

# **SOCIAL MOVEMENT UNIONISM**

***THROUGH TEACHERS UNIONS' MOBILIZATION IN OPPOSITION TO  
CORPORATE EDUCATION REFORM***



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## **Introduction**

The education system in the U.S. is in an adolescent stage of transformation as corporate education reform, driven by bipartisan efforts, becomes the new standard for education reform. Corporate education reform aims to privatize public education, and while it grew rapidly under George W. Bush and Barack Obama, the movement is sure to accelerate under the new Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos.

At the same time as this increase of corporate education reform, there has also been a recent wave of teacher union militancy in response to this attack on public education. Rank and file reform caucuses have been organizing around adopting a social movement unionism (SMU) to combat the neoliberal project of corporate education reform. These caucuses in Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Newark, Milwaukee, and Minneapolis/St. Paul, have met varying success in winning leadership positions, internally reforming their union, and resisting corporate education reform, but they are some of the most active political groups opposing corporate education reform.

This thesis examines teachers' unions transformations from a service model to a social movement unionism model in response to corporate education reform and the efficacy of their resulting strategies and campaigns in combating corporate education reform, securing gains for membership, and building a broader class-focused politics. The thesis hopes to answer these questions: How does a reform caucus unseat incumbents, and once in that position of leadership, how does a union effectively rollout a reform project that changes members' understanding of the union and their relationship within it? How does a teachers' social movement union build coalitions and gain public support? What strategy does a SMU take to achieve its goals, does it

work, and why? Can SMU effectively challenge bipartisan corporate education reform and develop support for a new class-based politics?

The paper is divided into four primary chapters based around two case studies on the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) with an introduction and conclusion. These two cases were chosen primarily as two different unions operating under similar circumstances; they are the third and second largest school districts in the continental U.S., they are both located in states considered Democratic, they have similarly underfunded schools and suffer from aggressive corporate education reform coming from the heads of the cities and schools. The unions are also two of the most successful examples of teachers union's transforming into a SMU and each then using a comparable strategy to achieve their demands.

The first chapter provides a theoretical understanding of SMU and corporate education reform to be used to provide context and a framework for analyzing the case studies. The section will first explain the rise of SMU in the U.S and its main features, then explain the ideology behind the corporate education reform agenda and then the policies and impacts of the project.

The next two chapters are the two case studies and they follow the same chapter structure divided into three sections. The first section provides the context of the public schools system by examining budget crises and their causes and corporate education reform in the city. The second section tracks the reform caucus's rise to union leadership and their internal mobilization. The third section explains the unions' contract campaigns, strategies and actions towards the district under each leadership.

The fourth chapter is the analysis of the two case studies. Following a similar structure to the previous chapters, this section analyzes the similarities and differences in first the context of the unions, then the strategy of union reform and coalition building, then each unions' external contract campaigns. This chapter will then draw out the significant lessons from the analysis of each section and evaluate SMU as a stronger model for teachers unions and as a potential way of bring about political change.

## **CHAPTER 1: Theory of Social Movement Unionism and Corporate Education Reform**

This chapter will first layout the basic idea behind social movement unionism (SMU); a union model based on the merging of an active union and social movements to promote and more effectively organize around a common politics. The chapter will then track the development of SMU in the U.S. and its relationship to the rise of community and organizing models of unionism. The following section explains the main features of SMU and why they matter, particularly focusing on coalition building and the political basis for the model. As SMU has been a strategy used by teachers unions primarily in response to the rise of corporate education reform, the rest of the chapter explains corporate education reform, its policies and impacts.

### **Social Movement Unionism**

Social movement unionism (SMU) was first used to describe an emerging pattern, in the 1980's, of unions joining other political organizations to form broad coalitions to fight for economic and social justice in developing countries. The most immediate examples of this initial form of SMU was Cosatu's (a trade union federation) involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa, Kilusang Mayo Uno (a labor center) in the Philippines eventual organizing of a people's strike, and Brazil's Autenticos movement that resulted in the union forcing the military government to negotiate new wage levels through a public campaign. In developed countries, the basic idea behind the model stays the same although the impacts have been far less significant.

Lowell Turner and Richard W. Hurd define SMU as member involvement and activism in an interactive process of partnering with broad, powerful social movements for mutually beneficial gains.<sup>1</sup> Turner and Hurd also recognize that in a union's effort to build social movement unionism they can lay the groundwork for a social movement wave.<sup>2</sup> One of the most famous examples of SMU was the 1968 Memphis sanitation worker strikes during which Martin Luther King was killed. The force of the union movement and of the civil rights movement amplified the power of each in their fight to gain common goals.

Social movement unionism has gained in popularity in the U.S. primarily since the 1990's, when John Sweeney and his slate was elected to the leadership of the AFL-CIO and focused union activities on organizing non-union workers. He dedicated \$20 million to this effort by creating an organizing department. Through Sweeney's leadership, the organizing model became seen as a key strategy in reviving the labor movement and gained in popularity along with models that greatly overlap and have extended from it, such as the social movement model and community unionism. The organizing model of unionism emphasizes unionizing new workers, often minority groups and/or workers in precarious employment who were previously seen as unorganizable. The model relies on the work of full time organizers who train rank and file members to take a larger, more active role in their union and try to organize new firms as opposed to offering services to the union members. The community model takes on many forms depending on the context it operates within, but it essentially takes the organizing model and extends its focus past the workplace by organizing local communities around social, economic,

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<sup>1</sup> Lowell Turner and Richard W. Hurd, "Building Social Movement Unionism: The Transformation of the American Labor Movement," in *Rekindling the Movement: Labor's Quest for Relevance in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. L. Turner et al. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Turner and Hurd, "Building Social Movement Unionism," 12.

or political issues that may be affecting the area and organizing around common identities past those of class or being a worker in the same place.

Although there is no clear definition of a SMU model, there are a few main features of SMU. These do not encompass SMU in its entirety. The features include: an expressed political understanding and motivation for the activity; a highly active and involved membership with a voice in the union; and a focus on genuine coalition building to win mutually beneficial gains. The following section will go through each of these three main features of SMU.

SMU views its struggle as being beyond just the gains of its members, but pushing for broader social and economic justice. Freeman and Medoff break down understanding unions as institutions by arguing that they have two faces, “each of which leads to a different view of the institution. A monopoly face, associated with their monopolistic power to raise wages, and a collective voice/institutional response face, associated with their representation of organized workers within enterprises.”<sup>3</sup>

SMU was formed as a strategy to better respond to changes in the broader economic and political structure as neoliberalism took hold in the 1980s and the resulting patterns of inequality grew. In this way, SMU attempts to use its institutional voice as far more than a collective worker’s voice, but as a voice for the working class. The labor movement sociologist Kim Scipes argues SMU is “not only a different model of trade unionism but also based on a different understanding of the working class and its organization in the struggle to transform society.”<sup>4</sup> In practice, understanding oneself as a political union does not come inherently and a union moving towards a SMU model does not happen in a vacuum and usually comes out of a service

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<sup>3</sup> Richard B. Freeman and James L. Medoff, “A New Portrait of U.S. Unionism,” in *What Do Unions Do*, ed. Richard B Freeman et al. (New York, New York: Basic Books Publishers, February 1984) 5 - 6.

<sup>4</sup> Kim Scipes, “Understanding the New Labor Movements in the ‘Third World’: the Emergence of Social Movement Unionism.” *Critical Sociology* 19:2 (1992): 84



model. Whether coming from a conscious change in strategy from leadership or from the work of a reform caucus, moving to a political union requires a change in understanding of what the union does and is and that includes the activating of the rank and file. That activation of membership is one of the other key aspects of a SMU model.

The rationale behind social movement unionism's effort to mobilize rank and file members can be broken into two reasons. First, developing rank and file leadership contributes to the greater political project of building a stronger working class politics and uses the union as a more democratic institution for broader change. Secondly, strategically activating rank and file membership leads to a greater capacity for further organizing and growth of the union. Encouraging rank and file members to take ownership of the union through trainings and a real system of democracy that promotes membership involvement in key decision-making can potentially create an army of rank and file organizers.<sup>5</sup> Creating a union of active and trained members better prepares unions to effectively win contract campaigns, organize new firms, or resist managerial abuse. In this way, the ideological and strategic components both contribute and work together as a process; those wins with rank and file leadership and mass participation also shows members the potential power of a collective action in their group's interest.

The primary difference between social movement unionism and an organizing or community model is the emphasis on significant coalition building and the necessity of this pressure in bringing about political change beyond union issues. Turner and Hurd emphasize the merging of two distinct formations (labor movement and a new social movement) to make significant changes to current political structures as distinct to SMU. However, there are not

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<sup>5</sup> Kate Bronfenbrenner and Tom Juravich, "It Takes More Than Housecalls: Organizing to Win with a Comprehensive Union-Building Strategy," in *Organizing to Win: New Research on Union Strategies*, ed Kate Bronfenf et al. (Ithaca, N.Y.: IRL Press, 1998), 35.

always active social movements, and Hurd and Turner argue that “it is possible to build social movement unions in the absence of the broader social movement as many local unions have shown, [although] the broader movement more easily sweeps away obstacles and breaks down resistance from entrenched office-holders and conservative forces inside and outside of unions.”<sup>6</sup>

Turner writes “coalition building is important both for its reformist counter-pressure on employers and governments and as an indicator for labor’s shift from special interest group to broad partisan for the expansion of democratic voice and participation.”<sup>7</sup> Turner then breaks down coalition building into three primary types: *events* - one time affairs or actions; *campaigns* - sustained efforts over a period of time with multiple tactics aimed at a specific goal; and *institutional consolidation* - networks based on previous events/campaigns uniting into new organizations for creating future opportunities to further the common politics.<sup>8</sup> Events, campaigns, and then institutional consolidation are all forms of coalition building and according to Turner can operate as a process in escalating commitment to a coalition. While most unions will try to reach out to potentially supportive groups when organizing events, SMU centers the coalition building process (even if not consciously following this theory directly) as a major goal of the union. The case studies featured later in this paper all feature various levels of Turner’s theory of the process of coalition building.

Genuine coalition building, especially with a demographic of people rather than organization, needs a large group of people willing to build that relationship and therefore a dedicated rank and file is necessary for a successful project. As SMU ideologically organizes

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<sup>6</sup> Turner and Hurd, “Building Social Movement Unionism,” 11.

<sup>7</sup> Lowell Turner, “Globalization and the Logic of Participation: Unions and the Politics of Coalition Building,” *Journal of Industrial Relations* 48(2006): 88

<sup>8</sup> Turner, “Globalization and the Logic of Participation,” 6.

around building a working class politics, extending the union's efforts to a wider population than the membership is critical to SMU success.

This takes slightly different forms in the private sector versus the public sector. In private sector unions this is often seen as an organizing campaign that organizes previously unorganized workers, calls for an increase in jobs for people in the surrounding area, or pressures for bettering a public service connected to the employer's corporation. For example, in 1996, the Canadian Auto Workers pushed for a bargaining program that would increase employment throughout the country by shortening work time, restricting outsourcing, and guaranteeing job levels for the communities in the surrounding communities of plants.<sup>9</sup> The bargaining program succeeded in rallying support from the working class in the region while also growing union membership. In public sector campaigns the workers will frame their campaign around defending or bettering the public services in the local area that working people rely on. For example, 1996 California Nurses' Association incorporated patient rights into their bargaining program after a ballot measure for the same rights had failed in 1996.<sup>10</sup> Both private and public sector unions can both take a SMU approach and challenge status quo political agendas in distinct ways. Public sector unions can be understood in the context of the ongoing conflict over the urban agenda and can be a form of voice for the public interest.<sup>11</sup>

Teachers interact intimately with a significant section of the public perhaps more than any other public employee profession, making a social movement unionist strategy particularly effective from their position. Teachers generally meet and work with a fairly large number of

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<sup>9</sup> Kim Moody, "Conclusion: Toward an International Social-Movement Unionism," in *Workers in a Lean World: Unions in the International Economy*, ed. Kim Moody (New York: Verso, 1997), 279.

<sup>10</sup> Moody, "Conclusion: Toward an International Social-Movement Union," 279.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Johnston, "Peculiarities of the Public Workers' Movement," in *Success While Others Fail: Social Movement Unionism and the Public Workplace*, ed. Paul Johnston (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 1994), 11.

children each year, usually meeting the students' parents throughout the year, putting them in close contact with many people through their profession. Then within a year, the teacher has an entirely new class of students and parents to meet, teach, and work with. In this way, teachers interact with a large percentage of the public on both a personal and professional level, which places them in a unique position to form local community partnerships more easily as public employees. Teachers unions have a history of organizing around community institutions; "given the fiscal restraints of the late seventies and eighties, teachers' organizations have had to form coalitions in communities, participate in local elections, and press for alliances not just with labor organizations but with businessmen and other professionals just to make their needs known."<sup>12</sup>

### **Corporate Education Reform**

The wave of teachers reform caucuses pushing a social movement union model comes in response to the rise of corporate education reform since the early 2000s and its attack on teachers unions and changes to public education. Corporate education reform is neoliberal education reform through federal and state policies that include: "increase test-based evaluation of students, teachers, and schools; eliminate or weaken tenure and seniority rights; end pay for experience of advanced degrees; close schools deemed low performing and replace them by publicly funded, but privately run charters; and replace governance by local school boards with various forms of mayoral and state takeover or private management; vouchers and tax credit subsidies for private school tuition; and increases in class size, sometimes tied to the firing of the teaching staff."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1992) 256.

<sup>13</sup> Valerie Strauss, "A Primer on Corporate School Reform," *The Washington Post*, October 27, 2011, accessed April 20th, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/a-primer-on-corporate-school-reform/2011/10/26/gIQAyWrUKM\\_blog.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/a-primer-on-corporate-school-reform/2011/10/26/gIQAyWrUKM_blog.html)).

Corporate education reform is based on the premise that U.S. schools are seriously failing to educate students effectively and that the public education system has developed such an entrenched bureaucracy it is unsalvageable. The corporate education reform agenda promotes a narrative that the driving forces behind struggling schools are lazy teachers who have become comfortable with the status quo of low testing expectations and results, caring more about their salary and pensions than education.<sup>14</sup> This understanding of why schools are struggling is misguided at best and ignores significant research on key factors that dictate educational outcomes far more than teacher quality. This narrative ignores broader and more deeply entrenched societal issues that have a far greater impact on educational results, such as poverty, de facto segregation and school underfunding. (Part of the appeal of corporate education reform is its blindness to these problems, that would all require a significant restructuring of society and current government policies)

At its most basic, the corporate education reform movement seeks to open up public education to markets and justifies this as the only tangible solution to the problem of struggling public schools. However, the privatization of education agenda consists of a multitude of policies and developing industries. This section will go through national policies that have laid the groundwork for the movement, follow government policies that open up the privatization project and then look at markets and industries that have developed as privatization developed.

Corporate education reform places an emphasis on making policies based on data driven analysis as a measure of educational success. Corporate education reform seeks to use standardized testing as the primary metric of data for determining whether a school is successful or not. Because of the importance of test results to schools' funding and ability to stay open,

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<sup>14</sup> Diane Ravitch, *Reign of Error : The Hoax of the Privatization Movement and the Danger to America's Public Schools*, (New York: Albert A. Knopf, 2013), 3.

schools have since placed a much higher emphasis on preparation for standardized testing and testing itself.

As teachers, and the unions that support them, are seen as one of the primary groups at fault for schools' inability to increase testing scores in this narrative, corporate education reform seeks to connect teachers' employment more closely to testing results. It is also worth noting that the focus on teachers as the root cause of educational struggle conveniently glosses over how educational disparities are clear evidence of the impact of inequality in the United States. This agenda uses policies such as attaching teachers' wages and benefits to test scores (merit pay), decreasing barriers to employing people as teachers (not needing teaching certifications to work at charters, pushing certification programs that put non-certified people in teaching positions such as Teach For America), and weakening/eventually eliminating teachers unions.

Corporate education reform and other forces to reduce the profession of teaching look to limit the teacher's role as an educator with autonomy, and stress this role as a person teaching standardized curriculum who can be replaced easily. Enforcing core curriculum, standardized testing, and limiting teacher's ability to create curriculum shifts a teaching position towards an automated monitor rather than a professional employee whose value as an educator would be hard to replace. Reducing the teacher's role in the classroom to a someone who must teach a certain material, a certain way, at a certain pace then removes the value of what a passionate or experience teacher could provide to a classroom, and the skill and basis of education that teachers unions rely on. Corporate education reform, while looking to weaken unions immediately, also try to reform the teachers role and school system into one more of a replaceable worker than a valuable worker, reducing the strength of teacher unions on a more macro scale.

Teachers unions are one of the few groups that actively oppose corporate education reform, which often results in defending the status quo. Corporate reformers have since fabricated the myth that there is an inherent inconsistency between the goals of teachers and society's goals for students. This myth has led to a national trend of politicians, both Republican and Democratic, criticizing teachers unions as blockades to education reform, often depicting them as greedy institutions protecting bad and lazy teachers at the cost of children's' education.

While these are the mechanisms that reduce opposition to corporate education reform and justify the movement, actual privatization comes from public schools closings and being replaced by charter schools. No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top widely prescribed charter schools as a solution to schools marked as failing with no evidence that they would succeed in place of the public school.<sup>15</sup> In 1999-2000 there were 1,010 public charters in the U.S. and by 2014-2015, there were more than 6,700.<sup>1617</sup>

In 2001, No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandated that all states test all children grades three through eight annually in reading and mathematics, and track the data based on student demographics.<sup>18</sup> By 2014, all students were supposed to score proficient. If a school was unable to raise its scores on track with reaching 100% proficiency, it was labeled a failing school and faced increasingly harsh sanctions. Continuous school failures led to significant restructuring," which could mean firing the entire staff, closing the school, putting it under state management, or turning it into a charter. The goal of 100% proficiency was an impossible goal, with over 80% of

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<sup>15</sup> Ravitch, *Reign of Error*, 13.

<sup>16</sup> U.S. Department of Education, "Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999 - 2000," <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/2002313.pdf> (accessed April 20th, 2017) 69.

