To comrade Staughton

Immigrants, Unions, and the New U.S. Labor Market

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3 Unions and Immigrant Worker Organizing: New Models for New Workers

In recent years, leaders of the AFL-CIO have provided at least rhetorical support for transnational workers. Yet debates continue to simmer within the labor movement about how unions should relate to immigrant workers. To understand the relationship between unions and transnational workers, both nationally and in New York City, this chapter examines the evolution of AFL-CIO policies on immigration restrictions, amnesty, employer sanctions, and the current crackdown on immigrants (Bacon 2000a; Chishti 2000). It then examines the state of the labor movement in New York City, with particular attention to union strategies for organizing workers in general and immigrant workers in particular. Because these strategies have so far largely failed, the chapter concludes by offering some steps the labor movement can take to become more relevant and more welcoming to transnational workers, as it must in order to revitalize union power in New York City and the United States as a whole.

Labor's Changing Immigration Policies

Most labor unions in the United States have historically viewed immigrants, especially those from Mexico, China, the Caribbean, and Africa, as competitors for jobs and threats to better wages and working conditions. Unions have repeatedly supported immigration restriction, even as the country opened its doors more

widely to entrants from developing regions. In 1986, the AFL-CIO supported the employer sanction provision of the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). The provision requires employers to keep records—I-9 Forms—of workers' immigration status and punishes those who hire undocumented workers. In effect, the act's consequences have been the opposite of its intentions. The government rarely enforces I-9 sanctions against employers. In 2002, it collected only $2.6 million in fines from 320 employers who hired undocumented immigrants. The lack of enforcement of I-9 sanctions provides employers with a powerful weapon to fight the organization of immigrant workers. Facing unionization, employers call in the government to verify the I-9 forms, leading to firings, deportations, and through the replacement of workers, the decimation of workers' fledgling organizations. As a result, the act has encouraged employers to hire even more undocumented workers, thereby increasing the ranks of a vulnerable workforce and undermining the possibilities for unionization. It is no coincidence that many of the industries with high proportions of undocumented workers, including meatpacking, poultry processing, and garment manufacture, were once heavily unionized but are now almost union-free.

Several unions, including the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), the Union of Needletrades, Textile, and Industrial Employees (UNITE), and the United Farm Workers (UFW), understood IRCA's implications at the time of its passage and several more quickly came to see the anachronism of labor's anti-immigration stance.[1] However, the familiar pro-union rationale for exclusion lives on in the work of Vernon Briggs, a labor economist who decries the "extensive presence of illegal immigrants" in recent decades (Briggs 2001, 4). Briggs and his supporters believe that, because undocumented immigrants are vulnerable to deportation, they are more submissive to employers than native-born workers, and therefore more difficult to organize. He argues that unenforced immigration has allowed employers to dominate union and nonunion workplaces alike, thereby contributing to growing disparities in income within the U.S. population. He suggests that unions and U.S. workers should support restrictions on immigration as a means of defending union jobs (1–8).

When this pervasive argument is applied to New York City and other major U.S. cities, it fails to account for significant changes in the economy in the past fifty years. New immigrants have always been a foundation of the New York City labor market and have been essential to the city's economic growth (Department of Planning 1992). As the case studies of labor struggles presented in the following chapters demonstrate, the city's immigrant workers are often *more* militant than its native-born workers. Immigrants in New York's unregulated sector frequently engage in walkouts and sit-down strikes for higher wages and union recognition in the apparel, food service, private transportation, and delivery industries. Contrary to Briggs, immigrant status is not a barrier to unionization. Rather than fight an inhumane battle against immigration, unions should fight for immigrants' rights as workers and unionize them.

Despite these realities, anti-immigration sentiment remains widespread in organized labor. Why did the AFL-CIO reverse course in 2000 by opposing I-9 restrictions on undocumented immigrants and then begin to champion the legal and human rights of immigrant workers as a central part of its national program? The majority of labor leaders finally recognized in hindsight that the draconian policies toward undocumented laborers established by IRCA in 1986 hamstrung those workers' efforts to organize. The labor movement's original support of the I-9 restrictions had been a grievous error.

