

# Living-Wage Campaigns and Laws

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*This article examines the origins and development of living-wage ordinances that have been passed in more than eighty cities and counties, and the nature of the local campaigns promoting their passage. Ordinance characteristics and a number of specific campaigns are described, and factors contributing to the success of local efforts are considered. Coalitions including labor movement, community, and religious organizations have been central to these efforts, and the potential political and organizing impact of this collaboration is discussed.*

**L**IVING-WAGE CAMPAIGNS HAVE CAPTURED THE IMAGINATION of organizations that represent low-wage workers. These campaigns have succeeded in establishing more than eighty governmental ordinances, and the movement has spread to universities, involv-

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ing a growing cohort of students in local labor solidarity struggles for the first time in decades. The campaigns illuminate the possibility and importance of coalitions among labor movement, community, and religious organizations. This is no small feat, given the immense animosity that has characterized these relationships in past decades. Furthermore, coalition building is always difficult and coalitions are fragile, even when the partners are similar, as in the case of labor unions, and especially if they are dissimilar, as in the case of the variety of groups involved in the World Trade Organization (WTO) protests (McAdam 1982; Levi and Olson 2000).

That there are so many thriving campaigns and that most involve real coalitions among labor, community, and religious partners confirm the existence of a social movement involving numerous individuals and groups throughout the country in sustained collective actions aimed at winning living-wage legislation and monitoring its enforcement after enactment. The existence of so many ordinances indicates the success of this movement in achieving its immediate goals and raises important issues about both the possibilities and limits of this strategy for raising the standard of living for working people in the United States.

## Background

Since the mid-1990s, cities and counties have passed living-wage ordinances that require private-sector firms that have financial relationships with government—as either service contractors, recipients of subsidies or tax breaks, concessionaires, or tenants on publicly owned property—to provide a “living wage,” a wage above the federally mandated minimum wage. Living-wage legislation is generally initiated by either community-based organizations—such as the Industrial Area Foundation (IAF), the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), and a wide range of local churches and neighborhood associations—or by labor unions, either particular unions or central labor councils (CLCs).

Successful campaigns seem to require the involvement of both types

of organizations from the very beginning. It is hard to bring a missing partner aboard once the action has begun. Without the proper base in both the unions and the community, the campaign is less likely to be successful and the changes less likely to be sustained. These campaigns are also more likely to succeed if they are bottom up. This approach ensures continued demands for enforcement of legislation from those affected as well as contributing to the long-term construction of social networks and common interests that can be mobilized for future actions. If the campaign succeeds due to their joint efforts, they develop greater commitment to and monitoring of ongoing policy and more confidence in their capacity to make future change (Lipsky and Levi 1972; Levi 2001).

### *Labor Organizations*

Labor's reasons for joining living-wage coalitions derive from several factors. The labor movement, reeling from membership declines, is eager to attract new members. As part of its recruitment strategy, the "new leadership" of the AFL-CIO, elected in 1996, developed a Union Cities program to revitalize the role of unions in political and economic development. Labor's support for the living wage allows it to target previously ignored employment sectors, such as low-wage service sectors where women and people of color predominate as well as employee groups whose employers have been particularly resistant to union organizing (Bronfenbrenner et al. 1998).

Labor's recent organizing involvement among low-income communities brings it into direct contact with traditional community organizers in these same communities. Due to labor's efforts to involve members of low-income communities, organizers increasingly draw upon younger people who practiced organizing in social movements at the neighborhood level (Voss and Sherman 2000). The alliances between labor and community have developed livable-wage standards as an actionable agenda item (Zabin and Martin 1999). The new coalitions have also been critical for overcoming long-standing antagonisms between community and labor activists. The racism and

sexism of many unions, their conflicting goals when it comes to urban renewal and other large construction projects that displace the poor without employing them, and their past indifference to service-sector workers have proved an obstacle to organizing the very workers that the AFL-CIO now recognizes as providing the potential for the highest membership growth.