<sup>17</sup> National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, *Estimated Number of Public Charter Schools and Students, 2014-2015*. Accessed April 20th, 2017, [http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/open\\_closed\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/open_closed_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Ravitch, *Reign of Error*, 11.

schools in the top rated state, Massachusetts, failing to meet the NCLB standards.<sup>19</sup> Somewhat predictably, the schools that were likeliest to be ranked failing were schools with predominately poor and minority student enrollment.<sup>20</sup> The nationwide testing project that would designate most schools as failing was the first major step in opening up public schools to market forces, as it created the need for an alternative to public schools and started the industries of educational consulting, charters, and standardized tests.

Corporate education reform became a bipartisan movement with Barack Obama furthering Bush's national policies with his Race to the Top. Race to the Top (RTTP) was a competition of bettering schools for \$5 billion between the states, in which states agreed to Common Core State Standards, the expansion of the number of charter schools, the linkage of teacher evaluations to student test scores, and the restructuring of their lowest performing schools through firing staff or closing the schools.<sup>21</sup> The impact of RTTP led to all of the changes necessary to open public schools to markets as nearly all states competed for federal funding. RTTP represented both a democratic commitment to corporate education reform and an abandonment of the previous core principle that equity should be the driving principle of federal aid, since it was based on competition rather than on proportions of students who were poor.<sup>22</sup> These changes purposefully led to the "scale up of entrepreneurial activity, to encourage the creation of new markets for both for-profit and nonprofit investors," according to the director of Race to the Top, Joanna Weiss.<sup>23</sup> The motivation for public school privatization is driven by

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<sup>19</sup> Ravitch, *Reign of Error*, 11.

<sup>20</sup> Ravitch, *Reign of Error*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> Ravitch, *Reign of Error*, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Ravitch, *Reign of Error*, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Ravitch, *Reign of Error*, 15.



opening up new markets and the industry of corporate education reform has grown alongside the increased implementation of its policies.

This paper will not argue that public schools necessarily provide better educations than charters as there is so much variance between states, cities, and even districts. Some charter schools certainly provide better educational opportunities than the public schools of their area, but part of that comes at the cost of local public schools, as charters tend to have a lower percentage of high-need students (this process will be explained further in the LA case study). Although charter schools technically cannot deny any student from attending their schools as public institutions, in practice many charters have demanding applications that strongly benefit those in the most stable family and financial positions to enroll.<sup>24</sup> Charter school expansion creates a tiered system of public education that exacerbates inequality. Also, depending on the state and other classifications (such as for-profit vs non-profit, etc) charter schools are often not held to the same standards or oversight procedures as public schools, such as through standardized testing and core curriculum. This variability in oversight, standards, and local enforcement of law results in an inconsistency in charter school education quality.

It is also important to note that there are stark differences and inequalities in the educations that people receive in the United States based on race and class. Different school districts provide “dramatically different learning opportunities - especially disparities in access to well-qualified teachers, high quality curriculum, and small schools and classes, [all of which] are strongly related to differences in student achievement.”<sup>25</sup> These resource disparities between

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<sup>24</sup> Stephanie Simon, “Special Report: Class Struggle - How charter schools get the students they want,” *Reuters*, February 15th, 2013, accessed April 20th, 2017, <http://mobile.reuters.com/article/idUSBRE91E0HF20130215?irpc=932>.

<sup>25</sup> Linda Darling-Hammond, “The Color Line in American Education: Race, Resources, and Student Achievement,” *The Du Bois Review* Vol. 1:2 (2004): 213-246. Page 213

schools is closely linked to race through the legacy of racial redlining and segregation. In 1998, “70% of nation’s Black students attended predominantly minority schools... and more than a third of African American and Latino students attended schools with a minority enrollment of 90%-100%.”<sup>26</sup> The schools that are most affected by corporate education reform are the underfunded schools with predominantly African-American and Latinx student populations.

This theory section identified three main features of SMU; an active and involved rank and file with democratic voice in the union, a focus on coalition building to achieve collective gains, and a political understanding and motivation for pushing the previous two features. The section also explains the mechanisms and driving forces behind the rise in corporate education reform. These theories and explanations should explain and provide context to the two local concrete examples of the following case studies and will then be used in the analysis section to examine and interpret the cases.

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<sup>26</sup> Linda Darling-Hammond, “The Color Line in American Education: Race, Resources, and Student Achievement,” *The Du Bois Review* Vol. 1:2 (2004): 213-246. Page 217

## CHAPTER 2: Chicago Case Study

Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) became known in the labor movement for its 2012 strike, the largest work stoppage in the United States in 2012 that ended with the union opting to go back to work after the district offered a better contract.<sup>27</sup> CTU's strike became widely known, not just for the size of the stoppage, but as an example of a successfully operating social movement union (SMU). The union quickly transformed from a passive service union to the model of a successful social movement union with an active rank and file membership, social justice oriented agenda, democratic structure, and strong coalitions with parents and community organizations. Teachers unions across the country have looked to CTU for ways to transform their union and CTU has hosted multiple conferences on the subject. CTU has continued to become a more active political force in Chicago and in the battle for public education, running close mayoral campaigns in 2014 and leading another successful contract campaign in 2015-2016.

It is particularly significant for the transformation and win to have taken place in Chicago because the city has the third largest school district in the country and the city's leadership has pushed for corporate education reform since the early 2000's.<sup>28</sup> Chicago has been a testing-ground for corporate education reform, with a record numbers of school closings accompanying charter expansion.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Profiles of significant collective bargaining disputes of 2012," Monthly Labor Review, May 2013, accessed April 20th, 2017, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2013/article/profiles-of-significant-collective-bargaining-disputes-of-2012.htm>.

<sup>28</sup> NCES (National Center for Education Statistics), 2010, "Enrollment, poverty, and federal funds for the 100 largest school districts, by enrollment size," accessed April 20th, 2017, [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12\\_104.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12_104.asp).

<sup>29</sup> NCES (National Center for Education Statistics), "Enrollment, poverty, and federal funds for the 100 largest school districts, by enrollment size,"

The first section of this case study will provide context of how Chicago Public Schools (CPS) developed a large debt crisis and the related corporate education reform implemented in the 2000s. The second section will track the internal politics of CTU, primarily the Caucus of Rank and File Educators' (CORE) growth and transformation of CTU to a social movement union through their activism. The third section will focus on CTU's strategies in further mobilizing rank and file members, building public support, and exerting pressure on the district for the 2012 and 2015-2016 contract campaigns.

### **Section 1: The Context of Chicago's Education System**

Chicago has a long history of employing new or untried financial investment devices in the name of revitalization. Chicago has used financial tools such as Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and interest rate swaps to try to revitalize areas of Chicago and reduce city debt. However, those risky financial devices have backfired in some sense, leaving the city with a larger debt and an underfunded public education system. To understand the context of Chicago's public schools, this paper will first explain TIF, Chicago's massive pension debt and misguided attempts to reduce it, and how Chicago's leaders moved towards corporate education reform as a neoliberal solution for improving a struggling public school system. This section will then show the subsequent attacks on public schools and teachers unions which were a necessary step to justify moving towards a market education system

Chicago widely uses Tax Increment Financing (TIF), a tool that freezes the amount of money coming from property taxes in a designated location for 15+ years and then uses the potential increases in property taxes as a return for private investments in the designated location. This practice often results in new private building developments without the necessary public services for those who lived in the area prior to TIF. A district's frozen property tax base

also does not account for inflation, which over more than 15 years has a significant effect on the impact of property taxes on state coffers. Essentially, regardless of how high property values and taxes become in a TIF location, that location will pay the same tax rate to the city, with the difference between the frozen tax base and actual taxes going to the TIF fund. As TIF is used heavily throughout Chicago, a significant amount of tax revenue for public services stays at the same rate it did 15+ years ago, not accounting for inflation, while the difference goes to a specific TIF fund. TIF collects an enormous amount of money, nearly half a billion dollars in 2015 (\$461 million), and has earned around that amount every year since 2006.<sup>30</sup> The growth of tax dollars from the frozen base that would go to Chicago Public Schools budget is instead put towards the district's TIF fund, essentially depriving public schools of a large amount of tax revenue. TIF fund usage is fairly opaque to the public, under mayoral control and can be distributed relatively at the city's discretion often to help private investment in the name of revitalization, such as using \$55 million to help finance a basketball stadium for DePaul University.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to dealing with the impact of how TIF withholds tax revenue from CPS, CPS and Chicago made a series of poor policy decisions in 1995 in an attempt to remedy a failing school system, leading to a massive pension debt that has only worsened. In 1979, CPS was failing and unable to pay their teachers and as a response they created the Chicago School Finance Authority to oversee budgeting. Nearly two years later, CPS and CTU negotiated a deal where CPS paid 98% of teachers pension costs in exchange for lower pay raises (Chicago

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<sup>30</sup> Nick Shields, "Chicago TIFs to collect \$461 million," *Cook County Clerk Newsroom*, July 19th, 2016, accessed April 20th, 2017, <http://www.cookcountyclerk.com/newsroom/newsfromclerk/Pages/2015TIFReport.aspx>.

<sup>31</sup> Fran Spielman, "TIF flap forgotten as mayor breaks ground on Depaul basketball arena," *The Chicago Sun Times*, November 16th, 2015, accessed April 20th, 2017, <http://chicago.suntimes.com/news/tif-flap-forgotten-as-mayor-breaks-ground-on-depaul-basketball-arena/>.

teachers also do not receive social security - their pensions are their entire retirement plans<sup>32</sup>).

In 1995, Chicago's education system was seen as a national failure and the then governor of Illinois put Chicago's schools under the control of then Mayor Richard Daley - creating a mayoral control of Chicago's education system through the appointment of a school board and chief executive officer (superintendent) that has continued until the present day (2017). In addition to creating mayoral control of Chicago public school education, the law also ruled that class size, district or school restructuring, and the creation of new charters were no longer mandatory and all optional for CPS to bargain over as part of any future negotiations with CTU<sup>33</sup>.

Daley and the legislature allowed the district to skip their pension fund payments from 1996 to 2005, diverting property tax dollars that were initially allocated for the pension fund into paying for the failing schools' operation. The deferral of pension payments was part of a larger project of CPS to build schools and better the education system that involved borrowing large sums with mostly fixed interest rate bonds.<sup>34</sup> While it did improve the schools by providing some funding, the deferral also led to a massive growth in unpaid pension debt as more teachers entered the system and the fund did not grow; the pension fund estimates that the district should have contributed \$2 billion over that period. Teacher's pensions were not the only pension payments were skipped. Chicago's pension debt also includes that of other public sector workers' (such as police and firefighters) pensions.

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<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Campbell, "School of Debt: How to Bankrupt Public Education, Chicago - Style," *Bloomberg*, February 16th, 2016, accessed April 20th, 2017, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-02-16/school-of-debt-how-to-bankrupt-public-education-chicago-style>.

<sup>33</sup> Alexandra Bradbury et al., *How to Jump-Start Your Union: Lessons from the Chicago Teachers* (Detroit: Labor Notes, 2014), 10.

<sup>34</sup> Jason Grotto and Heather Gillers, "Risky bonds prove costly for Chicago Public Schools," *The Chicago Tribune*, November 7th, 2014, accessed April 20th, 2017, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/watchdog/cpsbonds/ct-chicago-public-schools-bond-deals-met-20141107-story.html>.

In the early 2000s, Chicago looked to financial derivatives rather than issuing municipal bonds to address the shortfall and the district sold \$1 billion of auction-rate securities from 2003 to 2007, nearly all of which were tied to interest-rate swaps.<sup>35</sup> The auction-rate securities rely on investors bidding on the securities. Once a bid is won, that investor holds onto the security for a set period of time until up for auction again. Borrowing on floating interest rates/issuing floating rate bonds offer interest rates that are dependent on market rates rather than a fixed amount. Interest rate swaps are a financial derivative instrument that means a party exchanges a floating rate for a fixed amount. In the case of CPS, it would receive payments from an investment bank based on a common floating market rate in return for making payments to the bank on a fixed rate.

CPS financial advisors accepted the push for floating rate bonds and interest rate swaps because they thought it could lead to paying off more debt and saving money on interest costs. However, just as the district could potentially save more money than with the stable fixed interest rate borrowing, they could also potentially lose far more in the event of a market crash. In addition to the risky decision making from CPS officials to use the interest-rate swap instrument, there have also been some accusations from the Chicago Tribune that CPS's financial advisors' made poor models that inaccurately represented actual payoff and risk analysis, thereby downplaying the risk.

After the financial crisis of 2008, Chicago's swaps and debt grew massively as banks decided to stop supporting the auctions (a number of banks had previously submitted support bids to keep interest rates down and prevent auction failure) and as a result market floating rates skyrocketed<sup>36</sup>. CPS took a serious gamble on attempting to pay off a large debt with exotic

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<sup>35</sup> Campbell, "School of Debt."

<sup>36</sup> Grotto and Gillers, "Risky bonds prove costly for Chicago Public Schools."

financial instruments, but the higher risk took its toll and, instead, CPS faced a higher debt with worsening interest rates.

From 2003 to 2008, CPS's variable-rate debt had multiplied six times over and by 2008 \$1.8 billion in bonds (40% of district's outstanding debt) were subject to fluctuating rates, whereas in 2003 it had been just \$300 million (10% of debt).<sup>37</sup> The Chicago Tribune estimated that over the course of the deals, due to interest rate swaps the district will pay \$100 million more than it would have on fixed-rate bonds.

In 2016, Chicago was failing to address the debt effectively under Mayor Rahm Emanuel and Moody's dropped the debts credit rating to junk status, and while other ratings firms did not follow Moody's, the impact of their drop is still significant. The problem of the debt only worsens as the lower ratings will lead to higher interest rates on current and future debt, making it harder to pay off the debt the longer it exists. As of 2016, CPS owes more than \$6 billion to its bondholders and the teacher's retirement fund is about \$9.6 billion short.<sup>38</sup> Chicago is in a general debt crisis, with their property tax backed city debt at about \$9.4 billion at the end of 2015.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to the pension debt stress on CPS budget, student enrollment has dropped significantly in Chicago in the past ten years, from 413,694 in 2006-2007 to 392,285 in 2015-2016.<sup>40</sup> As will be discussed in the later case study of LA, a declining student enrollment reduces district funding from the state and then individual funding for schools that have the

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<sup>37</sup> Grotto and Gillers, "Risky bonds prove costly for Chicago Public Schools."

<sup>38</sup> Campbell, "School of Debt."

<sup>39</sup> Hal Dardick, "Latest sign of Chicago financial stress: City debt up by \$1 billion," *The Chicago Tribune*, July 8th, 2016, accessed April 20th, 2017, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/politics/ct-chicago-financial-report-debt-met-0709-20160708-story.html>.

<sup>40</sup> CPS (Chicago Public Schools Chicago Board of Education), January 2017, *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the year ended June 30, 2016*, accessed April 20th, 2017, [http://cps.edu/About\\_CPS/Financial\\_information/Documents/FY16\\_CAFR.PDF](http://cps.edu/About_CPS/Financial_information/Documents/FY16_CAFR.PDF).



highest enrollment decline. Losing about 5% of student enrollment over almost ten years led to a state revenue decrease of 11.4% ( \$180 million dollars) to CPS in 2015-2016.<sup>41</sup>

This trend of private investment of public money and spaces in Chicago has continued more directly into other aspects of education policy. Due to a series of policy decision from CPS and Chicago government, CPS became further underfunded from TIF while accumulating a massive amount of debt through their pension debt obligations (even prior to interest rate swaps). When faced with the opportunity of implementing corporate education reform and opening public education to market forces rather than attempting to fix the highly institutionalized and struggling public schools, CPS and the mayor chose corporate education reform. The schools were struggling in part because of a legacy of mayoral irresponsibility. Privatizing education diffuses responsibility for struggling schools into the obscure language of market forces and free choice, in some ways absolving government responsibility while allowing the mayor to keep the TIF funds at their discretion. A worsening public education system actually helps an expanding corporate education reform policy, as it provides justification for the shift to a privatized school system.

Since 2004, Chicago Public Schools' School Board (CPS) has closed large numbers of public schools in order to create charter schools, which are often investment opportunities. This rollout of corporate education reform also serves the project of weakening and shrinking public teachers unions - one of the few opponents of that very kind of corporate reform.

Beginning in 2004, Mayor Daley began the “Renaissance 2010” plan that called for school closings and ‘turnarounds’ (called reconstitution in LA) - the whole staff of a school is

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<sup>41</sup> CPS (Chicago Public Schools Chicago Board of Education), January 2017, *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the year ended June 30, 2016*, accessed April 20th, 2017, [http://cps.edu/About\\_CPS/Financial\\_information/Documents/FY16\\_CAFR.PDF](http://cps.edu/About_CPS/Financial_information/Documents/FY16_CAFR.PDF).

fired and must reapply for their jobs - for schools on the grounds they were failing.<sup>42</sup> Between 2001 and 2010, 70 Chicago Public Schools were closed and 6,000 union jobs disappeared (about 20% of the union membership). The closed schools were replaced with publicly funded non-union charters.<sup>43</sup> In 2013 alone, the Chicago Board of Education shut down 49 public schools which was “the largest mass school closure in U.S. history.”<sup>44</sup> CPS then promptly released a document asking for charter schools to apply in the city, specifically in eleven neighborhoods with overcrowded schools.<sup>45</sup> Although the closing of these public schools is more complex and due to more factors than simply the desire to form charter schools for investment, the decision to respond to failing schools with inadequate funding by closing them is also supportive of the trend towards corporate education reform sought in Chicago.

In 2011, Illinois’s General Assembly passed SB7, an education reform bill heavily influenced by Stand for Children and Advance Illinois, education reform advocacy groups that push corporate reform policies, and endorsed by Emanuel.<sup>46</sup> The bill was initially written with negotiations from CTU and with CTU support, but the sponsors of the bill added in union-busting measures that would limit CTU’s strike power just before sending the bill to the general assembly, giving CTU little time to re-negotiate the bill, and this resulted in CTU rescinding their support but the bill still passed.

