

Oral History with Margaret Butler

Advocate for Workers' Rights and Jobs with Justice

OREGON VOICES

by Laurie Mercier, with Margaret Butler

DURING THE LATE 1980s, Margaret Butler and a handful of labor activists held a series of informal meetings to discuss how they might build an action-based workers' rights movement in Portland, Oregon. Frustrated by the inability of traditional unions to effectively challenge rising threats to worker power, they were attracted to new labor-community alliances, including Jobs with Justice (JwJ). In 1987, ten national unions had come together to form Jobs with Justice, which labor studies scholar Andy Banks describes as "the labor movement's most ambitious and comprehensive attempt at community unionism."¹ Community unionism, which sought to engage workers beyond the workplace with broader labor, civic, and social concerns to advance the needs of all working families, had been practiced by some unions in earlier decades.² But by the 1980s, unions were struggling to deliver gains and address a changing economic, political, and legal context.

The challenges were many. Despite rising worker productivity,

real wages plummeted in relation to purchasing power, and the profits from productivity steadily shifted to the top 1 percent, widening income inequality. Since the 1930s, union power had been relatively successful in achieving gains for White male workers, but growing conservative political power weakened labor laws and enforcement, automation reduced the number of union jobs, global trade agreements and capital flight moved jobs to where cheaper labor was available, and union complacency all contributed to decreases in union power.³ Union membership fell from a peak of almost 35 percent of nonagricultural employment in 1953 to 20 percent in 1983, and industries that had a high concentration of union members before the 1980s, such as transportation and manufacturing, suffered dramatic declines.⁴

Margaret Butler was part of a generation of labor activists who developed innovative strategies to confront this new environment, embrace new workers in the growing service econ-



All images courtesy of Margaret Butler

MARGARET BUTLER stands between Anne Sweet (left) and Rachel Noble (right) at the Summer Institute for Union Women (SIUW) in 1994. University labor education programs affiliated with the United Association for Labor Education (UALE) started SIUW in 1980. Since the late 1990s, SIUW has been hosted by UALE institutions in the West as well as by the British Columbia Federation of Labour.

omy, and diversify labor leadership. Witnessing setbacks within her own union, the Communications Workers of America (CWA), Butler recognized that bolder methods of organizing were needed. She gravitated to what is today called "social justice unionism," which combined trade union goals of mobilizing rank-and-file workers with community goals for the "common good."⁵ Steeped in civil rights and other social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the "New Labor Movement" of the 1980s and 1990s sought to expand labor and social rights to non-unionized and low-wage workers and workers of color.⁶

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Justice for Janitors campaign, which launched in 1986 and enjoyed a major success in Los Angeles by the end of the decade, provided new models of organizing that included civil disobedience and public pressure on vulnerable targets — in this case, commercial landlords who outsourced janitorial work to cleaning companies — and empowered Latina low-wage workers.⁷ In 1995, AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organization) members chose the "New Voice" electoral slate to lead the nation's labor movement,



JOBS WITH JUSTICE (JwJ) MARCHERS protest Austin CableVision's unfair labor practices, likely at a February 1992 JwJ annual conference.

including President John Sweeney, who articulated plans for revitalizing and diversifying unions. At age forty-six, Richard Trumka became the youngest person ever to serve as the federation's Secretary Treasurer, and Linda Chavez-Thompson, as executive vice-president, became the first woman of color to hold a high-ranking position in the organization.⁸

While the "union advantage," which shrinks the pay gap between male and female workers, encouraged women's growing participation in unions, women held few union leadership roles during the 1990s.⁹ Faced with the "double day," or the extra shift that most women workers had to put in with their unpaid domestic labors at home, few women had time available to volunteer for union work. White men who dominated unions, furthermore, rarely invited women to climb the ranks of leadership.¹⁰ Even

in unions with a majority female membership (such as Butler's CWA), only 12 percent of officer and executive board positions were held by women by 2000.¹¹ Nevertheless, Butler and some other women advanced within their locals and joined national organizing teams.¹² Butler believed that workers held the power to change society for the better and was enthusiastic about the organizing potential of JwJ, which linked unions and community groups through their shared goals. With support from CWA, she became an active organizer of the Portland JwJ coalition, which she and others formally organized in April 1991, joining several other cities with established chapters. After sixteen years as a committed rank-and-file activist and paid labor organizer for CWA, in April 1996, Butler became the first paid organizer, lead staff person, and later director of Portland JwJ. Until she retired as

director in 2013, Butler helped shape what remains an important labor-community coalition in Portland.

