Building Solidarity for 30 Years

Portland Jobs with Justice

EXHIBIT ESSAY

by Nikki Mandell

BUILDING SOLIDARITY for 30 Years: Portland Jobs with Justice is an exhibit co-sponsored by the Pacific Northwest Labor History Association (PNLHA) and Portland Jobs with Justice (JwJ). The exhibit offers a historical retrospective on one of the most significant workers’ rights organizations established during the late twentieth century. The Portland Jobs with Justice Papers, recently donated to the Oregon Historical Society’s (OHS) research library, provided the inspiration and historical record for the exhibit. Interviews conducted by the Oregon Labor Oral History Project, also held by OHS’s research library, complemented by new interviews specific to the exhibit, offered detail and insights into personal experiences and perspectives that often do not make it into written records. Professional historians, members of PNLHA, developed the exhibit as volunteer curators. Although not utilized for this exhibit, other labor-related collections at OHS — including a robust run of the proceedings of annual statewide AFL-CIO conventions, partial records of individual unions, scattered company records, Northwest Labor College papers, and the recently digitized Migrant Valley League photo collection — hold substantial history awaiting researchers who will incorporate their stories into the Oregon story.

Founded in 1991, Portland Jobs with Justice became a vibrant part of a new labor movement taking shape in localities across the country during the final decades of the twentieth century. These labor movement activists, frustrated by the inertia of long-established labor unions, sought to restore workers’ rights and build working-class power through worker-community alliances encompassing union and non-union workers and the general public. In line with this new labor strategy, JwJ’s founders and activists undertook campaign work on two fronts: supporting workers engaged in union organizing and contract campaigns; and collaborating with labor, faith, and social justice groups to further public policies for the common good. Within a decade, Portland JwJ contributed to remarkable successes on both fronts. Nevertheless, the transformative changes to which JwJ aspired proved elusive — the consequence of

THIS HANDCRAFTED RALLY FLYER was sent to unions and social justice groups and posted on bulletin boards in Portland. The image of working boys in the top half of the flyer, part of photographer Louis Hine’s early-twentieth-century exposé of child labor, connects the rally’s demand of “Jobs with Justice” to a time when a concerted mass movement ended some of that era’s most heinous forms of worker exploitation. The flyer’s creator, labor activist and Communications Workers of America vice-president Margaret Butler, was excited by the prospect of a new worker’s rights movement. When the rally sponsors failed to build on the enthusiasm around the June 1988 event, Butler joined with other local labor activists to establish a Portland chapter of Jobs with Justice.
increasing corporate power and, to a lesser extent, inertia within the larger labor movement. This essay delves more deeply into key aspects of this history than was possible in the limited space of the Building Solidarity for 30 Years exhibit.

1988: The morning’s chill had lifted, and the early June sun shone brightly as people streamed toward Portland’s Terry Schrunk Plaza for a noontime rally. Some walked the short distance from nearby offices while others arrived via public transit or private car. Some boarded chartered buses from as far away as Washington’s Puget Sound to join the downtown gathering. Balloons lent a festive air to the event, but the people were coming on serious business. Many wore union T-shirts or hats and carried signs that hinted at their purpose: “I work hard for Oregon,” “OPEU” (Oregon Public Employees Union), “Local 189 Demands Equity Pay,” “Teamsters,” “ILWU” (International Longshore and Warehouse Union), “On Strike,” “Jobs with Justice.” Some had attended the Oregon AFL-CIO convention earlier in the week. Others had learned of the rally through non-affiliated unions, religious groups, press conferences, newspaper announcements, and even hand-crafted flyers. The Northwest Labor Press reported that “some 1,200” people crowded into the city-block-sized plaza, nestled among city, county, federal, and commercial buildings.

The Portland rally was one of a number of similar events organized across the country that year by coalitions of labor, community, and faith groups. In Portland, as elsewhere, the goal was to reclaim workers’ rights and standard of living that had been deteriorating for a decade. Amidst chants of “Workers united will never be defeated” and “When do we want justice? Now!” rally-goers heard fiery speeches from local and national leaders. Tom Cunningham of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 49 told the crowd that his union “won’t give up” in its fight for higher pay for janitors working in downtown buildings. “This is a people’s issue,” he declared, “in which people are cleaning up multimillion-dollar buildings for a mere $3.50 to $4.00 an hour — and those are no jobs with justice.” Mike Draper of the Western Council of Industrial Workers, whose members had gone on strike three days earlier, described the unfair advantage enjoyed by employers: “It’s against the law for two companies to attempt to fix prices in this nation, but in the lumber industry we have 10 companies conspiring to hold down wages for workers.” The keynote speaker, Rev. Joseph Lowery of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, condemned the “fat cats” and “grasshoppers” who want to divide workers, declaring that “all work has dignity; no work is menial; menial is what the grasshoppers want to pay.” Lowery told listeners that they “must be giants to fight in the superbowl for jobs with justice.”

“Superbowl” probably understated the magnitude of problems facing American workers, and the fight was far from sport. Draper and striking woodworkers across the Pacific Northwest, for example, were trying to recoup deep wage and benefit cuts that Weyerhaeuser and other lumber companies had enforced at the end of a bitter contract strike two years earlier. This was a raw wound in the timber industry—dependent Pacific Northwest. Despite reporting an increase in year-over-year profits of more than 30 percent for the first half of 1986, Weyerhaeuser had demanded that its employees take wage and benefit cuts amounting to as much as 25 percent of their average pay. After five and a half difficult weeks on strike, and with an ultimatum that Weyerhaeuser would fire and replace them if they did not return to work on the company’s terms, woodworkers had grudgingly voted to accept a $4.00 per hour cut in wages and benefits, barely leavened by the promise of a complicated profit-sharing scheme and retention of some jobs. In the words of one woodworker: “We either take it, or someone else does.” Weyerhaeuser’s profits had more than doubled over the life of that two-year contract. In 1988, it was time to negotiate a new contract. As Bill Hubbell, president of the International Woodworkers of America, often put it, “in light of record profit years the last two years we felt certain there would be some social justice at the table with these employers but so far we haven’t seen any.”

Woodworkers were not the only ones demanding workplace justice during the 1980s. Pay cuts had become rampant despite soaring corporate profits, hitting workers in all sectors. Employers did not limit their demands to pay cuts. Many came to the contract bargaining table insisting on some combination of cuts in wages, benefits, job security, and working conditions, or the imposition of a two-tier system that remunerated and protected recent hires at substantially lower levels than those hired earlier. In marked contrast to decades of post–World War II contract negotiations, in which labor and management battled each other over the size of wage and benefit increases and workplace improvements, by the early 1980s, the name of the game was concession bargaining — that is, employers’ demanding ever-deeper pay cuts and fewer restraints on their power to dictate work conditions, while workers and their unions negotiated to lessen the severity of those cuts and loss of job protections. U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports in the early years of the decade offered a preview of the darker days to come. In 1980 and 1981, only 1 percent or fewer of all union contracts failed to provide some increase in pay over the life of the agreement. In 1982, 35 percent of all union contracts failed to provide an increase in pay over the life of the agreement.

