space in public school buildings for charter schools—independently run public schools that receive less public funding than district schools and are subsidized by private donations. If the city can't find room for charters inside public schools—an arrangement known as colocation—they must pay to house them elsewhere. The new law will also allot $500 more per charter school student by 2017… In New York, where school

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[58] For example, in the city's neighbourhoods with 100% Black and Latino residents, no more than 10% of high school students graduate ready for college.

space is at a premium, colocation of charters and district schools can exacerbate tensions in a particularly intense way. Colocation among district schools is common in the city, but when charter schools rub right up against traditional public schools, the differences—both financial and cultural—are hard to ignore. Nearly half of city schools face overcrowding, and according to many parents and activists, new protections for charters will only squeeze resources further… Still, it's not the inch so much as the mile that concerns Hernandez and others. Anti-charter activists are calling the new deal an affront to the 94 percent of kids who don't attend charters and yet another example of a privileged few benefiting while so many others remain underserved.

Not only does co-locating charters with traditional neighbourhood public schools divert resources, which has an incredibly jarring effect on students, who now see a stark contrast every day when they look to the charter hallways and classes, with their bright, freshly painted walls (often adorned with inspirational quotes) and other technological resources that their school does not have. It is a painful reminder to many students that for some reason they are not deemed good enough to enjoy such things. Indeed, as one Harlem principal in a school that was recently co-located with a Success Academy charter puts it, "'It's this underlying tension," she said. "There's almost an air of elitism. When they're not making eye contact with you [in the hallways] and they're not acknowledging your existence, you kinda start thinking, 'I guess I'm less than.' I know my kids must feel that.'" One parent, Tashena Elliott, whose daughter attends Success Academy Harlem 1, responds to this kind of criticism, which is felt by the principal and the parents of her students, by insisting that, "'They're upset about how their school is being run compared to our school, because they have nowhere near what we have." "I don't blame them. We're in your space, and now you feel threatened'" (Willis-Aronowitz 2014).

And while kids in both schools are from the same neighbourhood, these tensions and emotional stresses are quite real and rooted in material inequalities between the co-

located schools, including when each group of kids gets to eat lunch. Beyond different lunchtimes, however, those charters, like the one in Harlem, sometimes do in fact perform better on standardized tests. But this is largely due to the fact that whereas public schools have to accept all children, including those with special needs who require a great deal more of resources, charters do not.

Moreover, as Willis-Aronowitz (2014) further notes, "even though the charters serve the same communities as the regular schools, charter school parents are often savvier and more involved. A parent needs to be plugged-in to navigate the admissions process in the first place, and once his or her child is accepted, charters have high standards for community involvement." This observation adds an important insight to our analysis of the complexities and inequities that exist between charters and public, neighbourhood schools. It is interesting to note here that this reporting, which is so critical of charter practices, was supported by Gates Foundation Funding, which suggests that some of their financing does trickle down to sources that are challenging the main agenda that is being pursued in education by Gates and other financers of corporate reform.

More than simply experiments in alternative forms of schools, charters are linked to processes of privatization and the absorption of surplus capital. Their very existence means that public funds are being funnelled into private hands, and in the process making public school systems into important sources of surplus capital flows under corporate control with little government oversight or accountability. Charters expand private sector control over schooling and incorporate teachers, parents, and students into the logic of

capital in new ways by completely transforming the relationship that they have to school administrators and by commodifying educational services.

As a crucial part of the larger testing and the new Common Core regime, discussed further below, charters help create new opportunities for profit making in the public sector. By providing alternative schools, with a limited space for all of the students who now want to attend, most of whom come from historically disinvested racialized neighborhoods, the resulting competition among parents has created a small but vocal constituency of charter supporters in the impoverished urban core. Additionally, charters have become an important weapon in capital's war against organized labour as teachers' unions face unprecedented attacks from across the political spectrum. Lastly, it is crucial to recognize that charter reforms indicate a reworking of the ideological functions of schooling, particularly the notion of equal educational opportunity as a meritocratic mechanism for the development of human capital. The common sense of charter schools, and of the market model in education more generally, is deeply tied to the historic inability of disinvested public schools and neighbourhoods to provide upward mobility for racialized communities throughout the urban United States, compounded by the general lack of economic opportunities (Pedroni 2007; Lipman 2011a). This contradiction has diminished the capacity of schools to serve as the "ideological defense of capitalism" (Bowles 1972).

School choice discourse, through which charter schools have been rationalized and promoted, aids in the construction of parental support by blending culture of poverty theories with the commodification of education in a way that positions parents to perform unpaid labour for the sake of making "good choices" in an ostensibly equitable education

marketplace. Charters mobilize free market ideas as a way to renew cultural explanations of African American and Latino poverty, further obscuring the structural foundations of inequality in the deeply racialized capitalism of the United States and thereby legitimizing social and economic policies that exacerbate race and class inequality. Charter schools, in New York City in particular, while growing out of the political economic shifts that structured school decentralization in New York in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, have seen a vast expansion since the passing of NCLB and the shift to mayoral control in the 2000s.

As a mechanism for market expansion in education, the choice paradigm maintains that education policy should create a landscape within which schools have to compete with one another for students and the funds that come with them. According to this logic, these pressures will incentivize innovation and entrepreneurship in education. Yet, in order for charters to exert sufficient pressure on public school systems more broadly, for them to become a serious threat to the survival of public schools, charters must be scaled up. The resulting improvements in school organization, curricula, pedagogy, and other education and administrative practices, charter advocates maintain, will provide the U.S. with a more productive and therefore competitive labour force, which in turn will help the nation re-establish its dominance in the global economy. In May of 2013, when President Barak Obama (2013) officially declared National Charter School Week, he made explicit the connection between charters, globalization, and the labour force, proclaiming:

> America's success in the 21st century depends on what we do today to reignite the true engine of our economic growth.... We need to equip all our students with the education and skills that put them on the path to good jobs and a bright future—no

matter where they live or what school they attend. Charter schools play an important role in meeting that obligation.

To understand how charters have grown so rapidly in the past two decades, it is useful to turn to Harvey's observation that the role of the state under neoliberalism is to create an institutional framework that supports and facilitates competition and marketization. Public schooling is one of the most important state functions within such a framework. Obama's support of charters reflects this state function; he goes on to proclaim his and the nation's support of charters as "learning laboratories" where increased "flexibility" spurs excellence "in communities with few high-quality educational options," thus "widening the circle of opportunity for students who need it most" (2013). Education under RTTP institutionalizes the kind of framework described by Harvey (2005).

It bears repeating that this policy—and the replacement for NCLB passed in 2015, the *Every Student Succeeds Act*—asserts criteria that states must meet in order to receive grants for education. These criteria include adopting standards like the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and standardized, internationally benchmarked assessments—two developments that have induced a spate of competition among private sector providers of testing and test preparation materials. Also included in RTTP is the requirement that states lift caps on charter school proliferation. As a result, in 2010 New York State raised its cap on charters from 200 to 460, embraced the nationally benchmarked standards of the Common Core, revamped its testing regime, and strengthened the link between test score data and teacher evaluation.

Map 1.

For States, Multiple Choice Is Increasingly the Answer

With 809, California leads the nation in the number of charter schools. In less than 20 years, education activists have started nearly 5,000 of these institutions, which are publicly financed and free for students to attend but independently operated. The charter schools boom is expected to grow as states remove or increase the caps on the number of such schools permitted to operate in each state. There are still 11 states that have no charter schools at all.

98
36
3
26
72 153
809
482 71
216
25
31

155
224 231 144
332 138
8
39 54
34 33
18 30 22 4
76 110 96
39
423

N.H. 10
Mass. 62
R.I. 13
Conn. 17
N.J. 68
Del. 18
Md. 36
D.C. 57

■ States without a charter law in the 2009-2010 academic year
■ States with a charter law in the 2009-2010 academic year

1991	1992	1994	2000	2009
Minnesota passes the first law enabling the creation of charter schools.	City Academy in St. Paul, Minn., becomes the country's first charter school.	The Knowledge Is Power Program, a leading charter school administrator, starts in Houston and New York City.	The first online charter school, Pennsylvania Charter School, starts classes.	The Obama administration pledges millions toward the expansion of charter schools.

Data courtesy of the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools

Source: *U.S News and World Report* 2009.

These proposed solutions to educational inequality are problematic for multiple

reasons. First, as evidenced by a recent study by Christopher and Sarah Lubienski of the

University of Illinois (2013) comparing nationwide scores of charter and public school

students on the math exam of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP),

charters performed below their public school counterparts, and, when they controlled for

class, race, and location, charter school students often performed at a level months behind

students in public schools. There is little evidence to support the notion that the autonomy

and flexibility afforded charters actually leads to innovations that improve student test

scores. Second, data suggests that competition causes a downward pressure on
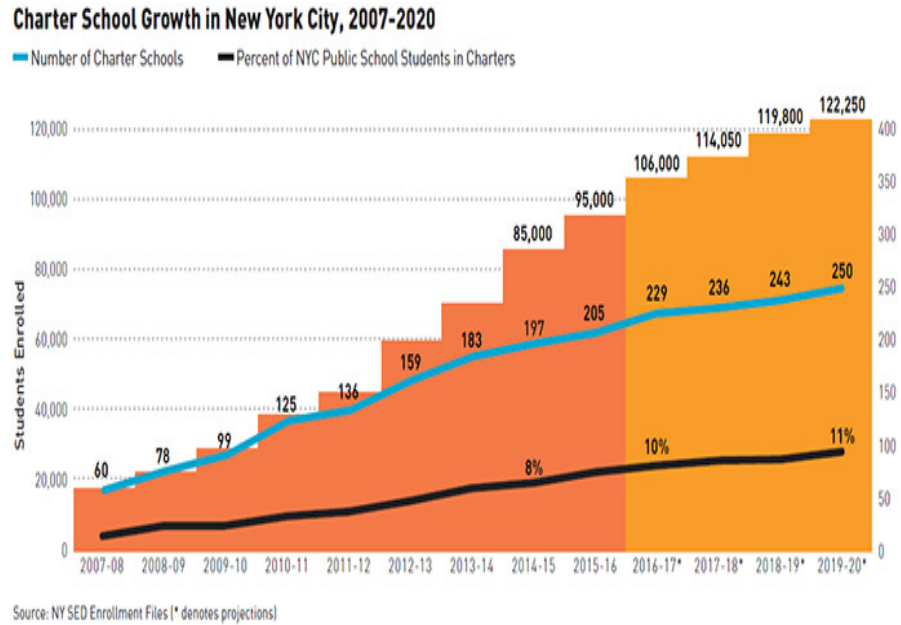
educational quality in both public and charter schools (Ravitch 2010; Fabricant and Fine 2012; Crawford-Garrett 2013). Competitive pressure within the context of standardized testing and punitive accountability has led to a narrowing of curriculum and a pedagogy of teaching to the test. This creates a dual curriculum—with poor and working-class students being drilled in basic skills and test taking tricks while middle and upper (generally white) peers are exposed to a rich and varied curriculum, with access to quality libraries, music, and art education (Lipman 2005; Chicago Teachers Union 2012a).

Curriculum narrows as schools make cuts to the arts, science, music, and the humanities in order to reallocate limited resources to test preparation and basic skills, as happened in Chicago. The threat of school closure in New York has similarly been a central piece of corporate reform there since 2002, as it is directly linked to scores on standardized tests. For example, a 2015 study by Michael Pih and published by the New York City's Independent Budget Office shows that, of the 26 New York City public schools slated to close in 2013, all 17 elementary schools exhibited English Language Arts (ELA) and Math test scores below the 40% mark. All eight high schools on the closure list had a larger share of incoming ninth graders with scores below 62% on the eighth grade ELA test and below 67% on the eighth grade Math test than schools not on the closure list (Pih 2015). For public schools, as well as many charters, punitive accountability mechanisms like teacher evaluations, firings, and school closings, incentivize teachers and school leaders to achieve higher test scores via drills and rote learning (and sometimes outright cheating, for which individual teachers have been known to be criminally prosecuted outside of New York state), instead of individualized, culturally relevant, and critical pedagogy (Bidwell 2015).

The competitive dynamics that have been injected into urban education through the expansion of the testocracy and charter schools has produced a number of serious problems for students, parents, teachers, and other school workers. First, in charters teachers tend to be non-unionized, lower paid, expected to work longer hours than those in public schools, and are often assigned tasks that, in public schools, are the domain of other school employees. Charter school administrations have more times than not proven to be highly opposed to union organizing efforts. This in turn creates a high turnover in the teaching force, which creates further instability for students and those looking for a secure career with a future (R. M. Cohen 2015). Furthermore, the constant pressure to cut costs has forced both charters and public schools, with greater incentives for a district like New York City where each school is responsible for managing its own budget, to rely on low-cost short-term jobs like those produced by Teach for America (TFA) and an increasing number of alternative teacher preparation programs that inadequately prepare teachers. This is even more disturbing and problematic because the teachers being produced by TFA and other rapid-fire, non-traditional teacher training programs are being placed in the poorest, most high-needs schools, again, in predominantly racialized schools after only 3-6 months of training (Fabricant and Fine 2012, 20; Erickson 2015). Finally, because of increased competition in the charter market, especially in a city like New Orleans, which is now entirely charter and has therefore achieved market saturation, instead of putting more money towards salaries and student's educational needs, charters are dedicating more funds to marketing and public relations (Fabricant and Fine 2012; Buras 2014).

For example, the head of the Charter Success network in New York, former City

Council member for the Upper East Side Eva Moskowitz, along with the Hedge fund-backed Families for Excellent Schools, spent close to five million dollars on a massive PR campaign to attack, and defeat, Mayor de Blasio's attempt to deny three charter schools rent-free space in public school buildings (Khan 2014; Hernández 2014). From 2010-2011, New York City's Success Academy Charter Schools Inc. spent $883,119 on flyers, bus stop ads, internet ads, and "an army of paid recruiters who go door-to-door soliciting student applications" (Gonzales 2010). Another $1.3 million was spent on networking and outreach, including $243,150 paid to the PR firm SKD Knickerbocker and $129,000 to a consulting firm founded by David Axelrod, President Obama's chief strategist. Additionally, $912,000 was spent by Success Academy's first seven schools on advertising and branding firms to recruit more students. The total spent on marketing and PR for 2010-2011 was $3.4 million. Between 2007 and 2009 alone, Harlem Success spent $1.3 million on marketing. $1 million of that money was spent on student recruitment efforts including posters, brochures, Internet and radio ads, and door-to-door solicitations (Gonzales 2010). In 2008, private sector educational entrepreneurs in New York joined with the neoliberal think tank Democrats for Education Reform (DER) to unleash a massive wave of publicity campaigns designed to defame public schools in poor neighborhoods and promote charter schools as the solution to a broken system of public schooling. As indicated in Figure 8, charter expansion in New York City since 2002 when Bloomberg became mayor has been extensive.

Figure 8.

Charter School Growth in New York City, 2007-2020

— Number of Charter Schools   — Percent of NYC Public School Students in Charters

Source: NY SED Enrollment Files (* denotes projections)

Source: New York City Charter School Centre 2016.

Figure 9.

NYC charter school applicants and seats, by neighborhood (estimated, 2013-14)[5]

Source: New York City Charter School Centre 2016.

Like Marx's industrial reserve army, competition in education plays working-class and poor families against one another as they compete for resources, especially limited spaces in well-advertised charter schools. This competition and the instability unleashed

by expansion of charters and competition in school systems puts pressure on the city and state to aid corporate reformers like Moskowitz and the hedge fund millionaires she works with to open more charters (Gonzales 2010). Meanwhile, marketing and PR campaigns funnel more public money into private firms, and in so doing have come to depend on (and exploit) the unpaid physical and emotional labour families engage in while they strive to get their kids a quality education that is generally no longer guaranteed to them by the government.

Figure 10. Hedge Funds and Corporate Reform in NYC

Source: Joseph 2015.

Furthermore, because charters receive less funding from state governments, and because urban public schools are forced to adapt to the funding that they receive through

the typically lower property values that form their tax base, both seek out additional revenue streams from corporate philanthropy. There are two major implications that flow from this: First, the competition among schools not only for students but also for capital from the venture philanthropists and the support of business leaders intensifies competition (Saltman 2010). Charters, as the model of the corporate reform, receive millions in subsidies from corporate and hedge fund philanthropic organizations. Though charters receive 20% less per child than traditional public schools, a vast and seemingly endless inflow of foundation money gives them a significant competitive edge. The Gates Foundation alone has given charters at least $137 million within the last few years. Gates, Walton, and Broad family philanthropies combined have given at least $600 million to charter schools and organizations. As a result of private financing, The Harlem Children Zone's per capita investment is three times that of the per student spending of New York City's traditional schools. The reliance of charters and public schools on capital from venture philanthropists blurs the borders between the public and private spheres and increases corporate control over schooling as billionaires like Bill Gates and Eli Broad become increasingly involved in education policymaking and governance (Fabricant and Fine 2012).

The competitive dynamics that are so central to neoliberal education policy have important spatial implications. In New York City this is especially true of charter school co-location, discussed above, which has emerged as a cost saving strategy for charter entrepreneurs. Co-location was a major part of the educational agenda of former mayor Michael Bloomberg, though today it faces some challenges under current mayor Bill de Blasio. Under Bloomberg, the city used its vast resources and command over built space

to help charter schools remain competitive by providing them with rent-free space in buildings that were also occupied by public schools. A recent study published by the New York City Independent Budget Office compares the funding of traditional public schools with that of charter schools.

Figure 11.

Comparison of Funding Traditional Schools Versus Charter Schools		
	2008-2009	
Public Funding Per General Education Student	(Revised)	2009-2010
Traditional Public Schools	$15,672	$16,011
Funding of Charters in DOE Buildings	$16,373	$16,660
Difference from Traditional Public Schools	$701	$649
Funding of Charters in Private Space	$13,661	$13,653
Difference from Traditional Public Schools	($2,011)	($2,358)
SOURCES: IBO; Department of Education		

Source: Pih 2015.

With approximately 35,478 students attending co-located charter schools in FY 2012, this amounts to a public subsidy of more than $96 million in 2012 alone. This funnelling of public money and public space into the private sector means that one effect of competition on public schools is, in fact, the draining of revenue away from the city's public schools and other services (Pih 2015). This in turn undermines their ability to compete. An additional $96 million could help public schools provide smaller class sizes, attract more experienced teachers, and develop the kinds of innovative pedagogy and curricula that the choice paradigm claims to encourage.

In New York City racial segregation and poverty concentration are tightly linked in charter schools. For instance, charter school enrolment in the New York metropolitan area is 26% Latino, 66% Black, and 5% white. Public schools enrol 27% Latino, 20%

Black, and 42% white students. 85% of charter students attend intensely segregated minority schools, compared to 32% of white charter students, therefore illustrating the extent to which charter schools in New York, as in Chicago and a number of other U.S. cities, operate at the intersection of race and poverty, with at least 90% of Black and Latino charter school students in New York coming from low-income, poverty-level households. Further, as students leave public schools, the flow of money that follows them to charters drains overcrowded public schools in high poverty neighbourhoods of much needed funds. Because the market for charter schools in New York City is primarily located in impoverished neighbourhoods in the urban core, public schools serving primarily African American and Latino students are drained of crucial revenue at the same time that their highest performing students are transferred to charter schools. With school closings intensifying already overcrowded classrooms across New York, these conditions make it extremely difficult for public schools to garner the kinds of standardized test scores they need in order to avoid being turned around or closed altogether (Frankenberg, Siegal-Hawley, and Wang 2010).

And while African American and Latino parents navigate the constraints of urban poverty and an educational landscape in which schools in low-income racialized neighbourhoods have suffered repeated waves of disinvestment in New York and other urban centers, their embrace of charter schools, and articulated desire to get their children enrolled in one, creates a small but vocal constituency in urban centres who rally in support of charter school expansion and corporate reform of education, as in New York City (Pedroni 2007; Shapiro 2015; Lipman 2011a). At the same time, charters cut costs in order to enhance their market position, with the result that poor racialized youth who are

attending highly segregated charter schools disproportionately bear the negative educational impact of those cuts. This is yet another instance of targeted abandonment as African American and Latino youth and their parents, abandoned by the state to fend for themselves in the educational marketplace, bear the brunt of the harms associated with increasingly intense competition as available educational infrastructure is hollowed out, if not dismantled altogether.

In a 2006 interview with William Ouchi (2009), Joel Klein declares, "The school is the unit that matters." As Ouchi explains, "New York City's strategy was to improve student performance by allowing each school to elevate itself in its own unique way. The basic theory was that every school, given proper freedom and accountability with skilled leadership from the principal, will improve." When asked by former New York State Commissioner of Education, David Steiner, in 2013 if he still believed in building a system of great schools instead of a great school system, Chancellor Klein (2013) responded,

> I don't know any other way. You send your kid to a school, you don't send your kid to a school system. This is the one thing that drives me nuts about choice. I'm a pretty big believer that [if] it is good enough for the one percent it is good enough for the 99 percent, and I don't know anyone in the one percent who doesn't insist on choice for their kids, and the idea that we would eliminate choice strikes me as nuts…. I don't know of any formula that tells me that the unit that doesn't matter is schools…. Choice is something that all of us want in every aspect of our life.

Not only does Klein celebrate choice as a basic human right, but his focus on individual schools and on individual parents and children who deserve to exercise choice obscures his failure to say how the system can ensure that these schools are quality choices. While choice is framed as a way to "level the playing field," or to ensure that low-income communities have the same opportunity to choose as wealthy parents, recent research by

the Annenberg Institute (Fruchter et al. 2015) shows that the implementation of a widespread system of choice has not resulted in more low-income students graduating college-ready. The authors found that 18 of the 21 neighbourhoods with the lowest college-readiness rates are in the Bronx, that in the city's neighbourhoods with 100% Black and Latino residents, no more than 10% of students graduate college-ready, and that 13 of the 15 neighbourhoods with the highest college-readiness rates are in Manhattan. This leads the authors to conclude that "in spite of the city's efforts to increase equity by expanding high school choice and creating five hundred new small schools and one hundred charter schools, college readiness rates are still largely predicted by the demographics of a student's home neighborhood" (Fruchter et al. 2015, 1). While de Blasio and Chancellor Fariña have taken such research findings into consideration, unlike Mayor Emanuel and many other U.S. city school administrators, the de Blasio administration has not yet managed to make any significant course direction based on these failed policies.

According to Chancellor Klein's framework, choice could only function if school budgets were restructured so that there was a direct connection between the amount of funding a school received and the size and need of its student body. In *The Secret of TSL: The Revolutionary Discovery That Raises School Performance*, Ouchi (2009, 273), one of Klein's initial advisors and a strong proponent of weighted student funding, explicitly connects weighted student funding to school choice: "Without school choice, the effects of Weighted Student Formula are muted as well…. If students are assigned to the nearest school, each school will have only a few students who have one type or another type of special need, and typically the additional money that those few special students bring will

be insufficient to enable the school to meet their need fully."

Also of importance for understanding charters in New York today are the historical experiments in community control of schools in the late 1960s, and what occurred when, after these short lived experiments, New York City returned to its more traditional model of school governance. Community control constituted a shift in power relations as local poor and working-class African American and Latino constituencies gained jurisdiction over school districts in parts of Brooklyn and Manhattan. After overwhelming resistance from teachers, principals, politicians, and the teachers' union, however, these experimental districts were dismantled. In 1969, the state legislature passed a school decentralization law that broke the city up into 32 community school districts, each with an elected board, with a decentralized administration and policymaking bodies (H. Lewis 2015).

The decentralization of the city's schools occurred as part of a wider trend that was taking place around the country, where, in the name of granting municipalities greater choice and autonomy, governmental authority was increasingly localized, even though the actual space for local maneuverability was tightly constrained. In a city like New York, decentralization was largely "the result of an institutionally regulated (and policed) disciplining of localities" (Hackworth 2007, 17). As an increasingly transnationalized finance capital gained greater control of the city in the aftermath of the fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s, localized choice and autonomy were less about "the degree of separation from the wider economic sphere" than "the degree of control over the social construction of place" (Hackworth 2007, 19).

In New York, this shift in control manifested in an increased susceptibility to bond

rating agencies and creditworthiness, which, like that which has occurred in cities across the United States since this period, has been elevated to be the primary goal driving the city's social and economic policies (Tabb and Sawers 1978; Tabb 1982; Hackworth 2007; Moody 2007). Hackworth has probably done the most to elucidate the analytical and political importance that these bond rating agencies have come to play within contemporary urban neoliberalization; reaching across jurisdictions, they place constraints on municipal governments regardless of which political party is in power.

It is crucial to place these changes within the broader political-economic transformation of New York, which since the 1970s has experienced significant deindustrialization, white flight, and economic abandonment by the federal government. As a result of these processes, the municipal functions that many urban residents—at least in the advanced capitalist core—take for granted, from housing and sanitation to education, policing, and transit, could only be funded by borrowing money. But, in order to receive credit to cover these services, a municipality requires a strong bond rating. A strong bond rating, in turn, generally translates into prioritizing the needs of investors in order to make the city an attractive place for investment. In New York City, this project has taken a variety of shapes, including the beautification and renewal of "blighted" areas and the heavy-handed policing of squeegee-persons and turnstile hoppers. Similar changes and trends have taken place in Chicago and other U.S. cities, beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s, with some cities like Detroit facing more severe abandonment by the federal government and even more catastrophic results of deindustrialization due to its narrow sectoral dependence on the auto industry (Hackworth 2007; Brash 2011).

As New York's municipal functions have been increasingly incorporated into the

logic of capital throughout the 1970s and since by means of such mechanisms as forcing workers to invest their pensions in municipal bonds, the profit driven activities of real estate developers, mega-project developers, investors, and bankers have transformed the city's built environment to suit their objectives of profit maximization. Furthermore, global capital flows shaped the allocation and flow of local capital as New York's service industry developed to meet the needs of global finance. Unions, as well as social programs like welfare and public housing, were seen as straining the city's budget, which proved bad for credit, and threatening to the economic and political interests of this new elite power bloc. Labour would have to be disciplined (Moody 2007).

The austerity measures of the mid to late 1970s battered school decentralization in New York City. The creation of the Municipal Assistance Corporation (MAC) and the Emergency Financial Control Board (EFCB), which represented the interests of finance and real estate capital and injected their influence into city governance, institutionalized the new power bloc of bankers and real estate tycoons. In the spirit of the structural adjustments demanded by the World Bank and the IMF, MAC and EFCB insisted on austerity as a precondition for restoring the creditworthiness of the city, and public schools were no exception to the cuts this entailed.

After a six-day strike by the United Federation of Teachers in 1975, the union acquiesced and, though some teachers' jobs were saved, New York City schools intensified the workload of teachers by cutting prep periods and reducing instructional time by 90 minutes per week. Student services were cut as the EFCB slashed the city's budget by 22% between 1975 and 1983. Fifteen thousand teachers were laid off during this period. Elementary schools lost 21% of their staff, and middle schools and high

schools lost 16%. As a result, class size and student-to-teacher ratios exploded while school buildings, and entire neighbourhoods, deteriorated (Tabb 1982).

Worthy of note here is that austerity in this period, as is true of the present, disproportionately affected African American and Latino educators. For instance, in 1975 15,000 teachers and paraprofessionals were laid off. The number of African American and Latino teachers decreased from 11% to 3%, even though two-thirds of the city's students were African American or Latino. The racialized impact of austerity on municipal workers more generally mirrored these trends in education. Between 1974 and 1976, New York City lost half its Latino workers, two-fifths of African American workers, and one-third of its female workers, many of whom were parents of youth in the city's decentralized school system. Though African Americans and Latinos made up only 31% of the city's municipal workforce, they were dealt 44% of the cuts (Tabb 1982). And as a recent Teachers Unite (2014a) report demonstrates, Black and Latino educators have similarly taken the brunt of losses as a result of more recent neoliberal policy reforms.

Figure 12. Demographics of New York City Teachers
(Does not include Asian and Native American teacher hires)

Teachers' race	percent hires 1990- 1991	percent hires 2000- 2001	percent hires 2011-2012
Black	16%	27.2%	10.9%
Latina/o	11.9%	16.3%	14.4%
White	59.5%	53%	67.6%

Source: Teachers Unite 2014a.

As the report points out, "The decline in the number of Black and Latina/o teacher hires is troublesome, but when the percentage of hires is compared with the children who attend New York City public schools these data are even more troublesome. Data from

the 2011 New York City Independent Budget Office's annual report show that only 14.3% of students are white (as of 2012, 67.6% of teacher hires were white), 39.3% of students are Latina/o (but as of 2012, 14.4% of teacher hires were Latina/o), and 29.9% of students are Black (as of 2012, 10.9% of teacher hires were Black)" (Teachers Unite 2014a, 4).

It is useful to think through what has transpired in both New York and Chicago by using Gilmore's (2007, 36) notion of abandoned places, which she says might also be viewed as "planned concentrations or sinks—of hazardous materials and destructive practices that are in turn sources of group differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death (which, whether state-sanctioned or extralegal, is how racism works, regardless of the intent of the harms' producers, who produce along the way racialization and therefore race)." According to Gilmore, abandonment, disinvestment, and dislocation are not just about exodus, social costs, dismantling, and disappearances—they are also productive of the ideological and material conditions and practices that shape unequal schooling and structure the racialized nature not only of criminalization or public health, but also of educational experiences and trajectories.

3.8 Concluding Remarks

Former Mayor Bloomberg's education reforms are a prime example of using business models and free market ideology to design and implement educational policy. *These reforms are both symptomatic of and a driving force behind the larger globalized neoliberal project. Their most pronounced manifestations are local, but the sweep of their influence, and the discourses in which they participate, are global.* Bloomberg's reforms, which emerged within an educational context shaped largely by NCLB and a

manufactured discourse of education crisis, are perhaps among the policy's most thoroughly deployed transformations.

As with other neoliberal mutations, these reforms required a highly authoritarian governing body and organizational structure (Harvey 2003; Harvey 2005; N. Klein 2007). Elected in 2001, billionaire Michael Bloomberg immediately centralized control over the city's Department of Education. The mayor and his appointed chancellor, Joel Klein, developed the mayoral appointed and controlled Public Education Panel (PEP) to replace the New York City Board of Education, further cementing centralized control by dismantling community structures and channels for actualizing dissent. Through concentrating governance and management in a panel of mayoral appointees rather than in an elected or community run Boards of Education, Bloomberg worked to disempower parents and teachers in a process of consolidating control that would expand and evolve throughout his terms as mayor. Furthermore, a massive influx of capital from foundations like The Gates Foundation, The Walton Family, The Broad Foundation, as well as hedge fund managers like Anchorage Capital Partners, Green light Capital, and Pershing Square Capital Management (Medina 2010; Gabriel and Medina 2010) extended elite class power more deeply into education, as billionaires from the private sector found themselves with increasing influence over educational policy under Bloomberg's administration. As a result of a mix of federal mandates from NCLB and considerable new inflows of private capital, an unprecedented growth in the number of charter schools occurred as competition and privatization became cornerstones of the Bloomberg administration's reform agenda. Due to pressure from Bloomberg as well as the millions spent by hedge fund managers on lobbying the state legislature, then Governor Paterson

raised the state cap on charters to 460, with a cap of 214 in New York City. As a result, New York received $700 million in Race To The Top money, $170 million for school districts and charter schools, and another $150 million for private vendors who provide the products and services needed to maintain the state's standards, testing, and accountability regime (Office of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo 2015). In 2010, there were 100 charter schools in New York City.

Today, out of 208 charter schools in New York State, 183 of them are in New York City and serve 47,000 students. They enrol approximately 4% of the city's students, except in the neighbourhoods where they are located in concentration, where they enrol approximately 25% of the students. With the cap raised to 460, school choice advocates expect student enrolment in charter schools to explode in the years to come (New York City Charter School Center 2016). To Bloomberg's consternation, as well as that of the hedge fund managers, a 2010 bill mandated that all new charters be run by private non-profit organizations (Charter Management Organizations or CMOs), though a handful of for-profit Education Management Organizations (EMOs) remain. Co-location policy remained untouched, however, and remains a key strategy in making charters competitive with public schools. Under Bloomberg's mayoralty, two-thirds of New York City's charter schools were allowed to co-locate with public schools at no cost in rent (Medina 2010; Gabriel and Medina 2010).

As I have tried to demonstrate in my analysis of neoliberal education reform in Chicago and New York City, although proponents of corporatization and neoliberal reform have been amazingly successful in advancing their policy agenda, as is true throughout the United States more broadly, there is probably no city, state, or province in

North America, with the exception of New Orleans, that has completely neoliberalized its public school system. Rather, in most places we find a combination of some of the reforms and specific local variants on plans. And in many places there exist elements of other educational agendas, in particular a neoconservative cultural attack on modern liberal schooling. This can be explained in part because, while neoliberal education reform might envision a completely privatized system across all urban jurisdictions, all manner of place specific institutions, actors, and cultures that are both responsible for materializing urban transformation and neoliberalization in place mediate and sometimes interrupt this "pure" vision of neoliberal education reform as policies are implemented on the ground.

In both Chicago and New York, as elsewhere in the nation, teachers and their unions are the principal targets of the new school restructuring. The primary reason for this is because teachers tend to staunchly oppose the corporatization of schooling wherein their students are treated as little more than test scores and wherein teaching is subject to a Taylorist reorganization that leeches the joy out of both teaching and learning. This results in the creation of a more "flexible" and disposable workforce (Bellamy Foster 2011, n.p.). Because the largest expenditure in education is teacher salaries, deprofessionalizing teaching serves to cut costs and makes sense from a capitalist perspective in which the bulk of jobs available in the U.S. labour market are in the low-wage service sector. And through this deprofessionalization, more opportunities for capital accumulation are created by means of the expansion of charter schools and the creation of a less skilled, disposable workforce through programs like Teach for America.

This is part of a more general push to squeeze a greater amount of work out of teachers for less pay. Once we understand that a central objective of education restructuring is to turn teaching into a precarious profession, it becomes clear why it is necessary to attack established structures by which unions protect workers, such as seniority. Teaching can then be transformed from a career into a temporary (three to five year) job for a lowly paid, easily credentialed, and in the U.S., typically white work force (Sears 2003; Antush 2014; H. Stevenson 2007). By this means, teaching is devolving into a low-wage/low-skill job that requires little to no special education as a teacher, which is a major reason that in recent years we have witnessed a proliferation of alternative teacher training/placement programs, so that instead of requiring people to get a special degree in teacher education they get a few months of training before being parachuted into a high needs classroom in a largely poor, Black and Brown working-class neighbourhood. While there remain a small segment of select-enrolment and high quality traditional public schools whose aim remains preparing students for knowledge sector employment and other traditionally "middle-class" employment in the public sector, this function of the state provision of education is less important in the United States today than it has been in a hundred years.

Another chief reason that teachers are subject to such severe attacks is because they comprise the single biggest sector of unionized workers in the US, with approximately 1.4 million members in the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and 3 million members in the National Education Association. Worldwide, there are approximately 29 million teachers organized into unions or some form of professional association. As a result, teachers' unions comprise the most powerful *potential* opposition

to the neoliberalization of schooling. Yet, with few exceptions, U.S. teacher unions (especially the AFT) cling to a conservative, collaborationist business unionism. The national organizations and local affiliates rarely mobilize their own members and have in fact been important actors in neoliberalizing both their own work and public education policy through concessions made in local negotiations and in national and international policy arenas on such areas as merit pay and teacher evaluation systems. Yet, as I discuss in the next chapter, the 2012 CTU strike and the transformations this union has undergone since 2010 has struck a significant blow to neoliberalism in that it has slowed the assault on teachers and public education in one of the most politically important spaces for neoliberal policy experimentation. Also, and perhaps more importantly, the CTU has built up working-class and social movement capacities and expectations necessary for greater struggle.

And because teachers work with ideas and are responsible for conveying values and norms of behaviour, they need to be recognized as ideological workers (B. Stevenson 2010, 2). This makes them unique and privileged members of the working class. We should reject notions of teachers as middle-class professionals just as we should reject viewing them as merely another segment of the working class. Yet, as Betsey Stevenson (2010, 3) argues, "there is … nothing inevitable about what teachers do or how they" do it. And further, "education has the power both to reproduce and to transform, and will always contain elements of both and be a struggle between both." And it is this "*potential* [for education and teachers] to work in critical and transformatory ways" that makes teachers and their unions such a danger to the status quo of contemporary capitalism. Grasping this helps to explain why, in recent years, teachers have been demonized in the

media and targeted by policies that have as their principal goal the undermining of the control and influence that teachers have both in their classrooms, as individuals, and over education policy and governance, as an organized workforce.