Living-wage ordinances also help unions by setting norms about prevailing local wage levels. If employers are to compete for workers, they are forced to offer employees higher pay. The living-wage ordinance also empowers unionized city and county workers. In an era of privatization, where unionized public workforces see their numbers dwindling due to outsourcing of their work, forcing contractors to pay living wages to their private employees levels the cost competition between public and private provision of services. Living-wage laws make it less tempting for cities to privatize service provision, thus increasing union bargaining power.

From the labor movement's point of view, the living-wage campaigns are most likely to be successful and sustained when linked with organizing drives, which means even failures in passing legislation can represent labor movement gains. Targeting living-wage proposals to cover employees in firms where employers have blocked workers' attempts to organize attracts labor to the campaigns. In Houston, the ordinance lost citywide but won in low-wage neighborhoods. Moreover, the joint campaign with Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 100 helped the union succeed in its efforts to organize Head Start workers. In New Orleans, the community-labor coalition targeted hotel workers, which then became the focus of an organizing drive by the Hotel and Restaurant Employees (HERE). The New Orleans campaign began in reaction to efforts by hotels, restaurants, and other hospitality industries to block unionization activities led by SEIU. In Santa Monica, the living wage covers employees of major beachfront employers who previously resisted unionization. In Oakland, where the ordinance passed in 1998, the effect was to frighten the Port Authority, which was not covered due to provisions of the city charter. Four years later, in 2002, the living-

wage coalition remobilized to pass Measure I, extending living-wage coverage to port employees.

### *Religious Organizations*

Religious organizations are active in most, but not all, living-wage campaigns. Besides providing occasions for demonstrating visible concern for the welfare needs of the poor and communities of color,

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living-wage campaigns satisfy church organizational maintenance and enhancement needs. They provide opportunities for recruiting and retaining members within the inner-city neighborhoods by making the church relevant to their needs. The campaigns also afford churches opportunities to form alliances with community groups whose membership is partly shared, thus demonstrating solidarity on social and political issues. In addition, the campaigns offer direct community engagement in neighborhoods where their congregations historically have been located, but where large shares of their membership no longer reside.

Congregations and parishes at the neighborhood level are represented city- and countywide by councils of churches or diocese associations that have been particularly active as coalition members. They act as advocacy groups promoting the living wage. They find allies who share their membership, they provide an outlet for direct action for their activist members, and they develop social networks that prove beneficial in their ongoing social service delivery activities.

Besides lending legitimacy and authority to living-wage campaigns, church involvement provides significant contributions to organization building for campaigns. Church involvement allows preexisting congregational resources to be deployed in organizing

efforts and expanded through social network linkages. Churches provide meeting places for campaign organizers and participants, recruit campaign activists from congregational rolls, provide venues for leadership training, offer financial and technical resources, and assist in developing social networks spanning neighborhood to citywide levels.

### *Community Organizations*

National community-based organizations, such as IAF or ACORN, have resources and commitments to devise new and workable strategies for building a social movement of poor people. In addition to the

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potential for living-wage laws to advance their social goals, they greatly benefit from highly visible participation in successful public campaigns such as living-wage efforts. Their legitimacy and funding are derived exclusively from efforts to mobilize community members for desired changes. Unlike churches, they have no other rationale for existence, and, unlike successful unions, they cannot make legal claims to represent workers in formal negotiations over wages and other work issues. Community organizations lack structured opportunities for the maintenance of member participation (such as job sites for unions). Nor do they receive support as a by-product of deeply institutionalized behavior such as church attendance or union dues. Thus, community organizations must be highly responsive to community members' needs as they compete for participation and support.

Perhaps even more so than other coalition members, national

community organizations with local chapters must be entrepreneurs, capable of quickly adopting campaign strategies that have proven successful elsewhere. With generally fewer ties to formal hierarchies and their dependence on street-level participation, community organizations have much to gain from living-wage campaigns, particularly those that generate substantial publicity on their positive contribution.