Butler's oral history interview is significant in explaining the creation and evolution of a strong local chapter of JwJ that reflected new labor initiatives during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The organization experimented with new tactics and expanded its reach to affect local and state government policies and participate in actions that supported workers. What happened in Portland helps explain the persistence of local and national coalitions; at its peak, JwJ counted over forty-five chapters across the country. The Portland chapter played a pivotal role by initiating projects that other coalitions adopted, shaping strategies at the national level, and influencing the city's and region's economic and social justice activism from the late 1980s to the present.

Until now, little has been written about JwJ.¹³ Archival records and oral history collections about the organization are few, and historians are only beginning to examine this recent history. Having studied history in college and worked in a library, Butler knew the value of the JwJ records and photographs and initiated their preservation and donation, on behalf of JwJ, to the Oregon Historical Society (OHS) in 2018. In developing an exhibition on the history of Portland JwJ, on display at OHS from February 11 through May 15, 2022, Butler provided key advice and solicited donations and materials.¹⁴

Today, Portland JwJ describes itself as a "labor-community organizing hub" and includes over one hundred labor, faith, community, and student organizations that come together to support workers' rights. Like other social justice and labor groups in the twenty-first century, JwJ has become more inclusive of the variety of workers who live in the region, especially those most marginalized by the economy, including Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) people, immigrants, and women, and it has diversified its leadership structure. It still considers as its basic building block "a pledge from individuals to turn out to support other people's struggles at least five times a year."¹⁵ Current Portland JwJ executive director Jill Pham, who describes herself as "a queer woman of color" and a "child of refugees," commented on the value of JwJ's ability to blend traditional and newer labor issues: "What keeps me around is the tenacity of the organization. We don't stray from the more spicier topics within community organizing, like the police accountability campaign . . . that I value the most about our coalition work. Also, that we continue to show up for workers time and time again."¹⁶

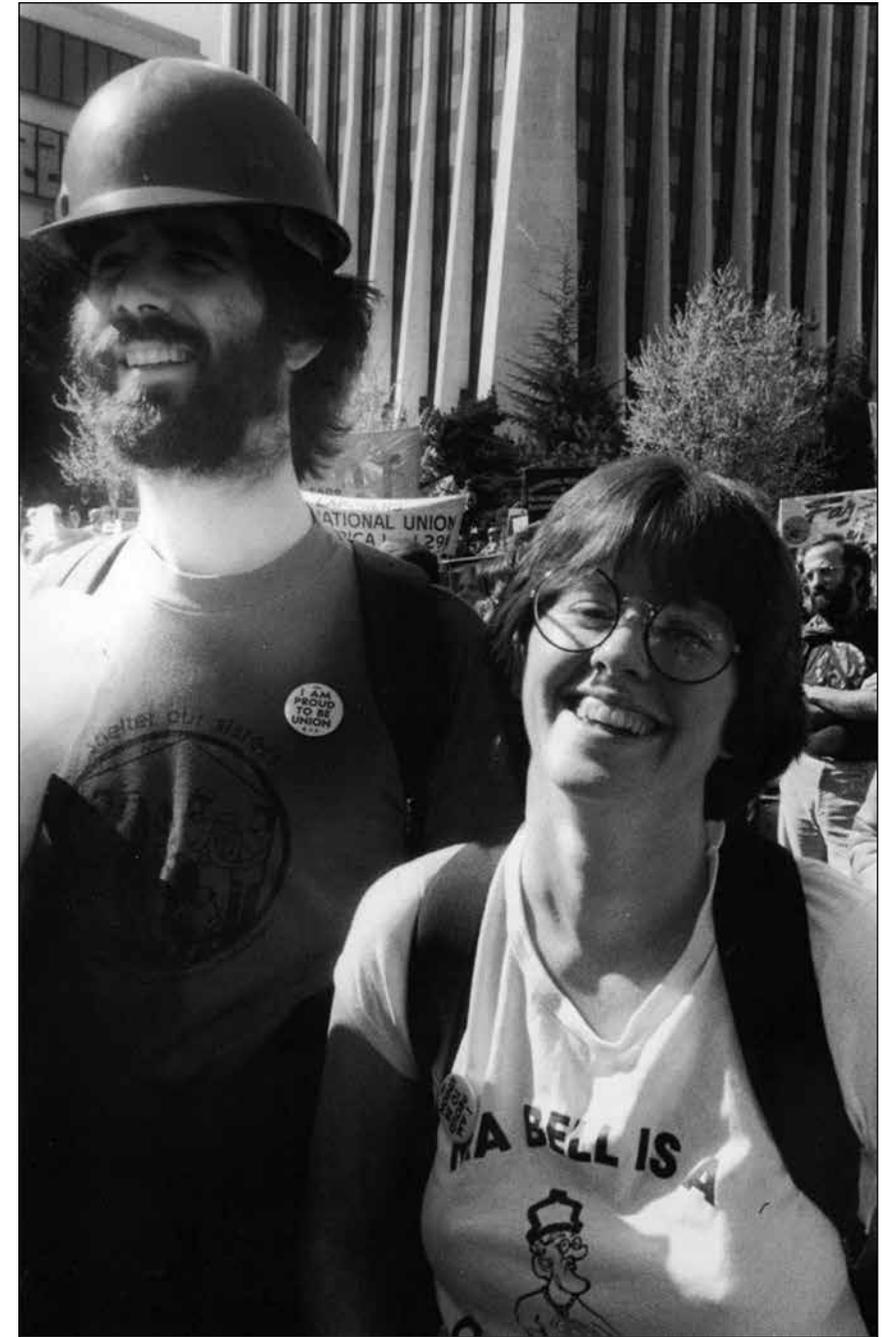
Recent worker actions on the heels of the COVID-19 pandemic signal to many labor observers and media pundits that another "new labor movement" is brewing, suggesting a more optimistic future than what Butler and labor activists faced