**Chapter 4 Getting to the CORE of the Transformation of the Chicago Teachers'
Union**

4.1 Introduction

Since the Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU) shook the pillars of corporate
education reform with a seven-day strike in September 2012, many sympathetic
commentators and activists have sought to decipher the meaning and lessons the strike
has to offer teacher unionists, education activists, and the labour movement in the United
States (Sustar 2013a; Alter 2013) and Canada (Camfield 2013).

Indeed, in a period in which few unions in North America have stood up to
neoliberal governments and won a high stakes strike,[59] those who experienced the
transformation of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) through organizing—and the group
that led this change, the Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE)—have much to
teach scholars and activists alike about forging a new form of class struggle and antiracist
unionism. And yet, much of the analysis produced so far lacks careful treatment of the
radical particularities of the politics and socio-spatial dynamics of the city of Chicago out
of which these inspirational developments have occurred, some of which I review in the
previous chapter.[60]

In the following chapter, I explore the experiences of the Chicago Teachers Union
(CTU), which has been one of the few U.S. local unions—in either the public or private
sectors—to effectively challenge austere economic measures and push back against the
neoliberal project in public education. In so doing, I argue, they have inspired other

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[59] The number of work stoppages in the United States dropped to an all-time low of five in 2009 (US
Bureau of Labor Statistics 2016c) Some of the other notable exceptions of social movement oriented strikes
include the Staley lockout of the mid-1990s and the Teamster strike at UPS in 1997.
[60] For one important exception, see Lipman and Gustein (2013).

workers in Chicago and across the United States and Canada to build a different kind of *spatial justice unionism*. However, as will be explored in the next chapter on rank-and-file activism in New York, the "Chicago model" of teacher rebellion and union transformation is not so easily replicated, although the spatial justice unionism they have forged in Chicago certainly does hold general lessons for a new generation of labour activists. I argue that this model of unionism and rank-and-file organization is a vital component of developing broader working-class capacities and an alternative working-class politics.

The case of the CTU under the leadership of the Caucus of Rank-and-file Educators (CORE) demonstrates that, if unions are to regain their once prominent role in the pursuit of social justice and workplace democracy, they will need to take the risks of organizing (building) working-class communities, in and outside of the workplace. This will entail efforts to build genuinely reciprocal labour-community alliances (Tattersall 2010a) and the cultivation of a critical spatial imagination (Soja 2010). This case also illustrates how a teachers' union and its allies may leverage the contradictions of global city development in uniquely effective ways. In this, we should see the CTU under CORE's leadership as a leading light in the renewal of public sector unions, which have only recently become the subject of increased academic enquiry (Johnston 1994; Ross and Savage 2013; Camfield 2011).

Hovering like a cloud over negotiations between the CTU and the City of Chicago today, three years after the great 2012 strike, is a serious fiscal crisis and governance crisis of democratic accountability at both the municipal and state governments. They may be facing an additional $450 million in cuts this year alone, as a result of the gross

financial practices of the Board in recent years as the privatization analyzed in the previous chapter has continued to advance in Chicago. This has had a devastating effect on special education in particular. The CTU rightly insists that this system has been "broken on purpose" in order to advance this agenda (for example, choosing to borrow money on the bond market, and rolling the service costs of these bonds over into the operating budget for the district rather than raising the capital improvement tax which would have generated significant revenue, rather than debt) (Sharkey 2015; Gillers 2015).

Although the present round of negotiations will likely result in another strike in 2016, the 2012 strike was the first launched by the CTU in 25 years. And in spite of the fact that the Chicago teachers did not attain dramatic improvement in this round of negotiations in terms of either economic gains or the broader improvements to schools that the union made the center piece of the strike (i.e. smaller class sizes, air conditioning, greater "wrap around" services to provide desperately needed support beyond the classroom teacher), the CTU did effectively hold the line on many of the worst concessionary demands, analyzed in the previous chapter, that structure neoliberal education reform. And the process of doing so through struggle has reignited the democratic imagination and opened up the horizons of the possible for unionists and activists across North America. In addition to preventing the use of merit pay and standardized test scores in teacher evaluations, at least to the extent that it was demanded of them,[61] the CTU secured a number of important gains. These included: a principal anti-bullying clause; freedom to develop lesson plans; the hiring of art, music, and physical education teachers to create a better school day for students as the year was

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[61] Illinois state law mandated that an evaluation system must base at least 25% of the total score on value-added metrics of annual improvements in standardized test scores.

slightly extended in 2012; significant cost of living increases; and short-term disability leave for pregnant teachers (Chicago Teachers Union 2016).

The strike and the organizing which has taken place since CORE was founded in 2008 and came to elected office of the union in 2010 have had a profoundly transformative impact on the internal structures, culture, and practice of the union. This has in turn led to significant transformations in the political consciousness and agency of the union's members, and strengthened alliances with parents and students. Most impressively, these efforts have won the support of a majority of working-class Chicagoans.

In order to fully understand how CORE has managed to accomplish such a revitalization of its union and move towards the development of a renewed, visionary, and transformative working-class politics in Chicago—and the United States more widely—this chapter focuses on the formation and evolution of CORE. Its purpose is to elucidate why CORE has been successful in transforming the CTU, especially in such a relatively short amount of time. In part, the explanation is due to a happy combination of timing and circumstances. More substantially, I demonstrate that a significant explanation for CORE's success can be grasped by understanding its organizational structure, which has maintained a deep commitment to a social movement union praxis rooted at the scales of the workplace, neighborhood, and the city. In so doing, I argue, CORE is truly a unique formation in the history of rank-and-file union reform movements.

But beyond a commitment to social movement unionism, the CTU under CORE's leadership, is forging a new kind of *spatial justice unionism*. Put differently, in unpacking how the transformation of the CTU has "taken place," I argue that CORE, and the CTU

under its direction, has adopted an explicitly critical geographical analysis of the city and the struggles that have developed in it, which has been pivotal to the deep community-labour alliances the CTU and CORE have built across Chicago. The aim of these struggles is to "take back" Chicago for the majority of working-class people who dwell in the city from the one percent, which has been leading a political-economic urban development in Chicago that is making the city unlivable for working people, while also deepening already entrenched forms of racial segregation, violence, and inequality.[62] *The mode of praxis (Camfield 2011) of the CORE-led CTU validates the importance of bringing a critical spatial analysis to research, organizing, and the development of a transformative vision for public policy and urban life.*[63]

Hence, while the CTU has demonstrated the continuing effectiveness of such a spatial approach to organizing, researching, and educating their membership since the 2012 strike, they have done so only insofar as it was part of a wider publicly focused urban strategy that built alliances with parents, students, and community through the articulation of antiracist and class-wide demands for the transformation of public services and urban life. In doing so, the CTU emphasized the special significance that education holds for the marginalized, largely African American and Latino working-class neighbourhoods of the city. Such powerful tactics and alliances were built, most importantly, atop a foundational understanding amongst the rank-and-file and the union's progressive leadership that the ways in which education fails city residents are tied to their class location and racial status.

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[62] While I argue this objective has been in a germinal phase for some time, the CTU and the Grassroots Collaborative have formally launched a campaign to do just this. See Lydersen 2013.

[63] Here I draw on the powerful arguments made by Edward Soja in *Seeking Spatial Justice* (2010), who demonstrates how important such a critical spatial perspective is to social movement organization in Los Angeles.

As we peel back the layers of organizing that the CTU had been conducting in the four years prior to the 2012 strike under the direction of CORE, and that which they have continued to do in the three years since the strike, it is important to acknowledge that the Chicago teachers' strike has become, much like the 2011 public sector uprising in Wisconsin, the Occupy Wall Street movement, and other recent moments of contentious politics from below, an instantiation of hope for broader movements of social transformation and justice. It is no mere coincidence that many Chicago teachers and CORE activists visited Madison in 2011 in solidarity, or were active, at least to some extent, in Occupy Chicago.

Although there has been a significant amount written about the CTU, and CORE, since the 2012 strike,[64] few commentators have addressed how CORE has been leading a fight to completely transform not only the public school system, but the city of Chicago itself, into a more just metropolis that puts people before profit. Fewer still have paid much attention to the unique political and economic geography of Chicago in order to understand the role it has played in the CTU accomplishing what it has, and to understand why it failed to accomplish particular goals.

And while much of CORE's activity, and the ways in which CORE and the CTU frame their struggle, is articulated through a liberal, rights-based discourse, their political practice of confronting neoliberalism through such a rights-based discursive strategy has led to a radicalization of many of its members. Indeed, as I argue below, CORE and their allies have articulated both the liberal claim that all students have the right to a quality,

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[64] Chicago-based socialist activist and labour journalist Lee Sustar, who has covered CORE and education struggles since their earliest rumblings, recently published an important book, *Striking Back in Chicago: How Teachers Took on City Hall and Pushed Back Education Reform*. Haymarket Books. 2013. Additionally, the independent socialist journal, *Monthly Review*, published a special issue in June 2013 on education struggles, which includes at least five different articles on Chicago and the CTU struggle.

"world class" education and more radical claims for democratic control of the school system, and for a more critical, transformative education, as the centerpiece of producing more socially just urban space (the creation of a state-appointed facilities task force[65] is a good example of how they have sought to produce urban space against the annual ritual of school closures).

The first part of this chapter sketches the rise of CORE as a qualitatively different kind of union reform group and urban movement organization in its own right. While I chart CORE's historical and geographical development since its formation in late 2008, I also examine the ways in which its members and other teacher activists in Chicago, who are a part of the larger education justice movement, have been influenced by similar activist formations elsewhere in the United States and Canada (the British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF) was especially critical to CORE's initial development in 2008)[66].

The second part of the chapter then turns to an examination of CORE's and the CTU's actions since winning control of the Executive Board in 2010, giving special attention to the Chicago teachers' strike of September 2012 and its aftermath. Beyond what I have already mentioned about the 2012 strike, I analyze some of the other

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[65]PA 96-0803 established the Chicago Educational Facilities Task Force in 2012. "The purpose of the task force is to ensure that school facility-related decisions are made with the input of the community and reflect educationally sound and fiscally responsible criteria. The task force, with the help of independent experts, will analyze past Chicago experiences and data with respect to school openings, school closings, school consolidations, school turnarounds, school phase-outs, school construction, school repairs, school modernizations, school boundary changes, and other related school facility decisions on students; consult widely with stakeholders, including public officials, about these facility issues and their related costs; and examine relevant best practices from other school systems for dealing with these issues systematically and equitably." See http://www.isbe.net/CEF/.

[66] A number of leading CORE activists whom I interviewed mentioned a meeting and forum with former BCTF president, Jinny Simms, as being a crucial moment in their organizational development. It helped them to understand what they should do to build a more serious organization that was more than simply a left opposition within the union. See the video of the public forum at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p9k-Va5_rqE&list=PL8C579F55993227D9&index=29

significant ways in which the strike radically transformed everyday life on the streets of Chicago, if only for a brief time; Wearing a red t-shirt in support of the teachers, for example, opened up political conversations everywhere you went, whether on the El train or at a local coffee shop (even with your local Starbucks barista).

By examining these experiences, I hope to illustrate the ways in which a politics in, of, and beyond place is central to the refashioning of an alternative politics for the working class and political left in the United States. In making these arguments I put my empirical research on Chicago teachers in conversation with both the older and newer work of Doreen Massey and Jane Wills, along with the theoretical scholarship discussed in Chapter 2. Likewise, I deploy Edward Soja's (2010) conception of *seeking spatial justice* in my elaboration of CORE/CTU as forging what I call spatial justice unionism.

4.2 From Reading Group to Leadership – The Birth and Transformation of the Caucus of Rank-and-file Educators (CORE)

Until the founding of CORE in 2008 the CTU had been in a demobilized state of stasis for at least a decade. And during this period we had witnessed the corporate agenda in public education advance at a rapid pace with devastating consequences. Once a powerful player in Chicago's labour movement and in city politics more broadly (Lyons 2008), by 2008 the CTU had ceased to play this role. Indeed, in the early 2000s, as many of its members faced layoffs, resulting from budget cuts and the closing or "turning around" of schools in predominantly African American and Latino neighborhoods, the CTU under the leadership of Marilyn Stewart and the United Progressive Caucus (UPC)

did little beyond telling its members to "get their resumes ready."[67] Additionally, as former CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, and U.S. Secretary of Education under Obama since 2009, Arne Duncan, announced Renaissance 2010,[68] what he called the "Chicago Plan," as the national policy for public education, Stewart cheered him on (Lipman and Haines 2007; Bell 2015).

From the 1960s until CORE took over the leadership of the CTU in 2008, the UPC, which is affiliated with the New York-based Progressive Caucus (PC), dominated the leadership of the CTU. With fairly progressive origins in the organizing of African American teachers in the 1960s, the UPC led the Chicago teachers out on a series of eight strikes, from 1969 through 1987. It was only after the 1987 strike that the UPC led the union in becoming a more compliant partner with the city. The relationship between the CTU and the city grew more and more routine even as the CTU was confronted with an escalating erosion of teachers' rights in Chicago public schools. This erosion was the result of state legislation enacted in 1995 that unilaterally targeted Chicago teachers by restricting what the CTU could legally negotiate for to wages and benefits, and eliminating system-wide seniority. This meant that all matters relating to class size, pedagogy, and other broader areas that clearly affect the working conditions of Chicago teachers came to be referred to as "permissible subjects of bargaining" and could only be negotiated if both sides agreed to do so. So to pursue a broader vision of public education at the negotiating table would take some creativity and would be risky.

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[67] Interview with CH5, January 2012. Then Vice President of the CTU, Tom Reese, informed members at this participant's high school of employment at the time that this would be the only thing they could do in the wake of their school being shuttered.

[68] As discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, Renaissance 2010 was a policy hatched in 2004 under then Mayor Richard M. Daley and CPS head Paul Vallas, who was Duncan's predecessor. It sought to remake the Chicago school system largely by shuttering approximately 100 supposedly low-performing neighborhood schools and reopening them as privately run charter schools by 2010.

Rob Barlett (2013, 12), an activist and teacher in a suburb just outside the city of Chicago, is correct when he writes that "CORE and the CTU's success was not due to replacing a weak leadership with a militant one willing to strike, but rather to the creation of a layer of union members in the CTU who saw the struggle as one for what CTU president Karen Lewis calls 'the soul of public education." Such a focus on removing a corrupt or inept, undemocratic leadership has long been a narrow focus that union reformers have limited their work to, as noted in Chapter 2, so that CORE did not do this is important. Yet, while this is a large part of story, it is not the whole story. Barlett views CORE as having built itself out of the failure of traditional union reform efforts, by which he means an earlier caucus that was led by Debbie Lynch, called the Pro-Active Chicago Teachers (PACT). When CORE emerged, PACT had ousted the reigning caucus associated with the Progressive Caucus, which dominates the New York local, United Federation of Teachers (UFT), the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT), and the national union, the AFT.

As Barlett (2013, 13) notes about this earlier attempt at reform, "PACT capitalized on the weak UPC leadership of Tom Reese, who succeeded the more militant Jacqueline Vaughn after her death. Reese's lack of charisma and the lackluster leadership of the union in the beginning phases of the corporate agenda led to an opening that the dynamic and articulate Debbie Lynch was able to use to propel her caucus to leadership in the CTU in 2001." And while the next three years would see some improvement in how the union functioned, no bold initiatives were taken to get members involved or build any wider alliances outside of the union. Lynch and the PACT leadership got caught up in factional warfare with UPC and then foolishly oversold a new contract in 2001, which

made modest improvements to wages and saw an increase in healthcare premiums. It was voted down by members, an event which some see as responsible for Lynch and PACT's narrow defeat to Marylyn Stewart and the UPC slate in the next union election in 2004.

While the experience of running as a reform caucus was no doubt important for some of the key people who would later go on to form CORE, Barlett attributes too much of CORE's success to the experience of PACT and the marginal impact it had on the CTU. It is important to note, however, that prior to the formation of PACT other opposition caucuses and candidates had run for leadership of the union, such as those active around the newspaper *Substance*[69] (which had previously been an organization of substitute teachers in the CTU that advocated for a greater focus on the issues that affected their work), founded and run by George Schmidt, who has played an important role in CORE from its beginning. Those who ran against UPC candidates had received as much as 30% of the vote in elections, but their support was overwhelmingly concentrated in the high schools, which, as noted in a previous chapter, have tended to be more militant.

Most importantly for our understanding of CORE, having gone through this more traditional experience of union reform with PACT allowed a few of its members to better understood the deep limitations of traditional union reform efforts that are overly focused on economic issues and that are too inwardly oriented. A further pivotal lesson these activists learned from this experience is that the kind of top down leadership model embodied by Debbie Lynch is incapable of significantly changing the union and that any

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[69] Run primarily by George Schmidt, *Substance* has been an invaluable space for critical analysis of education in Chicago, as well as for matters related to labour and teachers' unions. It has been an important venue for CORE members to report on and develop their analyses. For all of these reasons, it has been a vital source in my research.

new caucus needs to be independent and have a broad and representative base of activists in the union (in terms of racial/ethnic identity and spanning the spectrum of employees). The problem with having a leadership layer from a reform caucus, like PACT, win is that that layer either becomes elected officers or members of the staff of the union, who then have to deal with the incredibly difficult work of running its day-to-day operations. As a consequence, the caucus languishes if not completely collapses. As I discuss below, this too would prove to be a major challenge for CORE.

Barlett also identifies a second expression of "reform from above," under PACT, which was characterized by a rhetorical strategy of opposing the draconian changes that had been imposed on the union by the state government. This expression played the "inside game" of lobbying elected officials (usually Democrats) for changes, instead of mobilizing the membership. Only a small leadership team knew what was happening in contract negotiations, leaving general members with little idea of what the union was fighting to win.

"When Lynch came out with an agreement that had modest wage gains plus increases in health care premiums," Barlett notes, "those issues seemed more important to members than broadening the scope of permissive bargaining, which was limited by state law. A clause in the contract that forced the Board to eliminate a non-tenured category in which teachers were kept indefinitely was an improvement, but the overselling of the contract, as the best that could be gained, allowed the UPC to campaign against it and led to its rejection. The contract fiasco led in large part to the PACT defeat" (2013, 14). He goes on to note that some of the people who would later help create CORE had left PACT around this time because of its limitations and how badly it was defeated in the 2007

union elections, which further disillusioned these activists who saw PACT as having lost its luster due to the way it was structured and the way it acted when in power.[70] I heard a similar narrative and critique from many of the CORE members that I interviewed, although less from the younger activists and those who had only become active in the union in the past five years.

It is in this context that a small group of teachers and paraprofessionals came together to discuss how they might organize to change the direction of their union and to fight the policies of corporate school reform, especially the closings, turnarounds, and expansion of charter schools that had become an annual ritual since 2004 as part of Renaissance 2010. This crew of dissidents was made up of socialists, anarchists, and people who had been active in a range of other social struggles. They were diverse in terms of race, gender, age, and experience as teachers. They lived and taught all over Chicago. Those who would come to form CORE ran the gamut from people who were relatively new to activism or involvement in the union, including some who never saw themselves as "political" people. Others were members of socialist groups like Solidarity,[71] the International Socialist Organization (ISO),[72] and unaffiliated radicals of different stripes, or were teachers interested in progressive pedagogy, many of whom were members of Teachers for Social Justice (TSJ).

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[70] This same point was made by two of the CORE founders that I interviewed, CH8 and CH10.

[71] Prior to moving to Toronto to pursue my PhD I had been a member of Solidarity for three years. It was in fact through my membership in this organization that I first learned of CORE and developed friendships with some of its founding members, who would prove amazing assets in helping me to do the research for this dissertation.

[72] I explore the theoretical and political tradition of these socialist organizations in so far as it relates to the ways in which it has guided their orientation to trade unions and working-class politics in Chapter 2. Given how significant activists from both the ISO and Solidarity have been in building reform struggles in the CTU and in New York's UFT, this is highly relevant.

One of the first things this incipient version of CORE did after its initial meeting was to decide that they should study together in order to get a better handle on what was driving corporate education reform and the attack on teachers in Chicago. In doing so they joined an analysis of global capitalism (vis-à-vis Naomi Klein's book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*) with what they and their coworkers were experiencing in the Chicago public school system. While the group remained small at this point, reading *The Shock Doctrine* would be crucial in the development of a political and ideological analysis of both contemporary capitalism and the attacks that public institutions and workers in those institutions (e.g. public school teachers) had undergone in recent years.

Existing research and analysis on CORE has neglected the caucuses' production of oppositional knowledge that influenced their organizing. This is a significant silence because CORE has since its earliest days been studying and debating an array of vital political and strategic questions, ranging from an examination of the spatial organization of racism and its relationship to education restructuring and urban development in Chicago to what kind of teacher union and public education activists should seek to create. A commitment to critical learning and education within CORE emerged as a central theme in all of my interviews with founding CORE members, but less so with people who joined the caucus after 2010. This likely reflects a greater focus of energy on action and mobilizing, as well as training people how to organize. Working through the official structures of the CTU and its Quest Center, however, CORE has continued to organize lectures and workshops on labour history and topics like understanding austerity.

Moving beyond the study group format and the organizing of educational forums, rank-and-file activists in Chicago have produced a substantial body of oppositional knowledge through a diverse range of research on the contemporary political and economic geography of Chicago, the amount of work teachers do in a week (inside and outside of the classroom), and the real impacts of standardized testing, school closings, and charter schools on the most vulnerable urban populations and neighbourhoods (largely African American and Latino). With the 2012 CTU strike being both a significant result of this oppositional knowledge and a political event around which further learning and knowledge was generated, school (workplace), neighbourhood-based, and city-wide organizing has similarly been pivotal in effectively contesting education restructuring, in expanding the democratic imagination with and beyond the CTU, and in the ongoing development of a different kind of urban working-class politics.

Comparing this with efforts of teachers and their allies in New York City reveals how this model has influenced and contributed to the transformation of the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) in order to build a broad movement to contest education restructuring in New York. I will turn to a fuller analysis of this in the next chapter.

For now, however, what is important to note is that, while members of this early iteration of CORE were figuring out not only what kind of organizing was needed in order to change their union they were, as importantly, exploring precisely what they thought a teachers' union in the twenty-first century should be. They also recognized the need to learn about how the restructuring of schools in Chicago connected with broader social, economic, and cultural changes around the United States and the World.

Following this, they needed to conduct wider education amongst fellow union members and Chicagoans.

When this small group of people, which included teachers and present CTU/CORE leaders like Jackson Potter, Xian Barrett, Karen Lewis, Norine Gutekanst, Jesse Sharkey, and Jen Johnson, decided to form a caucus, they did so with an explicit recognition that it needed to be different than the existing caucuses in the union, including those older caucuses in which some members had participated (e.g. PACT), which brought Deborah Lynch to the presidency of the CTU in the late 1990s. Understanding the similarities and differences between Lynch's caucus and the organizing done both to get her elected and in the union after she became president is especially important because this was the most recent historical attempt at progressive transformation of the CTU (which historian John Lyons (2008) holds up as a sign of inspiration in the conclusion of his book on the CTU) and also because a number of key leaders in CORE were active participants in the previous caucus, PACT. I will return to these lessons shortly.

Beyond the study group, CORE members brought together other likeminded allies in grassroots groups, like Action Now, the Pilsen Alliance, Blocks Together, and the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO), to figure out how they could work together to fight school closings and privatization. As a founding CORE member explains, "Our plan was [that] we wanted to build partnerships with the community. We wanted to end all of the bad school policies, in terms of…turn arounds, charter proliferation and all that. We wanted to create an organizing union that was constantly trying to bring in more activists and building our strength through that; and ultimately to

fix our schools through the union. Another one of our planks was also a strong contract (CH8 Interview, February 7, 2012). Soon thereafter these groups formed the Grassroots Education Movement (GEM)[73] to help facilitate this organizing. This new coalition helped to ensure that CORE would effectively mobilize as many CTU members and allies as possible to be at each and every community hearing and Board of Education meeting where closings, turn arounds, and co-locations with charters were on the agenda. As one participant told me:

> Boards of Ed meetings are the perfect example of how city politics work, you know. You say that you have community involvement but you really don't. You say that they have a voice but they really didn't. So, anyway just showing up to these meetings and putting them out there, putting them on blast sometimes you know. You guys are doing this and you're hurting us. Did it mean anything? Never, never did. But people had seen it, people had witnessed it. People had heard about what our opinion was and now I think that what we've been able to do is kind of steer some of the discussion, um, to include our perspective in the discussion (CH1 Interview, May 2011).

GEM organized rallies and marches to both the Board of Education and to the offices of the leading proponents of corporate reform (e.g. the Commercial Club of Chicago). When a school was targeted for closing or turnaround, CORE and GEM members would go there and meet with the teachers and parents who wanted to fight the closings. In doing so they made it clear that they were there to help build resistance in that community. This included everything from handing out leaflets in front of the school to setting up camp in front of CPS headquarters on a cold winter's day.

As Barlett (2013, 14) perceptively observes, "Most teachers threatened with losing their jobs do not automatically respond by trying to fight back, but a critical layer started going to school board meetings, bringing with them parents and teachers from the

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[73] There is a different GEM in New York, which played a pivotal role in bringing together the group that would eventually become MORE.

affected schools, as well as community organizations that were also opposed to board policies, to testify at board meetings and become a public opposition to privatization." This required a significant investment of time because anyone who wants to testify at a board meeting (typically held during school hours) needs to get there at six a.m. to line up so that they can sign up as a speaker (and receive a maximum of two minutes to address the board!). This is no easy task for parents and community members coming from the West or South sides of the city, especially those who do not drive, which proved to further exclude racialized communities from participation.

Engaging in such public and confrontational activity is one of the key practices that distinguishes CORE from more traditional union reformers, who historically have tended to restrict their oppositional work to critiquing the incumbent union leadership and mobilizing members to take on more narrow, albeit important, issues primarily at the workplace. In this sense, we can, as Barlett suggests, understand CORE as functioning as a dual leadership force within the union. As Barlett (2013, 14) observes, "The inability of the faction-ridden UPC leadership to propose effective action opened the door for CORE to begin to mobilize other CTU members and, most importantly, to begin to forge links with community organizations that were also opposed to the shuttering of schools in their neighborhoods."

Such alliances would have likely been difficult to build if not for the pre-existing relationships that some CORE leaders had with the anti-gentrification and education justice grassroots organizations mentioned above. This kind of activity has resulted in the establishment of highly durable relationships of solidarity between CORE/CTU members and these different grassroots groups. This laid the foundation for a more genuine and

potentially powerful community or social justice unionism that would push beyond narrow economic interests like wage increases or cuts to benefits (vital issues that have not been neglected by CORE). This is supported in a number of the Chicago interviews I did with both teacher activists and community organizers in some of the groups mentioned above. But it is also something that I got to witness first hand while I traversed the city in 2011 and 2012 to attend community meeting and protests against school closings and for a number of other community fights in which CORE and the CTU contributed support.

Equally as pivotal as the study group to CORE's evolution was a visit and public meeting with former British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF) president, Jinny Simms, organized by some of CORE's key activists. As Barlett (2013, 15) notes, her "talk about how the BCTF organized province-wide to bring their issues to the public and involve their entire membership in a contract campaign that culminated in an illegal strike, and their work against standardized testing encroachment, provided a concrete model from which CORE could learn." Learning about how the BCTF organized and educated its membership and the public so effectively would influence future activities of CORE in important ways. Supporting this observation, two leading CORE activists that I interviewed who organized this meeting with Simms emphasized in their interviews with me that this meeting was essential in CORE's formative stage of development.

The growth of CORE would have likely continued without necessarily running a caucus for elected office had there not been an internal crisis within the incumbent leadership of the union, the UPC, who, in addition to not putting up a fight against attacks on teachers and public education in Chicago, had a Vice President, Ted Dallas, who was

expelled from office due to charges of financial impropriety. Interestingly enough, Dallas was the union official who first inspired Jackson Potter to connect with others and build what became CORE, and who, upon meeting with Potter and his co-workers who were losing their jobs as a result of their school being closed, told them to "get their resumes ready."

A major turning point for CORE's development came during the big snow storm of 2010 when they had organized a meeting at Malcolm X College, the objective of which was to strategize around ways that teachers, parents, and community allies could fight back against school closings. Prior to this meeting the CTU leadership did not take CORE very seriously, either as opposition or as a mobilizing force. As one CORE activist explained, "The school closings were leaked so representatives from all those schools showed up. We had 500 people at that meeting. And the union leadership even showed up to kind of spy on us…And I think when they saw 500 people that's when they [the old guard CTU leadership] decided that they had to start attacking us." Reiterating the point that this meeting marked a turning point in CORE's momentum that reflects the difficulties of building a strong membership-based organization, he continues:

> We were this small nucleus. We were getting dues paying members but not many … Many of these were dues paying members that wouldn't show up to meetings or do any work. And not to malign them either because we didn't look like we could do much, so it was like 'oh I'll throw money at them. They seemed like they're [CORE activists] well intentioned people.' I think there was a lot of that. So up to that point, I felt that we needed to keep this going so that maybe ten years down the line we can take over union leadership (CH 6 Interview, February 2012).

Until that point, this participant and many others that I interviewed thought that through organizing in CORE they could push the leadership in a better direction, get members more organized, and do more to work with community organizations, "but anything

beyond that, like running a slate to take over the CTU, did not seem possible." This is the view of one of CORE's founders, who continues, "it really was that meeting that was the big turning point, where five hundred people showed up, because that's when we knew we were effective. We knew people were responsive to our message and we also knew that the union leadership was afraid of us and hated us. I mean we were like the cute little, I even heard this, and we were like the cute little nerdy ones in the union who liked to do research and read books. And at that point they were like shit, maybe they're at the cool kid's table not the nerdy kid's table" (CH8 Interview, February 7, 2012).

Then in the spring of 2010 CORE organized a major rally downtown to protest ongoing school cuts. As one CORE member describes it,

> We had our activist in every single school flyering and talking to people. And we turned out about 4,000 people. Our union sent out, I think, an email blast and put something on their website. But they maintained that it was not a CORE event, that it was a CTU event. And like one of the things that came of it was that we had 4,000 people out, we blocked traffic. Mayor Daley at the time was stuck in traffic because of it. He couldn't even get home. Like it was a real big thing. And the leadership of the union at the time sabotaged our press conference. They didn't want us, they didn't want Karen Lewis in front of a camera saying look we brought 4,000 people out. So it got that nasty when they were actually working against the goals of the union to make us look ineffective (CH8 Interview, February 7, 2012).

Despite this resistance from the old guard leadership of the CTU, CORE's organizing continued to gain momentum. Indeed, one of the key factors that makes CORE unique as a caucus within the CTU—and amongst rank-and-file reform groups in the United States labour movement more generally—is the historical experience of struggle with grassroots community groups that was present from the beginning of its formation and was central to its organizational evolution. Related to this was CORE's inclusive membership, which was open not just to members of the CTU but also to community allies, other workers (employees of CPS and elsewhere). In terms of

organizational structure, then, CORE set up an executive committee made up of what could be termed the first tier activists, with Karen Lewis as the chair, that served as the primary leadership body of the group. But unlike the union itself, general members were the ultimate democratic decision-making body of CORE (Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators 2014).

Given this momentum, the intensified attacks on public education and teachers in Chicago and elsewhere, and the lack of legitimacy that the incumbent UPC leadership faced because of their timid response, CORE members decided to run a slate for the executive officer position in 2010.[74] The organizing CORE did for the election blended well with the activism that they had engaged with against school closings. With only two hundred or so CORE members and supporters, they managed to leaflet and talk with members outside of each of the six hundred schools across Chicago, and to train people to have organizing conversations with their co-workers at their own schools. Throughout this phase of organizational evolution, CORE members made clear that their goal was never merely to replace the existing leadership with a more militant and progressive leadership, although this point was certainly made. Rather, they emphasized the need to reinvent the union and the dire need for the broader membership to mobilize in their schools and their neighbourhoods with a broad array of forces of the working class across the city. This focus on building the capacities within the union and more broadly amongst

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[74] For example, in February 2010 all the teachers at Central Falls High School were fired, with the public support of the Obama administration. And then in March, half of the public schools in Kansas City, Missouri, were closed. These actions came in the wake of many states around the country having just passed legislation modeled on Renaissance 2010, which prioritized charter school expansion and linked teacher pay to student test scores in order for school districts to receive federal funding under the Obama administration's "Race to the Top." In Chicago, teachers were facing major layoffs and an increased in class size from twenty-eight to thirty-five students to one teacher. CPS was also demanding that the CTU open up its contract and forgo a four percent raise in each of the final two years of the agreement (Alter 2013).

poor, working-class, and marginalized populations across Chicago by drawing on the institutional resources of the union is a major point of departure for rank-and-file reform struggles in the United States. Equally as important, however, is that the CORE leadership has drawn moral courage and leadership from the Black and Latino grassroots organizations with whom they have partnered since 2008.

These efforts would pay off on June 11, 2010, when CORE won a run-off election that saw its entire slate elected, with high school chemistry teacher Karen Lewis as the president and English teacher, and socialist, Jesse Sharkey, as vice president. Jackson Potter, who played a central role in bringing CORE together, came on as the chief of staff for the union, which meant that he was in charge of all of the different departments (including the newly created organizing and research departments). In this capacity Potter continues to serve as a key strategist for the CTU, with CORE having been elected twice more since 2010.

In her 2010 acceptance speech, Karen Lewis (2010) made a powerful statement, which showed the political direction that CORE would be taking the union in:

> Today marks the beginning of the end of scapegoating educators for all the social ills that our children, families, and schools struggle against every day…. This election shows the unity of 30,000 educators standing strong to put business in its place—out of our schools. Corporate America sees K-12 public education as 380 billion dollars that, up until the last 10 or 15 years, they didn't have a sizeable piece of. This so-called school reform is not an education plan. It's a business plan and mayoral control of our schools, and our Board of Education, is the linchpin of their operation.

After being elected to the leadership of the CTU, the political attacks of the corporate reformers on the union and public education continued to advance with an increased ferocity. Advocates of corporate education restructuring, including Stand for Children and Mayor-elect Rahm Emanuel, reacted to the CTU's turn to militancy by

getting the state legislature to pass a new law, Illinois Senate Bill 7 (SB 7) (Lightford 2011). SB 7 made it easier to fire teachers and gave CPS the authority to lengthen both the school day and school year. It specifically targeted the CTU by requiring that any teachers' union in a district in Illinois with a population greater than five hundred thousand (which in effect is only Chicago) must submit to arbitration before the union can legally strike. Further evidence of the potential power of an alliance between the CTU and the community to rally wider working-class support against the mayor's agenda of slashing social services, privatizing city functions, and handing out tax breaks for big business, SB 7 mandated that the CTU could only legally strike over wage and compensation issues. Moreover, the union would, first, need to secure 75% of the entire membership's vote before they could strike (with all those who don't vote being counted as no votes), and second, go through a drawn out mediation process[75]. Corporate reformers like the CEO of Stand for Children, Josh Edelman (2011), saw the passing of SB 7 as effectively meaning that "The union cannot strike in Chicago … They will never be able to muster the 75 percent threshold necessary to strike." This hubris would, of course, prove to be false.

Before turning to a discussion of how the CORE-led CTU was able to pull off a feat of membership mobilization so fantastic that over 90% of the membership voted yes to a strike, I will briefly interrogate what happened prior to the passing of SB 7, which became a subject of contention within CORE, the CTU, and the radical labour activists who looked to the teachers for inspiration and leadership.

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[75] During the first time this mediation process was deployed in the 2012 round of negotiations, while the mediator did not really grasp the education issues the CTU had put on the table, he delivered a highly favorable ruling that gave them a 19% wage increase over the course of a three-year collective agreement. Both the union and employer rejected this.