Several secular developments have also fueled community organization involvement in living-wage campaigns. Among these are the steep reduction in government funding for welfare programs and poverty programs. This move has forced low-income groups to articulate their own agendas from the bottom up and has led to a search for allies from labor and religious organizations in pursuing new agendas. Community organizations' focus on the availability of jobs, the access their members have to the workforce, and the quality of employment (including living-wage standards) have brought them more directly in contact with unions. The early history of living-wage campaigns initiated by ACORN or IAF did not necessarily involve unions. However, this has largely changed with sustained union involvement. Some of the campaigns in which ACORN has been involved were initiated by the national AFL-CIO (e.g., Detroit), some by the CLC (e.g., San Jose), and some by union locals and ACORN together (e.g., Cook County, Illinois), but all ultimately required a joint partnership and commitment of resources.

### *Coalitions*

Coalitions appear to be critical to living-wage victories and, as well, to long-term success. A vast majority of successful campaigns involved a mix of community, labor, and religious organizations. Once adopted, rarely are living-wage ordinances implemented without a struggle led by a supportive coalition. Portland, Oregon, for example, effectively ignored the living-wage ordinance. Without organized monitoring groups, the legislation was not enforced (Reynolds 1999, 76).

Despite numerous successes, there are tensions inherent in coalition building. The concerns that coalition partners have about each other

depend in part upon whether they are small local groups or larger-scale organizations and in part upon whether they represent workers or residents or allies of those who will benefit rather than the primary beneficiaries. The tensions are also a result of the different and conflicting agendas of the allied organizations as well as the history of relations among them. Many unions do not see enough for them in the living-wage campaigns to justify serious or long-term involvement unless the campaigns are directly tied to organizing drives. Nor are the community groups always convinced of the benefits to them (Levi 2001).

For example, in Los Angeles, the CLC initiated living-wage campaigns around two large-scale projects that were receiving public subsidies: the extension of Los Angeles International Airport and the development of Dreamworks. The aim of the labor movement was to ensure living wages not only for the construction workers but also for those involved in the janitorial services, concessions, and other occupations that would result from the projects, and they wanted to ensure job retention for those who joined the unions. Forming a coalition with community groups and churches, the CLC took the campaign to City Hall, where they succeeded in winning a living-wage ordinance and worker retention. However, they still have to ensure that contractors and vendors meet the terms.

The community groups involved were often in disagreement among themselves and with the unions about what protections their members would receive in regard to job and housing from these large-scale projects. The unions, especially those in the building trades, won protections under project labor agreements (PLAs), which are special collective bargaining agreements unique to the building trades, establishing basic terms and conditions for all contractors on a specific construction project. The poor people affected by the projects received no such binding contractual coverage. Nor were the members of the community organizations confident that labor had formed an alliance with them for the long haul. Anthony Thigpenn of AGENDA, a community organization based in south Los Angeles, argues that the labor movement has to demonstrate the strategic and not just tactical advantages of coalitions, and such a demonstration requires a com-

prehensive and long-term regional development plan that serves the interests of both unions and communities (as cited in Levi et al. 1998).

Unions also have their share of concerns about the community organizations and their share of internal conflicts. When the IAF or ACORN are involved from the outset, unions have assurances that there will be allies able to plan and mobilize as full partners. When no such groups exist, the unions become more wary. Moreover, there are real differences of opinion among labor activists about the value of coalition politics. The internationals and the locals are not always in agreement about strategy. Sometimes the impetus comes from one and sometimes from the other; only occasionally are both in agreement. The AFL-CIO national, regional, and metropolitan offices add yet more layers in negotiating strategy. Even among some of the staff of CLCs committed to Union Cities, with its emphasis on regional development and organizing, there is disagreement about the value of living-wage campaigns. Unions have limited resources and must consider trade-offs. Should energy and resources be put into mobilizing for living-wage campaigns or put straight into workplace organizing? When a first contract is under negotiation, should low-wage workers hold out for the higher living wage or settle for salaries lower than those mandated by a living-wage ordinance but still representative of a victory for that local?

