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Unions in Waterloo, Iowa: How organization, political activism, and community outreach led to the rise and fall of organized labor, 1947-1990

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UNIONS IN WATERLOO, IOWA: HOW ORGANIZATION, POLITICAL ACTIVISM,
AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH LED TO THE RISE AND FALL OF
ORGANIZED LABOR, 1947-1990

An Abstract of a Thesis
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Dylan Christian Krauter Keller

University of Northern Iowa

December 2016

ABSTRACT

I will explore the three foundations for union strength and success that were present in Waterloo: organization and representation, political activism/awakening, and community outreach. Unions' solidarity and strength can be attributed to these foundations, but they also created limitations that led to the local unions' decline in Waterloo.

Part I focuses on the relationship between organization and representation and the political awakening in 1947. It argues that Waterloo unions' political activism from 1947 to 1964 expanded the local's presence in the community. Campaigning, electing candidates who were members of a union, and developing a labor agenda resulted in positive growth for the locals. After the election of 1964, labors' new found majority with the Democrat Party resulted in limited policy changes. It splintered the locals' shared political agenda that weakened Waterloo unions' solidarity in the community.

Part II looks at the third foundation, community outreach. It argues the UAW Local 838 "Brown Bag" Committee, a social aid organization, did more than provide food for needy community members. It served a social and cultural role in the community during the severe economic downturn of the 1980s. Having exposed this problem, the union was eventually replaced in solving it, by a better funded agent of the local government. Waterloo unions' built a foundation from organization and representation, political activism, and community outreach that was successful throughout the twentieth century. However, that success led to members diminishing the collectiveness of the

union, along with the impacts of the Cold War, the Great Society, the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War, contributed to the decline of labor in Waterloo.

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This Study by: Dylan Christian Krauter Keller

Entitled: Unions in Waterloo, Iowa: How Organization, Political Activism, and
Community Outreach Led to the Rise and Fall of Organized Labor, 1947-1990.

has been approved as meeting the thesis requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts in History

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Dr. Brian E. Roberts, Chair, Thesis Committee

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Dr. John W. Johnson, Thesis Committee Member

Date

Dr. Thomas G. Connors, Thesis Committee Member

Date

Dr. Kavita R. Dhanwada, Dean, Graduate College

I would like to dedicate this work to the team who I had the utmost honor to work with in developing and building the John Deere Tractor & Engine Museum in Waterloo, IA:
Cathey Brown, Lynn Geiger, Rosa P. Grant, Dawn R. Hendershot, Annette Scherber,
Cynthia Sweet, and Joshua Waddle.

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I would like to thank my family and friends who have been a stable support through my entire life: my parents, Gary and Kristi, and sisters, Stefani and Traci. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my late grandparents Christian and Vesta Lowenberg Krauter who inspired me to pursue history and follow my “curiosity bug” through research.

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INTRODUCTION

Gene Condon, former President of the UAW Local 838, recalled in a 1981 interview his first encounter with unions after returning to work from military service in 1948. He stated:

The headlines in every paper you'd pick up would be talking about communism within the CIO. I'd never worked where there was a union prior to that time, and when I started at the plant the departmental steward talked to me every day and tried to get me to join the union. And I says, "I wouldn't have any part of the communistic rats," and just didn't want any part of it. I was fresh out of service. He talked to me every day, and three weeks later I finally joined the union. I told him, "I'm going to every single union meeting, and I'm going to be looking for Communists." And, you know, after thirty-three years of being active in the local and attending every meeting and attending meetings all over the country, I've yet to see my first Communist.¹

Condon's memory after thirty-three years showed the influence of Cold War politics on Waterloo and across the nation. The United States, during the 1950s thru 1970s, faced unrest and social angst. President Lyndon B. Johnson's introduced his "Great Society" platform, the Civil Rights Movement swept through the South, and the Vietnam War sparked protests across the country. The nation shifted by the 1970s with the rise of the New Right and conservative leaders and industries shift to the Sun Belt region.² By the early 1980s, most blue-collar cities, including Waterloo, faced a severe economic downturn. Industries closed production and moved South or overseas causing

¹ Gene Condon, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, June 11, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa.

² Paul Buhle, *Taking Care of Business: Samuel Gompers, George Meany, Lane Kirkland, and the Tragedy of American Labor* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999), 2-4.

unemployment to rise.³ These movements and national events questioned the community's stability along with organized labor's future existence.

Waterloo has been a "Factory City" due to its many industries. The most prominent of which were Rath Packing Company and Waterloo Gasoline Engine Company, later incorporated into its current name, the John Deere Waterloo Works. Both organizations struggled to unionize, and by the outbreak of World War II each had established a strong local union presence through the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA) and the United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America; International Union (UAW), respectfully.⁴ Other trades and crafts workers also organized in the early twentieth-century, transforming Waterloo's "factory city" into a "union city" where union locals became tied to the community. In Waterloo, these included the city's barbers, bartenders, fire fighters (IAFF), electricians (IBEW), carpenters, Teamsters, and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).

Unions, specifically the UPWA Local 46 and UAW Local 838, grew and flourished in Waterloo throughout the fifties and sixties. They succeeded in three key areas that made each a strong and successful union. The first priority of a union is to be a strong bargaining agent for its members in order to produce a strong contract between the worker and management. Local 46 and Local 838 solidified their strength after lengthy

³ Shelton Stromquist, *Solidarity & Survival: An Oral History of Iowa Labor in the Twentieth Century* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 11.

⁴ Sister John Marie Daly, "History of Unionization in Waterloo, Iowa" (master's thesis, Creighton University, 1962), 3, 18-19.

and continuous strikes in 1948 at Rath and 1950 at John Deere. Their solidarity led to new long-term contracts focused on workplace safety, employee benefits, and wage increases.

Political activism or sense of awakening also stimulated Waterloo unions' strength and success. It arose during the 1947 right to work debate, at the state and federal levels, prompting union leaders and members to become politically active for their own advancement. The rise of political activism created a unified labor agenda focused on electing pro-labor candidates and labor leaders to political office in Des Moines and Black Hawk County, including Waterloo – the county seat, which culminated in the 1964 election. Political activity provided a secondary responsibility for the union beyond contractual negotiations and grievances. The third area is community outreach. An active union needs the community's support for it to be strong and successful. In Waterloo, Local 838 and Local 46 provided programs and committees to improve the social welfare of the community and address problems that were not being addressed by the city. These programs assisted youth, race relations, food shortages, medical necessities, and layoffs. Organization, political activism, and community outreach were the three key areas foundational to Waterloo unions' strength and success.

This foundation promoted growth, but divided the workforce from the union. By the mid-sixties, the United States faced unrest from the rise of anti-Vietnam protest, the struggle for civil rights, and the continuous threat of nuclear war. The success of a three- or five-year contract agreements resulted in inactivity of union members between negotiations. By not bargaining every year, the question - what role does a union play

between negotiations – arose. One answer to that question was political activism. Union membership increased its involvement in political campaigns and voter turnout in state and local elections. It created a unified political agenda. However, it peaked after the election of 1964. Union locals' succeeded in electing local and state candidates favorable to labor's agenda. That success, however, did not equal legislative results. Differing interest from local and national union leaders led to the splintering of labor's collective agenda. Even the union locals' success in providing social welfare programs were diminished after being displaced by city led programs or third-party institutions.

Labor historians have not primarily focused on the relationship between union locals and the community it represents. Their research generally focuses on the rise and the fall of unions from the Gilded Age to the rise of what scholars call neoliberalism in the 1980s. Few explore the cultural and social connections between union locals and their communities or look at the way these connections influence labor's success or failures. My research focusses on the political, social and cultural forces that connected Waterloo's local unions to the community. Union locals were active in Waterloo, most notably from 1950s to 1990s, focused on political involvement and providing social welfare services. Some of the social programs sponsored by the Waterloo locals include: youth programs - Boy and Girl Scouts Troops, the Boys & Girls Club, YMCA camps, and Teenage Jive Joint; minority institutions - Crosby Center, and Equal Employment Commission; elderly programs; and general welfare programs – the free community

blood bank, food drives, and the United Way/United Appeal/Community Chest.⁵ Unions held positive association with the community of Waterloo, in part, because of its work providing and supporting these types of programs. However, this relationship deteriorated through the late-twentieth century due to three factors. First, union locals splintered its unified political agenda after the Democrat landslide election in 1964. This left Waterloo divided between the multiple locals seeking influence in the community and a Democrat Party regaining prominence in Iowa. Second, labor unions spearheaded many social programs addressing issues not being handled by the city of Waterloo. When the city took over responsibility of the unions' sponsored programs, the locals were relegated from its leadership role. This diminished union's presence in the community. Third, the 1980s opened with a downturn in the economy that forced labor to withdraw from the community in order to sustain services for its members. These factors greatly impacted the success Waterloo unions experienced in the 1950s through 1990s, along with national events, that led to the unions' decline.

The term "community" is defined as a city or town of people who actively recognize their common culture, technological, institutional, and economical traits. Historiographical analysis of local influences on unions heavily focuses on political

⁵ A. W. "Rusty" Lubert and Ruth Lubert, Waterloo, Joint Interview by Merle Davis, July 2, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 18-37.; Paul M. Larsen, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 15, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 33-36.; Roosevelt Taylor, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 8, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 11-15.; Shelton Stromquist, *Solidarity & Survival: An Oral History of Iowa Labor in the Twentieth Century* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 294-299.

context. Some historians argue that unions' power comes from the locals rather than being national leaders. They suggest that the absence of local leadership is a key reason for the decline of labor by the 1980s. Gordon L. Clark uses this analysis in *Union and Communities Under Siege: American Communities and the Crisis of Organized Labor* (1989). He argues that industrial unions, during the latter portions of the Cold War Era, faced increased hostility due to the notion that "unions are accountable for the prosperity (or lack thereof) of communities and regions across the United States." Clark suggests that the "crisis of organized labor is more than the loss of membership." He traces labor's decline to a local realization that "the welfare of unions is no longer consistent with the welfare of communities."⁶ His research presents an opportunity to re-explore the fundamental elements that were consistent between a community and the local unions and how they shifted during the strong and turbulent years of the mid- to late-twentieth century.

Gary M. Fink supports Clark's interpretation. He also challenges research on the AFL and concepts of voluntarism arguing that while these studies are accurate at "portraying the convictions of the AFL leadership, they largely fail to reflect the attitudes of local and state labor leaders."⁷ He suggests that local labor was more successful than its national leaders due to its focused responsibilities:

⁶ Gordon L. Clark, *Unions and Communities Under Siege: American Communities and the Crisis of Organized Labor* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 241.

⁷ Gary M. Fink, *Labor's Search for Political Order: The Political Behavior of the Missouri Labor Movement 1890-1940* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1973), 165.

Local labor was much closer to react to immediate economic and political realities of working-class America. Unlike the national leaders of organized labor, they tended to react to immediate problems and seldom thought in long-range terms or in terms of the labor movement as a whole...Moreover, in a very literal sense, local labor organizations were much more democratic than either the AFL or various union bureaucracies.⁸

A community's influence on labor is more than political rhetoric, workplace struggle, or shopfloor militancy.

A third leading labor scholar, James A. Craft, recognizes a union's connection to the community provides a source of power or leverage that should be fostered and maintained in order to apply sufficient pressure on management when the proper situation arises, i.e. negotiations and contractual agreements. Craft identifies four union-community relationships that could be fostered: the extensive community, community subgroups, community action groups, and government official or units. The extensive community relies on the entire local community working with the union to create a strong alliance against both local and national management. This practice can be narrowed by working with community subgroups who often are "issue-oriented or have a narrow focal interest."⁹ Community action groups differ from community subgroups due to their grass-roots and active organizational structure. Lastly, government official or units can change rules and laws to benefit unions, but this will only occur if the official sees political gains

⁸ Fink, *Labor's Search for Political Order*, 181.

⁹ James A. Craft, "The Community as a Source of Union Power," *Journal of Labor Research* 11, no. 2 (June 1990): 149.

from their support.¹⁰ Within these four groups, unions could build coalitions that would help secure a strong labor presence within their community.

Even though these relationships were identified within labor communities, Craft argues they were not effectively maintained by the unions. According to many researchers and union members, unions by their nature are collective bargaining agents. Any activity outside this responsibility, including building community groups, is not a priority or an interest for its members. During the 1950s and into the 1960s, the AFL-CIO established a national and local community services program. Yet, as Craft suggests, “Potentially, these programs could be the basis for labor-community alliances, but unions have not been effective in transforming such activities into focused good will or systematic ties to the community with power implications.”¹¹ He concludes that an effective union-community relation is only active during a crisis once traditional union procedures have failed.¹²

John Hinshaw and Paul Le Blanc’s edited collection *U.S. Labor in the Twentieth Century* (2000) focuses on the evolution of capitalism and the diminished labor market through stages of “structural adjustments” and “lean and mean” practices at the expense of employees.¹³ They argue, along with David Montgomery, Paul Buhle and other

¹⁰ Craft, “The Community as a Source of Union Power,” 150.

¹¹ Craft, “The Community as a Source of Union Power,” 154.

¹² Craft, “The Community as a Source of Union Power,” 156.

¹³ Paul Le Blanc and John Hinshaw, “Why the Working Class Still Matters,” in *U.S. Labor in the Twentieth Century: Studies in Working-Class Struggles and Insurgency*, ed. John Hinshaw and Paul Le Blanc (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2000), 13.

historians, that capitalism hinders and degrades the American workforce, while benefiting the owner over the worker.¹⁴ This system “is deeply committed to inequality: the few owners of the economy must be enriched by employing the labor of the many who own nothing but their own labor-power.”¹⁵ Le Blanc and Hinshaw recognizes the negative influence employers’ and unions have had on people of color, women, and workers of low-class status. Their analysis of labor history “involves the ability to look beyond the institution of the trade union, recognizing that the trade union is not necessarily all there is to ‘organized labor,’ just as the working class and the class struggle are not confined simply to the membership of the organized labor movement.”¹⁶ This argument is widely adopted by new labor historians. Their works, introduced in the 1960s, challenged the “Commons School of Thought” or old labor history led by economist, John R. Commons.¹⁷

¹⁴ See David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Paul Buhle, *Taking Care of Business: Samuel Gompers, George Meany, Lane Kirkland, and the Tragedy of American Labor* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999); Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the US Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1999); Elizabeth Faue, *Community of Suffering & Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); and Deborah Fink, *Cutting into the Meatpacking Line: Workers and Change in the Rural Midwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1998).

¹⁵ Le Blanc and Hinshaw, “Why the Working Class Still Matters,” 21.

¹⁶ Le Blanc and Hinshaw, “Why the Working Class Still Matters,” 22.

¹⁷ Jack Barbash, “John R. Commons: Pioneer of Labor Economics” *Monthly Labor Review* 122, no. 5 (May 1989): 44-49. Commons’s notable works are: *Institutional Economics* (New York: Macmillan, 1934), *Industrial Goodwill* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1919), Commons and John B. Andrews, *Principles of Labor Legislation* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1936), *The Economics of Collective Action* (New York, Macmillan, 1950), *Trade Unionism and Labor Problems* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1921), & *Labor and Administration* (New York: Macmillan, 1923). Commons also produced influential edited works including *History of Labor in the United States*, vol. 1-4 (New York: Macmillan, 1918-1935) & *A Documentary History of American Industrial Society* (Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1910). He influenced the works of Edwin E. Witte, “father of social security,” John A. Fitch, *The Steel Workers*, Herbert Simon and Oliver Williamson.

Andrew Battista builds on new labor history of Montgomery, Le Blanc and Hinshaw, and Buhle with his 1991 article, “Political Divisions in Organized Labor, 1968-1988.” Battista focuses on the relationship between national and local leaders as a source to the labor movement’s strength and weakness. He argues that four interrelated issues during these twenty years challenged union solidarity: the presidential election of 1968, the rise of new social movements (antiwar, civil rights, feminism), foreign policy and an international focus, and the power structure of the AFL-CIO. Battista notes, “The origin and significance of this split in the labor movement lie in the expansion of the social base and policy agenda of the Democratic Party liberalism during the 1960s and 1970s, which was resisted by the AFL-CIO leadership but supported by a bloc of dissident unions and labor leaders.”¹⁸

Buhle outlines the AFL-CIO leadership challenges that supports Battista’s analysis of union leadership’s disconnection with their locals. He argues that the AFL-CIO “leaders had treated themselves as partners with the elite and constantly fortified their positions in the midst of apathy, sealing themselves off from challenges.”¹⁹ Those challenges, as mentioned by Clark, Fink, Le Blanc and Hinshaw, Montgomery, and Battista, were an opportunity to strengthen union solidarity. However, “members lost, diminished not only by the virtually unchecked rise of a powerful system breaking down the real options for autonomy in daily economic life but also degraded by the narrowing

¹⁸ Andrew Battista, “Political Division in Organized Labor, 1968-1988,” *Polity* 24, no. 2 (Winter 1991): 174.

¹⁹ Buhle, *Taking Care of Business*, 251-252.

of the movement's purpose from human emancipation to special favors for the connected," Buhle concludes.²⁰

Kevin Boyle and Clayton Sinyai offer different perspectives on political history by focusing on union influences from the New Deal legislation rather than the leadership challenges in the late twentieth-century. Boyle challenges the paradigm that organized labor, in the Cold War Era, received the necessary means to protect itself and maintain its political influence. He believes the labor-liberal alliance, "champions of the forgotten American," were trapped in a New Deal system that did not fully recognize the changes in "the realignment of partisan loyalties and the restructuring of the American state."²¹ These leaders' inability to adapt to the changing environment impacted the success of unions. Sinyai supports Boyle's concerns that labor depended on the New Deal, but approaches the argument differently in *School of Democracy: A political history of the American labor movement* (2006). He argues that the United States labor movement is in a cyclical structure, rather than Boyle's use of a traditional timeline, and "finds itself in the world before the New Deal.... [Where] our nation is home to a burgeoning class of working poor."²² American labor is not continuing with the New Deal from FDR, but rather in an environment that might result in a *new* New Deal legislation, which will support growth for another labor movement.

²⁰ Buhle, *Taking Care of Business*, 263.

²¹ Kevin Boyle, ed., *Organized Labor and American Politics 1894-1994: The Labor-Liberalism Alliance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 11.

²² Clayton Sinyai, *Schools of Democracy: A Political History of the American Labor Movement* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 226-227.

Sinyai offers a rare optimistic conclusion for organized labor as many historians lean towards a pessimistic or cynical view. Historians, following the latter perspective, do not fully write the obituary of organized labor. Many leave open-ended conclusions hinting at the final days of labor unions. The argument - national labors disconnect with its locals affected unions' solidarity – offers an opportunity to further explore the role of local unions. The narrative around unions' successes or failures and its relation with the community should be expanded, specifically in Iowa.

To understand Iowa's labor history, researchers and students must start with Shelton Stromquist. Stromquist's work has influenced numerous articles, often published in the *Annals of Iowa*, along with several dissertations. Stromquist, emeritus professor at the University of Iowa, developed Iowa's labor history with his leadership in organizing the Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO Labor History Oral Project. This project became *Solidarity & Survival* (1993), a book that provides rich, personal accounts of labor in the twentieth century with limited interpretation and analytical contexts. Stromquist lets the oral histories provide their own interpretation focused on the social movements of labor relations with management and worker. However, his analysis does not strongly highlight the local community-union relations in Iowa.

Bruce Fehn's 1995 article, "'The Only Hope We Had': United Packinghouse Workers Local 46 and the Struggle for Racial Equality in Waterloo, Iowa, 1948-1960," and Matthew M. Mettler's 2014 article, "AFL Community Unionism: The Des Moines Department Store Strike of 1939," utilizes Stromquist's research and the interviews under the Iowa Labor History Oral Project (ILHOP) to expand on racial and community

consciousness in Iowa before the national Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Fehn analyzes Waterloo and the United Packinghouse Workers Local 46 at the Rath Packing Company, while Mettler looks at the AFL's influence on the service industry in Des Moines.