In early negotiations over the bill that took place in Springfield, the state capital, Karen Lewis, following the lead of the downstate teachers' unions and the CTU's state affiliate, the Illinois Federation of Teachers (ITF), endorsed the bill. Immediately after they became aware of Lewis' endorsement of SB 7, CORE members, both those inside the union (staff and elected leaders) and outside the union (general members) mobilized against this decision and successfully reversed the CTU's endorsement of SB 7.[76] This reversal would have been unlikely to have happened were CORE not a strong organization with a base outside of the institutional leadership positions of the union. Indeed, in many ways this experience would provide a number of vital lessons for CORE and union reformers more generally. The first is that a presence in negotiations of state legislation that affect education and the bargaining rights of unions is necessary. The second lesson is that, when it comes to sitting at such negotiating tables, it is important to acknowledge the vast difference in power that exists between unions and the array of neoliberal policy actors on the other side of the table. Thirdly, it is crucial to understand that, because other unions at the table have radically different interests, which are rooted in their geography, their organizational structure, and their politics, they are not necessarily going to share your position but might constitute another source of opposition and pressure. And finally, the support of a state labour affiliate is effective only if one is aware of the limitations of what they have to offer local unions, especially when it comes to politics. *Lewis' change of course taught state policy makers and corporate reformers that the CTU had a mobilized, activist base strong enough to effectively stop the dominant mode of education policy negotiations in which union leaders have so*

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[76] CORE activists successfully passed a motion at the CTU's Executive Board and then also moved and passed an additional resolution at the union's highest representative decision-making body, the CTU House of Delegates, which rejected SB 7 and reiterated the union's opposition to it.

systematically and consistently shut out their members and been complicit in the advancement of destructive changes in public education.

While some left commentators and critics of CORE were quick to jump on Lewis' endorsement of SB 7 as evidence of yet another pseudo-left force selling out the membership after coming to power, they failed to grasp what the union's reversal of its endorsement meant. Even since the much commented upon 2012 strike, this important moment in CORE's maturation has not been adequately reflected upon. This moment showed the importance of having an independent organization of activists with a foot both inside and outside of the union, and both inside and outside the workplace. Specifically, those members of CORE that I interviewed who were neither staff nor elected officers in the union drew from this experience that they would need to strengthen the independence of CORE as an activist base. I will return to this still unresolved tension later.

As noted above, however, SB 7 passed despite the CTU's reversal of course. And once it did CORE activists and organizers in the union needed to conduct the kind of workplace and neighbourhood organizing that most unions have either forgotten how to do or rejected long ago. As one CORE activist and current CTU staff member explained to me, they would need to undo decades of damage because, "for years the union was strong as a service union, as a business union, but it was good at it so they [the former UPC leadership] could take people out on strike and the public would be pissed off [but] the union would still win in the end." In contrast, today not only does the public tend to view unions in a generally negative light, according to this activist, but also "a lot of people who are of voting age or who are influential people, maybe in their 20s and 30s

now, just don't get unions at all" (CH8 Interview, February 2012). She continues, "So…
the piece that I think was a lot harder than we anticipated was the public education piece.
That people don't get that the union is representative of teachers, that it's really not a third
party. And another challenge was making it so that we're not at all a third party. And just
getting teachers on board is hard." Reframing public discourse and winning the public to
the side of the Chicago teachers and their fight would be difficult, but achievable.

Additionally, as the labour historian and Chicago-based activist Tom Alter (2013,
20) observes, although Mayor Emanuel and corporate reformers now had SB 7 in their
arsenal for use against the CTU, a major shift in the broader political landscape had taken
place across the world in 2011, marked by the Egyptian revolution that led to the
overthrow of the US-backed Mubarak regime, the uprising of public sector workers in
Madison, and the birth of the Occupy Wall Street movement. This posed a challenge to
corporate reformers and austerity urbanism (Peck 2012). All of these major flashpoints of
social change from below bolstered the CORE-led CTU and labour struggle in the United
States more widely to one degree or another. Indeed, CORE organized Chicago teachers
to visit Madison during the occupation in order to show support and similarly connect
CTU members to Occupy Chicago actions, and specifically to support a major political
action that focused on the Bank of America and other beneficiaries of financial power in
Chicago who profit at the expense of Chicago's most vulnerable populations and
institutions (for example, public schools, mental health facilities, housing).

4.3 Communication, Organizing and the Generational Divide

After CORE was elected in 2010, one of the challenges they faced was how best
to communicate to the different generations and constituencies within the union. For

example, one CORE member, and later a CTU staff member, who dedicated much of her

effort to CORE's communications explains:

> Well a big challenge we have is that we have a lot of members that have been around; probably our most active members are the ones who have been around forever. And they're not afraid to use the word strike. And they're the ones that are willing to say F the board and we're going to do what we need to do to get what we need. More and more people are dying out and retiring who come from that base. And then you have the mid-career people who kind of get the union. And with the right kind of conversation you can get them on board. But then we have a lot of younger teachers who just don't get it. They don't understand that everything we have is because we have a union. The union can't always be receptive to their immediate needs. Like one question that I always hear is, if I'm not tenured, why do I pay union dues? And, you have to really put it in the historical context for them to get it. From a member communication standpoint, I need to be able to reach all three of those demographics but also not piss off the public because anything that we put out the Board of Ed and the broader public is reading. Outside reporters, bloggers…they're all taking that stuff when you put it out. So that's the line that you really have to walk carefully. You know I would love to write a flyer that says let's march on the Board and strike tomorrow or something like that. And that would totally get our retirees riled up and ready to go and it would scare the shit out of a lot of our newer members, [but] people in the middle might not quite be there yet. And the public would definitely be like, look at these greedy teachers: all they want is pay and benefits. So one of the things that we've been using to alleviate that is that we have an organizing staff now. Our union, our local has never had an organizing staff. So we have people who go directly out to our buildings, talking to people face-to-face, explaining issues. So it's not just a press release, and a website posting, and a newsletter article. So, there's a little bit more of a connection to the union. One of the opportunities we had was the longer school day issue because resoundingly the members did not want a longer school day and we knew that. So we sent our organizers out to all the schools to organize around that issue. And I think for a lot of people that was the first time they saw the union in their school, really being present and receptive to what they [the members] want. (CH13, February 2012)

Highlighted in this quote is the importance of understanding the need to address multiple

constituencies in the union simultaneously, as well as to craft and organize dedicated

communications targeted to people outside the union, to the broader working-class public

whose support the union seeks to win and with whom it seeks to build a broader

movement to transform the city.

One of the most pivotal lessons for rank-and-file groups looking to learn from CORE's experience, this member notes, is that union activists should not be afraid to use new media. In fact, they should seek out and cultivate their younger members who often engage with social media like Twitter and Facebook. At the same time, it is crucial to be able to reach older members who barely use email, much less these other platforms. In other words, hard copies of leaflets and newsletters remain important tools for organizing.[77] As this participant explains, "you have to have all those people informing what your communications looks like. And be aware that different people are utilizing different media. So a newsletter can have a different message than a tweet." Those who handled the CORE twitter account, for example, used a unique and snarky voice that resonated with their members who were 22 to 35 or so, who likely watch the Daily Show and the Colbert Report. In contrast, newsletter and print communications needs to take an entirely different tone so as to not be perceived as "snarky and unprofessional" (CH13, February 2012).

Any narrative of CORE's evolution would be incomplete without mentioning the incredibly effective manner in which they have deployed video, largely hosted on YouTube, to inspire and catalyze their membership and Chicago allies, as well as to communicate their story beyond the city of Chicago and the United States. Indeed, a dissertation could be written simply by analyzing all of the videos that have been posted by CORE and the CTU, or about CORE and the CTU. A good place to start in seeking to understand this is a year or so prior to when CORE was founded. Jackson Potter and Al Ramirez, two angry and frustrated Chicago teachers who thought that it would be a good

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[77] This important point is missed by scholars like Peter Waterman and the key theorist that he draws on, Manuel Castells, both of whom too easily, and romantically, celebrate new social media and "network" politics as the central catalysts of radical social change.

use of their energy and time to make a short punchy, and powerful film to expose Renaissance 2010. Indeed, after this film, and the formation of CORE soon afterwards, Ramirez would play a central role as one of a network of videographers of CORE and the wider movement for education justice in Chicago. Ramirez and others would film all of the vibrant actions, Board takeovers (which effectively utilized a tactic from Occupy Wall Street, "the people's mic," to shut the meeting down on at least one occasion), and forums and speeches of Karen Lewis and other CORE leaders. Al Ramirez is one of the many unsung heroes of CORE who has been a dedicated leader of CORE from its earliest iterations but who has not generally been out front in the media or in other accounts of CORE and the Chicago teachers.

With CORE's ascendance to the leadership of the CTU, grassroots education struggles began to garner a much brighter spotlight. As Lipman and Gutstein (2013) observe, "The force of the union's institutional power and membership in every school, its reinvigorated organizing department and new research department, and its public voice strengthened the struggles of African-American and Latina/o communities to defend their schools." Of particular importance is the further observation that the union's involvement in these struggles helped to "politicize a teacher membership that had been largely demobilized and *ideologically disarmed* by a bureaucratized union structure" (Lipman and Gustein, E. 2013, my emphasis). This stress on politicization and forging a new, insurgent ideology with which teachers can combat the neoliberal attacks on public schools, their unions, and working people more generally has been essential in sustaining CORE and the CTU in weathering the storm of these attacks and giving people some

hope that collective struggle can win tangible change and offer the promise of a different future.

As mentioned earlier, upon taking over the union in 2010 the first thing that Karen Lewis and the other executive officers of the CTU did was to cut their pay so that they could direct the union's resources to what CORE viewed as more important things, like opening up new organizing and research departments (neither of which the CTU had prior to 2010. The organizing would be largely directed towards internal mobilization and ongoing efforts to link organizing at the scale of the workplace/school building to grassroots organizing against school closings at the scale of the neighbourhood and the city. From the very beginning, the CORE leadership team, including executive officers and staff, was dedicated to building strong membership organizations at each and every school in Chicago. So later in 2010, when Rahm Emanuel, who only a few years prior was Obama's chief of staff, launched his mayoral election campaign in Chicago by bashing teachers, the union was already in motion.

Yet, as one of the founding members of CORE who had taken a staff position with the union observes:

> We didn't have the tools to really be able to utlize the contacts we had. How do we message to people and it was a new ball game…. We had a nacent organizing department but hadn't perfected a strategic approach. We had all new and [largely] inexperienced organizers. So there was a sudden realization that in a lot of ways we don't know what the fuck we're doing. And we're going to have to figure it out quickly, and do so in a short period of time. So we expected to have this community board where we made these decisions and people were on the same page and we could kind of create campaigns, start cooking with gas. We could use the union organs, as vehicles to mobilize people, to inspire them, connect them to a broader vision. But it takes a lot more basics to get that off the ground…. I mean we've learned and now it's starting to really be a lot of synergy. You've got to find ways to really help the community organizations build their capacity. So we've been able to assemble more tools, you know predictive dialers, use the voter action and labour action networks of our international, and identify other people in precints and

communities that could be targeted for outreach. So that these community groups are building their base while they're advocating for things that we believe in. Um, helping them do mailings, you know helping them finance some of the organizing. All of those things are critical to having real relationships where it's not simply about do what we need you to do and we'll give you a cheque every year. But thinking through like what does real solidarity mean and look like? (CH5 Interview, January 2012)

As suggested above, CORE barely had any time to catch their breath after being elected, with Rahm Emanuel now the mayor of Chicago and his hand-picked school board, including billionaire Penny Pritzker (of the Hyatt Hotels empire), moving to lay off over a thousand teachers and rescind a four percent raise that had already been negotiated. This was followed up with the release of a new hit list of 17 schools slated for closure, co-location, or turn around in 2011.[78] And just prior to this it was documented that Chicago public schools CEO, Jean-Claude Brizzard, had violated the CTU contract by trying to bribe teachers at a select number of schools to vote in favour of a longer school day.

4.4 The Longer School Day and Rahm Emanuel's Hubris

The supposed fiscal crisis at the state level in Illinois gave CPS a rational for implementing broad cuts to music and art and increases in class size, which impact even the whiter, more affluent neighbourhoods in Chicago. In conjunction with Mayor Emanuel's and CEO Brizzard's determination to impose a longer school day and school year on Chicago schools, this provided an opening for new alliances between more privileged parents and teachers and those who had been feeling the brunt of cuts for years, the poor, largely black and Latina/o populations of Chicago. Middle-class parents

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[78] This is when two or more schools are created within the same building. Often the new school, usually a charter, is given a tremendous amount of new resources and is able to invest in many infrastructural improvements such that it stands in sharp contrast with the older, typically resource starved school that it now shares a building with.

were upset by these cuts and the imposition of a longer day, which many parents saw as disruptive to their lives and the lives of their kids, many of whom were in the privileged position of engaging in sports and other extracurricular activities outside of school. This was especially important because these white, middle-income families had been an especially important constituency that previous Chicago mayors looked to for support, whom they had worked to attract to public schools in particular gentrified neighbourhoods of Chicago. And once Emanuel became mayor and started to push for a longer school day this group of parents began to organize, upset that their voices were being ignored by the Mayor and his appointed Board of Education. While black and brown parents had been used to being disrespected and ignored by politicians and policy makers in Chicago, these largely white middle-class parents, who saw a longer day as having adverse effects on their kids, felt ignored and disrespected by Mayor Emanuel. This led many of these parents to organize and to protest against these cuts and the longer day. By doing so, they came into contact with black and Latina/o parents, as well as teachers and the union.

These newly active parents and outraged community members would go on to form a coalition in 2012 to fight for a democratically elected school board, which has been deeply connected with the fight against school closings and for education justice. In fact, it grew directly out of the CTU-Community Board mentioned above. As Lipman and Gutstein (2013) note, this organizing resulted in a non-binding referendum for an elected board wining 87% of the vote in a sampling of 13% of the city's approximately 2,500

electoral precincts, which the authors note, "spanned Chicago—economically, racially, and geographically."[79]

And so Mayor Emanuel's attempt to impose a longer school day helped catalyze parent opposition to his education policy agenda, especially amongst middle-class, white parents in the north side of the city. It also helped educate and organize CTU members, as evidenced by many of the responses I heard in my interviews. As participants explained to me, the longer school day provided a critical organizing opportunity because it was simultaneously a workplace and community/parent issue that affects both teachers and other workers in schools, it allowed for the CTU to effectively dialog with a broad spectrum of people in the city, especially those from more privileged places who do not necessarily understand what the union does or the historical context in which the it acts. Because a lot of parents opposed the longer school day, they were more open than they previously had been to listening to the teachers' union and joining those who were resisting these changes. As one CORE member told me "the longer school day piece got organizers in the schools and it got [CTU members] to understand more what the organizers do. I think that was an important thing. In a way, like we had organizers going out to schools, but if you have no idea how a union structure works and you have this person coming in saying, I'm not filing your grievances but I'm here for you, it is difficult to understand what else they would do."

In particular, the attempted imposition of the longer school day helped the CTU organize in elementary schools. As one CORE member explained to me: "I actually think we can thank Rahm for the longer school day stuff and trying to force it down our throats

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[79] See also the important research report written by Lipman, Gutstein, Gutierrez, and Tirzah (2015) and published by the Collaborative for Equity and Justice in Education entitled "Should Chicago Have an Elected Representative School Board?: A New Review of the Evidence."

through these waiver votes in elementary schools. It forced us to get out to a ton of elementary schools and have discussions about why the union is important and why waiving your union rights is a bad idea." Perhaps most importantly, she continues, "it has exponentially increased the consciousness that people in elementary schools have around their role as union members and their idenity as union members." This is because "they were connecting a real threat to what was going on in their particular school with how that relates to their role as a union person, their rights as a union person. There was a very clear and explicit opportunity to have that kind of conversation." Moving beyond simply having a conversation, CORE founding member and current CTU organizing director, Norine Gutekanst, verifies that this organizing translated into better organized schools across the city, especially elementary schools. Many of the large elementary schools, for instance, voted on the longer school day even though they had not been asked to, and overwhelmingly rejected it, which bolstered oppositional efforts.

Thus not only did the longer school day issue help the union connect with a wider and more racially (and geographically) diverse population of parents and communities across Chicago, it alllowed the CTU to mobilize elementary teachers, which has historically posed a greater challenge than organizing high school teachers in Chicago and elsewhere. As CH5 observes (January 2012), "the waiver vote got us out into neighborhoods that we wouldn't have necessarily been in if it was just a school closing fight. It got us all over the city. Because they were trying to show this coup of support for this idea. So they were trying to seed it in all the different areas. So we had to be in all the different areas. Every time we heard a rumor we had to be out there."

4.5 Building a Strong Foundation - Power in the Workplace and in the Community

Just as CORE members have put an emphasis on building strong alliances with parents, students, and community organizations, so too have they prioritized organizing each and every school throughout Chicago by building membership organization and thus power in the workplace. Indeed, one of the central things that makes CORE unique is seeing these two aspects of organizing as intertwined*; a well-organized neighbourhood school is the strongest base from which to engage parents and ordinary people who live in the very same communities where members work (and sometimes, but not often, live)*.[80]

This orientation is easily understandable within the unique nature of a workplace that is a neighbourhood school. This speaks to the point made in an earlier chapter that teachers are, to a greater extent than many other public sector workers, in constant contact with the parents of their students, which typically makes the task of community outreach and relationship building easier.[81] Building strong organizational infrastructure, at the scale of the school building and of particular geographical clusters of schools, and mobilization across the city's more than six hundred schools, has proved difficult, but has been accomplished with remarkable success by CORE.

The need for a high level of membership engagement and participation was both instrumental in achieving a strong mandate for a strike in 2012, as it was in 2015-16. Indeed, this organizational infrastructure was greatly strengthened through the 2012 strike and its aftermath through continuous mobilization, which is not to say that ongoing mobilization has not also been weakening the CTU through exhaustion, which is one way

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[80] Yet, based on all of the teachers and paraprofessionals that I interviewed in both Chicago and New York, only a few actually lived in the vicinity of the school in which they worked. It is for this reason that organizations like the Logan Square Neighborhood Association have built "grown our own" teacher education programs, which provide routes by which neighborhood people can become teachers and work in the schools in their communities.

[81] It needs to be acknowledged, however, that these relationships are not always so friendly, nor are they without tensions.

in which capitalism works to suppress or stymie dissent. As discussed in more detail below, the vibrant picket lines became revitalizing, productive spaces for CTU members to build relationships with each other, as well as invaluable spaces for connecting with community members and producing wildly different urban space in Chicago, at least in the brief time of the seven-day strike.

In an interview that I conducted prior to the 2012 strike and the CTU's release of the powerful report, *The Schools Chicago Students Deserve* (2012), a central leader and founding member of CORE explains some of the ideas that would come to underpin CORE's positive vision for education. He observes that:

> I don't think we're quite in a place to be clear [about our vision of what public education should be] yet. I think we're still trying to figure that out. But, the KOCOs [Kenwood Oakland Community Organization] and Paulines [Lipman]of the world have been really helpful in challenging us to be clearer on those kinds of questions and sharpen our approach. So one thing certainly they've helped us to understand and promote is this idea of creating an alternative vision of school imporvement that's not as heavily based on test scores. Sort of like the Finland mode, really developing the higher order of thinking, the critical thinking skills of young people. Having an inquiry based model that's student centered. That encourages professional communities to really evaluate the work they're doing and the results they're getting, and constantly reasses whether it's producing a kind of result in students that they sought to create. And if not, why not? And how do we change that if it's not a desireable outcome? And really holding ourselves accountable as human beings that have this incredible responsibility to shape young people and help direct them in a world filled with all kinds of pitfalls. And, how do we do that while we also push against the systemic inequities that really limit the ability of young people to universally achieve. So finding a balnce between those two things. Being self-critical, being critical of the system and also not internalizing failure when it's beyond our control but not allowing it to go unchallenged (CH9 January 2012 Interview).

Thus, we can see just how important it is to complicate how teachers understand their identity as professional workers and the way in which this relates to the ongoing development not only of a critique of actually existing neoliberal education policies and practices, but the alternative vision that teacher activists, unions, and those solidarity

researchers who work with them in struggle posit against the neoliberal status quo. Moreover, the above comments from this CORE/CTU leader further illustrate how vital radical community organization and critical solidarity researcher, like that of Chicago-based education scholar Pauline Lipman, have been in working in solidarity with education justice struggles and organizations like CORE and the CTU. Such research also functions to challenge their vision, helping to do what Max Haiven and Alex Khasnabish (2014a) describe as *convoking the radical imagination*.

4.6 Striking for the "Schools Chicago Students Deserve"

All of this organizing and relationship building, within and beyond schools throughout Chicago, would pay huge dividends in the 2012 round of negotiations between the CTU and the Board of Education, which saw the first Chicago teachers' strike in 25 years. It is vital to understand the 2012 CTU strike within the broader attack on public services and public sector workers, wherein municipal governments all over the world, but especially in the United States and Canada, have pursued austerity under the guise of fiscal crisis,[82] cutting deep into what remain of the social welfare state. Municipal governments throughout the United States in particular have slashed the wages and benefits of public employees, cutting thousands of jobs (in many cases, such as the recent cuts at CPS, citing pension commitments as the reason the cuts are necessary), which has resulted in sharp declines in some desperately needed public services. In a number of cities, including Chicago and New York, these cuts are even being directed at police and firefighters. And as Pauline Lipman and Rico Gutstein (2013) observe, these cuts constitute a "class strategy to shift the cost of the crisis of financialization,

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[82] While many municipalities indeed faced real fiscal troubles, in almost all cases, including Chicago, governing officials exaggerated matters in order to advance an austerity agenda.

speculative real estate investment, and corporate profiteering run amuck onto the working class and poor…and to support capital accumulation in the context of lack of profitable outlets for investment."

This observation builds on the important work of David Harvey's *Rebel Cities* (2012) and Jamie Peck's research on austerity urbanism. The key is to understand, as the CTU has insisted, that this fiscal crisis, while real in many places, is the direct result of intentional decisions on the part of municipal governments in Chicago, from Richard M. Daley to Rahm Emanuel, which have refused to raise revenue by taxing the rich, opting instead to incur debt by engaging in highly risky and toxic investments with the likes of Bank of America, which is making staggering profits off of the Chicago schools system while the Board has made destructive cuts that hurt the neediest students (Gillers and Grotto 2014; Jankov 2015). In late 2015, the CTU started a campaign to boycott of Bank of America because, as they explain in a leaflet:

> Chicago Public Schools just cut $200 million from its budget, eliminating 200 special education positions and nearly 300 bus aides and special education classroom assistants. School budgets have been slashed to the bone, and Bank of America is profiting mightily. According to an expose in the *Chicago Tribune*, Bank of America was one of the underwriters on CPS's auction rate securities (ARS) that cost the district $100 million more than an equivalent fixed-rate bond would have. Despite the risk, and the fact that B of A knew the ARS market was headed for a "meltdown," the bank did not warn CPS, which was in violation of the federal fair dealing rule. Banks like Bank of America were active in manipulating the real estate market with slick stock strategies that blew up in all of our faces in 2008. Their irresponsible actions caused a recession and forced the Federal Reserve to bring interests rates down around zero percent. As a result, cities like Chicago lost money on its bet that interest rates would rise, while the banks—which caused the collapse of interest rates—profited. According to an expose in the *Chicago Tribune*, Bank of America was one of the underwriters on CPS's auction rate securities (ARS) that cost the district $100 million more than an equivalent fixed-rate bond would have. Despite the risk, and the fact that B of A knew the ARS market was headed for a "meltdown," the bank did not warn CPS, which was in violation of the federal fair dealing rule. Bank of America is one of five banks that stand to profit from estimated net payments and potential

penalties for termination from "toxic swap" deals. The City and Chicago Public Schools stand to lose a whopping $1.2 billion from terrible financial schemes that the banks shamelessly promoted. The *Chicago Tribune* found that CPS has not even bothered to look into legal options to recoup the money lost to Bank of America and others. This is despite the fact that a growing number of cities, most recently Houston, have retrieved millions through legal recourse for similar deals, and have only a fraction of the exposure to and liability from toxic swaps as Chicago (Chicago Teachers Union 2015).

This is but one more recent example in which global finance is working to undermine public education, which has proven to be a lucrative opportunity for immediate profit making while also serving in the further erosion of the institution of public schooling and urban institutions that provide secure and good work for those who do the difficult, undervalued, and generally underappreciated work of educating children. It also provides an example of how the CTU under CORE's leadership has sought to target the financial institutions at the centre of urban neoliberal development.

In the 2012 round of negotiations Chicago teachers and other public school employees faced a 20% increase in their workday along with a proposed 2% pay increase. As a result, CTU members used the strong workplace organizations that they had built over the past two years to secure a near 90% yes vote to authorize a strike, which was possibly the strongest message they could have sent to the Board of Education and Mayor Emanuel that the union did not have any intention of backing down without a fight. Of those CTU members who cast a ballot, 98% voted yes. Incredibly, only 482 teachers—or 1.82% of the membership—voted against a strike authorization. As a result of SB 7 union members who did not cast ballots were counted as voting against a strike. Thus of 26,502 members eligible to vote, 23,780 voted to strike.

This vote, which took place on June 4, 2012, came on the heels of the largest march of teachers and their allies in Chicago's history, a march that itself spilled over

from a massive CTU meeting where over 4,000 CTU members had packed a downtown

auditorium for one of the largest union meetings (organized to discuss negotiations and

the increasing likelihood of a strike) (Duncan, Larry and Schmidt 2012). "It was

excellent, very inspiring," Mayra Almarez, a history teacher at Taft High School on the

city's North Side, said of the rally. "Sometimes it's really hard to continue when, in the

media, you hear that we're aggressive, we're this, we're that, we're not in it for the right

reasons—when in reality, we are. It was great to see we are supported by other people, by

parents." Asked if teachers at Taft are prepared to walk a picket line if necessary, she

replied, "Absolutely. We're ready" (Quoted in Sustar 2012a).

> At the raucous May 23 union rally, Karen Lewis made the vital observation that:

>> Some people don't believe me, but this is a national fight. All across this country, teachers, clinicians and paraprofessionals are fighting failed status quo reforms. School districts have become emboldened…because rich people are now writing the laws. Rich people, who never send their children to public schools, are making the policy. And nationwide, everyone—everyone—is facing the loss of their collective bargaining rights. Look at Wisconsin. Look at Indiana. We are surrounded by that, brothers and sisters. So why are we here?

In answer to this question a member in the crowed screamed: "Str-i-i-i-ke!" Teachers took

up the chant, "Strike! Strike! Strike!" as someone sounded a vuvuzela, the noisemaker

made famous during the World Cup soccer tournament in South Africa in 2010.

Moving swiftly in response to the strong CTU strike authorization vote,

opponents of teachers flooded the radio (with a special focus on African American and

Latino stations) with advertisements that depicted the teachers and the CTU as greedy

reprobates whose actions would only hurt the city's kids, whom they were charged with

educating. Then on July 4, 2012 the CTU issued a warning to their members about

responding to surveys about their work for CPS, which the union suspected were being

conducted by opponents of teachers and the union. The CTU informed members that,

"Many of the out-of-town groups seeking to defame CTU and its members have deep pockets and may contract local vendors in an attempt to make their surveys look authentic. Some have "localized" the name of their organizations by adding "Chicago" or "Illinois" to give cover to who they really are" (Chicago Teachers Union 2012). These organizations promoting corporate reform are part of an extensive national network and many local organizational affiliations. They have access to a wide array of resources, from finances to political influence and sympathetic coverage in the corporate media.

To counter this campaign the CTU did not develop slicker advertisements to convince people that they are on the side of students and parents[83] but instead began to assert their own positive vision of public education, a vision that at the same time drove and developed over the course of their organizing. To this end, they sought not only to take cuts off of the bargaining table but also to put broader issues on the table (many of which are outlined in the union's vitally important report, *The Schools Chicago Students Deserve* (Chicago Teachers Union 2012a). For example, the CTU made the crucial link between their demands for improved compensation for teachers and support staff and a more progressive fully funded and enriched system of public schooling. Broadening the bargaining agenda such that what was at stake was an alternative version of education was vital for gaining public support, but because of the 1995 law that governs bargaining for Chicago Public Schools, employees could not strike on anything other than wages and benefits. In order to expand the bargaining agenda, then, the CTU had to focus on

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[83] This stands in contrast to what a number of labour unions have done elsewhere and which many communications "experts" might recommend as a useful tactic. See for example, CUPE Local 4400 and CUPE Local 79, both municipal worker unions in Toronto, who invested significant resources in advertising campaigns to persuade the public that they are the good guys standing up for quality public services.

increasing wages at the negotiating table—beginning with the replacement of the four percent raise that was cancelled by CPS in the previous year and an additional increase to compensate teachers for the longer school day—but make it clear that they were fighting for a wide range of issues to improve the schools in Chicago. In response, Mayor Emanuel and CPS officials rebuffed the CTU for asking for more money at a time when many workers endured pay cuts. However, demanding more just compensation provided a necessary springboard from which to both defend union members and force CPS and Emanuel to widen the scope of bargaining.

The CTU framed their demand for just compensation as the necessary means by which the alternate vision of education they were advancing would become possible. In doing so, they reframed the discourse of the employer and of advocates of corporate education reform that positioned them as greedy public servants trying to secure liberal compensation for themselves within an economic climate in which many workers suffered more severely than teachers, and positioned CPS and Emanuel as responsible government imposing necessary austerity. Such a reframing was made possible both by the CTU's strategy of using extensive research to understand their employer and the context in which negotiations were situated. That the CTU had an especially sharp understanding of the kind of employer they bargained with and the context of contract negotiations (knowledge of which is missing from the majority of union negotiations) is reflected in a remark Jesse Sharkey made in May: "You can't have a seat at the table when you're on the menu." Sharkey's comment sharply rejects the predominant business unionism that structured the CTU's previous rounds of bargaining (Labor Beat 2012).

While CTU organizers and leaders proved quite adept at using their research and the research conducted by sympathetic academics to reframe the discussion and reportage in the local media, one of the most significant ways in which the CTU addressed anti-union propaganda was through tireless neighbourhood and workplace organizing, which allowed the unions' members, CPS parents, and community members across Chicago to more deeply grasp the issues the Chicago teachers were fighting for. These efforts also included some well attended and vibrant public forums organized by the CTU, which took place across the city in preparation for the strike. At these forums many parents and community members expressed concern about the prospect of a strike and were not afraid to voice their fears and questions to the leaders of the CTU in attendance. While these forums themselves were not deliberative spaces of democratic decision making and did not shape bargaining demands directly, they did go a long way in opening up the process of negotiations to the public and providing a space where those interested could access further information about the issues and process of negotiations (and how the strike, which now appeared more likely than ever, might play out). Importantly, the St. Paul's Federation of Teachers (SPFT) in Minnesota would learn from this experience and Chicago and take it a few steps further by turning such forums into deliberative spaces through which organizing demands were developed and a new vision for education in St. Paul was forged (Ricker 2015).

Another forum in which the CTU employed a communications strategy that sought to counter propaganda by reframing the discussion was community hearings. At these hearings, the union's organizers engaged with particular journalists in order to expose the duplicity of corporate education advocates. To give but one example, in

February, 2012 a network of preachers who were advocates of closing schools and replacing them with charters were exposed by the *Chicago Sun Times* for paying protesters (mostly poor African American men, who were remunerated $25 for each community hearing at which they testified in support of the proposed closings. This story would not have come to light but for one CTU organizer in particular who spotted and "flipped" a number of these paid protesters at some of the hearings, and then managed to convince both these paid protesters and a certain journalist at the *Chicago Sun Times* who covers education issues in the city to write a story about it.[84]

A central component of this strategy involved targeting corporations like Bank of America, Hyatt Hotels, and the Chicago Board of Trade—all of which have benefited handsomely from the Tax Incremental Financing (TIF) scheme and other global city development policies focused on the downtown core of Chicago and at making the city an attractive site of investment for transnational capital. TIF, while supposedly serving the purpose of economic development in specific areas of Chicago designated as "blighted" communities, has, since its original deployment in the City of Chicago, functioned to siphon money from resource-starved, poor neighborhoods and the public institutions that serve them to be used as a slush fund of the Mayor's Office (Weber and Goddeeris 2007; Weber 2010).

While the CTU targeted these corporate institutions and this particular model of urban economic development prior to the commencement of the strike with direct actions that saw a number of CORE/CTU leaders arrested, the union continued to identify the

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[84] I witnessed all of this at one of the community hearings, which was organized by CPS, in accordance with the new process for closing schools. And I was present after the meeting while the CTU organizer spoke with the *Chicago Sun Times* journalist on the phone, convincing her of the merits and importance of the story. This was one of the most skilled displays of organizing and media savvy that I have ever seen.

taxing of corporations operating in Chicago, especially financial institutions, as the key means of funding their proposals for improving public education.

This attention to how governing officials (from Mayor Richard M. Daley to Mayor Rahm Emanuel) have aligned themselves with corporate actors based in Chicago in order to remake particular neighborhoods so as to build Chicago as a "world class" or "global" city at the expense of institutions like public schools, mental health clinics, and libraries that serve marginalized working-class communities is further evidence of how vital a critical geographical analysis has been to the CTU under CORE's direction. As elaborated in Chapter 3 on urban neoliberalism and education restructuring in Chicago, the CORE-led CTU highlighted the deeply exploitative and racist nature of the mechanisms of the global city development strategy in Chicago (whose chief weapon has been the use of TIF).

Prior to the CTU's strike authorization vote on June 4, 2012, CPS officials were so firm in their belief that the union would never be able to strike that they agreed to the negotiations timeline proposed by the teachers' union, which would allow a strike to occur in September. Labour journalist and socialist activist, Lee Sustar, accurately explains the smugness the flowed from the CPS's mistaken belief that the new CTU leadership would not have the capacity to unite the union's membership behind their militant program of transformation. And a little over a month after the CTU's amazingly strong strike authorization vote, the appointed arbitrator (another new step in the bargaining process made necessary courtesy of SB 7) issued his report, which would prove to be another problem for CPS and Mayor Emanuel's austerity demands: the report recommended wage increases of 35.74% over four years! Needless to say the city

rejected this recommendation, as did the union. Crucial here is that the CTU rejected

these recommendations because the arbitrator's report did not speak to any of the broader

demands/issues that the union had raised to improve the school system, a rejection which

would go a long way in bolstering public support and serving as evidence that, contra

CPS's and Emanuel's claims, the teachers and their union were not concerned only with

their own narrow economic interests (Ahmed-Ullah and Hood 2012).

The combination of a longer school day and a smaller budget proposed by CPS

led to the creation of a new alliance of parent and community groups, Chicago Parents for

Quality Education. Despite having various positions on the longer school day, the

organizations united behind a demand for increased funding for schools (Chicago Parents

for Quality Education 2012). One group in the alliance, Parents 4 Teachers (P4T), was

formed with the explicit aim of supporting the CTU. As P4T states on its website,

blaming teachers "diverts attention from the real problems in education, like under-

resourced schools, large class size and high-stakes testing" (Parents 4 Teachers 2015).

P4T while small would prove to be an invaluable ally during the strike and likewise

played a vital role in shaping public discourse on teachers and why the CTU was out on

strike—and perhaps as importantly, why parents were organizing to support them.

Consolidating and expanding parent support was vital for the Chicago teachers.

Yet, building labour solidarity during the strike, both at the local and national levels, was

similarly important. Doing so, however, proved complicated. And as Alter (2013, 22)

observes, with 2012 being an election year and labour having long since abandoned

organizing and action for a narrow focus on electoral politics and lobbying, the bulk of its

energy was focused on getting President Obama elected to a second term. So for

example, instead of organizing a Labour Day rally, which the Chicago Federation of Labor had not done since 1998, the CTU took it upon themselves to organize a rally and march, with over 10,000 participants. Again, this proved to be a smart tactical move on the part of the CTU. It served to energize the union and add to their momentum and support base just prior to the start of the new school year and their proposed strike. This rejection of depending on the Democrats for support is a critical element in the story of the CTU, and is discussed further below. For now, however, it is important to highlight what Karen Lewis (quoted in Sustar 2013) told participants at the labour day rally: "I do not have that much faith in the political system, because at this very moment I still believe there is one party in this country: that is the party of money with two branches." Just prior to the Labour Day rally, on August 29, the CTU filed the mandatory ten-day strike notice. The stage was set for the first teachers strike since 1987 and neither side in negotiations gave any indication that a settlement would be reached to prevent it

Less promising in terms of building labour solidarity was that, despite the fact that the two other unions with contracts with CPS—UNITE HERE Local 1 and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 73—had been supportive of the CTU, by the time the teachers went out on strike, both unions had already settled their contracts. Why they did so rather than bargain in parallel with the CTU is not an easy question to answer and surprised many labour activists in Chicago because both unions had a progressive reputation and had extensively supported and collaborated with the CTU. Indeed, Karen Lewis and a number of other CTU members had turned out to each union's respective rallies at CPS when they were in negotiations, as well as to support UNITE HERE workers while they were on strike at the city's Hyatt Hotels in 2012.

