Cornell University
ILR School

Cornell University ILR School
DigitalCommons@ILR

Faculty Publications - Collective Bargaining, Labor Law, and Labor History

Collective Bargaining, Labor Law, and Labor History

12-14-2005

New Unity for Labor?

Ruth Milkman
University of California

Kim Voss
University of California

Kate Bronfenbrenner
Cornell University, klb23@cornell.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cbpubs

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Collective Bargaining, Labor Law, and Labor History at DigitalCommons@ILR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications - Collective Bargaining, Labor Law, and Labor History by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@ILR. For more information, please contact jdd10@cornell.edu.

New Unity for Labor?

Abstract
From the "Editor's Introduction": Within today's AFL-CIO, a different set of frustrations with the bureaucratic structure and leadership is simmering. The relative lack of new organizing and the continuous toll of jurisdictional rivalries have produced a call for radical restructuring, or "New Unity Partnership" (NUP). As articulated by the leaders of some of the most powerful and dynamic of federation affiliates, including the Service Employees International Union's president Andrew L. Stern, the promise (or threat, depending on one's point of view) of the NUP deserves full scrutiny. To that end, we are pleased to present a forum organized by Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss of the University of California's Institute for Labor and Employment, focused on the core concepts of the NUP proposal. The edited discussion features four labor policy experts: Stephen Lerner, director of the SEIU's Building Services Division and a leading NUP draftsman; Kate Bronfenbrenner of the Cornell School of Industrial and Labor Relations; Dan Clawson, a sociologist at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst; and Jane Slaughter, of Labor Notes.

Keywords
AFL, CIO, crisis, labor, history, commentary

Comments
Suggested Citation
Milkman, R. & Voss, K. (2005). New unity for labor? *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas, 2*, 15-25.
http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cbpubs/15/

Required Publisher Statement
Posted with permission of the Journal, Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas.

This article is available at DigitalCommons@ILR: http://digitalcommons.ilr.cornell.edu/cbpubs/15

New Unity for Labor?

Ruth Milkman and Kim Voss

Nearly a decade ago, former Service Employees International Union (SEIU) president John J. Sweeney was elected to the AFL-CIO presidency, generating widespread hopes that he would reverse labor's decline by extrapolating the transformative vision and growth strategy that had made the SEIU the most dynamic union in the nation to the labor movement as a whole. Sweeney immediately recruited a new generation of leaders (many of them drawn from the SEIU's ranks) into key positions within the federation and sparked widespread enthusiasm among progressives that labor finally had overcome its lethargy and was on the move once again.

However, the hopes these developments nurtured have been frustrated in the past few years. The attempt to stem the long decline in the unionized proportion of the workforce, to which Sweeney's administration devoted enormous rhetorical and financial resources for organizing the unorganized, has produced only limited results. It succeeded briefly in stabilizing (although not increasing) union density in the late 1990s, but then the decline resumed after the turn of the century. By 2003, just 12.9 percent of all U.S. wage and salary workers were union members; in the private sector, density was only 8.2 percent.

Indeed, the crisis of organized labor—far from being resolved—has been growing more and more severe, despite a decade-long infusion of creative and sustained strategic thinking. The AFL-CIO has had four different organizing directors since 1995, when Sweeney's administration began. All four were talented leaders who experimented with bold new approaches, yet none was able to reverse the relentless decline in union density, which virtually everyone agrees is a necessary condition for labor's survival, much less revitalization.

Faced with this dilemma, some key players have come to believe that the basic structure of the AFL-CIO—formed a half century ago when the American Federation of Labor merged with the Congress of Industrial Organizations—is itself a major obstacle to progress. The organization (like its predecessors) was constituted from the outset as a federation of autonomous unions, each of which is free to act entirely independently in workplace organizing, politics, and every other area of

Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas, Volume 2, Issue 1
Copyright © 2005 by Labor and Working-Class History Association

work. This means that even the most farsighted AFL-CIO leadership cannot impose its program on the affiliates.