### What Has Been Achieved?

As of June 2002, there are more than eighty ordinances on the books, counting precursors in Des Moines, Iowa (1988, amended 1996), and Gary, Indiana (1991). Sixty-five ordinances have passed since Baltimore in 1994, generally considered the first victory in the modern living-wage movement.

Wages range from \$6.15 (New Orleans) to a high of \$12.92 per hour assuming employer pays health benefits, otherwise \$11.42 per hour (Santa Monica). Many are indexed to inflation or to the federally determined poverty level. Job categories covered are generally limited to janitorial, food service, security, hotel, restaurant, and cleri-

cal workers and parking lot attendants. However, a few ordinances include more: Chicago includes home health-care workers and Denver on-site child-care workers.

Thirty-five ordinances principally cover city or county service contractors. Nine cover only some form of economic development subsidy. Twenty-four cover both service contracts and economic development subsidies. Seven ordinances additionally cover some firms leasing land from the city, and one ordinance, Berkeley, extends coverage to all businesses within the Berkeley Marina Zone. Several also cover direct city or county employees in addition to contracts or subsidies recipients.

One ordinance, Santa Monica, requires some employers who have no direct financial relationship with the city to pay a living wage (employers operating within the city's Coastal Zone tourist district with revenues of more than \$5 million a year). Another ordinance, adopted in New Orleans by referendum, extends more broadly in covering all public- and private-sector workers, and thus resembles the more familiar minimum wage. Twenty ordinances cover some nonprofits.

Eleven ordinances include some "jobs" language—for example, job creation goals, targeted community hiring. Two require covered firms to work with community hiring halls to fill jobs created with contracts/subsidies.

Fifty-two ordinances require (or encourage) some form of health benefits. This sometimes implies only that covered firms are expected to meet the health benefit requirement but can also require a wage at a higher percentage of the poverty calculation for firms that do not provide health benefits. Eight include vacation benefits.

Many ordinances include specific labor language having to do with prevailing wage, participation in union apprenticeship programs, prohibitions on use of public money for anti-union activities, worker retention, sick pay, vacation pay, and health care.

In addition to these governmental ordinances, ten universities have at least partly changed their wage or employment practices in response to living-wage campaigns. More than twenty campus campaigns are either in early (five of them) or advanced (sixteen) stages of organiz-

ing. Students have led these efforts, but faculty, alumni, community members, and—in nine out of ten victories—local unions have played important roles. Among those with the strongest gains, such as Cornell, Wesleyan, Harvard, and Stanford, the new policies greatly reflect governmental ordinances in terms of the definitions of a living wage and the level of benefits. At many of the others, the gains have been much more modest (Walker 2002).

Campaigns targeting governmental bodies and those targeting universities exhibit recurrent differences. This paper focuses on the former, but it is important to recognize the existence of the latter.

### Where and How?

In the following paragraphs, we will present summaries of the campaigns for government ordinances for which there is good available material. Information about individual cases is compiled from a variety of sources: ACORN 1998; Zabin and Martin 1999; Nissen 2000; Fine 1998, 2001; Reynolds 1999; Samuel 1999; Gapasin 2001; Eimer 2001; and Ness and Eimer 2001.

#### *Baltimore*

The living-wage campaign in Baltimore was initiated by the preexisting Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD) organization of forty-six churches, affiliated with the Industrial Areas Foundation. BUILD advanced the idea as part of an ongoing effort to rebuild the center city and provide economic justice to marginalized populations. The specific catalyst to a coalition around community development and workplace organizing was the Inner Harbor Development. This large-scale urban project required public subsidy, which in turn depended on support—or, at least, the absence of protest and resistance—from the city's predominantly black population. BUILD created a campaign with highly visible and original public actions (subsidy tours, etc.). An alliance was formed between BUILD and the international American Federation of State, County, and Municipal

Employees (AFSCME), the largest union representing government employees. AFSCME viewed the living wage as a way to stem privatization.