One possible answer as to why both UNITE-HERE and SEIU did not coordinate their bargaining with the CTU may be that CPS has the power to contract out the work of their members, which in turn gives these workers and their unions significantly less leverage. As a result, members of these unions, including food service workers, custodians, and school aides were contractually obligated to cross CTU picket lines in the event of a strike. More specifically related to the cafeteria workers represented by UNITE-HERE Local 1, Lee Sustar (2012a, n.p.) suggests that when CPS went back on its plans to replaced cooked meals with frozen ones, Local 1 president, Henry Tamarin, "jumped at the five-year deal offered by the city, rather than wait to negotiate alongside the CTU." And further, in addition to "peeling off these two locals from the CTU," Sustar contends, "Emanuel…also sought to consolidate ties with the unions that are the mainstays of the Chicago Federation of Labor (CFL) membership meeting by withholding details of the tentative agreement until the vote June 9." Unfortunately, most of Chicago's unions, many of whom do benefit in a particularly short-sighted and immediate manner from global city development policies, have continued to support him rather than looking to join the CTU in forging a different kind of independent, working-class politics.

To get a flavor of the CTU's parent union's relationship to their struggle, we can turn to the AFT's President, Randi Weingarten, who addressed the CTU's May 23 solidarity rally, showing support by saying, "If the one percent can get the help, if all those with silver spoons in their mouths can get help, what about the children of this city and the people that teach them?" While she was met with cheers from those in attendance, the AFT President had elsewhere made it crystal clear that she prefers

partnership to confrontation. In fact, she had come to the rally from Cincinnati where she was attending the U.S. Department of Education Labor-Management Collaboration conference. At that meeting, she said, "there are over 100 districts talking about working together, and here in the second [sic] city in the United States of America, we have to rally just to be heard" (Ahmed-Ullah and Hood 2012). Weingarten profoundly misunderstood the context in which this round of bargaining between the CTU and CPS took place. She missed that which Sustar (2012a, n.p.) observes, which is that "the face-off in Chicago [was] an example of the failure of Weingarten's strategy of collaboration." Further evidence that labour at the national level, failing to understand the specific conditions under which Chicago teachers were bargaining, adopted a failing strategy rather than one in solidarity with the teachers was the attendance of Microsoft Chair Bill Gates, who bankrolls a wide range of corporate reform efforts, as a guest speaker at the 2010 AFT convention in Seattle. How the AFT leadership believes it possible to partner with people who have proven themselves committed to deprofessionalizing and undermining, to the point of rendering teachers' unions irrelevant, teaching seems to be delusional and dangerous behaviour on the part of the AFT.

If labour's support for the CTU prior to and during the strike was limited by its leaders' inability to understand the context in which bargaining was occurring as one in which it was necessary to assert a positive, alternative version of education, support amongst Chicago residents was not affected by this same limitation. In spite of the failure of the leadership of the city's unions to actively support the CTU, support from rank-and-file unionists for the CTU and the vision of education they asserted manifested throughout the city: "Everyone's been talking about the teachers at work," said Don

Schraffenberger, a member of Teamsters Local 705, who works at the huge UPS facility just outside Chicago. Frustrated by the slowness with which their own union dealt with workplace safety issues, these UPS workers were excited by the CTU's high-profile rally and strike vote. "They are seeing a union that's actually fighting back," Schraffenberger said. "I think they see it the way people saw the 1997 Teamsters strike at UPS'" (Hood and Pearson 2015).

From the first day of the strike, picket lines, held from 6:00 am until 10:30 am, were strong. Each day I attended a different picket line to experience picket lines in as many neighbourhoods as possible, some at elementary schools and some at high schools. Everyone on the lines wore red shirts that, over the next seven days, would become iconic of the CTU. Living down the street from Roosevelt High School in Albany Park, I awoke every morning of the strike to horns blasting in solidarity. Wearing a red t-shirt during the strike would elicit those same horns of solidarity and warm greetings of support from Chicagoans of all walks of life. To my amazement, over the entire course of the strike I was only treated to two or three negative comments from passers-by while I was on the picket line wearing my now classic "Support Chicago Teachers" t-shirt.[85]

The El ride to the rallies I took daily from my home base in Albany Park evidenced massive rallies downtown and the electrification of the entire city. By mid-week of the strike the CTU decided to move their afternoon actions away from the downtown core and instead march through the West and South sides of the city, around the schools and neighbourhoods that have suffered the most from economic neglect and

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[85] The Chicago Teachers Solidarity Campaign, which came out of Occupy Chicago and has since the strike morphed into a broader Labour Support group, produced and sold over 15,000 of these t-shirts. I was one of those who helped sell a number of these t-shirts at different rallies and public forums before and during the strike.

marginalization. Doing so represented a clear understanding on the part of the union's organizers and leadership that it was vital for them to target not simply the center of power in global Chicago but to refocus a spotlight on the devastation that has been wrought by the uneven political and economic restructuring that has come along with a global city development strategy.

Moreover, this turn to marginalized neighbourhoods further extended solidarity and deepened the CTU's support of segments of the racialized working class who had been ignored and neglected by the ruling classes of Chicago (and the nation) for some time. As such, it was the best possible counter to the corporate education, anti-union propaganda that was being broadcast on African American and Latino radio stations. These marches and the neighbourhood organizing that took place throughout the strike, some directed by the CTU leadership, some that happened more organically in different schools and neighbourhoods, are evidence of the continued importance of place for movement building, and urban politics more generally. As Jane Wills (2013, 136) observes, "Our local schools, universities, hospitals, councils, churches and mosques— amongst others—provide important geographical anchors in our everyday lives." In focusing on building deep relations with the people who live in places where their members work, to fight for neighbourhood schools as community anchors, as community spaces, the CTU has sought to both understand the social and cultural particularities of neighbourhoods in the South and West side of Chicago that have been defunded and relegated by economic and political elites as zones of abandonment. In so doing, the CTU is building a profoundly place-based but multiscalar form of unionism and working-class

politics. This is the kind of attention to place and scale that labour geographers have long insisted unions develop in their practice.

While Lewis indicated to the press on Friday, September 14, 2012 that the union was close to a deal and would likely end the strike in time for school to resume that Monday, union delegates voted at the Saturday meeting to delay accepting the offer until all of their members had a chance to read and discuss the employer's proposal. So the following Monday, instead of calling off the strike, members went back to the picket lines and took the time to do just this, displaying an incredible, new level of internal membership engagement. The proposal showed significant gains, which included: the creation of over six hundred new positions in art, music, and physical education; a freeze on healthcare payments; a seven percent wage increase over three years; a new teacher evaluation system (which was not so much an improvement as a mitigated concession); an important anti-bullying provision that would protect teachers from abusive principles; language to promote racial diversity in hiring; and an annual supply reimbursement increase from $100 to $250 (Chicago Teachers Union 2012b).

In addition to the gains made by the CTU in this round of bargaining, Karen Lewis (Chicago Teachers Union 2013d), reflecting upon the strike a year later, importantly observed that "We gained the ability to finally have due process in all discipline issues and the right to appeal evaluations. We also won a real right for teachers to follow students when schools close—which proved significant when CPS closed 50 schools in a single year." Lewis further observes that:

> This Union had survived an all-out attack on our very existence and our ability to advocate for our members, our students and their communities from a well-funded, well-orchestrated group of extremely wealthy people who saw themselves as the authorities on education…. We were vilified in the press and on paid radio

ads which attempted to paint us as greedy and unknowledgeable. Our contractually agreed to raises were stolen to goad us into acting rashly. Our members have been laid off, terminated and publicly humiliated all in attempt to turn public school educators and the public against us. None of it worked.

Thus we have a pivotal example of the power of organized people beating back the power of money, rather than another failed attempt of a union to win public support through well-crafted PR campaigns, which have not shown themselves to be hugely effective.

4.7 Pushing Back Against Top-down Education Governance

As already suggested, one of the biggest areas that the CTU and the wider movement for education justice that it is a part of has challenged is the autocratic organization of school governance. As one leading CORE activist explained to me:

> In Chicago for the past 15 years the status quo has been top down change, every year, and every few years. Kind of a big picture policy. And then each year the building will have different internal tests, different mandated curriculum, things like that. So there's no continuity. And I think what would work to combat that is if we gave more local control over the schools. And that's what the union should really be fighting for; teachers, students, Para professionals and even local administrators deciding what works best for their school. And then basically going to the district and saying this is our plan. Fund us. And some schools need more funding than other schools. And things are not being allocated according to need. They're being allocated towards clout. So that's something that the union needs to continue fighting for. We need strong local school councils. Unfortunately, it's actually state policy to weaken our local school councils…. In 1995 the mayor of Chicago was given total control of our school system, and that was a reaction to the 1988 state law that formed local school councils. So we had about five or six years to implement local control and even in that a lot of the local school boards, local school councils, the elections were gamed, principals essentially ruled them. They weren't really allowed to see their potential. And then in '95 a lot of their latitude was cut off and the mayor was given a total top down control of the school system, so in that we had all these mandated changes. The big thing really would just be to take the top down part out and allow communities to build schools the way they see fit (CH3 Interview, June 2012).

On the question of what differentiates this view in CORE and the CTU from the teacher unions who opposed local, community control of schools in the late 1960s (the UFT in particular), this activist continues,

They [teachers' unions] were more or less professional organizations. And they really needed to flex their power to get the things that they did. I'm not saying they went the right route, but I think that is what they were doing at that point, becoming an organization that could do something. And they probably felt at odds with the idea of local control. Now we're at a point where, even though unions are losing power, we still have quite a bit and if we cede that power to the community as opposed to corporations and city hall we could really build something great. And at that time maybe there was short-sighted leadership. Maybe it was egos. It just didn't play out that way. But I think because we can look back and see what happened when unions and community were at odds, we can learn from that experience and build something better (CH5 Interview, July 2012).

Thus we have explained here the real meaning of community unionism, which is that unions must in some aspects cede power to communities for the sake of building shared models of bottom up, genuinely democratic forms of school and urban governance. In contrast to seeing parents and local communities as antagonists, then, the approach being posited here is one that views them as equal partners. And under the status quo of neoliberal education policy, practice, and governance, both teachers and parents are being marginalized, which creates ripe circumstances for alliances. This stands in stark contrast to the approach of parent and local community control, shared with teachers and other school employees, taken by most urban teachers' unions in the late 1960s and 1970s, discussed in more detail in the next chapter on New York and the UFT. That being said, however, there is still much about the ways in which a democratically elected school board and local school councils function that needs to be critically interrogated and further developed if they are to be genuinely democratic and responsive bodies for school governance. Yet, at this time, subject to Mayoral control and ongoing assaults on the rights of teachers and the little control that they and parents enjoy over school policy, getting back what was lost seems like the best possible outcome of struggle. How this will shape up and evolve remains an open question.

4.8 Post 2012 Strike: Moving Toward an Alternative Politics?

In a CTU communication that reflects on the one-year anniversary of the strike, Karen Lewis observes, "Since the strike we have strengthened our ability to build power through a significant change in the political landscape including increased voter awareness, registration and candidate preparation…. We've done remarkable work towards equitable funding by changing the conversation about revenue but now our focus is on securing fair taxes, closing corporate loopholes and holding the unelected, unaccountable school board to making budgetary decisions that do not destroy traditional public schools" (Chicago Teachers Union 2013d).

With the threat of even more school closings and teacher layoffs for 2013—a record high of 50 schools, which would result in approximately 3,000 lost jobs[86]—CTU members decided to use their summer to educate, organize, and agitate. As they put it in one of their email communications to members and allies on June 6, 2013, "The union will use the teachers' summer break to send them into the communities to organize, as well as gear up union operations for an all-out fight. For their part, supporters of the teachers aim to have connections in every neighborhood in the city, with activists prepared to answer City Hall's lies and distortions with a clear and principled defense of public education against the budget-cutters, business elites and charter school operators" (quoted in Sustar 2012a).

And, as the labour journalist David Bacon (2013) recounts, in opposition to the closing of 49 schools which took place not long after the 2012 strike, "Thousands rallied and marched on March 27 in opposition, organized by the CTU, UNITE HERE Local 1,

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[86] On June 14, 2013, the Chicago Public Schools sent layoff notices to 850 school employees, including 550 teachers.

SEIU Local 1 and the Grassroots Education Movement. They demanded that the district stop the closures and slow the expansion of charter schools and focus instead on investment in public schools in working-class neighborhoods." And, "CTU President Karen Lewis urged students, "On the first day of school, you show up at your real school. Don't let these people take your school!" Over 100 people were then arrested in acts of civil disobedience outside City Hall. AFT President Randi Weingarten sent them a message, saying, "Chicago's reckless mass school closure agenda will destabilize neighborhoods, threaten our children's safety, fail to improve learning or save money, and create a domino effect of destabilization in schools across the city. It is part of a disturbing trend in cities across the country by the powers that be to ignore what parents, students and teachers demand and what our children need in favor of failed policies." On May 18, Chicago students, parents, and teachers organized a three-day March for Educational Justice. Following the march, the CEO of the Chicago Public Schools, Barbara Byrd-Bennett, took four schools off the list, including Marcus Garvey Elementary, Asean Johnson's school.

Beyond this organizing, the CTU coordinated with a number of their parent and community allies to launch lawsuits against the shuttering of these schools. The suits argued that the board violated its own guidelines by disregarding the recommendations of independent hearing officers on more than one occasion; that the schools targeted for closing are highly concentrated in largely African American and Latino neighborhoods; and that the city's plan utterly disregards the needs of special education students. [87]

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[87] And as Bacon (2013) notes, "Out of the 54 schools proposed for closure in 2013, 88 percent are overwhelmingly attended by African-American students, and only 125 of the 16,119 total students—0.78 percent—are white. The racial and economic polarization of Chicago was visible in the announced closure of George Manierre Elementary, where the surrounding neighborhood includes both the townhouses of one

Unfortunately the courts upheld the right of the Board to close 50 schools, dismissing the parents' lawsuit. As Karen Lewis said in response to this ruling, "The district wrote the rules regarding the power given to the hearing officers, and when the officers' decisions weren't to their liking, CPS broke its own rules in overturning those decisions and voting to close 50 schools. Under the Illinois School Code, the officers' ruling should have been final," Lewis added. "This unfortunate ruling basically upheld CPS going back on its own word and it does an injustice to the parents of these students" (CTU Communications 2013). There have been a number of different protests at the affected schools, as well as direct actions, which had been a major objective of the summer trainings organized by the CTU and the newly reinvigorated Grassroots Education Movement.

The board's final decision on closures came just days after the incumbent Caucus of Rank-and-File Educators (CORE) was elected to a second term in office, with a whopping 79% of the membership voting them in. Like their initial election in 2012, CORE members did not have much time to breathe, much less celebrate their victory. They needed to organize against this latest and potentially largest round of school closings. As Sustar (2013b) observes, "At the caucus' re-election party on May 17, congratulations and toasts were immediately followed by the question: 'What march are you going to tomorrow?' The next morning, CTU organizers were to join with student, parent and community activists to begin the three-day March for Educational Justice as part of the fight to keep schools open. Thus, the victory party thinned out early so CTU officers, staffers and activists could get some sleep before hitting the streets a few hours later."

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of the city's poorest public housing projects and burgeoning condominiums worth millions of dollars."

Despite this mobilizing, legal action, creative direct actions, and so forth, all of the 50 school closures were approved by the rubber stamp Mayoral appointed Chicago Board of Education, in what the *Chicago Sun-Times* (FitzPatrick 2013) observed was "less time than it takes to boil an egg." Karen Lewis called it "a day of mourning for the children of Chicago." She continued by saying that, "Their [students'] education has been hijacked by an unrepresentative, unelected corporate school board, acting at the behest of a mayor who has no vision for improving the education of our children," and that, "Closing schools is not an education plan. It is a scorched earth policy" (quoted in Bacon 2013, n.p.). And upon the scorched earth shall be built charter schools to profit from the intentionally broken system of public urban education in Chicago and other metropolitan areas across the United States.

Thus the most crushing blow to Chicago teachers since the strike has come in the form of over 3,000 layoffs since June 2013. As CORE/CTU new media guru Kenzo Shabita (2013) writes in *The Huffington Post*:

> There is a disconnect between City Hall and the people of Chicago. While Mayor Rahm Emanuel throws millions into pet projects, 3,000 Chicago educators are being laid off. The announcement of these firings was not only devastating to the teachers, clinicians, paraprofessionals and the families they serve, but to Chicago residents at large. This mass firing will cause irreparable damage to the Chicago students who've established relationships with their educators. Class sizes will likely swell and there will be fewer program offerings available. Chicago Public Schools claims that there's a massive shortfall that forced these firings. Whether or not this is true, it's clear that there is a need for new revenue to fund our schools. The mayor will not touch TIFs, the Board of Education will not renegotiate toxic swap deals, and corporations continue shirking the responsibility of paying their fair share. If the public supports teachers, why isn't City government? In order to make the city bend to the will of the people, the people will need to make their voices louder. We need to turn righteous anger into organization. This summer, Chicago Teachers Union is training supporters and members on how to organize communities. In this four-minute video, organizing interns explain the overwhelming support they encountered in the communities.

Related to this organizing, two Chicago socialist activists who have been deeply involved in the fight for education justice ask why, despite the fact that they marched for three days from the West and South Sides to downtown in opposition to the city's plan to close neighbourhood schools, with its inevitable destabilization of communities of colour, which included over a hundred people being arrested at a massive protest the day the closures were announced, the city pushed ahead with the closures and budget cuts, which have resulted in nearly 3,000 teachers losing their jobs. In answer to their questions, they suggest that these defeats have led the education justice movement to reach for greater political power in the city where we live (Marchetti and Fleer 2013).

Yet, it is not at all clear what expanding the political power of working-class Chicago will require beyond simply expanding the activism and organizing that have brought so many out into the street already. While many radical grassroots Black and Latino organizations got behind Jesus "Chuy" Garcia as the opposition candidate who ran against Rahm Emanuel in the 2015 mayoral election, and uncharacteristically for Chicago forced a run-off election, which Emanuel won, this was more an expression of an inability to chart an independent pro-labour or socialist approach to the electoral arena in the city. While there were a number of important independent city council campaigns in 2015 that occurred simultaneously with the mayoral election, from Tim Meegan's campaign in the 33rd ward (who lost) to Sue Sadlowski Garza in the 10th ward (who won against a strong Emanuel supporter), there was no decisive shift in city politics. Nor was there an altogether different approach built for how unions might engage in electoral politics. Interestingly, however, both Meegan and Sawlowski Garza are leading activists in the CTU and CORE supporters, but Sadlowski Garza ran as a Democrat (albeit an

independent one) whereas Meegan ran as an independent candidate. Both campaigns drew strong activist support, although by all accounts Sadlowski Garza's campaign had a more diverse working-class base of support (Lydersen 2015).

What both represent, however, is a confused and a fairly mixed approach to the Chicago left's attempt to engage in electoral politics and to shift the balance of forces in municipal government. The CTU put significant resources (money, time, and people power) into the Garcia mayoral campaign, which yielded little dividends, with the exception of helping support some solid progressive candidates like Sadlowski Garza and forming new "independent political organizations" in at least three wards. But in terms of the net effect on the mayoral election and in building momentum for extra parliamentary activism amongst its members and the broader working class in Chicago, the results of this engagement in the electoral arena have been limited.

If the education justice movement is unlikely to expand its political power by exerting an influence over electoral politics, the possibility exists that it will do so by means of organizing for a counterhegemonic education movement. Assessing the prospects for a counterhegemonic education movement, Lipman and Gutstein (2013, 8) argue that, "A convergence of social forces and unfolding crises has created an opening for a counterhegemonic education movement in Chicago," which crystallized in the CTU strike. They attribute this moment to an accumulation of "economic crisis, the accumulated effects of neoliberal education policy, acceleration of school closings, the illegitimacy of mayoral control, the persistence and maturation of the education-justice struggles in black and Latina/o communities *[this is a key component that I think many commentators have either neglected to mention or downplayed],* and the rebirth of the

CTU," which laid the foundation for the formation of the new or revitalized or deepened alliances that have been built. Lipman and Gutstein (2013, 9) observe similar crises that have resulted from the CTU's organizing: "The mayor and CPS officials are on the defensive for now. There is chaos in the CPS administration: five CEOs in four years, a revolving door of staff in the central administration, and an appointed, unaccountable Board of Education with diminishing credibility. Even CPS's current CEO acknowledges that distrust of CPS is rampant."

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, CPS is also plagued with a serious fiscal crisis and looks to solve it by means of cuts to teacher's pay and pensions, along with more layoffs, rather than generating revenue by taxing the rich who make so much money in and through global Chicago. And while the 2012 strike no doubt consolidated a major pole of opposition to education deform and neoliberal urban policy, the ongoing attacks that Chicago teachers have been confronting since the strike ended more than three years ago, including a failed attempt to dethrone Emanuel in the 2015 election, has yielded little for the CTU or those fighting against neoliberal austerity, from either a movement or electoral perspective. We must therefore critically probe the ways that the CTU has sought to move their struggle for a different kind of city forward.

While it has yet to yield the desired change, the CTU has since the 2012 strike sought to pull together movement organizations drawing on and expanding the framework through which they organized in 2012, moving from fighting for "The Schools Chicago Students Deserve" to the "City Our People Deserve." Reflecting the wider social justice framing that has been developed under CORE's leadership, the union put out a statement encouraging its members and allies to participate in a march and rally

in Washington D.C. on the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous, "I have a Dream" speech. In an email to their members and supporters, on August 8, 2013, the CTU declares that, "The attack on the working people of Chicago and the country—school closings, high rates of unemployment, evictions and foreclosures, mass incarceration of our youth, lack of access to affordable health care and clinics—highlights the structural racism in our society. We are marching for Trayvon, for jobs, for schools, for health care, for justice and for dignity" (Chicago Teachers Union 2013c). This is one example of the kinds of analysis and politics that the CTU and CORE have continued to mobilize around since the 2012 strike. There are many others we could cite, but the important point is that they have continued to mobilize and cultivate their alliances with community and labour partners, as well as to lead as a pole of opposition to neoliberal austerity in Chicago, despite being exhausted, somewhat isolated from other unions in the city and state, and facing a barrage of attacks from the City and proponents of corporate reform.

In some ways we might conclude that CORE and the CTU are simply running up against the limitations of what can be done in and through any one union, if that union undergoes a radical transformation while the other unions in the city, state, and country do not. The focus that the CTU has continued to put on the destructive and predatory role that finance capital, and Bank of America more specifically, has played in Chicago may yet prove to be a tactically brilliant move that can yield substantial improvements. But without wider transformation of the rest of the Chicago labour movement, as well as a more concerted effort to chart an *independent and left political* alternative to electoral

politics to accompany all of this organizing and mobilizing, the gains will be partial and insecure.

4.10 Concluding Remarks

While in no sense claiming that CORE/CTU have all the answers for how teachers, parents, students, or community allies can stand up and push back against urban neoliberalism, I have argued in this chapter that the movement CORE helped catalyze contains a number of important lessons for how to transform and more effectively use seemingly moribund, bureaucratic organizations, such as most U.S. and Canadian unions have unfortunately become over the past 30 or 40 years (a state reflected not only in the decline in union membership and density, but also, more generally, in their declining influence on society). And unlike union reformers of years past, these efforts in Chicago recognize the need to push beyond the institutional boundaries of the trade union form to advance a progressive agenda of systemic, transformative change in a deeply fragmented, exploited, and relatively demobilized global city.

While some analysts of teacher unions argue that unions should be transformed into social movement unions and not simply social justice unions, founding members of CORE have, from the earliest days of CORE's development, seen these visions or models as intimately connected. [88] Thus, CH1 makes the point that "we couldn't see having a democratic union without being a social justice union…. That idea is one" (May 7, 2011. CH1 Interview).

Moreover, as I have analyzed throughout this chapter, the important geographical imagination that CORE and the CTU have developed and deployed to understand how

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[88] Lois Weiner (2013) stands out as someone who consistently makes this argument, but in my opinion it draws too rigid a distinction between the models of social justice vs. social movement unionism, and constructs a false dichotomy that many teacher union activists themselves do not see as existing.

housing segregation, disinvestment in particular neighbourhoods, and the spatial and racial organization of the city's labour markets intersect with the racist organization of the public school system is one further way in which we can see their approach as a distinctly spatial justice unionism.

And as the labour geographer Jane Wills (2013, 137) observes, "At this conjuncture, and despite the time honoured connection between the polis and the emergence of democracy, geographers seem to have remarkably little to say about these connections between place and politics. Indeed, the hegemonic ideas of the discipline have reinforced the idea that place is less significant than it was in the past. Places are understood to be intersections or nodes in spaces of flows, in which capital, people and ideas are constantly moving. Places are seen as unbound and fluid, providing weak foundations for political practice [This view is most associated with Ash Amin (2002, 2006, 2010) and Nigel Thrift (Amin and Thrift 2002)]." For them, "places are characterised as sites for occasional encounters where lasting face-to-face relationships are a thing of the past." Yet, CORE and the CTU have made a serious commitment to thinking through the significance of place in their organizing, both in terms of how they understand the schools in which their members organize and the communities their members serve, which has proven vital in developing genuine relationships with the people who live in these neighbourhoods, and thus provided a foundation for constructing reciprocal labour-community alliances.

In contrast to the bleak perspective according to which places having little meaning for people as communities, where no one knows their neighbours or has any substantial contact with others, the organizing that the CORE-led CTU has conducted,

especially in the electrifying seven day strike of September 2012, demonstrates just how powerful and emancipatory a politics *in* place, both within neighbourhoods and across them at a citywide scale, remains today.[89] At the same time, as I witnessed on many occasions, a key strategy of CORE and CTU organizers in their neighbourhood and school (workplace) organizing was to help situate the struggles happening in any given place as connected to a wider geographical struggle against a corporate, neoliberal agenda for school reform and urban development, an agenda which people grew to understand very well through the Occupy framework of the one percent growing richer at the expense of the 99 percent (which is comprised especially of the most marginalized, African American and Latino/a, populations and neighbourhoods in the city). In this way, I argue, the CTU has helped its members and the communities that they have been organizing, gain a deeper understanding of what Massey understands as the political and economic forces that produce or lie behind the formation of places (the politics *of* place).

What is thus so important about the CORE approach to union transformation, movement building, and urban politics is its bringing together of both a politics in place (which looks inward to understand the neighbourhoods and workplaces of Chicago) and the cultivation of a politics of place (which looks outward to understand the political and economic forces structuring their schools and city, as well as to build a broader movement for education and urban justice).

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[89] Jane Wills (2013, 137) organizes Doreen Massey's work on place into two distinct phases: an earlier politics in place (developed in the 1980s when Massey was involved in the Greater London Council); and a later politics of place (developed since the 1990s during an entrenchment period of neoliberal globalization, during which many scholars and activists were concerned with cultivating alternative forms of international connections).

Chapter 5: Working-class New York and Rank-and-File Struggle in the United

Federation of Teachers (UFT)

In New York City, we can feel this energy that we're moving education forward the right way.

Michael Mulgrew, President, United Federation of Teacher (quoted in Decker 2015)

In some respects, working-class New York is thriving. With more than 40 percent of the workforce foreign-born, it has a cultural vibrancy only occasionally noted in the mainstream media (except in reviews of ethnic restaurants), but evident to any casual visitor to immigrant neighborhoods. People still flock to New York from all over the world seeking economic opportunities and personal freedom. (At more than 8.3 million people, the city is as large as ever.) With the city's streets extraordinarily safe, with municipal services under Bloomberg generally well run, if you own a home with an affordable mortgage or have a rent-regulated apartment, and if your children are lucky enough to go to schools that are not failing and you have managed to keep steady work at decent pay, you might well be better off than you were a dozen years ago. But for hundreds of thousands of working-class families with unsteady work, low wages, unaffordable housing, crummy schools and no union representation, New York City has failed miserably—a wealthy, self-congratulatory metropolis, whose pride of place rests on willful blindness.

New York labour historian Joshua Freeman (2013)

5.1 Introduction

With over 1.1 million students and 1600 schools, New York's school district is the largest in the United States. As one might expect, being the largest school district in the country means that New York is also home to the largest—and most powerful— teachers' union in the country, the UFT. The sheer size of the UFT has allowed it to dictate for decades who becomes the president of the national union, the AFT, the National president of which was Randi Weingarten from 1998 to 2009.

The central concern of this chapter is an exploration of teacher activism in New York, especially that which is focused on working through the UFT, and more

specifically transforming the union into a democratic, vehicle of worker power, antiracism, and social justice. More specifically, I concentrate my analysis on the formation and development of the Movement of Rank-and-file Educators (MORE), a group of UFT members who strive to emulate the CORE model of union transformation and teacher unionism in more than name alone. The central questions addressed in this chapter are: *(1) how has MORE been shaped by, and in turn shaped, urban transformation and teacher unionism in New York City? and (2) How well do the lessons of CORE in Chicago travel or get translated across space to New York City?*

In the first part of this chapter I provide an overview of the state of working-class New York and its labour movement, including the landscape in which its working class lives, works, and continually remakes (albeit not often in the way workers or their organizations desire) the urban environment. While an exhaustive and critical history of the UFT is beyond the scope of my study, in the second section I provide a brief historical sketch of how the union has evolved since coming to represent the majority of New York teachers in the 1960s, and what drives its evolution. In particular, I focus on the UFT's historical relationship to corporate education reform in New York City over the past fifteen years or so, with an analysis of its evolving, problematic relationship with racialized communities in the city. In so doing, I aim to illuminate how influential the UFT has been on teacher unionism in the United States. Further, I seek to explain why the UFT has been so impervious to rank-and-file reform. In so doing, I strive to grapple with how the geography of working-class New York has both shaped and been formed by the UFT.

This synopsis of the UFT's evolution and entanglement with the neoliberalization of public schooling in New York City should make clear why it is no exaggeration to contend, as I do in this chapter, *that the UFT is the most strategically vital teachers' union local in the United States, rendering it the most in need of transformation. Yet, as a result of its size, strength, and the urban geography of global New York, which it is both is embedded within and responsible for making, the UFT has proven incredibly resistant to rank-and-file efforts aimed at democratization and revitalization.* This is the central thesis around which my account of the UFT's historical development and rank-and-file efforts to transform it revolves. In the third and final section of the chapter, I turn to the central question of contemporary rank-and-file activism and MORE, which began as an amalgamation of a number of other teacher activist groups and opposition caucuses within the UFT, "forming like Voltron," as one of its founding members told me.[90]

5.2 The State of Working-class New York and its Labour Movement

Since the Great Recession began in 2008 New York City has experienced major job losses at the relatively well-paid end of the spectrum of the labour market, including in construction, manufacturing, government, finance and insurance, and wholesale trade. At the same time, to the extent that job growth has occurred, it is at the low-wage end of the spectrum, in industries such as restaurants, hospitality, retail, and home healthcare. For example, from July, 2008 through July, 2012, New York saw a net loss of close to 60,000 jobs that paid $45,000 a year or more, and a net gain of over 130,000 jobs that pay less than $45,000. Combined, these changes in the economy contributed to a nearly eight percent decrease in real median wage earnings between 2008 and 2011.

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[90] Voltron was a U.S. cartoon from the 1980s. The reference is meant to suggest that when each individual group merges they could form a much more powerful entity through which they can fight to change the union.
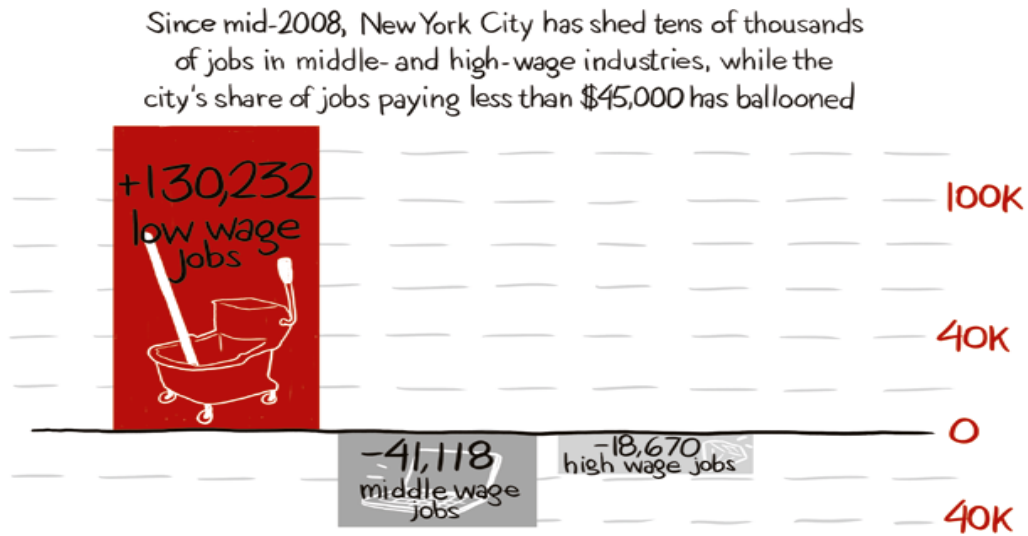
Figure 13. Recent Shifts in New York City Employment

Since mid-2008, New York City has shed tens of thousands of jobs in middle- and high-wage industries, while the city's share of jobs paying less than $45,000 has ballooned

+130,232 low wage jobs

100K

40K

0

−41,118 middle wage jobs

−18,670 high wage jobs

40K

Image: Susie Cagle. Source: Freeman 2013[91]

Moreover, as economists Gregory DeFreitas and Bhaswati Sengupta (2012) show, many of the newly created jobs have been taken not by city residents but by commuters, which exacerbates the difficulty faced by city dwellers in attaining decently paid employment, making life all that much harder in one of the most expensive cities to live in in the United States. For residents of the five boroughs, the official unemployment rate in November 2015 was 4.7%, just under the national average of 4.9%, reflecting some real improvements since the recession since 2007.
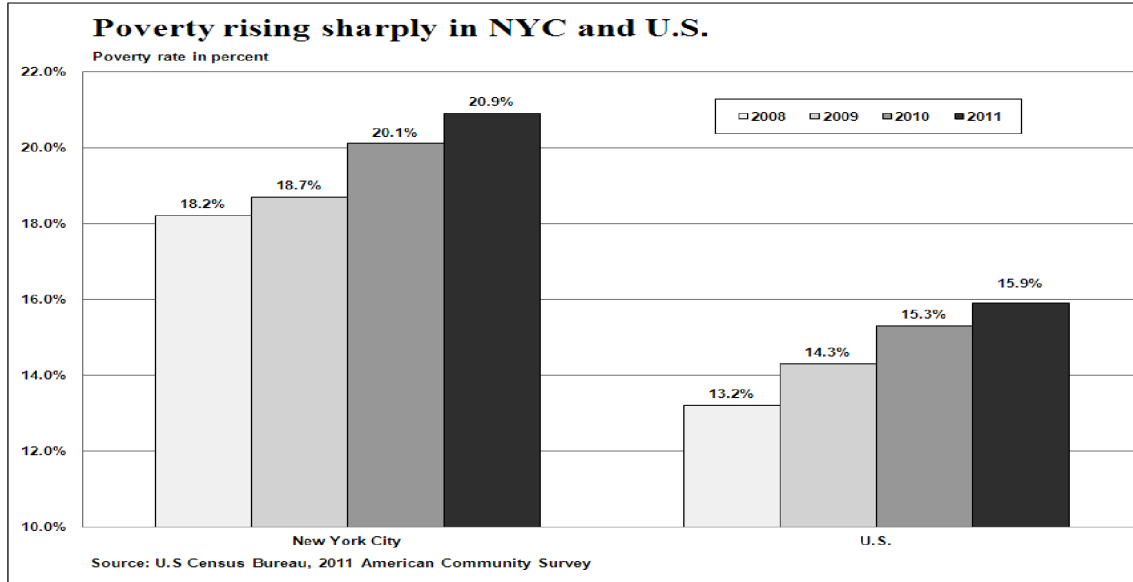
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[91] Freeman's data is drawn from the Fiscal Policy Institute's seasonal adjustment of CES employment data and QCEW 2011 annual average wage data from NYS DOL. Low wage industries are those whose annual average wage is below $45,000. Middle wage industries have annual wages of $45,000-$75,000. High wage industries are those whose annual average wage is above $75,000.

Figure 14. New York City Unemployment Rate (%)

	November 2015*	October 2015	November 2014
United States	**5.0**	5.0	5.8
New York State	**4.8**	4.8	5.8
New York City	**4.8**	4.8	6.5
NYS, outside NYC	**4.8**	4.9	5.3

Source: New York Department of Labor 2016a.