Loss of benefits piled another layer of insecurity on top of stagnant or falling real wages. During the post-war heyday of union power, the majority of American workers, regardless of union status, had gained access to health insurance and pensions. Workplace-based health insurance
How American workers got left behind:
Actual wages compared to estimated increases if they had risen with productivity

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics—Productivity, Average Wage of Non-Supervisory Production Workers, Consumer Price Index

THE MID-1970s marked a turning point for the majority of American wage earners. Prior to that time, employers had generally passed on a portion of their firm’s productivity (increased output per worker hour) to their workers in the form of higher wages and increased benefits. Had this practice continued, workers’ average weekly earnings would have been nearly twice what they actually were in 2010. While U.S. companies withheld productivity earnings from their employees, they raised CEO compensation exponentially between the mid-1970s and 2010, from less than 30 to more than 200 times average worker pay. (Economic Policy Institute, “CEO Compensation Has Grown 940% Since 1978,” August 14, 2019, Table originally published in Eric Larson, 25 Years, 25 Voices: Jobs with Justice (Oakland, Calif.: PM Press, 2013), p. 2.)

Coverage peaked in about 1981, with 71 percent of all workers covered (ranging from a high of 79 percent for White men to a low of 55 percent for Hispanic women). Millions of workers lost this benefit over the course of the decade. By the time of the 1988 JwJ rallies, 62 percent of all workers were covered by workplace-based health insurance (ranging from a high of 70 percent for White men to a low of 47 percent for Hispanic men). Although fewer workers had ever had access to workplace-based pensions than to health insurance, as with health insurance, employers discontinued or withdrew from many of the pension plans they had funded. 11

The minimum wage, which would become a focal point of JwJ activism, was another indicator of this downward trend. Adjusting for inflation, the buying power of the minimum wage peaked in 1968. By 1982, it had lost almost 20 percent of its value, and by the time of the first Jobs with Justice rallies in 1988, the purchasing power of the minimum wage had declined by a full 30 percent from that 1968 peak. This trend continues to the present day. 12

Alongside the declining value of the minimum wage, an increasing number of jobs became available at the low end of the wage scale, particularly in the service and retail sectors that accounted for 75 percent of job growth in the 1980s. Economists Barry Bluestone and Bennett Harrison reported that almost half of new jobs created between 1979 and 1985 paid poverty-level wages. 13 It was possible to miss this development if one looked only at macro measures of the economy. In Oregon, for example, the growth in high-tech jobs in the Portland metro area largely masked stagnant wages in the declining timber industry in the central and southern parts of the state. 14 In Oregon, as in the rest of the country, disparities in income grew as the middle class was hollowed out.

This situation was decades in the making. Business interests’ efforts to end all restraints on their power (whether from government regulation or labor unions), a new wave of corporate-driven globalization (aided by supranational trade agreements and new technologies), the transition from a manufacturing-based industrial economy to a service- and finance-based economy, and organized labor’s unpreparedness for these mounting challenges brought the post-war dream of upward mobility crashing down. Whispers of a new Gilded Age would grow into a loud refrain in the early years of the new century. 15

Organized labor’s inability to stem the tide puzzled many. Working men, women, and children in virtually all sectors and regions of the country had fought their employers, the courts, and police for three-quarters of a century for fair treatment and the right to organize and join unions. Even during the darkest years, from the 1880s to the 1920s, when the courts declared unions to be illegal and workers lost many more battles than they won, an activist labor movement never gave up. Widespread suffering during the Great Depression of the 1930s brought new energy, purpose, and workers into the labor movement. In the face of this upswell, Congress enacted legislation, including the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (NLRA), that recognized and protected workers’ right to organize unions and required employers to bargain in good faith with those unions. 6 When employers defied the law, workers and their unions fought back with both long-standing weapons (pickets, strikes, and boycotts) and new ones afforded by the NLRA (filing charges of unfair labor practices against employers who were no longer able to call on federal troops to repress defiant workers). It would take the wartime demand for steady production — and labor’s leveraging of that national priority — before the federal government finally compelled major American employers (under penalty of losing wartime contracts) to adhere to the law. 77
The right to organize was a hard-fought first step, but not workers’ ultimate goal. Their goal was to improve the quality of their lives. Unions were the vehicle through which workers could join together and in solidarity press their demands. And, press they had. Union growth during and after World War II was a key reason that so many American workers, especially White men and their families, enjoyed a rising middle-class standard of living in the post-war decades. Although union membership topped out at 35 percent of the non-farm workforce in the mid-1950s, many non-union employers offered compensation equal to the union standard in order to attract the best workers. Union power did more than help raise blue- and pink-collar workers into the burgeoning middle class. Many unions played prominent roles in promoting civil rights legislation, equal pay laws, the Medicare and Medicaid programs, and laws to protect workplace safety and the environment. Whether they supported or abhorred unions, business and political leaders agreed that unions had political clout.

Despite these achievements, it was not all smooth-sailing. Although war-time enforcement of labor laws and popular support for labor unions compelled employers to recognize their workers’ unions and negotiate in good faith with those unions, business leaders worked assiduously to overturn the New Deal laws that required them to do so. Thus, at the very time that workers began to reap the rewards of decades of brutal, often deadly struggles, a well-organized business lobby counter-attacked with a campaign to roll back the laws that made those gains possible. Anti-union business leaders enjoyed a quick victory with the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947. Taft-Hartley was designed to cut the legs out from under the union movement. Passed over President Harry S. Truman’s veto, the most noteworthy provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act required union leaders to sign affidavits declaring that they were neither Communist Party members nor adherents to communist beliefs; granted states the power to prohibit union shops; excluded supervisors from union bargaining units; required that union recognition be certified through NLRB-supervised elections unless an employer waived this requirement; guaranteed employers virtually unlimited speech rights to oppose union organizing with no protection of speech rights for workers engaged in union organizing; prohibited the use of union dues for political activities; defined a number of union tactics to be illegal “unfair labor practices,” including mass picketing and secondary boycotts (supporting fellow workers by refusing to purchase or handle the products of the firm that is the subject of a strike); and granted the President of the United States, with court approval, the power to delay a strike and require federal mediation. Union leaders at the time referred to the Taft-Hartley Act as a “slave-labor act.”

The law’s impact was both immediate and enduring. Labor leaders who survived the Taft-Hartley anti-communist purges directed their energies away from growing the labor movement to consolidating their unions’ footholds and providing services to existing members. Over time, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), tasked with overseeing much of federal labor law, reinterpreted those laws in ways that allowed employers to exercise powers that the 1935 NLRA and wartime labor board decisions had disallowed. Frustration at the NLRB’s increasingly employer-friendly interpretations of labor law would become a key factor behind the founding of Jobs with Justice. Yet, as long as the U.S. economy enjoyed explosive growth, led by the most-unionized manufacturing and construction sectors, unions and their members remained a force to be reckoned with.