Both Fehn and Mettler notice a significant percentage of each community supported their union's efforts to integrate the workplace. "While breaking down the structure of workplace inequality, Local 46 members also took the fight for racial equality into the community. They converted the union into a bastion of the civil rights struggle in Waterloo," Fehn concludes.²³ Mettler suggests that unions helped shift Des Moines's "labor movement away from its history of racism by creating an opportunity for union consciousness to trump racial consciousness."²⁴ This shift in each community evolves out of a union's relation with their community and working for solidarity not only in the workplace but also in their communities.

In 1997, Stromquist and Marvin Bergman, SHSI *Annals of Iowa* editor and adjunct professor of history at the University of Iowa, published their co-edited collection of works on the meatpacking industry in the twentieth-century. The two labor scholars came up with a new interpretation, arguing that the decline of UPWA in Iowa and the Midwest was fostered by the loss of "union memory." This decline came about because

²³ Bruce Fehn, "'The Only Hope We Had': United Packinghouse Workers Local 46 and the Struggle for Racial Equality in Waterloo, Iowa, 1948-1960," *The Annals of Iowa* 54, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 213.

²⁴ Matthew M. Mettler, "AFL Community Unionism: The Des Moines Department Store Strike of 1939," *Labor Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 101.

of the transition from a community based workforce to an internationalized one. A “sense of community,” whether based on union, race, class, or gender, served as the foundation to union success. Without this factor, unions could not have flourished in the immediate post-Depression years.²⁵

Wilson J. Warren, who wrote a chapter in Stromquist and Bergman’s edited works, also published his research on Ottumwa’s meatpacking labor history in the twentieth-century, *Struggling with “Iowa’s Pride”: Labor relations, unionism, and politics in the rural Midwest since 1877* (2000) and *Tied to the Great Packing Machine: The Midwest and Meatpacking* (2007). Warren finds that unions “were distinctive to one community” and this relationship demanded stronger continuity in its study. He argues that “this intensive focus on one community illuminates the dynamics of the particular personalities and ideas involved in creating the various forms of labor relations” and should be expanded to similar packing communities.²⁶ The suggestion for further study should not solely focus on packing communities, but to all unions in Iowa’s rural and urban communities.

I will explore the three foundations for union strength and success that were present in Waterloo: organization and representation, political activism/awakening, and community outreach. Unions’ solidarity and strength can be attributed to these

²⁵ Shelton Stromquist, and Marvin Bergman, eds., *Unionizing the Jungles: Labor and Community in the Twentieth-Century Meatpacking Industry* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1997), 10-11.

²⁶ Wilson J. Warren, *Struggling with “Iowa’s Pride”: Labor Relations, Unionism, and Politics in the Rural Midwest Since 1877* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), 2-3.

foundations, but they also created limitations that led to the local unions' decline in Waterloo.

Part I focuses on the relationship between organization and representation and the political awakening in 1947. It argues that Waterloo unions' political activism from 1947 to 1964 expanded the local's presence in the community. Campaigning, electing candidates who were members of a union, and developing a labor agenda resulted in positive growth for the locals. After the election of 1964, labors' new found majority with the Democrat Party resulted in limited policy changes. It splintered the locals' shared political agenda that weakened Waterloo unions' solidarity in the community.

Part II looks at the third foundation, community outreach. It argues the UAW Local 838 "Brown Bag" Committee, a social aid organization, did more than provide food for needy community members. It served a social and cultural role in the community during the severe economic downturn of the 1980s. Having exposed this problem, the union was eventually replaced in solving it, by a better funded agent of the local government. This too decreased the union's visibility and role in the community. Waterloo unions' built a foundation from organization and representation, political activism, and community outreach that was successful throughout the twentieth century. However, that success led to members diminishing the collectiveness of the union, along with the impacts of the Cold War, the Great Society, the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War, contributed to the decline of labor in Waterloo.

PART I
EMERGENCE OF A POLITICAL POWER, 1940-1970

Marlene Kruger, president of the Machinists Union, Local 1373 who served on the executive board of the Black Hawk Union Council, offered her views on the role of politics in unions in a 1991 interview:

I don't think there's any way that you can separate labor unions from politics. Down through the years the people in the plants never wanted to hear about politics and they kind of wanted you to just stay away from them when it was time for elections. But down through the years they have finally realized that from the time you get up in the morning and you turn on the light to get dressed, that everything you do through the entire day...is regulated by legislation. And we have found that during the Nixon years and the Reagan years that things got really rough for us because those people were not labor minded.¹

Kruger's reflection shows a political awakening in rank-in-file members in Waterloo. The success and strength of a union requires three foundational areas: organization and representation, a political awakening that evolves to activism, and community outreach.

This chapter argues Waterloo unions' political awakening led to their decline after the 1964 election due to the limited policy changes from political victories and the splintering of a shared political agenda. The local unions successfully established political activism with its members, but, once awakened and active, the unions could not keep a unified force. It was in part inhibited by national issues such as the Civil Rights

¹ Marlene Kruger, Waterloo, Interview by Dan Holub, June 27, 1991, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 31-32.

Movement, the rise of the New Right, the Vietnam War, and the continued strained relations with the Soviet Union.²

Organized labor, along with the country, faced national adversity. Three decades before the sixties, the United States experienced its toughest economic crisis with The Great Depression. A quarter of Americans were without jobs, thousands of banks collapsed, and production slowed by a third of the levels in 1929. The newly sworn in president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, along with a compliant Congress, quickly implemented his New Deal policies focused on recovery, relief, and reform. One of his earliest measures, the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) of 1933, targeted labor-management relations.

A key provision of the NIRA granted the National Recovery Administration, headed by former General Hugh S. Johnson, to create “codes of fair competition” that were implemented, voluntarily, industry wide with the goal of establishing fair prices, fair working conditions, and fair profits. Within nine months, the NRA established over 500 new codes of fair practices that were adopted by various industries. Public awareness grew when participating companies displayed the NRA Blue Eagle in their places of business. If a company or business did not have the Blue Eagle displayed, it could be boycotted.³ The legislation also included a labor caveat through Article 7a that allowed

²Paul Buhle, *Taking Care of Business: Samuel Gompers, George Meany, Lane Kirkland, and the Tragedy of American Labor* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999), 8-16.

³ National Archives, “National Industrial Recovery Act (1933)” in “Our Documents: 100 Milestone Documents from the National Archives,” National Archives, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=true&doc=66> (accessed August 2016).

employees the right to organize and collective bargain. In addition, it prevented employers restricting or restraining employees' union membership.⁴

According to Melvin Dubofsky, NIRA did not sufficiently help with the recovery or reducing prices. Coal miners and garment workers quickly benefited from the new legislation due to their early presence in the workforce. Other industries - including auto workers, steel workers, rubber workers, teamsters, and longshoremen - were not able to gain ground in collective bargaining. The legislation only added to the economic situation, instead of improving it.⁵ The NIRA, subsequent to other New Deal legislation, did not survive constitutional review of the United States Supreme Court. In May 1935, the Court ruled unanimously in the case *Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States* (1935) that Congress unconstitutionally delegated legislative powers to the President in violation of Article I, Section 8 and Congress' authority to regulate interstate commerce. The Justices argued the NRA "codes of fair practice" were actual laws unconstitutionally approved by the President.⁶

U.S. Senator Robert Wagner (D-New York) pressed to revive the labor protections previously offered under Section 7a in his sponsored bill the National Labor Relation Act (NLRA). This act stipulated that employees had the right to "self-organization, to form, join, or assist labor organizations, to bargain collectively through

⁴ Melvyn Dubofsky, ed., *American Labor since the New Deal* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 5.

⁵ Dubofsky, *American Labor*, 6-7.

⁶ *Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States*, 295 U.S. 495 (1935).

representatives of their own choosing, and to engage in concerted activities for the purpose of collective bargaining or other mutual aid and protection.”⁷ Major provisions of the act included: the formation of the National Labor Relation Board, a list of unfair labor practices, bargaining agreements for increase in pay and workplace safety, and approved strike practices.⁸ Unlike the NRA, the governing board under the NLRA, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), had sufficient authority to engage in arbitration, guarantee fair and democratic elected unions, and penalized unfair labor practices. Just two years later, the Wagner Act was before the Supreme Court to test its constitutional validity. In a five-four decision, the Court ruled that Congress had the right to regulate labor relations under the Commerce Clause.⁹

This decision cemented labor’s legal right to organize collectively across the country. Factories in Waterloo and across the country formed labor coalitions knowing they had the official support and strength of the federal government behind their movement. In 1933, John Deere Waterloo Tractor Works first organized under the AFL Federal Union. It proved inefficient, because the union was limited to certain skilled trades and not inclusive to all factory workers. With the forming of the Committee for Industrial Organization in November of 1935 (later changed to Congress of Industrial

⁷ National Archives, “National Labor Relations Act (1935)” in “Our Documents: 100 Milestone Documents from the National Archives,” National Archives, <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?doc=67> (accessed August 2016).

⁸ National Labor Relations Act, 29 U.S.C. §§ 151-169 (2015).

⁹ *NLRB v. Jones & Laughlin Steel Corp.* 301 U.S. 1 (1937).

Organization), it created a battleground for bargaining control between CIO, AFL and other union organizations.

Between 1937 and 1939, four additional unions sought to organize the Waterloo Tractor Works: the Steel Workers (SWOC), the Farm Equipment Workers (FE), the International Association of Machinists of the AFL (IAM), and the UAW-CIO. By April 1940, the NLRB received sufficient support for two of the four unions, IAM and UAW, to hold an election for bargaining agent. Neither union reached a majority. After the election the two unions compromised and agreed that the UAW could organize the Waterloo Tractor Works, if they withdrew from organizing Solar Aircraft of Des Moines. The International UAW chartered Local 838 on April 30, 1941 without holding another election by the NLRB. The next election came on May 22, 1942, and this time the UAW was the only union on the ballot.¹⁰

Another factory to organize during World War II was the Rath Packing Company. In 1938, the CIO Packinghouse Workers' Organizing Committee (PWOC) helped Rath workers quietly organize the company even though it was not a major target of the group. PWOC targeted the "Big Four" packers: Armour, Swift, Wilson, and Cudahy Packing Companies intending to cause a "domino effect" for small, independent packers.¹¹ By 1941, Rath was the second largest employer in the state, next to John Deere, with nearly 4,500 workers. The meatpacker primarily focused on pork, but it expanded to beef

¹⁰ UAW Local 838, *UAW Local 838: Our History* (Des Moines: Allied Printing Trades Council, [1980?]), 2-5.

¹¹ Sister John Marie Daly, "History of Unionization in Waterloo, Iowa" (master's thesis, Creighton University, 1962), 54-55.

production and added veal and lamb by the 1930s. In 1941, the Waterloo factory built the “nation’s largest [modern] single-unit meatpacking facility.” It not only competed with national meatpackers, but it also faced local factories in Cedar Rapids, Ottumwa, Sioux City, Des Moines, Davenport and Mason City.¹²

The PWOC had its biggest break through with the “Big Four” when it won bargaining rights under a master agreement in 1941. This encouraged Rath workers to prominently push against the Company’s union, Independent Packinghouse Workers Association, and organize under a legitimate union, meaning a union elected by a majority of the voters and approved by the NLRB.¹³ Six months after the NLRB held Deere’s bargaining election, Rath workers held their own on November 18, 1942, when they overwhelmingly voted for a union.¹⁴ They officially organized under the Local 46 of the United Packinghouse Workers of America (UPWA).

Each union slowly grew in numbers. Their leaders seemed to understand that they needed to push for recognition not only by their respective companies, but also by the community of Waterloo. So, while they worked to establish their first contact, they also tried to build their community presence. At the same time, the political shift in Washington D.C. presented a new challenge for organized labor. Organized labor faced a time of transition. The Great Depression created an environment of growth and

¹² Rebecca Conard, *Bringin’ Home the Bacon: The Rath Packing Company in Waterloo, 1891-1985*, (Iowa City: TruArt Color Graphics, 2010) 4, 7.

¹³ Paul Buhle, *Taking Care of Business: Samuel Gompers, George Meany, Lane Kirkland, and the Tragedy of American Labor* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999), 120.

¹⁴ Daly, “History of Unionization in Waterloo, Iowa,” 69-70.

collectivism, while WWII led to a period of sacrifice and stability. After ending one war and entering into another; the Cold War raised new concerns for labor.

Political Awakening

In 1947, a Republican-dominated Congress passed the Taft-Hartley Act to reign in federal oversight of unions in the private sector. President Harry S. Truman vetoed the act, but Congress successfully overruled the executive power and expanded management authority over unions. According to Robert W. Cherny, et. al, the Taft-Hartley Act did not repeal the Wagner Act, but it did fundamentally change the government's role in labor relations. It established an eighty day "cooling-off" period for strikes considered too dangerous to health or safety. It also required union officers to swear they were not members of the Communist Party.¹⁵ Another major provision of the Taft-Hartley Act is Section 14-B. It made "closed shops" illegal, but allowed "union shops." The closed shop required employers to hire only union members, while the union shop stipulated that employees who were represented by a union or bargaining agent must be dues-paying, union members within a certain time-frame after being hired.¹⁶ Without the union shop, "free-riders," employees' not paying union dues, but who receive union benefits through contractual gains, emerged.

¹⁵ Robert W. Cherny, William Issel, and Kieran Walsh Taylor, eds., *American Labor and the Cold War: Grassroots Politics and Postwar Political Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 2-3.

¹⁶ James C. Larew, *A Party Reborn: The Democrats of Iowa 1950-1974* (Iowa City: Iowa State Historical Department Division of the State Historical Society, 1980), 31.

The same year Taft-Hartley Act passed, ten states in the Midwest and the Sunbelt region passed “Right to Work” (anti-union shop) legislation. During the 1950s, six more states, in these same regions, passed right to work laws.¹⁷ Cherny, et al. argues the swift passage in these two regions, led by anti-labor coalitions, did not come as a surprise due to the “widespread hostility and determined resistance” in the area. The act impacted labor unions’ organization efforts in these industrial regions at the very moment unions were improving its membership by the end of WWII.¹⁸ Iowa was among the initial ten states to pass right to work legislation in 1947.

According to Paul Larew, labor’s lack of statewide organization impeded its political action, which was further hampered by Iowa’s weak Democratic Party.¹⁹ In the early decades of the twentieth-century, U.S. Representative Jonathan P. Dolliver (R-Fort Dodge) predicted that “hell would go Methodist before Iowa went Democratic.”²⁰ Republican dominance in the General Assembly appealed to many interest groups well into the 1950s. Two prominent groups, the Iowa Manufactures Association (IMA) and the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation (IFBF), held great influence in Iowa politics. Their power was maintained by malapportionment that left a growing urban populace to be

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Labor, “Right-to-Work States,” National Council of State Legislatures, <http://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/right-to-work-laws-and-bills.aspx>. List of states and years RTW legislation passed: 1943: FL; 1947: AZ, AR, GA, IA, NE, NC, ND, SD, TN, VA; 1951: NV; 1953: AL; 1954: MS, SC; 1955: UT; 1963: WY; 1976: LA; 1985: ID; 1993: TX; 2001: OK; 2012: IN, MI; 2015: WI. List of states that passed constitutional amendments: 1944: AR; 1946: AZ, NE, SD; 1948: ND; 1952: NV; 1958: KS; 1960: MS; 1968: FL; 2001: OK.

¹⁸ Cherny, et al., *American Labor and the Cold War*, 3.

¹⁹ Larew, *A Party Reborn*, 19-20, 31-32.

²⁰ Leland L. Sage, *A History of Iowa* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1974), 220.

influenced by organized rural and small-town interest.²¹ This political environment played a role in the quick passage of Iowa's "right to work" law banning the closed shop. It first passed the Iowa Senate on March 31, 1947 by a vote of 36-12. Senator John P. Berg, from Cedar Falls, representing Black Hawk and Grundy counties, voted for its passage. The first section of the bill states:

It is declared to be the policy of the state of Iowa that no person within its boundaries shall be deprived of the right to work at his chosen occupation for any employer willing to so employ him, because of membership in, affiliation with, withdrawal or expulsion from, or refusal to join any labor union, organization or society, and any contract which contravenes this policy is void.²²

The news of the Senate's move to ban closed shops mobilized labor unions across the state to take action. The Iowa AFL and CIO organized a "labor holiday" in order "to give our members the opportunity to go to Des Moines en masse to appear and meet with our state representatives," as stated in an AFL released statement.²³

UPWA Local 46 organized a mass meeting during the height of production on Saturday, April 19, 1947, in the auditorium of Waterloo East High School. Approximately 2,000 members of the reported 4,600 total membership crowded into the auditorium to unanimously vote in favor of the labor holiday. Rath Packing Co. was virtually shut down due to this meeting, leaving only cleanup crews to prevent any meat spoilage.²⁴ Leo Guynn, president of the local, shared the following statement after the

²¹ Larew, *A Party Reborn*, 16-18, 33-34.

²² "Iowa Senate Votes Ban on Closed Shop," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, April 1, 1947.

²³ "Waterloo Workers to Join Holiday," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, April 20, 1947.

²⁴ "Waterloo Workers to Join Holiday," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, April 20, 1947.

vote to support the holiday, “that the union membership would have the opportunity to travel to Des Moines to personally present to the legislature their disapproval of the treacherous actions taken against Iowa labor;” he added, “Labor does not intend to absorb this abuse without striking back.”²⁵ UAW Local 838, under the leadership of Carl Dahl, also voted to participate in the “labor holiday” the following day in the same auditorium.²⁶ Dahl recalled mobilization efforts were achieved by word of mouth stating, we “passed the word what the Governor’s [Robert Blue] doing to us and said, ‘Be out here tomorrow morning at seven o’clock. We’re heading for Des Moines.’ And we did.”²⁷ The coalition of Waterloo union members sent an estimated 1,000 member to protest in Des Moines on Monday, April 21.

A reporter with the *Waterloo Daily Courier* covered the demonstration. He noted “approximately 500 members of [UPWA] in 75 automobiles and four buses” left for Des Moines. The UAW-CIO took fifty autos and two buses caring an estimated 350 workers from the John Deere Tractor Works. Another 250 members from the Central Labor body of the AFL traveled by automobiles, while the Bell Telephone Company took one car.²⁸ Sending nearly 1,000 members and authorizing other union members to stay home from

²⁵ “Waterloo Workers to Join Holiday,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, April 20, 1947.

²⁶ “Thousands Idle in Waterloo as Workers Join Motorcade,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, April 21, 1947.

²⁷ Carl Dahl, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, June 29, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 42.

²⁸ “Thousands Idle in Waterloo as Workers Join Motorcade,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, April 21, 1947.

work caused majority of the factories in Waterloo to go quiet. Dahl explained, “We shut the damn plant down and hauled them all down, hauled busloads down to Des Moines. Went to the State Capitol and raised old Blue, Governor Blue.”²⁹

According to the *Courier*, the city’s industries were practically shut down. The reporter put it, “the John Deere Tractor Co. and the Rath Packing Co. were closed down except for the maintenance of ‘essential services’ which would permit prompt resumption of fullscale operations Tuesday without loss or spoilage,” he further stated, “Associated Manufacturers reported ‘no one working but foreman’ while the Chamberlin Corp. said the holiday is ‘quite effective.’”³⁰ Jack Seeber, who started in 1946 as a lathe operator for the John Deere Tractor Works, recalled the effectiveness of the “labor holiday” stating, “We just told Deere we weren’t coming to work, and I’m telling you, I was down there that morning and it was 99 percent effective. Very few people went in that day.”³¹

In Des Moines, state union leaders estimated 60,000 of the 200,000 union members in Iowa might convene at the Capitol. But estimates from the event reported the crowd at 22,000 participants. Even though it fell well short of the union leaders’ goal, this mass crowd “spread over the statehouse lawn, surged into the huge building, jammed the basement cafeteria, spilled into corridors and crowded the house chamber, both on the

²⁹ Dahl, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, June 29, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 42.

³⁰ “Thousands Idle in Waterloo as Workers Join Motorcade,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, April 21, 1947.