Sweeney has repeatedly urged all the unions in the federation to devote more resources to recruiting new members and to adopt proven "best practices" in the organizing arena, for example, but there is nothing he can do about the fact that few of them have heeded this call. The practical reality is that the AFL-CIO leadership, for all its inspiring rhetoric, simply cannot implement programs or policies that *any* of its sixty-odd affiliates—more than a few of which remain mired in the dinosaur age of "business unionism"—find objectionable.

Against this background, a few leading apostles of union transformation recently launched a controversial new initiative, the New Unity Partnership (NUP). Spearheaded by Andy Stern, president of the giant SEIU, now the largest AFL-CIO affiliate, the NUP has been the subject of intensive debate within and around labor circles for the past two years. In essence, it advocates importing some of the structural changes that fostered the SEIU's growth and revitalization over recent decades into the federation itself, along with other fundamental reforms.

If adopted, the NUP program would radically alter the basic structure of the AFL-CIO, consolidating power at the top in the hands of the change-oriented unions. Such centralization has been conspicuously absent throughout the federation's half-century-long history, and this part of the NUP proposal has already led some critics to suggest that it would imperil union democracy.

The NUP also aims to foster multiple union mergers and designate clear responsibility among the resulting mega-unions for organizing specific industries and sectors of the economy—a sharply defined jurisdictional division that has not existed for decades.

One step in this direction was the July 2004 merger of the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees union (HERE) and the Union of Needletrades, Textiles and Industrial Employees (UNITE). The new union, UNITE HERE, is touted by NUP supporters as a model of the strategy the labor movement as a whole should adopt. UNITE HERE recently announced that 50 percent of its assets would be devoted to organizing—even more than the 30 percent that Sweeney urged AFL-CIO affiliates commit to this purpose a decade ago.

HERE's former president John Wilhelm, who is often mentioned as a possible successor to Sweeney as head of the AFL-CIO, and UNITE's president Bruce Raynor, who now heads the merged UNITE HERE union, have been part of the NUP leadership coalition from the outset. The maverick grouping also includes President Doug McCarron of the Carpenters Union, which disaffiliated from the AFL-CIO in 2001 after announcing its frustration with the federation's limited progress toward increasing density. Finally, the NUP core leadership group includes Terence M. O'Sullivan, president of the Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA), which currently boasts that it is the second-fastest growing union inside the AFL-CIO (the first being SEIU).

The four NUP-associated unions account for a sizable portion of the AFL-

CIO's overall membership (in the range of 15–20 percent—an exact calculation is difficult, given the fact that the Carpenters is no longer affiliated with the federation). From a historical perspective, it is striking that all four of these unions have roots not in the industrial unionism of the 1930s that gave rise to the CIO but rather in the old-line craft unionism of the AFL.

Not very long ago, progressives thought of the AFL unions as backwaters of corruption, racism, and conservatism, yet today these unions have been in the vanguard of labor movement revitalization. Their leaders are more intellectually oriented (some are Ivy League graduates, as the press is fond of pointing out) than most union officials—and they enjoy the kind of reputation for forward-looking, radical vision that was once associated with figures like Walter Reuther of the United Auto Workers, and more generally with the CIO.

Ironically, however, the industrial unions that once argued that the AFL's structure was obsolete and broke away to form the CIO in 1935 are now the ones that seem more resistant to change. They mostly supported Richard Gephardt in the early stages of the Democratic primary process, whereas the NUP group supported Howard Dean. And in the summer of 2004 the SEIU's Stern became a lightning rod for criticism by other unionists when he was reported to have suggested that the ultimate Democratic nominee, John Kerry, wasn't going far enough in addressing the issues facing working people.