The first step was to encourage Mayor Kurt Schmoke to pass a “right to organize” ordinance, which he helped to do in the summer of 1994. The legislation protects the worker by voiding the contract of a contractor who fires someone for organizing and by hiring the fired person onto the city payroll. The immediate result of this law and the alliance was an intensive joint organizing campaign, especially among building service workers such as janitors, which created an organization of low-wage workers, Solidarity—“a little bit of church, a little bit of union, a little bit of social service, a whole lot of politics!” (Fine 2001, 65).

The next step was a campaign for a living wage pegged to the inflation rate and applicable to city contractors. The campaign exploited existing political divisions and upcoming elections to garner support and fight the business opposition. In December 1994, the living-wage ordinance passed with strong City Council support.

### *Milwaukee*

The living-wage campaign in Milwaukee was led by the Campaign for Sustainable Milwaukee (CSM), created in 1993 by the Milwaukee County Labor Council (MCLC). The CSM represented a broadly based coalition composed of housing activists, environmentalists, community organizers, religious leaders, and third-party activists, but clearly with the MCLC taking the leading role. The broad-based coalition contrasted with prior labor strategies where MCLC picked its battles selectively and only then sought out allies.

The CSM launched its campaign for a living wage in March 1995, using Baltimore’s 1994 ordinance as its model. CSM targeted firms doing business with the city, the county, and the school board to pay a minimum \$7.70 an hour. The campaign itself relied upon grassroots organizing strategies that led to a string of partial successes in which all three units of government adopted a living-wage ordinance. First, the city set its minimum pay for service contract employees at \$6.05

(1995), followed by the school district's setting its baseline wages at \$7.70 (1996) and the county at \$6.25 (1997), all indexed for increases.

Following these successes, the CSM kept the coalition intact, establishing a Workers Rights Board (WRB) to protect workers' rights, whether union or not. The WRB monitors and holds hearings on injustices that workers face on the job and in their communities, and it monitors the three separate living-wage ordinances.

### *Chicago*

ACORN initiated the Chicago campaign by creating a steering committee composed of a wide variety of key organizations, including many unions. The coalition targeted city contracts and financial assistance. A systematic strategy to contact all fifty members of the city council in the fall of 1995 succeeded in bringing thirteen city council members on board in a short time, and by spring of 1996 twenty-six councilors had become cosponsors of the bill. The coalition organized rallies and used substantial political leverage to dissuade Mayor Daley from opposing the law, which he nonetheless did. The coalition, however, continued its high-profile efforts promoting the living-wage law. For example, it extended its range, supporting the attempts of a local company that paid living wages to stay in Chicago.

In the summer of 1997, activists finally pushed for a vote. Daley's opposition held sway and the vote failed. The campaign did not die, however. In the summer of 1998, living-wage advocates linked the living-wage issue with proposed increases in city council and mayoral salaries, and the mayor struck a deal allowing a living-wage law covering city contracts to pass the city council.

### *Los Angeles*

The LA campaign was initiated by local labor working in conjunction with community and religious groups on worker and economic issues. One aspect spurring the effort was the potential loss of hundreds of union jobs at the airport. The Los Angeles Alliance for a New

Economy (LAANE)—created by a local of Hotel and Restaurant Employees to promote a positive climate for low-wage organizing in the LA tourist sector—led the campaign.

LAANE helped found an organization of progressive religious leaders with a focus on economic issues. It recruited neighborhood, community, and union leaders, and organized and involved workers who would be affected by the ordinance. The effort faced concerted business opposition and a hostile mayor. The two-year multilevel campaign spent \$300,000 and required policy development, coalition building, and worker education and mobilization. It created a presence in the streets and at city council meetings. It relied on well-prepared research, patient media strategy, and inside leadership of a progressive city council member. In the spring of 1997, the city council passed the measure unanimously and overrode the mayor's subsequent veto.