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<sup>42</sup> Bradbury, et al., *How to Jump Start your Union*, 10

<sup>43</sup> Bradbury, et al., *How to Jump Start your Union*, 11

<sup>44</sup> Sameen Amin, “School Debate Threatens Rahm Emanuel’s Re-election,” *Aljazeera America*, March 27, 2015, accessed April 20th, 2017. <http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/america-tonight/articles/2015/3/27/rahm-emanuel-chuy-garcia-chicago-runoff-schools.html>

<sup>45</sup> Rebecca Klein, “Chicago Requests More Charter Schools After Massive Wave of Public School Closings,” *HuffingtoPost*, August 15, 2013, accessed April 20th, 2017. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/15/chicago-charter-schools\\_n\\_3757911.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/15/chicago-charter-schools_n_3757911.html)

<sup>46</sup> Matthew Blake, “The Union Cannot Strike in Chicago: SB7 and The CTU Strike,” *Progress Illinois*, September 13th, 2012, accessed April 20th, 2017. <http://progressillinois.com/posts/content/2012/09/13/union-cannot-strike-chicago-sb7-and-teachers-strike>

### Summarized impacts of SB7:

- Rather than needing a majority of voting members to sign on to allow a strike like all other teachers' unions in Illinois, CTU would need 75% of all covered employees to vote yes to authorize a strike.<sup>47</sup>
- Fact-finding report would be released 100 days after stalled negotiations<sup>48</sup>
- There would then be a 90-day cooling off period if both sides rejected the report.<sup>49</sup>
- The bill would “prevent CTU from filing unfair labor practice charges, and strip state authority from mediators and factfinders.”<sup>50</sup>
- The bill would further develop the Performance Evaluation and Reform Act (PERA) and make teacher salary and personnel decisions based on performance based evaluations, with seniority and additional education only considered secondarily.
- The PERA development included an increase in performance evaluations, leaving the decision of evaluation ambiguous (potentially through standardized testing).
- The bill increased new teacher probation from two years to four years.<sup>51</sup>
- The bill shifted negotiations over the length of school day and school year to permissible issues, meaning that they could be on the bargaining table only if the educational

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<sup>47</sup> Blake, “The Union Cannot Strike in Chicago.”

<sup>48</sup> Blake, “The Union Cannot Strike in Chicago.”

<sup>49</sup> Blake, “The Union Cannot Strike in Chicago.”

<sup>50</sup> Howard Ryan, “Billionaires and Politicians Test Chicago Teachers Union,” *Labor Notes*, May 11, 2011, accessed April 20th, 2017. <http://labornotes.org/2011/05/billionaires-and-politicians-test-chicago-teachers-union#sthash.S0RKmzDs.dpuf>

<sup>51</sup> Illinois Statewide School Management Alliance, “SB7/SB630 Analysis”  
<http://www.iasb.com/govrel/sb7analysis.pdf>

employer decided to allow it on the table, effectively allowing the Chicago school board to unilaterally implement a longer school day.<sup>52</sup>

SB7 changed collective bargaining laws for CTU, limiting their ability to strike and thus their potential strength, as well as making changes to teacher pay systems and potential job security. One key aspect of SB7 is the change that the school board can unilaterally increase the length of the school day. This later resulted in Emanuel and the school board mandating a 20% increase in school day without a pay increase as a part of CTU's new contract, one of the driving proposed contract changes contributing to CTU's mobilization. CPS argued that lengthening the school day would give students more time in class and would help students in Chicago's schools. In addition to significantly adding to teacher workload without compensation, CTU argued that the proposal was a band-aid solution to education that did not address the more deep-seeded funding disparities and school issues. CTU instead argued to only increase the school day with additional funding for the arts, physical education and other necessary parts of education that are under-funded in Chicago.

The effects of SB7 can be seen as tangible changes limiting union power and implementing changes in opposition to union goals, but also as an example of the trend of bi-partisan support for corporate education reform, with both major political parties pushing against teachers unions in Chicago.

CTU's contract with the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) was set to end in 2012.

Following SB7's changes to Chicago schools and CTU's collective bargaining ability,

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<sup>52</sup> Yana Kunichoff, "Effects of SB7 Collective Bargaining Provisions Being Felt in CTU vs. CPS Negotiations," *Chicago Now*, July 19, 2012, accessed April 20th, 2017. <http://www.chicagonow.com/chicago-muckrakers/2012/07/effects-of-sb7-collective-bargaining-provisions-being-felt-in-ctu-vs-cps-negotiations/>

Emanuel's school board put forward a new contract proposal for 2012 to 2015 proposing fierce changes to teachers jobs and the school systems.

**Changes from the 2007 contract to CPS's proposed 2012 contract:**

- One of the biggest changes proposed was an 20% increase in the length of the school day without increased compensation to account for the extra work.<sup>53</sup>
- A change in teacher evaluation to yearly evaluations dependent on student's standardized test results.<sup>54</sup>
- A change from layoffs being done based on seniority to teacher performance evaluations (as Chicago had been and continues to close record numbers of public schools per year, teacher layoff transferring has a large impact on job security).<sup>55</sup>
- An elimination of the enhanced pension program.<sup>56</sup>

In June 2010, CPS CEO called for CTU to accept 2,000 layoffs or open their contract to give up all or part of the members' 4% annual raise due to financial crisis.<sup>57</sup> After CTU refused to open the contract to negotiations and demanded that CPS explain the financial crisis and budget failure, CPS laid off nearly 1,300 teachers.<sup>58</sup>

CPS faced a growing debt crisis after the 2008 recession that continued to escalate until the current day (2017). As so much of the debt was in unpaid pensions and the retirement

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<sup>53</sup> CPS (Chicago Public Schools Chicago Board of Education), January 2017, *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the year ended June 30, 2016*, accessed April 20th, 2017, [http://cps.edu/About\\_CPS/Financial\\_information/Documents/FY16\\_CAFR.PDF](http://cps.edu/About_CPS/Financial_information/Documents/FY16_CAFR.PDF).

<sup>54</sup> CPS, *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the year ended June 30th 2016*

<sup>55</sup> CPS, *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the year ended June 30th 2016*

<sup>56</sup> CPS, *Comprehensive Annual Financial Report for the year ended June 30th 2016*

<sup>57</sup> Bradbury et al., *How to Jump Start your Union*, 83.

<sup>58</sup> Bradbury et al., *How to Jump Start your Union*, 85.

system for teachers, one of CPS's solutions for addressing the budget crisis was to weaken the teachers union. This was both a general cost cutting measure and a means of limiting their ability to resist changes to their pensions, one of the largest amounts of CPS debt. SB7 was passed and challenged teachers unions in Chicago specifically. SB7 and CPS's contract proposal were large tangible steps towards creating a corporate education system, both immediately affecting teachers' livelihood and day-to-day work. At the same time as these pension debts grow, and Chicago as a whole sinks further into debt, CPS has undergone significant enrollment decline and is forced to work with reduced state funding. Meanwhile, Chicago has been collecting massive amounts of revenue through property taxes that could have been going to CPS but instead were going to a TIF fund mostly under the control of the mayor. In response to this mounting financial crisis, the attack on public schools and teachers unions and the rollout of corporate education reform, CTU undertook its rank and file transformation.

## Section 2: Internal Union Politics and the Development of CORE

This section will first track CORE's growth and strategy as an activist group and caucus from 2008 to the 2010 union elections. Although this section is not focused on strategy, it includes a description of many of CORE's actions because after they were elected, these strategies and ideas shifted CTU policy and led to the caucus's electoral success. In the 2010 CTU elections, the top four positions, nine other citywide offices, and all elementary and high school vice presidencies changed from the incumbents of the United Progressive Caucus (UPC) to members of the Caucus of Rank and File Educators (CORE). UPC had gone through waves of militancy over their 37 years leading the union during the past 40 years (there was a brief 3-year period of an unsuccessful reform slate), despite these waves of militancy, they became a service union that did not actively fight corporate education reform.<sup>59</sup> CORE originally formed in 2005 as an activist group to stop school closings, but ended up running a reform slate out of frustration with CTU's lack of financial transparency and failure to actively fight against school closings and other corporate education policies changes.<sup>60</sup>

CORE began in 2005 as groups of teachers who partnered with the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization (KOCO) to protest school closings in the Bronzeville area of Chicago, a predominantly poor and African-American area. In 2008, after fighting individual closings for three years, the small group began to organize as a caucus, forming a study group that looked at corporate education reform projects in other cities, CTU history, social movement unionism, and their contract.<sup>61</sup> They criticized the UPC leadership, demanding transparency on the union's

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<sup>59</sup> Bradbury et al., *How to Jump Start your Union*, 31.

<sup>60</sup> George N. Schmidt, "CORE, Led by Karen Lewis, Wins CTU Election in Landslide, with Lewis Defeating Marilyn Stewart 12,080 to 8,326," *Substance News*, June 12, 2010, accessed April 20th, 2017. <http://www.substancenews.net/articles.php?page=1472>

<sup>61</sup> Bradbury et al., *How to Jump Start your Union*, 18

budget while simultaneously working to stop school closings by CPS by going to every school board meeting and closure hearing.

CORE's grassroots strategy took a variety of avenues of applying pressure on CPS for their goals. Through their earlier activism, CORE had previous alliances and coalitions with community organizations to oppose corporate education reform, demanding that the school board stop all school closings and turnarounds and reduce class sizes in certain over packed schools serving predominantly working-class people of color. For example, CORE developed early a working relationship with Grassroots Education Movement (GEM - a group of parents and community organizations that work against schools closing and turnarounds), working on specific issues (primarily school closures) that they believed the union should be fighting. They did so without union resources.

In January 2009, CORE organized a city-wide public hearing on how they should best organize to stop 20 school closings and 12 turnarounds (a policy that fires all teachers at the school and forces them to reapply for their jobs). This was "attended by more than 500 students, parents, community members, and teachers representing 81 schools."<sup>62</sup> In February 2009, CORE organized with GEM to march on the school board's meeting, then camped outside the district's downtown offices in tents overnight, with hundreds protesting inside the school board meeting and outside the building. The action succeeded in preventing six of the proposed 22 school closures.<sup>63</sup>

CORE also tried to exert pressure through labor law, and in June 2009 CORE filed an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission complaint that turnarounds (or reconstitutions)

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<sup>62</sup> Jackson Potter, "Chicago Teachers Organize against Privatization," *Labor Notes*. January 28, 2009, accessed April 20th 2017. <http://labornotes.org/2009/01/chicago-teachers-organize-against-privatization?language=en>

<sup>63</sup> Bradbury et al., *How to Jump Start your Union*, 26.



have a disproportionate impact on African American Teachers in CPS.<sup>64</sup> Although CORE didn't win the complaint, the action served as another example that demonstrated how an active and differently minded leadership could run CTU to better protect union members and more broadly, Chicago education.

In addition to community organizing campaigns and public protests, CORE also sought power over Chicago's executive branch through the courts. In May 2010, Jackson Pottery, a teacher and co-chair of CORE sued CPS over a failure in transparency based on the results of research on the turnaround program, how Tax Increment Financing money is being used, and on other general unanswered city budget questions.<sup>65</sup>

By doing the work they wanted CTU to do, fighting school closings, working with community and parent organizations, and actively resisting attacks on teachers, CORE organized a base of activists with a coherent understanding of what they imagined CTU could do. This activism positioned the caucus well to run a reform slate against the incumbents who had been accused of careless spending, apathy, and accepting of corporate education reform.

CORE entered union elections as a caucus at the lowest level, first running elections in CTU's 800 member house of delegates in early 2009 (there is at least one delegate from every school, more from larger schools).<sup>66</sup> The caucus quickly made the 20 member minimum necessary to propose actions to the floor of the house, but often faced opposition from CTU's leadership in proposing new business. CORE's next larger electoral push was to run two teachers who had been researching and publicizing CTU's pension planning failures as

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<sup>64</sup> Bradbury et al., *How to Jump Start your Union*, 26.

<sup>65</sup> Adam Doster, "A Teacher's Fight to Open Up Chicago's TIF Budget," *Progress Illinois*. May 19th, 2010, accessed April 20th, 2017. <http://www.progressillinois.com/posts/content/2010/05/19/teachers-fight-open-chicago-tif-budget>

<sup>66</sup> Bradbury et al., *How to Jump Start your Union*, 32

candidates for the board of CTU's pension fund. This campaign functioned as a primer for the future elections by familiarizing teachers in schools with CORE's ideas of a more democratic and actively fighting union. The two teachers, Lois Ashford and Jay Rehak, took a "a tour of the Chicago Public Schools, speaking to teachers about their concerns over the security of their pensions," while distributing literature about the pensions.<sup>67</sup> CORE also kept an up-to-date website on Ashford's and Rehak's research into the pension planning, while Ashford and Rehak publicly chastised Ron Huberman (CPS's CEO) for attempting to cut pension payments. In October 2009, Ashford and Rehak were elected to the pension fund board of trustees.

As the election developed, CORE organized protests outside of CTU headquarters, citing their research of the mismanagement of the pensions funds. This election strategy had mobilization implications for both CORE's takeover of CTU and the 2012 strike. Firstly, the election campaign showed inactive teachers that there was an organization of teachers fighting corporate education policy, as well as demonstrating how CTU's leadership and the union itself had previously failed. By exposing CTU's mismanagement and lack of action, CORE showed that there had been a failure of agency to oppose structural changes, rather than insurmountable external barriers. The election campaign also served as an educational campaign teaching members about the dangers of pension mismanagement and assaults on public employee pensions, potentially activating them in further recognizing attacks on teachers and public education. Finally, the campaign introduced CORE as a caucus looking to make a more active and democratic union by reaching out to individual teachers at their schools to join CORE.

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<sup>67</sup> Kenzo Shibata, "Rank-and File Teachers Caucus Unseats Incumbents on Pension Board in Chicago," *Labor Notes*, November 5th, 2009. <http://labornotes.org/blogs/2009/11/rank-and-file-teachers-caucus-unseats-incumbents-pension-board-chicago?language=en>

In CORE's 2010 election campaign for top CTU positions, CORE ran as the only caucus willing to re-open their contract with CPS, arguing for actively fighting change versus slowly losing their benefits. Jesse Sharkey, CORE member and CTU vice president said, "What the union had been doing wasn't working, teachers know the power of our union is in decline. And while we can't guarantee that we'll win this fight we're facing, we can guarantee that we'll lose if we don't try."<sup>68</sup>

CORE ran a decentralized grassroots campaign that had about eighty to a hundred CORE member activists visiting schools where they would talk to teachers in parking lots and inside schools, then leave flyers in the teachers' mailboxes.<sup>69</sup> The caucus broke up the district's schools geographically with a detailed google document that all members had access to in order to ensure that every school was included, with most schools being visited more than three times.<sup>70</sup> CORE also phone banked members, created a website and also a newsletter to get their name out. CORE paid for the campaign with official caucus member dues (\$35 for teachers, \$20 for paraprofessionals, retirees, and supporters), fundraisers with other unions and events (such as AFSCME locals and Labor Notes), and through slate candidates putting their own money towards the campaign.

While running their election campaign, CORE also continued to fight school closings, through attending every board meeting, camping outside of schools proposed for closures, and organizing rallies. In February 2010, CPS ended up keeping six of eight proposed school closings open after CORE's protests (that included three aldermen testifying with CORE).<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Lee Sustar, "Shockwaves in the CTU," *DailyKos*. -[http://www.dailykos.com/stories/870687/full\\_content](http://www.dailykos.com/stories/870687/full_content)

<sup>69</sup> Bradbury et al., *How to Jump Start your Union*, 36.

<sup>70</sup> Bradbury et al., *How to Jump Start your Union*, 37.

<sup>71</sup> Bradbury et al., *How to Jump Start your Union*, 43.

CORE's activism essentially was their campaign - as one member said "they didn't say 'Elect me and I'll do this.' They said 'This is what we've been doing and we'll keep doing it.'"<sup>72</sup>

In the midst of union elections, CPS CEO Huberman announced a projected \$900 million budget deficit and called to reduce that deficit through reducing teachers' pensions, raises, and increasing class sizes. CORE in response called for more financial transparency from the district and offered an alternative funding solution through using TIF funds, and cutting executive funding and bureaucracies.

Three different opposition slates ran for the 2010 elections, with the incumbent United Progressive Caucus getting 36%, CORE getting 31% and the other three challenger slates splitting the other 31%.<sup>73</sup> In the runoff, all other slates supported CORE and the top four officer positions won with 59% in favor with 76% of members voting.<sup>74</sup> The slate also won the other nine citywide positions, all six vice-presidencies for high schools, and seventeen elementary schools. The Caucus had control of the union.<sup>75</sup>

In 2013, CORE was re-elected to the top four positions and maintained their control of the union.

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<sup>72</sup> Bradbury et al., *How to Jump Start your Union*, 45.

<sup>73</sup> Bradbury et al., *How to Jump Start your Union*, 50.

<sup>74</sup> Bradbury et al., *How to Jump Start your Union*, 50.

<sup>75</sup> Bradbury et al., *How to Jump Start your Union*, 50.

### **Section 3: Internal Power Building/Union Reform Efforts and External Pressure**

The section will focus on CTU's internal organization of teachers and school workers and the following section will discuss CTU's coalition building with non-union groups. CTU began organizing teachers for a potential strike over contract negotiations during the summer of 2012 (CTU went to strike that September). During this time, CTU created an organizing department filled with staff organizers who had previously been teachers or paraprofessionals within Chicago public schools. Their job was to keep teachers active and up to date on bargaining developments and CTU action plans, with each organizer responsible for 100 schools in regional clusters.<sup>76</sup> CORE's organizing turned CTU into a highly democratic union by working to engage teachers and school workers in action planning, keeping them up to date on bargaining and developing their demands with heavy rank and file membership influence.

CTU formed Contract Action Committees in each school (over 600 total), in which each committee member "was responsible for communicating with about 10 employees face-to-face, including teachers and paraprofessionals, as well as the engineers, security staff, and lunchroom workers in other unions."<sup>77</sup> These Action committees allowed CTU to quickly disperse information, letters, and petitions to not just teachers, but other allies as well, such as other union members and parents. By getting teachers to participate as local organizers, dedicating their time to updating and organizing their fellow school workers, CTU effectively made them further invested in union activity, and created a sense of solidarity among those workers at the school. CTU developed bargaining demands through a process of getting each of 28 existing member committees to discuss and develop a list of demands that were then compiled and finalized by a

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<sup>76</sup> Norine Gutekanst, "How Chicago Teachers Got Organized to Strike," *Labor Notes*. October 19, 2012. <http://labornotes.org/2012/10/how-chicago-teachers-got-organized-strike?language=en#sthash.8tEfkAd2.dpuf>

<sup>77</sup> IBID

central committee with rank-and-file involvement.<sup>78</sup> Creating a democratic system for developing demands is important for creating demands best suited to all members, but also in continuing to cultivate feelings of solidarity with one another as all participate in decision making rather than decisions being made by a distant leadership.