That economic and political calculus shifted during the 1970s, as European and Asian manufacturers challenged American industrial dominance. The very sectors where labor unions had achieved their greatest gains were the sectors that faced the greatest challenges from abroad. Corporate leaders responded in a number of ways, not least of which was to embark on a new round of attacks on unions and their members. Employers began hiring a newly sophisticated generation of union-busting consultants (referred to as union avoidance consultants by employers) who introduced a panoply of tactics to weaken existing unions and to prevent new union organizing — threatening plant closures, demanding contract concessions, requiring workers to attend anti-union propaganda meetings, and firing workers they suspected of union sympathies. The NLRB response to worker complaints did nothing to dissuade employers from deploying such tactics; when the NLRB did not outright allow one or another version of these practices, it imposed such minor penalties that employers benefited more from violating the law than following it.

In the face of this onslaught, most unions doubled down on protecting their current members. While this seemed necessary to many, others in the labor movement saw this as a manifestation of deeper problems. An initial explosion of discontent blew up around the lack of union transparency and democracy, and in reaction to union failures to address the civil rights and equity demands of their Black and female members. Some pursued redress through internal union caucuses, such as Teamsters for a Democratic Union, founded in 1976; some sought to revitalize the labor movement by connecting rank-and-file militants through a new publication, Labor Notes, and associated conferences started in 1979; while others created new organizations dedicated to changing the labor movement to meet the needs of marginalized workers, such as the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists and the Coalition of Labor Union Women, founded in 1972 and 1974, respectively.

Many of these developments took place outside public view, the result of both union and corporate efforts...
not to air uncomfortable truths and of a consolidating media increasingly prone to casting business as job creators and organized labor as passé at best and disruptive to the consumer economy at worst. It was not until the PATCO (Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization) strike of 1981 that many of these trends became topics of public debate. In August 1981, following months of stalled contract negotiations between their union and the Federal Aviation Administration, 13,000 air traffic controllers went on strike. Two days later, President Reagan fired more than 11,000 of the striking PATCO workers. As historian Joseph McCartin notes, this strike captured the “attention of the nation like no other labor conflict of the post–World War II era.”

A growing body of scholarship leaves little doubt that the forces at play in the PATCO strike were not new. Workers’ persistent efforts to join unions and bargain good contracts had been stymied time and again by a powerful anti-union movement, aided by governments’ reinterpretation of labor laws in ways that advantaged employers. The PATCO strike was a turning point to the extent that it shone a very bright light on this imbalance of power. The president’s action further emboldened employers and gave greater urgency and legitimacy to voices within the labor movement that had been demanding more robust activism.

Even before the PATCO debacle, labor activists had begun experimenting with new forms of worker organization capable of confronting ever-more-empowered employers. After PATCO, new labor organizations increasingly took the form of worker-community coalitions dedicated to empowering workers and to pressuring businesses, governments, and the general public to respect workers’ rights to dignity, security, and a full share in the nation’s wealth. Appealing for community support was not an entirely new strategy. It has long been crucial to labor struggles, dating as far back as the nineteenth-century labor uprisings that brought local communities into the streets and extending to the boycotts of the 1960s and 1970s that built national communities in support of farm- and garment-worker unions. In contrast to long-standing tradition, however, proponents of this “new labor movement” did not limit themselves to achieving union recognition or collectively bargained contracts, and did not measure success by membership numbers or dues collected. Immigrant and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) workers were in the forefront of the new labor organizations, which today range in scope from local workers centers to nationwide networks. Pinosos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN), established in 1985, is an Oregon-specific example of this type of organization. Other examples, with national as well as local presence, are the National Day Laborers Organizing Network, and the Fight for $15 (campaigns to raise the minimum wage to fifteen dollars per hour).

Jobs with Justice was one of these early new labor movement organizations. It was the brainchild of Larry Cohen, Organizing Director of the Communications Workers of America (CWA), and fellow union activists who could no longer ignore the failure of labor laws to protect workers or the failures of unions to mount an effective response. The immediate precipitant was the disastrous outcome of an initially successful CWA organizing campaign in 1986. The employer, telecommunications giant MCI, thwarted a National Labor Relations Board–supervised representation election by suddenly relocating a Michigan call center and dismissing the workers just weeks before the election — a clear violation of labor law. The NLRB did nothing, in effect aiding and abetting MCI’s union-busting. While the MCI campaign stood as an example of what was not working, the SEIU’s Justice for Janitors campaign in Denver offered a hopeful alternative. In response to a similar employer action (dismissing directly employed union janitors and contracting cleaning to a non-union firm), SEIU decided to bypass NLRB elections in favor of building worker-community coalitions to bring direct pressure on the building owners to recognize the union. It worked. The success of the Denver Justice for Janitors campaign in 1987 highlighted the potential of worker-community coalitions and sparked similar campaigns in other cities, including Portland.

That summer, Jobs with Justice’s founding convention, supported by a number of AFL-CIO unions and with more than 10,000 in attendance, was held in conjunction with CWA’s annual convention in Miami. In a clear sign of the new organization’s goals and methods, convention-goers gained JwJ membership by signing “I’ll Be There” pledge cards, promising to show up at least five times a year for someone else’s fight, as well as their own. They quickly acted on this solidarity pledge, holding a mass picket in support of workers on strike against the local NBC affiliate, and joining 3,000 Eastern Airlines mechanics on their Miami picket lines. These actions only scratched the surface of JwJ’s vision.

Jobs with Justice’s founders wanted to foster grassroots solidarity coalitions across the country. Their plan was for local coalitions, guided by steering committees, to set their own agendas, while JwJ national would offer forums where coalitions could learn from one another, provide research and other materials to support local campaigns, and leverage the network in national campaigns around shared concerns and policy initiatives. The larger goal was to build a broad-based, activist labor movement by refoCUSing established unions from servicing their members to organizing workers and allies to demand good jobs for all.

The sizable turnout at Portland’s 1988 Jobs with Justice rally testified to both the pent-up frustration felt by many workers and the excitement generated by the rallying cry of “jobs with justice.” An estimated 300 people signed Jobs with Justice pledge cards during the mid-day gathering, but there did not seem to be a plan for re-connecting with pledge signers or building on the crowd’s enthusiasm. Over the next few years, some of
THE “I’LL BE THERE” PLEDGE distinguished JwJ from other new labor groups, both as the signifier of membership and as the commitment members made to actively participate in labor struggles. Fulfilling the solidarity pledge could mean joining a picket line, testifying at a legislative hearing, choosing to join a civil disobedience action, gathering petition signatures, or allying with a diverse array of civil rights and social justice actions. This pledge card is from about 1988.