The labor movement's about-face reflects two important factors—pragmatism by union leaders and pressures from workers and activists. First, the AFL-CIO's shift in position can be seen as a sensible response to its inability to influence federal trade policy, a weakness that was starkly obvious in President Clinton's support for NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) in 1993. The expansion of regional and global free trade sent tremors throughout the labor movement and highlighted the increasing threats to labor's survival in an era of globalization and rising immigration. These threats, combined with the long-term slide in union density, led the AFL-CIO to elect John Sweeney of SEIU as AFL-CIO president in October 1995. His New Voice slate espoused removal of the I-9 sanctions and pledged resources and logistical support to organize immigrant workers.

Still, despite much prodding, it took some four years after Sweeney's election for the AFL-CIO to change course. At its national convention in Los Angeles in October 1999, delegates voted for repeal of the I-9 sanctions (AFL-CIO Executive Council Actions 2000; Greer 2000; Haus 2002). In February 2000, the AFL-CIO went further, calling for comprehensive amnesty for the approximately six million undocumented immigrants currently working and living in the United States. Amnesty would greatly ease the organization and unionization of immigrants (Greenhouse 2000; Greer 2000).

To inaugurate its new policy, the AFL-CIO used the slogan "Recognizing Our Common Bonds," obliquely promoting a new unity between native-born and immigrant workers. The federation alluded to a "joint destiny" to reflect the collective interests of working people and, more importantly, to uphold the importance of labor unions in organizing the newly arrived low-wage workers.

Three years later, to symbolize the importance of immigrant organizing, the AFL-CIO and its affiliates championed the Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride in the fall of 2003. The Freedom Ride of 2003 evoked the Freedom Rides in the South during the early 1960s, which galvanized support for the civil rights movement by challenging racial segregation in public transportation.[2] The objectives of the 2003 rides were not limited to workplace issues and the right to organize, but also included amnesty for undocumented immigrants and an end to discrimination and racial profiling. The coast-to-coast demonstration garnered broad support among immigrants for organized labor—evidenced by the tens of thousands attending public rallies—at a time when the government had been bearing down on them in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks.

The Freedom Ride of 2003 was important in shaping public opinion, energizing immigrants to organize, and countering opponents' efforts to characterize undocumented immigrants as a dangerous social burden. The event demonstrated to the public that immigrants work hard at low wages, stimulate the economy, and pay taxes. The absence of a clear, fair government policy on undocumented immigrant workers adds to their uneasiness and insecurity, which helps companies to exploit them. Precisely because

the U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (BCIS) continues to threaten deportation, immigrants can be intimidated into working at low wages under intolerable conditions without complaining publicly. Because some immigrants can be arbitrarily deemed security risks to federal authorities due to their ethnic background, they are also wary of reporting poor working conditions to public authorities.

The second factor in the AFL-CIO's reversal of its immigration policy was pressure from workers and activists in the labor movement (Haus 2002; Watts 2002). As union leaders came to recognize that organized labor lacked the power to halt immigration, immigrant workers and their supporters began to push labor leaders toward a new stance on government restrictions. More and more employers were penalizing these workers for complaining about working conditions, mobilizing protest, and trying to organize into labor unions (Greenhouse 2000; Swoboda 2000). Recognition of the importance of immigrants to union-organizing campaigns in the 1990s helped to change organized labor's position to support repeal of the 1986 IRCA law penalizing undocumented workers. Employers facing immigrant-organizing drives regularly called in the INS and the Social Security Administration as a means to break worker unionization campaigns. When employees of Bear Creek Production Company of Bakersfield, California—the world's largest rose grower—tried to organize a union, the company turned more than one thousand personnel records in to the INS, and three hundred immigrants found to be undocumented were terminated by the company. In Northern California, the Labor Immigrant Organizers Network, a coalition of immigrant rights activists, protested the Social Security Administration's frequent audits of immigrant records. Indeed, growing militancy and pressure among undocumented workers was helpful in pushing the AFL-CIO—as several national leaders in the federation finally recognized that the 1986 IRCA law was not protecting worker rights—to support repeal of the employer sanctions provision of the law.

The growing number of undocumented immigrants in traditionally unionized industries has obliged many unions to reassess their long-standing practices of excluding foreign-born workers and has compelled a growing number of unions to develop organizing

strategies directed at these workers. In September 1999, even before the AFL-CIO adopted its new policy to encourage immigrant organizing and oppose government penalties and restrictions on undocumented workers, the New York City Central Labor Council (NYC-CLC) and affiliated unions identified immigrants as a primary target for new organizing. As noted in Chapter 1, unions in New York City have had to welcome new immigrants. Recognizing that transnational workers may help to rebuild the labor movement in metropolitan New York City, the NYC-CLC made immigrant rights a vital part of its program. On October 4, 2003, the labor council sponsored a rally of tens of thousands of people at the last stop of the coast-to-coast Immigrant Workers Freedom Ride in Flushing Meadows Park in the borough of Queens, home to the largest new immigrant population in the city (Greenhouse 2003).