Although various draft documents found their way into the public discourse via the Internet, the NUP did not put forward any concrete proposals until after the 2004 presidential election, to avoid diverting energies from the effort to defeat Bush. Even now, many crucial details remain unclear. The debate will begin in earnest at the February 2005 AFL-CIO Executive Committee meeting. Several outcomes are possible, including a succession battle over the AFL-CIO presidency, if the seventy-year-old Sweeney declines to run when his current term expires in July 2005. Another scenario that has been the subject of considerable speculation is that the NUP could form a rival federation, pulling out of the AFL-CIO entirely if the organization proves resistant to reform.

Meanwhile, the NUP concept has provoked a great deal of discussion both inside the labor movement and on the part of labor commentators and in the press. Among those discussions was a forum on the topic that we organized under the auspices of the University of California's Institute for Labor and Employment, which offers a window into the ongoing controversy and a range of perspectives on the NUP proposal. It featured four speakers:

- Stephen Lerner, who directs the SEIU's Building Service Division and who authored the most detailed published version of ideas in the NUP's controversial program (in the summer 2003 issue of *New Labor Forum*).
- Kate Bronfenbrenner, a former union organizer now based at Cornell University, where she has spent the past decade documenting the efficacy of rank-and-file intensive tactics for overcoming the obstacles to successful organizing.

- Dan Clawson, author of the 2003 book *The Next Upsurge: Labor and the New Social Movements*, which argues that labor must become a broader social movement, as in previous periods of union growth, by building alliances with other progressive movements among women, immigrants, and community activists.
- Jane Slaughter, a staff writer for the Detroit-based *Labor Notes*, who has publicly critiqued Lerner's proposal for not sufficiently safeguarding or valuing internal union democracy.

While the views of these four commentators are not mutually exclusive, their distinctive perspectives, taken together, lay out the key issues and challenges facing the U.S. labor movement in this difficult period of history. Below are some of the highlights of their discussion, which was held in October 2003, on the UCLA and UC-Berkeley campuses as well as at the UCLA Downtown Labor Center.

Stephen Lerner

We all agree that if the labor movement is going to survive, it has to reshape itself, build coalitions with other movements, and offer a new vision. But what are the concrete things that we can do? What are the things that we in organized labor can actually control that might really make a difference? We have to begin taking a hard look at how the labor movement has chosen to structure itself.

Just as in the 1930s the CIO insisted on a different model of organization—industrial unions instead of craft unions—today we must restructure ourselves once again. We not only need to revitalize the individual unions that make up the labor movement, but we also need to develop effective leadership and accountability structures for the movement as a whole.

Right now, we have no way to make decisions as a movement; instead, each individual union does whatever it likes. The AFL-CIO as a whole doesn't have any power. It is basically a bunch of separate fiefdoms, each of which can do anything they want as long as they don't get indicted and they pay the per capita dues. And many of these fiefdoms are very small: There are sixty-six unions in the AFL-CIO, but once you get past the top fifteen or so, the average membership is down to fifty thousand. The ten largest unions now account for about two-thirds of the entire membership. But because the AFL operates on consensus, you have to get all sixty-six unions to think something's a good idea or else it's hopeless.

The era of labor history that I find the most fascinating is not the 1930s, which so many people invoke, but the years from 1954 to 1979. That was this incredible period when organized labor's *membership* was increasing, but our *density* was declining. We continued to get more members in highly unionized industries during this long economic expansion, because employers didn't fight that hard against us.

It was a time of terrible self-deception, because membership was growing. But in those days, you could grow without doing the hard thing, namely, organizing. So instead of unions that had their industry organized in the North following it to the South, they started to morph into general workers' unions. They said, "Why should

I have that brutal fight to organize in the South, when I can instead (and much more easily) pick up a few public sector workers?" Essentially, we moved away from a model that said our job is to organize a specific industry and to take wages out of competition. And by the late 1970s we had lost control of what gave unions power—our ability to set and control wages.