By having an active union base, CTU had more person-power to try to organize and activate more members and ran a phone banking campaign with trained members reaching out to the new, least-protected, and lowest-paid members. The calls consisted of discussing board policies and how to put forward union goals, ending the conversation by asking members to get more actively involved, through attending actions or joining an action committee.<sup>79</sup>

CTU's bargaining team consisted of "30 members drawn from all sectors, seniority ranges, job categories, and caucuses ... which worked well to create buy-in and cooperation."<sup>80</sup> CTU's internal organizing tactics focused on building a more democratic union for ideological reasons as well as strategical reasons, such as developing a larger group of teachers actively working on CTU's campaign, creating union buy-in, and in general developing a sense of solidarity among teachers and school workers. This resulted in 88% of total members voting to strike, with 96% of members participating in the vote.<sup>81</sup>

As discussed earlier in this paper, parental support can play a key role in a teachers' strike as it not only breaks the myth that teachers' unions demands hurt students education, but also provides non-employee public pressure on elected officials. Prior to the strike, CORE - through CTU - had been working with parent groups to protest schools closing through working

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<sup>78</sup>Norine Gutekanst, "How Chicago Teachers Got Organized to Strike," *Labor Notes*. October 19, 2012. <http://labornotes.org/2012/10/how-chicago-teachers-got-organized-strike?language=en#sthash.8tEfkAd2.dpuf>

<sup>79</sup> IBID.

<sup>80</sup> IBID

<sup>81</sup> Theresa Moran, "Chicago Teachers Say They'll Strike for the Kids," *Labor Notes*. August 28, 2012. <http://labornotes.org/2012/08/chicago-teachers-say-theyll-strike-kids>

with groups like GEM, but began wider support efforts for the strike. Action committee members were active in local school council meetings and circulated a petition among parents that said “If we are going to have a longer school day, it must be a better school day, with a rich curriculum, more social workers and counselors, and high quality facilities.”<sup>82</sup>

Much of the union’s efforts towards winning over parents came through educational campaigns, one of which came from informational picket lines when a third of Chicago’s schools opened early.<sup>83</sup> The mock picket lines also served to educate members on running a picket line. The education campaign needed to convince parents and the public that addressing the massive school budget deficit did not need to come at the expense of teachers and that Chicago could change its budget policies to focus more on education. CTU released a 45 page report on Chicago public schools with data showing how schools could be more equally funded to avoid the racial educational disparities and questioning Chicago’s use of TIF (specifically where the money that would otherwise be going to schools, was going). The report was also simplified into one page reports in English and Spanish that were distributed at every opportunity possible. Most public actions included parents and community members protesting alongside teachers, often using confrontational action methods. For example they “disrupted and took over a board meeting; parents and community activists occupied a school; and community organizations led a vigil outside the Mayor’s home.”<sup>84</sup> CTU’s efforts in organizing parents proved successful, as their strategy (in addition to the structural factors many parents already disliked) led to a poll

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<sup>82</sup> Norine Gutekanst, “How Chicago Teachers Got Organized to Strike,” *Labor Notes*. October 19, 2012. <http://labornotes.org/2012/10/how-chicago-teachers-got-organized-strike?language=en#sthash.8tEfkAd2.dpuf>

<sup>83</sup> IBID

<sup>84</sup> Norine Gutekanst, “How Chicago Teachers Got Organized to Strike,” *Labor Notes*. October 19, 2012. <http://labornotes.org/2012/10/how-chicago-teachers-got-organized-strike?language=en#sthash.8tEfkAd2.dpuf>

showing 66% of public school parents supporting the strike and less than 31% disapproving of the strike.<sup>85</sup>

CTU went to strike on September 10th, 2012 after negotiations between CTU and CPS fell through. CTU overcame some of the striking provisions set out by SB7 with a massive vote to strike that well exceeded the new 75% threshold required to strike, and demanding that issues that SB7 took off the bargaining table should be negotiated. The strike lasted until September 18th, after Emanuel sought an injunction against the teachers which was denied, and CTU members voted to suspend the strike in favor of a 3 year contract. During the strike, teachers, parents, and students ran picket lines outside Chicago's schools. The 3 year contract included compromises from both sides, resulting in a 3% salary increase for the first year, a 2% increase for each subsequent year, and a 4% increase to extend the contract an additional year at the end of the contract; 30% of teacher evaluations based on standardized test scores down from 45%; 50% of new teaching positions to be filled by displaced teachers from school closings; and a 7 hour and 15 minute school day - down from the proposed 7 hour and 45 minute increase.<sup>86</sup>

The contract represents some wins over corporate education as well as some compromises for CTU. The reduction of the proposed 20% increased school day to a 13% increase is significant because due to SB7, school day length was an issue that was not necessarily on the bargaining table, and that CPS could choose whether or not to include it. Pushing to negotiate school day length down from the proposed 20% demonstrated union strength for both union members and CPS, as well as to parents and the wider public that even

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<sup>85</sup> "As Chicago Teachers Strike Enters Fourth Day, A New Poll Proves Majority of Parents and Taxpayers Approve of Fair Contract Fight," *Chicago Teachers Union*. September 13, 2012. <http://www.ctunet.com/blog/new-poll-shows-that-that-majority-of-the-public-supports-the-strike>

<sup>86</sup> Bradbury et al., "How to Jump Start your Union."



SB7 non-negotiable issues could be included on the bargaining table. The reduction in the importance of standardized testing evaluation is one of the more important wins for CTU, as it reduces corporate education reform's agenda of devaluing teachers and the general shift to a data driven and standardized test focused education. Although reducing the importance of standardized testing for teacher evaluations does not seriously address, or remedy, Chicago's trend of closing public schools, it does generally reduce their importance as an institutional value system, as testing scores currently act as a driving justification for school closings.

Creating a pool of displaced teachers to be rehired at a certain quota to opening school positions creates some degree of job security in response to the great number of school closings. As part of the incentive for removing tenure and opening new charter schools lies in the lower cost of new teacher salaries, this change also fights corporate education trends, as it also works against devaluing the experience and the profession of teachers. The non-wage benefits was a bigger bone of contention in these negotiations than salary increases, and CTU and CPS both compromised and found middle ground on wage increases.

Despite CTU's wins and their decision to return to work after a week, rather than a forced end to the strike, CTU failed in their larger school reform demands that played a fairly central role in their campaign. These demands were facing more structural opposition than the teacher benefit and evaluation demands because they were not necessarily on the bargaining table and CPS had to choose to include them in negotiations. Their demands included smaller class sizes and class size caps, a richer curriculum in underfunded schools, and increased funding for music, visual art, and physical education. Had the negotiations gone to mediation, these demands would not have been recognized as they are not economic issues the teachers have bargaining jurisdiction over. CTU publicized these demands as some of their top bargaining issues, but

were unable to force CPS to negotiate on serious education reform policies. In this way, CTU functioned as an institutional voice of power for parents and students who were frustrated with bipartisan pushes for corporate education reform.

Despite their failure to push through lasting education reform with their strike, CTU has since taken action through other strategies to act as an institutional mechanism for a democratic voice. Specifically, CTU collaborated with SEIU Illinois, Action Now, and other community organizations to form United Working Families, an independent political organization formed “to create a progressive, pro-labor, political infrastructure to challenge the mayor’s pro-business agenda.”<sup>87</sup> Unable to push forward serious education reform through strike bargaining, CTU helped form and play a big role in continuing to organize for mayoral and city council election campaigns, realizing that other avenues of organizing could better achieve education reform.

CTU put forward Jesus ‘Chuy’ Garcia as their candidate, whose campaign focused on ending school closings, stopping the development of charter schools, bringing back an elected rather than mayoral appointed school board, and reforming Chicago’s TIF system.<sup>88</sup> Electoral grassroots organizing continued out of CTU’s 2012 strike mobilization and Emanuel received less than the majority of Chicago’s vote, leading to a runoff election, the first in 25 years. Emanuel eventually won the 2015 mayoralship, receiving 55% of the vote versus Garcia’s 44%, but CTU’s candidate and previous CTU member and teacher for city council Susan Sadlowski Garza was elected in her district.<sup>89</sup> Since her election, Garza headed a city council ordinance

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<sup>87</sup> Samantha Winslow, “Chicago Teachers Take on Rahm Democrats,” *Labor Notes*, February 9th, 2015. <http://labornotes.org/2015/02/chicago-teachers-take-rahm-democrats>

<sup>88</sup> Samantha Winslow, “Chicago Teachers Force Rahm into a Runoff,” *Labor Notes*, February 25th, 2015. <http://labornotes.org/blogs/2015/02/chicago-teachers-force-rahm-runoff>

<sup>89</sup> “2015 Election Results,” Chicago Tribune. April 9th, 2015. <http://elections.chicagotribune.com/results/>

(Garza-Cardenas TIF ordinance) that would directly put \$200 million of TIF surplus into public schools, with 40 of the 50 Aldermen publicly supporting it.<sup>90</sup>

### **2015-2016 Contract Campaign**

Negotiations for the 2015 contract began in 2014 as the 2012 contract would expire in early 2015. Emanuel and the school board looked at the contract as an opportunity to reduce their growing pension debt and proposed phasing out the current pension pickup. The district paid 7% of the members' pension payments since the 1987 contract where pension pickup was agreed upon instead of salary increases.<sup>91</sup> CPS also looked to cut \$51 million each year in healthcare from members to reduce costs and debt. CTU wanted to use their voice to push more policy changes within CPS, including increasing school funding, capping charter school growth, and diverting money from the city's TIF fund to public education. In addition to school policy changes, the union also sought to defend against attacks on member's healthcare, pensions, and wage increases. Negotiations between the district and CTU lasted until the last bargaining day before a possible strike, when CTU's negotiating team endorsed the proposed contract agreement. The membership then approved the deal with over 70% of the voting members in favor of the deal.<sup>92</sup>

The contract campaign was a much more straightforward fight than the 2012 contract battle because the union's social movement strategy and power had been building since the caucus took control in 2010. The campaign focused its strategy around the threat of another

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<sup>90</sup> Samantha Winslow, "Chicago Teachers Avert a Strike by forcing the Mayor to Dig Deep," *Labor Notes*, October 14th, 2016. <http://www.labornotes.org/2016/10/chicago-teachers-avert-strike-forcing-mayor-dig-deep>

<sup>91</sup> Heather Cherone, "Here's What Chicago Teachers Won and Lost in Contract Deal," *DNAInfo*, October 14th, 2016. <https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20161014/gladstone-park/cps-chicago-public-schools-teachers-union-strike>

<sup>92</sup> Juan Perez Jr, "Chicago Teachers Union gives thumbs up to 4-year contract," *The Chicago Tribune*, November 2nd, 2016. <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/ct-chicago-teachers-contract-vote-met-20161101-story.html>

strike and building public support for the union's demands to back up the strike. Public opinion plays a large role in determining public sector unions' strike success. As the union is negotiating primarily with elected officials, or at least bureaucrats beneath elected officials instead of businesses, constituent support will affect the official's response to the strike. Unlike striking against a business, in which withholding labor reduces profits for the employer, for most public sector unions, it is the public that suffers from strikes. Therefore, the strike's power is primarily of a political rather than economic nature; it will cost the district money to have students out of schools, but without public support the strike risks villainizing the union.

CTU threatened a strike three times throughout the bargaining process, once a mock strike vote, then a vote and proposed one-day strike, then waiting till late in the bargaining process for another proposed agreement and holding rallies during negotiations to show a preparedness to strike. In the winter of 2015, CTU conducted mock votes to strike again, with 88% of all members voting to strike, 96% out of the 92% voting members.<sup>93</sup> Although fairly early in the bargaining process, the mock vote served an internal function as well as an external pressure function. Internally, the vote gages membership sentiments on a potential strike for the leadership and in the case of the highly militant CTU, readies members and primes them for a strike. Externally, the vote acts as a display of strength, showing the district that the union membership is very willing to go on strike.

From June 2015 forward CTU was operating and negotiating without a contract and in early Spring 2016, CPS announced they were planning on stopping payment on the 7% pension pickup entirely as part of a plan - essentially cutting salaries by 7% and creating a policy forcing

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<sup>93</sup> Nancy Harty, "Nearly 90 Percent of Chicago Teachers Union Members Vote in Favor of Going on Strike," *CBSCChicago*, December 14th, 2015. <http://chicago.cbslocal.com/2015/12/14/nearly-90-percent-of-chicago-teachers-vote-in-favor-of-going-on-strike/>

members to pay for their entire retirement (members receive no social security, only their pension payment).<sup>94</sup> CTU organized a one day strike for April 1st in response to this threat arguing that the district would break labor law by doing so, validating their strike prior to a fact-finding period (a strike otherwise would be illegal). The district argued that the strike would violate labor law and that they were operating legally by cutting pension payments. After the threat, the district loosened their terms and decided against cutting the payments, leaving it for future contract negotiations. The union saw this as a win, and held a walk-out and rally downtown, forcing CPS to hold 250 contingency sites for students (child monitoring centers).<sup>95</sup>

The one-day strike strategy has the same basic impact as the mock strike vote, but amplified. The strike should prepare and activate rank and file members for a potentially longer strike and provide leadership with an opportunity to organize a strike. Similar to CTU's 2012 mock picket-lines, practicing striking can lead to a more effective eventual strike. Externally, the one-day strike both demonstrates to the district the union's willingness to strike and adds militancy to their demands. However, unlike the mock vote, the one-day strike has concrete financial and political impacts on the district, forcing them to organize contingency sites and deal with a large protest.

CTU used the threat of a strike effectively enough to avoid needing to follow through with their threat, however that came from confidence in their ability to strike and that public opinion would support that strike. Most of CTU's building of support for their strike came from earlier organizing around school closings, mayoral campaign organizing, and connecting their

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<sup>94</sup> Ted Cox and Joe Ward, "Chicago Teachers Union Softens on April 1st Strike, Says CPS 'Backed Down,'" *DNAInfo*, March 4th, 2016. <https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20160304/downtown/chicago-teachers-soften-on-april-1-strike-date>

<sup>95</sup> Ted Cox, "CPS Sets Up 250 Sites Where Kids Can go When Teachers Strike April 1st," *DNAinfo*, March 24, 2016. <https://www.dnainfo.com/chicago/20160324/ravenswood/cps-sets-up-250-sites-where-kids-can-go-when-teachers-strike-april-1>

contract battle to frustration with the mayor and city's use of TIF funds. By focusing on TIF and linking it to the underfunding of education allowed CTU to gain more public support for their contract campaign, as it included demands around those issues. Actions of public support culminated with a series of rallies in the last week of negotiations before the potential strike. The union organized a press conference with community organizations, aldermen, and state legislators that demanded Emanuel "free the funds" to settle the contract.<sup>96</sup> During the same week, teachers and parents continued to hold 'walk ins' and morning pickets around the city.<sup>97</sup> On the last day of negotiations, the union organized a parent and student picket outside of the mayor's house, and a strike headquarters for teachers for painting banners and assembling picket signs. However the final strike was unnecessary; the negotiating team strongly endorsed a last minute contract agreement that was later ratified by the membership.

CTU saw the contract campaign as a victory, successfully limiting health care cost increases, defending the pension pickup for current members with a fair raise to compensate for no pension pickup for new hires, and pushing a series of district policy changes to better schools in Chicago (including capping charters, a temporary ban on school closings, and increasing funding for education). However, some of those wins, specifically around pay and benefits were still mostly defensive, fighting off aggressive changes to their pension, healthcare, and pay structure. Also, as the district still has an enrollment decline, the union continues to face the threat of large layoffs, but the contract's cap on charter schools and new layoff policy should help. 1000 employees were laid off right before the 2016 school year (500 union members), and then 237 teachers were laid off two weeks before the strike deadline and the union was unable to regain those jobs. Many of these positions were in special education, leading to some schools

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<sup>96</sup> Winslow, "Chicago Teachers Avert Strike Forcing Mayor to Dig Deep."

<sup>97</sup> Winslow, "Chicago Teachers Avert Strike Forcing Mayor to Dig Deep."

failing to meet federally mandated individualized education plans for students with disabilities, and one failure of the contract was in addressing the special education cuts.<sup>98</sup> While the contract agreement succeeded in defending teacher's pay and benefits, the most exciting wins came from their district policy changes.

The following section will summarize the 2016 contract wins, first covering pay, benefits, and working conditions, then the district policy changes. The chart below compares CPS's original contract proposal and the final contract agreement. In addition to these changes, the contract included two important working condition changes for specific groups. First, three additional professional development days and two additional 15-minutes preparation blocks per week for elementary school teachers.<sup>99</sup> Second, teachers who teach subjects, such as Art and Music, that are not covered by standardized tests will not be evaluated based on those tests.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Winslow, "Chicago Teachers Avert Strike Forcing Mayor to Dig Deep."

<sup>99</sup> Winslow, "Chicago Teachers Avert Strike Forcing Mayor to Dig Deep."

<sup>100</sup> Winslow, "Chicago Teachers Avert Strike Forcing Mayor to Dig Deep."

## Pay and Benefits compared in the proposed contract versus final contract

Issue	CPS proposed (and rejected) contract	Final contract
<b>7% Pension pickup</b>	Eliminated for all teachers	Remains for current teachers, all new hires after Jan 1st, 2017 would get two raises totaling 7%
<b>Raises</b>	8.75% increase over 4 years	2018 (2.0%) 2019 (2.5%) (no retroactive pay raises from 2015-2016, or 2016-2017)
<b>Steps and Lanes</b>	Eliminating pay structure	Remains unchanged
<b>Charter Schools</b>	Capping Charters at 127	Capping Charters at 127
<b>Health Insurance</b>	Teacher contributions increase by 1.5%	Teachers contributions increase by 0.8%
<b>Layoffs</b>	No change	10 month period for laid off teachers to remain in reassigned teacher pool with pay



Realizing concrete gains for the public (namely parents and their children) through the institution of the union is key to a successful social movement union. The union was able to force a number of district policy changes through their contract negotiations, linking community support for better education conditions to their contract.