But while New York City unions have enthusiastically raised the banner of organizing new immigrants, up until now, few have successfully organized transnational workers into their ranks. For example, the SEIU has accelerated its campaigns to organize building maintenance and health care workers, the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) have initiated campaigns to incorporate low-wage immigrant workers in the hospitality industry into their international union. In the late 1990s, UNITE recruited immigrant laundry workers through several high-profile organizing campaigns throughout the country and by capturing control of workers in the independent Textile Processors Union. In July of 2004, UNITE and HERE merged to form a single more powerful international union—UNITE HERE—that as a combined entity would have greater resources and clout to wage successful organizing drives.

These industry-based campaign victories may be considered only a drop in the bucket, but they are important in demonstrating the renewed interest in immigrants and the renewed will of the unions to organize immigrants. Still, only a minority of national unions have devoted significant resources to recruitment and organizing campaigns. Organizing failures among immigrant workers have occurred for three reasons: (1) the absence of will, evident in the limited resources and staff that unions have dedicated to organizing, (2) a minimal understanding of the restructured

immigrant labor markets that have displaced traditional ones, and (3) the legal barriers to organizing workers in general and immigrants in particular.[3] In part due to organized labor's inadequate efforts, immigrants are organizing among themselves—with or without unions—inside and outside labor law—into various types of labor organizations to defend their rights on the job. Immigrants, to a great extent, are pushing organized labor to take action.

The New York City Labor Movement and Transnational Workers

Despite recognizing that organizing transnational workers is essential, most New York City unions have exhibited an ambivalent reaction to recent new immigrants. Only a few unions have attempted to organize. The reasons for this lie in the particular contexts of the New York City labor movement that is comprised of three dominant sectors: construction and building trades, private sector production and services, and public sector and nonprofits.

Since the late nineteenth century, leadership over organized labor in New York City was dominated by craft-oriented construction and building trade unions that survived through restricting membership to ethnic and racial cohorts as a means of controlling wages and labor standards. Construction unions have maintained a hold on high-wage large-scale projects in the central business districts and public construction projects as immigrant workers from Eastern Europe and Latin America concentrate in lower-wage small projects, rehabilitation, demolition, and hazardous waste removal (Kieffer and Ness 1998).

Since the 1970s, private sector manufacturing in New York City, once dominated by the garment and printing unions, has been in freefall decline as garment production has moved offshore and new technology has displaced workers in the printing industry. Since garment production is based on piecework, membership in the garment unions has further declined due to the marginal wage differentials between union and nonunion sectors. Despite much ballyhooed anti-sweatshop campaigns, most remaining union and nonunion garment producers continue to employ new East Asian

and Mexican immigrants on a piecework basis that fails to lift wages above the minimum.

While manufacturing has largely disappeared since the 1970s, services have grown sharply and have created a demand for low-skill, low-wage workers (Feránandez-Kelly and Sassen 1991). Unions have maintained a presence in building maintenance, supermarkets, and narrow segments of the service industry, but their density in the industries has eroded. In other traditional private service sectors—taxi drivers, retail trade, and hospitality industries, traditional union membership has all but vanished. In the last thirty years, private-sector services have become integral to the New York City postindustrial economy.

Economic restructuring has fostered informal jobs where people work off-the-books, under-the-table, are paid in cash, and are not taxed. Features of the informal service sector include self-employment, casual labor, and lack of regulation. In the last three decades there has been a new growing reliance of primary services on informal sector workers in domestic services and child care, security, taxis, private transportation, delivery, food preparation, vending, and other nonunion consumer service jobs. As a rule, the new "low road" service sectors forms part of the informal economy.

Two contradictory characteristics come together in New York City. It is an international financial center and also a union town with a long history of labor activism (Freeman 2000). On one hand, as a center of global finance, the city epitomizes the predatory nature of capital, which has instituted economic policies that are displacing traditional workplace norms and standards in the United States. On the other hand, many consider New York a working-class city, based on its past history of labor activism and high union membership. In 2003, 24.5 percent of workers in New York City were union members, nearly twice the national rate of 13 percent (Hirsch and Macpherson 2004).