We have a profound choice to make: Do we let the labor movement continue to fragment into a bunch of general unions that are jacks-of-all-industries and masters of none, or do we call for a radical restructuring of the AFL-CIO that takes us back to the approach of taking wages out of competition in individual sectors of the economy? I think we could be a lot more effective if each union would say, "We're organizing one industry, we're living, breathing, using our resources, mobilizing our members, and using our density to try to help workers break through in that industry."

Another big challenge is to allow the labor movement as a whole to put together a strategy to do what individual unions cannot do. Everybody knows Wal-Mart is devastating the economy, yet no union in this country has said, "It is my job, my future, my livelihood to organize Wal-Mart." The labor movement has not developed a strategy for Wal-Mart, and I think that is because of our dysfunctional structure. If the movement was working the way it should be, we would be able to recognize that nobody has enough money to do this all by themselves; and we'd pool our resources and our capital strategies and we'd develop a movement-wide strategy to organize Wal-Mart. We would also say that no union has a right *not* to do the job well, because it's hurting all of us. But as long as we have a movement in which everybody can do their own thing and nobody can be held accountable, and there's no central way to make decisions, then there is no way to take on the largest corporation in the world.

I want to describe some of what we've done in SEIU, because I think it reveals the hard choices unions have to make today. First, in SEIU it did not work for us to have "amalgamated locals" that had a little bit of public sector, a little bit of health care, a little bit of janitors, and so on. It was an enormous internal struggle to split our locals along industry lines, but we've done it. The second thing was that it didn't work for us to have eight competing locals as we once did in Chicago, for example, where in building services we had eight locals representing the same employers. So we had a series of mergers and consolidations, and where we used to have eight local unions, now we have one. It wasn't the members who were upset about merging into one strong local; it was some of the presidents saying, "Wait a second, let me do the math here: Eight locals, eight presidents. One local, one president! Hmmm . . ."

After a long internal debate, we passed the New Strength Unity program at the 2000 SEIU convention. So we restructured and consolidated our locals, which was a very difficult thing. In addition, our members voted to dramatically raise the amount of money that is dedicated to organizing. The building service part of SEIU, which is over 200,000 members, will spend almost $30 million on organizing next year. Just our little piece of SEIU.

We made other changes, too. The Building Service Division established a

policy mandating that each local regain the right to honor other locals' picket lines, so that when our members strike in one part of the country, their coworkers in other places can honor this action.

So we have transformed our locals, and we now have a level of activism you've never seen before. For example, when Local 32BJ in New York had their last contract expiration and strike vote, they filled Madison Square Garden with members. We also have more people in leadership that look like the members, in terms of race and gender.

Now some people would point out that some of these leaders don't come out of the rank and file of the local that they have been elected to lead. We're accused all the time of bringing in "outsiders." It's fascinating to me that these "outsiders" critics complain about often tend to be people of color. For example, in our Boston janitors' local, we have a democratically elected leader who is a Mexican immigrant. She worked in the industry, so she's not an outsider in that sense, but she wasn't from Boston and she hadn't been a member of that local union.

But if 90 percent of all workers in the private sector are outside our unions, the notion that the only legitimate leader of the new labor movement we're trying to build is somebody who happens to be out of the rank and file of a particular local is incredibly narrow, it's pseudodemocracy. I think people should run for leadership positions on program, on how they believe we should run the labor movement and how we should organize, regardless of where they come from.

The transformation of our building service locals is a model for what can happen in the labor movement as a whole. Because of all the things we've done over the last fifteen years, we now have grown—after having shrunk down to 150,000—to almost 210,000 members. The terrifying thing is that the Building Service Division of SEIU would now be among the top twenty private sector unions in America if it were an international.

There were fights; there were trusteeships; but because we made those hard choices we're now positioned to double our membership. Because we've tackled the issues that some people would dismiss as bureaucratic or technical details, we can now move forward to do the inspiring movement-building work that will take us to a new level. We have already shown that we could change our unions, and now we must show that not only can we change the labor movement, but we can change this world.