The primary win came from pushing Emanuel to withdraw \$88 million from the TIF fund and direct it for CPS funding, including new additional funding previously not in the budget to pay for both teacher compensation and new programs. One of those programs was creating enforceable class-size caps for elementary schools (the first class-size caps in 20 years)<sup>101</sup>. Any kindergarten to 2nd grade classes with more than 32 students will receive teachers assistants (CPS has designated \$7 million for this program). The agreement also reserves \$10 million to \$27 million (\$500,000 per school) to provide after-school programs, counseling, social work, psychiatric services and medical clinics at 20-55 ‘community schools’ that will be designated by a joint committee of union members and CPS officials. This money from the district will also come from outside sources, effectively increasing school budgets by looking for new streams of revenue dedicated to public education, such as TIF funds.<sup>102</sup> Additionally, the agreement included a ban of school closings for the first two years of the contract, and following those two years, only if the schools don’t meet a set percentage of student graduation can they be closed.<sup>103</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Due to risky policy making and use of exotic financial devices, Chicago Public Schools have been underfunded and in debt from the late 90’s onwards. CPS followed a national trend of policies to abandon significant public school improvement, instead looking to the private sector

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<sup>101</sup> Cherone, “Here’s What Chicago Teachers Won and Lost in Contract Deal.”

<sup>102</sup> Perez Jr, “Chicago Teachers Union gives thumbs up to 4-year contract.”

<sup>103</sup> Winslow, “Chicago Teachers Avert Strike Forcing Mayor to Dig Deep.”

for solutions. The union's transformation was spurred in response to aggressive school closings, expansion of charters, and limiting laws directed at teachers unions.

The caucus's activism focused around stopping school closings led them to form genuine coalitions with parents and community groups that continued once the caucus took leadership of the union. The union's creation of strong public support by connecting their interests as employees to the interests of the most immediately interested parties, namely the public through parents and students, was central to their social movement unionism. CTU transformed into a social movement union to effectively gain defensive wins in both the 2012 and 2016 contract disputes with the district as well as forcing policy changes towards improving Chicago's public schools.

## **CHAPTER 3: Los Angeles Case Study**

Whereas CTU in Chicago quickly transformed into a rank and file driven union after CORE took leadership in 2010, the United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) went through a series of different reform leaderships from 2005 until the reform caucus, Progressive Educators for Action, (PEAC) assumed full leadership of the union in 2014. The context for UTLA's transformation is similar to that of Chicago's; there had been an expansion of corporate education reform and a series of budget crises leading to attacks on the teachers union. PEAC's takeover of UTLA led to a significant change in union focus towards a social movement union model by pushing meaningful membership involvement and coalition building, culminating in a successful contract campaign and optimistic forward vision.

This case study is divided into three sections. The first section will explain the contributing factors to Los Angeles's education budget crises, the following implementation of corporate education reform, and the resulting impact on the city's public school system. The second section will track the union politics of ULTA through the three different leaderships from 2005 to 2017, focusing on the reform caucus's (PEAC) efforts to mobilize membership towards a rank and file driven union. The third section will look at the strategies of each of the different leaderships, focusing on the union's response to 2009 budget cuts and their 2015 contract campaign.

### **Section 1: Context of Los Angeles United School District (LAUSD) from 2005 - 2017**

UTLA's changes in leadership and strategy developed in response to the combined impact of the growing charter school project and growing funding crises. This section will first explain California's district and school funding structures, specific tax laws, and how that has led

to an underfunding of California public schools. The section will then explain why enrollment decline negatively affects school districts and how public schools bear the brunt of the impact of the rising numbers of charter schools. The section will then lay out charter schools' financial impact on LAUSD and district schools. This section should help provide context to explain the shifts in UTLA leadership and strategy, particularly after facing approximately 9,000 layoffs and losing almost a fifth of its membership over 8 years - mostly from 2009-2011.<sup>104</sup>

Reeling from the 2008 recession and its impact on state budgets, California faced a massive budget crisis of \$11.2 billion<sup>105</sup>. Governor Schwarzenegger sought to cut a sizable portion of the deficit through cutting education funding across the state. In 2009, LAUSD, anticipating a projected 470 million budget deficit, proposed massive cuts including cutting the majority of summer school programs<sup>106</sup> and 8,000 layoffs of administrators, teachers, and support employees.<sup>107</sup> Just two years later, in 2011, LAUSD faced a further \$408 million deficit and proposed cutting another 5,000 LAUSD employees<sup>108</sup>. Under several different leaderships, UTLA worked to oppose these layoffs using a variety of strategies and was able to limit the massive cuts a little; the proposed 8,554 layoffs in 2009 were reduced to 6,000 and the 5,000 layoffs in 2011 were reduced to approximately 3000 layoffs.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Joel Jordan, "Progressive Coalition Sweeps L.A. Teachers' Union Election," *Labor Notes*, April 1st, 2005. <http://www.labornotes.org/2005/04/progressive-coalition-sweeps-la-teachers%E2%80%99-union-election>

<sup>105</sup> Wikipedia contributors, "2008–12 California budget crisis," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=2008%E2%80%9312\\_California\\_budget\\_crisis&oldid=770043325](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=2008%E2%80%9312_California_budget_crisis&oldid=770043325) (accessed April 21, 2017).

<sup>106</sup> Joshua Cook, "LA Teachers Cut Prompt Walkouts, Arrests, Hunger Strike," *Labor Notes*, July 15th, 2009. <http://www.labornotes.org/2009/07/la-teacher-cuts-prompt-walkouts-arrests-hunger-strike>

<sup>107</sup> LAUSD, "LAUSD Budget Briefing 2008-09 & 2009-10" (Presentation March 24, 2009) [http://notebook.lausd.net/pls/ptl/docs/PAGE/CA\\_LAUSD/FLDR\\_LAUSD\\_NEWS/FLDR\\_ANNOUNCEMENTS\\_PARENTS\\_GUARDIAN/LAUSD%20BUDGET%20PRES%2003242009%20FINAL.PDF](http://notebook.lausd.net/pls/ptl/docs/PAGE/CA_LAUSD/FLDR_LAUSD_NEWS/FLDR_ANNOUNCEMENTS_PARENTS_GUARDIAN/LAUSD%20BUDGET%20PRES%2003242009%20FINAL.PDF)

<sup>108</sup> Joseph Zeccola, "Gains and Losses in LA Teachers Union Election," *Labor Notes*, April 26th, 2011. <http://labornotes.org/2011/04/gains-and-losses-la-teachers-union-election>

<sup>109</sup> Los Angeles Unified School District, "Superintendents's Final Budget," 2011-2012. [http://achieve.lausd.net/cms/lib08/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/328/Fiscal%20Year%202011-12/2011-2012%20SUPERINTENDENT%20FINAL%20BUDGET%20062311\\_REVISED%20fix.pdf](http://achieve.lausd.net/cms/lib08/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/328/Fiscal%20Year%202011-12/2011-2012%20SUPERINTENDENT%20FINAL%20BUDGET%20062311_REVISED%20fix.pdf)

Although the recession played a significant role in the 2009 budget crisis, California had passed earlier laws that led to a reduction in state tax revenues and also created local government taxing autonomy that resulted in an unpreparedness to deal with the economic crisis of 2009.

Proposition 13, passed in 1978, led to California schools being primarily dependent on the state for their funding. Designed to protect homeowners from rising property taxes as more people were moving to California in the late 70s, Prop 13 lowered property taxes and limited subsequent changes to property taxes. Prop 13 also rolled back assessed property values to their 1975 value; capped increases to property value by 2% per year; capped the property tax at 1%; ruled that property should be re-assessed only upon change of ownership or new construction; and mandated that all changes to local and state taxes need a two-thirds majority vote.<sup>110</sup> The tax reform also assigned the authority of distributing property tax revenues to local agencies, such as school systems, to control of the state.<sup>111</sup> As intended, Prop 13 immediately decreased local and state tax collection, limiting local school districts' abilities to raise sufficient funds for their public education systems. California's per pupil spending decreased significantly since the implementation of Prop 13, which ultimately lead to Proposition 98.

California's average per pupil spending has consistently been below the average U.S. spending per pupil, but dropped dramatically - from 3.7% in 1977-78, to 3.4% in 1978-79 and then to 3.19% in 1985-86. Prop 98 mandated a minimum education spending level dependent on the economic situation at that time. In years of strong economic growth, spending would equal the level of the previous year plus capita growth and student enrollment adjustments.<sup>112</sup> In years

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<sup>110</sup> Wikipedia contributors, "California Proposition 13 (1978)," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=California\\_Proposition\\_13\\_\(1978\)&oldid=768852171](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=California_Proposition_13_(1978)&oldid=768852171) (accessed April 21, 2017).

<sup>111</sup> Wikipedia Contributors, "California Proposition 13 (1978)."

<sup>112</sup> Wikipedia contributors, "California Proposition 98 (1988)," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=California\\_Proposition\\_98\\_\(1988\)&oldid=729130737](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=California_Proposition_98_(1988)&oldid=729130737) (accessed April 21, 2017).

of weak economic growth, the spending level would guarantee the previous year's spending in addition to "adjustment for enrollment growth increases for changes in per capita general fund revenues, and an increase in .5 percent in state general funds." Despite Prop 98's attempted protections, education spending has dropped in California and the gap between California's per capita spending on education and the U.S. average has grown - with the 2008-2009 U.S. average at 4.25% and California's average at 3.3%.

These gaps in spending levels are not representative of a strong education system with a particularly efficient or effective form of spending. In 2010 California was ranked 50th in the nation in student to teacher ratio and was ranked 44th in K-12 spending per student.<sup>113</sup> To address the persistent budget deficit, in 2012 California voters passed Proposition 30 that increased income tax levels for residents with an annual income over \$250,000 and also increased the state sales tax by .25 percent for four years.<sup>114</sup> At the end of the four year period in 2016, the sales tax increase expired but voters passed Proposition 55 to extended the 2012 income tax rates for another 12 years.

### **Corporate Education Reform in LA**

The charter school movement has grown in LA - from the first charter school in 1993 to about 250 independent and affiliated charter schools attended by over 130,000 students in 2016 - making LA the district with the largest number of students in charters in the U.S.<sup>115</sup> The growth of charter schools in LA has had a significant financial impact on LAUSD's budget, specifically due to a variety of policies (or lack of policies put in place by LAUSD). In 2016, UTLA

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<sup>113</sup> Kaplan, Jonathan (June 2010). "Race to the Bottom? California's Support for Schools Lags the Nation" (PDF). *calbudgetcenter.org*. California Budget & Policy Center. Retrieved 9 November 2016.

<sup>114</sup> Wikipedia contributors, "California Proposition 30, 2012," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=California\\_Proposition\\_30,\\_2012&oldid=757775934](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=California_Proposition_30,_2012&oldid=757775934) (accessed April 21, 2017).

<sup>115</sup> "LAUSD Charter Schools Division," LAUSD, accessed April 21st, 2017, <http://achieve.lausd.net/charter>.

commissioned MGT of America, a national consulting company, to conduct a study on the fiscal impact of charter schools on LAUSD. The study found that different district and state policies effecting charter schools and school funding impacted LAUSD district schools negatively (with some policies having much larger financial implications than others). The state policies are not within the direct control of LAUSD, but they, nevertheless, contribute to and help explain the failing public school funding, particularly in relation to the growth of charter schools. However the LAUSD school board is in control of district policy and could enact changes or enforce current law to help reduce charter schools' financial burden on the district. The following section will explain California's district and school funding structure and how that funding structure leads to a relative enrollment decline in public schools in comparison to charter schools and the resulting negative impact on those public schools. The next section will go through various findings of MGT's study that show the direct financial burden imposed by charter schools on LAUSD as a result of district policy.

California funds schools based on Average Daily Attendance (ADA) which is calculated by taking student attendance per day and dividing that number by the number of school days in the period (essentially actual attendance divided by expected attendance). A school's funding then gets adjusted with any changes in ADA - if the ADA goes up, so does its funding (and vice versa).<sup>116</sup> School districts in California are funded based on fixed and variable costs. Fixed costs are the set costs the board has agreed to pay for the school to function for the number of students who will attend the school, such as the electricity bill for the school or custodian's salary for cleaning the classroom. The variable costs increase and decrease proportionally to the number of students, but once the money has been spent concretely based on the set number of students, it

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<sup>116</sup> Susan Zoller, *UTLA: Fiscal Impact of Charter Schools on LAUSD*, MGT of America, 2016, January 2017.

becomes a fixed cost. For example, when buying textbooks for an expected class of 25, the cost of the 25 textbooks becomes fixed regardless of whether there are 25 students in the class.

Partially due to the funding structure, enrollment decline becomes an issue for public schools but not for charter schools. Teacher salaries and benefits are distributed between fixed and variable costs, but if enrollment begins to drop to the extent that full class loads are shrinking or classes can be combined, teacher jobs become seen as variable costs. Enrollment decline is financially detrimental to a district because as enrollment declines, so does funding, but in practice decreases in revenues and costs rarely align.<sup>117</sup> When a student leaves a public school (for example to attend a charter school) 100% of that student's funding is cut from the district funding, but all the costs of that student do not leave with the student as the fixed costs from the student's previous enrollment remain (an estimated at least 55% of student's revenue goes into fixed costs).<sup>118</sup>

The total enrollment in LA has been declining since its peak in 2002-2003 due to a number of complex factors including a reduced birth-rate and the increased cost of living in southern California.<sup>119</sup> Although this larger trend is not attributable to the rise of charter schools, as the total LAUSD enrollment declines as charter school enrollment rises because of transfers from public to charter schools, the burden of enrollment decline is felt almost entirely in public schools. The percentage of students in charters goes up every year; from 2009-2010 to 2015-2016, LAUSD total enrollment had declined 6.49% while the percentage of students in

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<sup>117</sup> Zoller, *Fiscal Impact of Charter Schools on LAUSD*

<sup>118</sup> Zoller, *Fiscal Impact of Charter Schools on LAUSD*

<sup>119</sup> LAUSD, "2011 - 2012 Final Budget"



independent charter schools has more than doubled from 7.4% to 15.7% and the actual percentage becomes larger when considering affiliated charter schools.<sup>120121</sup>

LAUSD has a significantly higher proportion of high-need and high-cost special education students as well as English language students than the charter schools in the district.<sup>122</sup> LAUSD is indirectly penalized financially for having a disproportionately number of high-need students because California's funding formula provides equal funding per student enrollment, regardless of additional need. In addition to suffering financially due to enrollment declines, the public schools also enroll a larger percentage of high-need students and this combination of lower funding per student with more high-need students makes it difficult for public schools to provide a high quality education.

Although some are more significant than other, the findings from the MGT study show how LAUSD could address some of the uncovered charters' costs to the district with policy changes. There is a 1% annual oversight revenue collected from the charter schools that is designed to cover the district's Charter School Division (CSD), but the funds do not adequately cover the \$92,000/year cost of the division's office.<sup>123</sup> There are additional oversight costs from the Special Education Department (SPED) and Office of Inspector General (OIG) that are estimated at \$1,416,259 for additional charter school specific SPED staff and a larger charter-specific caseload for OIG that is not covered by Charter revenue.<sup>124</sup> The law allows the district

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<sup>120</sup> Los Angeles Unified School District, "Superintendents's Final Budget," 2009-2010. <http://achieve.lausd.net/cms/lib08/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/328/Fiscal%20Year%202009-10/WEB%20COPY%20OF%20CONSOLIDATED%20FB%202009-10%20PDF%20FOR%20PRINT%20101909.pdf>

<sup>121</sup> Los Angeles Unified School District, "Superintendents's Final Budget," 2015 - 2016. <http://achieve.lausd.net/cms/lib08/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/123/Final%20Budget%20Book%202015-07-01.pdf>

<sup>122</sup> Zoller, *Fiscal Impact of Charter Schools on LAUSD*.

<sup>123</sup> Zoller, *Fiscal Impact of Charter Schools on LAUSD*.

<sup>124</sup> Zoller, *Fiscal Impact of Charter Schools on LAUSD*.

to collect a 3% oversight fee from charter schools that operate in district facilities that do not pay rent (56 charters are in this situation), yet none of the 56 schools pay the fee - the estimated lost revenue is \$2,062,517.<sup>125</sup>

The study also found indirect costs (through time/opportunity losses) to LAUSD where district staff spend time managing and working with charter schools instead of district schools. These indirect costs are estimated at \$13,845,203 for costs not already included in the 1% oversight fee. These indirect costs cannot always be directly accountable - some are for services that can be tracked and then charged to the charter organization that used them, whereas some are less visible - such as those costs to the departments of finance, human resources, and student services that are required to adapt their practices to account for the differing charters' systems. Charters benefit from these services and increase the caseload for certain departments without paying for that additional necessary work that must be done by the LAUSD. All of these findings are based on district policies that could be changed or simply enforced more strictly by the district.

The LA public education system has gone through significant changes from 2002-2003 to 2016-2017 with a declining enrollment, increase in the charter school movement, and massive budget cuts. Prior to the 2009-2012 budget deficit, LAUSD was already a struggling school system with a lack of funding, and the budget cuts resulted in a huge reduction of teachers and support staff, laying off 9,000 employees and UTLA members between just 2009-2012. As staff was cut, class sizes rose past the set caps (in times of economic crisis LAUSD schools are allowed to break class size caps) - in 2015 there were 1,427 middle school courses and 1,242 high school courses that had 45 or more students in the class. Parents and community members

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<sup>125</sup> IBID

are, in some ways, primed for social movement organizing because of the negative effects of the larger economic crisis and the district's policies.

## **Section 2: Internal Union Elections and Politics**

This section will go through the three changes in leadership in UTLA from 2005 - 2017: the election of the United Action slate in 2005, Warren Fletcher's election in 2011, and the United Power slate in 2014. Each election period will describe the slate/candidates campaign, and then how their terms affected the following election period. The following section, focused on strategy, will go into greater details of each group's tactics and actions. The section will also track the reform caucus PEAC's, (Progressive Educators for Action) activity in UTLA for the past 12 years, which resulted in them eventually winning a majority on the board and presidency in 2014.