This relatively high union density in New York City is largely a product of past labor conflict, from apparel industry organizing in the early twentieth century to public sector organizing in the 1950s and 1960s. However, since the 1970s, union membership has not grown, except in the health care industry. Today's unions are mere vestiges of the city's illustrious labor-organizing past. While

New York has more unions and higher density than most large U.S. cities, union membership is falling precipitously as the economy shifts from manufacturing to services and immigrants replace native-born workers. Union membership has dropped sharply, from about two million in 1975 to about one million today. Despite the decline, the total number of unions in the city has remained roughly the same. The city now has about four hundred union locals in the public and private sectors, representing workers in both declining and growing labor markets. Though unions may lose members, merge, and consolidate, they rarely shut their doors.

To a great extent, the maze of unions in New York City mirrors the decentralized and fragmentary nature of industries that have emerged, expanded, and faded away. Unlike Akron, Detroit, Houston, Pittsburgh, Seattle, and other cities, New York has never had a single industry dominating its economy. Instead, the city's industrial labor markets have developed piecemeal, as small and medium-sized shops have grown up in distinct industrial areas. As a result, unions have commonly had to focus on trades and labor markets, rather than on single firms.

Labor-market organizing is significantly harder than factory-based organizing, however, because it necessitates reaching out to workers at many firms with many owners. As noted in Chapter 2, specialized industrial areas ameliorated some of the obstacles created by the dispersion of workers among many small firms (Dubofsky 1968; Freeman 2000). But since the 1970s, this pattern of industrial organization has begun to unravel as manufacturing has moved abroad and local businesses have moved to new locations in the New York metropolitan area to escape high real estate costs.

Today, the largest unions in New York City are those in the public and private sectors whose members depend directly or indirectly on local and state government funding for their jobs. These include uniformed service workers (police, fire, and sanitation), nonuniformed service employees (municipal employees of all types, and health care and public hospital workers), transit workers, and teachers. Even unions that represent healthcare workers in private hospitals rely on state funding. New York is beginning to reflect the rest of the nation: Private-sector unionism is declining rapidly

and public-sector unions are the mainstay of organized labor.[4] This decline in private-sector unionism largely reflects the restructuring of industry and the emergence of nonunion, nonstandard jobs that are often filled by immigrants.

New York still has a range of private-sector unions, both in the declining manufacturing industries and in the emerging service businesses. The oldest unions in the city are remnants of craft unions in the building and construction trades, printing, and arts and entertainment. Although most unions in the private sector originated in New York City itself, in the 1990s several national unions began recruiting workers in the growing sectors of the city's economy—health care, hospitality industries, and industrial laundries. In cities dominated by several large firms, national unions command labor-management relations; in New York, local unions tend to have more control, negotiating directly with the small and medium-sized firms that comprise the lion's share of industry.

Unlike most national unions that represent workers in specific industrial sectors, New York's unions tend to include members from a wide range of industries. Unions tend to compete in the service sector by reaching into new labor markets that no union has organized or that have been organized by unions in other occupational jurisdictions. For example, in New York, the United Auto Workers (UAW) represents office workers at public institutions, public service lawyers, writers, publishing employees, and it competes with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) in organizing graduate student employees and adjunct professors. The International Longshoreman's Association (ILA) represents Domino sugar processing workers and grocery workers. Locals of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) represent workers at the Red Cross, United Parcel Service, New School University, and small manufacturing companies. The International Association of Machinists (IAM) represents car drivers as well as airline workers. Locals of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) represent employees at supermarkets, greengroceries, restaurants, food processors, discount retail stores, and drugstore chains.

The ethnic and racial composition of unions in New York City is changing significantly as new members enter union jobs and others are organized. As a rule, workers entering low-skill and low-wage

jobs tend to be new immigrants of color while those in high-wage professional jobs remain largely white. The shift from white workers to immigrants of color is happening in the majority of unions, but predominantly among unskilled workers. The membership of the UFCW and HERE is increasingly comprised of new immigrants as older workers retire. Even the construction industry—long dominated by Irish and Italian Americans—is changing as immigrants from Latin America and Eastern Europe enter the industry.