Kate Bronfenbrenner

I agree that unions should focus on the jurisdictions where they have bargaining power. But power is about more than leverage. All the leverage in the world comes to naught if workers are unwilling to sign the cards or stay out on the picket line. Unions have to do the hard work of developing leadership, building solidarity and commitment, developing community and labor alliances, and making a real difference in workers' lives at work and at home. Building power also requires giving new

members, primarily women and people of color, a seat at the table and a voice in the union once the union is won.

We also need to remember that some jurisdictions are much easier to organize than others. The only way we're going to rebuild the labor movement in this country is if those unions, such as SEIU, UNITE, and HERE, who are having success in organizing service workers, also make a commitment to ensure that manufacturing gets organized, high-tech gets organized, and office workers get organized. And we can't just announce from on high that from now on, all unions should be in certain jurisdictions. Let's be realistic. We are not going to be able to say to the Teamsters and the Laborers and the many other unions that have become general unions, "Give it up, you've got to focus just on one primary jurisdiction." It just isn't going to happen. What we can do is to try to educate unions and say, "Concentrate on those areas where you do have bargaining leverage and stop fighting about who's going to organize what."

Many unions have never even thought of using leverage with customers and suppliers to organize new members. They may never have thought about reaching out to unions in the European headquarters of a company and asking them for support. Even unions that are actively organizing in most cases haven't researched the company enough even to know where they already have leverage. In fact, most of the organizers that I interviewed did not even know who owned the company they were trying to organize! This is why many unions are not moving forward despite putting a lot more resources into organizing. By contrast, employers have gotten more and more sophisticated.

It also can't just be about organizing. We have to spend as much energy in making sure we get good contracts, and to build power between contracts, because if we don't empower our current membership, we'll start losing old members as fast as we organize new ones. And we cannot wait for labor law reform. We should stop spending money on endless polling to figure out the right words to make us more palatable to unorganized workers. This is the logic that leads us to say "voice at work" rather than "union," and to avoid the word "power" because it might alienate people.

What we should be doing is taking people where they are now and moving them to a different level. The way the labor movement will do that best is if we get out in front on the issues that are threatening American workers the most. That means we stand out in front and say that the Patriot Act is wrong, dismantling the Constitution is wrong, dismantling affirmative action is wrong. We need to stand up for immigrant workers but not forget African American workers. We need to stand out in front and say the redistribution of wealth that is happening as a result of the current tax policy is wrong; that the twelve-hour day is wrong; that mandatory overtime is wrong; that the lack of access to public education and health care is wrong; and that the war in Iraq is wrong.

We have to think about vision, about what it takes to inspire workers to jump through the hoops of fire that they have to jump through to organize today. We

have to think about labor education. Unions are shifting money away from education into organizing. But if you cut labor education, then you cut the possibility of a vision, because that's where unions build vision. That's where they develop leaders. Education is what brings workers up from the ranks to become leaders. It educates the members about issues; it teaches them that there's a reason not to vote for Arnold Schwarzenegger. It helps workers to understand that the worker in Mexico or China is not their enemy. It gets workers to wrestle with the issue of racism. It gets workers to understand class. And by cutting education within unions and shifting the money into organizing, we have a new problem, because then we have no one to develop the committee, no one to train the membership. So I would say that putting resources into education is even more essential to labor's revitalization than restructuring unions.

Whatever we do, we should not spend our resources attacking each other. We need to encourage debate, encourage experimentation, but not be so arrogant and foolhardy as to believe that any one of us has a magic formula or that those who do not agree with us have sold out. We need to keep talking, we need to keep thinking, and remember that as flawed as it is, in this environment the labor movement is still the single best vehicle to move toward social and economic justice.