during the late 1980s. Many business leaders bemoan or express surprise at the audacity of workers who quit their jobs, strike, or attempt to organize key workplaces such as Amazon and Starbucks. Locally, the success of Burgerville workers to unionize — represented by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the iconic militant union of Pacific Northwest loggers in the early twentieth century and now popular among younger workers — has set a new standard as the first to win a contract for low-wage fast-food workers. Recent polls indicate that almost 70 percent of Americans and almost 80 percent of workers ages 18 to 34 have a positive opinion of unions.¹⁷ The decades-long efforts of JwJ to build community coalitions, to think globally and act locally, and to support low-wage workers still represent successful strategies to build a “new” labor movement.

Butler’s reminiscences about her decades of work on behalf of workers’ rights are documented in a series of interviews conducted during summer 2018, created in collaboration with interviewer Madeline Bisgyer for the Oregon Labor Oral History Program (OLOHP). The interviews provide an important examination of the tremendous challenges facing workers and their unions in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries and the strategically creative ways in which they responded.¹⁸ Butler’s more extensive OLOHP life-history interview, deposited with OHS, provides more details about her experiences and insights from a forty-year career as a labor activist.

Selections from the interview are presented here in block quotes or uncited quotes within the text, and ellipses indicate portions that have been cut or rearranged for space and narrative flow. I summarize Butler’s background and then turn to quotes from her oral history that describe her work organizing and leading the Portland JwJ coalition.

BUTLER’S PASSION for workers’ rights emerged in the context of her Portland upbringing and 1970s activism. Born in 1957 to Ken Butler and Rusty Butler, both White and both librarians with liberal politics, she grew up in a lower-middle-class neighborhood in Southeast Portland. At age four, her twin sister became ill, her father struggled with depression, and her mother became ill after her younger sister was born. Butler remembered: “That’s the time I became the one who didn’t need anything and the one who took care of other people and thought of other people.” Her mother instilled in her the importance of racial justice as she grew up in a segregated city known for its racism, and her mother modeled resisting sexism in the Episcopal Church by insisting that girls could become acolytes. By the time Butler entered Lewis & Clark College in Portland, she knew that she wanted to do something “useful and good.” Like many cities and campuses in the 1970s, Portland and Lewis & Clark were brimming with new radical ideas and feminist and social justice groups that attracted Butler, who decided to become a history major.