PORTLAND JOBS WITH JUSTICE
STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

Portland JOBS with JUSTICE is a coalition of labor and community organizations defending workers' rights: the right to a decent standard of living, the right to job security, and the right to organize.

JOBS with JUSTICE is based on direct action: people making a pledge to support each others' struggles. We will focus on abuse of civil rights and the struggles of exploited workers and their communities, especially people of color, immigrants and women. “An injury to one is an injury to all.”

Through united action, we can win justice for all!

A SMALL GROUP gathered on a houseboat on the Willamette River in 1991 and hammered out this “statement of purpose.” Their agenda was: workplace rights, including support for union organizing and contract bargaining campaigns; social justice, including advocating for unions and governments to address society-wide issues affecting workers, from living wages to immigrant rights, health care, racism, and climate change; and direct action, including mobilizing those who had signed the JwJ pledge to come out for actions and take on volunteer tasks to build momentum and worker power.
the organizers stepped up to plan local events connected to national campaigns, including a Health Care Day of Action in 1990. By the spring of 1991 these local activists, in collaboration with the Labor Committee of the local Rainbow Coalition, decided that “building an ongoing Jobs with Justice coalition would help all of us in our struggles.”

The first few years of building that coalition were hectic and exhilarating. As one of the founders recalled, “we wanted people to represent organizations as much as possible, but we just invited everybody who was organizing or wanted to organize or wanted to do something real in the labor movement to come.”

Local unions provided important support. Oregon AFL-CIO urged members to take the solidarity pledge. CWA Local 7901 reassigned Harold Brookins to devote ten hours a week to JwJ work. Within a few years, hundreds signed the signature JwJ “I’ll Be There” pledge. Pledge volunteers undertook a wide range of tasks, from communications to event organizing to building relations with coalition partners.

One of the young organization’s early mobilizations took place in support of Fred Meyer workers. When contract negotiations broke down between the workers’ union (United Food and Commercial Workers local 555) and Fred Meyer, JwJ members joined the picket- and check-out lines to talk to customers about the key issue of seniority rights for full-time workers. After eighty-eight days on strike, workers negotiated a contract protecting full-time work. Sensing strong community support for their contributions to the workers’ victory, JwJ activists decided it was time to create a more sustainable structure. They strengthened alliances with established unions, raised funds from grants and unions, and moved from an organization where decisions were made by an all-volunteer committee-of-the-whole to an organization with a small paid staff and more formal decision-making structures.

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) lent a small office, phone line, and mailing address to this build up. Although grateful, JwJ’s group of scrappy activists did not feel, and did not act, beholden to the established labor unions. “We wanted to spread the gospel of organizing and mobilizing members and creating a strong labor movement,” recalled founder Margaret Butler. “At the time we started the Jobs with Justice chapter, that wasn’t necessarily that popular yet. Now most people will at least pay lip service to those other ideas, even if they don’t implement them.”

As the decade and century came to a close, Portland Jobs with Justice JwJ ENCOURAGED SOLIDARITY pledgers to be active volunteers. Opportunities abounded. Solidarity pledgers could join mailing parties almost every month. During the pre-internet era, they sent brightly colored reminder postcards to inform fellow pledgers of both the issue at hand and the time and place to “show up” for someone else’s fight.
reported more than 1,500 individual solidarity pledgers and close to 60 organizational members. JwJ national counted 40 local affiliates across the country, including 3 others in Oregon (Eugene-Springfield, Central Oregon, and Southern Oregon). Portland JwJ was one of four “leadership coalitions,” a classification indicating “a stable, effective coalition with the capacity to win its own fights, [and to] mobilize decisive support on behalf of local and national solidarity efforts.” According to national JwJ reports, in 2000 and 2001, the Portland chapter engaged in more of those fights than any other chapter in the country. At its twentieth anniversary in 2011, Portland JwJ reported more than 3,500 individual pledgers and over 90 organizational members. Nationally, there were more than 45 coalitions, including the 4 in Oregon.

The goal, of course, was not simply to amass numbers but to use those numbers to build a movement to restore workers’ rights and build a more equitable society. Portland JwJ staff and volunteers pursued this goal on two fronts: union campaigns and common good campaigns. The first, to which they decided to dedicate 60 percent of their capacity, entailed supporting workers who were engaged in union organizing and in collective bargaining contract campaigns. This took many forms, ranging from mobilizing solidarity pledgers to show up for informational and strike pickets led by unions caught in contentious contract bargaining to behind-the-scenes advising and mentoring with workers trying to form a union or induce their union leaders to be more proactive.

Most Portland JwJ actions entailed some form of creative street theater, and some included carefully planned civil disobedience. For example, activists invaded a Lewis & Clark College Board of Trustees luncheon in support of a janitors organizing campaign. In addition to the camaraderie and creativity involved, these kinds of actions purposefully drew attention in order to engage and thereby educate the public and pressure business and political leaders to meet their demands. It was common for leadership and pledgers to be involved in multiple campaigns at the same time, often more than a dozen a year. Portland JwJ reported almost forty distinct workplace-struggle actions on its 2003 Solidarity Calendar, and the same number again in 2004, with actions supporting workers ranging from nurses to communication workers, janitors, store clerks, and fast food and factory workers, among others.

The Powell’s Books campaign stands as one of Portland JwJ’s most important and memorable efforts. JwJ’s multi-year involvement, from 1999 to 2004, was a model of the JwJ approach to building a mass workers’ rights movement. It began when a handful of Powell’s employees asked JwJ how they could go about forming a union. JwJ staff and volunteers collaborated with the workers for several years, initially by connecting them to established unions and urging them to seek affiliation with a union compatible with their goals. Powell’s worker leaders chose ILWU and ultimately organized as ILWU Local 5. The JwJ team advised and mentored the new leaders on organizing strategy and actions and mobilized JwJ solidarity pledgers to show up, repeatedly, in support of Powell’s workers. JwJ also led direct actions both inside and outside the store, something that employees could not do, and held press conferences that elevated workers’ voices and built strong community support for them. For the Powell’s campaign, JwJ organized the first Portland-area Workers’ Rights Board (WRB) hearing, whose distinguished panel of political, academic, faith, and cultural leaders gave further legitimacy to concerns raised by workers who testified. Powell’s workers won their union representation election, and JwJ continued to show up for them, helping ensure that they actually got a first
ON THIS DAY in the spring of 2000, JwJ entertained and educated the crowd with a performative marriage between giant puppets of Powell’s owner Michael Powell and an ILWU namesake Larry Longshore. This was one of many large rallies outside Powell’s Books.