As the Fiscal Policy Institute (2013) notes, jobs have grown at a significantly faster rate in New York City as compared to its suburbs and Upstate New York. In 2013, for instance, New York City had 4.7% more jobs than prior to the recession, while the rest of the state as a whole was 1.6% below the pre-recession level. Long Island and the Ithaca metro area were the only places in both New York State and the nation as whole that experienced more rapid job growth post-recession than pre-recession. And while the glittery wealth of New York City is openly displayed throughout Manhattan and some neighbourhoods in the other boroughs, Manhattan's median household income is below the national median and falling. In 2011, 21% of New Yorkers lived in poverty, compared with 16 percent nationally. Indeed, a vast gap persists between growth in wages and productivity, which has eroded living standards for most workers and their families in New York and elsewhere in the United States (Fiscal Policy Institute 2015).
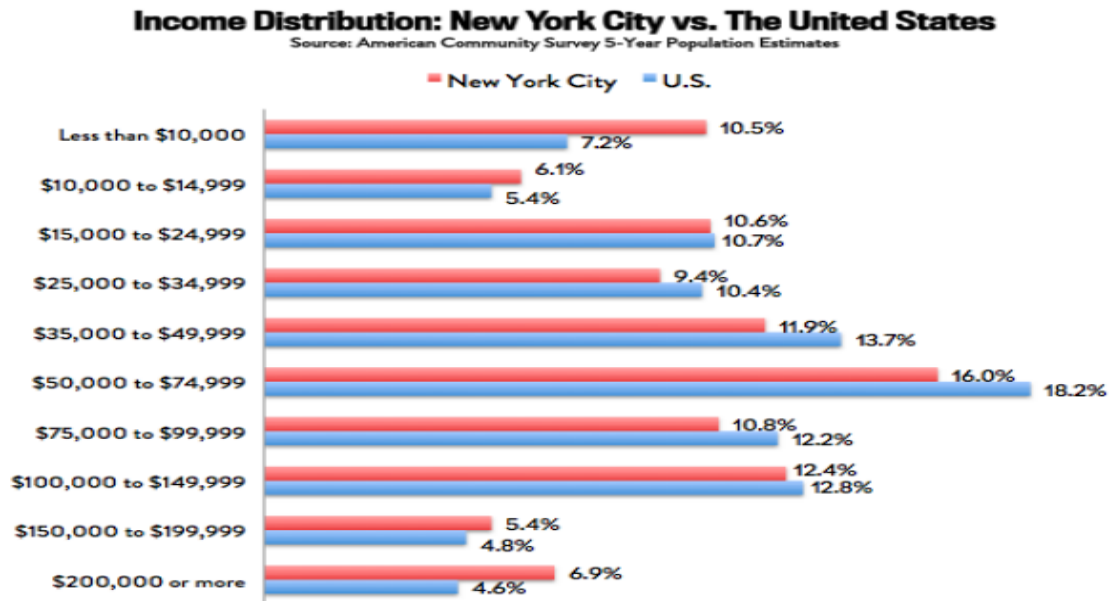
Figure 15.

Source: Fiscal Policy Institute 2012.

Although real wages have fallen for all working-class New Yorkers since 2000, largely as a result of inflation, slow wage growth, and the dramatic shift of many to low-wage employment, those New Yorkers who were covered by major union contracts bargained in the late 1990s and early 2000s have been able to keep pace with, and in some case make slight gains above, inflation. Insofar as New York continues to have a vast mass transit system, some degree of government-regulated rents, relatively low-cost public universities, a large public hospital system, and a sprawling network of government and non-profit social services, the city offers workers a set of social welfare benefits and opportunities few U.S. cities can provide (J. Freeman 2013). Yet, the social welfare policies on which the poor and unemployed depend continues to be rolled back through neoliberalization and austerity policies, with benefits being cut, as well as made more difficult to access and maintain. And regardless of the many differences that exist in circumstances and incomes, all segments of working-class New York have seen a steady

decline in real hourly wages since 2000, with women faring worse than men, and African American and Latino/a's faring worse than whites (Fiscal Policy Institute 2013). The only group of workers to see any gains had at least a college degree or more postsecondary education, which might suggest that middle and upper middle-class employees are enjoying the benefits of rising incomes in financial and business services. These groups continue to be a growing sector in New York City. In contrast, not only have racialized workers been disproportionately affected by declining incomes and wealth since 2000, but their wages, compared to those of whites, declined during this time as well, reflecting a growth in low-wage service sector employment, particularly in retail, hospitality, and fast food. This is happening in conjunction with the fact that native born U.S. racialized workers and a huge immigrant population seem to be trapped in this growing sector of low-wage employment. Indeed, as a recent study by the Economic Policy Institute (Sommeiller and Price 2015) shows, the incomes of the top 1% in New York State were nearly 50 times more than the bottom 99% in 2012. "Despite hollow assertions that the economy has rebounded since the Great Recession, the average New York family is still waiting to see the financial fruits of the recovery from the financial crash. This new report confirms that all of the income gains in the recovery's early years accrued to New York's wealthiest while everyone else has been treading water at best and many are actually worse off," said Ron Deutsch, Executive Director of the Fiscal Policy Institute (Fiscal Policy Institute 2013).

Figure 16.

Income Distribution: New York City vs. The United States
Source: American Community Survey 5-Year Population Estimates

■ New York City   ■ U.S.

Income	New York City	U.S.
Less than $10,000	10.5%	7.2%
$10,000 to $14,999	6.1%	5.4%
$15,000 to $24,999	10.6%	10.7%
$25,000 to $34,999	9.4%	10.4%
$35,000 to $49,999	11.9%	13.7%
$50,000 to $74,999	16.0%	18.2%
$75,000 to $99,999	10.8%	12.2%
$100,000 to $149,999	12.4%	12.8%
$150,000 to $199,999	5.4%	4.8%
$200,000 or more	6.9%	4.6%

Source: Weissmann (2014).

Additionally, it is important to remember that the lion's share of this income goes to pay for housing, which in New York City has become an increasingly unbearable cost for many working people (Moody 2007, 281; Fiscal Policy Institute 2013). The shift of employment towards a dependence on the low-wage service sector has been particularly pernicious because this is where a huge swath of immigrant workers and native born racialized workers become trapped.

The preeminent labour historian of New York, Joshua Freeman (2013), rightly observes that "New York, at least numerically, has long been a working-class city. Today, there are far fewer manufacturing workers than a generation or two ago and many more service workers, far fewer immigrants from Europe and many more from Asia and Central America. But perhaps the biggest change is that workers and their families are less socially visible than in the past, except when disaster hits or conflicts break out—like

Sandy or the school bus drivers' strike earlier this year. Increasingly, the image of the city as the home to great wealth or layabout hipsters (sometimes, as on *Girls*, living off their parents' bank accounts) has camouflaged the struggle of middle- and lower-income New Yorkers simply to get by." So while the city clearly remains a working-class town, where unions still remain relatively influential and represent most city workers, but far less private sector workers, and where militant struggles are still fought, workers and their struggles are today far less visible than they once were.

Towards the end of the Giuliani administration and the beginning of Bloomberg's first term, collective bargaining for New York's biggest unions was not only affected by the economic recession of the period or the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, but also by internal crisis that plagued a number of the large unions that dominate the New York labour movement. In two of these unions, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 32BJ and American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) District Council 37, rank-and-file reform efforts ended in leadership changes imposed by their international unions (Moody 2007, 257). Thus, as Freeman (2001) has shown in his magisterial book *Working-Class New York*, New York unions do a have a strong history of struggle in the public and private sector—and historically have achieved significant economic improvements for New York workers— but they also have a strong history of containing rank-and-file reform movements, often in a quite authoritarian manner.

Indeed, trade unions in New York, however, still represent approximately one million members, similar to the number of workers they represented in 1945, with a density of between 26% and 29%, nearly two times that of the country as a whole

(Milkman and Luce 2015). New York is thus the most highly unionized city in the United States and might epitomize what Rich Yeselson (2013, 79–80) describes as "fortress unionism," a metropolitan region in which high union density sustains a labour-liberal politics, which still includes decent social welfare policies for the poor and working class of the city. Yet, as already noted, New York also enjoys higher levels of income inequality than any other large U.S. city, as well as having the dubious honour of being home to the largest group of precarious workers in the United States. In part, however, this has led the creation of the most vibrant, creative, and successful alternative organizations to organize low-wage workers, from Domestic Workers United, which successfully won a state-wide "Domestic Workers Bill of Rights" to the Taxi Workers Alliance and worker centres that fight for largely immigrant day labour workers' rights (Milkman and Ott 2014)[92].

When organized labour was at its peak in the U.S. during the middle of the twentieth century, union density in New York City was not much higher than it was in the country as a whole. But in the decades since, this gap has widened considerably, with density in 2011-12, in both public and private sectors, jumping to twice the national level. Union density is higher in New York than in any other major U.S. metropolis, which has resulted in New York remaining in general a labour-friendly city. Which as Milkman and Ott note is "a rare bright spot in the national firmament, still relatively insulated from the desperate crisis that organized labor faces in most of the United States" (Milkman and Ott 2014, 10). And while this strength is partially responsible for securing the election of Mayor Bill de Blasio in 2014, the New York union movement, while relatively

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[92] For an overview of the New York State Domestic Workers Bill of Rights, which was made law only after many years of hard-fought organizing and struggle see: https://labor.ny.gov/legal/domestic-workers-bill-of-rights.shtm (Accessed December 23, 2015).

progressive, remains stagnant, top-down, and incapable of organizing for a renewed vision for working-class New York.

Private sector unions were the primary influences on the social democratic political culture that took shape in New York during the Progressive and New Deal eras. Likewise, these same unions, which had in these periods become influential political actors, played a key role in creating institutional infrastructure in the form of truly affordable housing, public transit, and quality public schools, at least for those majority white working-class neighbourhoods across the city. Indeed, Freeman (2001) persuasively contends that this social state infrastructure made New York a uniquely social democratic city with no comparable equivalents in the whole of the United States. And since the political and economic changes that were imposed in the wake of the 1970s fiscal crisis in New York, discussed briefly in Chapter 4, the cultural and institutional legacy of these past social institutions has been dramatically degraded, with the increases in inequality mentioned above leaving those still relatively better off union members in New York City isolated from the city's wider, highly fragmented and lower-wage working-class population.

As Freeman (2013, my emphasis) more recently observed, "The big unions that dominate New York labor, like the building service workers (SEIU Local 32BJ), healthcare workers (1199SEIU), United Federation of Teachers and electrical workers (IBEW Local 3), have an unstated confidence that they can rely on their own power to defend themselves. *The very success of organized labor in New York makes it act less like a movement than it does elsewhere*." Unfortunately, none of the unions in New York has experienced the kind of membership-led transformation of their culture or institutions

necessary to make the shift towards a unionism more effectively capable of mobilizing its own membership, much less, capable of gaining the support of the broader public and communities that constitute the rest of working-class New York.

Indeed, in recent years, even some of the strongest New York unions have been drained of their power. In the construction, hotel, and communications industries—long-time union strongholds—non-union operations have carved out large niches. In the public sector, too, unions have weakened, as Bloomberg has taken a hard line opposing pay increases. One municipal union after another has decided to avoid open battle, hoping that a friendlier successor and a more hospitable fiscal environment will follow Bloomberg. Every one of the city's 152 union contracts has expired (though under state law their terms remain in effect until new agreements are reached). This stalling tactic— the "recognition we don't have anyone on the other side to negotiate with," as Arthur Cheliotes (quoted in Freeman 2001), head of a local that represents thousands of city administrative workers, terms it—might ultimately pay off for the city, but it seems unlikely that city employees will ever make up the losses they have suffered from frozen wages while living costs have kept rising. As unions wait out the clock, members have become frustrated but are generally not mobilized to push their union leadership, much less than city as employer, to make any movement.

With so few private sector unionists to build alliances with, the once mighty municipal unions are in no position to defend themselves against any more concerted political attacks and certainly are incapable of adequately confronting a situation in which they lose the legal right to collect dues or fair share fees from those who presently enjoy the benefits and wages won by the union, which nearly happened in the Friedrichs v. CTA

case. Had the Justices ruled in favor of Fredrichs, a disgruntled California teacher who was supported by anti-union organizations, it would effectively rendered the entire country a *de facto* right to work state for public employees. Unions in New York, as in most places, are not politically or organizationally strong enough to fight in such an environment (Resnikoff 2015; Paul 2015). Former executive director of the New York City Central Labor Council, Ed Ott, is right to say that most of New York's unions lack the kind of organizing culture necessary to revitalize a new movement in the city (J. Freeman 2013).

As discussed in the previous chapter, New York City teachers, at least over the past two decades, have largely been seen as advancing their own interests at the expense of working-class and poor kids, especially those African American and Latino/a students who need the most help but have been instead subjected to the harshest disciplinary measures. In particular, since the UFT strike of 1968 the teachers union has been seen by many New Yorkers as advancing the interests of its largely white membership at the expense of African American communities (Clarence Taylor 2010; Sullivan and Keeney 2008).

Of importance for thinking about both the composition of New York's economic geography and the kind of education that those in power see as necessary to maintain an economically competitive global city is the fact that the kinds of unions, industries, and occupations found in New York today differ dramatically from those that were dominant in the postwar years. For instance, since the 1970s, public sector and healthcare unions have eclipsed those representing manufacturing or longshore workers. As Moody (2007, 244–45) observes, "The force that had expanded the limits of New York's unique welfare

state from the early to mid-twentieth century now fought a rearguard action to preserve what remained of it in the early twenty-first century." At the same time there have been a few unions, like the one that represents approximately 38,000 transit workers, TWU Local 100, and the communications workers' union, which have fought some important battles in recent years, including attempting to organizing workers in the private sector, where unions now represent less then 6% of the labour force in the United States.[93]

     As already suggested, rank-and-file rebellion has occurred in a number of these large New York unions, in both the private and public sector, in the past decade. It has been driven by a desire to maintain the quality of the jobs of their members, but also to assert the power of the union in a reconfigured political economic landscape in which the balance of power has without question shifted towards the side of capital. Capital has the multiple goals of maintaining New York City as a center of control for global capitalism, maintaining it as a luxury city for those who can afford it, and also containing the majority of workers and poor people who keep the city running but are having an increasingly difficult time surviving, much less flourishing, in today's New York. This power shift within the urban governance and political economy of New York has been characterized by the ascendancy of real-estate and transnationally-oriented factions of New York's bourgeoisie, whose power and corporate style of governance was consolidated under the two terms, spanning from 2012 to 2014, served by billionaire Michael Bloomberg (Brash 2011).

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[93] The Communications Workers of America (CWA) local in New York City was taken over by a left caucus in 2013 and took part in a larger strike of Verizon workers on the North East coast of the United States. With approximately 37,000 workers striking for over a month, this was one of the largest and visible strikes since the 1997 Teamster strike at UPS.

As a collective survival and resistance strategy, many low-income working-class New Yorkers not in more traditional unions have joined or created alternative worker organizations, like the Taxi Workers Alliance or the Restaurant Organizing Committee (ROC-NY), to influence pay, working, and living conditions across the five boroughs (Tait 2005; J. Fine 2006a; Milkman and Ott 2014). Indeed, many of these alternative organizations have strived to act as unions for these marginalized workers who have been neglected by most traditional unions. Although these organizations serve as vital resources for these workers, they have generally made only marginal gains with respect to changing the degraded working conditions or the broader living conditions of these workers, in part, I argue, because these organizations are rooted more in the city's ethnic communities than its workplaces, but also because these workplaces are usually not strategically vital to the operations of the economy of the city and thus do not provide workers with much social power that can be exercised through job action (Post 2015).

In building the capacities of these workers and raising the public profile of their struggles against highly degraded and exploitative forms of work, these alternative worker organizations have become a significant part of the labour movement in New York City (Milkman and Ott 2014). As such, these new organizations have influenced the politics and organizing of left reformers inside the more traditional unions, like the UFT, providing creative inspiration for community oriented actions and mobilization, but also providing the grounds for the cultivation of a deeper analysis of race, class, and transformative strategies for change.

Two of New York's largest and most influential unions that likewise represent many of the city's racialized public sector workers, SEIU 32BJ and AFSCME DC 37,

have undergone sweeping internal changes since the 1990s. Some of these changes have come as a result of rank-and-file reform movements having fought to democratize and reorient their unions. SEIU 32BJ's attempt at reform drew down the wrath of its national union, which was then headed by the controversial union leader, Andy Stern, who is renowned for declaring the death of class struggle, insisting instead that unions can do more than most do at present (which is already quite a bit) to collaborate with corporations. In abandoning a more aggressive, militant, and member-driven approach for one of corporate partnerships, Stern insists that doing so adds value to all parties. And as he has done on many occasions Stern placed 32BJ under "trusteeship," a euphemism for the process by which a national union takes full control of a local affiliate for a particular period of time, in the process removing all of the local union's elected leaders. This has been a common strategy of the SEIU and some other U.S. unions for clamping down on internal dissent and rank-and-file reform (Brogan 2009; Early 2010). Similarly, DC 37, which represents over 10,000 city workers, used to be viewed by many observers of New York labour as the embodiment of social democratic unionism grown into a "cesspool of corruption," (Moody 2007, 257) that was put under trusteeship by AFSCME around the same time (the early to mid-2000s). Around this time a new rank-and-file reform movement in DC 37 had sprouted up, calling itself the Committee for Real Change. It was built primarily by a coalition of local officials for the purposes of advancing internal democratic reforms, which included the direct election of the district council's top officers.

Yet, as Moody (2007; see also Downs 2008) notes, rank-and-file rebellion quickly spread to other New York unions, from the New York postal worker's local and the union

that represented employees at the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to the Professional Staff Congress (PSC), which represents all of the faculty who teach in the City University of New York (CUNY). As of this writing, the PSC is on the verge of its first ever strike and has been organizing direct actions in an effort to win improvements for its members, who have been working without a contract for over three years (Ballesteros 2015; K. Taylor 2015). The kind of rank-and-file mobilization that is responsible for these changes in the PSC and the other unions mentioned above had, by the early 2000s, wound its way to the Queens-based Teamsters Local 805 (Paff 2014).

Similarly, this spirit of reform could also be seen in the UFT, where dissidents, some of whom were members of a caucus called Teachers for a Just Contract (TJC), managed to win six executive board seats in 2005. As I elaborate in more detail below, while this was a small victory, it should be understood as especially significant given how effective and far reaching the political machine inside the UFT is in containing opposition.

The ruling caucus, Unity, which was founded by Albert Shanker, has been in power since the UFT's formation in the 1960s. Unity's level of organization stretches from the presidency of the UFT down to the scale of the neighbourhood school. TJC on the other hand, was a small group of mostly white socialists and shop floor militants, largely organized in a tradition of union reform that focuses primarily on workplace issues. They have generally opted for a militant, but incredibly narrow, focus on workplace issues that affect teachers rather than a broader socialist, antiracist, or social justice orientation, which is a clear articulation of the rank-and-file approach discussed at great length in Chapter 2. In particular, while TJC has done a great deal of important

work in advocating an aggressive organizing approach to dealing with workplace problems, they have generally refused to take on issues of racism and its effects on both union members and their students. That being said, members of TJC and other education activist groups in New York (discussed further below) began to see in 2011 the limitation of this approach and so looked to the successful model of union transformation and movement building developed by CORE in Chicago. Members of TJC, along with three other teacher activist organizations within the UFT, would, in 2012, go on to organize the Movement of Rank-and-file Educators (MORE).

Before delving any deeper into an analysis of the origin and ongoing development of MORE since its foundation in 2011, it is important to acknowledge that, despite the various advances made by rank-and-file reformers across some of New York City's most important unions, generally the impact of these reformers on public sector bargaining during Bloomberg's two terms as mayor has been marginal. Nor did these efforts at union reform establish many new capacities or institutions to further advance rank-and-file transformation, or any wider urban social struggle. The exception might be the Teamsters for a Democratic Union, which have managed to achieve major transformations in Local 814 in moving and storage, as well as the large UPS local in Queens mentioned above.

In general, however, since the 1970s public sector bargaining in New York City has been tumultuous from the perspective of city workers. Bargaining in recent years has not resulted in many advances, except for those seeking to neoliberalize public services and urban governance. From the perspective of the city government (as employer), however, whose central objective is ostensibly to maintain a stable system of labour relations, keep costs down, and provide public services—not necessarily in that order—

bargaining has worked fairly well in the sense that the unions have not gone on strike and have hardly engaged in any disruptive activity. In part, this is because of the Taylor Law, which prohibits any public sector union in the city from taking strike action (O'Neil and McMahon 2007). But given that the achievements of most of these municipal unions, including the right to collective bargaining, were won through illegal job action, this can only partially explain matters. In more recent decades, it has been fairly typical for negotiations to take two or more years to settle after their expiration date. This can be explained in part by some combination of city or state governments stalling in order to wrest concessions from municipal unions. This strategy has had some degree of success with respect to reducing labour costs, as most of the city's unions today have been too exhausted or otherwise disinclined to wage a real fight over contract negotiations— something that extends to the ongoing negotiation over the implementation of urban neoliberalization writ large. While portraying workers as part of his team, former Mayor Bloomberg was upfront with his commitment to securing concessions from city workers in every round of negotiations, a goal he achieved.

It has only been under Bill de Blasio, elected in 2014, that city workers, beginning with UFT members, have secured a raise in wages. This raise covered 5 years in retroactive pay to cover the Bloomberg period during which they did not have a new contract. Critics in MORE correctly insist that, beyond the provisions in wages and benefits that were negotiated, the new contract, which expires in 2018, will reinforce the practice of evaluating teachers based on students' test scores and will expand other corporate reforms across the school system. These include allowing 200 schools to opt out of a number of contract provisions, if 65 percent of UFT members at the school agree,

thereby making public schools more flexible and amendable to administrators at each individual school, as their counterparts are at most of New York's non-union charter schools, especially as administrators are now more easily able to dismiss teachers. Moreover, by agreeing to the creation of three new teacher designations, the UFT has increased the likelihood that a merit pay system will be implemented (M. Brenner 2014).

With respect to the meagre improvements in teacher's wages made under Bloomberg's tenure, teachers were forced to accept a longer workweek, the loss of the right to file a grievance over disciplinary letters placed by school administrators into their files, and a loss in their ability to direct nonteaching related assignments (Moody 2007, 260). And as *Labor Notes* Director Mark Brenner (2014) rightly observes about the agreements settled in 2014 by the UFT and the transit workers, "The deals show how little juice is left for public sector unions trying to deliver using traditional tools at the bargaining table or in the political arena. If these are the limits in a union stronghold like New York—where one in four workers is a union member and 70 percent of the public sector is organized—the news isn't good for conventional strategies elsewhere."

Yet, even during the Bloomberg years, a number of municipal unions tried a different tact when, in June 2006, they decided to engage in coalition bargaining. A spokesman from a group called the Uniformed Sanitationmen said, "We're joining together in solidarity because none of us wants to go years and years without a contract again" (quoted in Moody 2007, 262–63). While the majority of the city's unions were part of this coalition, DC 37 was not, which likely undermined the power of the coalition. Indeed, the settlement that DC 37 reached infuriated the other municipal unions because it was their agreement that typically set the pattern for non-uniformed unions in the city.

Concurrent with Bloomberg's election to a second term as mayor, the president of the UFT, Randi Weingarten, was quoted in the independent weekly civil service paper, *The Chief*, as saying that "The Mayor was very effective [in the last round of negotiations] in having the unions bid against each other. It used to be said that the unions whip-sawed the city; the mayor whip-sawed the unions" (quoted in Moody 2007, 263). Yet, as Moody (2007, 262) reminds us, New York's large municipal unions have historically put up little opposition to being whip-sawed in this manner, with the Municipal Labor Committee, which was chaired for many years by Weingarten, offering up nothing in the way of resistance. The Mayor was fine with conceding some wage increase, never much beyond inflation, so long as he managed to extract other cost-saving concessions on productivity, including implementing multi-tier wage schemes whereby new hires would not receive the same pay and benefits as their co-workers did when they were hired. Beyond this, however, one additional component of the neoliberalization of urban economic development that had become regularized—wage increases based solely on "real productivity increases"—resulted in depressing wages in the public sector and subsequently in working-class incomes across the city. Although the size of New York's labour force, as well as its cost, increased, it did so more slowly than growth in the city's budget as a whole, with total labour costs having dropped from 53.2% of the budget in FY2003 to 50.9% in FY2005 (Milkman and Luce 2015).

5.3 Earlier Waves of Rank-and-File Dissent, Challenges and Limitations

From this discussion it is easy to see why ordinary members in these large city unions, from DC 37 to the UFT, might want to organize internally to transform their unions. And, for education workers in particular, not only did they not see any significant

financial improvement in this period, but as discussed at length in the last chapter, the UFT presided over dramatic and detrimental changes to public education and teacher's working conditions in New York—the neoliberalization of public schooling and teachers' work. We cannot understand rank-and-file reform movements in New York, however, divorced from the national context of union decline and crisis, analyzed in Chapter 3. Membership rebellion inside unions has indeed been spurred on by the retreat of unions from struggle. But significant transformation of these large city unions proved impossible without the construction of a wider movement to transform the political and economic geography of global New York by changing the underlying power relations that structure both the unions themselves and the political and economic landscape of New York City.

As discussed previously, a number of different, interrelated trends, such as the globalization of capitalism and its increased financialization, a major shift rightwards of U.S. politics, and a more general anti-labour offensive being carried out by employers across workplaces and sectors in conjunction with the proliferation of anti-worker legislation courtesy of organizations like the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), produced these underlying shifts in power. [94] All of these conditions are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 so I will not rehash them here. But it is worth stressing that public workers have suffered in myriad ways as a result of the fiscal austerity and anti-union laws that have been imposed on them in the past three decades. In this period, city, state, and the national government have pursued neoliberal policies that have generally been met not by a fierce resistance of the union movement, but rather by many unions adapting to these shifts in politics and culture, which has in fact meant

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[94] For a critical evaluation of ALEC's past and ongoing efforts to strip workers of their rights and ability to defend themselves through trade unions, see ALEC Exposed (2016).

that unions have played a central role in managing a declining living standard for New York workers.

As a consequence of this adaptation to neoliberalism, austerity, and the curtailing of the radical, or even social democratic, imagination, a social movement that was led by unions and aimed to create a more socially just form of urbanism and economic life at the scale of the city in New York or nationally was nowhere in sight in the 1990s or 2000s during these rank-and-file insurgencies in some of New York City's most important unions, nor was one likely to emerge in the near future, according to Moody (2007).

While Moody's assessment is no doubt correct in many ways, I think that it lends too much weight to the power of capital to contain labour and broader social movement struggle more generally, specifically as it might develop in one of the most important global cities on the planet, New York. Even in Chicago, while the CTU has run up against limitations that present themselves as a seemingly impenetrable wall of neoliberal power that no single union, even a radically transformed, militant, and popular one like the CTU, can surmount, there are still many contradictions within global city, neoliberal development that workers and their unions can leverage to win important improvements in their lives and reverse neoliberalization in order to make more just urban geographies. It might thus be more accurate to say that in such circumstances a left, membership-driven, grassroots unionism can lead the way in defending against the most hideous onslaughts of austerity and the further advancement of neoliberalization, and can certainly continue to build working-class movement capacities for struggle, but is not able to create by itself the kind of systemic, revolutionary transformation that is needed to

advance an alternative form of working-class urban development and politics more generally.

That being said, I agree with Moody's (2007, 264, my emphasis) general argument that to "*alter the balance of forces in New York City's unions even slightly would have required changes in two other relationships: that between the members and leaders, on the one hand, and that between the leaders and the employers, on the other.*" It is no doubt correct to conclude that these two relationships are mutually constitutive. As noted in Chapter 2, bureaucratic, business forms of unions are characterized by an often distant and contradictory relationship between union members and their leadership, on the one hand, and a close relationship between union bureaucracy (elected leaders and staff) and employers on the other, which shapes union praxis in both the public and private sectors. The less democratic and less workplace centered the union, the more intense are these tensions. Indeed, in evolving into ever more tightly controlled, bureaucratic institutions that are removed from the shop floor and the day-to-day plight of workers, most of the unions in New York City have become insulated from membership criticism and accountability and hence often breed corruption insofar leaders can more easily make deals with employers that hurt their members, and in the public sector often hurt the people that use the services provided by union members. Crucially, this bureaucratization of unions undermines the potential of the union members to fight to transmutate their unions. In order to turn these relationships on their heads, which is often the goal of rank-and-file rebellion, reform struggles need to go way beyond changing the faces of elected leadership to transforming the culture and institutional structures of the union so that the power of members drives everything the union does.

The reform efforts in New York from the 1990s to the early 2000s made the fatal error characteristic of many previous reform movements; they limited their aim to electing a slate of leaders they believed to be better than existing leaders. Moreover, like many reformers in the historical tradition of rank-and-file reform struggles, the analysis and praxis of these reformers was overly economistic, by which I mean generally limited to wages, benefits, and a narrow conception of working conditions. Even in cases, such as that of the transit workers' union (TWU Local 100), in which these earlier reform movements succeeded in getting a reform slate elected, the new leadership ended up reproducing the basic relationship between the union and the employer as the new leaders became incorporated into the prevailing regime of labour relations (I. T. MacDonald 2011). This is in large part because the rank-and-file organization that brought the new leaders to power had such limited goals to begin with, disbanded once their leaders were elected, or otherwise failed to alter in any substantial way the top-down culture that remains the status quo in most unions today, a structure that functions to prevent any fundamental change in the relationship between the union's leadership, staff, their members, and the employer. At the risk of oversimplifying or overgeneralizing from a wide variety of historical and geographical examples of rank-and-file union reform efforts in New York, it is clear that these challenges faced by rank-and-file struggles will need to be confronted and surmounted by any internal, member-led movement to reinvent the UFT or other unions.

Although the cultures of many smaller local unions in New York and elsewhere tend to be relatively democratic—at least compared to other institutions and spaces that most workers interact with in their daily lives—this is not the case in larger local unions

like DC 37 or the UFT, where specific structures have evolved over time that serve to insulate leaders from members. In some cases, like the UFT, such structures were purposefully established to contain any dissent to the ruling faction, Unity caucus. With respect to the UFT, this is in no small part due to the monumental impact of the long-time president of the UFT and later the AFT, Albert Shanker. As Lois Weiner (2012, 90) observes, "In a very short time after becoming president…Shanker instituted changes to insulate his authority. One key mechanism was his creation of 'disciplined' caucuses on the city, state, and national level…Although other unions have caucuses as vehicles for officials to control the apparatus, Shanker borrowed a strategy that is more prevalent amongst left-wing sects than US labor unions." Derived from the principal of democratic centralism, long used in a variety of different socialist organizations around the world, once a caucus like Unity agrees on a position—which in the AFT was historically the policy that Shanker wanted—caucus members are not allowed to articulate a different perspective. Nor are they allowed to otherwise express themselves in any way that might be construed as reflecting a divergent position to that of the caucus. If they do they are subject to be expelled from the caucus, which in both the UFT and AFT translates into being deprived of the benefits that derive from running the union, which include most importantly part-time or full-time staff jobs at the union itself. And as Weiner further notes, the "political lives of union staff were—and are—closely monitored in the three unions controlled by the machines/caucuses Shanker created (the UFT, AFT, and NYSUT)" (Weiner 2012, 90).[95] This degree of ideological control over staff is highly

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[95] Shanker and many of his allies, as well as most of his top underlings in the AFT and UFT, were members or followers of "a tiny but highly influential clique of former socialists, organized into Social Democrats-USA (SD-USA). The intellectual mentor of this group, Max Shachtman, was well known in left-wing circles up until the mid-1950s as a socialist, a left-wing opponent of communism, and a supporter of "Third

unusual in other labour unions, and makes it particularly difficult for opposition groups in the UFT and AFT to make democratic changes to the structure of the union, without which it is impossible to pursue a broadly socio-spatial justice agenda.

Put differently, the ruling caucus of the UFT has mastered the art of establishing its power by controlling the vast amounts of the money available to top officials to hire and fire union staff, selecting members who will be granted time in lieu for their work with the union, and securing higher salaries for union officers, which itself makes retaining union positions a central priority for those already in them. Further, this provides a structural incentive for union officials to undermine any efforts to reduce the salaries of top leaders or to challenge the ruling consensus to which they have tied their fates. The kinds of patronage networks that have been created in the UFT and other large unions that also include a cadre of staff loyal to top officials are a central component of the processes that rationalize and solidify a particularly virulent, however enduring, form of business unionism, which itself has been complicit in the making of urban neoliberalization in New York City (I. T. MacDonald 2011). The structure of the UFT and other New York unions like DC 37 and the Transit Workers Union, Local 100 exemplify such a system of patronage. As nearly all of the MORE activists I interviewed point out, the patronage network—the center of Unity's political machine—that exists in the UFT has been essential to Unity's supreme ability to endure against left opposition movements. What is essential to grasp here is that this organizational logic radiates out from the New York-based UFT to its state-wide affiliate, New York State United Teachers

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Camp," a vision of social movements from below creating an alternative to both capitalism and communism. However, as the Cold War intensified, Schactman jettisoned his anticapitalism and his former comrades." This turn in politics led Schactman, and many of his followers like Shanker (and the unions they controlled), to back US foreign policy zealously (quoted in Moody 2007).

(NYSUT) (where I worked as an organizer for a year prior to entering a PhD program), to the national scale with the AFT. By all accounts, Unity explicitly conceives of itself as a political party, reflecting its deformed roots in a conservative social democratic organization affiliated with Max Schactman, which has led the UFT and its national affiliate the AFT to be fully complicit in U.S. imperialism, even today working to crush any criticism of U.S. or Israeli policy at Education International. Unity has ruled the union and has since Shanker's day used its control over the union's finances and political contracts to not only cajole and influence the UFT but also to intimidate through the veiled threat of withholding resources to local teacher unions across the United States if any elected officers dare to be too critical of the AFT leadership and its practices (Weiner 2012, 88).

Beyond the structural obstacles and intransigence of the old guard in the UFT, it is equally important, if we are to grasp the failures of earlier union reform efforts, to examine the shortcomings of the politics, visions, and practices of union reformers themselves. Describing the limitations of most of the reform movements that took place in the New York unions mentioned above in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Moody (2007, 266; see also Downs 2008; and LaTour 2013) perceptively contends that, "Most of the insurgencies …were mounted by local officials or small groups of activists. *The vast majority of members remained on the sidelines or simply voted their preference. To buck the structural barriers would require a greater and deeper upheaval, one in which deeper layers of the ranks were players*." As I elaborate more fully in my discussion of the rank-and-file strategy in Chapter 2, overcoming these limitations requires that dissidents undertake a strategy that centers on creating not just a membership-driven, democratic

unionism—no doubt a necessary objective—but also on completely reinventing unionism—which by necessity entails developing a different form of working-class politics so as to overcome some of the inherent structural limitations of the contemporary trade union form. This in turn entails constructing a synthesis between workplace and community, between the intersection of race, gender, and class, along with the complicated spatial dynamics that cut through all of these relations and social processes.

The reason the reform movements from 1990s-early 2000s in New York neglected to focus their energy on placing rank-and-file members at the center of their practice is in part because they were incapable of moving beyond the structural and ideological constraints of the trade union form discussed in Chapter 2. It is also because it is generally less risky and easier for union reformers to try to do everything themselves, as a small group of dissidents, whereas it is riskier and more difficult to organize and mobilize a union's membership base to take on the daily work of the union, to collectively mobilize around grievances rather than relying on professional staff and the legal procedure of the grievance arbitration system that is the centerpiece of contemporary U.S. labour relations. And, if one is to be honest, while a union's membership may be disgruntled about the status quo and thus vote for a left reform group, they typically do so in order to have a different group handle the union's affairs more effectively, still without the participation of union members. Here it is clear that, to the extent that unions have become neoliberalized, it is not simply the leadership and bureaucratic structures that are problematic but the culture and subjectivities of members, which have been thoroughly transformed over the past thirty years of political, economic, spatial, and *cultural* change. Put more theoretically, "neoliberalism produces not just political economic phenomena

but 'cultural meanings and practices related to the constitution of proper personhood, markets, the state,' and to this list we might add cities, 'that are emergent in a contested cultural field' … "neoliberalization generates new meanings, practices, and forms of subjectivity, as well as new links between these elements (Bondi 2005; D. M. Goldstein 2001)" (Brash 2011, 7). In confronting a membership that wants change but does necessarily understand why they should be the driving collective actor of change, it is easy to understand why many reformers opt to take a path of least resistance and do everything themselves. Unfortunately, this proves not only to be exhausting but also ineffective for creating real, sustainable transformation in the union. Strong, effective unions that fight for their members and the broader working class can only be created when union members are at the center of all union activity (Parker and Gruelle 1999; McAlevey 2012). Outside of the particular unions mentioned already, the reforms of which have generally been reversed with a few notable exceptions (Teamsters Local 814 and the CWA local that represents Verizon workers), some of the lasting effects of union reform in New York City endures in the important work done by Teamsters for a Democratic Union, Labor Notes, and the Association for Union Democracy—all of which share office space in Brooklyn. Of the three, only Labor Notes has played any real role in contributing the work of teacher union activists in the city, including those in MORE.