³¹ Jack Seeber, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 15, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 18.

floor and in the galleries.”³² Some of the state representatives were not pleased with the demonstration and made their opinion known in the local papers. Representative Carl Burkman (R-Des Moines), chief sponsor of an amendment to further strengthen the senate legislation against labor, stated, “This demonstration is definitely one of intimidation and this legislature will not be intimidated.”³³ He noted that the unions’ actions placed the state in a precarious position with their “labor holiday,” which in effect meant, “you deal with us or else.”³⁴

Governor Blue, standing on a chair positioned between the United State and Iowa flags, addressed the labor crowd by mid-morning. He opened his remarks by explaining to the demonstrators that “the chief executive of this state as well as the legislature and citizens are not unfriendly to the laboring man.” This remark was not received well, and boos reverberated from the crowd silencing the Governor. He responded by noting, “You have asked me to speak here and I am your guest. If you do not want to listen to me tell me.” The crowd obliged and silenced their criticism to allow the Governor to continue his statement. The rest of his remarks highlighted the role of the legislature in representing all citizens and not the minority of the laborers unionized. “The chief executive of this state and the legislature never have been and never will be a rubber stamp for any pressure group.” He continued, “They have been elected by the people of this great state

³² “Thousands Jam State House: Workers Come in Doves for Protest Meet,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, April 21, 1947.

³³ “Plan March on State House: Will Oppose Move to Ban Closed Shop,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, April 20, 1947.

³⁴ “Open Battle Over Ban on Closed Shop,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, April 21, 1947.

and are legislating as they see fit in the best interests of the greatest number of people of this state.”³⁵

Labor leaders and the mass of demonstrators did not respond well to the arguments by Governor Blue and the General Assembly. Dahl recalled the Governor’s address stating, “We got told by Governor Blue that we were infinitesimal. That’s the very word he used. He said, “As far as I’m concerned, you’re infinitesimal.” In other words, that’s just next to nothing.”³⁶ Seeber’s memory was less detailed, but he expressed the same sentiment, “[The Governor] politely told us to go to hell, really.”³⁷ The results of the demonstration only delayed action on the legislation, but it did not prevent passage. The Iowa House passed its version on Tuesday, 74-31, with few labor demonstrators present, leaving the House floor and galleries virtually unoccupied.³⁸ Governor Blue signed the legislation into law on April 28, 1947, officially making Iowa a “Right to Work” state, that “prohibits discrimination against workers because of membership or non-membership in a union and bans involuntary check-off of union dues.”³⁹

A. A. Couch, president of the State Federation of Labor, AFL and John Connolly, Jr., a Des Moines labor attorney, tried to challenge the law through the courts, arguing it violated the current federal legislation (Wagner Act) due to employers participating in

³⁵ “Blue Booed in Address to Workers,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, April 21, 1947.

³⁶ Dahl, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, June 29, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 43.

³⁷ Seeber, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 15, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 19.

³⁸ “House Passes Ban on Closed Shops; 74-31,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, April 23, 1947.; “House Votes Down State Ban on Closed Shop Only,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, April 22, 1947.

³⁹ “Blue Signs Bill to Outlaw Closed Shop,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, April 28, 1947.

interstate commerce, an action regulated by federal law. Connolly argued, “Where the federal government has assumed jurisdiction of subject matter, a state cannot make laws contradictory thereto,” he continued, “The government has assumed such jurisdiction. The provision of the Iowa bill are proper objectives of collective bargaining and courts have so held for years.”⁴⁰ Their argument may have been within grounds, but action by the federal government passing the Taft-Hartley Act made their case moot. Legal remedies could not overturn the actions taken by the Iowa General Assembly or Governor Blue. Earl Riley, who worked in the foundry as a shake-out man at the John Deere Tractor Works, recalled the struggle for labor representation in the legislature stating, “Oh, well, we was down to Des Moines and had a bunch of people down there to try to fight against [right to work law]. But the people that we had in office then, it was pretty hard to do anything with, I’ll tell you that.”⁴¹ The unions were left with a last resort: only political activism could overturn the law.

At the start of 1948, the *Courier* Editorial staff argued Governor Blue would hold a strong advantage in the Republican primary due to his incumbent status and the lack of Republican principles shared by his challengers, of course “barring [any] unforeseen developments.” At the same time, the editors noted the political enemies Governor Blue made during his previous two terms, notably organized labor. They stated, “There is reportedly a movement by some organized labor groups to register as Republicans in

⁴⁰ “Court Battle Promised on Union Curbs,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, April 24, 1947.

⁴¹ Earl Riley, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 22, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 21.

order to vote at the GOP primary. This may stimulate a larger-than-average turnout at the primary.”⁴²

The candidate that inspired such a movement was Republican William S. Beardsley. A state representative from New Virginia, Beardsley served in the senate from 1932-1940. He was a supporter of labor and an opponent of the right to work law.⁴³ Organized labor, along with special interest groups, such as the IFBF and Iowa State Education Association (ISEA), influenced their members to participate in the Republican primary. Both the IFBF and ISEA did not officially endorse a candidate for governor during the primaries, but the Farm Bureau leaders believed “that the bigger the vote in the Republican primary the better the chance for Beardsley,” as reported by the Iowa Daily Press Writer in the *Courier*. The same sentiment was shared by the educators, by getting the vote out their members “will mostly cast their ballots for Beardsley”.⁴⁴

The campaign to switch party allegiance was not welcomed by all Waterloo rank-and-file union members. Gus Morkel, a member of the AFL Machinists at Chamberlain’s Manufacturing, did not favor the CIO unions’ advocating who to vote for stating, “I’m going to vote the way I want to vote, and it’s none of your business, and the way you want to vote is none of my business.”⁴⁵ The editors at the *Courier* did their part to

⁴² Editorial, “Blue to Run Again,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, January 22, 1948.

⁴³ “Beardsley to Start Race for Governor,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, January 3, 1948.

⁴⁴ *Iowa Daily Press* Writer, “Farm Bureau is Reported Pushing Beardsley Drive,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, February 12, 1948.

⁴⁵ Gus Morkel, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, June 26, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 37.

discourage switching party affiliation citing State Code in their editorial, “Changing Party Allegiance”:

‘It shall be unlawful for any person...not at the time a member in good faith of such political party, to vote at such primary election.’ Anyone found guilty of violating this section of the code or aiding anyone else in violating it ‘shall be deemed guilty of a misdemeanor, and upon conviction shall be fined not to exceed \$100 or be imprisoned in the country jail not to exceed 30 days.’⁴⁶

In order for a voter to be convicted, the accuser needed to produce sufficient evidence that proved the voter’s insincerity in switching party affiliation. This was a major flaw in the code that made it ineffective. However, it did not stop the editors from offering one last plea, “it would be unwise for anyone who has been and will in the future be active in Democratic politics to participate in this movement in the Republican primary.”⁴⁷

The editorial did not deter the UAW Local 838 who expanded their efforts and targeted other races down ballot, including Representative John W. Gwynne (R-Waterloo) who had voted in favor of the Taft-Hartley Act. Dahl recognized the limitations of Iowa’s political landscape and the slim odds a Democrat could win an open seat, let alone defeat an incumbent Republican. He decided to fight fire with fire, recalling “We just went after [Governor Blue] and supported [Beardsley] because we couldn’t beat him with a Democrat. So we supported a Republican and beat him with another Republican.”⁴⁸ Between statehood in 1846 to 1948, Iowans elected six governors

⁴⁶ Editorial, “Changing Party Allegiance,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, May 20, 1948.

⁴⁷ Editorial, “Changing Party Allegiance,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, May 20, 1948.

⁴⁸ Dahl, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, June 29, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 43.

outside the Republican Party - five of them were Democrats and one a Whig.⁴⁹

Supporting a Republican seemed the only viable option for organized labor this election cycle.

The June third primary revealed a significant increase in voter participation under the Republican ticket. Blue won his first gubernatorial primary by less than 30,000 votes in a three-way race in 1944 and then defeated his challenger by over 60,000 votes in 1946.⁵⁰ His re-election for a third term ended in defeat to Beardsley, by losing over 62,000 votes in the 1948 primary.⁵¹ Republican turnout in the 1944 primary was 175,116. In 1946, turnout increased by nearly twenty-seven percent, with 221,614 Republican voters coming to the polls. And, in 1948, turnout reached 317,709 Republican voters, an increase of over forty-three percent statewide.

Black Hawk County, where nearly sixty-five percent of the population resided in the county seat of Waterloo, also showed an increase in voter turnout.⁵² In 1944, 3,998 voters participated in the Republican gubernatorial primary, in which Blue finished second. In 1946, 4,851 voters showed up at the polls and Blue won the county by nearly 1,100 votes. And, in 1948, 10,558 votes were casted in Black Hawk County, an increase of 118 percent from the previous primary. Blue lost to Beardsley by 1,722 votes. Ninety-

⁴⁹ Tom W. Purcell, ed., *State of Iowa Official Register 1949-1950*, no. 43, 53d General Assembly, (Des Moines: State of Iowa, 1949), 253.

⁵⁰ Lou Gardner, ed., *State of Iowa Official Register 1945-1946*, no. 41, 51st General Assembly, (Des Moines: State of Iowa, [1945?]), 264.; Robert A. Jarnagin, ed., *State of Iowa Official Register 1947-1948*, no. 42, 52d General Assembly, (Des Moines: State of Iowa, 1947), 282.

⁵¹ Purcell, ed., *State of Iowa Official Register 1949-1950*, 284.

⁵² Gardner, ed., *State of Iowa Official Register 1945-1946*, 179.

two percent of all voters in the 1948 gubernatorial primary voted Republican, reflecting a four percent increase from 1944 and two percent increase in 1946.⁵³

The targeted Congressional primary between U.S. Representative Gwynne and H. R. Gross (R-Waterloo) closely mirrored the result in the gubernatorial primary. With only a two percent voter drop off, Gross won Black Hawk Co. by over 2,000 votes (6,205 to Gwynne's 4,164) and won the Third Congressional District Republican nomination by over 4,700 votes. In the general election, both Beardsley and Gross went on to easily defeat their Democrat challengers. Black Hawk County re-elected the two Republicans for the Iowa House.⁵⁴

The Local 838 membership was determined to defeat Governor Blue and Representative Gwynne. Some even volunteered for their challengers' campaigns. Riley noted, "That's the only Republican I ever voted for in my life," but "I was one that drove my car and went all over the [state], along with a lot of others, and campaigned for this guy in little towns, put out handbills and everything for [Gross]."⁵⁵ Riley even helped pay for the newly elected Congressman's gas to get to the Nation's Capital,

Some of us fellows went out—Bob Williams and Dwight Freedley and some more of us good union guys—went out there and [Gross] didn't have money enough to drive his old Plymouth to Washington, D.C., so we proceeded to get in our pockets when we was pretty hard up about that time too, and kicked in a few dollars to buy him gas to get to Washington, D.C.⁵⁶

⁵³ Gardner, ed., *State of Iowa Official Register 1945-1946*, 263.; Jarnagin, ed., *State of Iowa Official Register 1947-1948*, 281.; Purcell, ed., *State of Iowa Official Register 1949-1950*, 283.

⁵⁴ Purcell, ed., *State of Iowa Official Register 1949-1950*, 290, 299-300, 307, 312.

⁵⁵ Riley, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 22, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 22.

⁵⁶ Riley, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 22, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 22.

Seeber also recognized the motives of Dahl in raising voter participation in the 1948 primary stating, “I can remember President Dahl urging us all to switch our allegiance into the Republican primary, which I did, and voted for Gross... There was an old conservative [Representative Gwynne] been in for a number of years, and we couldn’t elect a Democrat, so we thought Mr. Gross was the answer to our problems at the time.”⁵⁷

That assumption did not prove fruitful for organized labor in two ways. First, Gross was a Republican who consistently voted with the Republican bloc in Congress. It created an impasse with labors’ efforts to repeal the Taft-Hartley Act. Secondly, it could be difficult to convince the labor membership to re-register as Democrats after the election. Dahl recalled, “We couldn’t get them back to the Democrats again! That’s the hell of it with that... We switch them in the primary, and we never got them back as Democrats.”⁵⁸ The absence of a strong Democratic Party left Iowa one-sided in a two-party system. According to Larew, the growth of special interest groups, such as the Farm Bureau and Iowa Manufactures, “were visibly thwarting the popular will of Iowa’s citizens.”⁵⁹ These interest groups, along with the rural, conservative controlled legislature, faced issues that would hinder their constituents and their majority. The key

⁵⁷ Seeber, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 15, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 17-18.

⁵⁸ Dahl, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, June 29, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 43.

⁵⁹ Larew, *A Party Reborn*, 34.

issues for debate were “liquor-by-the-drink”, tax reform, labor laws, and legislative reapportionment.⁶⁰

The 1947 right to work law and the 1948 election caused a political awakening, not only for Waterloo locals but for unions across Iowa and the country. Union members realized they needed political influence at the city and state level that favored labor. Over next two decades, Waterloo unions pushed for a shared labor agenda focused on supporting candidates who would positively improve labor’s position in the state. Their primary goal would be to elect enough supporters to repeal the right to work law.

1950-1964: Battle for Representation

The 1948 primary and general election were not the only focus of labor in Waterloo. Wartime inflation caused a wage-price imbalance that affected many industries across the country. Packinghouse workers, under AFL and CIO unions, pressured their respective leaders to negotiate a twenty-nine-cent-per-hour increase industry wide after receiving a sixteen-cent-per-hour increase in 1946. According to Bruce Fehn, wages were not the sole issue for concern. Union leaders sought the opportunity to show their strength in spite of the newly enacted Taft-Harley Act, which severely limited their traditional strike tactics of walkouts and shutdowns.

While UPWA leaders were negotiating their terms, the rejuvenated Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen (AMCBW) of the AFL announced they reached a settlement of a wage increase that was lower than the twenty-nine-cent-per-hour increase.

⁶⁰ Larew, *A Party Reborn*, 30.

At the beginning of March 1948, negotiations reached an impasse. The UPWA persisted on a twenty-nine-cents increase, but the Big Four (Armour, Cudahy, Swift, and Wilson) countered with a nine-cent increase. This was the last straw for UPWA membership. They voted to strike, not a single plant, but industrywide by a margin of twenty to one.⁶¹ The strike began at Rath Packing Company on March 16, sending 4,600 union workers to the picket line, a small fraction of the nearly 100,000 UPWA striking across 140 plants in twenty states.⁶²

Six weeks later the strike in Waterloo became a riot. The cause was the shooting of Chuck Farrell, Local 46 union founder, by strike breaker Fred Lee Roberts. Soon the riot became a war zone. The City of Waterloo requested the Iowa National Guard to come in and restore order at the plant, and Governor Blue immediately responded. Two hundred of the estimated eight hundred guardsmen lined up shoulder-to-shoulder, stretching almost two blocks long, in front of the Rath Plant and “on command the troops fixed bayonets and advanced across the street, pushing back the strikers that were still parading in front of the plant.”⁶³ The Guard erected a perimeter around the plant and patrolled the area in jeeps and trucks, while two to three soldiers maintained guard at every block.

⁶¹ Bruce Fehn, “Ruin or Renewal: The United Packinghouse Workers of America and the 1948 Meatpacking Strike in Iowa,” *Annals of Iowa* 56, no. 4 (Fall 1997): 356-357.

⁶² Bruce Fehn, “‘The Only Hope We Had’: United Packinghouse Workers Local 46 and the Struggle for Racial Equality in Waterloo, Iowa, 1948-1960,” *Annals of Iowa* 54, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 195.

⁶³ “Restore Order at Rath Plant,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, May 20, 1948.

The strike ended on May 28 with the rank-and-file agreeing on Rath's original proposal, mirroring the Big 4, of a nine-cent increase in pay and resumed full operations on June 1. The effects of the 1948 strike ran deep, "a man's life lost, a woman injured, families divided, finances lost, and hearts embittered."⁶⁴ The *Courier* echoed a national sentiment toward rioting and violence in the United States:

Nobody gains by violence and no policy in an industrial dispute which involves violence is going to be tolerated by the American people. The only people who, after quiet thought, advocate violence are the Communists who like to see people killed and hatred stimulated to divide a community.⁶⁵

The presence, or suggestion, of Communists involvement in the 1948 strike led UPWA Local 46 to lose membership and exposed itself to be challenged by the independent National Brotherhood of Packinghouse Workers for bargaining agent. This challenge did not measure up to a significant take over, but the four to one majority in favor of the CIO union showed some sense of collectiveness among the remaining members.⁶⁶

Rath Packing Company and UPWA Local 46 were not the only workers fighting for better wages. UAW Local 838 entered their own grievances with the John Deere Tractor Works in 1949, seeking higher wages, improved medical benefits, right to strike, and other contractual improvements.⁶⁷ In the summer of 1950, employees at the Waterloo Deere plant entered, what would be the second longest strike in the state of Iowa, after

⁶⁴ Daly, "History of Unionization in Waterloo, Iowa," 104-105.

⁶⁵ Editorial, "To the People of Waterloo," *Waterloo Sunday Courier*, May 23, 1948.

⁶⁶ Fehn, "Ruin or Renewal," 373-374.

⁶⁷ UAW Local 838, *Our History*, 28, 30-31.

core makers in the Foundry started a wildcat strike over piecework pricing. It lasted for nearly four months with more than 13,500 workers out of work companywide in Iowa and Illinois.⁶⁸ The strike ended in December with a new five-year contract that improved the union's situation, but it fell short of achieving all of its goals.⁶⁹ The long term agreement provided stability in the plant, but left open possibilities of the contract being misused by the company or workers, which could not be resolved until the next contract. Without yearly negotiations, union members decreased their participation in local activities. Gene Condon, who succeeded Carl Dahl as president of Local 838 in 1956, recalled the decline in participation stating, "Well, shortly after the 1950 strike we had large attendance, but then it would dwindle off about 1953. It'd get down to the point where it was hard to get a quorum of 35 people."⁷⁰ The success in gaining a strong contract also affected membership participation. Union leaders looked to political activity as one way to renew interest.

Organized labor in Waterloo formed the Waterloo Coordinating Council following the 1950 strike. This voluntary group included representatives of both craft and industrial unions, which organized to implement the collective electoral goal to "try and elect public officials who would at least give us a chance to survive."⁷¹ The council

⁶⁸"Big Tractor Plant Idled by Decision," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, September 3, 1950.

⁶⁹ "UAW Ratifies New Contract with Deere's," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, December 21, 1950.

⁷⁰ Gene Condon, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, June 11, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 16.

⁷¹ UAW Local 838, *Our History*, 29.

targeted the March 1950 mayoral race to unseat Mayor Bailey Barnes by supporting Lawrence “Pat” Touchae. Joseph McGlade, state commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, was labor’s initial candidate to run for Waterloo mayor. However, he withdrew from the race leaving on a few days for Touchae to get his name on the ballot.⁷² Labor rallied together by sending people to the downtown area and business district of Waterloo. Within forty-eight hours, they collected enough signatures to put Touchae on the ticket before the noon deadline on that Friday.⁷³ UAW Local 838’s union member, Clarence Lines, ran for Third ward councilman under Touchae’s ticket. On election night, Touchae won by a slim margin of 129 votes over Mayor Barnes. His ticket won four of six council seats, including Lines, in the highest turnout for a city election up to that time, with 14,505 votes cast.⁷⁴

The Waterloo Coordinating Council proved its collective effort could produce electoral victories. The political function of the union strengthened as it elected its first local candidates openly supportive of the local unions and organized labor.⁷⁵ However, these small gains locally were not enough to make a dent statewide in the Republican controlled legislature. The Iowa Democratic Party was inactive up to 1950. It had little influence statewide that left local areas to organize themselves. AFL and CIO unions needed to challenge the Iowa Farm Bureau’s and IMA’s influence over Republican

⁷² “Pat Touchae, Jim Maillie Head Tickets,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, March 12, 1950.

⁷³ Condon, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, June 11, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 26.

⁷⁴ “Mayor-Elect Takes Office Next Monday,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, March 28, 1950.

⁷⁵ Daly, “History of Unionization in Waterloo, Iowa,” 128.

legislators. Even though both the AFL and CIO championed strong membership rolls statewide, their differing ideals in political action impeded initial success across Iowa. The AFL focused on local activism, while the CIO, led by the UAW, sought political power up and down the ballot with the purpose to strengthen labor laws.⁷⁶

In the 1950s, the presence of the Communist Party and the Cold War severely impacted the growth of labor, especially in the CIO. According to Ellen Schrecker, professor of history, the internal purging of left-led unions made the CIO and AFL weak and vulnerable to further anti-labor legislation. It also prevented the national unions from effectively growing their membership and organizing the unorganized, while implementing internal reforms over their previous focus on social reforms.⁷⁷ In order for the two main international unions to preserve any political strength during the era of McCarthyism, new leadership decided to merge the two organizations in 1955. Led by George Meany (President of AFL) and Walter Reuther (President of CIO), the United Labor Policy committee unanimously agreed “to create a single trade union center in America through the process of merger [which] will preserve the integrity of each affiliated national and international union.” The AFL ratified the merger in the first week of December 1955, and the CIO followed suit with only a few dissensions.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Larew, *A Party Reborn*, 19-20.