### *Boston*

The Boston living-wage campaign grew out of efforts by ACORN to create a labor-community coalition. Politicians warmly received early efforts, but this support evaporated when the mayor came out tentatively against the living-wage idea. This response stimulated more active organizing by the campaign. Escalating public action created strong support from the council and overrode a potential veto. By waiting until it had sufficient support for passage before releasing the actual provisions of the proposal, the campaign was able to outmaneuver the chamber of commerce and other opponents and pass legislation in 1997. The next year, the chamber counterattacked after the vote on legal grounds, the coalition yielded some elements in order to maintain the legislation.

### *San Jose*

Working Partnerships USA (WPUSA), an organization created by the local South Bay Labor Council to “close the low road” while de-

veloping a high road and long-term strategy for restructuring low-wage industries to support families, led the living-wage campaign. WPUSA's campaign integrated research, policy development, grassroots education, and leadership. Together with San Jose State University, it created a local Labor Community Leadership Institute to educate leaders about the politics of local economic development. The campaign also recruited leaders from the WPUSA's preexisting Community Economic Blueprint Project. Participants in the resulting coalition included the Green Party, ACORN, a toxics coalition, an immigrant rights organization, Hispanic and Vietnamese chambers of commerce, and others. Against a business coalition and strong editorializing by the *San Jose Mercury News*, the campaign won support from key city council members and the mayor and the ordinance passed in 1998.

### *Miami/Dade County*

The Miami case is relatively unique in that no vocal business opposition emerged. No one even spoke against it at the county commissioner meeting at which the formal vote was held. But advocates anticipated such opposition and attempted a grassroots campaign. The Community Coalition for a living wage (CCLiving wage) was initiated by the South Florida AFL-CIO and the Human Services Coalition, an organization of service providers to the poor. Following background research, the CCLiving wage held a series of low-key events: breakfasts, open meetings, opinion pieces, and the like. The coalition conducted a campaign that seems amateurish in comparison with other locales. There was no paid staff and little strategic discussion, and regular meetings drew limited attendance. The campaign suffered from sporadic leadership, no budget or treasury, uneven and halting outreach, and very little union involvement until near the end. Mass phone calling, one large public rally, and turnout for the vote constituted the main efforts. In May 1999, with hundreds of supporters watching, the county council voted unanimously in favor of the ordinance.

## *Oakland*

Here, local unions and community organizations created a new social movement organization after their joint efforts won the passage of a living-wage ordinance. ACORN initiated the project, involving unions, other community organizations, and churches, but it also acted independently to highlight the plight of low-wage workers. In response to public actions, city officials began to promote the living-wage idea. In fact, political support moved too fast for local organizers who hadn't solidified coalition or policy, and they asked politicians to slow down the process. The local campaign used models and resources from other cities' struggles (Denver and LA). In the course of the campaign, tension arose between labor and community leaders over leadership and specific policy issues, including first rights to jobs (between ACORN and unions). ACORN used the campaign as a recruitment strategy, while unions saw new points of leverage over firms in the legislation. However, members realized they needed each other, and the coalition held.

After the law was passed by the city council, coalition members moved to formalize their partnership. Subsequently, the HERE local contributed resources for creating the East Bay Alliance for Sustainable Economy (EBASE), an organization similar to LA's LAANE. One of its functions is to monitor living-wage enforcement. But the efforts did not end here. EBASE began organizing an extension of the living-wage policy to the Port of Oakland. It created the Coalition for an Accountable Port, with the agenda driven by unions, ACORN, and local community groups in close proximity. In their report on this case, Zabin and Martin claim that the relationships developed in the first campaign supported the later alliance, and it was particularly crucial in that racial difference between the mostly white unions and the mostly black community neighboring the port could have led to a breakdown.