### **United Action Slate (2005 - 2011)**

In 2005, the slate United Action ran and won UTLA's elections on a campaign that promised to mobilize rank and file teachers, school workers, as well as other school related actors such as students and parents. The slate was a broad coalition composed of PEAC members and other self-styled union reformers. The slate also endorsed a number of other opposition candidates in an effort to remove passive incumbents, most importantly A.J. Duffy was endorsed for President. Since the early 2000s, PEAC has been active in fighting corporate education reform - often through members organizing in their schools against the increase in standardized tests and punishment of 'failing schools'.<sup>126</sup> Although the coalition was created around reforming UTLA and held some common ideas, the mixed slate included a wide range of

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<sup>126</sup> Samantha Winslow "L.A. Teachers Run on a Bigger Vision," *Labor Notes*, January 10th, 2014, <http://www.labornotes.org/2014/01/la-teachers-run-bigger-vision>.

different visions for the union. Once elected this led to difficulty in creating a cohesive series of changes to the union.

The slate extended their focus past traditional salary and benefits issues, and pushed additional changes such as “class-size reduction, teacher participation in curriculum planning and implementation, and a sharp reduction in standardized testing,” and argued to make those changes with an active rank and file.<sup>127</sup> The heavily involved caucus had been critical of the union’s leadership for the preceding two years, specifically their reliance on elected school board members and lack of offensive action. The previous leadership was criticized specifically for trying to reduce standardized testing through lobbying efforts at the state and federal level, which was largely unsuccessful, (particularly as corporate education reform moves to become a bipartisan agenda. The coalition ran a grassroots campaign of teachers, forming campaigning groups in 7 of the 8 UTLA geographic areas/chapters and seeking endorsements from shop stewards and chapter chairs.<sup>128</sup> The slate fundraised money to mail out a “United Action Voter's Guide” to the union’s 42,000 members and got flyers into most of the 600+ schools.<sup>129</sup> Their efforts led to 1,000 more votes over the previous election in election turnout.<sup>130</sup>

The election was the first time in UTLA history in which an opposition slate won a sizable number of seats. The coalition endorsed and elected Joshua Pechthlat for UTLA/AFT vice president, Julie Washington for elementary vice president, David Goldberg for treasurer, and A.J. Duffy for President.<sup>131</sup> The coalition had formed against a longtime incumbent

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<sup>127</sup> Jordan, “Progressive Coalition Sweeps L.A. Teachers’ Union Election.”

<sup>128</sup> Jordan, “Progressive Coalition Sweeps L.A. Teachers’ Union Election.”

<sup>129</sup> Jordan, “Progressive Coalition Sweeps L.A. Teachers’ Union Election.”

<sup>130</sup> Jordan, “Progressive Coalition Sweeps L.A. Teachers’ Union Election.”

<sup>131</sup> Jordan, “Progressive Coalition Sweeps L.A. Teachers’ Union Election.”

leadership that practiced a bureaucratic and inactive rank and file unionism, but they did not have a unified strategy plan for change.

PEAC was still a fairly small caucus in 2005 and would have been unable to successfully run an individual campaign, let alone support a slate if elected. Instead the caucus started the coalition slate United Action to begin a reform effort and gain power in the leadership. Although they played a large role in forming the slate, the coalition was fairly broad in reach and was only a first step in trying to activate membership to vote and move towards a rank and file union. PEAC used the election's success to build a larger base for the reform caucus and in 2014, a more heavily PEAC led slate won out, with one of PEAC's founding members, Alex Caputo-Pearl, as UTLA president.

As explained in the context section, LAUSD faced a large budget deficit from 2009-2012, and despite their resistance, faced massive layoffs and lost approximately 6,000 members of the 42,000 person union. Losing around 14% of a union's membership over just three years can bring bread and butter issues to the forefront of memberships minds, as questions of reform fall by the wayside in favor of questions of survival. In terms of the reform project, the slate produced mixed results for union reform. While they were able to make some gains in activating membership to take action and expanding the politics of the union, they lacked unity and a cohesive plan for leadership and were unable to really enact effective change. The United Action slate ran a reform focused campaign, but were unprepared to deal with the budget crisis (not that the leadership prior to their election necessarily would have been, since the external economic crisis placed a huge amount of financial stress on California and LAUSD) and as the reform group did not live up to expectations, there was a backlash against reform groups. That

backlash opened up the elections for Warren Fletcher, a bread and butter candidate, and he was elected president from 2011-2014.

### **Warren Fletcher (2011 - 2014)**

In April 2011, Warren Fletcher won 53% to 47% over Vice President Julie Washington (who had been endorsed by PEAC).<sup>132</sup> PEAC candidates won four officer positions out of the seven in the union's leadership and PEAC also won the majority of the union's board of directors.<sup>133</sup> Active UTLA teacher Gillian Russom said that the membership voted for Fletcher primarily out of disappointment in the previous reform project in addition to their inability to defend membership jobs.<sup>134</sup> Fletcher represented a return to bread and butter issues and bureaucratic strategy with little rank and file involvement, such as focusing on bringing in better negotiators for the union.

Throughout his presidency, Fletcher was unsuccessful in fighting for bread and butter issues namely failing to secure a contract. As in the case of the previous United Action leadership, Fletcher's presidency lead to a backlash against the old form of unionism, opening up room for PEAC's social movement unionist slate.

Despite holding the majority of officer seats and a majority on the board of directors, PEAC found "it was very hard to move any kind of progressive agenda around a really non-progressive president. Unfortunately, structurally the president in our union had a lot of sway," according to area chair and teacher Gillian Russom.<sup>135</sup> PEAC board members would bring proposals to meetings but the meetings were run in such a bureaucratic manner by the head leadership that the meeting often wouldn't get to important points on the agenda and the

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<sup>132</sup> Zeccola, "Gains and Losses in LA Teachers Union Election."

<sup>133</sup> Zeccola, "Gains and Losses in LA Teachers Union Election."

<sup>134</sup> Gillian Russom (UTLA Area Chair) in interview 1 with the author, 6:34, February 2017.

<sup>135</sup> Gillian Russom (UTLA Area Chair) in interview 2 with the author, 16:57, March 2017.

proposals wouldn't even be discussed. PEAC instead dedicated energy to mobilizing teachers for the caucus's vision of the union in preparation for the 2014 elections. This consisted of focusing on local efforts of progressive area chairs who could do positive work in those areas, such as holding actions and supporting school-site organizing, and creating The Schools L.A. Students Deserve coalition and then referendum.<sup>136</sup>

The Schools L.A. Students Deserve was a coalition formed in 2012, made up of PEAC, the Latino Caucus, Coalition for Educational Justice and other groups in order to push a resolution with the same name through UTLA's referendum process. Because UTLA's contract with LAUSD ended in 2012, the resolution called for UTLA to run a contract campaign "starting by working with community groups and parents to identify shared issues... put more resources into both member and community organizing, and plan a series of escalating actions."<sup>137</sup> The resolution passed through the rank and file voting process in February 2013 with 70% of teachers who voted supporting the resolution.<sup>138</sup> With such broad support for the resolution, it also served as a strategic plan for PEAC to mobilize/campaign around in the 2014 elections, as 70% of the teachers who voted supported the resolution<sup>139</sup>

### **United Power (2014-2017)**

In the spring of 2014, the reform Union Power slate, heavily run and endorsed by PEAC, won the presidency (Alex Caputo-Pearl) and the majority of seats on UTLA's executive board. The slate was made up of returning officers, teacher activists and PEAC members. The Union Power slate ran on their resolution and vision for The School's LA Students Deserve, pushing a

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<sup>136</sup> Gillian Russom (UTLA Area Chair) interview 2,17:00 - 18:15.

<sup>137</sup> Winslow, "L.A. Teachers Run on a Bigger Vision."

<sup>138</sup> Winslow, "L.A. Teachers Run on a Bigger Vision."

<sup>139</sup> Winslow, "L.A. Teachers Run on a Bigger Vision."

model of community, teacher, and union partnership to fight for both union agenda and shared interests.

### **Section 3: Strategies and Campaigns of the Different Leaderships**

#### **United Action (2005 – 2011)**

In preparation for the conflict over budget cuts, teachers in one of UTLA's eight areas began boycotting district-assigned standardized tests called periodic assessments in January 2009. "Rather, the boycott was hastily called to escalate the pushback against stalled contract negotiations and budget cuts by a union leadership under pressure from fed-up teachers to step up the fight" said Sarah Knopp teacher co-chair of her LAUSD school.<sup>140</sup> At first there was little community outreach explaining the boycott and it received mixed support; about half of the teachers complied with the boycott. But the union leadership then posted materials on their website and sent out a case, written by elementary school Vice President Julie Washington, arguing against periodic tests and explaining the boycott in the UTLA newsletter sent to all teachers. The boycott lasted throughout the school year as the contract negotiations and question of layoffs continued.

Unlike other standardized testing, which often plays a role in which schools receive what funding, the tests are mandated by LAUSD and hold no connection to state or federal funding (or mandate). The boycott explicitly protested three impacts of the testing. First, teachers argued that the testing itself does not help students learn and instead forces teachers to constantly 'teach to the test'. The assessments are given quarterly in math, english, science, and social studies,

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<sup>140</sup> Sarah Knopp, "Boycott!" *Rethinking Schools*, [http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/23\\_04/boyc234.shtml](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/23_04/boyc234.shtml).



which comes on top of the mandatory federal and state testing, leading teachers to design their curriculum around preparing for the different tests.<sup>141</sup> Second, the test data is also aggregated by teacher, setting up a system for teacher evaluations or salary being based on students' test results (which then leads to further teaching to the test). Although test results were not considered in LA teacher evaluations in 2009, similar systems had been implemented across the country, such as in Washington D.C, and were eventually implemented in LA in 2013. Third, UTLA calculated that when one adds up the contracts with Princeton Review and McGraw Hill (these two companies write and score the tests), their tests, and paid staff training time, the total cost is over \$100 million per year. The union argued that the testing was a strong example of corporate education reform, specifically directing a shrinking amount of education's budget towards more testing and gathering data on student success at the cost of class sizes, course offerings, and summer school programs.<sup>142</sup>

UTLA demanded that the board should use their federal stimulus funds to avoid the teacher's layoffs and maintain class size rather than save the funds for the following year's budget. At the March school board meeting where the cuts were up for vote, teachers illegally occupied the boardroom to protest and try to delay the vote. However, the board left and voted in the backroom in favor of the layoffs. At the end of April, UTLA threatened a one-day strike the protest the layoffs and passed the membership authorization vote with 75%. However, the UTLA contract does not allow a strike over layoffs and LAUSD was granted an injunction against the strike. Striking individuals would have faced fines up to \$1000 and risked their teaching credentials and the union could have faced millions of dollars in fines, a financial burden the union could not bear. In response to the injunction, the union leadership moved to

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<sup>141</sup> Knopp, "Boycott!"

<sup>142</sup> Knopp, "Boycott!"

cancel the strike, instead organizing rallies before and after the proposed strike school day with over 1,000 teachers showing up.<sup>143</sup> The same day a smaller group of just under a hundred protesters sat in front of the district office and 40 union members were arrested for blocking traffic, including President A.J. Duffy and Vice President Josh Pechthalt.<sup>144</sup>

The union continued to organize rallies and protests in attempts to pressure the school board into using more of their federal stimulus money on keeping jobs. On May 15th (the day pink slips were distributed at 7 middle and high schools), large groups of students refused to enter their schools and marched around their campus in protest of the layoffs and resulting increased class size. At Santee education complex, students refused to enter the school until administrators agreed that they would be able to meet with superintendent Ramon Cortines. After he failed to meet with the students, 400 students walked three miles to protest at his office a few days later.

The union leadership faced criticism from some membership after running a strike authorization vote that received 75% in support, then cancelling the strike, despite the potential sanctions. Teachers at Santee education complex and Lincoln High voted “no confidence” in the UTLA leadership.<sup>145</sup> The initial testing boycotts were also initially a signal from a group of members for UTLA leadership to take more direct action against layoffs and contract negotiations.

Chapter chairs at four schools put out a call for a hunger strike and camp-out at schools on May 26th called Hungry for a Better Education campaign. This group was mostly made up of younger and newer teachers who were more affected by the cuts and felt somewhat left behind

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<sup>143</sup> Cook, “LA Teachers Cut Prompt Walkouts, Arrests, Hunger Strike,”

<sup>144</sup> Cook, “LA Teachers Cut Prompt Walkouts, Arrests, Hunger Strike,”

<sup>145</sup> Cook, “LA Teachers Cut Prompt Walkouts, Arrests, Hunger Strike,”

by UTLA and began organizing on their own. Supporters camped out every night for weeks at the schools most affected by the cuts before eventually moving to the district headquarters. Although the occupation action was relatively small, it was publicized and was visited by state legislators at times.<sup>146</sup> Nine teachers participated in the full hunger strike, with two teachers lasting more than 15 days, and hundreds of one day solidarity hunger strikes and rolling solidarity fasts.<sup>147</sup><sup>148</sup> The hunger strike specifically called for using LAUSD's federal stimulus money to save the classroom jobs that would be cut to avoid large increases in class size.

### **Warren Fletcher (2011 – 2014)**

In June 2011, UTLA and LAUSD made a one year agreement to help address the budget deficit and stop 3,400 of the proposed 5,000 layoffs on the condition that staff accepted four more furlough days in the following school year.<sup>149</sup> The agreement was voted on favorably by 20,000 of the 25,000 members.<sup>150</sup>

On January 20th, 2013, UTLA approved an agreement to use student test scores for evaluating teachers due to a new state law requiring some form of student test data to be involved in teacher evaluations. The agreement was passed by 66% of the 16,892 members who voted.<sup>151</sup> The evaluations changed to be based on raw state test score, district assessments, high school exit exams, and rates of attendance, graduation, suspensions, and course completion.<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Cook, "LA Teachers Cut Prompt Walkouts, Arrests, Hunger Strike,"

<sup>147</sup> Jose Lara, "Hungry For Action," Interview by Emily Henry, *Intersections South LA*, June 2nd, 2009, [http://intersectionssouthla.org/story/hungry\\_for\\_action\\_an\\_interview\\_with\\_santee\\_teacher\\_jose\\_lara/](http://intersectionssouthla.org/story/hungry_for_action_an_interview_with_santee_teacher_jose_lara/).

<sup>148</sup> Sean Leys, "Hungry for a Better Education," Interview by Amy Goodman, *Democracy Now*, June 10th, 2009, [https://www.democracynow.org/2009/6/10/la\\_schools](https://www.democracynow.org/2009/6/10/la_schools).

<sup>149</sup> The Associated Press, "L.A. Teachers OK Deal for 3,400 Jobs," *Education Week*, June 15th, 2011, <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2011/06/15/35brief-1.h30.html>

<sup>150</sup> The Associated Press, "L.A. Teachers OK Deal for 3,400 Jobs."

<sup>151</sup> Teresa Wantanabe, "Union OKs evals' use of scores," *LA Times*, January 20th, 2013, <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/jan/20/local/la-me-utla-evals-20130120>.

<sup>152</sup> Wantanaba, "Union OKS evals' use of scores."

Although linking tests to evaluations, the agreement required that the change would be used in the most limited way possible; the test measures could be used in the informal part of the meeting but could not be used for final decisions and evaluations.<sup>153</sup>

### **United Power (2014 - Present (2017))**

UTLA under the Union Power leadership have used social movement unionism not only as a way to push for education reform, but also as a better strategy to protect bread and butter issues. This may be particularly true when a union is in a defensive position attempting to defend their jobs, benefits, and salary as opposed to a union attempting to make larger demands of their employer. The Union Power leadership slate was closely linked to PEAC, which offered an alternative vision for how to make change and fight corporate education reform. PEAC promoted a bottom-up strategy and believed that through building an active membership and coalition with affected actors, such as students and their families, they would be able to better negotiate and push forward their vision for their schools and education. PEAC's focus connects bread and butter issues to the underfunding of schools and general attacks on public education.

From the Union Power win forward, UTLA immediately began organizing a contract campaign and devoting resources to The Schools LA Students Deserve Campaign through focusing on engaging the membership in more meaningful ways. The campaign primarily focused on class-size and salary increases in response to the previous year's furlough days and lack of cost of living pay increases for multiple years.<sup>154</sup> The previous years' massive layoffs of teachers and support staff resulted in a large growth in class size across the district, leaving

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<sup>153</sup> Gillian Russom (UTLA Area Chair) interview 2, 31:00

<sup>154</sup> Mario Vasquez, "Los Angeles Teachers Poised to Strike for First Time in 26 Years," *In These Times*, March 13th, 2015, [http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/17746/los\\_angeles\\_teachers\\_strike](http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/17746/los_angeles_teachers_strike).

almost 2,700 middle and high school classes operating with over 45 students.<sup>155</sup> Luis Blazer, a math teacher at Rancho Dominguez Preparatory School, says via email, “My biggest concern is that it is not just one class of 45 students. It is five classes of 45 students. Two-hundred twenty-five students to grade, support, give constructive feedback, differentiate instruction for, inspire and guide.”<sup>156</sup> As class sizes grow to 40-45 students per classroom and teachers’ workloads change significantly with the class size and education reform issues become work condition issues for the membership as it becomes far more difficult for them to do their job satisfactorily.

As UTLA moved forward with The Schools LA Students Deserve they significantly changed their internal union organization to build power in tandem with the escalating contract campaign. UTLA created a political department, parent department, and research department for the union with some funding from NEA as the union was nearly broke after years of shrinking dues. UTLA leadership visited hundreds of schools to assess members’ willingness to strike and try to build involvement from the rank and file.<sup>157</sup> On February 12, UTLA organized picketing at 850 schools and also began holding meetings for students, teachers and new teachers over contract demands and social justice education. UTLA created local positions for member teachers called parent liaisons, whose job it is to engage parents with the Schools LA Students Deserve campaign, how they could be involved, and ask what their priorities were as parents.<sup>158</sup> They organized parent liaisons in 150 schools where they partnered with community organizations to hold monthly forums on inequality. The union continued their coalition building, partnering with UCLA’s institute for Democracy, Education and Access, where they

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<sup>155</sup> Ramon C. Cortines to LAUSD Members, Board of Education, “Class Size Report,” February 3rd, 2015, <https://www.scribd.com/document/254641629/LAUSD-Class-Size-Memo>.

<sup>156</sup> Vasquez, “Los Angeles Teachers Poised to Strike for First Time in 26 Years.”

<sup>157</sup> Alex Caputo-Pearl, “Step-by-step: Recipe for Change,” interview by California Teachers Association, *California Educator*, October 2016, <http://educator.cta.org/i/740763-october-2016/25>.

<sup>158</sup> Vasquez, “Los Angeles Teachers Poised to Strike for First Time in 26 Years.”

held monthly meetings with 15 community organizations to discuss and plan around education justice.