⁷⁷ Ellen Schrecker, “Labor and the Cold War: The Legacy of McCarthyism” in *American Labor and the Cold War* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 16-19.

⁷⁸ Buhle, *Taking Care of Business*, 132-134.

The weakening of the international unions left the locals to become more prominent leaders in labor. The merger required collaboration among locals to work together and maintain strong, active membership. This was not a new concept to Waterloo because the rise of political activism after the right to work law in 1947 had already led to collaboration in the following state and local elections. Condon recalled, “We were the first county to merge of any county in the United States. We had what we called a coordinating council with the AFL-CIO and all unions, and we merged officially February 6, 1956. It was just a continuation of our old organization.”⁷⁹ The newly unified labor organization, Black Hawk County Union Council (BHUC, county was later dropped from the name), emerged from the consolidation of the Waterloo Central Labor Body (AFL) and the Black Hawk Industrial Union Council (CIO). It was led by John Cooney (UAW) and Paul Larsen (Pipefitters).⁸⁰

Larsen, executive secretary, recalled there were initial hesitations from a few locals over the merger. However, the BHUC overcame the opposition and members “were able to, in most cases, reach agreements so there [would] be only one of the two groups [AFL or CIO] on the ballot, giving us more of a chance to win the election, which at that time we were having quite good success.”⁸¹ Throughout the 1950s, the local

⁷⁹ Condon, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, June 11, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 24.

⁸⁰ “Merger of CIO-AFL Here Set,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, February 6, 1956.; John Cooney, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 16, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 22.; Paul M. Larsen, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 15, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 6-7.

⁸¹ Larsen, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 15, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 7.

unions continued to encourage and nominate city and state candidates who supported and were favorable to labor. BHUC's presence in Waterloo served as more than a labor council. It even took over the local Democratic Party. According to Cooney, "We got our membership very, very active in politics...Well, as far as I'm concerned, the Black Hawk County Union Council was the local Democratic Party."⁸² The limitations of Iowa's Democratic Party were not isolated to Waterloo, but throughout the entire state. James Larew argues that Iowa's Democratic Party was dormant between 1938 and 1962 due to three factors: urban areas lack of proportional elective representation; limited organizational techniques, especially in the larger cities; and the patronage system to sustain the party expenses and loyalties built by party chairman, Jake Moore.⁸³

Larsen's recollection mirrored Larew's assessment as he noted in 1981:

It was very poorly organized. Well, at that time Black Hawk County was very similar to many other places. [Democrats] were just so used to being number two, not winning, but they would get these purely patronage things. [The chairman] didn't really develop any party structure as such very much. And again, a lot of the help for this came from the labor movement in these campaigns.⁸⁴

The lack of party activism was not solely on the shoulders of the state and county leadership. Larsen also suggested labor's efforts in the 1948 election hindered its effectiveness: "What happened there was that for a long time thereafter many people that were leaders in the labor movement were registered as Republicans, and their

⁸² Cooney, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 16, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 22-23.

⁸³ Larew, *A Party Reborn*, 12-13.

⁸⁴ Larsen, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 15, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 23-24.

membership identified a little bit that way. So we were unable to be an effective voice until the late fifties, and then it started to change.”⁸⁵

One new element to emerge in the late fifties was the Committee on Political Education (COPE) that replaced the UAW-CIO Political Action Committee (PAC) after the merger. COPE, through the BHUC, became active in elections by endorsing candidates who supported labor-friendly legislation and policies. Member contributions helped finance its political campaigns. Larsen recognized the Democratic struggle, but with the development of COPE, and the presence of BHUC, Waterloo and the Third Congressional District received its necessary spark. He stated, “In the State Legislature the first friends that we had since the Depression years was after the Council became active politically. We had a very, very active Third District COPE. And as a result of that, we were able to gain a great deal of influence that we had not [previously] had with members of the State Legislature from rural areas.”⁸⁶ Despite the growing pressures driven by anti-communism accusations against organized labor, Waterloo continued to improve its political activism. It looked to expand its representation outside of city government and into the statehouse.

Iowa’s population, by the turn of the twentieth century, shifted away from rural to urban areas. The 1960 census recorded another decade of increased population in Black Hawk County and in Waterloo. The county’s population increased by 23 percent over 1950’s census and by 53.2 of 1940. Specifically in Waterloo, the city’s population grew

⁸⁵ Larsen, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 15, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 19.

⁸⁶ Larsen, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 15, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 13.

by 11.5 percent since 1950 and 38.7 percent from 1940. Overall, Iowa's urban population - making up 53 percent of the state's total population - increased by 16.9 percent in 1960, while rural areas declined by 5.5 percent.⁸⁷ The growing demands for action from the legislature to address urban concerns, mainly reapportionment, created a strong platform for labor. The regained strength of the Democratic leadership at the state level, along with a united urban coalition and the Federation of Labor, combined to challenge the state's rural, Republican dominance, influenced by IFBF and IMA.

Waterloo unions maintained labor support in the city government when voters re-elected Mayor Touchae to his fourth term in November 1955. Touchae then resigned in the middle of his term to become the executive secretary of the Chamber of Commerce.⁸⁸ The election of 1956 hinted at a decline of Republican dominance in the state, particularly when Herschel Loveless (D-Ottumwa) defeated first-year incumbent Leo Hoegh. Loveless became the sixth Democrat Governor of Iowa, the first in twenty years. It would not be easy. He faced a Republican controlled legislature and a Republican Lieutenant Governor William H. Nicolas (R-Mason City). This was Iowa's first split-party executive branch since 1890.⁸⁹ In Black Hawk County, Republicans maintained

⁸⁷ Edward F. Mason, ed., *State of Iowa Official Register 1961-1961*, no. 49, 59th General Assembly, (Des Moines: State of Iowa, 1961), 295, 305.; Sherman W. Needham, ed., *State of Iowa Official Register 1951-1952*, no. 44, 54th General Assembly, (Des Moines: State of Iowa, 1951), 246-47. ; Gardner, ed., *State of Iowa Official Register 1945-1946*, 179-180.

⁸⁸ "Mayor's Entire Slate Swept In," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, November 6, 1955.; Condon, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, June 11, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 26-27.

⁸⁹ "Split Statehouse First Since 1890: Loveless Wins Race for Governor," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, November 7, 1956. The last split executive leadership was in 1890, with Democrat Governor Horace Boise and Republican Lieutenant Governor Alfred N. Poyneer.

control of its county officials, but lost the majority on the board of supervisors.⁹⁰ County Republicans also withheld a challenge from Dahl and another Democrat for the two state house seats.⁹¹ The editors at the *Courier* wrote a warning to Republicans in Iowa: “This has become a two-party state and no Republican can any longer be assured of victory simple because he is a Republican.”⁹²

After Touchae’s resignation, labor leaders needed to find another mayoral candidate who would support labor and be at least nonpartisan, if not favoring labor, during contract negotiations. In the 1957 mayoral election, BHUC supported Edward A. Jochumsen, who won the election and served for four terms. Black Hawk County Democrats finally broke through in 1958, electing two of the three state representatives on the ballot. They elected Melvin Wolf (D-Waterloo) to the state senate and Robert D. Fulton (D-Waterloo) to the house. The other Democrat candidate lost the second house seat by thirteen votes.⁹³ In 1959, the voters in the Second Ward elected Gene Condon to the city council, who served two terms on Jochumsen’s “People’s Ticket.”⁹⁴

⁹⁰ “Demos Win Control of Supervisors,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, November 7, 1956.; Official Register 1957-1958 pg 310

⁹¹ Sherman W. Needham, ed., *State of Iowa Official Register 1957-1958*, no. 47, 57th General Assembly, (Des Moines: State of Iowa, [1957?]), 358.

⁹² Editorial, “Personal Victory for President Poses Problems for Republicans,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, November 7, 1956.

⁹³ Leon S. Barnes, ed., *State of Iowa Official Register 1959-1960*, no. 48, 58th General Assembly, (Des Moines: State of Iowa, [1959?]), 377.

⁹⁴ “Jochumsen’s Ticket in Smashing Triumph: Many New Faces Due at City Hall,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, November 6, 1957.; “Landslide Winner Jochumsen Moving: Peoples Ticket Swept into New City Hall,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, November 4, 1959.

Outside of Black Hawk County, Governor Loveless faced tough opposition from the rural, Republican controlled legislature due to the state's inability to reapportion its districts to recognize urban population centers. Labor, through the Democratic Party, moved its positions closely to the top of the legislative agenda, but it could not achieve its ultimate goal of overturning Iowa's right to work law without majority support at all three levels. Legislators debated reapportionment in the 1955, 1957, and 1959 sessions, but it resulted in each chamber blocking the other's proposals. Charles Wiggins describes the tenuous debates as "legislative checkmate" where "the urban forces tended to rely upon much senate opposition to the rural forces' plan, while the rural forces were bolstered by opposition on the part of many representatives to the proposals advanced by the urban interests."⁹⁵

The *Des Moines Register* noted in 1956 that: "Residents of Iowa's small towns and rural counties, who have long since died or moved away, carry more weight in the legislature than the swelling populations of the growing industrial cities. Legislators who represent more ghosts than men are elected on the same ticket with unnecessary county elective officials."⁹⁶ With the increased union membership and the growth of urban areas that favored the Democratic Party, reapportionment moved to the forefront of the party's platform. Democrats, urban residents, and unions challenged the fact that "one-fourth of

⁹⁵ Charles W. Wiggins, "The Post World War II Legislative Reapportionment Battle in Iowa Politics," in *Patterns and Perspectives in Iowa History* (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1973), 409.

⁹⁶ Larew, *A Party Reborn*, 33.

the state's citizens (most of them rural) elected a majority of the House, and about one-third of the voters elected a majority of the Senate."⁹⁷

Iowa's censuses had recorded an increase in the urban population for each subsequent decade since 1900. But Iowa's General Assembly, largely dominated by rural interests, turned a blind eye to reapportionment. To maintain the rural, conservative majority, the Iowa legislature had not redrawn the map to reflect population growth since 1886. This was constitutional due to two amendments that limited state action. The 1904 amendment regulated the Iowa House to 108 seats that equated "one representative from each county, except for the nine most populous counties which were granted two representatives." And the 1928 amendment created a 50 member Senate by limiting each county to no more than one senator, regardless of population.⁹⁸

The 1960 Election temporarily stopped the Democrats momentum. Black Hawk County Republicans regained control of the board of supervisors and sent the two Republican candidates back to the Iowa house. They defeated Fulton's re-election and held off Larsen's challenge for those house seats. The only Democrat to hold his seat was State Senator Wolf, who was not up for re-election. The county supported Nixon's ticket for President and the relatively unknown Jack Miller (R-Sioux City) for U.S. Senator over Governor Loveless. The majority of the voters in Black Hawk supported Lieutenant

⁹⁷ Larew, *A Party Reborn*, 33.

⁹⁸ Wiggins, "The Post World War II Legislative Reapportionment Battle in Iowa Politics," 406-407.

Governor Edward M. McManus (D-Keokuk) for the vacated governorship, but McManus lost to Norman A. Erbe (R-Boone) statewide.⁹⁹

According to state constitutional guidelines, each election ending in a zero (i.e. 1940, 1950, 1960...) would include a ballot measure asking voters if they would support a Constitutional Convention. Labor, urban areas, and predominately Democrats saw this as their only plausible way to achieve reapportionment. The *ad hoc* group, Citizens Committee for a Constitutional Convention, formed to advocate for the passage of the measure. The committee was supported by Iowa's liberal groups, including the League of Women Voters and the Iowa's Federation of Labor. Rural and conservative forces responded with their own *ad hoc* group, Iowans for Reapportionment by Legislative Action. It was supported heavily by IFBF and IMA with the goal to prevent any further changes to the State's Constitution that could arise during a convention including, overturning Iowa's right to work law and other measures against unions.¹⁰⁰ Black Hawk County strongly supported the measure (35,807 to 12,792), but the rural county voters overwhelmingly prevented its passage 534,628 to 470,257.¹⁰¹ With the defeat of the constitutional convention measure, Republicans took action to maintain their regained majority. They pushed through their reapportionment amendment known as the Shaff Plan.

⁹⁹ Mason, ed., *State of Iowa Official Register 1961-1961*, 330, 363-377.

¹⁰⁰ Wiggins, "The Post World War II Legislative Reapportionment Battle in Iowa Politics," 416.

¹⁰¹ Mason, ed., *State of Iowa Official Register 1961-1961*, 330, 377.

The plan, originally drafted by the Iowa Farm Bureau Federation in 1955, was sponsored by Senator David Shaff (R-Clinton). It called for “the apportioning of the senate on a population basis and the house on an area basis, with one representative from each county.”¹⁰² It passed the 1961 session by one vote casted by Senator Adolph Elvers of Elkader. He was the sole Democrat to support the plan after party leadership urged for unanimous support against it. The Democrat leadership in turn called it the “Shaft Plan.”¹⁰³ The 1963 session followed similar lines for passage, but it saw an increase in assenting votes from urban Republicans who joined their rural colleagues under the notion that it was the best plan to achieve reapportionment at the time. Meeting the State’s constitutional requirements for an amendment, the Shaff Plan was sent to the voters for their approval at a special election on December 3, 1963.¹⁰⁴

Waterloo unions, Chamber of Commerce, and city leaders set aside its partisan differences and joined together in the debate solely between rural and urban voters. The Waterloo Junior Chamber of Commerce hosted a debate in August 1963 between Senator Shaff and Pat Touchae, executive vice president of the Waterloo Chamber of Commerce and former mayor, on the pros and cons of the amendment. Senator Shaff argued that his plan offered the fairest make-up for the state, because “if you place apportionment on population, 17 counties would control each House...They would outvote the other 82 counties.” Touchae countered his argument by suggesting, “Why should the farmer,

¹⁰² Wiggins, “The Post World War II Legislative Reapportionment Battle in Iowa Politics,” 408.

¹⁰³ Larew, *A Party Reborn*, 75.

¹⁰⁴ Wiggins, “The Post World War II Legislative Reapportionment Battle in Iowa Politics,” 419.

because he's using a large area, be entitled to veto power over the majority?" The former mayor further denied the argument that voting down the Shaff Plan would cause the statehouse to be run by a majority influenced by a union-backed political machine. He emphasized that most town and city residents grew up on the farm and offered this rhetorical question to the audience, "Has their move from the rural to the urban areas caused them to be less desirable of enjoying rights and privileges of the first class citizenship?"¹⁰⁵

Touchae's impassioned statements against the Shaff Plan emphasized urban centers' willingness to prevent the severe impact of its passage on their representational rights. Newly elected Governor Harold Hughes (D-Ida Grove) joined the fight against the Shaff Plan, independent of any *ad hoc* group, noting the "Iowa legislature was on the right road in seeking legislative reapportionment, but wound up heading the "wrong direction." He further expressed the Shaff Plan "would pit an urban Senate against a rural House in a situation that will lead to deadlock and to the rural-urban antagonisms that will retard the development of Iowa."¹⁰⁶

Supporters of the Shaff Plan went beyond their campaign from reapportionment to expressing concerns of a union takeover in the statehouse, if the amendment failed. The Governor publicly addressed one accusation from the group "Physicians Committee for Reapportionment," which included seventeen members of the Iowa State Medical Society. The committee sent a letter to the society's membership asking, "Shall organized

¹⁰⁵ "Pros, Cons of Shaff Plan Aired at Jaycee Meeting," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, August 29, 1963.

¹⁰⁶ "Hughes to play active role in Fighting Shaff Plan," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, August 29, 1963.

labor control the future lives and destiny of the citizens of Iowa?” They expanded their argument stating:

Now what can we do? All we can really hope to accomplish is to educate the electorate and combat the propaganda of the big unions. We can ally ourselves with other organizations in a last ditch fight for freedom... We can literally join hands with our friends.¹⁰⁷

Governor Hughes passionately issued the following response, “I don’t know how responsible people can attempt to sow the seeds of fear among Iowa people - fear of one man against another.” He continued, using the same rationale Touchae expressed in Waterloo, “The people of Iowa should realize that 90 percent of laboring people in the state have had some contact with the farm, and many of them are only a generation away from the farm itself.”¹⁰⁸ The Governor even highlighted labor’s shortfall in achieving elected office in city halls or the legislature. This point was echoed by Duane Dewel, chairman of “Iowans Against the Shaff Plan” from Algona and supported by Charles L. Davis, president of the IFL, AFL-CIO. Dewel argued:

It’s ridiculous to claim that 70,000 labor union members in this state are going to push around Iowa’s 2,757,000 citizens. The labor union members are concentrated in a few cities, while Iowa Farm Bureau members are spread out through many counties in such a fashion that they can push the state around and run it.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ “Hughes Deplores Doctors’ Letter for Shaff Plan,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, October 17, 1963.

¹⁰⁸ “Hughes Deplores Doctors’ Letter for Shaff Plan,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, October 17, 1963.

¹⁰⁹ “Hughes Deplores Doctors’ Letter for Shaff Plan,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, October 17, 1963.

Even the conservative leaning *Courier* editorial staff challenged the claims of a labor takeover in an editorial entitled, “Shaff Plan Backers Try to Create Fear, Say City People Can’t Be Trusted.” They argued that voting against the plan would not mean defeat for conservative principles, nor would the plan create a permanent rural minority. They claimed that the state’s seventeen largest counties, which contained nearly fifty percent of Iowa’s population, were represented by “25 Republican state legislators and only 18 Democratic.” And the editorial claimed “only one of these Democratic legislators is a labor union official.” The editors also argued labor had connections to the farm that benefited both from their presence in the state. The editorial concluded:

Farmers in Iowa will have a sympathetic audience among city people in presenting their case. Farmers should not vote out of fear but from a determination to promote a progressive Iowa which will provide jobs for the young people coming off the farms... After all, what good is a “right to work” law unless the majority of Iowa citizens believe that employees should have the legally protected right not to join a union?¹¹⁰

Over 462,000 votes were casted in the special election. The Shaff Plan was defeated by margins of three to two statewide and with even higher margins in Iowa’s most populous seventeen counties. Black Hawk County defeated the plan by a margin of five to one, with a nearly thirty-five percent voter turnout. In Waterloo, the measure lost by a ten to one margin, with 10,198 against and 1,167 in favor. Even the county’s rural

¹¹⁰ Editorial, “Shaff Plan Backers Try to Create Fear, Say City People Can’t Be Trusted,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, December 2, 1962.

precincts opposed the measure nearly two to one over those who supported it.¹¹¹ Condon recalled years later:

In fact, the greatest thing that happened outside of our contracts and everything was when we defeated the Shaff Plan, reapportionment plan, on December 3, [1963], and we finally got representation in the House of Representatives and in the Senate. Labor's role in getting reapportionment and establishing a two-party system for the first time in I don't know how many years, that was the biggest contribution that I could've possibly made and that I'm very proud of.¹¹²

Labor's involvement, along with the League of Women Voters and united urban voters, both Republicans and Democrats, defeated the Shaff Plan. But the plan's failure still did not solve the reapportionment issue. This would eventually be settled through the Iowa and U.S. Supreme Courts over challenges lasting nine years. The Iowa Supreme Court redrew the state's legislative apportionment map after its *Noun v. Turner* (1972) decision. The result, according to one analysis, created the "most equitably apportioned legislature in the Union!"¹¹³

Defeating the Shaff Plan gave union leaders' confidence that their voices could be heard in the legislature. That confidence grew after Iowa joined President Johnson's

¹¹¹ "Black Hawk Turns Down Plan 5 to 1, Only Three Townships Back Shaff," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, December 4, 1963.; "Shaff Plan Killed, Iowa Rejects Proposal 3-2," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, December 4, 1963.