Just as union reformers in New York have so far failed to shift the balance of political forces to their side, engagement with electoral politics has likewise yielded few results. Whether in the realm of electoral politics or action-oriented movement building in workplaces and communities, New York's labour movement, even amongst the public

sector, has rarely formed anything resembling a unified front. As Moody (2007) observes, "By the late 1990s, the politics of the deal and/or the endorsement from fear dominated the political practices of most of the major public sector-unions…. The futility of this approach could be seen not only in the round of public-sector bargaining that dragged into 2006, but in the mayor's tough postelection stance on issues like health care costs and pensions—despite a predicted $3.3 billion surplus by the end of fiscal year 2006." While the dominant orientation to electoral politics of a union movement that ceased to be a movement decades ago indicates the futility of this approach, perhaps most importantly, any chance that trade unions, and workers more generally might have had to advance their interests through the electoral arena in New York City and New York State—and across scales and jurisdictions in the United State more broadly—has been constrained by the near full retreat of the Democratic Party and the refusal to actually use the Working Families Party as the Tea Party of the Left.[96] In New York specifically, to the extent that unions intervene in elections and work to get Democrats elected, they do so in the context of a fairly disorganized party and through an extremely top-down method, whereby the same bureaucratic structures used for collective bargaining operate to limit the union's engagement with elections, as well as to curtail how local union leaders can engage in politics. These structural constraints limit a union's engagement to supporting the whims of the top union officials, who in turn are wedded to the Democratic Party; little to no genuine input from ordinary members takes place other than being asked to vote a certain way and donate money to whichever politicians their union leadership

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[96] By this I mean simply that the Working Families Party, which works in New York State where it was created, as a left pole within the Democrats refuses to run independent candidates as a way to contend for power and hold Democrats like Governor Cuomo accountable when they fail to advance labour's agenda when in office.

endorses. While this mode of engagement with electoral politics extends to many jurisdictions outside of New York, important here is that such political practices work to entrench the passivity of members and cement their alienation from their unions and the political process more generally.

"The only breadth of innovation in labor's approach to politics" Moody (2007, 268–69) contends, "was the formation of the Working Families Party (WFP) in 1998," which the UFT has had little to no involvement in. This state-wide party was created in order to more effectively raise issues vital to New York's working-class population that were being neglected in mainstream discourse, including that of leading Democrats across the state. And because New York State's election laws allow a third party candidate to put a major party candidate on his or her ballot line, a rather unique fusion provision legal in only a few states, a given candidate may receive endorsement from multiple parties. This provision also allows for a minor party to receive ballot status by the votes it wins from the major party candidate on its line. Moody (2007, 269, my emphasis) perceptively observes that, "*What makes the WFP different from the major parties is that it actually mobilizes union and community activists to go door-to-door campaigning for issues as well as candidates. So far, however, the WFP has largely stayed clear of New York City, concentrating on suburban and upstate counties and state politics*. The WFP has thus done some important mobilizing work and brought key working-class issues into the debate during elections, yet it has also supported anti-working-class politicians like current governor Andrew Cuomo.

On a more general level, Moody (2007) suggests that New York's working class "presents a picture of fragmentation and weakness. It is tempting to compare this state of

affairs unfavorably to that which prevailed from the 1940s through the early 1970s. In 2005 the only strike with disruptive power was the three-day transit strike in December." As someone living in New York at the time of the strike, I can say that, while there were major problems internal to the TWU Local 100, along with major external political and legal challenges (for example, the strike was a violation of the Taylor Law, which prohibits all public sector unions in New York City from striking), this particular strike had a deep impact on me personally. In many respects, this strike provided the initial inspiration for the problematic that frames this dissertation by convincing me of the massive power that particular groups of workers in a global city like New York can have when they take collective action; shutting down public transit in the city has a major impact on a number of key areas of the New York economy, the disruption of which can deeply effect global capital, thus making the strike a strategically vital source of leverage for worker power.

5.4 The Rise of the UFT and the Defeat of Social Justice Unionism

Big cities in the 1960s were a central focus of organizing for the AFT, in large part because the poor conditions that existed in New York (overcrowded classes, low salaries, old dilapidated buildings, and insufficient supplies) were roughly similar in other cities. Moreover, the AFT was looking to build strong urban locals in order to pose a challenge to their rival, the National Education Association (NEA), which was slow in coming to support, much less campaign for, collective bargaining for teachers. Beyond schoolteachers, however, unionism in the public sector had received a major boost by a 1962 executive order signed by President Kennedy that created a friendlier framework for public employees, from postal workers and sanitation workers to teachers, to unionize.

The AFL-CIO, prodded by the United Auto Workers (UAW), began to more fully advocate for public sector unionization as a way to counter the decline of industrial unionism that was beginning to occur at this time (Golin 2002, 19). It was in this context, historian Clarence Taylor (2010, 296) persuasively argues in his book, *Reds at the Blackboard: Communism, Civil Rights and the New York City Teachers Union,* that although the historical development of the UFT from the 1960s on helped move teacher unionism in a different direction—that of illegally striking to win the right to collectively bargain—its ascension as the sole bargaining representative for New York teachers was a result of a militancy that shunted aside social justice unionism. While the UFT successfully won, through striking and a militant defense of the more than 4,000 teachers who participated in the action, dramatic improvements in the economic lives of New York City teachers, the UFT in the process embodied a narrowly focused bread and butter unionism in contrast to a distinctly more radical social movement or class struggle teacher unionism, one that had been forged by the Communist-led New York Teachers Union (TU). By the first UFT strike in 1967, the TU had been too marginal to offer much of an alternative for New York teachers, largely because their Communist affiliation had led to them being barred from access to schools, which made it near impossible to effectively recruit and organize new members. The UFT, having effectively doubled the size of the AFT such that it represented nine hundred thousand members across the United States, located primarily in large cities, was by 1968 the sole collective bargaining agent for more than sixty-five thousand New York teachers and paraprofessionals (Weiner 2012, 87).

Thus, we should understand the evolution of U.S. teacher unionism as a distinctly urban phenomenon. And while never a politically radical union, the UFT accomplished this organizational success through a militant—albeit economically narrow and in many ways politically reactionary and racist—orientation that emphasized what Isaiah Berlin (quoted in Perrillo 2012, 10) terms "negative liberty, a conception of freedom that aims to delineate and protect "the area in which a man can act unobstructed" in contrast to "positive liberty," which views freedom as fundamentally about "being one's own master," responsible for one's own choices and life circumstances. The issues that the UFT rallied around and advocated for through confrontational engagements with the Board of Education and City evidence the UFT's adoption of the former conception of freedom. In contrast to the UFT and the organization from which it was founded, during the 1950s the TU had an explicitly antiracist and social justice practice, evident in their public exposure of the radically low numbers of Black teachers in New York, which led the TU to petition and organize for the training and hiring of more Black educators. Moreover, "Teachers Union members fought to integrate schools, build new facilities in minority neighborhoods, and rid schools of racist textbooks (including one written by New York City's school superintendent at the time); they created forward-thinking black history materials to be used in schools that were purchased by libraries and educational institutions across the nation" (Perrillo 2012, 8–9). Like the TU, the UFT worked in its earliest days as an organization through which teachers could fight on broader questions of social and racial justice while also fighting to improve their economic and working conditions. The Teachers Guild, the main forerunner of the UFT, actively recruited Southern Blacks to be teachers in New York, as well as advocated for concrete plans to

integrate schools. Indeed, in 1964 the UFT sent the largest single contingent of teachers from the North to work in the famous Mississippi Freedom Schools. And yet, only a few years after doing this work the UFT would begin to frame its struggle to improve the freedom of teachers to control their work in opposition to the efforts of Black parents and community members to expand control over the schools. While this evidences a real contradiction between the control of workers and the control of racialized parents over their communities and schools, this contradiction did not inevitably result in the UFT asserting the rights and freedoms of its members antagonistically against community members.

As I discuss in the previous chapter on Chicago, and will further analyze below, teacher unionists today have been much more successful in framing and conducting the struggle for education justice as one that must be about equitable education for racialized students and for the respect, dignity, and freedom of classroom teachers through collective work. In other words, instead of pitting workers (teachers) against community control, today's movement pits workers and the communities in which they work against corporate and bureaucratic control of education. Unfortunately, while some teachers and their unions, like the UFT, viewed the civil rights movement and school integration as worthy of support, some teachers and their unions would often denigrate the racialized students (and their parents) they were assigned to teach (Delpit 2006). In New York City this escalated into a confrontation between the UFT and Black parents fighting for community controlled schools in Brooklyn in the late 1960s. As Perrillo (2012, 9) writes, "teachers worked for and against the advancement of equality for black Americans

through their unions, a contradiction with which some members, black and white, struggled."

This further illustrates why it is crucial to understand unions not as monolithic unchanging entities but sites of contestation. Moreover, this conflict speaks to the problematic nature of rights discourse, because as Matthew Frye Jacobson (quoted in Perrillo 2012, 9) observes, "in creating a sense of allegiance, the language of rights also denotes a necessity to identify competitors, those who seek to deny a group their rights for their own agenda." Connected to this is a sense of antagonism that is integral to rights discourse, similar in effect to the language of entitlement.

As Perrillo (2012, 9) and others show in their work, a majority of New York City teachers in the late 1950s and 1960s—especially with the expansion of community control boards:

> believed their work needed protection from the agendas of activists and parents who were not trained educators and … it served them to voice their professional dissatisfactions as injustices … a framework of contest or competition gave teachers a means to distinguish their professional, disciplinary knowledge of how to teach children from black parents' and activists' experiential knowledge of black children. Teachers claimed that their professional authority—grounded in academic training—enabled them to access students' academic potential and performance. But parents often drew very different conclusions about both. If the language of rights and entitlements enabled teachers in developing black parents into opponents, it also helped them to justify the distance between their frequent perceptions of black students as uninterested and unmotivated and parents' perception of those students.

Again, this discourse frames two sets of knowledge and experiences as if they necessarily exist in a contradictory or antagonistic relationship with one another, and no doubt there are many instances today in which white teachers operate according to a deficiency model of education whereby they view the culture and home life of racialized children as deficient or inadequate (D. Y. Ford and Grantham 2003; Gorski 2010). Yet,

there have also been massive changes to teacher education programs, some of which, seeking to prepare teachers in a much more critically and racially conscious (if not outright antiracist) manner, provide urban teachers with an alternative framework and practice. This change has occurred in the context of a corporate attack on teaching and public schools that marginalizes the knowledge and experience of both teachers and parents (except perhaps as individual consumers). The material basis for solidarity and alliance building is, then, more fertile today than it was in the 1960s and 1970s.

This older struggle over teachers' rights was motivated in large measure by their concern that their professionalism was being undercut—a concern that, while it was true to some extent then, is even more true today with the deep challenges teachers face in the classroom. It is particularly acute for teachers in predominantly Black and Latino/a schools, who are framed as performance failures.

Although the more radical TU had long been an advocate of collective bargaining for teachers, it was the Teachers Guild (one of the precursors to what would become the UFT) who in 1956 made achieving collective bargaining a central objective. While the legal framework for collective bargaining did not make it easy for teachers or other public employees to collectively bargain, Taylor contends that the main obstacle to collective bargaining for teachers was the large number of organizations that sought to represent them in New York. "Not only did having a number of competing teacher organizations make it difficult to unite around a common program for all teachers, or reinforce differences of teachers (especially in the gender division of labour between elementary teachers who were largely women and the lowest paid, with better paid, and predominantly male, high school teachers), but numerous groups affiliated with the NEA,

such as the Elementary Teachers Association, opposed trade unionism for teachers altogether. Instead, they advocated for recognized associations of professionals," writes Taylor (2010, 296–97). The Teachers Guild was right to see this multiplicity of organizations, with their varied objectives (and politics), as an obstacle to winning collective bargaining for teachers.[97]

Focusing more narrowly on the bread and butter concerns of a largely white, Jewish teaching workforce, the UFT would establish itself as the representative of New York teachers when it led the first major strike of teachers in the country in 1967, winning the right to collective bargaining. Prior to this strike, in 1960, 1,500 members of the UFT had voted in support of a resolution to strike if the city did not agree to its demands, which included collective bargaining, dues check-off, duty-free lunch periods for elementary teachers, and a base pay schedule that ranged from $5,000 to $10,000 in ten steps (Clarence Taylor 2010, 98).

Crucially, the success and growth of the UFT, or the AFT at the national scale, was not simply a result of these militant tactics or the personal acumen of Albert Shanker. While taking strike action to achieve the right to collective bargaining shifted the mode of operations for teacher unions, the United States witnessed the rise of mass social movements, such as the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the anti (Vietnam) war movement, and farmworker organizing in the fields of California, that fought around a range of issues. In particular, these movements sought to end rising

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[97] On March 16, 1960 the United Federation of Teachers was born when the delegate assembly of the Teachers Guild voted 295 to 12 to merge with a group within the High School Teachers Association (HSTA) called the Committee for Action Through Unity (CATU), which was made up of approximately 1,000 members at the time of the merger, according to CATU's own estimate. As Taylor (2010, 297) observes, "The UFT claimed, without presenting evidence, that it had the support of one quarter of New York City's 40,000 public school teachers."

inequalities in the country, end *de jure* racial discrimination, and ensure equal education opportunity for all Americans regardless of race. In this context, and largely as a result of how these broader societal changes and social movements had transformed the political culture of schools, cities, and the conceptions teachers had of themselves, a new teacher's union movement was born.

Shanker's reputation as a militant union leader is not a fabrication, however, without these movements and the cultural and political changes they wrought across American society, Shanker and the teachers' unions that experienced a transformation would not have taken the turn that they did in the 1960s. Indeed, as Weiner (2012, 89, my emphasis) argues, it cannot be overstated just how important it was that many teacher unionists themselves were active participants in the antiwar movement, the civil rights struggle, and other movements for social change. Many teachers who were active in these other struggles viewed union work, according to Weiner, "as a natural complement to their other political activity. *It was the movement that gave teacher unionism its clout.*"

At the same time, the UFT, like the Teachers' Guild before it, consolidated its power and vastly increased the number of teachers it represented by mobilizing through a framework that saw not only the Board of Education and the city government but also Black and Puerto Rican parents who sought to improve education for their kids by improving teacher quality and expanding community control over schools as challenges to teachers and their professionalism. As Perrillo (2012, 12) contends, "The oppressed teacher argument served to depoliticize conversations at the same time that it drew on human rights rhetoric and that race politics in the city schools were becoming all the

more difficult to ignore." Thus, the UFT embodied a perceived division between teachers' rights and civil rights.

Ironically, in expanding its size such that it represented the majority of the city's teachers, the UFT also now represented less liberal minded teachers and teachers with widely varying political views, some of whom were quite conservative and deeply racist. This is, however, the challenge and opportunity intrinsic to trade unions, which bring workers together solely on the basis of the employment relationship.

Without a doubt the militant position staked out by the UFT immediately after its formation in 1960 helped to define the new teacher unionism that was developing in large cities like Chicago, Philadelphia, Newark, and elsewhere throughout the United States. And while fighting for better salaries, improved working conditions, and job security were all major concerns of the New York Teachers Union and the UFT alike, it was only the TU that effectively related these issues to such broader political objectives as fighting racism and improving relations between educators and urban communities (Clarence Taylor 2010; Weiner 2012).

Neither its deployment of the strike weapon nor its narrow focus on the bread and butter concerns of teachers helped the UFT emerge as the sole representative of New York teachers; rather, it was the emphasis that leaders like Dave Selden put on organizing school by school, effectively building a strong union in the workplace, with elected chairpersons who held weekly meetings whereby teachers could develop collective solutions in order to improve conditions, deal with members' grievances, and formulate union policy. The Guild focused on raising the profile of the union by developing leadership amongst faculty in the schools through expanding what was called a "Big

Guild, Little Guild approach," which, to a large extent, took direction from the bottom up or from what classroom teachers were most concerned about. Selden maintains that the Guild took an approach similar to what today would be identified as a minority union approach insofar as, regardless of being recognized, the union acted as a bargaining agent in representing and fighting for teachers. On the other hand, this approach was also characterized by a refusal to engage in activities that might alienate any particular group of teachers, which in practice meant avoiding a whole range of issues like racism, war, and all manner of issues that deeply affected teachers outside of work, as well as their students, parents, and the broader working class. Attention to such issues, Selden argues, would need to wait until they won collective bargaining. And so from the start, Taylor (2010, 299) observes, the UFT and its precursors "cultivated a militant image of unionists fighting to improve salaries and working conditions for teachers."

Most of the above analysis relies upon Selden's book, *Teachers Rebellion*, and articles published during this period in the *New York Times*. And as is clear from my discussion in Chapter 2 of the "burrowing from within" rank-and-file union reform strategy that has been advocated by some socialists, this is an orientation that many socialists and radicals within unions, including the contemporary UFT, generally gravitate to. It has even created some tensions within MORE, with some older, predominantly white, teachers opposing the developing of an antiracist analysis and practice in the struggle to transform the union. Yet much of the language used by the UFT, particularly with respect to overcrowding and the inability of the profession to attract new teachers because of low pay and poor working conditions in the schools,

suggested that the union was fighting for broader education reform rather than a narrow focus on improving teachers' working conditions (Clarence Taylor 2010, 301).

While the newly formed UFT did not make good on their first threat to strike in 1960, because they believed Mayor Wagner's promise in May of that year to hold a representation election that would commit the city to contract negotiations with the union, a majority of teachers voted to represent them in negotiations. Yet, when Wagner reneged on his commitment to hold an election, the UFT went on strike on November 7, 1960. The November 1960 strike saw nearly 5,000 teachers take action, nearly all of who faced serious disciplinary action, including being fired. In the end, the Board of Education realized that such disciplinary action against the teachers who had gone on strike would likely result in increased support for the UFT. As the collective bargaining election approached, the UFT had demonstrated to teachers across the five boroughs that it could effectively organize disruptive actions in the school system and get the respect of the city government. A collective bargaining election was only ordered in the summer of 1961, after Mayor Wagner had convinced the state legislature to allow him to disband the current school board and replace it with a new one appointed solely by the Mayor. Thus, on December 16, 1961 the United Federation of Teachers became the sole collective bargaining agent for New York City public school teachers, receiving 20,045 of the 33,119 votes cast, or the votes of close to 50% of all of the city's teachers (Clarence Taylor 2010, 311). Taylor claims, probably correctly, that the UFT's success was largely a result of the fact that the TU had been stripped of its right to operate in the schools because of its affiliation with the Communist Party. Although the TU had staunchly advocated for the rights of Black teachers and students by fighting against segregation

and racist textbooks, and for the hiring of more racialized teachers and the acknowledgement of Black history and culture in the curricula taught in New York City schools, without access to the actual building spaces it proved impossible to expand their organization to reach a sizeable number of New York teachers. For many, this rendered the TU incapable of representing the concerns of teachers in negotiations. Moreover, by 1960 a good deal of the city's teachers had been hired after the TU was banned, which meant that most were unfamiliar with its more progressive past. In contrast, the UFT had recently taken successful action to improve the most immediately relevant concerns for the majority of New York teachers (Clarence Taylor 2010, 312).

And so, as the UFT became the teachers' union, its strict focus on increasing salaries and improving working condition marginalized those issues critical to racialized communities, including eliminating segregation, the inequitable distribution of resources, and the practice of assigning the least experienced teachers to schools in their communities. Black and Latino/a working-class communities lost a strong ally in the TU, which had been cultivating relations of solidarity and mutual support since 1935.

Of deep importance for unionism in the United States today was the UFT's strategic decision to reject a legal challenge to the constitutionality of the Condon-Wadlin Act, which made it illegal for public employees, including teachers, to strike. Instead, the UFT called on teachers to stage a walkout in defiance of this anti-worker law (Clarence Taylor 2010, 304). The UFT's leadership viewed such militancy as key to convincing the superintendent of the schools and the city government that they needed to get back to the bargaining table. Indeed, inspired by the non-violent civil disobedience used in the civil rights movement, the UFT framed such actions as part of a "moral crusade on behalf of

teachers" (Clarence Taylor 2010, 304). This stands in stark contrast to the UFT of 2015, which is far more comfortable navigating the backrooms of government and relying on their lawyers to make their case in the courtrooms it is organizing teachers in the schools and streets of the city (Interview with NY 2, October 2011).

It is interesting to briefly pause this narrative of the UFT's historical development to point out just how similar these early tactics are to some of those employed by the radicals who now run the union in Chicago, as discussed in the previous chapter, and indeed to those who seek to radically transform the UFT today. This focus on organizing school by school, and by taking on issues most important to the everyday work lives of teachers, as well as on challenging unjust laws by means of direct action rather than legal action, is what CORE and the CTU under its direction has been doing to great effect. In contrast, today's UFT generally avoids doing these things, although they have had some important legal victories that have prevented a certain number of school closings. And of course, the central difference is how the CTU and left teacher dissidents in New York forge a radical synthesis in their analysis and political practices between workplace and community, which is becoming something of a new common sense among teacher activists today.

In the conclusion to *Reds at the Blackboards*, Taylor (2010) maintains, that the TU's goal of "building a radical movement for social change—connected its concerns to working-class black and Latino communities…[and] helped established a culture of teacher-community unionism unparalleled in the city's history." And that its defeat, which was largely a product of the attacks it suffered during the Cold War anti-Communist purges, including, as noted above, being barred from operating in the

schools, deprived teachers of an alternative model of unionism, one which needs to be revived today if they are to defend and transform public education and teacher professionalism.

Indeed, the complex, often cantankerous, historical relationship between the UFT and racialized communities in New York, which was at its worst during the 1968 strike, when the UFT effectively took action against experiments in community controlled schools in the largely African American Ocean Hill-Brownsville part of Brooklyn, still runs deep (Podair 2008). Yet, this dynamic of the racialized structure of teaching, teacher and parent consciousness, and student and parent relationships in cities across the United States is enigmatic. Parrillo (2012, 6) is correct to insist that "Although more than four decades have passed since the ocean Hill-Brownsville strikes, our own political period resonates with the tensions that evolved between a growing teacher union movement and a flourishing civil rights movement and with the legacy of the events" recounted with great analytical depth and rigor in her book *Uncivil Rights*. Indeed, one can read her book as a compelling historical argument for why no project of teacher unionism in the urban United States today will be successful without developing and deploying a strong antiracist praxis.

In part we can understand this complex dynamic by examining the current attack on teacher professionalism, which is at the center of neoliberal education restructuring. This is tied to the expansion of charter schools, which require little formal specialized education or certification for teachers, as well as efforts to expand non-traditional programs to certify teachers to work in public schools, most prominently Teach for America. Beyond TFA there are number of local variants of alternative teacher

certification programs which require little preparation or specialized training on how to teach. And more and more jobs in large urban districts, like New York and Chicago, are reserved for people from these programs (Erickson 2015). As Perrillo (2012, 7) observes, in "deprofessionalizing teachers in the schools that need high-quality teachers the most, reforms have had the frequent, regrettable effect of making teaching poor and minority students a professional liability…These challenges have not stemmed solely from government edicts or Board of Education regulations; just as important has been the relationship among teachers, teacher unions, and minority communities and their difficulties in working together."

Indeed, the situation today in New York City and elsewhere illustrates that, when the rights of students and teachers are assumed to be in conflict with each other, both groups are destined to suffer. As Weiner (2012, 92) rightly insists in her review of Golin's *The Newark Teacher Strikes* (2002), "teacher unionism's incapacity to name racism in schools—and teaching—has had very destructive consequences." Hence it is due precisely to the fact that the acceptance of systemic racism has been so central to the discourse and practice of U.S. teacher unions, Weiner similarly argues, that racism, and more specifically antiracism must be made central to any transformed teacher unionism today. Unless teacher unions focalize race and the struggle against structural inequality in schools—as its fits into a broader unequal and oppressive structuring of urban space— they will remain ineffective and more open to attacks by enemies of public education and labour unions.

Sadly, long before they were championed in the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk,* Shanker had embraced testing and standardization, as well as a certain type of charter

school, arguably a more progressive vision than the charters that dominate the landscape today. This policy shift has disproportionately and detrimentally affected African American teachers and students. Moreover, Shanker, like other conservatives of his day, spoke vehemently against advocates of multicultural education, bilingual education, and mainstreaming of special education students. As Weiner (2012, 90) notes, "For Shanker these reforms were destructive diversions from 'excellence' and were based on erroneous, unpatriotic claims that the nation's schools (and the society itself) had deep systemic problems with racism, anti-immigrant sentiment, and sexism." As suggested above, Shanker's position on these issues grows directly from his right-wing social democratic affiliation with Schactman's organization, the Social Democrats-USA (SD-USA). More than a marginal note to the story, this organization constructed a political machine inside the AFT that made it more resistant to change—especially as a national federation of teacher unions—than any other U.S. union today. And the strongest base of this conservative internal machine is New York City's UFT (Weiner 2012, especially Chapter 7; Scott 2015).

It used to be the case that the UFT's power to set education policy and craft pension deals in the city and state-wide was so formidable that its former leader was once called "governor" in a newspaper editorial. And no matter how much the city detests the union's policies, even Mayor Bloomberg admitted that the union is part of the solution (Medina 2010). But this is no longer the case today. Lois Weiner (2012, 118–19) succinctly articulates the central problem when she writes that: "Nowhere is the suicidal trajectory of narrow business unionism in education more obvious than in New York City, home of the largest teacher union local in the world, the United Federation of Teachers

(UFT), New York's affiliate of the AFT…Isolated from progressive forces in the city and from other unions in both the public and private sector, the UFT leadership is unable to win even modest improvements in salary or working conditions for city teachers without appealing to the state legislature. Rather than building a working relationship with parent and community activists UFT bureaucracy tries to circumvent them and public opinion too." This then leaves the mayor free to manipulate votes in the state capital, Albany. Weiner (2012, 119) is further correct, unfortunately, to point out that, "Spurning activism outside the union goes hand in hand with crushing it within the organization. As a matter of course union officials discourage any initiative from the membership and strictly control access to the union press, denying entry even through paid advertisements...The monthly sessions of the union's representative assembly are so obviously powerless to determine policy that only a small fraction of the schools bother sending delegates; meetings are frequently adjourned for lack of a quorum, with union staff (all appointed, all faithful members of the leadership's caucus) outnumbering bona fide representatives."

This kind of practice might allow for a coherent strategy and for the incumbents to undermine any membership challenges but it has been disastrous for preventing the further erosion of teacher's professionalism and power, as well as in slowing down, never mind reversing, neoliberalization of the school system in New York. And because New York City is a global city, this kind of teacher unionism and its complicity with neoliberalization makes the struggle to transform the UFT and push back and beyond neoliberal education restructuring vital.
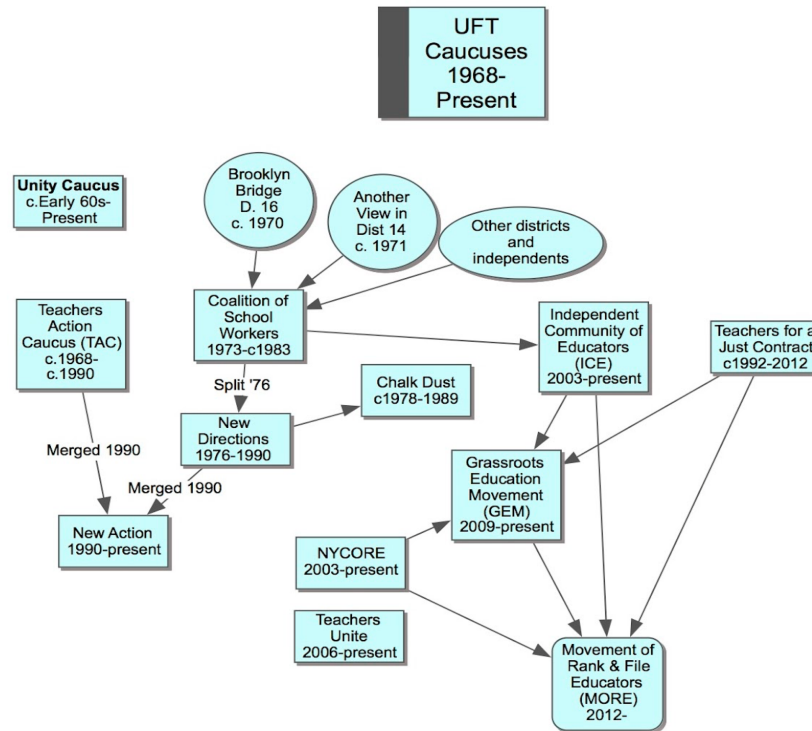
5.5 Making Change in the UFT Today

As was the case when Shanker was president of the AFT, Randi Weingarten's power—and the power of the political machine built up in the national union affiliated with Social Democrats-USA—is stronger at national conventions than it is on a local by local basis, but this groups' organization through Unity in New York is the bastion of its strength. In part this strength flows from the structures of the national convention, whereby locals are able to elect their own delegates but often fail to send the full complement they are entitled to (based on the size of their membership) to the convention, whereas the UFT always sends a full delegation, which is a large, loyal, and therefore monolithic force. That "most votes are taken by voice or hand," Weiner (2012, 98) notes, means that "the number of delegates voting for a policy, rather than their representative strength, determines the outcomes." Moreover, historically, the absence of proportional representation in the UFT further entrenches the strength of the AFT president, whether it be Shanker or Weingarten. This means that, unless the winner-take-all system is overturned, an oppositional convention slate within the UFT must win a majority of the vote if it is to be represented at all.

Given that one caucus, Unity, has dominated the UFT since its formation on March 16, 1960, it is generally not a question whether the Unity candidates will win but by how large a margin, which is usually above 80%. Like Weingarten before him, Mulgrew was hand-picked for the job and voted in by the union's Unity-dominated governing board. In 2001, the first time former UFT president Randi Weingarten ran for office, she won with 76.6% of the vote. In 2004, she got 88.6% of the vote, and in 2007, she got 87%. Along with voting for a union president, UFT members also cast their votes

for 10 officer positions and 78 executive board positions. The executive board, which meets once a month and votes on resolutions, breaks down into 42 at large positions that can be held by any UFT members, along with 36 positions that are parceled out among elementary (11), middle (5), and high school teachers (6), as well as "functional" employees (14) such as guidance counsellors. Of all the positions on the ballot, the high school seats on the executive board are the most contested and always have been.

Figure 17. Organizational Chart of UFT Caucuses

Source: Ed Notes. Created by founding MORE member Norm Scott (2011).

The UFT, like many AFT locals, is made up of caucuses, which are like political parties within the union. Rather than checking off 900 boxes, most people vote by caucus, which means they vote for a slate of either Unity, New Action, or Independent

Community of Educators/Teachers for a Just Contract (known as ICE/TJC) candidates.

Every UFT president since the days of Al Shanker, who, according to Richard

Kahlenberg's biography, is largely responsible for Unity's grip on the UFT's reins, has

been a Unity member. Kahlenberg (2009, 28) writes:

> In the spring of 1970, at Shanker's urging, the Unity Caucus adopted a rule under which Unity members were free to fight out positions within the caucus, but once the caucus took a position, members had to support it publicly outside the caucus or risk expulsion. By 1970, the Unity Caucus had grown so powerful that expulsion from Unity was tantamount to expulsion from power within the union. Many teachers, especially those new to the city's schools, aren't aware that there are alternatives to Unity. Unless their school's chapter leader or delegate is an opposition party member, or they're especially curious about how the union works, chances that they'll know who's running are slim. Norm Scott, a member of the opposition group ICE, writes on his blog that when he asks teachers whether their chapter leaders are Unity members, they often have no idea. That makes life more difficult for the union's two opposition groups: New Action and ICE/TJC. "Former UFT member Lois Weiner argues in her recent book, *The Future of Our Schools: Teachers Unions and Social Justice,* that Unity's unchecked reign has ossified the union. "The UFT has indeed been able to protect many of the vestiges of the old system by calling in its political chips," she writes, but "has done so at the expense of alienating its natural allies, insulating the bureaucracy and allowing the union to all but disappear at the school." At a February panel organized by MORE, Weiner cautioned caucus members not to focus only on capturing union leadership, but to reinvent the union through organizing, inside and out.

Thus, as the diagram above illustrates, rank-and-file dissent in the UFT is as old

as Unity's incumbency. Yet, opposition caucuses have struggled to gain a foothold in the

UFT. The Independent Coalition of Educators (ICE), one prominent caucus,

unsuccessfully supported James Eterno in a run against incumbent UFT President,

Michael Mulgrew in 2010. Meanwhile, New Action, another caucus, was successful in

capturing several seats on the union's board by agreeing to cross-endorse candidates with

the Unity Caucus. As one of the first teacher activists I interviewed told me, New Action

opted for the path of "loyal opposition" instead of trying to build a more direct,

democratic school-based movement from below. Sam Colman, one of the few African American teacher activists to help found MORE, observed at the July 2012 meeting that "The thing that will be different about us is that we will go into schools and neighborhoods and educate our members" on topics ranging from race to charter schools. New Action was the primary opposition caucus for two decades until 2003, when it reached a détente with Weingarten that effectively killed its militancy. Two newer caucuses—the Independent Community of Educators (ICE) and Teachers for a Just Contract (TJC)—filled the void. Both groups represented different elements within the UFT: ICE members were older and predominantly white; TJC was younger and more focused on direct action. In 2005, ICE and TJC combined forces in response to that year's contract, which instituted merit pay and absentee teachers reserves, or ATRs (quoted in Cersonsky 2013). Before 2005, teachers who were laid off due to school closings were redeployed by the city's Department of Education into vacancies in other schools. With the new contract, teachers lost seniority placement rights and had to apply for new jobs while remaining on the DOE's payroll. Despite widespread outcry from teachers in reaction to these changes, the ICE-TJC opposition still lost the 2007 and 2010 union elections by large margins.

One veteran teacher and UFT member who is critical of Unity and active in his union as a building representative, but who was not a member of the new dissident caucus MORE, said that the reason that these opposition caucuses have such a difficult time attracting members is because many union members consider Mulgrew to be the only person up for the task of fighting Mayor Michael Bloomberg's most controversial school policies. Goodman (quoted in Cromidas 2012) claims that, "The Unity Caucus

certainly dominates everything now, but I think that's simply a function of the fact that Bloomberg is the enemy of everyone. If you don't support Mulgrew, you're really supporting Bloomberg. And with the union's recent victories, the members see Mulgrew as fighting the mayor and winning." Cromidas correctly observes that the UFT has actually won some important victories against the Bloomberg administration, including preventing the closing of a number of schools. What she does not mention, however, is that these successes were the result of legal actions rather than membership mobilization, and as such may be fleeting wins. While there is a place for using legal means, fights in the courts need to be done in tandem with organizing workplaces and communities—in building workers' power—otherwise significant change is unlikely.

New Action has been around longer than ICE/TJC and is better known among some retirees (who make up a large percentage of voters), but it is no longer wholly independent of Unity. In 2004, the leaders of New Action decided the caucus would endorse then-president Randi Weingarten's run for re-election rather than run a candidate against her, as they had done in the past. Unhappy with this decision, some New Action members left and formed ICE, a group that would challenge Unity from the outside rather than partner with them. New Action does not always agree with Unity's decisions. Since 2007, New Action has supported Unity's endorsement of candidates for president and Unity has cross endorsed New Action's candidates for the only competitive internal union race—the high school executive board seats—making it significantly more difficult for ICE to win any of these positions. That has not stopped ICE from trying to win seats on the board. Its supporters place flyers in teachers' school mailboxes and Teachers Unite, a non-profit organization that backed ICE/TJC in the 2009 election, did phone banking on

its behalf. ICE's candidate for president, James Eterno, a teacher at Jamaica High School, received some press attention for speaking out against Jamaica's closure. But as with any challenger, it was difficult for Eterno to gain the exposure that current UFT president Michael Mulgrew receives in the city's newspapers, at delegate assemblies, and when he travels to places like Florida to meet retired union members. Aside from putting flyers in mailboxes, Unity has done little to promote Mulgrew, likely calculating that it does not need to. When I asked a UFT spokesman why there had not been a debate among presidential candidates, he said that the opposition groups had not asked for one.