AFTER POWELL’S WORKERS voted to be represented by ILWU 5, owner Michael Powell refused to consider a union security clause. (Unions are required by law to represent all workers in a bargaining unit; a union security clause ensures that those employees are either dues-paying members or pay an agency fee to cover union representation.) JwJ organized this hearing of a Workers’ Rights Board (WRB) to shine a light on Powell’s failure to bargain in good faith as required by labor law. The panel, including State Representative Diane Rosenbaum as chair (center), listened to testimony from Powell’s workers. A few hours before the public hearing, Powell called members of the WRB to say that he was ready to talk. The hearing proceeded, and Powell met with WRB members shortly thereafter, acknowledging that he would have to agree to a union security clause. Both sides reached a tentative agreement at the next round of negotiations.

JwJ ORGANIZED PLEDGERS and allies for a flash mob and solidarity serenade featuring custom-written lyrics for “Don’t Be Cruel” during this 2004 Valentine’s Day action inside Powell’s Books.
contract and a second one three years later, when negotiations bogged down over healthcare costs. In his study of the Powell’s organizing campaign, historian Ryan Wisnor concluded that “ultimately, Jobs with Justice proved crucial in harnessing and directing the community support, acting as the new union’s most important local partner and conduit to sympathetic organizations and individuals.” In their first contract, the workers’ new union, ILWU Local 5, negotiated pay increases of close to 20 percent over the life of the contract along with improvements in healthcare and a formal grievance process.42

After launching its first WRB in the 2000 Powell’s contract campaign, Portland JwJ continues to employ the strategy in both contract and community-wide campaigns. This innovative strategy, pioneered by the Vermont chapter seven years earlier, was spreading slowly across the JwJ network. Local chapters convened a WRB when a particular labor struggle or workforce condition was at an impasse that could benefit from outside intervention, as was the case when Michael Powell (owner of Powell’s Books) refused to consider a union security clause or to meet with community leaders seeking to resolve the deadlock. WRBs are never a first strategy, instead signifying a long-simmering stalemate. The most recent WRB convened in March 2021 to hear complaints from Providence Hospital nurses and staff that their employer was not providing adequate safeguards or release time in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.43

After the Powell’s victory, national JwJ often called on Portland staff and volunteers to give talks and trainings on organizing and convening WRBs. WRBs are composed of local educators, legal and medical professionals, politicians, faith leaders, business representatives, and other community leaders whose reputations “give moral support and public visibility” to the issue at hand. The boards investigate workers’ complaints, meet with workers and employers, hold public hearings and press conferences, and support policies protecting community labor standards and workers’ rights to organize. Portland JwJ works with its coalition partners, union leaders, pledgers, and WRB members to identify and invite people to join the WRB.44 More than a hundred people have served on WRBs over the years, with five to ten members serving on each board.45

THE PORTLAND RISING BUS TOUR also stopped at the Multnomah County office building in Southeast Portland, in support of AFSCME Local 88’s contract campaign. Here, bus tour participants are preparing to join the union’s call-in to county commissioners. The bus tours offer an example of how JwJ combined fun and creativity with serious business to educate, energize, and build camaraderie.

PORTLAND RISING, a committee of JwJ, learned in 2011 that a number of union contracts were coming up for renewal at the same time. They innovated a new solidarity-building strategy: a bus tour to bring local unionists and their allies to each other’s worksites. The idea was so popular that Portland Rising conducted two bus tours. At each stop, people poured out of the buses to hear from and stand in solidarity with fellow workers who were typically siloed from one another in different unions. Here, the Portland Rising Bus Tour visits the Oregon state office building in downtown Portland in support of the SEIU 503 contract campaign. The array of colorful union T-shirts and other regalia reveals the diversity of workers and unions who were showing up for each other’s fight.
on any given WRB. This is labor-intensive volunteer work, requiring considerable background preparation and quiet efforts to resolve a situation, and if still needed, to arrange for testimony at public hearings, schedule press conferences, and follow through to a desired resolution.

While Portland JwJ devoted enormous efforts to workplace campaigns, JwJ’s expansive vision of workers’ rights and a more equitable society called for action on a second front as well — advocating for public policies that benefit the community as a whole. JwJ’s common good campaigns addressed issues that directly affected working people but were not specific to workplace or even geography. Affordable health care was, and continues to be, one such issue. Most chapters, including Portland JwJ, coordinated their common good campaigns with initiatives promoted by national JwJ. This offered a number of advantages. National JwJ provided research reports, talking points, and campaign materials that would have been beyond the financial capacity and personnel of largely volunteer-run local chapters. By coordinating these campaigns, JwJ leveraged local efforts into national campaigns that attracted greater publicity, raised public awareness, and thereby built pressure for change.

FOR MANY YEARS, Portland JwJ published multi-page reports after each Workers’ Rights Board hearing, carefully explaining the issues and facts in the case, reporting worker testimony, and making recommendations for resolving the situation. On the left is the report from the WRB hearing on “The High Cost of Low Wage Temporary Work in Portland,” and on the right is the report on the 2002 “Hearing on Quality Patient Care and Collective Bargaining for Nurses at Providence Milwaukie Hospital.”

JwJ HEALTH CARE ACTION DAYS in 1990, 1991, and 1992 contributed to the public pressure that made affordable health care a major issue in the 1992 election and beyond. Future founders of Portland Jobs with Justice had organized a Health Care Action rally the year before they established the local chapter, and continued to do so in subsequent years, including to the present day. Jobs with Justice hosted a Health Care Community forum in 2006 and a Single Payer conference in 2011, which was attended by 500 people. The big nurse at the head of this Health Care for All march sports a "single payer" button.

Local JwJ chapters decided whether and how they would participate in common good campaigns on the national agenda and might also launch common good campaigns on their own initiative, in contrast to workplace campaigns, in which workers or unions reached out to JwJ for support. It was rare, however, for JwJ to be the only sponsor. As a solidarity movement, JwJ chapters partnered with labor, faith, social justice, and other community groups working on the same common-good issue. As the issues changed, the coalition partners changed. In addition to universal, affordable healthcare, Portland JwJ has persistently advocated for immigrant rights and against trade agreements that do not include meaningful worker safety, right to organize, and environmental protections. Its living wage campaigns had the greatest success and most far-reaching impact.