¹¹² Condon, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, June 11, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 25.

¹¹³ Wiggins, "The Post World War II Legislative Reapportionment Battle in Iowa Politics," 430. The court's plan decreased the rejected 1971 legislative reapportionment plan of 3.8 % population deviation in the house districts and 3.2% in the senate districts to less than 0.1 of 1% in both chambers.

landslide election of 1964. Democrats overwhelmingly were elected to national and state offices up and down the ballot.¹¹⁴ Iowans woke up on the morning of November 4, 1964 reading headlines in Iowa's leading newspapers that descriptively summed up the elections results. *The Des Moines Register* led with "The Johnson Victory Landslide for Hughes; Democrats Win Statehouse" and "Worst Loss for G.O.P. in Iowa History." *The Cedar Rapids Gazette* printed, "Demos Win Greatest Triumph in Iowa History," while Dubuque's *Telegraph-Herald* was more subtle and straightforward: "Hughes Victory Margin 7-3 Iowa House, State Offices Go Demo." The *Waterloo Daily Courier*'s front page was covered in headlines "Iowa Demos Score Biggest Vote Victory, Hughes Leads Massive Triumph; Party Wins Statehouse and House Majority," "Historic County Victory, Demos Win First Courthouse Posts in Black Hawk," and "Gross Is Only Iowa Republican Solon, Bucks Tide by Narrow Victory."

The Democrats also swept the state representation in Black Hawk County. Condon, who won by over 4,800 votes, became the first labor leader to serve in the state senate. He was joined by five other Democrats in the House, four of whom were from Waterloo. Another historical triumph came when James Jackson won his House race. He was the first African American elected to serve Black Hawk County in the state legislature. Representative Jackson joined Mrs. Willie Stevenson Glanton, from Des Moines, in becoming the first two African Americans to be seated in the Iowa House of Representatives.¹¹⁵ Democrat victories continued down through county officials, where it

¹¹⁴ Larew, *A Party Reborn*, 92.

¹¹⁵ "Fulton Asks Early Vote for Senate, County Has Solid Demo Delegation," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, November 4, 1964.

held major offices in the Courthouse for the first time in its history including: Auditor, Clerk of Court, and County Attorney. Republicans retained County Sheriff, whom was unopposed in the primary and general election. Finally, Democrats regained control of the board of supervisors with a super majority of four to one.¹¹⁶

The sweeping majority caught even Democrats and labor leaders off guard. Seeber recalled, “All of a sudden, here we were with all kinds of county candidates that didn’t know what they were going to do. You know, we ran the usual people, and all of a sudden they won.”¹¹⁷ The *Courier* editors softened the Republican defeat locally by noting the dwindling electoral margins county officials and state legislatures had faced in the previous elections and the shortcomings of Barry Goldwater’s Presidential ticket concluding, “When the party’s presidential candidate can carry only 11 precincts - and those by small margins - the local candidates have no chance.” They continued, “The local Democratic organization apparently did not anticipate the great Democratic sweep this year, since it did not bring out a candidate in opposition to Sherriff Elmer Hightower... even he probably would have been defeated had a Democratic opponent been named.”¹¹⁸

In the statewide races, Governor Hughes was re-elected by a resounding margin, winning 97 of Iowa’s 99 counties. The Democrat Ticket also claimed victory in the

¹¹⁶ “Historic County Victory, Demos Win First Courthouse Posts in Black Hawk,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, November 4, 1964.

¹¹⁷ Seeber, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 15, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 28.

¹¹⁸ Editorial, “Issues, Not Personalities Won Democratic Sweep,” *Waterloo Daily Courier*, November 4, 1964.

Lieutenant Governor race, by electing Senator Fulton (D-Waterloo), who's vacated seat was filled by Francis Messerly (R-Cedar Falls) in a special election. Democrats' election spoils claimed five Republican state offices, its first since 1938, and six of the seven U.S. Congressional seats.¹¹⁹ The only Republican to survive the onslaught was Representative H. R. Gross who defeated Stephen Peterson (D-Waterloo) by only 419 votes. Petersen held over a 5,000 vote lead in Black Hawk County, but that slowly dwindled away as the rural vote came in and solidified another term for the Republican.¹²⁰

Social scientists and historians have analyzed a shift in the American voter between the 1960 and 1964 elections. Prior to the Eisenhower years, many American voters relied on partisan affiliation in casting their votes for president. Party affiliation sustained through each generation based on habitual, family traditions and social identity. The average voter showed little knowledge of policy and the political party served as the anchor to the individual's political position.¹²¹ The shift from Eisenhower to Kennedy to Johnson, which culminated in the Goldwater/Johnson election, involved new set of voters who were not tied to political party. These voters were concerned with rising social issues of racial and gender equality, social welfare, and the expanded role of the federal government. Professor Norman H. Nie and his colleagues observed, "The American public has been entering the electoral arena since 1964 with quite a different mental set

¹¹⁹ "Iowa Demos Score Biggest Vote Victory," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, November 4, 1964.

¹²⁰ "Gross Is Only Iowa Republican Solon," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, November 4, 1964.

¹²¹ Norman H. Nie, Sidney Verba, and John R. Petrocik, *The Changing American Voter*, enlarged ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 29

than was the case in the late 1950s and early 1960s. They have become more concerned with issues and less tied to their parties.”¹²²

Political Activism’s Successful Decline

With its newly found majority, the labor movement took up one final campaign to overturn Iowa’s right to work law and to establish an agency shop in its place. Labor leaders wrote in the platform at the Democratic State Convention a plank that suggested, “...the Democratic Party of Iowa recommends action to repeal the so-called right-to-work law” without the knowledge or approval of Governor Hughes.¹²³ Governor Hughes did not want to jeopardize the party’s newly found majority. He had to keep in mind the relations between businessmen (IMA) and farmers (IFBF) within his administration. He opened the new legislature in 1965 by suggesting pro-labor modifications to Iowa’s labor laws instead of an outright repeal of the right to work law. In 1976, Lieutenant Governor Fulton recalled the tense situation within the Democratic party, then: “Labor, of course, was very influential with the Democrats and, in 1965, we had a knock-down, drag-out fight over who was going to run the party: the Governor and the party organization or the labor halls.”¹²⁴

¹²² Nie et al., *The Changing American Voter*, 98-99, 166, 178-179.; Larew, *A Party Reborn*, 78-79.

¹²³ Larew, *A Party Reborn*, 110.

¹²⁴ Larew, *A Party Reborn*, 111.

Governor Hughes supported a three-bill plan that looked to achieve labor's objective in overturning the state's right to work law. The first measure called for the legalization of the union shop. It stipulated that an employer could only hire union members or if an employee is hired outside the union, they would need to become a member and pay union dues in a set timeframe. The second bill proposed a commission to mediate and prevent labor disputes mirroring the NLRB. The third challenged the state's anti-secondary boycott law, which prevented unions from pressuring neutral companies to halt business with another company under strike.¹²⁵ The Governor argued "Either we believe in collective bargaining or we do not. To me, this is the point on which it all hinges," and directed the legislature to grant labor "the dignity of fair partnership in the industry and business future of Iowa...instead of treating them as a distrusted and ill-favored stepchild."¹²⁶ The union shop bill first passed the House, but failed in the Senate by 31-27. Seven Democrat senators, majority of whom were in rural districts, voted against the bill.

Mike Adams, UAW Local 838 member who worked at the John Deere Waterloo Tractor Works as a sheet metal presser, vividly recalled the defeat and showed the frustration that many union members shared that day:

In 1964, when we had the people, we was supposed to have the most Democrats in Iowa, we couldn't get the right-to-scab law repealed. And one of those goddam Democrats that was head of the right-to-scab law today was one of the Senators

¹²⁵ "Demos Still Hope for Two Labor Laws," *Waterloo Sunday Courier*, May 23, 1965.

¹²⁶ Larew, *A Party Reborn*, 112-113.

from Boone that voted against us. The AFL voted against us on this agency shop because they wanted the union shop. And, hey, they've got [an open] shop.¹²⁷

Jack Seeber, electrician at the Waterloo Tractor Works and UAW Local 838 President from 1973 thru 1975, also shared Adams's assessment that the divide between the AFL and CIO from the UAW caused the failure of the bill to pass. Seeber remembered the Democrats who, earned labor's support in their elections, went against the unions on right to work:

A gentleman by the name of Francis Messerly, who labor had split on after half the locals had endorsed him. The Packinghouse Workers and some others had endorsed him. Local 838 had not. He had promised to vote for repeal. Also a gentleman from Cedar Rapids had had the endorsement of labor in that area and had promised to vote for repeal. When it came time to vote they both deserted us.¹²⁸

The failure to repeal or modify the right to work law became the breaking point in Waterloo local's political activism. The unified front could not be sustained with differing interest on solving labor laws in Iowa. In 1965, Reuther withdrew the UAW-CIO from the AFL-CIO. Buhle argued that Meany's tight grip over the executive committee and their differing views on social reform, including Civil Rights and the Vietnam War, led to Reuther's breakaway.¹²⁹ The state and locals followed suit in 1968.

¹²⁷ Clare (Mike) Adams with Cecil Pierce, Waterloo, Joint Interview by Merle Davis, June 18, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 63-64.

¹²⁸ Seeber, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 15, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 30.

¹²⁹ Buhle, *Taking Care of Business*, 179-180.

The UAW-CIO in Iowa withdrew from the IFL, AFL-CIO and the BHUC.¹³⁰ The local unions' successful political activism would not survive this institutional divide.

Many UAW Local 838 leaders saw the power their union had in Waterloo and felt the smaller AFL unions and other locals took advantage of the numbers and money they contributed to the BHUC. Cecil Pierce, a UAW Local 838 divisional steward at the Waterloo Tractor Works, provided this assessment of the Local's involvement in political elections, "I mostly just base it on UAW, that we went out and worked like hell, and we ended up behind the eight ball. We furnished the leg work and the money, and they [AFL] took the credit."¹³¹ Carl Dahl, UAW Local 838 President, tried to restrain the divisiveness that emerged between the Local 838 and AFL unions. He recalled, "I've always had trouble with 838 due to their size. They get cocky. 'We pay the most money. We're going to have all the say-so.' I said, 'You got to have a little compassion. You got to be tolerant. You got to help the little guy a little.'"¹³²

The division between labor organizations jeopardized union solidarity in Iowa, especially in Waterloo. The UAW Local 838 was the largest union by membership and was heavily invested in leadership roles within both the IFL, AFL-CIO and BHUC. Its withdrawal from those organizations contributed to labor's failure to repeal or modify the state's right to work law, despite having the largest Democratic majority in Iowa's

¹³⁰ UAW Local 838, *Our History*, 63.

¹³¹ Adams/Pierce, Waterloo, Joint Interview by Merle Davis, June 18, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 39.

¹³² Dahl, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, June 29, 1981, ILHOP, Transcript, 79.

history. The landslide victories in 1964 were all but erased in the 1968 election. The nation's sentiment against the Johnson Administration and the Vietnam War, along with civil unrest in the country, led to significant victories for the Republican Party. In Iowa the Republicans regained the statehouse electing Robert D. Ray as governor and gaining the rest of the state offices under the GOP ticket. Black Hawk County's GOP followed the statewide trend and swept all the courthouse offices up for election and won all but two of the state representatives on the ballot. Fred Nolting (D-Waterloo), supported by labor, survived re-election for state representative.¹³³

A union's role in political activism is necessary for it to be successful within the community and the state. Beyond organization and representation, political activism provided a rationale for union membership. The 1948 UPWA strike and the 1950 UAW strike solidified each local's presence within its respective companies, albeit a shaky one for Local 46 and Rath's. The local unions showed their strength in negotiation, bargaining, and solidarity by achieving long term contracts that capitalized on majority of its members' concerns. This success left union membership in flux. Between negotiations, what benefit did the union provide in maintaining an active membership? That purpose presented itself through a political awakening after the state's passage of its right to work law in 1947.

The victories achieved by the leadership and solidarity of the Local 838 members, from the 1948 election to 1964, became their demise. One consequence was due to the

¹³³ "Ray Leads GOP to Statehouse Sweep," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, November 6, 1968.; "GOP Wins County with 2 Exceptions," *Waterloo Daily Courier*, November 6, 1968.

unions' campaign for its members to register Republican in the 1948 gubernatorial primary. It created an opening for the membership, who were slightly conservative themselves, to be Union Republicans rather than Union Democrats. It took a joint effort by all locals, CIO and AFL, to rectify and rebuild a labor coalition that supported candidates who would back organized labor in the community and the state.

Waterloo unions' determination to be represented led to the creation of the voluntary based Waterloo Coordinating Council that included representation from AFL, Teamsters, and CIO local unions. Even though the International Unions AFL and CIO formally merged in 1955, Waterloo's commitment to unity among its locals led Black Hawk County to be the first official merged entity under the new AFL-CIO. Union political activism here hit its peak in 1964. The unions' strong opposition to the Shaff Plan played a part in the large Democrat landslide in 1964. Labor made concerted efforts to place the repeal of the state's right to work law at the top of the Democrat agenda. However, this goal was not shared by Democrat leaders, Governor Hughes and Lieutenant Governor Fulton. The Democrat's strong majority gave labor the optimism that they could finally achieve its ultimate goal. This unraveled with the divisiveness within the party on whether to repeal right to work or modify it through positive labor legislation. Both tactics failed in session and played a part in the decline of the unions' united political activism.

Over the next decade Waterloo had limited labor representation at the city and state level and faced combative primaries on who earned labor's support. Without a strong, unified coalition, Waterloo slipped back under Republican control and this led to

a decreased labor representation at the state level. Richard Price, UPWA Local 46 member and Chief Steward from 1969 to 1979, recalled the dissatisfaction: “Seems like our biggest problem in the county, the City of Waterloo, we can’t correlate our beliefs and ideas jointly with the UAW. We have lost candidates that would’ve won the goddam thing if we’d got together.”¹³⁴ The election 1964 resulted in the success the local unions strove for in their efforts for political activism. However, that success did not produce the result they truly wanted. It led to dissention among the locals and instability in the community of Waterloo.

The unions suffered political limitations from anti-communist sentiment at the height of McCarthyism and rising social issues around the Vietnam War and Civil Rights. But this did not prevent unions from improving the social welfare of its community and membership. The role of community outreach is the third foundation that defined the success of Waterloo unions. This is explained in the next chapter that focuses on one example when Local 838 organized to assist needy families at the height of another economic downturn, known as the farm crisis.

¹³⁴ Richard Price, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 9, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 54.

PART II

COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND THE “BROWN BAGGERS,” 1970-1990

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the United States’ farm economy hit record yields and high land prices. These yields resulted in surpluses that could not be consumed by the market. As the surpluses increased, prices started to drop. Farmers could not sell their crops or land, agriculture manufacturers’ production slowed, and the nation faced another economic crisis, known as the Farm Crisis. During the height of this crisis, the community of Waterloo struggled to feed and support its needy families, particularly those who were facing layoffs and waning benefits. The Cedar Valley Food Bank and the UAW Local 838 “Brown Baggers,” another social aid organization, were both crucial in offering necessary supplies to those in need. But only the Food Bank became a staple resource in the Waterloo community in the last decade of the twentieth century.

In 1985, a second grader at Kinglsey Elementary wrote the following essay after her class finished a canned food drive for the Salvation Army.

Once my neighbor lost her job. I didn’t help her, but a cloud came right up to me and said, ‘You should be nicer. I’ve seen lots of people lose their jobs and after awhile they lose their house. They don’t have any food. They can’t buy anything and it’s all because they don’t have any money and nobody helps them.’ ‘You’re right,’ I said, ‘I am being selfish.’¹

This vivid realization underscores the vast impact the economic downturn in the 1980s had on the community. Community service and relief agencies were overwhelmed by the number of needy families asking for assistance during this period, and the farm crisis

¹ Cindy Kranz, “Metro Area Student are Pitching in to Give Assistance to Those in Need,” *Waterloo Courier*, February 22, 1985.

caused some to restructure their outreach to weather the storm. The full impact of the farm crisis on Waterloo has yet to be studied, but the UAW Local 838 Brown Baggers is worth exploring.

This chapter expands on the third foundation, community outreach, for union strength and solidarity. It argues that the Brown Bag Committee did more than provide food for needy community members. It served a social and cultural role, affirming connections between the community of Waterloo and the UAW Local 838. The chapter addresses two main questions: What effect did the UAW's Brown Baggers have on union-community relations? And, what contributed to the later decline of union visibility in the community? When Waterloo officials later partnered with a citywide food bank, the result shifted focus away from the Brown Baggers and decreased the visibility of the union's social impact on the community.

By the late 1970s, Iowans had experienced at least a decade of positive economic growth under Governors Harold Hughes and Robert Ray. The state held a surplus of about \$30 million in its general fund, and industrial production surpassed \$8 billion.² Farmers mentality shifted and saw their farms not as a "way of life," but as a business. William A. Hewitt, chairman of Deere & Company, called this new type of farmer "the businessman farmer."³ Between 1970 and 1981, the value of farm acreage increased from \$300 to \$1700 nationally. In Iowa, the value of an acre could go as high as \$3200. Farmers took advantage of this prosperous time and expanded their land holdings,

² Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996), 303.

³ Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land*, 304.

purchased new equipment, and harvested a surplus of crops that was supported by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).⁴

Origins of the “Brown Baggers”

Large farmers were not the only ones producing a surplus. Roger Bleeker, a foundry worker at John Deere Waterloo Tractor Works, noticed his garden and those in his neighborhood grew more vegetables than could be consumed by a single household. The surplus was left to rot or be thrown away. Bleeker shared his concerns about the rotting produce with a group of his friends at Buck Hill Tap, a local tavern.⁵ The group noticed that people who were handicapped or elderly could not easily grow their own gardens and would be a perfect group to receive the extra fruits and vegetables. So the group organized a collection of the surplus and by word-of-mouth created a clearinghouse in the back of a station wagon that served as a mobile food transport, delivering to those in need around their neighborhood.⁶

The popularity of this organization quickly outgrew the back of the station wagon, and Bleeker turned to the UAW. In 1974, Bleeker joined the UAW Local 838 and by 1977 was a member of the union’s community service committee. This committee

⁴ Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land*, 316.

⁵ Peter Goldman, “For Hungry Families, Help in Brown Bags,” in “100 New American Heroes,” Special Issue, *Newsweek*, Summer 1986, 62.

⁶ Roger Bleeker, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, May 19, 1982, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 5.

expanded its primary focus of helping union members during strikes, to being visible on all community boards and partnering with other non-profit organizations.⁷ Bleeker saw an opportunity for the community service committee to sponsor a new program involving his surplus produce. He proposed his idea with the intentions of someone taking it up and organizing the efforts. But, as he recalled, “They dropped it right back in my lap and said it sounded like a good idea.”⁸ So Bleeker became chairman of the group that soon began calling itself the “Brown Baggers,” named after the brown bags used to store produce.⁹

The Brown Baggers’ connection to labor helped the program establish credibility within the community. Its visibility increased and so did donations. Within its first year of operation, the Brown Baggers collected five tons of food to aid the elderly and needy in Waterloo.¹⁰ Bleeker described the range of people, who donated items to the union hall:

High-ranking company officials. We’ve got union officials. We have people come in...[that are] plain rank and file people. We have people come off the street with absolutely no affiliation with John Deere or with organized labor.¹¹

The union’s outreach to the broader community created a relationship that only continued to expand and grow in the subsequent years.

⁷ Bleeker, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, May 19, 1982, ILHOP, Transcript, 3.

⁸ Bleeker, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, May 19, 1982, ILHOP, Transcript, 5.

⁹ Goldman, “For Hungry Families, Help in Brown Bags,” 62.

¹⁰ Goldman, “For Hungry Families, Help in Brown Bags,” 62.

¹¹ Bleeker, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, May 19, 1982, ILHOP, Transcript, 6.

The Brown Baggers took every opportunity to broaden their resources and developed a relationship with community subgroups. Bleeker felt the union could benefit by partnering with the Hawkeye Valley Area Agency on Aging, directed by Chris Harshbarger. This established agency, within the Waterloo community, provided direct services to the elderly, including “transportation, congregate and home-delivered meal services, income assistance, and legal advocacy.”¹² Harshbarger described the newly formed partnership as a natural fit. Together they were able to broaden their reach and make sure the necessary recipients received the donations collected by the Brown Baggers.