5.6 The Formation and Evolution of MORE

In the summer of 2012 in a small bar in the lower east side in New York City, teacher union activists from across the city converged to hold the first meeting of a new organization called the Movement of Rank-and-file Educators (MORE). Witnessing a membership-controlled teachers' union with a broader social justice vision playing a vital role in the fight against corporate education reform in Chicago, teacher activists in New York City, as in other parts of the country, had come together to focus their energies on transforming their own union, the UFT, so that it might become a truly membership-controlled vehicle for fighting the corporate agenda in public education and achieving social justice in society more generally. As such, MORE identifies itself as the "social justice caucus" of the UFT. One of the leaders of this meeting, an experienced teacher activist named Norm Scott, said that MORE was aiming to bring together teachers who supported ICE, members of GEM [Grassroots Education Movement], and members of NYCoRE [New York Collective of Radical Educators] with those who have been uninvolved in union politics or citywide social justice issues. "All the groups are coming

together in one organization, plus a lot of people who have not been involved before," Scott (quoted in Cromidas 2012, n.p.) said about this early meeting. Scott, like many of MORE's founders, was a member of the ICE caucus but was also active in GEM and NYCoRE. Together with some other teacher activists, Scott made a critical film called "The Inconvenient Truth behind Waiting for Superman." He also publishes a dissident blog, inspired by the Chicago dissident newspaper, *Substance,* called EdNotes, which was created by former Chicago teacher and CORE activist George Schmidt. EdNotes has been a valuable source for dissident views on public education and teacher unionism in New York City.[98]

In their own words, MORE explain (on its website) that it attempts to "reach rank-and-file members and help them become more actively involved in our efforts to turn things around. This will include helping members build stronger and more effective union chapters in their schools, connecting members with others around the city who are combatting the impacts of standardized testing on our working conditions and our students' learning conditions, encouraging members to join us in various efforts to challenge the UFT leadership and turn the union into one that can lead the fight on all of these fronts" MORE 2015). As one young teacher who helped bridge the generational, and some of the political, divides to form MORE explains, NyCoRE was especially important in the process of organizing a united movement of progressive educators with the explicit aim of transforming the UFT into a genuine membership-run vehicle for social justice. As a Brooklyn high school teachers explained to me in an interview,

So I think it is important to educate ourselves about what it means to be a union

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[98] See EdNotes at: http://ednotesonline.blogspot.com and the Chicago-based *Substance* at: http://www.substancenews.net

and to think outside the box. And that's one thing that NYCoRE has done, is thinking outside the box to rethink how we can remake education. NyCoRE has been going through a lot of changes, opening up and bringing more people in. NYCoRE is great because it has lots of capacity and can bring many different kinds of people to a meeting. Me and Sam Coleman did a lot in NYCoRE to refocus on the union. So a couple years ago during the last UFT elections we had a candidates' forum, Teachers Unite and NYCoRE, out of which we endorsed ICE and TJC. We didn't run and we weren't part of the slate. Like Sam and I ran as delegates, but whatever. So that was how it kind of came about. We used to make this joke, like we're kind of like Voltron. Like we would be sitting at a bar saying 'can you imagine if like NYCoRE and Teachers Unite and GEM and ICE and TJC all came together and that we could work together, under a new movement, so that we can act united as union members, as progressive teachers. It's been difficult because there is [sic.] a lot of trust issues, personal histories, and people who have been involved longer had different things to work through with each other. So working through all that has been a challenge. But I feel like the only way to build trust is to do work together, so that is what we've been trying to do. But you know, the growing pains, they hurt (NY6 Interview, March 2012).

The need to overcome differences is far more prominent in New York than in Chicago or Los Angeles, not only because one caucus/party, Unity, dominates the internal dynamic within the UFT but also because the union in New York seems to be a microcosm of the U.S. left, where there exist a number of different far left groups, all of which are tiny, relatively marginal, and weighed down by mistrust and a poor personal history of working together for change. In general, this has led many younger progressive teachers with generally more anti-authoritarian politics and activist experience in newer movements to eschew participation in the union. So the task of building MORE, while daunting in the beginning, has been done with a huge amount of diligence and creativity by teacher activists from different generations and with a wide array of activist and union experience who, with the model of Chicago, have now come to realize just how powerful the teachers' union can be in struggles for social justice in the city.

Another member of MORE whom I interviewed confessed that she believes the similarities between MORE and CORE expand beyond their names. "CORE wasn't even

a group four years ago, and two years later they won the election [in Chicago]," she said. "It is unlikely that we'd win the election in two years, but the inspiration is how they organized, got into the grassroots, found teachers who were never active before and got them to become active. My hope is to get people who really want to do something different, and need a place to go" (NY4 Interview, October 2013). Prior to this meeting, in February 2012, the group of teacher dissidents that would become MORE had organized a conference, attended by more than 200 teachers and paraprofessionals, with workshops on union history, chapter leadership, and other education issues like high-stakes testing and school funding. After a founding meeting attended by 70 teachers and allies in March, the caucus settled on a name and a mission statement. While only 40 or so teachers were present at these first meetings, MORE has since grown into a larger, dynamic and well organized caucus of teachers and other DOE employees who assist in teaching, such as paraprofessionals. In response to the question of how MORE is different from previous reform groups, one member, who teaches high school in Brooklyn told me that the very fact that it is a membership based organization is novel. "No one has really done that," she says.

> To pay dues and be members, to really be democratic and open our steering committee and invite people to come. So we're not going to be scared anymore. We're still trying to figure it out if membership will be limited to union members or not. Personally, I think it should be open to parents and students. The more we can re-envision a union structure, the better. People don' want to be a part of the same old broken machine. And ultimately, if we're going to have kind of movement or effect, whether or not we win the elections or not, that's irrelevant, but if we're aligned with students, teachers, and parents, that's MORE's strength. So the other thing that we're doing a bit different is that we're looking at geography and trying to see where we have clusters, where we can emulate and build something, where we can focus on the communities. (NY4 Interview, October 2013)

This same member went on to elaborate how she believes that thinking spatially can

significantly change the dynamics of MORE's organizing. She told me that she believes that MORE needs "to think more about strategic mapping. Hopefully as we evolve we can take a step back and do that kind of strategic thinking and work. One thing we were thinking about is having coordinators for each district. While I think that's important, I think we need to first map out our membership and see where we have people" (NY4 Interview, October 2013). This kind of geographical thinking is neither entirely new to union organizing, nor does it require a sophisticated understanding of geoinfomatics, yet moving towards a geographical approach to union praxis is crucial for organizing in such a vast urban agglomeration as New York City. And I could witness how MORE members were grappling with questions of place and mobility in relation to thinking about organizing in the schools and communities in which many of them taught, but did not live. This is a reality that many students, especially in New York high schools, have also been forced to adapt to.

Although MORE still does not number more than 200, they have not only organized to push their union leadership in a more militant, democratic, and left direction but also, like CORE, have taken it upon themselves to work with parents and community allies to organize against school closings and high stakes standardized testing. The latter involves joining forcefully with a strong parent-led movement to "opt out" of state tests, which has gained serious momentum in New York State and elsewhere since 2012-13. MORE's sharpest point of departure from current leadership is over union governance. Like CORE and education activists in Chicago, MORE demands elections for district representatives, which became appointed positions in 2003 under then-president Randi Weingarten (now the head of the AFT). As a caucus that counts parents among its

members, it also advocates parent representation on the union's executive board.

MORE has sought to expand its membership base, and build the organizing skills and capacities of its membership, largely through organizing around internal elections in the UFT. Thus, in 2013 MORE ran its own slate in the UFT elections, with Julie Cavenagh and Brian Jones running for president and vice-president respectively. And while they did not win any executive seats, they did use the campaign to popularize their alternative movement perspective and vision for the UFT, and also to build the strength and reach of their organization. They are running another slate in 2016, on which activist Jia Lee, who has been a key figure in the New York Opt Out movement, will run for the position of president. Since the initial meeting at which MORE was created in 2012, the members of CORE have been intent on building a different kind of caucus, one that, like CORE in Chicago, would be involved not only in the life of the union and in schools but also in activism across the city more broadly. However, as I will discuss below, the question of how to balance workplace and union organizing with this broader citywide activist work, which some amongst the older generation of teacher reformers see as decidedly less important, remains contentious. Attendees at the first MORE meetings included both retired and current teachers and paraprofessionals who have been active in union politics for years, as well as younger teachers who have only recently come to see engaging in the union as a viable option for building an education justice movement. Attendees also included a mix of union chapter leaders, participants from Occupy the DOE, and other assorted teacher activists from groups such as NYCoRE and GEM. Those in attendance were teachers of varying ages, politics, and experience, including a number of retirees, who, in the UFT, retain a great deal of power.

Mike Schirtzer, a teacher at Leon M. Goldstein High School who is one the caretakers of MORE's Twitter account, asserts that one way MORE will set itself apart from other union caucuses will be by using social media to organize teachers. "We are not going to wait for Unity to organize actions," he said. Some MORE members said they hoped to inspire younger teachers who do not participate in union elections. Voter turnout in union elections is typically low and a large portion of these votes come from retired members (Phillips 2010). Union officials explain this low turnout, which in recent elections hovers around 30%, as a result of younger members being less interested in the union's governing process. While this might partially explain the low turnout, it elides the reality that most UFT members, both young and old, do not see the union as a relevant force in their lives. Younger teachers concerned with issues of social justice and racism in particular have expressed an interest in seeing the union take a more active role in fighting on these issues, but, since many have not been exposed to alternative perspectives, at least until the formation of MORE, they simply have not seen voting in elections as meaningful. As one MORE member explained in response to a question about what she thought MORE needs to do that previous reform groups have not:

> Ultimately, we need to put the U back in union, where teachers really have a voice. A very basic thing, which CORE did, is to create an organizing department so the union can get back into schools and actually listen to teachers, not just tell teachers what to do. Enforcing the contract is important but it doesn't mean anything if you don't have an organized chapter [school]. So number one is just organizing, going back into schools and creating democratic structures so that you can organize teachers, students and parents to do real education with teachers, not just education on how to use an iPad. I think people would be down to cutting the salaries of officers, like no officers should make more than the highest paid teachers. And then I think it's also like listening to teachers, listening to parents, listening to students to see 'what do you want to be fighting for?' And to really try and think beyond bread and butter issues, really doing something about the disappearance of Black and Latino educators, looking at issues of race in the classroom, that we have a majority of white teachers teaching a majority of Black

and Brown students. If that inequality is not going to be erased overnight, how do we make it a better experience for teachers and students? (NY8 Interview, July 2012)

This teacher is clear that antiracism must take priority in the organizing model and politics of MORE as its members work towards building a real movement for change in the UFT, and as they seek to lead the way in constructing a profound movement for education, social, and spatial justice in New York City.

While many of the people behind MORE, having taken part in two previous left-reform caucuses that dissolved to form MORE, have been long-time dissidents in the UFT, many younger teachers also participate. One of the MORE founders I interviewed (NY6), who is a 24 year-old Brooklyn native who teaches high school, identifies as a Republican. NY6 had his initial encounter with activism in 2010, when he and other teachers organized protests around their concern that citywide budget cuts would spell the end of the Brooklyn school's after school clubs. Others, especially those active in NYCoRE, opted to focus most of their political energies on promoting radical pedagogy and on developing restorative justice solutions to what they viewed as the deeply racist ways in which students are disciplined in New York City schools. Some teachers had also become active in the Occupy Movement, which in New York developed a significant splinter movement called Occupy the DOE. As this MORE leader informed me, "Occupy the DOE was absolutely crucial to uniting teacher activists with parents and other community allies concerned with education justice. We were able to put many of our political differences aside, including where we stood on the union, to engage in actions against school closings and other destructive policies that have been unleashed as part of the attacks on public schools" (NY6 Interview, June 2012).

The political work done through Occupy the DOE not only breathed fresh life into a teacher activist movement but helped to bring the UFT as an urban political actor into the sights of many New York teachers, especially those who had never known or thought of the union either as "their" organization or as one that should be at the center of social justice struggles. A number of those I interviewed from MORE and at least one parent cited their participation in Occupy the DOE as an experience that not only deeply influenced the development of their political consciousness but also pushed them to think more explicitly about the role that the teachers' union could, and should, play in New York City.

MORE's opposition to the reigning Unity leadership has focused on the following key issues: the incumbent slate's support for mayoral control, which was expressed under both Randi Weingarten in 2001 and under current President Michael Mulgrew in 2009; its agreement to merit pay in 2005; and its failure to lead a fight against school closings, charters, co-locations, class-size reduction, and testing. Here again we can see the parallels between Chicago and New York. Like their counterpart in Chicago, since its formation MORE has been forging a vision to expand on the community alliances that its affiliate groups have developed, while it has been building member power through the use of school-based organizing and taking action against such things as school closings. Thus far, its internal capacity building has largely taken shape through working to get new chapter leaders elected and in the process constructing strong school (workplace) based activist structures. At present, in many schools, chapter leaders are merely appointed by the principal and effectively do nothing meaningful. Another long time high school teacher and founding member of MORE who had previously been an active leader

in TJC reported that "In terms of political and social orientation, I think we have a lot in common with CORE in that we are seeking to turn the union into a force to fight for members' rights and also allying with larger forces to fight for quality schools" (NY2 Interview, June 2012). MORE's connection with Chicago goes beyond what I have already mentioned. For instance, NYCoRE is a close ally of its Chicago equivalent, Teachers for Social Justice (TSJ), which, although small, was an important organization in the formation of CORE and has been active, along with other grassroots organizations from across the city, on the CORE created Community Board of the CTU. Both NYCoRE and TSJ are members of a loose national network called Teacher Activist Groups. Leaders from MORE and CORE have built relationships through a variety of meetings, including an international teacher conference that CORE hosted in the summer of 2011 and a presentation that CORE leaders gave at Columbia's Teachers College in 2010.

MORE is sober about the challenges inherent in replicating CORE's achievements—winning union leadership and shifting discourse and policy in the city. "The election next year [in 2013] is going to be a massive operation on our part," says Sam Coleman, a seventh-year dual-language teacher. "We have more people than any of the opposition groups have ever had, because we've pulled so many groups together. Our work is still finding those people who are willing to do extra work" (Field Notes, June 2012). Indeed, while MORE members are hopeful and insist that changing the UFT is possible, they are right to be steel-eyed realists about the challenges that they confront in doing so. For example, the vastness of New York's school system and urban geography, along with the coverage of Unity leadership and loyalty of retiree voters, poses a major challenge for any opposition caucus. MORE has almost no representation in Staten Island

and in large parts of Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. By contrast, the incumbents uprooted by CORE in Chicago had only been in office for six years and lacked anything that remotely resembled Unity's electoral machine in New York. What's more, the writing had been on the wall in Chicago longer—mayoral control was granted by Republican state legislators in 1995, followed by a series of strong supporters of charters and other corporate reforms in the position of CEO of Chicago schools, including current Secretary of Education under Obama, Arne Duncan. As another long-time Brooklyn teacher and MORE founder insists, "There was much more of a sense among Chicago teachers that their careers were on the line than has been the case here in New York. We have no choice but to engage in patient organizing, which may take a long time. On the other hand, there could be an explosion of activity if the climate changes" (NY7 Interview, June 2012).

As suggested above, the incumbent UFT leadership of Michael Mulgrew has been responsible for a number of important victories. Included amongst these is winning a substantial lawsuit, in June 2012, that was filed against the city for turning around 24 schools under the pretence of replacing them with new schools, which, the union correctly argued, was merely a manoeuvre to remove half of their staff (Fleisher 2012). MORE has come out against this legal strategy because they see it as disconnected from membership organizing. "Even if the lawsuits succeed," a May pamphlet circulated by MORE argues, "they [the UFT] will merely delay the closings and leave our members in schools with shrinking enrollment, worried for their futures, and no better organized to fight back than they were a year ago" ("0 for 2" 2012). One MORE member believes not that the UFT has failed to oppose school closings but that it has collaborated in the

closing of schools: "We think the UFT has aided in the closing of schools, and the UFT supports charters," he said. "We are absolutely opposed to closing schools; we are absolutely opposed to the teacher data reports; we absolutely oppose mayoral control, whereas the UFT hedges its bets" (quoted in Cersonsky 2013). The UFT hedges its bets, in part because, based on their seeming disinterest in member organizing, they likely do not believe they are politically powerful enough to challenge these key tenants of neoliberal reform.

As might already be clear, the influence of CORE in Chicago on these dissidents in New York cannot be stressed enough. MORE views what CORE has accomplished in Chicago as a catalyst for a wider education justice movement in that city and across the nation. Of particular importance, many MORE members cite the work that CORE and the CTU under its leadership have done to organize with parents and community groups across the city as instrumental in maintaining favourable public support for the CTU before, during, and after the 2012 strike. In contrast, UFT President Michael Mulgrew said in reaction to the 2012 CTU strike that "The lesson for us here in New York is simple: Our ability to push back those so-called 'reformers' with their anti-teacher agenda depends in large measure on electing local and state representatives who understand and appreciate the importance of the work that we do every day in the classroom" (quoted in Cersonsky 2013).

Leo Casey, who was the UFT's vice president for high schools up until he left to take over the Albert Shanker Institute in Washington D.C, said MORE could be poised to generate more substantive policy debates within the union. But he is sceptical that it will have much success opposing Unity, which supported his election. "Insofar as MORE

seems to be running on a slate or on a platform that says Mulgrew and the leadership of the UFT haven't fought strongly for the members, I just think that that's not going to be taken seriously," claims Casey. Reducing, at least in part, the democratic model of organizing that CORE sees as cardinal to transforming education to ad hominem attacks, Casey dismisses MORE's potential to effect change: "Of the people they're bringing together, some of them are good at making principled political criticisms, but with some of them it's just a steady stream of personal attacks. I don't think that would have much resonance" (quoted in Cersonsky 2013).

In addition to the different oppositional caucuses that existed inside the UFT—the Teachers for a Just Contract (TJC) and ICE—it is worth repeating just how vital NYCoRE, GEM, and Occupy the DOE were as centrifugal forces in the creation of MORE. Occupy the DOE grew out of the Occupy Wall Street movement intended to wrest authority over the city's schools out of the hands of corporate interests in New York and into those of the working majority of education stakeholders, who are teachers, families, and students. Their first action was a protest that interrupted Chancellor Dennis Walcott and the Panel on Education Performance (PEP), the mayoral-appointed board that sets policy for NYC public schools. After getting "mic checked" at a meeting in 2011 where PEP was to present new curriculum standards to parents, Walcott cancelled the meeting rather than trying to engage those present in a genuine dialogue (Cramer and Cromidas 2011). One lesson learned from Occupy the DOE, MORE's first Vice Presidential candidate Brian Jones observed, is that protest does not have to be confined to the Department of Education's headquarters, commonly referred to as Tweed, which has been the focal point for many rallies and protest actions. Instead, Jones insists that

activism can and must travel to the very people it is meant to push back against. "It was a really simple idea," said Jones, a public school teacher and doctoral student at the CUNY Graduate Center, about the first Occupy the DOE rally. "We were the first group to use the mic check as a disruptive power to challenge people of authority at their own events" (quoted in Cersonsky 2012).

By disrupting city meetings, Occupy the DOE was able to put parent, teacher, and student voices on the record, and in turn to "bring democracy to education," notes one Brooklyn teacher who was a leading organizer in Occupy the DOE and now MORE. While there were already a number of organizations on the left seeking to organize New York City teachers and parents in 2011, it was Occupy Wall Street, Jones claims that, "gave them a shot in the arm, some specific tactics to try." Perhaps the most significant effect that persists today is the expanded activist base that turns out to education-related events. When a group of teachers called a rally to support their striking colleagues in Chicago in September 2012, Occupy-affiliated protesters represented a significant portion of the participants, according to teachers who participated. For Jones, this expansion of the activist base will change the scale of future organizing. Thus, he insists that, "if you look at the score sheet the victories are few…. But we raised the consciousness and understanding of a wider and wider circle of people to the mayor's agenda, and this year as schools come up to be closed we won't have to reinvent our ideas" (quoted in Streich 2012). And while Occupy the DOE no longer exists, most of those it politically activated have since gone on to build MORE, which, while still a marginal influence amongst the city's teaching force, has done a great deal to continue this work of consciousness raising and politicizing UFT members across the city.

Yet, some community activists, for instance, "who were already active in education issues but objected to some of Occupy the DOE's tactics" (Cramer 2012), expressed feeling frustrated and alienated by some of the Occupy DOE activists and the tactics they employed. Cynthia Williams, a community organizer in the Bronx for the Coalition for Educational Justice, said the mic checks at a February Department of Education meeting about school closures did not just inconvenience city officials. They may have also prevented other activists from being heard, claims Williams. This is no doubt correct because those who orchestrated the mic check did quite literally place their speakers upfront using the human mic, and so did deny other people the chance to use the actual microphones that were set up for questions and comments (Streich 2012). And as one UFT chapter chair from Murry Bergtraum High School in Manhattan said, "The average teacher didn't go down and participate in what was going on…They recognized it as generally positive but not necessarily something they would join or identify with" (quoted in Streich 2012).

Importantly, Williams expressed that she thought people of colour were underrepresented in Occupy the DOE, especially among the leadership. "It reflected the overall movement of middle-class folks who were feeling the effects of the economy and felt the need to speak out," she said. While people of colour may have been underrepresented in Occupy the DOE, teacher activist Wolcott asserted that Occupy the DOE was actually more diverse than the broader Occupy movement. "We had a professor from Columbia, principals from Queens, teachers from all over the city, and student groups working with closing schools — Occupy the DOE had a broader representation of gender, race, and even age," she said (quoted in Streich 2012).

This speaks to what I believe to be one of the most striking differences between CORE and MORE—the racial make-up of each organization. Although MORE has diligently attempted to reach and recruit amongst the incredibly diverse array of New York City's public school teachers, it remains an overwhelmingly white organization. Although none of the interviews I conducted were able to provide much in the way of explanation for this inability to develop a more racially diverse organization, I can offer some speculation as to why this is. While there has been a consistent tension over how much emphasis to give to an anti-racist analysis and politics within MORE, activists in CORE have generally and genuinely done a great deal to center an antiracist politics and analysis in all of its work. Explaining this divergence in either caucus' successful ability to build a more diverse, multiracial, and multiethnic membership is a difficult task. In part I believe a generational divide contributes to this variance insofar as the younger generation of teachers and members of the caucus in Chicago, being more racially diverse than those in New York, is subsequently more likely to have a stronger anti-racist, queer, anti-authoritarian left politics than the older generation of MORE and CORE members. That being said, there are some younger MORE members who have continuously promoted the need to cultivate a strong antiracist praxis for MORE, and as a result they have had some more recent successes in diversifying their membership (Field notes, December 2015).

Similar to CORE, members of MORE have emphasized internal education as a vital component of capacity building. In addition to organizing small study groups across all five boroughs of New York, which read and discuss books like Lois Weiner's *The Future of Our Schools: Teachers Unions and Social Justice* (2012), MORE has organized

a special summer series of workshops covering everything from the history of the UFT

and how it really operates today to how to build a strong school chapter (union

organization). MORE describes the latter, which it calls "Hardcore MORE Chapter

Leader Training," for instance, as, "Open to all newly elected or veteran chapter leaders,

delegates, consultation/SLT committee members, para-reps, and anyone interested in

getting more involved in their chapter. Some of the topics include: Getting members

involved, enforcing contractual rights, Planning chapter & consultation meetings,

Fighting back against administration, Building allies in PTA/SLT, Filing grievances"

("Successful Hardcore Chapter Leader Training/Summer Series Continues Next Week

with 'How to Build an Opt Out Movement in Your School'" 2015).

5.7 2013 UFT Elections: Members Deserve MORE

"Every three years, the UFT contracts its internal election out to the American

Arbitration Association, and on March 12, the AAA sent out 167,000 ballots to UFT

members. Those ballots went to members who have retired as well as to those who are

still working, landing on doorsteps across the five boroughs and in sun-soaked places like

Florida and Arizona where retirees often cluster" (Phillips 2010). Out of more than

100,000 ballots sent out, the bulk of them do not make it back to the AAA. Nearly 38%

of the all votes came from retirees, who are more likely to vote than active members.

Between 2004 and 2007 the percentage of UFT members who voted went from 29% to

22%. Asked to explain this low voter turnout, a UFT spokesman said that retirees are

more likely to have witnessed the union's foundation and seen it come to power, making

them more enthusiastic about unionism in general. Retirees are also seeing the bounty of

past union struggles materialize as pension benefits, whereas younger teachers can only

anticipate such benefits, which they may or may not see given how pensions are constantly being underfunded and attacked. Additionally, retirees typically have more free time to fill out ballots. Indeed, retirees participate in elections at such a high rate the union was forced to cap their votes at 18,000 so that they do not outnumber active UFT members, which would in effect give them the power dominate governance of the union.

It was in this context in 2013 that MORE ran a full slate of candidates for the UFT leadership. While it was highly unlikely that they would win the election, it was an important opportunity for MORE members to develop their organizational capacities, to do outreach to teachers across the city, and to help push a debate about what the union is doing and how it has been responding to the attacks on public education and teachers in New York. The 2013 elections served as a good training ground for MORE and presented a prime opportunity to engage the wider membership in an alternative perspective for struggle for education justice in New York City. Elections are a time for "accountability, conversation, outreach, relationship building," says Julie Cavanagh, MORE's candidate for union president. Describing the union culture that MORE is trying to create, she says, "Spaces would exist for discourse, dialogue, and analysis. Questions could be asked and answered. A vision for the next three years would be presented and collectively discussed" (quoted in Cersonsky 2013). To this end, MORE has used the elections as a launching pad for extensive member-to-member outreach across the five boroughs. Teachers have held countless regional forums and meetings to build a network of chapter leaders and members and organize at school sites. The caucus also maintains an active online presence, making extensive use of social media and platforms like Nation Builder for communications and organizing.

Yet, despite all of this organizing the incumbent Unity leadership has proved to be too difficult to dethrone. Out of the 90 members on its executive board, teachers from particular constituencies—elementary, middle, and high school exclusively elect only 23. Active employees and retirees alike vote on the rest of the board—19 "functionals" (non-teaching staff) and 48 at-large positions—and the 12-person leadership slate. The retiree vote puts non-incumbents in a fix: Although caucuses like MORE that seek to oust Unity in order to radically reinvent the union have access to every teacher's mailbox and are permitted to buy a chapter leader list for mailings, they have no way of directly reaching out to retirees. This has proven to be the biggest structural impediment to any dissident caucus that challenges Unity.
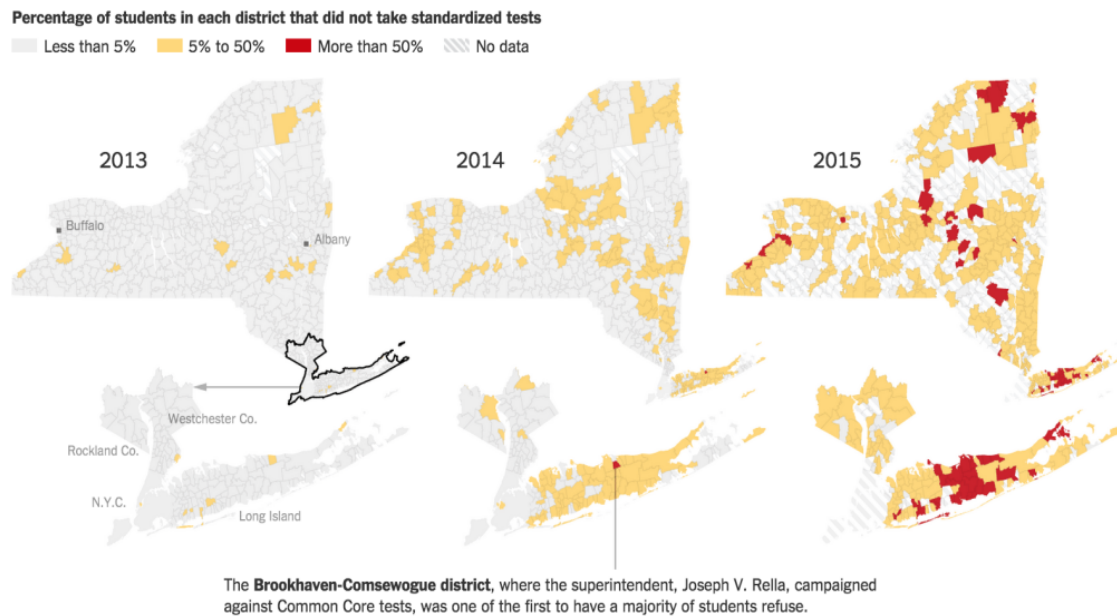
Meanwhile, labour-management negotiations have become a theater of contention between MORE and Unity over how assertive—and how democratic—the union should be. For example, in 2012 the Unity leadership decided to sign onto the city's application for $40 million in federal RTTT funds, drawing criticism from MORE. Cavanagh slammed the leadership for accepting a greater role for standardized tests in teacher evaluations—a precondition for Race to the Top funding—in exchange for online learning grants with unproven benefits. "We should take a look at what we know works," Cavanagh, MORE's 2013 Presidential candidate, insists, rather than spending millions of dollars to experiment on other people's kids (quoted in Cersonsky 2013). New York City ultimately lost its RTTP bid because it declined to provide requisite information about its budget. Responding to MORE's criticisms, Casey, co-chair of the UFT's evaluation negotiation committee at the time, stresses the importance of finding common ground with the city. "The union's position was that we needed to engage," he

says in an interview with *In These Times,* "and we needed to get the best possible evaluation system for our members that we could" (quoted in Cersonsky 2013). Casey dismisses those opposed to the Unity leadership, claiming that they are "in the thrall of the apolitical romance of 'revolutionary virtue'" and of the belief that "it is better to die gloriously on the field of battle protecting one's virtue than to live to fight another day." He accuses dissidents of ignoring "the balance of power and of different forces" and of offering "rank-and-file empowerment and mobilization" as "the answer to every question" (quoted in Cersonsky 2013). This kind of pragmatism is in no short supply for union officials like Casey who have been managing the decline of labour for the past 30 years. In stark contrast to this view, former NYC elementary school teacher and current executive director of a radical educators organization called Teachers Unite (a non-profit that has run organizing trainings for teachers and currently collaborates with the Urban Youth Collective on "Dignity in Schools," a campaign for restorative justice to stop the school-to-prison pipeline), Sally Lee, observes that, "Part of the work of transforming the UFT is not to be a union all about bargaining but also a union that promotes a discussion of pedagogy that's richer and appeals to community" (Field notes, February 2012). Teachers Unite includes members of MORE, with whom it works closely in the struggle to transform the UFT and build a transformative movement for education justice in New York.

In keeping with this perspective, MORE's strategy of empowering and mobilizing members was evident in the union's battle with the Bloomberg administration over a new evaluation system for teachers, which had made over 50% of evaluations based on standardizes test, value-added metrics. Governor Cuomo demanded that all districts

negotiate new formulas for rating teachers by January 17, 2013 or risk hundreds of millions in sanctions (Cramer 2012). MORE maneuvered to involve rank-and-file members in the negotiations, gathering some 1,000 signatures on a petition that called for a member-wide referendum on all extra-contractual agreements (any agreements made by votes at individual schools which effectively circumvent the main collective agreement). Negotiations between the union and the city on the new evaluation system collapsed— which the union (and an unusually sympathetic *New York Times* (January 18, 2013)) attributed to the administration's intransigence—while parent advocates won a legal battle to recoup the $250 million in punishment levied by the state. As a result of the parent led Opt Out movement in New York State, which has been particularly strong in Long Island, as indicated in Figure 24 on the next page, Governor Cuomo is in the process of reversing course on teacher evaluations.

Figure 19. Progression of the Opt Out Movement in New York State, 2013 to 2015

The **Brookhaven-Comsewogue district**, where the superintendent, Joseph V. Rella, campaigned against Common Core tests, was one of the first to have a majority of students refuse.

Source: Harris and Fessenden (2015)

As the quote from Mulgrew with which this chapter begins makes clear, it is crucial to note that, like MORE, the incumbent leadership of the UFT speaks a language of building community alliance and fighting for social justice. The union's website lists forty-one organizations, called "community partners," which include education focused organizations, New York labour coalitions, and groups that organize against homelessness and for LGBTQ youth. While UFT members generally have no idea what the actual relationship is between their union and these organizations, or how they might participate in the work that they do, the UFT Unity leadership does work with these organizations, largely through pursuing lawsuits, to resist school turnarounds and closings (Field Notes, August 2013). Sometimes, however, tangible and praiseworthy results issue from this work, such as when the union worked with the Bronx's Community Collaborative to improve schools in District 9, which covers part of Harlem and Morningside Heights, by creating the Lead Teacher Program in 2004, a program set up to attract teachers to the district and cultivate peer support. The UFT has likewise worked with the Coalition for Educational Justice, a citywide composite of community groups, to preserve free student transit passes (Metro Cards) and to resist cuts to school funding in the city's budget. Yet, the bulk of the work done by the UFT and its community allies is directed towards lobbying local and state governments rather than building power in workplaces and communities. And with the election of the fairly progressive Mayor, Bill de Blasio, in 2014, who has since settled long-expired collective agreements with the teachers union and municipal unions, the political battle to expand charter schools vis-à-vis new construction and co-location with traditional neighbourhood schools has jumped scales, making the state capital, Albany, the primary battleground for the charter fight. It is here

that Governor Andrew Cuomo, a strong advocate for charters and other neoliberal education reform policies, has been aggressively pursuing the corporate agenda in education and overruling de Blasio's attempts to slow charter expansion in New York City. These alliances, then, are largely directed at lobbying in Albany but are having little effect, unlike the more action-oriented, place-based, and parent-led, Opt Out movement, discussed below.

Another example of the UFT collaborating with other organizations is the social media campaign that the unions (including the UFT) have created in an attempt to make opposition to Cuomo more visible. This campaign encourages members to use Facebook and Twitter to urge the governor to increase school funding and end his support for charter expansion. Sadly, such social media activism alone will not likely deter corporate education reform in New York. This is why UFT president Mulgrew continues to work to build support among parent leaders, advocacy organizations, and clergy. At a meeting that happened in January 2015, and that was attended by representatives from organizations such as the NAACP, Class Size Matters, Alliance for Quality Education, and by parents from community education councils, Mulgrew clearly articulated what he wanted these allies to do, according to an attendee. "He wants parent support to go after Cuomo," the attendee said. Specific education issues were raised, but "he kept bringing it back to Cuomo" (quoted in Decker 2015). The major difference between Mulgrew and Unity's approach and MORE lies in the latter's work to empower rank-and-file members first in their schools and then extending out to neighbourhoods and across the city through the construction of strong organizational linkages with other UFT members as well as with community allies and parents, which whom MORE has sought to build

reciprocal democratic ties, as opposed to the limited partnerships that Mulgrew and the UFT leadership have cultivated.

Just as we should acknowledge that the UFT has built particular community alliances over the years, partnerships which deserve much greater scrutiny than I have space to give them here, so too should we recognize some of the creative means by which the UFT, under Mulgrew's leadership, has sought to address the greatest problems that confront New York public schools by leveraging particular economic contradictions within the neoliberal development model in the city. For instance, the UFT's proposal to reduce class size through closing tax loopholes for absentee owners of apartments would allow, according to the UFT, the city to raise at least $900 million a year by giving foreign and other absentee owners the choice of either paying taxes on the actual market value of their units or paying the city income tax. The current combination of out-dated incentive programs and a dysfunctional tax-assessment system, the UFT rightly insists, allows many absentee apartment owners to pay absurdly low real-estate taxes. Mulgrew (quoted in Decker 2015) said he was not pushing for a new tax, but that "you should not receive favorable tax treatment unless you are a resident." The union's tax plan follows legislation proposed by the Fiscal Policy Institute, a left-leaning group supported by a number of public employee unions, that has been introduced in the Senate and Assembly in Albany. This proposed legislation calls for an extra property tax on the portion of home values that, based on current market value, exceeds $5 million. This tax would range up to four percent on values above $25 million. The primary homes of New York City residents, who typically pay the city income tax, would be exempt. Further, to reduce class sizes, the union wants to phase in a cap that would restrict them to 15 students in

kindergarten through third grade, a plan that would require at least 7,000 new teachers. Currently, the union contract limits classes to 25 children in kindergarten and 33 in first grade through sixth grades. Advocates for smaller classes say children learn faster with more individual attention, especially in early grades. The union asserts that reducing class sizes in 100 high-poverty schools next year would cost $30 million in teacher salaries and would help cement gains made by poor students in preschool (Charles 2012).