If the Powell’s organizing campaign was a model of JwJ activism and movement building on the workplace front, the living wage campaign was the counterpart on the common good front. Like so many common good campaigns, the
JWJ LEADERS UNDERSTOOD that immigrant rights, workers’ rights, and racial equity are inseparable. Over the years, Portland Jobs with Justice has worked in coalition with local immigrant rights groups to demand equal workplace protection, to oppose guest worker legislation that enables exploitation, and to demand an end to raids by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Portland JwJ worked in coalition with the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) among other groups. Basking in the glow of the 1994 victory with UFCW 555 and Fred Meyer workers, Portland JwJ embraced the living wage campaign with fervor. Leadership believed a living wage was an essential element of what JwJ called a “sustainable economy.” In 1995 Portland JwJ helped build a diverse coalition of labor, civil rights, and social justice groups in support of a package of pro-worker bills introduced by State Representative Avel Gordly and other legislators. Number one on the list was an increase in the state minimum wage, which equaled the federal minimum in both nominal value and plummeting real value. None of the bills received a hearing; none made it out of committee.45

Frustrated, but undaunted, leadership decided to take the campaign to the people with a statewide initiative to raise the minimum wage. Portland JwJ led the Living Wage Coalition in organizing a grassroots campaign to qualify the initiative for the November 1996 ballot, holding multiple trainings for petition gatherers and speakers, and mobilizing union members and solidarity pledgers to join the effort.46 Organizers staged rallies and ratcheted up a civil disobedience campaign at Tony Roma’s restaurant to challenge restaurateur opposition and draw media attention to the ballot initiative. (Tony Roma owner Harold Pollin sued, and JwJ agreed to stop actions at his restaurant.) Unions eventually threw their weight and resources into the petition signature-gathering campaign, which easily qualified for the ballot. Oregon voters approved Measure 36 by a comfortable margin, with 57 percent voting yes, setting in motion three annual increases that raised the minimum hourly wage from $4.75 in 1996 to $6.00 in 1998, the highest minimum wage in the nation (although still below the poverty line for a family of three). State economists determined that Measure 36 increased wages for more than 150,000 workers and raised starting wages for as many as half of those leaving public assistance (welfare) for paid work.47

In the midst of the statewide campaign, Portland JwJ activists also turned their attention to their own locale, where the urban cost of living far exceeded the wages proposed by the statewide initiative. They brought more community groups into the Living Wage Coalition and began an intensive campaign for a city ordinance to raise the minimum wage that city service contractors would be required to pay their employees, and to require those contractors to provide benefits and union organizing protection. The city council unanimously approved a narrowed version of the Portland JwJ ordinance in the spring of 1998. Janitors, security guards, and parking attendants saw their hourly wages increase from seven dollars to eight dollars over the course of two years and also received basic health insurance. JwJ monitored and kept the pressure on city government to enforce contractor compliance, and at the end of two years, the coalition
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JwJ JOINED LABOR ORGANIZATIONS across the country to oppose international trade agreements that do not protect workers’ right to organize, worker safety, the environment, and public health. In one of its largest mobilizations, the Portland chapter organized 600 people to join the anti–World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle in 1999 after holding a WTO teach-in in Portland the previous week. In subsequent years, JwJ organized marches and rallies in Portland in continued opposition to WTO policies, Senate fast-tracking trade agreement approval, and a string of regional free trade agreements with nations in the Americas and Asia. The JwJ-led anti–free trade march in Portland on International Human Rights Day in December 2005, pictured here, drew more than 3,000 participants.

succeededly advocated for a further raise to $9.50 per hour.48

JwJ’s coalition work required constant and thoughtful attention. Labor unions are not monolithic; each has a distinct culture, structure, and relationship to the economy that can make it difficult to partner, or even put it at odds, with other unions and workers’ rights groups. Bringing social justice, faith, and other community groups into the mix added to the collective voice, but also added to the complexity of JwJ’s coalition work. From the national to the local level, Jobs with Justice chapters sought relationships with as wide a network of unions and community groups as possible.

Portland JwJ adopted practices that ensured a regular dialogue with local labor leaders and activists. Some of these practices are structural,

UNDER INTENSE PRESSURE from the Living Wage Coalition, which organized a grassroots campaign, Multnomah County Commissioners adopted a living wage ordinance matching the city’s standard in the fall of 1998 and, in 2000, created a Living Wage Review Board to monitor and recommend changes to the living wage rate. Here, a member of the Living Wage Coalition delivers a petition with 4,000 signatures to county commissioners at a public forum attended by 150 people in February 1998. In her official statement announcing the Living Wage Resolution in 1998, Multnomah County Chair Beverly Stein declared “I want to thank the Living Wage campaign activists who kept this issue on the front burner. They collected thousands of petition signatures and held a large public meeting.” (NW Labor Press, February 20, 1998, p. 1)
such as the JwJ Steering Committee, which has served as JwJ’s primary governing body since the mid 1990s. Member organizations are eligible to appoint a representative to the Steering Committee. At monthly meetings, Steering Committee members report on developments in their organizations, and the group makes decisions about which campaigns JwJ will support and what type of support it will provide. Beyond the practical business of decision-making, hearing from fellow committee members is an important way for JwJ leadership and member organizations to stay apprised of the workers’ rights landscape — to learn of brewing issues, strategize over common concerns, and work through conflicting perspectives. Over the years, JwJ staff and volunteer leaders deepened this type of member networking by meeting with union leaders and activists and by attending, and sometimes speaking at, union and other affiliated organization meetings. Social activities have offered a less formal, but equally important, way for JwJ to build relationships with the strength to draw members into coalition work. Action alert postcard mailing parties (in the pre-internet era), T.G.I.F. (Thank Goodness It’s Friday) get-togethers at a local tavern, and annual Grinch- and later Scrooge-of-the-Year parties honoring “bad bosses who went above and beyond” contributed to what a former JwJ staffer recalled as a “culture of camaraderie.” These social events emphasized fun and fostered friendships that encouraged people to support each other and helped prevent contentious situations from growing into permanent rifts.

Faith Labor Breakfasts, initiated in 2003, offer a particularly fruitful example of how social activities foster a culture of camaraderie, which in turn enhances JwJ’s workers’ rights activism. Well over a hundred people, drawn from both the faith and labor communities, attend this annual event. In typical JwJ fashion, multiple partners co-sponsor the breakfasts. The invitation for the 2014 breakfast, for example, was signed by the JwJ Faith Labor Committee, the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, and the Northwest Oregon Labor Council. JwJ’s Faith Labor Committee organizes the breakfasts to build understanding and friendships among people hailing from different groups. Organizers seat an equal number of faith and labor leaders at each table, initiate conversation with a provocative icebreaker, invite a speaker or panel as well as table conversation on the year’s theme, and, of course, provide tasty food. The breakfasts have helped foster a network within the local faith community that advocates for workers’ rights in a number of ways, from joining marches in support of workplace campaigns to serving on WRBs to urging officeholders to pass protective labor laws. Those relationships also drew JwJ into the church-based Sanctuary Movement following the arrest of more than a hundred workers in a 2007 immigration raid at a local Del Monte plant. Reflecting on the significance of these relationships, Faith Labor Committee member Jean Eilers noted that “many times in the labor struggle, we...
need the faith community to call forth the justice part.”54