Harshbarger recalled one event that reflected the character and drive Bleeker upheld as chairman of the Brown Baggers. In the summer of 1979, he returned to his office from a meeting in Grinnell and noticed something unusual,

When I came back to the office I pulled up the alleyway where I usually parked my car, and there was a bit of activity. So I got the car parked, and it must’ve been about 90 degrees in the shade. I went to come into the Center, and I heard this clucking and pecking inside the door. I looked in the door and here were probably two hundred live chickens tied leg-to-leg, two to a bundle, sitting in the back door of the Senior Center, with probably two hundred people fluttering about, playing Bingo.¹³

Bleeker used these chickens as a produce donation for the Brown Baggers, but when word got out there were not enough to distribute to all who wanted them. The next best thing was to organize a “Chicken Bingo” and distribute the clucking prizes to the lucky winners. The Brown Baggers consistently brought in large amounts of food to be shared

¹² Bleeker, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, May 19, 1982, ILHOP, Transcript, 6.

¹³ Bleeker, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, May 19, 1982, ILHOP, Transcript, 8.

with the elderly and needy, ranging from fifteen to twenty bushels of apples to truckloads of sweet corn. As the program grew, so did demand.

In the early years of the program, Bleeker faced a shortage of manpower to upkeep the committee's four community gardens in the metro area. In 1982, the committee reported that their members planted "700 cabbage plants, 560 tomato plants, 200 pounds of potato seeds, 152 hills of muskmelon and 32 pounds of onion sets" across the four gardens.¹⁴ This level of produce could not be left unmaintained, so the Brown Baggers relied on volunteer hours from committee members, John Deere retirees, and a unique group: juveniles on probation. Before the Brown Baggers, Waterloo established a program that allowed juveniles to volunteer their labor as payment for wrong doings in the community

This program was called VPOAs or volunteer probation officer aides. Members were described, by the *Waterloo Courier*, as "ordinary people - factory workers, businessmen, housewives, college students - who are working on a one-to-one basis with youngsters in trouble." VPOAs provided kids, who were first offenders or who committed lesser crimes, such as "shoplifting, petty larceny, [and] vandalism," an opportunity to connect with an individual in the community, two hours a week, who showed an interest in the child's life. In 1976, nearly 560 people were trained as VPOAs.¹⁵ In the following year, the program shifted from the Volunteer Bureau to the Juvenile Court Services, which revamped the program under the name, "Alternative

¹⁴ Roy Postel, "Food Program Nurtured by Cooperative Effort," *Waterloo Courier*, July 4, 1982.

¹⁵ Jim Wigdahl, "Volunteer Aides Help Youngsters in Trouble," *Waterloo Courier*, June 20, 1976.

Community Services.” The volunteer services supervisor, Steve Smith, explained that this new program “offers concrete repayment to society, community involvement and awareness, a possible sense of accomplishment for the youth and accountability for the juvenile court with minimal expense.”¹⁶

Bleeker partnered again with Harshbarger and Julia DaLaRosa, an information and referral counselor with the Hawkeye Valley Area Agency on Aging, to develop a relationship with the Black Hawk County Juvenile Court Services.¹⁷ The Brown Baggers and the Agency secured thirty-five juveniles to maintain the four community gardens in 1981. By the second year, it was estimated forty juveniles worked about 350 collective hours in the gardens. The youth were credited \$2.75 an hour that went to their restitution of damages and also counted towards work-project hours.

Bleeker noted that this was a fun program for both the juveniles and retiree volunteers who supervised the kids. He made the youth aware that “it’s a lot better to be out in a garden working with a grandparent than it is down in the basement of the Courthouse cleaning out a john.” Bleeker felt “You got to keep it fun. You got to make sure that you don’t destroy human dignity, because a lot of times the people that come to us the only thing they got left is their pride. You don’t take that from them.”¹⁸ The effects of the farm crisis challenged Bleeker’s humility and tested the strength of the Brown

¹⁶ “Young Offenders are put to Work,” *Waterloo Courier*, January 30, 1977.

¹⁷ Bleeker, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, May 19, 1982, ILHOP, Transcript, 12-13.

¹⁸ Bleeker, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, May 19, 1982, ILHOP, Transcript, 17-18.

Baggers. Necessities, besides food, became scarce for families including: clothes, shelter, and a strong support system.

As the Brown Baggers expanded their resources to meet the needs of the community, they also expanded the fact that the local government was not doing enough to meet either the farm crisis or the food shortage. Soon the organization was not alone in its effort. The Family and Children's Council of Black Hawk County and the Family Services League sponsored a "Pulling Together" meeting on Friday, November 19, 1982. The organizers mailed four hundred invitations to community members, leaders, and other groups to collectively organize in order to provide sufficient resources to needy families during the upcoming holiday season. The *Waterloo Courier* reported that 140 people attended the meeting at the Westminster United Presbyterian Church representing "service agencies, churches, schools, Local 838, organizations, the Extension service, Cedar Valley Food Bank, the Waterloo Recreation and Arts Center, and Hawkeye Institute of Technology."¹⁹

Waterloo Mayor Leo Roof, who represented the city at this meeting, pledged that "whatever the city can do, within the law, the city will do." The organizations in attendance also made a similar pledge to help the groups each represented. The Local 838 committed to help with food drives, clothing drives, and counseling services.²⁰ Following this meeting the Brown Baggers quickly went to work. The leaders stuck to the tested and

¹⁹ Bettie Ferguson, "Black Hawk Countians Pull Together to Help," *Waterloo Courier*, November 21, 1982.

²⁰ Bettie Ferguson, "Black Hawk Countians Pull Together to Help," *Waterloo Courier*, November 21, 1982.

true model of community subgroups. In two months, they partnered with the St. Vincent DePaul Society and organized a clothing drive providing “clothing, shoes and linen available to unemployed or low-income people who are having to use their funds on other needs, such as food and heating.”²¹ They collected donations on Wednesday, January 19 and distributed them over the next two days. Waterloo residents read on the front page of Thursday’s *Waterloo Courier*, “Clothing Drive Response Exceeds Expectations.” In the article, Bleeker said, “We got more clothing than you could ever imagine...I knew we’d have a fair turnout. But not in my wildest imaginations did I think we’d have a turnout like this.” Community members and Iowans, as far away as Waukon, donated thousands and thousands of articles of clothing at the UAW Local 838 union hall.²²

The numbers of donations were equaled by the hundreds of families who lined up in the winter cold to benefit from this service. In the initial two-days of the drive, 1,075 families claimed clothing. Due to the high turn-out, Bleeker continued the program into the following week, providing opportunities on Monday and Tuesday that assisted an additional 783 families. The total drive aided 6,358 people from Northeast Iowa.²³ Following this success, Brown Baggers and the St. Vincent DePaul Society organized another clothing drive at the UAW Security House during the first week of December in 1983. This drive outfitted 7,476 people. Bleeker commented on the efforts stating,

²¹ “Clothing Drive Materials Gathered,” *Waterloo Courier*, January 18, 1983, Picture.

²² David Avery, “Clothing Drive Response Exceeds Expectations,” *Waterloo Courier*, January 20, 1983.

²³ David Avery, “Thousands Give, Thousands Receive During Clothing Distribution Drive Here,” *Waterloo Courier*, January 26, 1983.

There are a lot of children and adults who are much warmer today than they were last week...And they are much warmer thanks to the generosity of the Waterloo-Cedar Falls community. This area may be a large one, but it is small enough to be caring.²⁴

The remaining items were then shipped to Cedar Rapids for local distribution.

Farm Crisis: Brown Baggers Successful Decline

The Brown Baggers substantially impacted Waterloo early in the farm crisis; but another entity began to organize and offer similar services with a larger focus, the Cedar Valley Food Bank. The food bank officially opened its doors on December 9, 1981, after ten months of planning. City officials, community members, and church leaders made up the multiple committees tasked in structuring the establishment of the food bank. The committee members included: Mayor Roof, Chris Harshberger, Rabbi Sol Serber, Pastor Bob Ward, and ten others in community.²⁵

The food bank distributed its first donations to families or community members referred from local churches or the Operation Threshold outreach office. It had enough donations to assemble emergency food boxes that contained a three-day supply of food. The food bank received its initial donations from “several churches, Immaculate Conception Elementary School in Gilbertville, Allen Memorial Hospital, Deere & Co. and Operation Threshold.”²⁶ The Cedar Valley Food Bank was wholly devoted to social

²⁴ “1,844 Households Benefit from Clothing Drive Here,” *Waterloo Courier*, December 5, 1983.

²⁵ “Food Bank Structure Eyed,” *Waterloo Courier*, May 22, 1981.

²⁶ “Deposits are All in Place, Food Bank Opens Doors,” *Waterloo Courier*, December 9, 1981.

welfare. In contrast, UAW Local 838 was a labor organization and bargaining agent first and community welfare organization second. Thus it would soon become clear that the Brown Baggers were no longer necessary.

Within a two-day period in its first month of operation, the food bank received forty referrals for emergency food boxes and aided 124 people. This grew to an average of 200 referrals a month, doubling the food bank's initial prediction of up to 100 families a month.²⁷ Monetary donations also increased with awareness and by December 20, Reverend Jack Boelens, president of the Cedar Valley Food Bank board of directors and pastor of First Presbyterian Church, reported \$9,514 in cash contributions received from churches, civic groups, and individuals. With the rapid increase in demand, unfamiliarity with handling numerous cash donations, and limited supplies, food bank officials sought assistance in developing their management and administrative processes. They partnered with Operation Threshold as the primary administer and financial recorder, but received assistance from "Black Hawk Lutheran Ministries, the County Relief Office, the Brown Bagger program and Hawkeye Valley Area Agency on Aging."²⁸

This partnership, although temporary, began to shift the Brown Baggers food drive responsibilities towards the city sponsored and supported food bank. Through 1982, the Brown Baggers were an important resource to the Waterloo community. From 1983 thru 1987, the Brown Baggers felt the impact of the Farm Crisis as John Deere drastically

²⁷ "Food Bank Gets Funds from Group," *Waterloo Courier*, March 25, 1982.

²⁸ "Funds from Civic Foundation, Anonymous Donor Lift Food Bank," *Waterloo Courier*, December 20, 1981.

reduced its workforce through layoffs and shutdowns. John Deere's workforce, in 1979, was 16,160 Waterloo employees. By October 1985, it had decreased to 7,109 wage and salaried employees. 4,371 of whom were still laid off and an additional 1,685 employees returned to their jobs without their previous seniority.²⁹ Across the state, manufacturing jobs declined to 18.3 percent of the workforce in 1987, which reflected a 4.7 percent loss from 1979.³⁰

Even Bleeker could not escape from the "pink slip" and was out of work for two years, lining up for a brown bag of his own.³¹ As a result of the continued hard times, the UAW Local 838 increasingly turned its focus away from providing charity to the broader community and focused on the original function of the community service committee: to provide services during strikes or in this case major layoffs. The massive layoffs limited the union's foundational functions. It could not sustain all three roles needed for solidarity and strength. Instead, charitable community outreach became relegated to members only; while the union's organization and representation function focused on its ongoing unemployed workers who were quickly running out of union and unemployment benefits.

In December 1983, 3,500 of the 4,000 idled union members registered to receive a ham or turkey for the holidays. The union, along with the Family Auxiliary 273 of Local 838, collected donations outside the gates of all five John Deere facilities. This donor

²⁹ Ed Adcock, "Deere to Idle 480 Employees," *Waterloo Courier*, October 3, 1985.

³⁰ Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land*, 318.

³¹ Goldman, "For Hungry Families, Help in Brown Bags," 62.

drive generated \$9,000, enough for the union to purchase \$10 food certificates redeemable at a metro supermarket by unemployed workers who had used up their benefits. Despite the lay-offs at the Deere plants, the Brown Baggers partnered with St. Joseph's Catholic Church to sponsor a food pantry. As Bleeker put it in a *Waterloo Courier* article, this service provided "emergency food for low-income families and low-income elderly until they can begin receiving assistance from other service agencies."³² The Brown Baggers shifted from a leadership to supportive role in the community. It allowed other resources, like the Cedar Valley Food Bank, to take over its once prominent position providing social services for the Waterloo community.

The following year, the UAW and Deere & Company created "Care and Share" program to offer assistance "for communities in Iowa and Illinois where John Deere facilities are located". The company offered to match up to \$100,000 worth of food and monetary donations collected by the employees. Items collected in Waterloo would be distributed through the Salvation Army and the Cedar Valley Food Bank. Gordon Tjelmeland, Deere & Company spokesman, commented that "through 'Care and Share,' all Deere employees have the opportunity to show again that they do care about their friends and neighbors of the entire community in which they work and live."³³ This program sponsored over 100,000 meals that helped laid-off employees, but it also

³² Bettie Ferguson, "Union Local Reinforces Effort to Help Jobless," *Waterloo Courier*, December 11, 1983.

³³ "Deere Teams with Workers to Aid Needy," *Waterloo Courier*, January 10, 1984.

expanded to seven agency pantries outside Black Hawk County, according to Ruth Toney, director of the food bank.³⁴

The efforts to help fellow employees continued into December. The John Deere Component Works Plant Engineering Department raised more than \$1,700 at their third annual Christmas benefit auction to help thirty Brown Baggers and their families. Cathie Rose, chairman of the Christmas project, commented that “this year we wanted to help our own people who aren’t as fortunate as those of us who are still working.” The thirty families received a basket “containing food, clothing and toys along with a ham or turkey for their Christmas dinner.”³⁵

Union members and John Deere employees greatly benefited from this community relationship they had created. However, Bleeker reflected on Waterloo’s continued struggles stating: “You can give away so many food baskets, open up so many clothes closets, but if the family has lost their home and is sitting in a snow bank, it is just not enough.”³⁶ His feelings of frustration and hopelessness echoed those shared by the second grader at Kingsley Elementary. These sentiments affected the effectiveness of community resources, including the Brown Baggers and the Cedar Valley Food Bank, over the next two years.

³⁴ Sara Summerhays, “Community Help for Needy Emphasized,” *Waterloo Courier*, February 1, 1985.

³⁵ “Deere Unit Helps Needy Families,” *Waterloo Courier*, December 20, 1984.

³⁶ Bettie Ferguson, “Union Local Reinforces Effort to Help Jobless,” *Waterloo Courier*, December 11, 1983.

In the summer of 1984, the food bank neared desperation as supplies dwindled and cash was quickly depleted. Director Toney told the *Waterloo Courier*: “The problem is ‘just getting worse’ and the food bank cannot be expected to carry this entire load without community support in the form of food or money donations.”³⁷ This plea for help was answered by the city six months later. Waterloo’s new mayor, Del Bowers, organized the “Warm Your Heart...Help with Food and Fuel” campaign, asking citizens and local businesses to raise \$300,000 to be split between the Cedar Valley Food Bank and Operations Threshold. Bowers suggested that “all citizens should take an active part in the observance of community needs by, among other things, volunteering their support to assist the numerous human service agencies as they strive to relieve the suffering and needs of many individuals and families in our city.”³⁸

The Waterloo Mayor’s call-to-action received positive responses from diverse organizations in the Waterloo-Cedar Falls area including: Black Hawk Democrat and Republican Parties, Hawkeye Chapter of the American Red Cross, University of Northern Iowa, UNI Student Association, Black Hawk County Union Council (AFL-CIO), The Waterloo Fire Department, John Deere Community Credit Union, and College Square Mall. All these organizations, and many others, developed friendly competitions to raise funds, held food drives and money drives, and organized volunteers.³⁹

³⁷ Julie Herman, “Food Bank Supplies, Cash Running Out,” *Waterloo Courier*, July 5, 1984.

³⁸ Sara Summerhays, “Community Help for Needy Emphasized,” *Waterloo Courier*, February 1, 1985.

³⁹ “Citizens, Organizations Pitching in to Help Drive,” *Waterloo Courier*, February 1, 1985.

The community rallied around the Cedar Valley Food Bank and supported its services in Black Hawk County and its surrounding areas. Increasingly, the community shifted its focus away from the UAW Local 838 and the Brown Baggers in support of the city sponsored food bank. The *Waterloo Courier* continued to cover the needs of the food bank, but fewer and fewer headlines on stories about the Brown Bag Committee. The last headline on the Brown Baggers in the *Waterloo Courier* occurred on April 16, 1984: “Agency honors Brown Baggers, ‘Helping Hands’.” The article discussed the Hawkeye Valley Area Agency on Aging’s recognition of the Brown Baggers as one of two recipients of their Community Service Award.

The award was “for demonstrated accomplishments through programs that benefit the elderly as a whole and showed new methods subsequently adopted by other organizations.” The Agency highlighted the Brown Baggers’ expansion of service beyond the elderly noting: “The program was instrumental in initiating the government’s distribution of surplus food, a biannual clothing drive, distribution for needy families, and in having volunteers available for other tasks, such as helping people move.”⁴⁰ The *Courier*’s description of the program in past-tense only added to the notion that the Brown Bag Committee had become disassociated with the community as an active organization, while community support increased around the Cedar Valley Food Bank.

In 1986, the national magazine *Newsweek* honored Roger Bleeker as one of the United States’ “100 New American Heroes,” because of his work with the Brown

⁴⁰ Steve Salato, “Agency Honors Brown Baggers, ‘Helping Hands’,” *Waterloo Courier*, April 16, 1984.

Baggers. This was not Bleeker's first recognition for his role. He received the Waterloo Crossroads Ford's VIP in 1981, winning a "two-tone brown pickup truck" that he put to use continuing to build the Brown Bag Committee.⁴¹ In 1982 he received the President's Volunteer Action Award from President Ronald Reagan.⁴² Peter Goldman, in his introduction to the *Newsweek* article on the list of honorees, wrote:

A hundred latter-day heroes walk the pages that follow, a hundred men, women and children whose deeds of bravery, will and self-sacrifice have made us better as a people...They are unencumbered by medals and gold brain and unsung beyond their local papers...Some have devoted their own lives and meager fortunes to reducing the sum of suffering in the world, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, comforting the sick and aged; they bear daily witness to Camus's observation that plagues help human beings rise above themselves.⁴³

This "plague" Bleeker bore witnessed to, as did Waterloo and agricultural states, was the farm crisis. The impacts of the crisis affected more than the paycheck. Waterloo's unions would no longer be as visible in the community. This is seen by the ability of the Cedar Valley Food Bank to supplant a nationally recognized program created by the UAW Local 838.

The Cedar Valley Food Bank celebrated its tenth anniversary in the summer of 1991. The food bank served 351 individuals in its first year, which could be overshadowed by the Brown Baggers five tons of produce it collected in its first year. But in ten years the food bank served "485,000 clients and 11 million pounds of food." Its services expanded from the low-income and church referrals to elderly care, emergency

⁴¹ "Bleeker Cited for Community Work," *Waterloo Courier*, December 9, 1982.

⁴² Dan Dundon, "'Unsung Hero' Gain Newsweek Recognition," *Waterloo Courier*, June 15, 1986.

⁴³ Peter Goldman, "100 New American Heroes," Special Issue, *Newsweek*, Summer 1986, 47.

need-based-aid, and children for food services. It also included social welfare activities such as the Metro Clothes Closet, the Adopt-A-Family program, the Holiday Tree program, and the commodity foods give-away.⁴⁴ The food bank services completely absorbed the programs started by the Brown Baggers and created unintentional competition during the Farm Crisis.

Providing such social programs was not a competition. Yet if visibility was a key to union power, the UAW Local 838 Brown Baggers program, along with the union, was increasingly eclipsed by other agencies. The impact of the Brown Baggers on Waterloo was significant to the charities and services currently operating in the community. Chris Harshbarger, in a 1982 interview, said this about Bleeker and the Brown Baggers:

But the full gamut of goods and services and supplies that the Brown Bag program now is able to deliver to people has enriched the quality of life, not just for them but for the rest of us, and I think it's changed in the minds of an awful lot of people in the general public just what organized labor is. It's not a group of guys who collect themselves together around the bargaining table to push up wages so that the company can't make a profit, and if anybody complains they give them a rap on the skull. It's really a bunch of guys that are our neighbors and living across the street and helping each other. Now banding together to help the entire community at a time when our economy is suffering pretty greatly.⁴⁵

The union mentality of collective action that came through in the Brown Baggers could not be sustained. The city supported the Cedar Valley Food Bank, which could not be challenged by the Brown Baggers, who were depleted in numbers and resources by 1990.