On February 26th, UTLA organized a large rally of 15,000 teachers, staff, union members and supporters at Grand Park in downtown LA. The rally was the opening salvo of a plan of escalating actions in their contract campaign and included students, teachers, community members, and presidents of NEA, CFT (California Federation of Teachers), CTA (California Teachers Association) all as speakers.<sup>159</sup> UTLA implemented a system of rosters, lists and records of one-on-one conversations to track which teachers would be coming to which actions, and then tracked if they actually attended.<sup>160</sup> One escalating action over a series of months was a call for district-wide boycott of faculty meetings. With the accountability system in place, school stewards confirmed and reconfirmed participation, and if teachers were not striking the meetings for a particular reason, perhaps because of an aggressive principal for example, then UTLA would extend more resources to that school.<sup>161</sup>

In March 2015 the contract negotiations stalled, which resulted in moving the negotiations to a state mediator and if negotiations failed there, the union could have legally moved to strike. The union was preparing their members and organization for the potential of a strike with a series of escalating actions, flexing their strength with the potential of a strike. After a month of negotiating with a state mediator, the union approved a contract with 97% of 25,407 voting members in favor of the agreement. The union saw the final contract as a win with gains in for both salary and benefits issues, but also with policies to better public education in the district.

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<sup>159</sup> Karla Griego, "LA Teachers Escalate," *Labor Notes*, March 30th, 2015, <http://labornotes.org/2015/03/la-teachers-escalate>

<sup>160</sup> Alex Caputo-Pearl, "Step-by-step: Recipe for Change."

<sup>161</sup> Alex Caputo-Pearl, "Step-by-step: Recipe for Change,"

For wages and benefits, the contract held a total 10% wage increase over 2 years, starting with a 4% increase from July 2014, another 2% retroactive increase from January 2015, then another 2% each in July 2015 and in January 2016.<sup>162</sup> This result came after the district initially proposed a 2% raise, and then a 5% raise as a response the union's second proposal of 8.5%.<sup>163</sup> The salary increase came after members had had no salary increases since 2008 in addition to dealing with pay cuts from furlough days which the union accepted as concessions in order to keep union jobs. The contract also protected 99% of member's health care benefits from cuts for the two years of the contract.<sup>164</sup> On more minor job security and contract enforcement issues, the contract requires LAUSD to inform UTLA members of accusations against them within three days of beginning investigations, to only allow reassignment of teachers if the person poses a safety risk, and speeds up the investigation process. The length of time to submit a grievance also increased from fifteen to thirty days after the incident to allow more time for members to pressure administrators to reach on-site solutions.<sup>165</sup>

In addition to winning on these bread and butter issues, the contract included concrete gains to better the struggling public schools, including class size caps and \$13 million dollars earmarked for the express goal of reducing the district's awful student to counselor ratio to under 500-to-1, which is still far from ideal.<sup>166</sup> The class size caps start with K-3 grades at 27 students with the caps increasing by grade to 46 for high school juniors and seniors and school-wide class averages must be three students below the cap for that grade.<sup>167</sup> The class size caps are still

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<sup>162</sup> Howard Blume, "L.A. Unified teachers ratify three year contract," *Los Angeles Times*, May 8th, 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-la-teachers-approve-contract-20150508-story.html>

<sup>163</sup> Randy Childs, "LA teachers headed for a showdown," *Socialist Worker*, March 31st, 2015, <https://socialistworker.org/2015/03/31/la-teachers-headed-for-a-showdown>.

<sup>164</sup> Randy Childs, "A fighting strategy wins contract gains in LA," *Socialist Worker*, May 19th, 2015, <https://socialistworker.org/2015/05/19/a-fighting-strategy-wins-for-la-teachers>.

<sup>165</sup> Randy Childs, "A fighting strategy wins contract gains in LA."

<sup>166</sup> Randy Childs, "A fighting strategy wins contract gains in LA."

<sup>167</sup> Randy Childs, "A fighting strategy wins contract gains in LA."

somewhat small wins; although they create limits on class size, set the precedent for caps and should reduce class size across LAUSD, the actual caps are still very high and schools continue to have massive class sizes that are highly difficult to learn and teach within.

The union has also pushed political activity outside of direct union work in May 2015, running campaigns for candidates for the LAUSD school board. Two UTLA backed candidates for the LAUSD school board forced a runoff election against candidates backed financially by charter school organizations and wealthy advocates of charter schools.<sup>168</sup> One charter candidate won one spot, replacing UTLA endorsed board member Bennett Kayser with Ref Rodriguez. UTLA backed Scott Schmerelson won over Incumbent Tamar Galatzan. The election was the most expensive one in LAUSD history, with outside organizations and donors donating 5.1 million dollars, almost exclusively to charter school backed candidates.<sup>169</sup>

Since their 2015 contract campaign, UTLA has continued their focus on building a strong social movement union, both by increasing member dues by one third to explicitly fight a growing reform movement and continuing their organizing efforts to reach teachers in charters. UTLA also seeks to organize teachers in charter schools and as of 2016 has 1000 members who work in charters with a variety of different contract operators and therefore variety of contracts.<sup>170</sup>

The Build the Future, Fund the Fight campaign was an effort by UTLA leadership to get the membership to reinvest in their union by increasing their dues by one-third to further expand their union's ability to build support for the union's vision of public education. The leadership

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<sup>168</sup> Vasquez, "Los Angeles Teachers Poised to Strike for First Time in 26 Years."

<sup>169</sup> Brittny Mejia and Howard Blume, "Two Challengers, one incumbent, finish first in L.A. Board of Education races," May 19th, 2015, <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-first-laUSD-elex-returns-20150519-story.html>.

<sup>170</sup> Alex Caputo-Pearl, "Step-by-step: Recipe for Change."



made the case that the monthly increase in dues (about \$19 a month) would be necessary to fight charter campaigns backed by billions of dollars, specifically the Broad-Walmart plan to expand charters in LAUSD.<sup>171</sup> The increase was particularly necessary after CTU was financially struggling because of their shrinking membership and because the massive layoffs reduced the union's monthly dues and the 2015 contract campaign required a great deal of resources (some of which NEA helped pay for). In February 2016, 82% of members voted in favor of the dues increase, which demonstrates the internal commitment to SMU strategy from UTLA's membership.<sup>172</sup>

### **Conclusion**

LAUSD has been consistently underfunded since the 80s due to old changes in tax structures that became exacerbated by the expansion of charters and enrollment decline. The financial crisis of 2008 then pushed the already struggling district into a major budget crisis that the district tried to address with massive layoffs. The initial United Action reform slate tried to move towards a SMU model and mobilized teachers for actions in response to the proposed cuts but was unable to organize effectively and combat the layoffs. Warren Fletcher was unable to win bread and butter benefits or even secure a contract, leading to PEAC's United Power slate winning the presidency in 2014 and transforming the union towards a SMU model with a significant contract win.

While Chicago provides a model transformation of service union to social movement union stemming from the momentum of a successful reform caucus, the LA case can serve as an example of a more difficult path towards a similar kind of SMU and potentially be more useful for other reform caucuses to study. The overwhelmingly positive response from the membership

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<sup>171</sup> Alex Caputo-Pearl, "Step-by-step: Recipe for Change."

<sup>172</sup> Alex Caputo-Pearl, "Step-by-step: Recipe for Change."

for increasing dues by one third demonstrates the rank and file's support of the union and its more active strategy in response to corporate education reform.

## **CHAPTER 4: Analysis of the Two Cases**

The prior two chapters outlined the contexts in which the unions' transformations took place, the natures of the transformations themselves, and how these were impacted by and impacted their contract campaigns and conflicts with the district. This chapter will look at the similarities and differences between the cases in terms of context, internal transformation, and strategies of external pressure and will try to draw from that analysis particular lessons that can contribute to creating an effective SMU model or campaign. Underlying this analysis is the argument that a SMU model for teachers unions can better secure bread and butter issues and defend against corporate education reform than a service model.

The Chicago and LA case studies are an opportunity to look at two large teacher unions in a similar economic and political context: underfunded public schools under primarily Democratic governments. Both districts were increasingly underfunded for a long period of time leading up to the union transformations and mobilization. In LA, proposition 13 limited local cities' autonomy to increase taxes for public education and put the authority for distributing property tax revenues to local agencies into the hands of the state. Despite efforts to lessen the decrease in public education budget with various propositions, education spending in California dropped and LAUSD found itself in a continuous budget crisis. In the same period, Chicago's Public Schools built up a serious debt through poor policy decisions regarding teachers pensions, then mismanaged that debt with risky financial decisions. CPS also had been underfunded over many years as a result of Chicago's implementation of Tax Increment Financing (TIF).

Each city's policies in response to their funding crises followed a similar path of layoffs, more heavily instituted corporate education reform, and management failures that looked bad in the eyes of the public. Both Chicago and LA suffered school district layoffs with about 2,500 in

Chicago after 2010 and 6,000 in the ten years before CORE entered office, and around 9,000 in LA. As two of the largest school districts in the country, LA and Chicago have been subject to an aggressive corporate education agenda with large numbers of school closings partnered with charter school expansion. Corporate education reform also takes the form of creating policies that work to limit teachers' unions and increase core curriculum and standardized testing, with the results data attached to teacher evaluations.

In Chicago, the mismanagement of the pension fund was a large misstep for CPS. It increased the debt of the city, while also putting the pensions for public sector workers from the city into a more precarious situation. Both cities also had their superintendents resign over fraud in conflicts of interest over no-bid contracts with educational product companies. Barbara Byrd-Bennett was Mayor Emanuel's handpicked CEO (superintendent position in Chicago) and served from 2012 until her resignation in 2015. Shortly after her 2015 resignation, Byrd-Bennett pleaded guilty to bribery in a \$22 million kickback scheme with an education consulting company she previously worked for and is currently facing between three and a half to seven and a half years in prison. In LA, Superintendent John Deasy (2011-2014) tried to implement a \$1.3 billion dollar technology plan to give Ipads to every student and teacher in the district. This failed as a policy, but more importantly, led to a multiple year FBI investigation into the bidding process for the tablet contract. Deasy was investigated for having conflicts of interest after emails and contact surfaced between Deasy, Pearson and Apple prior to the bidding process, leading to Deasy's resignation.

The similarities in the two city's cases extend past just the context the unions operated under, but also to each union's structure itself prior to the caucuses reform campaigns. PEAC and CORE pushed their union reform projects in opposition to an inactive and ineffective service

union leadership. Unfortunately, an ineffectual union leadership does not necessarily result in an energized response to change the union. More typically, passivity grows within the union due to a growing lack of belief that change can happen. While a service union model can satisfy membership's needs for gains within certain political economic contexts, it accomplishes this while maintaining distance between rank and file and leadership and doesn't require much work for the members. UTLA Area Chair Gillian Russom said "what we found was that distrust, demobilization, and passivity that was caused by the service model made it difficult even for opposition organizing, because the level of passivity in that members hadn't been engaged in even discussions about what we were facing, in grassroots school-site organizing or even in just rallies." It is critical for a membership to overcome such passivity and disillusionment for a shift to a social movement model to happen, as a SMU requires an immense amount of work. Worsening attacks on the membership, in which people's livelihoods become threatened are also a factor and a spur to action. This was the case in Chicago and LA.

Significant differences in the two unions' contexts are much fewer than similarities. The primary distinction is that since 1995 Chicago's mayor has had a extensive amount of executive control over the city's education system, as both the superintendent position and school board are appointed by the mayor. This means there are very few ways of changing education policy in the city outside of the purview of the mayor. Another difference is that while both cities tried to address budget deficits with large layoffs and school closings, UTLA suffered more layoffs over a shorter period of time whereas Chicago took the approach of closing a record number of schools.

## **Internal Organizing and Building Power**

Separating internal power building from external pressure is a useful way to look at how certain strategies are focused on building the necessary internal structure to respond to highly demanding external pressure. However, this can ignore how internal building strategies double as a tactic against the district and how external actions play a role in building solidarity and internal organizing ability. Much of the early internal reform for activating membership happened alongside coalition building with parents or community organizations. Building public support and coalitions is a necessity of successful social movement unionism and will be included in the internal power building section.

CORE and PEAC came to power in the union leadership in different ways. CORE won quickly in 2010 after winning a few lower elected seats, whereas PEAC was unable to present and win a cohesive slate until 2014, despite having some members in UTLA leadership since 2005.

The section will look at differences and similarities between each caucus's organizing leading up to their election, then what kind of reforms each caucus put forward to activate membership and build power once elected. The section discussing internal union mobilization strategy in PEAC is more developed because the union went through waves of disinterest in a SMU. In this area, we can learn more from that case than CORE in Chicago, which was able to build its power effectively and take leadership fully with a strategic vision.

CORE's formation as a local activist group, with continuous activism while building its membership, played a huge role in its success. CORE had originally formed as a group of teachers partnering with local community organizations for the purpose of stopping school closings in their area. The group shifted into a small caucus and while increasing a focus on

growing their numbers, the group continued to center their caucus around fighting school closings and became even more active, succeeding in stopping closings. Prior to any union election, the caucus had proven their ability to make change through action and also had created meaningful coalition relationships with community organizations.

PEAC's takeover of the union, in the form of winning the presidency and nearly all leadership positions, took almost ten years, as opposed to CORE winning these positions relatively quickly in their first major election in 2010. In 2005, PEAC played a large role in forming the United Action slate that unseated previous union incumbents and began to mobilize rank and file members in reaction to 2009 budget cuts. The 2009 fight over layoffs had a mobilizing effect on the rank and file and required some organizing to hold their large effective rallies -- the more deliberate internal organizing of 2014 was not yet present in their strategy. The union at this point did not make serious internal transformations to mobilize membership, as the elected leadership came as a mixed coalition, but some of the leadership's goal was still activating the rank and file. Although not a union tactic and not a positive reason for mobilization, the threat of and eventual follow through of massive layoffs also had an energizing effect. In 2009, UTLA held numerous rallies and protests in preparation for their potential strike

The union's tactic of boycotting standardized testing serves as an example of a good tactic with clumsy rollout. The organizing of 2009 largely consisted of actions that gathered teachers together to act, but without a sustained building of internal solidarity. The boycott started as much from teachers in one of UTLA's eight areas as a call for the union to prepare for upcoming contract battle as to pressure the district. Because there was little community outreach explaining the boycotts, the strategy received mixed support and there was little follow through

from other areas until the leadership explained the boycott in a union newsletter.

The reform efforts of 2009 had positive and negative effects for getting members engaged with the union. Although the 2009 fight got teachers engaged in public actions fighting the district, and started to shift towards a social movement union, the relative failure of those efforts created a minor backlash towards an SMU approach, resulting in three years of a bread-and-butter-focused leader and passivity. Overall, the effect was mostly positive towards building a social movement union, given that the membership voted overwhelmingly in favor of change in union strategy once presented with ‘The Schools LA Students’ Deserve’ referendum. It also meant that once PEAC entered the leadership, they did so with an understanding of the importance of a united vision and strategic plan.

Both PEAC and CORE released studies called The Schools LA/Chicago Students Deserve on each city’s public school system and education reform policies for public schools. In PEAC’s case, an additional strategic plan for how to bring about reform was included. Prior to their 2012 strike, CTU released a study called The Schools Chicago’s Students Deserve that laid out a variety of education reforms that could improve public schools in Chicago. The study became the union’s alternative vision for bettering public school education in opposition to corporate education reform. Modeled after Chicago’s report, in 2013 PEAC formed a coalition of various LA political groups and then forwarded a member referendum called The Schools LA Students Deserve. In addition to a series of education reforms, the report included an alternate vision of how the union could operate, essentially a proposal to shift towards a social movement union in the form of a referendum.

Although titled the same, the reports were used differently, CTU’s served as a report to primarily provide an argument for education reform improvements not driven by corporate



education reform. Providing this alternate vision for better public schools is key for successful coalition building and parent outreach since corporate education reform is often portrayed as the only possible way to better schools (in part because it has been the primary agenda for school improvements for these two districts). The report was publicized as the unions' visions for better schools and made available for parents.

PEAC's report came directly out of a coalition with the Latino Caucus, Coalition for Educational Justice and other groups and served to gain support for PEAC's vision of UTLA and LAUSD in preparation for their election. It also was their strategic plan for when elected. Driven by a coalition, the report also had the effect of being circulated as another way of improving LA public schools, including publicizing to parents.

In a manner similar to PEAC's use of The Schools LA Students Deserve to prime the membership for the upcoming election, CORE published a report about CTU's pension mismanagement when running two candidates for the board of pension funds, then followed the report by visiting all the schools in the district and talking to teachers.

Once PEAC fully came into the union leadership in 2014, they were prepared to internally transform UTLA into a more social movement driven union with an emphasis on sustained building of an active rank and file by systematizing building and tracking member participation. After CORE's 2010 election, the newly elected caucus similarly changed their internal union organization in an effort to mobilize rank and file members.

PEAC created a political department, parent department, organizing department and research department as well as local parent liaison positions for teachers in every school to develop the role of parents and bring them into the campaign. The forming of these departments was similar to CORE in its creation of an organizing department and research department in

2010 for their 2012 contract campaign. The organizing department had 5 full time organizers to mobilize the rank and file. CORE's organizing department worked to make sure every school had an active delegate (essentially shop steward) for the union's house of delegates, and to expand the role of delegates in their schools to host committee meetings focused around action and winning members over to the strategy. PEAC created a system of rosters, lists and records of one-on-one conversations that worked to increase the number of teachers at events by confirming and reconfirming their participation as well as tracking which teachers actually attended from which schools. This provided central leadership with data on which schools or areas required more resources. According to Area Chair Gillian Russom, that shift from a service model's requirement of stewards to an organizing model "was a huge deal to change. Our school stewards are called chapter chairs, [and to ask] 'so like you want our chapter chairs to actually keep a list of people and check them off, and actually go talk to people one on one, and engage them?' was like a whole culture change."

While the union tries to build public support through all their action, this section will describe some of the more deliberate efforts to reach out to parents to grow an internal network of parent support. Both CTU in 2010 and UTLA in 2014 created parent departments for the purpose of engaging with one of the most important demographics to have as allies. Somewhat obviously, if the people that run the schools and the people who have the most immediate vested interest in the schools fight for a certain kind of policy change, it becomes difficult for the district to oppose it. CTU's Contract Action Committees in 2010 reached out to other school workers and had members reach out to parents through becoming active in local school council meetings and circulating petitions for better school resources. UTLA created the position of parent liaisons, whose job it was to reach out to and engage parents, in every school. In 150 of

those schools, the liaisons partnered with community organizations to hold monthly forums on inequality. CTU had also developed strong relationships with certain groups of parents through their earlier successful activism against school closings.