IN SPRING 1982, Margaret Butler and Doug Urner, a union electrician, attend a protest calling out Georgia Pacific, Weyerhaeuser, and others for concession bargaining and plant closings.

In 1977, Butler took a year off from college and worked as a clerk at the Multnomah County Central Library, which raised her consciousness about worker injustices and the power of collective action. She joined a staff organizing committee, which decided to form an independent union to address issues of low pay, lack of respect, and loss of long-held perks. According to Butler, the workers won their election in April 1978 and formed the Multnomah County Library Union.¹⁹ She recalled their enthusiasm: “It was great — two-thirds of the staff would show up to meetings.” This participatory ethos and camaraderie influenced her commitment to worker-centered unionism and would remain with her as a model for workplace organizing.

That same year, Butler spent a semester abroad in Kenya, which also influenced her desire to focus her life on social justice. Her experiences there helped her understand how policies driven by U.S.-led global institutions extracted wealth from and impoverished former colonized nations in the global South. After returning to Portland in February 1979, she wanted to “help build African socialism,” but more local issues soon drew her attention. She resumed her studies at Lewis & Clark, returned to the library in a flexible, part-time job as switchboard operator, and became active again with the library staff association, helping build its independent union and gain a contract.²⁰ Many of her library union colleagues were involved in other social movements,

and they helped educate her about politics more broadly. She became active in the Portland Tenants Union and the Oregon Coalition Against the Draft. Admitting that, as “a shy person,” she did not believe she contributed much to these groups, she nonetheless became more committed to principles of group action. And, like many student activists at the time, she became less interested in formal classes and earning “A” grades than in working for urgent local causes.

After graduating from college in 1980, Butler sought a job where she could work with a larger union. She was hired as a switchboard operator for Pacific Northwest Bell and immediately became involved in CWA. Although it felt “scary,” she discovered a peer-counseling (also known as co-counseling) network, which helped her become more confident about engaging with and speaking in front of others.²¹ Butler attended her first co-counseling class at age twenty-three and found the practice helped her to stand up to management, become a shop steward, and do anti-racism work at the phone company. That training in co-counseling “has been and still is very useful to me,” she reflected, noting that she does not “believe we’ll be able to have the society we want unless people work [through their fears].” Although she liked working with people in her new job and in the union, the work was hard. As an operator, “you had to average about 19 seconds a call in Directory Assistance. It was very boring and had conflicting job demands — give excellent service and do it very quickly.”²²



MARGARET BUTLER and Rich Peppers stand among protesters at the August 1991 Solidarity Day March in Washington, D.C.

As a result of these experiences, she remembered: “I really wanted my life to be about ending that, making sure nobody had to be oppressed at work. That’s what I was thinking about that first year at the phone company.”

Butler worked as an operator for ten years and became increasingly active in the union. She served as organizing committee chair, a chief steward, and an area vice-president. In 1989, she led the member mobilization effort to prepare for bargaining a contract. In 1990, she ran for and was elected CWA Local 7901 Executive Vice President, a full-time, paid position overseeing the shop steward structure and grievance process. Unlike many unions at the time, CWA made space for and supported women officers

because so many women worked in communications. At the same time, however, telecommunications and other industries were increasingly replacing workers with technology. Impressed with Butler’s leadership and organizing skills, Larry Cohen, national organizing director of CWA (and later president), asked her to join national staff to help organize union campaigns in a fourteen-state district, including Washington, Oregon, North Dakota, and Utah. After she finished her local’s contract campaign in fall 1992, Butler continued her leave from the phone company to become a full-time CWA organizer.²³

Butler considered Cohen one of her primary mentors, who had “a vision of a lot of things . . . the CWA

triangle was mobilization on one side [one-on-one organizing inside the union], organizing new workers on the other, and political and community action through Jobs with Justice coalitions was on the third side.”²⁴ In the mid-1980s, Cohen reminded political leaders concerned about loss of jobs due to capital flight, automation, and deindustrialization that the country needed not only jobs but “jobs with justice,” and, as he recalled, “the name stuck.”²⁵ The AFL-CIO joined CWA and others in calling for the formation of a national network of local coalitions to fight for labor rights, primarily through “I’ll Be There” pledges, where workers and supporters showed up five times a year for someone else’s struggle.²⁶