⁴⁴ Gwenne Culpepper, "Cedar Valley Food Bank Celebrates 10th Anniversary," *Waterloo Courier*, July 28, 1981.

⁴⁵ Bleeker, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, May 19, 1982, ILHOP, Transcript, 11.

The food bank grew in numbers and outreach. In 2016, it operates under the name Northeast Iowa Food Bank.

The UAW Local 838 still recognizes the Brown Bag Committee as one of its fifteen active standing committees, along with Civil & Human Rights, Community Services, and Consumer Affairs.⁴⁶ But the Brown Baggers' involvement is not as visible in the community as it once was. In the mid-1980s, Waterloo unions pushed for social changes that were not being addressed by the city. The Brown Baggers succeeded in helping community members receive their needed food and supplies. Similar to the unions' political successes from 1948 to 1964, community outreach also led to its decline. The community could not sustain both groups, and the Brown Baggers slipped from the public eye. The union lost another key foundation that would have continued to shape public opinion on the benefits of organized labor and union activity. By the 1990s, Iowa started to diversify its economy by expanding beyond agriculture. And the unions' focus shifted back to the bargaining table to rebuild its organization and representation function with a depleted labor force and membership.

The three foundations for union strength succeeded in Waterloo, but also worked to the detriment of its solidarity. Community outreach and political activism led the working class to be aware of social and political issues in its community. This newly expanded self-interest allowed workers to be independent from the union's agenda, but they still received the benefits of the union's organization and representation function.

⁴⁶ UAW Local 838, "Committees," UAW Local 838, <http://www.uawlocal838.com/statistics/> (accessed August 2016).

This shift created a crack in the union's solidarity that, in part, led to the decline of the unions by the 1990s.

CONCLUSION

The recent history of unionization during the Cold War and the expanded analysis of public unions in the twenty-first century showed unions decline through success. From the 1950s through the 1970s, unions were strong, because of three foundational areas. Unions' core existence relied on organization and representation. Membership would not grow, if the union did not successfully bargain with the employer. Employees elected leaders to negotiate on their behalf to achieve a shared agenda. That agenda often included improved benefits, workplace safety, addressing grievances, and wage increases. Waterloo unions saw success in this area with long-term contracts that in turn led to increased membership. While establishing its organization and representation presence, Waterloo leaders ushered their new masses towards political activism.

The gains not achieved through contracts could be accomplished in political activism. The passage of Taft-Hartley created a political awakening among union leaders. They realized that the success achieved in organization and representation could be erased through state and federal action. Waterloo locals organized together, under the Black Hawk Union Council, and implemented a shared union goal of electing candidates supporting labor's presence in Waterloo. Their collective means resulted in successful results culminating in the sweeping landslide election of 1964. Waterloo labor achieved political representation in the midst of the Cold War, anti-communist sentiment, the heightened tension over Civil Rights, and the Great Society.

In this same environment, Waterloo's community faced social unrest. Inaction by the city government allowed the union locals to initiate solutions that addressed the social

welfare of the community. In one example, Local 838 established the “Brown Baggers” that provided elderly and needy families with produce and other supplies. This program grew, not only in members, but the community’s awareness of the lack of food for low-income and retired individuals. Waterloo unions sponsored other social programs including: the teen club - Teenage Jive Joint (TAJJ), a free community blood bank, the Equal Opportunity Committee and expanded the unions’ presence in the United Way.¹ Local unions’ community outreach provided positive visibility for unions in Waterloo and defined them beyond the role of organization, representation, and bargaining.

John Cooney defined a union man in 1981, as “a man that will stand up not only for his rights in the shop or on the job, but he will stand up for other people’s right. If he sees someone else offended, being taken advantage of, he will help do something about it. He is generous man. He is an honest man, and he is a good worker.”² Gene Condon added another perspective stating, “Even in the worst time of the most rabid politicking we listened and we talked. We can say anything we want to. The freedom that we have as men, as UAW men and women, it’s unexplainable. And we love it.”³ Both Cooney and

¹ A. W. “Rusty” Lubert and Ruth Lubert, Waterloo, Joint Interview by Merle Davis, July 2, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 18-37.; Paul M. Larsen, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 15, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 33-36.; Roosevelt Taylor, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 8, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 11-15.; Shelton Stromquist, *Solidarity & Survival: An Oral History of Iowa Labor in the Twentieth Century* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 294-299.

² John Cooney, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 16, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 38.

³ Gene Condon, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, June 11, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 35.

Condon expressed the sense of awakening felt by union leaders around the mission of community outreach and political activism. But that recognition would shift for rank-in-file members away from the union agenda to one of individual control.

After unions achieved long-term contracts, its membership fluctuated in the years between contract negotiations. Union leaders turned to political activism to keep their members united behind their collective agenda and to ensure political allies in local, state, and federal government. The success in electing labor leaders failed to produce desired legislation and reform in the short lived Democrat majority in the mid-1960s. The rise of the social voter allowed individuals to break from party coalitions or special interests groups and become informed by their own merit. This shift led to the splintering of Waterloo's BHUC and the differing views shared between the labor organizations.

Success in community outreach also affected labor's strength and solidarity. Local 838's nationally recognized "Brown Baggers" program suffered setbacks that led to a decline in the union's visibility in the community. The city's support for the Cedar Valley food bank inadvertently created competition addressing the same concerns in Waterloo. The effects of the Farm Crisis crippled the Brown Baggers. They could not keep pace with the expanding food bank and slipped from the public eye by the 1990s. Community outreach, political activism, and organization and representation created a strong and solid union in Waterloo. The unions created an active membership that branched from the labor agenda to seek out their own interests. UPWA Local 46 member, Richard Price detailed that shift in 1981 stating:

Well, of course, my original concept of union was brothers and sisters taking care of each other. We're far from that philosophy today. Everybody's taking care of themselves, I think. You know, we're not holy. Hell, it used to be if you needed volunteers you got volunteers. Today it's, "What will you pay me on lost time?" And that's the difference. When we were an infant, growing up, before we got to be fat cats, we were negotiating better. We were fighting for survival, fighting to get not a mile but an inch, and, hell, we did everything together. We've gotten over being brothers and sisters. That's the basis of a union, you know, to do the Golden Rule, have others do unto you. What I'm saying is that's gone in all unions.⁴

Price was not alone in his assessment. Jack Seeber, UAW Local 838, also offered hesitation on the union's solidarity noting, "If there's one thing that I get concerned about is I hope we don't ever lose our sense of brotherhood or sense of togetherness that brought the labor movement where it is. Because if we ever do, we can go back down."⁵ By the 1990s, Seeber's thoughts evolved into reality. The political awakening of union members, which was a direct result of union activities between the late forties and mid-eighties, led to a great strengthening of workers' political identities. As it turned out, there political identities were far more individualistic than collective. For many scholars this was an unfortunate loss. For many workers it was part of their political awakening. This shift left vulnerable the labor movement in Waterloo, which went into a long period of decline by the end of the 1980s.

⁴ Richard Price, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 9, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 70-71.

⁵ Jack Seeber, Waterloo, Interview by Merle Davis, July 15, 1981, Iowa Labor History Oral Project, Iowa Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Transcript, 54.

AFTERWORD

HARRIS V. QUINN: A NEW PRECEDENT FOR LABOR?

The effects of the 1980s Farm Crisis severely restricted rural and small communities, especially the agricultural based economy of the Midwest. Urban centers continued to outpace the growth of rural areas when people left the farms for a stable income. From 1983 to 2015, the number of all wage and salary workers grew from 88.3 million to 133.7 million. However, this increase in the labor force was not shared by organized labor. During this time, union membership decreased by 2.9 million or 11.1 percent of those employed in 2015, a decline 20.1 percent from 1983.¹ Within this decline, the private sector felt the most impact with a shift from 16.8 percent membership rate in 1983 to 6.7 percent in 2015. The public sector has consistently held membership rates around 35 percent, over five times higher than the private sector.²

The three foundations that applied to Waterloo unions: organization and representation, political activism, and community outreach, could also be used to understand public sector unions. Like the private sector, the strength of public sector unions can be tied to their political activism and community outreach. This chapter argues public sector unions' success in political activism created a special interest force that led to their failure from the U.S. Supreme Court rulings. By expanding their political strength, it allowed individual members to express their own self-interest over the

¹ Megan Dunn and James Walker, "Union Membership in the United States," *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: Spotlight on Statistics* (September 2016): 2.

² Dun and Walker, "Union Membership in the United States," 4.

collective agenda. The Court set a new precedent in Pamela Harris's 2014 challenge to the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the State of Illinois. The ruling effectively created a quasi-right-to-work state in Illinois only for a select group of employees. It could cause the public sector to see the same decline experienced by the private sector in the 1980s.

The case, *Harris v. Quinn* (2014), narrowly asked if members of a federal and state, jointly-funded program's agency fee, or "fair share fee" requirement is constitutional under the First Amendment free speech rights. This challenged the long standing ruling set by *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education* (1977) which allowed some infringement on the First Amendment. In 2014, the Court ruled along its ideological divide of 5-4 in favor of the plaintiffs. The majority concluded that the agency fee, due to its limited employment relation with the state, infringed upon the employees' First Amendment rights. It suspended forty years of *stare decisis*, and opened a potentially rich path for challenges to public sector labor unions.

The *Harris* ruling dominates the current debate on public labor relations. Scholars have predicted its impact will extend beyond the public sector to include implications for private sector unions. Criticism has focused on the very limited decision by the majority and its abrupt dismissal of *Abood* as an "anomaly." Professors of law, lawyers, judges, and other academics tended to support Justice Elena Kagan's dissent upholding *Abood* and the necessity of an agency fee to support union practices, even if it does not align with all individuals employed. In contrast, Harry Hutchison, law professor at Wayne State University, defended the majority's decision along economic lines using a

combined analysis of postmodernism and public choice. He suggested the “solidarity” proclaimed by unions is smoke and mirrors that drives away community support and is replaced by a select group of leaders who make decisions in their interest in lieu of the membership’s.³

Hutchinson’s argument is based on Richard Rorty’s postmodern concept arguing that the increase in diversity does not create a sense of solidarity, rather subgroups driven by individual identities to promote self-interest goals over a majority suggested outcome.⁴ Change to organized labor stems from self-interest over collective objectives. In another way, the defense of maintaining solidarity through an agency fee does not promote community of workers. This puts in jeopardy the unions’ foundation of political activism. Without a unified collective agenda, the strength of a union diminishes.

Labor history is significantly covered by many historians, social scientists, and other professional fields from the early nineteenth-century through the late twentieth. The modern era of U.S. labor history law starts with the passage of the 1935 National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) during the Second New Deal. Congress stipulated that collective bargaining is to be recognized by employers and established legal remedies for private organizations. A “switch in time” saved numerous New Deal statutes, including the NLRA. The Court’s shift allowed labor to establish private sector unions that could be supported and upheld under law.

³ Harry G. Hutchinson, “A Clearing in the Forest: Infusing the Labor Union Dues Dispute with First Amendment Values,” *William & Mary Bill of Rights Journal* 14, no. 4 (2006): 1309-1401.

⁴ Hutchinson, “A Clearing in the Forest,” 1332-1336.

The NLRA built upon the 1914 Clayton Act and 1926 Railway Labor Act (RLA), amended in 1934. Both provided certain provisions for labor unions existence within the private sector, but the legislature, executive and judiciary stopped short of extending bargaining and representative rights to the public sector. Even President Franklin Roosevelt had reservations. In a 1937 letter to the President of the National Federation of Federal Employees, he wrote: “The very nature and purposes of government make it impossible for administrative officials to represent fully or to bind the employer in mutual discussions with government employee organizations. The employer is the whole people, who speak by means of laws enacted by their representative in Congress.”⁵ The concerns of employees’ connection to public policy is a consistent inhibitor for collective bargaining.

The NLRA significantly changed the landscape of the workforce by establishing a generally balanced relationship between management and labor. Major provisions of the act included the formation of the National Labor Relation Board, list of unfair labor practices, bargaining agreements for increase in pay and workplace safety, and approved strike practices.⁶ Congress in 1947 proposed amendments to curb some of the union provisions and offered relief to employers. The Taft-Hartley Act offered a list of unfair union practices, forbade federal employees to strike, and ended closed-shops, while supporting a union-shop only if a state did not prohibit the practice through right-to-work

⁵ Ashley Brompton, “*Harris v. Quinn*’s Paradoxical Relationship with Past Union Jurisprudence and the Path to the Future,” *Wake Forest Journal of Business and Intellectual Property Law* 15, no. 3 (Spring 2015): 515.

⁶ National Labor Relations Act, 29 U.S.C. §§ 151-169 (2015).

legislation.⁷ The last provision, right-to-work, is the root of the issue in one of the first significant case in labor history.

Railway Employees v. Hanson (1956) challenged the 1951 amendment to the Railway Labor Act that allowed union-shops, such as the one established by the Union Pacific Railroad Company. The union-shop required all employees to pay an agency fee regardless of membership. A group of employees argued the RLA amendment violated the right-to-work provision in the Nebraska Constitution and the state supreme court upheld that argument. The United States Supreme Court granted *certiorari*, a request for appeal. The heard the case on the provision if the amendment to the RLA was “germane to the exercise of power under the Commerce Clause.”⁸ Congress’s power of commerce provided permissible regulations and the 1951 amendment “‘stabilized labor-management relations’ and thus furthered ‘industrial peace.’”⁹

The unanimous ruling, delivered by Justice William O. Douglas, supported Congress’s commerce powers over Nebraska’s state rights provisions guaranteed through Taft-Hartley. This case faced a challenge under the First Amendment, but the lack of infringement due to the early appeal provided no evidence to claim political or ideological engagement against members’ own ideals. Justice Douglas wrote, “On the

⁷ Labor Management Relations Act, 29 U.S.C. § 401-531 (2015) or Taft-Hartley Act 80 H.R. 3020, Pub. L. 80–101, 61 Stat. 136, enacted June 23, 1947.

⁸ *Railway Employees’ Department, American Federation of Labor, et al. v. Hanson et al.*, 351 U.S. 225, 234-235 (1956).

⁹ *Pamela Harris et al. v. Pat Quinn, Governor of Illinois, et al.*, 573 U.S. ___, 134 S. Ct. 2618, 2328 (2014).

present record, there is no more an infringement or impairment of First Amendment right than there would be in the case of a lawyer who by state law is required to be a member of an integrated bar.”¹⁰

Justice Douglas later recanted his *Hanson* conclusion in the plurality opinion of *Lathrop v. Donohue* (1961). The Justice’s dissent concluded that his previous First Amendment analogy failed, because if it was implemented, “we sanction a device where men and women in almost any profession or calling can be at least partially regimented behind causes which they oppose.”¹¹ Justice Douglas continued, “Unless we so treat it, we practically give carte blanche to any legislature to put at least professional people into goose-stepping brigades. Those brigades are not compatible with the First Amendment.”¹² His heightened dissent mirrored the extreme discontent some labor lawyers and professionals had with using the First Amendment to support unions. *Lathrop* did not provide a significant remedy for labor, but, in the same year, the Court heard another case that expanded the *Hanson* ruling.

Employees of the Southern Railway System in Georgia appealed, under the First Amendment, that their union dues were improperly used on political and ideological activities that they did not support. The case *Machinists v. Street* (1961) supported the RLA union-shop provision, but the Court saw merit in prohibiting political or ideological expenditures to protect employees’ free speech and expression rights. The Justices

¹⁰ *Railway Employees v. Hanson*, 351 U.S. 238.

¹¹ *Harris v. Quinn*, 134 S. Ct. 2629 (quoting *Lathrop v. Donohue*, 367 U.S. 820, 884 (1961)).

¹² *Harris v. Quinn*, 134 S. Ct. 2629 (quoting *Lathrop v. Donohue*, 367 U.S. 820, 884-885 (1961)).

stipulated the provision, “is to be construed to deny the unions, over an employee’s objection, the power to use his exacted funds to support political causes which he opposes.”¹³ The majority offered two remedies: First, a union member could request an injunction against the union for planning to spend a portion of their dues that violated their free speech right. They would then receive reimbursement of the projected cost. Or the union could offer restitution from spending a portion of the employee’s dues, after they notified the union of their objection, on certain political or ideological activities.¹⁴

Justice Hugo Black’s dissent heavily criticized the majority’s remedy, stating “I think the remedy suggested by the Court will work a far greater interference with the union’s bargaining activities because it will impose much greater trial and accounting burdens on both unions and workers.” He continued: the remedy “promises little hope for financial recompense to the individual workers whose First Amendment freedoms have been flagrantly violated.”¹⁵ The Justice defended the autonomy of unions and its structure of “voluntary membership”, but the influence of Government, supported in *Hanson* and now *Street*, puts the status of ‘voluntary membership’ at risk for stricter Constitutional review.¹⁶ Justice Felix Frankfurter, joined by Justice John M. Harlan, offered a dissent counter to Justice Black. He favored returning to *Hanson* and saw no violation of the First Amendment, arguing “No one’s desire or power to speak his mind is checked or

¹³ *Machinists v. Street*, 367 U.S. 740, 769-770 (1961).

¹⁴ *Machinists v. Street*, 367 U.S. 774-775.

¹⁵ *Machinists v. Street*, 367 U.S. 780, 795-796 (Black, J. Dissent)

¹⁶ *Machinists v. Street*, 367 U.S. 780, 796-797 (Black, J. Dissent)

curbed. The individual member may express his views in any public or private forum as freely as he could before the union collected his dues.”¹⁷

Both *Hanson* and *Street* established clear boundaries for private sector unions, but the public sector continued to be neglected in collective bargaining rights. This shifted when President John F. Kennedy in 1962, issued Executive Order 10988 that expanded collective bargaining rights to most public sector employees on noneconomic issues. Many states from 1965 to 1976 followed suit by passing state legislation expanding provisions for state employees, both economic and noneconomic.¹⁸ This sweeping change to labor law led to quick challenges in the courts, the first being in 1977.

A group of teachers, members of the Detroit Federation of Teachers Union, challenged the union’s agency-shop clause. It required “every teacher who had not become a Union member within 60 days of hire...pay the Union a service charge equal to the regular dues required of Union members. A teacher who failed to meet this obligation was subject to discharge.”¹⁹ The plaintiffs argued that a substantial portion of those dues would fund union “activities and programs which are economic, political, professional, scientific and religious in nature of which [they] do not approve, and in which they will have no voice.”²⁰ The Court’s unanimous decision, delivered by Justice Potter Stewart, did not agree with the plaintiffs’ argument that *Hanson* and *Street* dealt solely with the

¹⁷ *Machinists v. Street*, 367 U.S. 797, 806 (Frankfurter, J. Dissent)

¹⁸ Brompton, “*Harris v. Quinn*’s Paradoxical Relationship,” 515.

¹⁹ *Abood, et al. v. Detroit Board of Education et al.*, 431 U.S. 209, 212 (1977).

²⁰ *Abood v. Detroit Board of Ed.*, 431 U.S. 212-213.

private sector and that this case is different since it dealt with the public sector. The Court recognized that there are different responsibilities between the two employers, suggesting that political clout may provide greater influence on public employees and that “decisionmaking by a public employer is above all a political process.”²¹

However, the Justices ruled that *Hanson* and *Street* were applicable and upheld the union-shop agreements based on two primary functions: the desirability of “labor peace” and the problem of “free riders.” As they saw it, these functions were substantial reasons to permit the collection of an agency fee from non-union members. The limitation offered in *Street* comes from spending, not from an employer’s public or private organizational status. The Court created two areas for expenditures: chargeable (collective-bargaining, contract administration, and grievance-adjustment)²² or nonchargeable (political or ideological purposes).²³ The 1983 Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals decision, in *Hudson v. Chicago Teachers Union Local No. 1, et. al.*, further stipulated that “due process” is required in collecting fees so “the procedure must make reasonably sure that those employees’ wages will not be used to support any union activities that are not germane to collective bargaining, whether or not the activities are political or ideological.”²⁴ The Supreme Court upheld the Appeals Court, ruling the

²¹ *Aboud v. Detroit Board of Ed.*, 431 U.S. 227-229.