5.8 Opting Out in New York and the Ongoing Evolution of MORE Today

A Rally against high-stakes testing in Brooklyn New School and Brooklyn Collaborative Studies in March 2015, photo by Justin Weiner (Wall 2015)

As mentioned briefly above, the past two years, beginning in 2013, have seen the emergence of a significant parent-led movement to allow students to opt-out of state mandated standardized tests. This movement has been both intensely place-based, insofar as it is rooted in schools and communities, and multiscalar, insofar as strong citywide and state-wide organizations coordinate students who refuse to take standardized tests. Both Chicago and New York City have seen local iterations of this movement, with a number of teachers in each city taking courageous action against what Seattle-based teacher Jesse

Hagopian calls the "testocracy." Unfortunately, whereas the CTU has supported its members in these actions and has in fact contributed a significant amount of union resources to facilitating this organizing, the UFT has taken no such similar actions. As two teachers from the International High School in Brooklyn, in their account of organizing a testing boycott at their school in May 2014, explain,

> Sadly, we also learned that our union, the UFT, did not have our backs. For the past two years, as the opt-out movement had grown and it became more and more clear that these tests cause more harm than good, the UFT had been on the wrong side of the debate. While the UFT officialdom completely abandoned us and distanced themselves from our action, other organizations embraced us, supported us, and made our action possible. MORE…a UFT caucus that many teachers in our school are part of, helped us tremendously and stood with us. We knew they would be there if we needed backup in any way. NYCoRE, the New York Collective of Radical Educators, built us a website and made sure that we could see every amazing message of solidarity that came through from around the country. CTS, (Change the Stakes) taught us what they knew about the media and helped us navigate it. These groups and the people in them demonstrated true solidarity and made clear what a unified fighting rank-and-file is capable of. (Frascella and Giles 2014, 129–30)

As this quote suggests, where the UFT has failed, MORE has excelled in building organizing capacity, trust, and alliances through being at the forefront of this activism against standardized tests in New York City, with some of its members leading the fight and providing testimony at congressional hearings on these issues. Jia Lee, NYC teacher, parent, and MORE activist, is one such person. In addition to working as a fulltime public school teacher in New York who has been organizing with MORE for over three years, Lee is a parent who has opted her child out of the standardized tests in New York City. In doing so Lee joined two of her colleagues at the East Village public school in Manhattan where she teaches in refusing to administer state exams. Yet as Patrick Wall (2015) reports, "Enough families had opted their children out of the tests, the teachers were told, that they did not need to proctor the exam—the teachers' planned boycott was trumped

by their students," because as exam day approached in 2015, with the first of six days during which state-exams were set to be administered, only a few of Lee's students ended up taking the test, rather than working on a project with the majority of her class that explored immigration. As the number of parents who opt out their children increases, with test scores being more closely tied to teacher evaluations than ever before, educators like Lee are joining with other parents and teachers in a widespread rebellion against high stakes testing. While some teachers lend logistical information to parents, others share their concerns about over-testing; while a small but vocal group, including Lee, speak out and organize while also opting out their own children and offering support and encouragement to other parents to do the same. Lee has said that she and other parents are "hoping that more teachers will realize that there's empowerment in saying, 'We don't want to be a part of this,'" and that "The number of city families opting out of state tests this year [2015] is poised to hit a record high, one year after new tests tied to the Common Core standards resulted in vastly lower scores." Although only 276 students opted out citywide in 2014, approximately 640 students opted out in 2015 among six schools in Brooklyn and Manhattan alone. The advocacy group, Change the Stakes, estimates that 1,000 students or more may decline to take this year's test—a tiny portion of the city's test-takers, but a huge increase from years past (Wall 2015).[99]

Indeed, many families are opting out in spite of resistance from their schools. At least 50 parents told Change the Stakes that school administrators either discouraged them or misinformed them by telling them that children who skip the tests might be penalized, according to parent leader Nancy Cauthen. Responding to the growing tension within schools, Chancellor Carmen Fariña, who has articulated reservations about test

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[99] See: https://changethestakes.wordpress.com

boycotts, informed principals to "respect the parents' decision" if they decide to keep their child from taking the tests" (Darville 2014). In an open letter to Chancellor Fariña, a group of NYC public school teachers put matters sharply:

> We recognize that there has been a persistent and troubling gulf between the vision of individuals in policymaking and the work of educators, but we see you as someone who has known both positions and might therefore be understanding of our position. We find ourselves at a point in the progress of education reform in which clear acts of conscience will be necessary to preserve the integrity of public education. We can no longer implement policies that seek to transform the broad promises of public education into a narrow obsession with the ranking and sorting of children. We will not distort curriculum in order to encourage students to comply with bubble test thinking. We can no longer, in good conscience, push aside months of instruction to compete in a city-wide ritual of meaningless and academically bankrupt test preparation. We have seen clearly how these reforms undermine teachers' love for their profession and undermine students' intrinsic love of learning… We are acting in solidarity with countless public school teachers who have paved their own paths of resistance and spoken truthfully about the decay of their profession under market-based reforms. These acts of conscience have been necessary because we are accountable to the children we teach and our pedagogy, both of which are dishonored daily by current policies. (quoted in Teachers of Conscience 2014)

Encouraging families to boycott state tests comes with possible costs for educators. In their public comments, MORE quite adamantly supports parents who opt out and their colleagues who choose not to administer the tests. But in their press releases they have warned teachers against taking a stand against testing without first getting legal counsel. And not all teachers who oppose the testocracy have done so publically; some have chosen instead to work behind the scenes in private meetings with city officials. Teachers from several of the Brooklyn schools with high opt-out rates, for instance, have met with top education department officials to discuss their concerns with standardized testing (NY4 Interview, August 2015).

5.9 Concluding Remarks

Whereas the UFT might be the most important example of an urban teachers' union that consolidated its power in part by fighting for teachers through militant action, sometimes in defiance of the law, albeit generally limited to advancing strictly economistic objectives and some professional protections, the UFT has in the process stamped a far less class or social justice oriented brand on urban teacher unionism in the United States writ large. Since the 1970s this form of teacher unionism was often seen as being an antagonistic fight between protecting teacher autonomy and professionalism against poor Black parents and their demands/experiments in community control of schools. Any genuine effort to repair this damage so as to construct a broad movement for education justice and wider societal transformation requires that teacher union activists focus their energies on restoring the moral authority of the teacher union within local, especially Black and Latino working-class, communities. This is especially vital because, as Perrillo (2012, 13 My emphasis) writes, "the legacy of this agenda enabled the design of federal legislation that focuses on teacher quality as the primary obstacle to minority student success. The failure of NCLB to improve education for minority students and the historical events this book traces [of the evolution of struggles for teachers' rights vs. civil rights for African American and Latino communities in New York] indicate that *it is important that we rethink the centrality of rights talk to school reform projects and instead see the empowerment of teachers and students as mutually beneficial goals, not just rhetoric but in reality*."

MORE, which identifies itself as the "social justice caucus" of the UFT, was founded as I was conducting my fieldwork in Chicago in the winter of 2012. While these

rank-and-file efforts remain at a much earlier stage than those of CORE, the historical experiences of teachers involved in this process of reform, and the experiences of teachers engaged in similar attempts to remake the UFT, including the left caucuses that have been active within the union over the past decade or more, offer a tremendous amount to insights into the dynamics of resistance within the largest, most powerful, and arguably, the most strategically important urban teachers union in the country. In particular, the analysis of rank-and-file activism to transform the UFT reveals a great deal about the role a spatially sensitive analysis can yield to organizing, especially in regards to building successful labour-community alliances grounded in what Massey (1994) describes as a progressive (global) sense of place. Moreover, the experiences of MORE might also prove insightful for broader efforts to defend and transform public education in a global city, which, in the case of New York, has in many respects been the most entrenched example of social democracy at the urban scale in the United States.

 In part, this is because New York City has, historically, been home to the most progressive and powerful trade union movements in the country. With the foundation of MORE in 2012, many major political changes have occurred in New York City since I conducted the bulk of my research on rank-and-file teacher activism there. By way of offering some concluding remarks, I will briefly mention some of these changes, and the factors that explain the divergence between the Chicago and New York cases of rank-and-file teacher activism and urban transformation, as they relate to the evolution of MORE.

While MORE continues to build its ranks and support parent and community actions throughout New York City, in effect acting in the ways that they believe the UFT, as a social justice union, should act, hope for changing the union remains alive. Since

MORE was founded in 2012 its members have learned, and sought to implement within the largest public school district in the United States much from the CORE model in Chicago. So much has changed in the political, if not the economic, landscape of New York City during this time. The most important change, of course, was the election of a left populist Mayor, Bill de Blasio. de Blasio has appointed an educator to run the NYC school system and successfully settled a contract with the teachers' union, which, like all of the other city unions, had been without a contract for over five years. While MORE and other teacher activists were highly critical of this agreement, having actively organized UFT members to vote against it, the fact that de Blasio sought to settle a contract with the UFT first amongst all of the other unions is itself worthy of note. And perhaps as importantly, the fact that de Blasio has since his campaign vocally criticized how charter schools work in practice in New York City has led to he and his Chancellor of education slowing their expansion, which in itself has dramatically changed the landscape of education in the city. Charter advocates have in effect been successful in scaling up their causes, thereby circumventing de Blasio and the city government, by pushing their ally in the Governor's office and the State Legislature to overrule de Blasio on charter expansion. MORE, like most other urban rank-and-file teacher organizations— and urban teacher union locals writ large—has not been able to effectively counter this upscaling, although they organized multiple busloads of members to protest at the state capital Albany in 2015.

UFT members approved their latest contract with what one MORE critic describes as "a pitiful 1.4% annual raise for the ten-year period from 2009-18, with much of the money back-loaded to as far as the year 2020" (Field note, August 2015). Yet recently,

the City Comptroller, Scott Stringer, told the press that the City has a whopping $5.9 billion budget surplus and that City revenues have increased by seven percent, or one percent over the 2009-13 average of six percent (Fermino 2015). And as yet another disgruntled UFT member put it to me in response to the question of where money came from: "Partly from the economic recovery that greatly increased tax revenues and the cost savings from the public sector contracts that our UFT leadership rammed down the throats of City workers. That's right, the City is experiencing record surpluses while freezing school budgets, fails to reduce class sizes, and continuing the Bloomberg tradition of *"education on the cheap"* policies under Bill de Blasio" (Field note, August 2015).

So while the economic contradictions of urban neoliberalism persist in New York, the city is in much better fiscal shape today than it has been in for some time. And the political landscape with De Blasio as mayor is clearly a much friendlier one for working people and for teacher union activists in MORE than it was under Bloomberg. Yet, the challenges for transformation in the UFT remain daunting. Although MORE has, over the past three years, continued to expand in size and organizing capacity so as to challenge Mulgrew and Unity in the 2016 election shows, it still faces an uphill battle to change the UFT and continues to search for ways to build a transformative movement in a city where over 1500 schools and more than a million students comprise the largest urban system in the United States.

Indeed, I would argue that a major part of what makes this task so daunting is not only the geographical scope of the school system and the workforce but the fact that so many students and teachers, at least in New York high schools, do not live in the

neighbourhoods where the schools are located, unlike in Chicago, where the system is less fragmented and students and teachers are more likely to live close to their schools. This raises a unique challenge to bridging the school-neighbourhood divide, which is central to building strong place-based organizations from which the struggle for education justice can scale upwards and outwards across the city.

Conclusion

Summary

Attacks in the workplace, the urban retrenchment of austerity policies, radical political challenges, no less than the very right of unions to engage in free collective bargaining and to remain financially solvent, and the global restructuring and increased competition between firms in their industries to the devastating impacts that these processes have had on union members (including the loss of members) and on members of local communities around the world, unions in the United States have had to address a multitude of intersecting problems that traverse different scales.

Workers and their unions have had to confront these problems as they articulate through scale-specific arguments about the inevitability of globalization with increased competition, job loss, a decentering of industrial relations, and the passage of anti-union legislation at the state and, increasingly, municipal scales of government. In seeking to understand the nature of the present conjuncture of capitalism through an analysis of the relationship between the assault on public education, teachers and their unions, and urban transformation in the United States, I have strived to shed light on, and offer some insights into, an emergent political left, transformative teacher union organizing, and the ways in which cities are continuously remade through the contentious politics that take place in and between the spaces of schools, the streets, and the bastions of urban political and economic power in two of the most important global cities in North America, Chicago and New York.

While unions have developed in the context of capitalism, and have come to exist primarily to help workers live better within the structural confines of this mode of

organizing social and economic life, unions have, in the process, proved to be effective institutions in the very reproduction of capital, even when acting as part of a social movement. Yet, I believe the cases that I analyze in this dissertation demonstrate that labour unions might still constitute an oppositional force to be reckoned with. Although in order to do so, as these cases also show us, today's unions will need to be radically reconstructed. As I argue throughout this dissertation, there is a long history of alternative forms of unionism that are radical and that push against the boundaries that have historically served to confine the expectations of workers within capitalist structures. But as I show in my exploration of the travails of activist teachers in Chicago and New York, if unions are to serve as anti-systemic, transformative organizations of the working class, and to help build a different kind of working-class politics, they need to engage in building new forms of organization, education, militancy, and action. Moreover, as the cases of CORE/CTU and MORE/UFT respectively illustrate, systemic transformation requires not only new forms of social justice unionism but also a spatial justice unionism that centers a critical geographical imagination that pays attention, first, to the spatial organization of inequality in the built urban environment, and second, to the role that the particularities of place plays in organizing in both workplaces and communities.

One of the pioneers of urban sociology, Robert Park, argues that the city is "man's most consistent, and on the whole, his most successful attempt to remake the world he lives in more after his heart's desire. But, if the city is the world which man created, it is the world in which he is hence forth condemned to live. Thus, indirectly, and without any clear sense of the nature of his task, in making the city man has remade himself" (quoted in Harvey 2012, 4). Commenting on this point, Harvey observes that if "Park is correct,

then the question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from the question of what kind of people we want to be, what kinds of social relations we seek, what relations to nature we cherish, what style of life we desire, what aesthetic values we hold" (2012, 5). In this we might thus understand the struggles of Chicago and New York teachers over their unions as over the right to the city today.

The struggle over the right to the city, in turn, should be viewed as aiming to collectively reinvent urban life in accordance with the dictates of the working-class majority rather than in accordance with the requirements of capital accumulation. Reinventing the city is the focus of the practices and ideas of the teacher union activists and their community allies analyzed in this thesis. "Taking back our union" has therefore been central to "taking back our cities."

I have strived in this dissertation to make five central contributions to the scholarly literature on education, urbanization, and teacher unions. First, in examining the historical-geographical evolution of neoliberalization and education restructuring in Chicago and New York City I have sought to demonstrate how and why the remaking of public schooling has been essential to a global city development strategy, the evolution of urban neoliberalization, and global city development. Related to these changes, I have attempted to explore in concrete terms what unique possibilities are available to teachers and their allies in these global cities for contesting neoliberalism in education and more broadly fighting for social justice in their cities. While I think I have done an effective job on exploring the former, I still believe the latter needs ongoing research to unpack what unique leverage exists in global cities that does not exist in smaller or mid-size cities.

This research, in turn, necessarily requires additional comparative research on these different kinds of urban agglomerations.

Second, and perhaps more successfully, these case studies provide valuable insights into how to build successful, reciprocal community-labour alliances. Unlike much of the work on such alliances or what some term "community unionism," my research reveals that not only is such an approach no replacement for strong workplace-based organizing, but that when it comes to neighbourhood public schools in particular, strong workplace organization is essential to building powerful community-labour alliances or coalitions. Each can, and should, reflexively enhance and transform the other.

Third, my focus on the micro-dynamics within teacher unions aids in the development of a robust conceptualization of worker agency in the production of urban landscapes and education policy. My focus on rank-and-file caucuses illuminates how organizing to transform the culture and institutional framework of a union into a democratic, movement unionism challenges the very nature of what unions and policy makers do. Such organizing in turn transmutes the people involved in it just as it provides us with a more dynamic understanding of what constitutes labour's agency, and it is subject to change through contestation.

That being said, I think there is still some interesting research to be conducted on how such activism works to transform the work and pedagogical practice of teachers. Beyond this, however, what my analysis shows is that union activism—particularly in the context of a democratic, grassroots unionism—can transform one's worldview and relation to place (whether we are discussing one's workplace, the neighbourhood, or the city in which one lives). The teacher activists at the heart of this dissertation allow for a

conception of worker agency that includes an analysis of place and spatial imagination and how such agency produces urban landscapes and education policy.

Fourth, I have drawn on Edward Soja's (2010) notion of "seeking spatial justice" in order to develop what I term spatial justice unionism, which I have argued is a crucial factor in explaining how teachers in Chicago have been so successful in reinventing their union and reinvigorating the labour movement in Chicago. As such, the political and theoretical utility of *spatial justice unionism* warrants some deeper reflection before moving on. Like Soja, I do not think most of the people that I worked with in conducting this research would necessarily recognize or have an appreciation for this concept of spatial justice, much less spatial justice unionism. This is not, however, the case for social movement or social justice unionism, both of which most teacher activists would readily and explicitly identify with. Spatial justice unionism, whether the term is used or not, explicitly integrates a sensitivity to how injustice and exploitation is structured spatially and how in turn a new, radical form of union praxis must not only reflect a deep understanding of these spatial dynamics but of how a progressive sense of place and a multiscalar approach to organizing are vital for any project of union renewal and movement building. Analytically, the concept of spatial justice unionism is useful insofar it forces us to investigate the specifically spatial dynamics of union praxis and empirical cases of union revitalization.

More specifically, the concept of spatial justice unionism is especially useful—theoretically and politically—to any investigation into how urbanization and cities are not mere backgrounds to social and political struggles but the objects of contestation. The struggle over what form the built environment of the city will take and whom it will

serve, the geographical scales that unions prioritize, the way in which unions build—or do not, as the case may be—liveable and accessible urban space for workers, and the way in which inequality, racism in housing, labour markets, and public schools operate to structure urban space and life are usefully understood through my concept of spatial justice unionism, which in the first instance puts these questions squarely on the agenda for both researchers and activists. In sum, the critical spatial lens at the center of spatial justice unionism is vital for the development of comprehensive and rigorous investigations into the study of working-class power in general and rank-and-file reform movements within unions in particular.

And fifth, in elaborating how both Chicago and New York teachers have participated in and learned from different struggles for social justice and radical transformation, in particular the Occupy Movement, I have attempted to relate how the fight against neoliberal education deform, as articulated through the struggles of rank-and-file teacher union activists, has consistently traversed deeper struggles for urban justice. These teachers have attempted to transform their unions in part through contributing to a wider progressive movement through building deep alliances and with a variety of grassroots movement organizations that are fighting for the right to the city for workers and the marginalized. I have insisted throughout this dissertation, and demonstrated with my case studies of Chicago and New York teacher activists, that, insofar as they prepare workers to more effectively contest and unmake global capitalism, unions hold the potential to once again serve as what Marx and Engels called "schools of militancy." By exploring the cracks formed by the nexus of political, economic, and urban geographies that constitutes Chicago and New York City respectively, this

dissertation illuminates some of the ways in which education and urban change structure the possibilities for a more compassionate, democratic, and secure way of life for all urban dwellers, but especially those populations who have been historically most exploited and marginalized within the contemporary capitalist city in the United States.

In Chapter 3 I argue that the neoliberal school reform that has become dominant within the United States and elsewhere in the world facilitates capital accumulation in the post-Fordist, neoliberal conjuncture by providing capital with appropriately socialized and disciplined students as well as a polarized division of labour that is highly flexible and standardized. Flexible labour-power must have standard skills that can be applied across various occupations in the economy. This is achieved by the standardized tests and curricula that all scales of government promote, but in the United States the federal government most forcefully pushes. In liberal democracies a division of labour must be legitimized and workers must accept the coexistence of the economic authoritarianism of the workplace with the formal, shallow democracy that does exist in such societies as the United States. By dividing students—and their teachers—into "losers" and "winners," high-stakes testing helps to create a polarized division of labour. Since the tests are universal and standard, each individual can blame nobody but him or herself for his or her failure. And crucially, the neoliberal agenda in education has been central to the remaking of urban geographies and global city development in the United States.

Yet, it is crucial to understand that the restructuring of schooling is not merely a result of capitalist classes' successful struggle to mold workers according to capital's requirements or to find new avenues of profit; it is also the result of the increased structural power of capital, which is an effect of the state's increased dependence on

global financial markets, and which has been accompanied by austerity policies that have severe reduced social provisions in order to diminish budgets, taxes, and debts.

The shift to a regime of education founded on high-stakes standardized testing and the move towards undemocratic, corporate models of governance are examples of the structural power of capital to constrain the state and increase the state's relative autonomy from class struggle from below, while decreasing the state's autonomy in relation to capital. Recognizing the structural power of capital to place constraints upon the state does not mean that the state's form and actions should be presupposed without the consideration of political struggles (Poulantzas 1978, 25), which develop unpredictably and can have unforeseen results.

In the current conjuncture, social movements, of both a radical anti-capitalist and more reformist variety, have had moments of success, but these have yet to translate into a sustained impact on the overall balance of class forces and have not succeeded—and often not attempted to succeed—in affecting the state or its apparatuses. The struggles of urban teachers examined in these pages, however, show us that there are many contradictions within urban neoliberalization and its austerity agenda, particularly as it structures global city development, that can be leveraged to build workers' power and advance struggles for a social transformation, even if permanent mobilization and contestation usually prove unsustainable. Indeed, this is a serious problem that plagues the CTU at present.

Workers may well support class-struggle unionism when it yields results, but sophisticated managements learn how to marginalize militants and favour more accommodating unions and representatives. Recognizing tensions and contradictions may

prove to be a source of dynamism, and perhaps a source of inspiration and reflection, for union revitalization.

The analysis developed through this dissertation evidences the claim that, unless teacher unions are able to reinvent themselves into organizations that are viewed—and see themselves, by both members and leaders—as more than a special interest group, they will fail to defend public education and more broadly to forge a new organized labour for the twenty-first century, one that is a champion of the entire working class. When union leaders, like the AFT's Randi Weingarten, view organized labour as merely another lobby group rooted in a classless vision of the public and society that pervades neoliberal thinking, they allow unions and particular groups of workers to be pitted against the people whom they are supposed to serve and defend. As Weiner (2012, 105) notes, "That perspective is damaging for any union, but is catastrophic for public employees." Public sector workers, especially teachers who work with ideas and whose job is in large part to help produce labour power and shape the social, ethical, political development of future generations, are strategically placed for cultivating class struggle and advancing a radically different vision for society.

If trade unions and working-class communities are to resist austerity and rebuild the capacities of organized labour to fight against concessionary demands, they must seek to build community-labour coalitions from the bottom up (Brogan 2013; Tattersall 2010a). As scholar-activists like Sam Gindin (2012), Kim Moody (2007), Bill Fletcher Jr. and Fernando Gapasin (2008) have long argued, in order for unions to live up to their potential as transformative workers' organizations, they will need to be reinvented.

As part of this strategy of change, a revived emphasis on working-class politics must seek to transcend labour and activist subcultures, which are often insulated. Considering the weak state of anti-capitalist or progressive forces and organized labour in North America and Europe, and their inability to translate support for their political positions into broader political influence, new political organizations and sustained mobilizations that challenge the rule of capital are gravely needed. If unions are to reappear as a movement and not simply hang on as a relic of the past, they will need to move beyond the defence of their own members' interests to fight for the interests of the working class as a whole.

As I have aimed to demonstrate in this dissertation, doing so requires having feet both inside and outside the trade union movement—that is to say, it requires being rooted in an organizational form explicitly intent on building a broader working-class movement across the many cleavages among workers while being grounded in a critical analysis of neoliberal capitalism. In light of historical and contemporary attacks against free collective bargaining, it is becoming increasingly clear that unions and the oppressed generally can no longer, if they ever could, trust in the courts, laws, or governments to enforce the postwar class compromise. The postwar "consensus" has been thoroughly eroded in the face of the inability of trade unions and social justice activists to adequately counteract decades of cumulative and concerted attacks.

Despite four decades of neoliberalism and intensified attacks following the Great Recession, there has yet to be a commensurate rejuvenation of socialist- and anti-capitalist-inspired mobilizations. Examining the reasons for these failings is important since the shapes taken, or not taken, by struggles over austerity and social justice will

determine whether neoliberalism continues uninterrupted or whether something new and historically unique can capture the public imagination. Considering what the working class faces collectively, organizing solely around specific issues, workplaces, and particular constituencies cannot add up to the kind of strength, organization, and structure that is needed to bring about wide-ranging change. Although labour unions often remain the largest, most organized, well-resourced, and most stable institutions in the fight against the rule of capital, they cannot themselves hope to contest the consolidated attacks by the state and capital. And while trade unions must be a central part of any radical political renewal, their rebirth depends upon a broader revitalization of the Left outside of organized labour and working-class politics as a whole—or on what Marx identified as a social and political formation united in difference.

The course of neoliberalism has thoroughly eroded the remaining vestiges of trade union militancy, while social movements generally remain isolated, small-scale, and resource-poor coalitions. Given the ongoing onslaught against public services, private and public sector unions, and progressive movements, trade unionists and social justice activists must come to the bitter realization that the existing ways of doing things are not working. This is the only realistic starting point from which to move forward.

Put differently, I have argued that, if unions are to regain their once prominent role in the pursuit of social justice and workplace democracy, they will either need to take the risk of organizing working-class communities and fighting back while they still have some capacity to do so or risk continuing a now decades-long labour impasse and union decline. If the dismantlement of the public sector is to be resisted, unions must start

with their own members but extend to the unwaged, precariously employed, and those denied a chance to work.

In my view, this requires an explicitly anti-capitalist perspective aimed at developing both alternative policies and an alternative politics rooted in the working class. Municipal workers, I contend, are in a unique position to take the lead in developing such an alternative politics and strategic direction. This dissertation, I hope, has offered some insights into the ways in which the existing institutions of class struggle can be improved. It does so in part so that politically radical, left academics can connect our ideas, research, and strategies to the living working class. What the CORE model of union transformation uniquely illustrates, and this is largely a result of the kind of work that teaching is, is the need to focalize care within union struggles, especially as they relate to fights to radically reorganize schools as not simply institutions of education but as vibrant anchors of urban community life.

As many of the teacher activists I interviewed in both Chicago and New York insisted, education should be focused on learning for its own sake rather than on establishing a direct correlation between learning and earning. Thus, a good education (however we may define it) cannot solve economic woes in the absence of an expansion of useful, secure, well-paying, remunerative jobs. "We should not make economic rights, or economic security more generally, dependent upon how far one goes—of how short one comes up—in exercising his or her right to a good education. Rights are requirements" (Marsh 2011, 203). "If we truly care about lessening inequality and poverty," argues Marsh (2011, 92), "we should pay less attention to the educational accomplishments or failures of McDonald's customers and far more attention to the

incomes of workers behind the counter—those, and others like them, who sling Happy Meals for a living, or what now passes for a living." Education should serve the working people, their families, the poor, and the excluded, which education in the United States does not presently do. Nor can education be seen as the sole or even principal solution to the problems of poverty and economic inequality today. Meagan Erickson (2015, 21–22) captures the sentiments of many of the teacher activists that I interviewed for my dissertation, and with whom I spent time while organizing support, when she writes that

> American schools and workplaces must be transformed to integrate the human love of play—making meaning through building with blocks, experimenting with words, listening to music, dancing. I don't mean that play should become part of daily life for the sake of increasing working productivity, the way tech start-ups put ping-pong tables and ball pits on their 'campuses' to encourage workers to stay in the office longer and longer. I mean that what we understand as work should be revised and restructured around both basic human needs (like caring for friends and family) and complex needs, like being creative—instead of around the relentless drive for profit…. When teachers, parents, and students fight for control over their own schools, they are fighting for a say in how schooling is defined. What is the 'work' of a child or an adult? What should it be?

The beautiful thing about the struggle over what kind of schools we want is that they most clearly speak to what kind of society we want.

Limitations

While the work of radical scholars like Robin D.G. Kelley, who, looking outside the workplace to the spaces of churches, dance halls, "jook joints," and other everyday spaces in order to unearth and explore the "hidden transcripts" of Black working-class life, has done so much to make strong ties amongst Black workers, which in turn has enabled solidarity and a wide range of different forms of resistance, and thus has deeply informed my approach to understanding working-class practices and politics, my thesis primarily examines more public, and more typical spaces of organized collective

resistance. In part this is a major weakness of the research conducted for this dissertation, insofar as it does not allow me to fully explore the wide array of spaces, experiences, and institutions that constitute the rich tapestry of so many of the teacher activists in Chicago and New York City whose stories I seek to both tell and probe for insight into what makes a radical urban educator and how urban teachers, especially teachers of color, might both transform their unions and contribute to broader, dynamic urban working-class struggles in and through the urban landscapes of the United States. Hence, while I acknowledge the significant limitations of this approach, I maintain that my focus on how teachers go about organizing in public spaces, what they say and do (and plan to say and do) in the spaces of caucuses and union meetings to both recruit more teachers and to engage with parents, communities, other unions, and workers across their cities yields some valuable insights about the dynamics of urban struggle, working-class capacities, practices, and potentials, as well as how class, gender, and race articulate with the urban today.

Similarly, in choosing to scale my research design to case studies of cities, rather than, for instance, to neoliberal restructuring and teacher activism in particular school buildings, I sacrificed some degree of depth for breadth. I think a great deal of rich insight could be gained had I taken this route in my design, but I would also have missed so much of what has been central to how CORE and MORE have organized across the city, as well as to the varieties of place and the challenges of traversing it to organize within and across different schools and neighbourhoods.

A further limitation to this research and analysis is that, in seeking to interview a racially diverse group of teachers in both Chicago and New York, I was not able to fully access or explore the specific dynamics of how racialized teachers organize amongst

themselves, as compared to how they organize across racial and ethnic lines. An analysis of how Black teachers have organized historically, for example, would have required me to do extended archival research and possibly some oral or life history interviews that I simply have not done. Such research would add a great deal of insight and richness to my study and is a line of inquiry that I hope to pursue in the future.

Two other limitations of this dissertation that I want to acknowledge relate to policy making and corporate, neoliberal reform groups, on the one hand, and to the economic and urban geography of Chicago and New York on the other. First, with respect to policy makers and reform groups, while I encountered proponents of neoliberal education reform in Board of Education and Panel on Education Policy (PEP) meetings in Chicago and New York respectively, I did not actively seek to conduct a more in depth study of local neoliberal reform advocates. In retrospect, I think it would have been useful to try to interview some policy makers in these respective bodies as well as in organizations like StudentsFirst in New York or those involved in local charter operators, like UNO in Chicago. Both of these education governance bodies in particular have sought to draw on community organizers in order to expand and deepen reform policies, and an exploration of this would have enriched the analysis. Second, with respect to the economic and urban geographies of Chicago and New York, I think the more focused analysis on education reform policies and the labour movements of each city could be better integrated into the geographical analysis of each city, but doing so, especially in the New York case, proved a challenging task that I do not feel I have done in the way that I would have liked to do had I had more time to conduct further field work. Lastly, while I have pointed to some of the limitations of the teacher activism explored in this

dissertation and to the limits of my research and analysis, I believe I have engaged in an important study and set the stage for continued research into the nexus of urban change, teacher union activism, education policy, and working-class power in both cities.

Future Research

The inability of both organized labour and activists to confront the current impasse belies the need for a new kind of radical, anti-capitalist political project suited to the current historical and social conjuncture, one that interrogates both its own historical failures as well as the political, economic, socio-spatial, and cultural transformations under which we struggle today. The challenge before trade union and social justice activists is to move left of social democracy or risk increasingly becoming an impediment to rather than an instrument of a renewed working-class politics. In other words, labour and social justice activists must lead left if austerity is to be challenged. The failure to do so may, regrettably, amount to a continued defeat for the working class and the oppressed. Despite the setbacks faced by trade unionists and social justice activists over the period of neoliberalism, it is necessary to learn victory from defeats. Revitalizing the theoretical and political promise of a radical working-class politics remains a crucial step in resisting austerity and getting to the root of the problem—capitalism—in order to potentially realize a better world. There are a number of avenues of research to explore that build on the research and analysis conducted in this thesis.

I am planning on extending my research on the relationships between urban change and education policy by examining Los Angeles, specifically exploring how the CORE model of union transformation and spatial justice unionism has been taken up by United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA). The UTLA has similarly seen a group of

progressive reformers elected into the top leadership positions of the union. Indeed, UTLA has engaged in a tremendous amount of workplace and community organizing that has helped them to achieve massive gains in their 2015 contract negotiations, which included significant improvements on class size and other issues that deeply affect students in Los Angeles, the second largest school district in the country.

Beyond looking at other relational cases of rank-and-file activism aimed at building an education justice movement through the transformation of teacher unions—such as I have already begun to do in Los Angeles—a number of important threads have emerged in the course of writing this dissertation that need to be pulled on in future research. First, following a suggestion Weiner makes in her 2012 book on teacher unionism and the future of public education, it would be revealing to conduct a focused study on how teacher union activism effects the often racist or otherwise problematic attitudes teachers bring into their classrooms about the "deficits" of their students and the communities that they come from, attitudes that are often reinforced by school administrators. In this it will be important to remember that "the relationships teachers have—or more often, do not have—with parents" should not be separated from how schools are structured, "which is inextricable from gender" (Weiner 2012, 93). Related to this vein of research, I think it would be useful to conduct a study of how participation in the more radical forms of teacher activism, like those explored throughout this thesis, changes a teacher's professional practices and classroom pedagogy.

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Appendix A

THESIS INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Introductions, Nature of the Project and Expectations
The interviewer introduces him/herself to the participant and explains the nature of the project as detailed in the letter of information/consent form. Make sure the participant has a copy of the information. Explain to the participant that he or she has guarantees that are stated on the consent form. Make sure the participant knows that the interview is confidential and that their name will not be used. Two copies of the consent form must be signed by the interviewer and the participant. One copy will be given to the participant.

Interview Parameters

1. Biographical Information
   a. How long have you been teaching?
   b. Where do you teach?
   c. Why did you become a teacher?
   d. How and when did you first become involved in organizing in the union or around public education?
2. Global Assault on Teachers, their Unions and Public Education
   a. What do you think some of the major transformations in public education have been in the past 30 years? Probe: What and who do you think is driving these changes?
   b. What connections do you see between how these structural changes and 'reform' efforts have been happening in your city and elsewhere in the United States and around the world?
   c. How has race and racism figured into the crisis in education and these the changes we've discussed? How has this shaped organizing efforts to resist these changes?
   d. How has the gendered dimension of teachers work figured into the assault on teachers and their unions and the manner in which it has been resisted?
   e. In what ways have teachers and their unions been a part of and responded to these changes?

3. Global capitalism and Crisis
   a. How has the economic crisis that broke in 2008 impacted your organizing work?
   b. How do you think it has affected your city and public school system more specifically?
   c. Have there been any kinds of new political possibilities opened up or shut down by this crisis?

4. Global Cities as spaces of policy experimentation and transformation
   a. What specific role do you think your city has played in the corporate-led 'reform' of the public education system?
   b. How have the changes in funding, governance and the very purpose of education that have been part of this 'reform' agenda been met by teachers, unions, parents and other community-based groups?

    c. In what ways does organizing in a major urban region change the dynamics and political possibilities of your organizing efforts?

5. Organizing in and outside of the unions

    a. Where and how has your organization been seeking to fight to defend public Education in Chicago?

    b. Why or why not has your organization chosen to prioritize the transformation of the teachers union as part of this struggle?

    c. In what specific ways have you been mobilizing in and outside of the union?

    d. Where in the city have your organizing efforts been directed? Probe: How do you think organizing tactics and strategies should shift in accordance with where – what schools or neighbourhoods – you are organizing in?

    e. What level, or geographical scale, has your organization prioritized? What has been the strength and limitations of this priority?

    f. In what ways has the transformation of the content of what is taught, and the manner in which it is taught, been a priority of your organizations efforts? Probe: How and why is a social justice and anti-racist oriented curriculum an important component of your organizations work?

6. Future directions of the struggle

    a. Where do you see your organization headed in the next 5 years?

    b. What are some of the major strengths and limitations to how your organization has been mobilizing to defend teachers and public education?

    c. What do you think might be some of the chief lessons to be learned from your organizing experiences in this organization?