Dan Clawson

Imagine that the AFL-CIO were able to double the number of people that it's now organizing and keep that up year after year. Thirty years from now where would we be? We'd be back to the union density we had in 1983—after Reagan, after the PATCO (Professional Air Traffic Controllers' Organization) strike. So if what we're going to do is think inside the box, it's a pretty depressing prospect.

If you look at history, that's not the way the labor movement has grown in the past. More often than not, union density is gradually declining, and then once in a while there's a sudden burst of growth. From 1933 to 1945 the number of union members increased more than fivefold, from less than 3 million to 15 million. And it wasn't just the number of union members that grew. Labor's power grew even faster: that's when we got Social Security, unemployment compensation, the Wagner Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, and a variety of other things. Labor didn't just buckle down and do a better job of what it had been doing all along. Instead, it was a time of rupture, of larger social, economic, and political transformation. The labor movement created new forms and took on new issues, using new strategies and tactics.

If a labor movement is to maintain its vitality, it has to periodically renew itself in that way and connect to what's happening in the wider society. At least five things have happened since the last labor upsurge that are significant for thinking about what a new kind of labor movement would need to take on. First, the number of women working for pay has increased dramatically, especially white married mothers. Second, African Americans used to be overwhelmingly concentrated in the rural South, but now they are more urban and geographically dispersed. Third, the economy and labor movement were once driven overwhelmingly by blue-collar man-

ufacturing, but now we have a white-collar and service-sector economy, and one that relies more heavily on education. Fourth, immigration in the 1930s had been reduced to a trickle, and most of that immigration came from Europe. As recently as 1960, only 6 percent of children were in immigrant families, and two-thirds of those immigrants came from either Canada or Europe. Today more than 20 percent of children are in immigrant families and more than three-quarters of those families come from Latin America and Asia. And fifth, the U.S. economy was largely self-sufficient and U.S. foreign policy for the most part avoided foreign entanglements except in Latin America and the Caribbean, in sharp contrast to today.

Other social movements since the 1960s have been centrally concerned with these various social changes, but not the labor movement. Perhaps the single greatest failure of the Left in the past half century is the lack of connection between labor and the new social movements. That has drastically weakened the labor movement, contributing to its current state of ossification and insularity. And it also weakened the black, feminist, environmental, and student movements, limiting their working-class appeal.

So what would we need in order to have a new burst of growth? First and foremost, labor needs to strengthen its connection with other social movements. There have been some promising moves in that direction, like U.S. Labor against the War and the Immigrant Worker Freedom Ride, but many more such linkages need to be forged.

Second, labor needs to create new forms of unionism, just as the CIO did. The CIO didn't just reorganize the jurisdictional lines inside the existing AFL; it created a different kind of union. Similarly, today we need new organizational forms, forms that break down the boundaries between unionism and the larger society. To mobilize people, labor activists need to think about the problems people actually face in their daily lives—and ask what kinds of organizations can best deal with these problems.

The third thing that the labor movement needs to do to grow is to show a willingness to disrupt the normal functioning of the society and the economy. Most of what the labor movement in this country does is focus on issues, to appeal to people with power by saying, "Our cause is just, and it won't cost you that much to solve the problem." Even demonstrations and arrests often have the aim of generating publicity for issues in this way. But another approach to building power involves a willingness to disrupt the normal functioning of a society and to continue to do that until people with power make key concessions. What we remember about the civil rights movement is its use of civil disobedience. It was nonviolent, and it was inspirational, but what is often forgotten is that they kept going until they won. They didn't have one sit-in and then go home after a few hours to watch the news. They kept having sit-ins until downtown businesses couldn't make money and gave in because they were feeling the economic pinch. Labor needs to do things that way if it's going to rebuild its power.

If we can do those three things, we will have the potential for a new upsurge of labor union growth, building a movement that can address the critical issues that

have emerged since the last upsurge and making common cause with other social movements. If we can't do these things, the night is upon us.