The Oregon AFL-CIO understood the appeal of JwJ in addressing the sudden loss of unionized jobs, especially in Oregon’s timber industry, which was closing Oregon mills and shedding thousands of positions. Competition from southern and Canadian forests, falling wood-products prices, demand from Japan for whole (rather than sawed) logs, exhaustion of private timber lands, and new environmental regulations on federal lands devastated many Northwest timber communities and local unions.²⁷ On June 8, 1988, the state labor federation staged a rally in downtown Portland to draw visibility to the jobs crisis, provide a forum for workers to tell their stories, and sign up people on pledge cards to call them out for particular labor actions. A wide range of union members and supporters attended, carrying signs in support of various

unions, while speakers from labor, community, and faith groups called for livable wages, solidarity among workers, the end to corporate conspiracies to hold down wages, and jobs with justice.²⁸ Butler remembered that over a thousand people participated in the rally and about three hundred signed pledge cards. But she saw that a lot of money had been spent on one rally, and “then nobody did anything with the pledge cards.” She described how the event, and lack of follow up by the state labor federation, helped catalyze the formation of a local JwJ chapter:

I remember being at the [rally] debrief meeting afterwards and saying something about wanting to make it real, but the AFL wasn’t doing anything about it. At the same time . . . we had been meeting as the Oregon AFL-CIO organizing committee for a while. The AFL-CIO had put one penny of each person’s per capita [dues] payments towards an organizing fund, so there was this money, maybe \$10,000 a year . . . that was supposed to go to organizing. Well, they spent the money on “Union YES” billboards [and had a booth at] the Oregon State Fair. So those of us on the organizing committee really wanted to spend it on something that would actually help unions organize. This is how I met Rich [Peppers, with SEIU] and Lorene Scheer [then with Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union]. . . . We all had a similar vision of wanting the Oregon AFL-CIO to actually support organizing, because what was going on all through the 1980s was this huge decline in union membership, and we thought that was terrible. . . . [the other] thing, in the late 1980s I was building this whole mobilization structure inside the CWA, because I thought that was a really good idea too! [Laughs]. . . . [The

organizing committee tried to get the AFL to support a] volunteer and retiree organizer training project. . . . [But some unions] were very suspicious about how their money would be spent and whether their members would get any benefit from it. It was very interesting. So our frustration with that process led us to form the Jobs with Justice chapter as well.

Butler and the AFL-CIO organizing committee activists discussed how they might form a coalition that would serve as a rapid-action network to mobilize workers. She convinced the CWA national office to provide some assistance, and in 1991, the union assigned one of its telephone company technicians, Harold Brookins, to help. As Butler recalled, at the same time, some members of the multi-racial Portland Rainbow Coalition, including Jamie Partridge and Bob Gross, were also working to mobilize labor groups.²⁹ Together, they launched Portland JwJ. “People wanted to set up Jobs with Justices to figure out a way to make use of all the pledgers and get them out for actions, that was really it. There was nothing about organizational structure or anything. . . . So, we created the least amount of structure we could have.” In its first years, Portland JwJ focused on supporting local labor actions and “common good” campaigns — what historian Joseph McCartin has called “efforts to fuse the interests of union and community” — through publicly visible and creative protests.³⁰ Butler described how the group made decisions about actions to initiate or support:

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. And we had about fifteen people representing different organizations, and then when situations came up, we turned people out for them, and that’s mostly what we were doing. In the earliest days, the first actions we did were a Jobs with Justice healthcare action day in — I think it was [June] ’91 — and then we had one in ’92 a year later. . . . There was a national ambulance drive, where they collected all these ballots supporting single payer [universal healthcare] and drove them across the country in ambulances. We did an event with the ambulance, filled it up with ballots and sent it out across. We wrapped the Blue Cross/Blue Shield building in red tape [to dramatize the inefficiency of private insurers]. . . .