New York City affiliates of the national unions with sustained organizing campaigns tend to focus on labor markets in which immigrant workers are increasing rapidly. National unions that have expanded membership in some local unions are HERE, the Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA) in construction, the SEIU in building maintenance and health care, and UNITE in industrial laundries. However, because most new immigrants typically work in small shops, unions tend to ignore them, preferring firms with larger numbers of employees. UNITE has neither the resources nor the will to organize new Mexican immigrants washing and folding clothes in a small corner laundry. While immigrants tend to be employed in larger laundries too, the vast majority of workers are dispersed throughout the city in small shops. To meet the needs of new immigrants, unions must tangibly support organizing efforts at small shops as well as at larger establishments.

Some locals have ignored workers they might logically have sought. For decades, SEIU Local 32B-32J took no notice of immigrant service workers in buildings it had not organized, until the international union put the local into trusteeship in the mid-1990s. Local 100 of HERE also overlooked restaurant workers until put into trusteeship. Some locals have been stained by corruption and put into trusteeship by the government or their national unions. LIUNA locals connected to organized crime have traded union hazardous-waste jobs for money (Keiffer and Ness 1998).

The sheer number and diversity of New York unions formed over the past century produces fierce inter-union rivalries that present potential obstacles to organizing new members and make it hard for new unions to take root. Arrays of unions who are struggling to stay viable compete for immigrant workers outside the declining manufacturing sector. Given this competition, one can question whether unions help or hinder efforts to improve conditions for immigrants. This question is not new. In the early twentieth century, unions shunned new immigrants from Eastern Europe, Southern Europe, and East Asia on the basis of ethnic chauvinism, while craft unions fought to block the establishment of unions in basic industry, where most immigrant workers found themselves.

Competition among New York unions with long histories limits the possibilities for new unions, to represent new groups of employees in emerging industries, because unions protect their jurisdictions, even if they don't organize them. If one union with little or no history in one industrial sector organizes workers in another, it is frequently considered an act of aggression, as was the case when UNITE organized beer distribution truck drivers in the late 1990s. Organizing drives initiated by workers tend to be channeled into the Byzantine web of unions that has developed over the past hundred years. For example, it is difficult for independent organizing efforts to develop when a supermarket union guards its turf. Existing unions will frequently seek to gain the goodwill of workers by appropriating the independent organizing efforts by others.

Moreover, unions that no longer organize new members often stymie workers' organizing efforts in their jurisdictions for fear that the new workers may gain sway over their organizations. The rapidly growing undocumented immigrant population in New York City exerts a significant influence on unions' primary labor markets and on decisions to organize in these markets. Organizing recent immigrants is such a new endeavor, and the legal environment so volatile, that union organizers have little experience upon which to draw. Still, because many undocumented immigrants work in industries that are targeted by unions—building services, industrial laundries, health care, and delivery services—union leaders serious about increasing membership consider it crucial to work with immigrant activists.

Support for immigration among unions and in the general population is more resilient, broad-based, and bipartisan in New York City than at the federal level. Elected officials, even the conservative former Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, have regularly backed new immigrants and favored continued migration to the city. In January 1997, Giuliani, a Republican, convened an Immigration Coalition—a

business and community group—to oppose Republican-sponsored federal legislation that discriminated against legal immigrants by denying them disability benefits, food stamps, welfare, and other federal benefits (Giuliani 1997).

To protect the rights of transnational workers, New York City has a long-standing policy, begun under Democratic mayor Edward I. Koch in 1989, that prohibits city employees from sharing information on immigration status with federal agencies, including the United States Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services, except in criminal cases. That policy, which was continued under another Democratic mayor, David Dinkins, and his Republican successors, Rudolph Giuliani and Michael Bloomberg, was ostensibly invalidated by the 1996 Immigration Reform Law, which increased penalties on illegal immigrants. Hoping to avoid compliance with the 1996 law, the city unsuccessfully sued the U.S. government.

Nationwide public opinion regarding immigration grew more favorable for a time and buoyed optimism among immigrant workers hoping to gain amnesty. However, in the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the U.S. government significantly slowed its efforts to create a coherent policy that would give amnesty to immigrants and create a guest worker program. The failure to establish a coherent national policy has fueled resentment in immigrant communities. Officially, New York City maintains a generally hospitable policy toward immigrants, despite the rise in individual hate crimes after September 11 (see Chapter 7 for a discussion of the effect of 9/11 on new immigrants).