The EBASE coalition led the campaign for passage of Measure I in 2002, which would apply the living wage to the Port of Oakland, that city's primary employer. Labor unions, community organizations, and churches developed a corps of volunteers who staffed phone

banks, walked the precincts, and “posterred” the city streets. This effort led to a victory in March 2002 when Oakland voters overwhelmingly, by a margin of 78 to 22 percent, approved the living-wage initiative, which provides an inflation-indexed wage rate of \$10.50 without benefits and \$9.37 with benefits to the 1,500 low-wage workers at the port proper. It also requires businesses designated as “port-assisted” to pay these same wage rates, and it guarantees, when a contract at the port changes hands, that existing workers will be retained for ninety days and can be fired only for just cause.

### *New Orleans*

The New Orleans Campaign for a Living Wage (NOCLW) is a coalition of labor, community, and religious groups that began organizing its campaign with an alternative target. Instead of targeting firms holding contracts with the city, NOCLW drafted a living-wage proposal that would cover all workers, except those specifically excluded, and mandate a citywide minimum wage of \$6.15 an hour, indexed to federal inflation figures. The New Orleans wage rate thus is the lowest among adopting cities, but its coverage is much broader than the others. Nearly one-third of employees in New Orleans, about 75,000 people, would receive increases of roughly \$500 to \$2,000 per year. NOCLW also chose not to place the wage proposal before a reluctant city council and mayor. Instead, with ACORN in the lead, it circulated petitions gathering 25,000 signatures calling for a public referendum.

NOCLW made specific appeals to small-business owners for support, arguing that the increased purchasing power of low-wage workers who lived in neighborhoods where small businesses are concentrated would enhance their business activities. More generally, the campaign relied upon a bottom-up, grassroots strategy. Opposition to the minimum wage centered on the organization Small Business Coalition to Save Jobs (SBCST), composed of the chamber of commerce, the Marriott, Hyatt, and Hilton hotel chains, and the Restaurant Association. Opponents first turned to the Louisiana state legislature, which in 1997 passed a law barring local jurisdictions

from setting their own wage floors. Litigation against the living-wage referendum was dismissed as moot by an appeals court because the referendum had not yet occurred. In February 2002, voters in New Orleans approved the living-wage referendum by 63 percent to 37 percent. The nation's first minimum-wage rate within a city had been enacted. Litigation over its constitutionality is expected in the future.

## The Effects of Living-Wage Campaigns and Ordinances

Most studies regarding living-wage laws have addressed the economic effects of the proposed or enacted legislation, and a few consider the nature of the local coalitions and campaigns. We review these in turn and generate a beginning consideration of the factors associated with the success of living-wage campaigns. We end with summary comments reflecting on the available data.

Robert Pollin and Stephanie Luce (1998) suggest that the small size of municipal polities inhibits money-dominated politics and facilitates the impact of advocacy coalitions. They also argue that urban poverty and limited low-wage employment, especially in the face of extensive public subsidies for development, creates opportunity. Other scholars use urban political theory to identify the types of cities in which public subsidies are linked to redistributive measures. Fiscal and economic variables, as well as "residential need," are key factors in this perspective (Goetz 1990; Reese 1998).

Isaac Martin (2001) doubts that the key factors explaining the adoption of living-wage laws are endogenous to cities. Discounting poverty levels and similar economic factors, he argues that political resources available to local labor and community organizations matter, in interaction with national networks that provide policy models and expertise from other cities. Using a logistical regression analysis of the factors affecting whether the cities with populations of 100,000 or more have enacted living-wage laws, he finds that economic factors are not significant and that the interaction between the exist-

ence of an ACORN chapter and union density has a positive and significant effect. His analysis suffers from at least two evident weaknesses. First, the presence of an ACORN chapter is highly correlated with city size, also a positive and significant factor. Thus, the effect of the ACORN variable may be spurious. Second, he suggests that the operative dynamic in living-wage law adoption reflects the isomorphic processes described by sociological new institutionalist theory, in which actors look to other actors for policy models in times of uncertainty and without knowing the full effects of policy options. This interpretation, although plausible, is not supported by any empirical evidence.