While JwJ has generally enjoyed consensus among its constituent members, leaders developed an organizational practice to acknowledge areas of real or potential disagreement and, then, to proactively find mutually satisfactory ways to move forward. Often, this process took time. Sometimes, members reached only an agreement to disagree, with one or more groups withholding support for a campaign or action. JwJ purposely refrained from openly criticizing or calling out those in the labor movement with whom it disagreed. Its response to the 2005 eruption in the AFL-CIO, which saw the federation’s largest unions leave to form the Change to Win federation, exemplifies one way that JwJ navigated the challenges of coalition work. As talk of a split within the AFL-CIO grew louder in the months leading up to the federation’s annual convention, national Jobs with Justice issued a statement of Unity Principles that explicitly identified the “current crises” as a time to “reafﬁrm” its core principles, beginning with “Coalition Building.” The statement declared: “We will continue to work with any and all organizations that support these principles.”55 Portland JwJ fully embraced this approach. Months before the split, Executive Director Margaret Butler met with local union leaders to assure them that JwJ “WILL NOT TAKE SIDES” — with the all-caps statement in Steering Committee minutes reﬂecting the vehemence of local JwJ sentiment.56 State and local labor leaders welcomed the message, as they wanted to continue an inter-union alliance that had yielded a number of political successes.57 Thus, despite the conflict among national labor leaders, Portland JwJ moved ahead with plans for a massive coalition-led rally scheduled for just a few months after the split. (See image of the December 2005 anti-WTO march above.)

Portland JwJ leaders understood that some of the most challenging issues would not be resolved by statements of principle, no matter how emphatically delivered. In those cases, JwJ turned to its controversial issues process. That process included pre-emptively acknowledging the potential for disagreement, checking in with all stakeholders to better understand their perspectives, and not moving forward with planning or decision-making until the issue had been fully vetted and there was consensus among JwJ members. That vetting and consensus-building often took place at Steering Committee meetings. In the aftermath of the 2003 Portland police killing of Kendra James, for example, JwJ leaders wanted to join the call for police accountability. Because they were unsure how JwJ members, particularly unions, would feel about wading into this new area of activism, the leadership sent a letter explaining the rationale, surveyed member organizations, and gave months of advance notice before putting the issue on the Steering Committee agenda. When the issue came up for a discussion and vote, the Steering Committee confidently approved adding police accountability to its common good agenda, a policy Portland JwJ continues to advocate to the present day.54

The controversial issues process effectively broadened constituent members’ understanding of how public policies affected working people, and thus what constituted a workers’ rights issue. JwJ also used public forums to serve this purpose. JwJ leaders designed public forums to be educational events with broad appeal to constituent members and allies. They were always careful that these events had multiple union co-sponsors and that forum programs included both research-based information and plenty of opportunities for discussion, airing of different perspectives, and self-reflection. They frequently featured nationally renowned speakers and typically drew hundreds of attendees. Public forums focused on police accountability in 2004, healthcare in 2006 and 2011, and immigration in 2008 and 2013.55

WHEN THE GREAT RECESSION STRUCK in 2008, Jobs with Justice turned its educational attention to the economic crises, mobilizing more than two dozen unions and community groups to co-sponsor a public forum. The day’s program sought to “look beyond the bailout” and toward building an economy in which all can thrive. Talks by labor journalist David Bacon and a number of university scholars set the groundwork for over a dozen workshops on topics ranging from the Oregon economy to international free trade agreements, building a green economy, uniting across racial and ethnic divides, and more (reported in Street Roots on January 29, 2009, and Northwest Labor Press on January 16, 2009, as well as folder 3, box 33 of the JwJ collection). JwJ staffer Laurie King speaks at the JwJ-organized Economic Town Hall, at the First Unitarian Church in Portland in 2009 to an estimated 900 attendees.
The public forums on immigration issues, like the police accountability work, were part of JwJ’s larger anti-racist work. Portland JwJ founders had incorporated civil rights into the chapter’s original statement of purpose, no doubt heavily influenced by the fact that a number of them were active in Jesse Jackson’s Rainbow Coalition and doing solidarity work in support of Central American workers and campesinos. Anti-racism was a regular topic of conversation at annual planning retreats and monthly board meetings. As expressed in the chapter’s 1999 priorities, key organizational objectives were to “make JwJ actively and publicly an anti-racist organization” and to “clearly prioritize struggles of communities of color.” As it took shape in the late 1990s and the first decade of the new century, this anti-racist agenda was both inward- and outward-looking.

JwJ’s inward-looking anti-racist agenda had two components: building skills of its White leaders, pledgers, and coalition members to understand how White privilege functions; and proactively inviting individuals and communities of color into meaningful leadership roles. Although never as successful as they hoped, JwJ leaders made noteworthy strides on both fronts. Beginning in 1999 and episodically over the next decade, leadership and staff participated in a series of anti-racist workshops through Western States Center, formed a “white people eliminating racism” caucus, and developed a White privilege questionnaire for internal leadership and discussion with JwJ committees and organizational members. In 2018 and 2019, JwJ hosted annual Person of Color Leadership in Organizing workshops.

At the same time, JwJ actively pursued the second component of its inward-looking anti-racist agenda, building a racially diverse leadership team. From the moment of its founding, Portland JwJ’s leadership has always included people of color — as founders, co-chairs of the Executive Committee, as Steering Committee members, and often as staff. Some have moved in and out of JwJ leadership roles at the behest of their union or other member organization (such as Steering Committee members who are selected by JwJ’s member organizations). Others joined JwJ as a result of relationships that started when JwJ turned out to support their groups’ struggles. In many cases, JwJ support for other people’s struggles led to enduring friendships and trust. Where they earned the trust of community leaders of color, JwJ would ask them to serve in JwJ leadership positions. This had the beneficial effect of continually refreshing JwJ’s leadership circles with new voices and perspectives, as, for example, when JwJ joined the campaign to establish the VOZ Workers Education Project and workers’ center in the mid 2000s and leaders of that campaign joined the JwJ Executive Committee.

This intentional outreach made it possible for JwJ to partially overcome the demographic imbalances in a region (Portland metropolitan area) and among constituencies (unions and social justice groups) in which the population was so overwhelmingly White. It has been more challenging, however, for JwJ to estab-

JwJ LEADERS set goals and delineated concrete steps for building anti-racist practices into all facets of their work. Internal discussions, as reported in meeting minutes, reveal an ongoing commitment to, and frustration with, progress on this front. Internal organizational change did not materialize as leadership desired. JwJ, however, realized its goal of outreach to and support for campaigns involving communities of color. This internal document from 2001 outlines both the inward- and outward-facing actions as well as accountability procedures for monitoring and assessing the outcomes.
lish itself as the first priority or affiliation for labor activists of color, whose commitments to their own unions and community organizations make significant demands on their time.

The challenges of retaining people of color in JwJ leadership positions highlighted the importance of JwJ’s commitment to going out to support communities of color in their struggles. This outward-looking work reveals JwJ’s understanding that being an anti-racist organization required taking action against policies and practices that uphold and perpetuate racial inequities. This was a natural fit for an anti-racist organization founded on the pledge of communities of color in their struggles.