So we had a steering committee made up of people from different organizations who made decisions about what we were going to turn people out for. . . . Besides healthcare, we did support for an organizing campaign that Lorene [Scheer] was running for the Teamsters [Local 206]. . . . They had this organizing campaign at the Resort at the Mountain. They weren’t successful but they did a whole bunch of actions pressuring the Portland [Oregon] Visitors Association [POVA], pressuring the resort. One of them that I remember that we did was a golf-in [laughs] and some people signed up to play really slow golf and interfere with the resort.

The mostly Latino workers at the resort had voted to unionize but did not yet have a contract, and to help pressure management, JwJ and the union recruited “bad golfers” to play on a sunny Saturday when other golfers would likely complain. JwJ



MARGARET BUTLER stands with Anne Sweet (right) and an unknown person at a benefit walk for the Cascade AIDS project, which took place sometime between 1986 and 1990.

also helped organize a protest — with balloons and rock music — in front of POVA.³¹ Butler described how she and other JwJ activists believed such creative actions could bring attention to workers' issues in ways that unions had failed to do:

We wanted to build the organizing model. Too many unions were stuck in servicing and being junior lawyers. We wanted to spread the gospel of organizing and mobilizing members and creating a strong labor movement. 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. In '89, when I was doing the mobilization work [for CWA]. . . . only Tom Leedham at

[International Brotherhood of] Teamsters [Local] 206 was trying to create a one-on-one structure.³² . . . There was some encouragement . . . to get back to the basics of really talking to every member about what was going on. . . . I think we thought we were making a difference, pretty much from the beginning. . . . We wanted to be bigger so we could make more of a [difference].

Many union activists and labor scholars believe that, by the 1980s, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) had become ineffectual and often hampered union organizing, elections, and bargaining.³³ The NLRB never protected farmworkers or domestic workers, but it had once been the protector of workers in many other industries. As

Sociologist Ruth Milkman argues, however, by the late twentieth century, the NLRB had become a “cruel charade” as employers learned to manipulate the system to stymie union campaigns.³⁴ In 1993, labor activists responded by organizing the National Day of Action for Labor Law Reform and protesting at NLRB offices around the country. They demanded “real penalties for law-breaking employers, and majority sign-up recognition” — that is, union recognition when a majority of workers voted for a union in a fair election without employer interference.³⁵ Butler described her experiences with the labor board and the JwJ protest actions, where she and a few others were arrested for refusing to leave the lobby of Portland's KOIN building:

The NLRB was so bad. . . . In Medford, we [the CWA] filed for the [Trend College] election with the NLRB [in November 1992] with something like 75 percent support . . . and they were just going to wait on it. And the employer was [putting pressure on individual workers]. So, in January [1993] we got our hearing. . . . Then they wanted briefs. So, I had to write a brief, and with no lawyer, but Monica Smith who was a labor lawyer in town got contracted to help me. . . . So, we turned in our briefs. Then the NLRB said ‘we didn't get enough information in the hearing. We have to do another hearing.’ So, the delays were just terrible, and we lost the election by one vote on April Fool's Day. It was terrible. That was in '93. That was my learning campaign. . . . It just made me mad, that things are so stacked against workers. It was just so unfair. Those people should have had a union. . . .³⁶

In 1993, there was the National Day of Action for Labor Law Reform.

[Portland JwJ] did a sit-in at the NLRB offices. . . . We planned this action and had about 100 people come and only two of us had signed up to get arrested at the time, me and Rick Ball, who was an organizer for SEIU 49. But when the time came, and the police came . . . nine people got arrested, including my friend Anne Sweet, who [laughs] had been telling me for weeks ahead of time, ‘I'm not going to get arrested . . . you don't know what they do to Black people in jail.’ I said, ‘Don't get arrested. That's fine, just come to the rally’ . . . [laughs] but when they asked her to leave, [she] said ‘no!’ She got so into it.