²² *Aboud v. Detroit Board of Ed.*, 431 U.S. 232.

²³ *Aboud v. Detroit Board of Ed.*, 431 U.S. 236.

²⁴ *Annie Lee Hudson, et al. v. The Chicago Teachers Union Local No. 1, et al.*, 743 F. 2d 1187, 1194 (7th Circuit 1984).

union's practices "failed to provide adequate justification for the advance reduction of dues, and...failed to offer a reasonably prompt decision by an impartial decisionmaker."²⁵ This led the Court to stipulate a mandatory notification for all employees informing the charges due for both members and nonmembers and a period for nonmembers to "opt out" of certain dues, from the agency fee, designated for political or ideological purposes.

In *Lehnert v. Ferris* (1991), the Court further defined chargeable activities stipulating they "must (1) be 'germane' to collective-bargaining activity; (2) be justified by the government's vital policy interest in labor peace and avoiding 'free riders'; and (3) not significantly add to the burdening of free speech that is inherent in the allowance of an agency or union shop."²⁶ Even with these narrowed provisions, Justice Antonin Scalia's dissent argued that "each one of the three 'prongs' of the test involves a substantial judgment call (What is 'germane'? What is 'justified'? What is a 'significant' additional burden?) it seems calculated to perpetuate give-it-a-try litigation of monetary claims that are individually insignificant but cumulatively worth suing about."²⁷ Justice Scalia's reasoning offered a warning to the Court that this decision might lead to increased judicial review of unnecessary First Amendment appeals, because of the cases' Constitutional challenge to the First Amendment. *Abood* and *Lehnert* continued to define

²⁵ *Chicago Teachers Union Local No. 1, AFT, AFL-CIO, et al. v. Hudson et al.* 475 U.S. 292, 309 (1986).

²⁶ *Harris v. Quinn*, 134 S. Ct. 2633 (quoting *Lehnert v. Ferris*, 500 U.S. 507, 519 (1991)).

²⁷ *Lehnert v. Ferris*, 500 U.S. 551 (with whom Justice O'Connor and Justice Souter join, and with whom Justice Kennedy joins as to all but Part III-C, concurring in the judgment in part and dissenting in part.)

and regulate both public and private sector unions building a substantial precedent in the area.

Not until the *Knox v. SEIU* (2012) decision did *Abood* face a serious challenge. SEIU, Local 1000 wanted to collect additional funds and temporarily suspend the monthly dues cap in order to support a campaign against two special ballot issues in California that directly targeted the union. All members were informed of this decision via a mailed notice, but nonmembers were not given an option to opt-out outlined in *Hudson*.²⁸ The petitioners sued SEIU for violating their First Amendment right, because of the mandatory payment. The case was initially upheld in the District Court, but overturned by the Ninth Circuit. The three member court ruled the mandatory dues were a fair overreach on the First Amendment, because the unions sent out the required notice of expenditures.

The Supreme Court agreed to hear the case and by a 5-4 majority; Justice Samuel Alito delivered the opinion, arguing that the union failed to provide an accurate notice with an option to “opt-out” of the payment. He argued, “Acceptance of the free-rider argument as a justification for compelling nonmembers to pay a portion of union dues represents something of an anomaly – one that we have found to be justified by the interest in furthering ‘labor peace.’²⁹ But it is an anomaly nevertheless.”³⁰ This led to his

²⁸ *Hudson v. The Chicago Teachers Union*, 743 F. 2d 1187 (7th Circuit 1984).

²⁹ *Chicago Teachers Union v. Hudson*, 475 U.S., 303.

³⁰ *Dianne Knox, et al. v. Service Employees International Union, Local 1000*, 567 U.S. ___, 132 S. Ct. 2277, 2290 (2012).

remedy of “opting into” payment rather than a form of reimbursement from the union. This decision dramatically altered decades of jurisprudence that followed the “opting out” solution as seen in *Street* and expanded through *Abood*, *Hudson*, and *Lehnert*. Justice Alito suggested, “acceptance of the opt-out approach appears to have come about more as a historical accident than through the careful application of First Amendment principles.”³¹

Justice Alito subtly questioned the effectiveness of *Abood*’s handling of First Amendment challenges to the public employer agency shops, writing “the compulsory fees constitute a form of compelled speech and association that imposes a ‘significant impingement on First Amendment rights.’”³² He continued, “Our cases to date have tolerated this ‘impingement,’ and we do not revisit today whether the Court’s former cases have given adequate recognition to the critical First Amendment rights at stake.”³³ The Court did not answer that question in 2012, but two years later it resurfaced in *Harris*.

The *Harris* decision followed the same structure outlined in *Knox*, questioning *Abood*’s role in public unions and their ability to assess First Amendment claims. The Court mirrored the exact split in *Knox*, and Justice Alito expanded on that decision to further cement his distrust in *Abood*. Many scholars saw this case as cut and dried,

³¹ *Knox v. SEIU*, 132 S. Ct. 2290.

³² *Ellis et al. v. Brotherhood of Railway, Airline & Steamship Clerks, Freight Handlers, Express & Station Employees et al.* 466 U.S. 435, 455 (1984).

³³ *Knox v. SEIU*, 132 S. Ct. 2289.

believing that it would support collective bargaining rights for Illinois public employees. Those initial views swiftly changed after oral arguments focused on the merits of employment rather than the significance of *Abood*. The employment status of the personal assistants in the Illinois Homecare System caused the majority to negate *Abood*. They further supported the compelling interest standard highlighted in *Knox*.

In 1984, Illinois passed the Illinois Public Labor Relations Act (IPLRA) and the Illinois Educational Labor Relation Act (IELRA). These laws authorized public employees' collective bargaining, grievances, strikes, and arbitration. The state legislature vigorously debated the two pieces of legislation and faced amendatory vetoes from Governor James R. Thompson. Under IPLRA, two provisions played a key role in the case: coverage and the fair share requirements. The coverage provision, stipulated under Section 3(m), limited an employer to be "any individual employed by a public employer, including interns and residents at public hospitals..."³⁴ Furthermore, a public employer was defined as, someone employed by:

the State of Illinois; any political subdivision of the State, unit of local government or school districts; authorities including departments, divisions, bureaus, board, commissions or other agencies of the foregoing entities; and any person acting within the scope of his or her authority, express or implies, on behalf of such entities in dealing with its employees.³⁵

³⁴ Sally J. Whiteside, Robert P. Vogt, and Sherryl R. Scott, "Illinois Public Labor Relations Law: A Commentary and Analysis," *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 60, no. 4 (October 1984): 883-884.

³⁵ Whiteside, "Illinois Public Labor Relations Law," footnote 1.

This provision strictly defined an employee and an employer in Illinois, furthermore it qualified who could participate in collective bargaining agreements and union memberships.

Illinois never passed the right to work legislation legalized under Taft-Hartley that made the closed shop illegal. Instead, the state implemented an agency shop with a fair share requirement, stipulating that this would be

proportionate share of the costs of the collective bargaining process, contract administration and pursuing matters affecting wages, hours and other conditions of employment, but not to exceed the amount of dues uniformly required of members. The amount certified by the exclusive representative shall not include any fees for contributions related to the election or support of any candidate for political office.³⁶

This provision craftily included the exclusion of political contributions or expenditures of union dues on political activity, as required by *Abood*. In debate, State Senator Terry L. Bruce explained the explicit limitation on fair share stating, “We drew this language right from the *Abood* case, you cannot make political contributions. The only thing you can ask [non-union members] to pay is the cost of collective bargaining, contract administration, matters affecting wages, hours and conditions of employment, that is it.”³⁷

The state made sure to follow the constitutional limitations for public employees set by the Supreme Court, but according to some observers the law left gaps in its effectiveness. Senator Roger A. Keats, proposed an amendment to require the disclosure of all union’s funds to the Illinois Labor Relations Board including annual reports, by-

³⁶ Ill. Rev. Stat. Ch 48, Paragraph 1603, Section 3(g) (2013)

³⁷ Whiteside, “Illinois Public Labor Relations Law,” footnote 264, page 924-925.

laws, and listing of scheduled dues. This was not supported by the other Illinois legislators, because they felt the law should not be hindered by such a burden that could easily be amended by future legislatures, if the problem arose.³⁸ The inability to define a clear procedure for determining the amount of the fair share did not only fail in debate, but it also fell short of the guidelines in *Hudson*. A 1984 analysis of the law concluded that it made strides in improving Illinois public sector labor, but that it failed to resolve continuing conflicts.³⁹

In 1985, the Service Employees International Union petitioned the State Labor Relations Board to represent the personal assistants under the Home Services Program established by the Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities Act as public employees stipulated by IPLRA. The State Labor Relations Board denied this request because “Illinois does not exercise the type of control over personal assistants necessary to be considered, in the collective bargaining context envisioned by the Public Labor Relations Act.”⁴⁰ That decision seemed to put the issue at rest, but in 2003 Governor Rod R. Blagojevich signed Executive Order 2003-8, recognizing personal care assistants, both rehabilitation and disability, as employees of the state only for collective bargaining rights on the justification that “it is essential for the State to receive feedback from

³⁸ Whiteside, “Illinois Public Labor Relations Law,” 927.

³⁹ Whiteside, “Illinois Public Labor Relations Law,” 932.

⁴⁰ *Harris v. Quinn*, 134 S. Ct. 2625-2626.

personal assistants in order to effectively and efficiently deliver home services.”⁴¹

Governor Blagojevich made certain to support the State Labor Relation Board’s 1985 decision by reassuring that “personal assistants are not State employees for purposes of eligibility to receive statutorily mandated benefits because the State does not hire, supervise or terminate the personal assistants,” defined as a “unique” employment relationship by the Board.⁴²

The Illinois State Legislature followed upon the Governor’s executive order by amending the IPLRA. The amendment granted collective bargaining rights for all personal assistants and authorized the collection of a “fair share fee” from those who did not wish to join the union. Under Illinois’s Home Services Program, a federal subsidized Medicaid program, the state offered patients (customers) the opportunity to receive in home treatment instead of being institutionalized. Many customers chose to have a spouse, parent, or close relative take on this role as personal assistant to provide the necessary care. Illinois Home Services was divided into two programs: rehabilitation and disability. Patients served as the customer and were responsible for the hiring and firing, daily supervising, disciplining, and agreeing to terms and duties of employment through a Service Plan. None of these responsibilities were controlled or influenced by the State. The personal assistant was paid a standard rate set by the legislatures, which was also subsidized by federal Medicaid.

⁴¹ Illinois Governor, Executive Order no. 2003-8, “Executive Order on Collective Bargaining by Personal Care Assistants,” State of Illinois Executive Department (March 4, 2003) https://www.illinois.gov/Government/ExecOrders/Pages/2003_8.aspx (accessed April 2016).

⁴² Illinois Governor, Executive Order no. 2003-8.

After the 2003 amendment to the IPLRA, SEIU Healthcare Illinois & Indiana filed a petition to represent the personal assistants under the rehabilitation program. The personal assistants voted in favor of SEIU's request and were recognized by the State Labor Relations Board. Personal assistants under the disability program did not accept a bargaining unit and rejected representation in 2009. Between 2003 and 2010, rehabilitation personal assistants paid an agency or "fair share fee" that added up to \$3.6 million annually.⁴³ This proved too much for Pamela Harris and nine other care providers. They challenged the law as being in violation of the First Amendment.

The original suit was filed in District Court against Governor Pat Quinn, who succeeded Governor Blagojevich after his impeachment and removal from office in 2009. District Court Judge Sharon Johnson-Coleman found the suit moot since Harris was employed under the disability program and no union collected an agency fee from any of those personal assistants. She ruled in favor of the state against three of the plaintiffs, who were employed under the rehabilitation program, citing *Abood*'s precedents that allowed the collection of an agency fee. The case was appealed to the Seventh Circuit Court in 2011. It upheld Harris's "unripe" claim, but remanded it back to the district court to dismiss without prejudice due to a lack of jurisdiction. The court expanded Judge Johnson-Coleman's decision ruling that the personal assistants under the rehabilitation program are joint employers and can be required to pay an agency fee for the interest of stable labor relations, as suggested in *Abood*.⁴⁴ This affirmation led the plaintiffs to

⁴³ *Harris v. Quinn*, 134 S. Ct. 2626.

⁴⁴ *Pamela Harris, et al. v. Governor Pat Quinn, et al.*, 656 F. 3d 692 (7th Cir. 2011).

appeal to the Supreme Court in 2014 where the Justices heard arguments on the question, whether the First Amendment permits a State to compel personal care providers to subsidize speech on matters of public concern by a union that they do not wish to join or support? Or conversely, does compelling someone to pay union fees, which can be used for union activities with which they disagree, in any way, deny them their freedom of speech?

After oral arguments were heard on January 21, 2014, the Court announced its decision at the end of June. It ruled in favor of the plaintiffs. Justice Alito wrote for the 5-4 majority and concluded that “the First Amendment prohibits the collection of an agency fee from personal assistants in the Rehabilitation Program who do not want to join or support the union.”⁴⁵ This overturned the lower court’s decision, but it also affirmed Harris’s “unripe” claim against the disability program. The majority restated its opinion against *Abood*, found in *Knox*, as an anomaly further suggesting, “*Abood* itself has clear boundaries: it applies only to public employees. Extending those boundaries to encompass partial-public employees, quasi-public employees, or simply private employees would invite problems.”⁴⁶ But Justice Kagan, in a dissent, argued that the five Justices focused too much on the terms of employment that were clearly defined by the Court of Appeals and supported in *Abood*, stating, “Each caregiver has joint employers – the State and the customer – with each controlling significant aspects of the assistant’s

⁴⁵ *Harris v. Quinn*, 134 S. Ct. 2644.

⁴⁶ *Harris v. Quinn*, 134 S. Ct. 2638.

work.”⁴⁷ She concluded: “the government’s prerogative as employer,..., turns not on the ‘formal status’ of an employee, but on the nature of the public ‘interests at stake.’”⁴⁸ That interest is defended by the opportunity to provide individualized health services to the citizens of Illinois without baring cost for institutionalization and sacrifice of comfort.

The majority cast aside *Abood*, noting that case had no influence, and mandated a strict scrutiny test as outlined in *Knox* when there is an issue of compelled speech. Justice Alito found that the strict scrutiny test could not be applied to the agency provision because it did not even muster a compelling interest required by *Knox*. He denied SEIU’s claim that the agency fee provided stability while preventing free riders, something consistently upheld in the decades of previous cases. The Justice argued, “A host of organizations advocate on behalf of the interests of persons falling within an occupational group, and many of these groups are quite successful even though they are dependent on voluntary contributions.”⁴⁹ This statement drew criticism by the dissenters, because the majority suggested unions could be more successful without the fair share provision. Justice Kagan countered that unions are not like interest groups due to legislation stipulating their responsibilities. She stated:

⁴⁷ *Harris v. Quinn*, 134 S. Ct. 2644, 2646 (Kagan, J. Dissent).

⁴⁸ *Harris v. Quinn*, 134 S. Ct. 2648.

⁴⁹ *Harris v. Quinn*, 134 S. Ct. 2641.

The law compels unions to represent – and represent fairly – every worker in a bargaining unit, regardless whether they join or contribute to the union. That creates a collective action problem of far greater magnitude than in the typical interest group, because the union cannot give any special advantages to its own backers.⁵⁰

The Court did not fully overturn *Abood*'s decision, but it continued to poke holes in its viability.

The lasting impact of *Harris* is still unclear, but some clarity was thought to emerge from the Supreme Court ruling in *Friedrichs v. California Teachers Association* (2016). This most recent case asks if public employees, who are not members of the union, are constitutionally required to pay the agency fee as a condition of employment. It quickly moved through the lower courts due to the lack of authority by these courts to overturn Supreme Court precedent. Even though the Ninth Circuit of Appeals saw clear violation of Friedrichs's First Amendment rights, the case was heard without oral arguments and petitioners asked to support the District's decision to enter judgement on behalf of the unions.⁵¹

The debate around *Friedrichs* was whether *Harris* would become an anomaly, as suggested by Justice Kagan, or will the slim majority, led by Justice Alito, finally establish a national right to work for all public employees. This argument shifted after the sudden death of Justice Scalia on February 13, 2016, leaving the Court balanced with no

⁵⁰ *Harris v. Quinn*, 134 S. Ct. 2656-2657.

⁵¹ *Rebecca Friedrichs, et al. v. California Teachers Association, et al.*, No. 13-57095 23 (9th Cir. 2014)

majority.⁵² *Friedrichs* was argued in January and decided in March. Justice Scalia's vacancy was reflected in the Court's ruling. The Supreme Court issued a *per curiam* decision, a ruling in the name of the Court instead of individual Justices, that was affirmed by an equally divided Court.⁵³ This ruling upheld the lower court's decision in favor of the California Teachers Association leaving the debate between *Abood* and *Harris* untouched.

In November 2014, *Harvard Law Review*'s "Freedom of Speech" section, raised the question: "Why is only this public-employee speech worthy of such extensive protection?"⁵⁴ The initial impacts of *Harris* resulted in creating a quasi-right-to-work state for a select group of employees in Illinois. SEIU's success in political activism and advocacy led to members challenging the foundation of organization and representation. If the Court continues to build on this ruling, public unions are at risk of losing its free rider protection, established by the NLRA. Essentially they would establish right to work for the public sector in all 50 states.

The effects of *Harris* are also measurable in statistics. According to the United States Department of Labor, the SEIU of Illinois and Indiana have seen a drop in nearly 30,000 registered members. In 2013 the union reported 93,873 total members of which 39% or 36,743 were nonmembers paying an agency fee. After the ruling in *Harris* membership for 2014 dropped to 64,206 total members with zero members paying the

⁵² Adam Liptak, "Antonin Scalia, Justice on the Supreme Court, Dies at 79," *New York Times*, February 13, 2016.

⁵³ *Rebecca Friedrichs, et al. v. California Teachers Association, et al.*, 136 S. Ct. 1083 (2016).

⁵⁴ "Harris v. Quinn," *Harvard Law Review* 128, no. 1 (November 2014): 220.

agency fee.⁵⁵ This rapid loss of membership and income shows the extent of how *Harris* and a broader decision in the current term could further hinder the survival of unions.

The national labor statistics provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics recorded a drop from 2013 when 39.6% of union members were in the public sector compared to 7.3% of the private⁵⁶ to 35.2% and 6.7% respectfully, in 2015.⁵⁷

Labor leaders created an awakening for member participation in politics and community, but could not maintain a unified force. The unions' political clout hindered their ability to promote unity within the labor community. Harry Hutchinson concluded, "labor unions have become 'special interest adjuncts' to political allies while often failing to serve the actual interests of their memberships. Urgent legislative action and principled judicial decision-making should be seen as important elements of any effort that aims to decouple politics from collective bargaining."⁵⁸ Although Cynthia Estlund, NYU Professor of Law, shared the same enthusiasm for change, she differed in the method concluding, "the twentieth-century collective bargaining framework in which [unions] operate is in serious need of renovation" But, she adds, "these projects of reimagination, reform and reconstruction belong to the people – the workers, unions, employers, and

⁵⁵ *Union Reporting History: 543-894 Service Employees Local Union Healthcare IL IN*, United States Department of Labor, July 7, 2015, available at <https://olms.dol-esa.gov/query/orgReport.do>.

⁵⁶ Brompton, "*Harris v. Quinn*'s Paradoxical Relationship," 516.

⁵⁷ *Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey*, Bureau of Labor Statistics, February 12, 2015, available at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/tables.htm#union>.

⁵⁸ Hutchinson, "A Clearing in the Forest," 1401.

others who care about their fate. It is not for the Supreme Court to start pulling pillars and beams out of the existing structure.”⁵⁹

The question is can that be accomplished in a polarized political system? The Supreme Court creates opportunities, under Chief Justice John Roberts, for Congress to fix dated legislation. But inaction persists. If unions need to transition to become more voluntary institutions to maintain legitimacy and influence in the workforce, who would sacrifice political influence for that result?

⁵⁹ Cynthia Estlund, “Are Unions a Constitutional Anomaly?” *Michigan Law Review* 114 (November 2015): 234.

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