Jane Slaughter

If the labor movement were able to plan how to use its resources well, we would be thinking strategically about where workers have the potential for power. We would be looking at how to undertake massive organizing drives among workers in distribution—truck drivers and workers who move freight on and off the docks, for example—and in production and services in key sectors of the economy. We would pool our resources to organize the most powerful workers so that they could then help organize the less powerful.

At the same time, we'd also be organizing among those workers who have shown a willingness to confront employers, to kick up a ruckus. Even if their jobs don't make them the most powerful, when any workers go into action they can create the sense of a working-class movement and help show others the way.

And I strongly agree that instead of organizing helter-skelter, we'd be looking to increase union density sector by sector so we could move to take wages out of competition.

That sort of strategic thinking does not seem likely to prevail in the near term. And the shrinkage of our numbers creates desperation. So it's understandable that some would want to increase labor's numbers by any means necessary. I would argue, though, that it matters *how* workers get their union. It matters whether you get your union through a backroom deal with the boss or through workers confronting the boss.

The United Auto Workers, for example, are finally trying to organize the vast nonunion auto parts sector. Their strategy is to win employer neutrality by promising not to make those employers "uncompetitive." They assure the companies that they won't try to raise wages much, if at all, and that they are committed to lean production, which on the shop floor translates into speedup. Rather than convince autoworkers that if they form a union, their lives will be different and better, the UAW's approach is to convince the companies that if they allow the union in, their plants can continue with business as usual. To show their sincerity about keeping wages down, UAW leaders have even made concessions at the unionized parts companies that do have high wages. At Delphi and Visteon, with fifty-two thousand workers, new hires will make $10 an hour less than older workers.

Under these circumstances, higher density doesn't create a new balance of forces between the union and employers.

Such sweetheart deals have two other negative consequences: They can make unions in general unattractive to the unorganized. And they tend to anger existing members, who then see no reason to help the union recruit new members.

It's not impossible, of course, for a union initially to come in through a gentlemen's agreement, and later to bite the hand that recognized it. But rank-and-file mobilization is made more difficult when part of the union's agreement with management is to provide a docile and affordable labor force.

How do workers organized through a backdoor deal with the employer view their union and themselves? Are they energized, confident in their own clout? New members quite naturally expect the union to act the same way after the organizing drive that it did before. If the union came in because union and management made a deal, workers will understand that their role is to remain passive. If the "campaign" went on without workers' leadership or even their participation, they will expect the union to continue functioning the same way.

Some organizers who have run campaigns in which the workers were secondary say that workers can learn to be union members afterward. And others say that if workers don't go through a struggle where *they* own the campaign and *they* fight the boss, they don't develop the skills to enforce their contract on a daily basis or to fight for a second contract.

Perhaps a majority of current union members see the union as an outside decision maker, as "them," not as "we." How much more likely is that attitude for members organized through the back door?

Unions should seek employer neutrality, but they should use a stick—say, the power to hurt the employer in a related bargaining unit—rather than the carrot of concessions. If the union is making concessions at existing units in order to get neutrality, do the current members support that approach? Will the concessions (such as giving up work rules, or allowing more contracting out) handicap the union in future power struggles?

Union leaders then need to pay special attention to how units won through neutrality agreements will be owned by their members and to how the union will go about mobilizing members to confront management: Will locals be of manageable size? Are there councils of locals within the same employer, so that workers can act together? Will members have the right to reject contracts and have that rejection respected (as opposed to "vote until you get it right")? Will the union structure be dominated by staffers, or will resources be devoted to developing leaders from the rank and file? The proposals from the New Unity Partnership, if implemented, would make it harder, not easier, for unions to be run by their members.

Unions need all the pluses they can get to attract new members, and the right to control one's own local is one of them. The employers' line on unions is that we're third-party bigwigs, calling the shots from afar. As we think about how to rebuild the labor movement, we need to be able to prove them wrong.