There are more problems with the ACORN chapter hypothesis. According to ACORN's Web site, while there are chapters in "more than 30 cities," ACORN-led coalitions have won living-wage ordinances only in "St. Louis, St. Paul, Minneapolis, Boston, Oakland, Denver, Chicago, Cook County, IL and Detroit." That amounts to nine successes affiliated with ACORN chapters, hardly enough to compellingly support an account casting them as the key medium of diffusion and success for what is now more than eighty living-wage successes.

Other scholars focusing on social movements and presenting analyses of individual cases note a number of patterns regarding the nature of successful campaigns. Nearly all living-wage successes involve coalitions that include a broad range of members drawing from labor, community, and religious groups. David Reynolds (1999) suggests that the 1997 Chicago coalition is typical of many coalitions. It had seventy-eight members, including neighborhood organizations, state congressional representatives, a variety of unions, a New Party chapter, a homeless advocacy group, policy centers, the League of Women Voters, religious groups, ACORN, the Democratic Socialists of America, and others.

In many cases, central labor councils have been the key labor player (Luce 2001). The community groups that have been critical in initiating many campaigns are often local chapters of the ACORN and Industrial Area Foundations. In a number of cities, organizations of

religious leaders concerned about local economic issues either initiated the living-wage campaign or were formed in the early stages of campaign building.

The passage of living-wage laws may reflect a diffusion process where a local or regional success legitimates the concept for nearby actors, unions, community organizations, and public officials alike. The geographic cluster of living-wage ordinances suggests a process of inspiration or imitation vis-à-vis nearby cities. For example, California (fifteen), Michigan (nine), Wisconsin (six), and New York (six) account for thirty-six successes—almost half of the total. While California may be at greater “risk” for the passage of living-wage laws due to the number of California cities and municipalities, the other three states combined with Wisconsin (four) account for one-third of the total, not including three cases in New Jersey. It may be possible to model the diffusion of living-wage laws from regional origins, particularly major metropolitan cities. Many of the living-wage cities or counties are not large urban areas and, within a framework of imitative diffusion, are likely to take leads from these regional hubs.

## Conclusion

The impacts of the living-wage movement are multiple and not yet fully understood. It is, however, clearly a movement as judged by the number of coalitions that exist, and it has clearly achieved some notable success. The movement has changed a range of wage-setting practices and is potentially reshaping a number of related labor processes. In addition to the direct effects on workers and their families, the living-wage campaigns have also raised important questions about economic and political practices. Attempts to understand the economic consequences of these laws have stimulated creative rethinking of theoretical and applied issues heatedly disputed regarding minimum-wage policies (e.g., Neumark 2002). In the political sphere, new coalitions, issue framings, and public policies may combine to unsettle existing relationships and offer opportunities for creative policy entrepreneurs to exploit.

Another important effect may be increased cooperation and collaboration between unions and various types of community organizations. Generated in concrete local struggles, the widely shared experiences of positive union-community relationships and, most importantly, of victories may diffuse through these respective networks and facilitate future coalitions beyond the original contexts. By building trust, raising beliefs in joint efficacy, and suggesting new cooperative possibilities, living-wage campaigns may lower future costs and heighten the gains from innovative coalitions and partnerships. The living-wage campaigns demonstrate that coalitions of diverse actors and organizations, while always difficult to build and fragile over time, are possible. The campaigns also illuminate the importance of such coalitions for both winning passage of ordinances and ensuring their implementation. The major significance of the living-wage movement may in fact lie in the construction of coalitions committed to reducing poverty and new strategies for improving the lives of low-wage workers.

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