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Since its founding thirty years ago, Portland JwJ has made a concrete difference in many thousands of workers’ lives. Many saw increases in their wages and benefits or avoided painful concession cuts. Some gained or retained union representation and the protections that a union contract affords. Others felt validated by the support of a labor community that showed up for their fight, even when they lost. Thousands of union members and labor allies showed up at marches, rallies, public meetings, WRB hearings, and other actions to learn about or demand public policies that build dignity and a decent standard of living for all. Local campaigns for the common good contributed to the momentum that expanded access to healthcare, challenged free-trade agreements lacking in labor and environmental protections, made the Fight for $15 conceivable, and reconnected labor rights to immigrant rights.

Disparities in wealth have grown to historic proportions, and employers routinely violate workers’ legal rights to organize and collectively bargain their working conditions. The solidarity movement that JwJ envisioned has not yet materialized. Despite the thousands who have signed the “I’ll Be There” five times pledge, the turnout for Action Alert events, now distributed via e-mail as a weekly Solidarity Calendar, is often lackluster. The “fire and spirit” of the movement’s early decades is no longer evident. The culture of worker solidarity and robust activism, including nonviolent direct action, that Portland JwJ tried to bring to local labor unions has not produced the vibrant movement those early organizers envisioned.

Portland JwJ leaders struggled with this conundrum throughout the organization’s history. From its earliest years, they debriefed actions and campaigns at monthly leadership meetings and reviewed detailed participation reports at annual retreats. They debated and strategized how to fully speak out, and pressure business owners and government leaders to take actions they were not inclined to take. Victories in the 1990s built camaraderie and organizing skills, and expanded the coalition. This was more than a local story. Portland JwJ became an important leader in the national JwJ coalition, which featured this local chapter at annual conferences, in newsletters, and in regional trainings.

Yet three decades on, more Americans are working low-wage, precarious jobs than when JwJ was founded. Disparities in wealth have grown to historic proportions, and employers routinely violate workers’ legal rights to organize and collectively bargain their working conditions. The solidarity movement that JwJ envisioned has not yet materialized. Despite the thousands who have signed the “I’ll Be There” five times pledge, the turnout for Action Alert events, now distributed via e-mail as a weekly Solidarity Calendar, is often lackluster. The “fire and spirit” of the movement’s early decades is no longer evident. The culture of worker solidarity and robust activism, including nonviolent direct action, that Portland JwJ tried to bring to local labor unions has not produced the vibrant movement those early organizers envisioned.

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just voted to form the first-in-the-nation union of state-level legislative staff. Demands for a decent standard of living for all and for rein in runaway inequality are growing louder once again. Portland Jobs with Justice is reasserting its future, as well as its past. It is not the only labor organization asking: What does it take to build power for working people?

NOTES

1. Nikki Mandell, PhD., Professor of History, emerita, University of Wisconsin–Whitewater, and Laurie Mercier PhD., Claudius O. and Mary W. Johnson Distinguished Professor of History, Washington State University-Vancouver served as exhibit curators. Margaret Butler, Portland Jobs with Justice (JwJ) co-founder and past Executive Director served as lead advisor. A dozen current and former JwJ activists and Oregon labor scholars served on the exhibit advisory committee.


16. The National Labor Relations Act was a major advance in rights and protections for working people. Political lobbying, however, succeeded in excluding significant groups of workers from these protections, including agricultural workers and domestic workers who were overwhelmingly people of color and women, and public sector workers.


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43. Ibid. A sampling of more recent WRBs is posted at the JwJ website, https://jwjpdx.org/work/worksightsboard (accessed February 17, 2022). In early 2021, following months of research that included preliminary testimony from Providence nurses and quiet outreach to Providence executives that failed to jumpstart the stalled negotiations between nurses and their employer, the WRB decided to hold a public hearing. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the March 2021 WRB on a COVID-19 Bill of Rights for Providence Nurses was held via zoom. Providence executives did not accept the WRB’s invitation to attend or provide testimony. A video of the hearing is available at the JwJ website, https://www.facebook.com/jwjpdx/videos/47320423998612/. Accessed 12/29/2021 (accessed February 17, 2022). For Portland JwJ’s national leadership, see National JwJ Annual Meeting, 2000, which lists three presentations on WRBs by Portland JwJ staff and volunteers Jerry Atkin, Margaret Butler, and Nancy Haque.


46. See registration form for trainings, JwJ Records, box 3, folder 17, OHS Research Library.

47. On the statewide vote for Measure 99, see “Oregon’s Increasing Minimum Wage Brings Rises to Former Welfare Recipients,” Willamette Week, March 5, 2009, JwJ Records, box 3, folder 1, OHS Research Library.


49. Steering Committee meeting packets, JwJ Records, box 6, folders 19–28, and box 7, folders 1–8, staff time reports are included in many Executive Committee meeting packets, JwJ Records, box 6, folders 1–18, Action Alert, T.G.I.F., and Scoop/Scrooge postcards are scattered through the JwJ records at OHS Research Library. See, for example, box 6, folder 26, box 7, folder 9, and box 7, folder 30. “Culture of Camaraderie” is from the author’s interview with Laurie King, October 6, 2021.

50. Faith Labor Breakfast invitation and programs can be found in JwJ Records, box 3, folder 2, OHS Research Library. On faith leaders’ support for workplace campaigns and labor legislation see, for example, Joe Rastatter and Marco Mejia to National Farm Worker Ministry Board, August 24, 2011, and Faith Labor Committee to Oregon Metro Council, September 26, 2012, in JwJ Records, box 3, folder 11, OHS Research Library. On the sanctuary movement, see Faith Labor Committee meeting minutes September 19, 2007, JwJ Records, box 3, folder 5, OHS Research Library. Quote is from Jean Eilers, “Leaders Discuss Their Role in the Sanctuary Movement,” JwJ Annual Meeting, 2000, which lists three presentations on WRBs by Portland JwJ staff and volunteers Jerry Atkin, Margaret Butler, and Nancy Haque.


52. Executive Committee meeting packet, July 18, 2005, JwJ Records, box 6, folder 10, OHS Research Library.


54. Executive Committee Meeting packets, February 26, 2006, and April 17, 2006, JwJ Records, box 6, folder 11, OHS Research Library. Author’s interview with Margaret Butler, November 2, 2021.


56. Executive Committee meeting packet, February 20, 2006, JwJ Records, box 6, folder 10; Steering Committee meeting packet February 2005, JwJ Records, box 7, folder 1, Executive Committee Agenda, October 19, 1998, JwJ Records, box 6, folder 4, OHS Research Library.


61. See, for example, National JwJ newsletters, reports and annual conference programs in JwJ Records, box 10, folders 7, 17–20, 24–27, 37–38, OHS Research Library.