Notwithstanding their ideological components, these shifting attitudes and policies do not eliminate the self-interest that drives most leaders. Politicians want to win elections, employers want a steady supply of cheap labor, and unions want more members and greater influence.

Local unions in New York City have responded, both conceptually and in practice, to the challenges posed by unrestrained immigration. For unions, the key factor in mobilizing immigrants is defending workers through reducing worker competition in labor markets and shielding workers from exploitation. The severe exploitation of transnational workers, many of whom perform jobs that were once unionized, exerts a widespread pernicious effect,

lowering the living standards of native-born workers, depressing overall wages, undermining workplace safety, and hindering union organizing. Yet these workers are now an integral part of the U.S. economy (Sassen 1991).

In recent decades, labor leaders have increasingly recognized the connection between the growth of low-wage, nonunion jobs and the rising number of undocumented immigrants. For unions, undocumented transnational workers present a paradox: They depress wages, yet they are ripe for organizing. Over the past twenty years the labor movement, perhaps shortsightedly, has emphasized the former (Delgado 1994). Today, however, unions in California, Florida, New York State, and Texas are beginning to see immigrants as potential members (Milkman 2000; Milkman and Wong 2000).

On the whole, New York unions recognize that immigrants account for a large and growing proportion of workers in the primary labor markets in which they represent workers. Between 1985 and 2000, Latino immigrants increased from 22 percent to 32 percent of primary union labor markets; Asian immigrants grew from 7 to 12 percent; West Indian and African immigrants increased from 7 to 11 percent. During the same fifteen years, the ranks of recent Eastern European immigrants remained at 11 percent. Surprisingly, union leaders do not seem to notice the disparity between the current ethnic makeup of New York City and the ethnic composition of most unions, which reflects the city's workforce of a generation ago more than it does its current composition. More and more, union leaders reflect the composition of members of two or three generations ago. Most New York labor leaders recognize transnational workers' importance to their unions' survival and growth, but few have launched sustained campaigns to organize them.

With varying degrees of success, HERE, LIUNA, SEIU and UNITE are converging on organizing immigrants. Each of these national unions is concentrating on firms and labor markets with many workers. Unions typically prefer to devote their resources to large establishments, where recognition agreements would bring in many new members, rather than organize a few small businesses. No national union has yet expended the considerable resources needed to organize the overwhelming majority of service workers

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at the small and medium-sized firms that are the hallmark of the city's economy.

Revitalizing the Union Movement

How can labor respond to the corporate restructuring that has severely eroded U.S. wage and workplace standards? Unions have increasingly lost power. In the process, they have lost credibility with workers by making concessions in bargaining with management and by referring workers' grievances to regional and national officers instead of challenging employers directly in the workplace. Unions are reluctant to take militant actions such as strikes, fearing they are too weak to win and that defeat may threaten their survival. Labor leaders take the easy road instead. Wedded to predictable, conservative practices geared to workplace stability, union officials defuse the power of the rank and file, promoting cynicism among workers about the prospects of organizing to improve their conditions. Workers know that such attempts to organize will be scotched by both the management and the union.

In New York City, organized labor cannot revitalize itself unless it is willing to risk diminishing its power and embark on a sustained social protest movement that encompasses the broader working class—which includes immigrant workers employed in the new economy. Devoid of a membership that actually reflects the dramatically changing nature of the working class, organized labor in New York will lose its relevance to most workers, weakening its already-diminished influence in shaping state and local labor policies and state spending crucial to those workers' survival. To sustain and perhaps rebuild the local labor movement, far-sighted leaders inside and outside of organized labor must challenge the existing system. Such a movement must contend with labor leaders who seem at times to fear their own members—and potential new immigrant members—more than they fear management. Many unions have rhetorically adopted the progressive AFL-CIO platform embracing immigrants. But few are willing to put it into practice by devoting adequate resources to organizing transnational workers, fighting employers' abuses of them, and engaging immigrant workers in direct action, both in the workplace and in the political sphere. Some unions may even take action, but they do so without consulting the workers who have the most to risk.

To resuscitate the union movement, labor must adopt an organizing model that fosters workers' participation in problem solving and collective action, not just during bargaining. To avoid becoming relics, traditional unions will have to promote autonomous organizing among workers in their labor markets and encourage them to form their own, parallel, rank-and-file organizations. Unions have much to teach and learn from workers—members and nonmembers, immigrant and native-born alike—about how to engage in collective action to advance the political and economic power of working people.