Creating union positions for reaching out to parents is one step in a process of building parent support by incorporating their interests in the union's vision and then fighting for public school reform. Connecting concrete gains for improving public schools to the union's contract is important because teachers presumably care about bettering public school education for their students, and parents are more likely to become invested in the success of the contract campaign. CTU's 2012 campaign was unable to win education policy changes, UTLA's 2015 campaign won minor changes, and CTU's 2016 campaign secured the most education improvement gains, suggesting that a longer period of active social movement unionism helps those wins.

ULTA's 2015 contract won class-size caps for the district and \$13 million earmarked to reduce the district's student counselor ratio to below 500-to-1 in every school. The caps and earmarked money are wins for the union in that it establishes district caps that limit class size and hopefully better the student's opportunity for counseling, a necessary department for students to attend higher education. However the caps themselves are still quite high (46 for juniors and seniors) and a goal of a 500-to-1 student to counselor ratio is a barely adequate one.

Although CTU heavily featured education reform in their 2012 campaign, pushing for smaller class sizes, a richer curriculum in underfunded schools, and increase in funding for the arts and physical education, they were unable to get the district to negotiate on any of those non-economic issues.

However, CTU's 2016 campaign was able to win numerous education policy changes

from the district, most notably pushing Mayor Emanuel to withdraw \$88 million from the TIF fund to increase CPS funding. CTU won enforceable class-size caps for elementary schools with \$7 million earmarked to provide teachers assistants for any classes that run over the caps. \$10 - \$27 million was earmarked to provide after-school programs, counseling, social work, psychiatric services, and medical clinics at 20-55 community schools designated by a joint committee of union members and CPS officials. The contract also temporarily ended charter expansion and banned school closings for two years after the contract and reduced the measures for closing schools for the following two years.

There are three main lessons for how a union can more successfully build internal strength and power in a union reformed to a social movement union. First, the difficult task of mobilizing rank and file members can be done effectively with the creation of an organizing department and questionably feasible without. Second, moving people to action is the basis of an effective social movement unionist strategy. Third, providing alternative visions of what the union and school reform projects could be are important to building internal (and community) support.

Mobilizing rank and file teachers in a 30,000-person union is a difficult and large undertaking; teachers are already stretched for time by the nature of their profession and if the current leadership pushes a weak service union model, the members may already have an apathetic relationship with the union. Both CTU in 2010 and UTLA in 2014 created departments and hired organizers for the express purpose of activating rank and file members through working their way down the union bureaucracy chain, specifically targeting shop stewards to then train and encourage their school members to action. 5+ full time organizers in districts with over 600 schools do an immense amount of work, and without those full-time organizers the

union needs to rely on current members to move other members to action. UTLA in 2009 resembled this alternative. The union leadership wanted to create a more active membership but didn't focus the effort internally by pushing ideas of agency and action down the ranks of the leadership. The result was a union attempting to use external strategies of social movement unionism without fully committing resources to developing internal momentum to back up the strategies.

The importance of building internal strength and changing the idea of what it means to be a member to include taking action is paramount to a social movement union's success. While activating members through their stewards at their school site is a basic tenant of organizing, the focus on creating school-site committees that can recognize issues at their schools and win battles on that level really works to galvanize members. A successful minor win can act as an example of the impact the union can have when members act together, creating a greater sense of agency and solidarity within the union. That is why having the organizing department is so helpful, as there is someone pushing stewards to develop that kind of committee while providing them with training and resources on how to do so. That localized relationship with the union can then expand to be used in larger external pressure campaigns such as a contract campaign or in reaction to aggressive corporate education rollout. Building an active membership this way is necessary because between public actions, meeting with parents, building coalitions, and creating a democratic flow of ideas from the rank and file to the leadership, social movement unionism requires an immense amount of work. However, if a membership is committed to action, there are many people ready to do that work.

Promoting alternative visions of the union and public education reform that are reinforced with evidence and concrete examples is important for building excitement and support from the

public and membership. Although the conclusion is not exclusive to social movement unionism, a shift to a SMU usually requires winning internal union elections. Building support is necessary for those campaigns as well as showing to the public that there is another way to improve public schools. The Schools LA/Chicago Students Deserve reports served the purpose of proving there is a possible alternative, although one was more directed at the public (Chicago's case) and one more directed at membership (LA). This promotion of vision is a tool for trying to work against the passivity that can come from disappointment in the union and is a step towards mobilizing members towards action.

Generating the reports and vision in tandem with parents and community members is paramount to building public support for two reasons. Firstly, from an ideological standpoint, a social movement teachers union should have a vision of public education that is responsive to the interests of parents and students. Also, from a strategic standpoint, when a union creates ways to include and be responsive to parents, it defends itself against attacks that union agendas benefit the teachers at the cost of students. Also, the reports show real potential public school improvements when media sources frequently only cover corporate education reform as a viable solution to a struggling school, in part because that is the only kind of reform being pushed and therefore covered by media reports.

Turner's theory that separates moments of the coalition building process into three types - events, campaigns, and institutional consolidation - can be used to analyze UTLA and CTU's process of coalition building. The first two types of events and campaigns can be understood as fitting into each union's contract campaign of escalating actions as they were "sustained efforts over a period of time with multiple tactics aimed at a specific goal."<sup>173</sup> Although the goals were

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<sup>173</sup> Turner, "Globalization and the Logic of Participation," 6.

more directly those of the union in these examples, Chicago's 2016 contract campaign led to real improvements in Chicago's public schools. In LA's case, CORE partnered with the Latino Caucus, Coalition for Educational Justice, and other community organizations to form The Schools L.A. Students Deserve, which is still UTLA's leading plan for making change in LAUSD.

However, the final coalition building step of institutional consolidation, defined as "networks based on previous events/campaigns uniting into new organizations for creating future opportunities to further the common politics," is more difficult to assign actions to and is the basis for moving towards social movement unionism. CTU's 2012 strike and subsequent organizing has elicited so much excitement from leftists and labor movement not just because of the significance of the 2012 win, but because it has flirted with institutional consolidation. CTU used its organizational power and connection to a population of the city to expand into Chicago politics and ran CTU president Karen Lewis as a candidate for Mayor. Lewis fell ill and CTU instead ran Chuy Garcia (previously a Cook County commissioner) forcing Rahm Emanuel into a runoff election he closely won. Despite that loss, the closeness of the race demonstrates the potential political power of the union, which was able to elect CTU's candidate and member Susan Sadlowski Garza to city council. UTLA has not had the same extension of broader working class politics to issues outside of education, but has had some electoral success in the larger LA politics by winning seats on the school board. UTLA has not demonstrated any clear institutional consolidation but they have had less time as a union driven by a SMU (2014 - 2017 as opposed to 2010 - 2017) and have an optimistic future with an active membership and growing coalition.

## **Creating External Pressure on the District**

The strategies each union took to apply pressure to the district in their contract campaigns were very similar with slight variations in actions. Both unions planned a series of escalating actions ending at the last days of possible negotiation in preparation for a potential strike should negotiations stall. These were backed up by their coalition partners and public support. This section will briefly discuss the similar actions each union took to apply pressure to the district in the escalating campaigns, their union-sponsored campaigns for local elected office and then the differences in the strategies.

CTU and UTLA's strategies and following actions differed little in their escalating contract campaigns. The strategy was to hold a series of public actions that progressively got larger in preparation for a strike while simultaneously building public support for the strike. Both unions picketed at their schools before/after school, held large public rallies in their downtown areas, and took over/protested school board meetings.

These actions at their most simple do three important things for the campaign with different actions doing certain things particularly well. Public actions act as a practice for school stewards to organize their co-workers for future events, ideally getting a larger turnout at each progressive action through better outreach and developing leaders to mobilize more members in each school for the action. They are also opportunities for parent liaisons or members responsible for parent outreach to grow their network of involved parents, and to educate parents and students on the campaign. These actions also push some level of pressure on the district by the nature of public protest by showing the willingness of teachers and partnered public to act in opposition to their policies.

Picketing schools before or after school does not disrupt the school day and serves as a



particularly good action to reach out to parents and students to explain the union's fight and alternate vision for public education. Protesting and/or occupying school board meetings is a more militant action as it takes such a stand against the district's agenda that it fully disrupts the meeting and ability for them to function as they normally would. Public rallies demonstrate the potential public force and support for a potential strike and are a strong expression of strength behind the union and against the district.

Organizing and mobilizing members and public support works cyclically in that once an organizer develops a group of local leaders, those local leaders can then work to grow their network of actionable members and developing leaders and the cycle can continue. To grow a sustainable movement, a series of escalating actions provides dates and checkpoints to organize around, with the growing support from membership and hopefully the public, leading to the final action that puts a massive amount of stress and pressure on the city. Because some actions are more militant and people may be less easily convinced to participate in these, the climb from easier actions to more difficult actions prepares people to be more willing to participate in a difficult action after having a positive experience being involved with a less intense one. The cyclical tendency of asking members and parents to take action functions as the basis for SMU as it relies on growing participation and a political solidarity that extends past the workplace.

The idea of building a series of escalating actions with heavy participation from union members, parents, and coalition members all operates on the basis of a threat to strike. The actions show the union is prepared and willing to strike if the district is unwilling to negotiate with the union's terms. Both UTLA's contract campaign and CTU's 2016 campaign did not go to strike but were able to secure wins through their threat of that. A teacher's strike can be especially damaging to a city, and so the threat of a strike supported by the public is

significant. UTLA in 2009 was prepared to strike to protest the large number of layoffs, but an injunction was filed against the strike and it was ruled illegal and the union lost momentum and power with no final pressure for the district. The following section explicates why a teachers union strike can be so dangerous and therefore why the threat of a well-supported strike is significant, followed by the differences in strategies between CTU and UTLA on pressuring the district.

### **Differences in Strategy to Exert Pressure on the District**

There were few differences between the union's contract campaigns since UTLA heavily modeled theirs on CTU's 2012 campaign (with the exception of CTU's actual strike). The following section will go through the differences that did exist in tactics and actions taken outside of the contract campaigns.

In 2012, CTU went on strike for seven days while the bargaining team negotiated with the district. After the first five days, the bargaining team suggested accepting the contract offer, but the house of delegates voted against it, proposing to continue the strike for two more days and vote again after consulting with the membership. Two days later the delegates decided to suspend the strike and move the contract to membership ratification, which it passed. During the strike, teachers first picketed outside of their own schools (660 schools) with sometimes consolidating their picketing to 144 locations that were targeted with specific coalition and parent support.

Like most public sector jobs, a teacher's strike has a greater impact than a loss of profits, as compared to private sector strike might. Schools allow a large portion of the labor force to work while their children are cared for during that nine-to-five period of time. If schools close across a city due to a teacher strike, parents who would normally be working find themselves

with the problem of where to send their kids when they are at work. Cities can respond by keeping select schools open as ‘holding centers’ by employing under-trained monitors instead of teachers, but that can only act as a short term solution and is often expensive to set up. Although students’ loss of school time provides some pressure on a government to try to end the strike through negotiations, most pressure comes from parents directly complaining about their children’s lack of opportunity to learn and their being unable to go to work, from businesses that employ these parents, and from the cost of maintaining emergency school systems. By the same token, as parents are people who are most negatively impacted by the strike, parental frustration can be pointed at the union if the strike continues beyond what they see as reasonable. It is also worth noting that the most affected parents tend to be those in the most precarious situations, such as being a single parent, having a rigid employment schedule, and/or living in general poverty.

UTLA has used in-school tactics that directly defy district rules and agendas, specifically organizing boycotts of city-mandated standardized testing in 2009 and faculty meetings in 2015. While picketing, holding public rallies, and disrupting school board meetings all pressure the district, boycotting standardized testing and faculty meetings directly impedes the district’s ability to function as the authority of LAUSD education. Most of the social movement unionist tactics do not directly disrupt district agenda and what happens in schools, but instead cultivate public support for a strike, which stops education entirely. Internal organizing and coalition building may require a worker to sacrifice time or take a risk by standing up to a principal, but they do not risk punitive measures in the same way that boycotting does. This tactic has two effects. It could bring about the changes in the public education system that the teachers envision, and also has the potential to build a stronger sense of solidarity among workers, as

taking larger risks together tends to lead to a higher commitment to each other.

### **Lessons from the Strategies used to Pressure the District.**

Internal power building's primary goal is to mobilize members to action, build coalitions, and build public support for an alternative vision of public education improvements. The primary strategy of pressuring the district by these social movement unionist teachers unions is to build growing support in a contract campaign with a series of escalating actions with the final power over the district being a strike (or threat of the strike).

When comparing the efficacy of these two unions' ability to respond to corporate education reform, or attacks on teachers while operating under a social movement union model versus an earlier service model the social movement union model is more successful. Despite achieving mostly defensive wins, UTLA and CTU secured better contracts after each union reform project, and the following lessons can be drawn from the campaigns of each union. Both of these teachers unions' successful contract campaigns were based on the same strategy; build pressure on the district with escalating actions and increasing public involvement in preparation for a strike, using that threat of a potential well-organized and supported strike as the primary power in negotiating. That external strategy is only possible with a successful internal union reform and coalition building project, of which is heavily aided by; creating internal departments to mobilize the rank and file and parents, providing alternative visions of school and union improvements, and an understanding that moving people to take action is the basis of SMU.

SMU requires far more resources than a service union model, but for public sector teachers unions, the cases demonstrate that it can produce a more successful union judged on ability to secure wages and benefits and be more resilient to attacks. However, it is more difficult to evaluate SMU's capacity to create larger political change than within the extended

union purview, such as education policy changes. It is difficult because political impact can be less tangible than concrete changes and because these unions have only been progressing towards more effective SMUs over a relatively short period of time, and the political impact potentially has yet to be realized. This is not to overstate the significance of SMU as seen through UTLA and CTU and hail them and SMU as the future of the left, particularly as their wins are still most defensive. However, their successful coalition building and in the case of Chicago, institutional consolidation of political momentum, can hopefully provide part of a foundation for a broader left political movement while maintaining a successful union.

## **CHAPTER 5: Conclusion**

The previous analysis section focused on key lessons of strategy employed by UTLA and CTU to develop stronger social movement unionism, and based on those cases, open the discussion of the potential political impact of SMU. Along with this are the questions of SMU's ability to fight corporate education reform in the future. This conclusion will discuss the plausibility of extending those lessons and in turn, SMU's efficacy to teachers' unions in the rest of the U.S. and then more broadly, public sector unions. Finally, the section will look to explain what teachers' unions SMU mean for the ongoing question of revitalizing the labor movement.

Aggressive corporate education reform is unfortunately a national and widespread movement supported by politicians and private capital, whereas these examples of SMU teachers' unions are infrequent and based locally in cities. While they can limit the attacks on public education in their areas, they certainly cannot save public education as a whole, let alone solve nationwide problems of de-facto segregation and underfunding. However, if enough teachers' unions are able to make the transformation, effectively making concrete gains for public education and form supportive networks with one another, perhaps that voice in favor of the public can be extended from local politics to a national level.

UTLA and CTU were more successful operating as a SMU than a service model in securing wages and benefits, combating corporate education reform, and growing support for public education, and therefore it logically follows that teachers unions in a similar context seeking to blunt attacks from corporate education reform should consider adopting SMU. Other reform caucuses across the country have tried to make this shift, but many have struggled, similarly to LA, over winning full leadership and in turn, being able to institute internal changes and commit the membership to SMU. As discussed in the internal organizing section, there are

numerous barriers to mobilizing a membership, including leadership in the union adhering to a service model. Although it is worth looking to PEAC's election strategies, there is a significant variability between different states labor laws, city's education policy, and relationship to the union that the struggle to win membership to SMU will depend heavily on individual contexts.

Although teachers unions are particularly well suited to SMU compared to other public sector work because of their close proximity to the public and sheer size (unionized teachers are the single largest group of unionized workers in the U.S.) other public sector unions might consider moving towards a SMU approach. Other public sector unions also serve the public and can still build their contract campaign by forming coalitions with constituents and clients and frame their demands in terms of public policy and discourse. Public sector unions also generally negotiate with the city/state as one employer, allowing for single contract campaigns for large numbers of workers. While it is entirely plausible for other public sector unions to embrace SMU, the individual context and differences in labor laws from state to state will still have a huge influence on a SMU's viability. That is not to say that SMU is untenable in the South or in states with less favorable labor laws, but this paper focused on SMU under Democratic state and city conditions.

Under the current political climate, more unions should move towards SMU or at least a highly involved rank and file, as it may be the best strategy for self-preservation against right-to-work laws. As Republicans hold the Presidency, and the majority in Congress and on the Supreme Court, the U.S. should prepare for national right-to-work law to come into effect, whether coming through Congress or the Supreme Court. Building a democratic union structure that encourages rank and file involvement and action will have a much easier time collecting dues than a service model. UTLA's recent 82% membership vote to increase dues by fifty

percent serves as a strong example of how an active membership is willing to pay into a union they believe in.

SMU can and has been used in the private sector and is still based on the model of rank and file involvement and making broader political change through grassroots organizing, but the coalition building and the strategy of pressuring employers operates very differently.

Negotiating with private capital instead of the state directly changes the dynamics of power between the worker and employer, in turn changing the kinds of demands and strategies necessary for reaching those goals. The healthcare sector, often operating through public and private partnerships would be a natural target for private sector SMU.

Despite the excitement around it, public sector SMU will probably not be the savior to labor's decline, but is cause for some potential optimism around revitalizing the labor movement and left politics in general. Public sector unions are not the most important targets in reviving labor as there has been little change in the total number of public sector employees over the past 50 years and public sector employees make up less than a fifth of the total workforce; the decline in union density came from the private sector.<sup>174</sup> A rise in public sector unions adopting SMU would not increase union density significantly, but because political demands of the union operate in the public discourse of local policy and therefore are a voice in the conflict over urban agenda, they could lay a section of foundation for emerging class-based politics.

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<sup>174</sup> Jake Rosenfeld, *What Unions No Longer Do* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014), 43.



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