To encourage participation, labor organizations of all kinds must educate workers about their rights and limitations within the capitalist system that has become even more exploitative in the last thirty years. They must help develop workers' skills and nurture new leadership by sharing information and communicating openly. To promote immigrant involvement, unions must decentralize their structures and encourage the creation of novel organizations that can represent new workplaces in ways that old structures cannot. Unions must be independent of management and must listen to, and learn from, workers' dissent and militancy, rather than ignoring or resisting it. While the labor movement is constrained by a political and economic climate that is hostile to workers' rights, conventional bureaucratic unions have themselves become an impediment to autonomous labor organizing.

Because employers are using immigrants to undermine labor standards, not just in the Third World, but also in the United States, unions need to develop the will and the capacity to support the struggles of transnational workers. While immigrant workers in New York are geographically dispersed, they have a strategic advantage because they typically work in labor markets that are shaped by employer and worker social networks. Clustered together in the same labor niches, with limited connections to mainstream U.S. society, immigrants can build camaraderie and class consciousness, as illustrated in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Because transnational workers have few external bonds and little time to acquire them, they depend heavily on

the social networks that emerge within segregated workplaces. Segmentation on the basis of identity—color, nationality, ethnicity, and gender—is a valuable source of potential solidarity as it has been among garment, mining, and public service workers in previous generations. But even among immigrants who do not share such identities, social exclusion tends to build deeper, sturdier relationships on the job than those among native-born workers.

To gain influence among immigrant workers, union leaders must recognize that the current workplace blends old and new social ties that may diverge greatly from those within their own organizations, which were formed decades ago to protect different workers in different labor markets. Unions must become more flexible about organizing and collective bargaining and embrace social-network unionism that appeals to diverse workers and workplaces. National unions must also foster the organization of autonomous locals reflecting the ties among workers. Those locals would not be based purely on identities like ethnicity or country of origin, but could also grow from labor-management struggles in the relentlessly changing workplace.

A positive trend seen in current organizing drives by national unions is the changing of jurisdictional boundaries. More unions in low-wage manufacturing and service industries seek to organize workers beyond their old industrial bases. Indeed, unions may need to expand their traditional boundary lines further in order to organize immigrant workers. Fresh leadership by workers in new industries under old jurisdictional boundaries is the key to modern union organizing. However, as we will see, boundary disputes may still staunch efforts to promote worker participation and discourage the emergence of new rank-and-file leaders.

For its part, grassroots immigrant workers' organizing often lacks the resources, muscle, and staying power that national unions can provide and tends to occur on a smaller, more local scale. While grassroots worker control is clearly preferable to centralized control imposed by large unions, small units may not permit transnational workers to successfully challenge employers. To succeed, local strategies must account for the might of corporate globalism.

The next three chapters reveal grassroots organizing by transnational workers in three different labor markets in New York City: the mobilization of Mexican greengrocery and deli workers, the mobilization of West African supermarket workers employed by labor contractors, and the organization of Asian black-car drivers against fleet owners. Union responses differ from case to case. A union may opportunistically compel workers back under its jurisdiction, deliberately ignore workers in restructured labor markets, or fail to help workers form an entirely new, independent local to represent the members' interests rather than those of the broader union. The three case studies show that organizing tends to originate in the workplaces and percolate up to established unions. Even some unions that seldom organize can benefit from "hot shops" already organized by transnational workers, who then appeal to unions for assistance. On the rare occasions when employers do not resist organizing, unions may assist in the legal process of gaining recognition and negotiating collective bargaining agreements.

New transnational workers are not only seen as foreigners by U.S. society in general but are frequently treated as outsiders within labor unions in the industries in which they work. These workers are frequently trapped by inter-union conflicts and by the jurisdictions of national and local unions protecting their turf in the labor movement. As technology and the nature of work change, union leaders lose not only their demographic ties to workers in their traditional industries but their connection to the culture of the work.

One cannot assume that transnational workers will be organized into existing unions. In fact, the period of large-scale immigration from the 1880s through the early 1920s witnessed the creation of specific ethnic and national union structures, particularly among garment and mining workers. Today, the slogan "Si Se Puede" (Yes We Can) is both a union slogan and the cry of Mexican immigrants seeking self-respect in the United States. Organized labor would benefit from a renewed discussion of the many possible forms of inclusion beyond traditional bureaucratic unions that give little autonomy to workers.