While pregnant in 1994, Butler was working on a CWA campaign in Seattle and participating in JwJ protests when in Portland. After the CWA victory in Seattle, she returned home, just before her daughter Lorene Anne Butler was born and in time to join JwJ actions to support United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) strikers at Fred Meyer grocery stores who were demanding to preserve the principle of seniority and the right for senior employees to maintain full-time schedules.³⁷

J with J had this whole group of people from the labor movement who wanted to help [with the strike]. . . . I remember Amy Steer was the Organizing Director at [SEIU] 503 and she and others came up with this idea of doing a can and bottle return. This was before they had [returns] outside . . . we had this can and bottle return day and took up all of this space . . . and time talking to people . . . everyone went across the picket line to return their cans and bottles to give the scabs [workers not supporting the strike] a bad time. [laughs]

It was really fun to be at home without any [CWA] campaigns hanging over me,

[to] clean up paperwork and work with J while I waited for my baby to come. I was over at the picket line a lot, over at the [Fred Meyer] store. It was really fun. Then I took a 9-month [unpaid] baby leave. Lorene was born in November of '94 and I did some J with J stuff while I was off.³⁸

Butler's relief at staying home for a period and working on a local campaign made her reconsider continuing a life of travel and long hours as a national union organizer. She returned to CWA in the fall of 1995, and like other women in the labor movement, found that combining union organizing work with parenting was challenging and exhausting. Her husband Rich Peppers was SEIU political director, so he also worked long hours and was often away in Salem. At the same time, JwJ was planning to raise funds to move from an all-volunteer coalition to hire staff and expand its outreach. She explained the JwJ transition and how she was hired in April 1996 to become its first paid organizer:

We decided to take ourselves more seriously, coming out of the UFCW strike at Fred Meyer. Really, that was it. We felt like we had played a critical role, and we should be more than just a loose network of people. . . . It was the end of '95 that we had a meeting and we decided to move to the next level of organization. We went to the unions and asked for money . . . asked them to make regular contributions to Jobs with Justice. And they said 'yes.' It was easier than we thought it was going to be! We also decided to set up a monthly sustainer program. That was our name for it. [laughs] It made me laugh when other [organizations] started using it. We

also asked unions for office space, and AFSCME decided to donate it to us. . . .³⁹

We were putting together this job description to hire somebody for J with J. I thought, "I don't want to be on the road all the time" [and working 70 hrs per week for CWA]. But I could work with Jobs with Justice part-time and I could be at home. I could do the work I loved and still do the lean-in counseling [co-counseling]. I could still exercise and have friends, not just be a mom and a union organizer and that's all. I just thought Jobs with Justice fit my skill set better than doing campaign after campaign on the road. . . . I was trying to think about what made sense for my life. It was hard. I did feel torn in half, especially when I was [away from my daughter]. . . . So, I applied for the job. I don't know who else they interviewed but I was hired.

With two paid organizers hired — Butler in April 1996 and Nancy Haque in January 1997 — JwJ expanded its networks and actions. The coalition became more involved in local and state activities, and its capacity stretched. Butler described how leaders developed JwJ's organizational structure and made decisions about whether to support different campaigns.

The Steering Committee became . . . all the member organizations of Jobs with Justice, plus six people elected at-large so that there was community representation from people who weren't necessarily in any organization. The Steering Committee met every month and voted on which actions to support, at which level of support. Eventually we worked out a whole process, where people needed to fill out a form ahead of time, and explain how it built the movement, what they were willing to do to support the action or other people, how it fought racism, and we had a whole set of questions. But

that didn't happen until later because we were getting so many requests that we decided . . . the requesting organizations . . . needed to do more than just show up and say will you do this. . . . We had [to consider]: How will this action help build Jobs with Justice? Will it get us new pledges? Will it get us new money? How will it help J with J?. . .

We tried to do as many things as we were asked to do as we could. There wasn't a direct connection between what we did and funding. . . . [We were] supporting other people to make a thousand flowers bloom, because people loved getting to do what they wanted to do under the banner of Jobs with Justice. So, we tried a bunch of different things.

Throughout the interview, Butler acknowledged conflict within the movement and stressed how she and the organization kept focused on the primary goals of building relationships to strengthen the larger movement for workers' rights, regardless of differences in personalities, political orientations, strategic perspectives, and identities. She felt that she brought some skills, based on her years of organizing and co-counseling, to help build these relationships and "lead us into handling conflicts well," emphasizing to rivals that they were allies in the larger struggle.

Somebody once said that we were the conscience of the labor movement. We certainly have helped build real solidarity, I would say. There are all sorts of ways that we've thought about that strategically. . . . If we did a full mobilization, eventually we came up with this process of, we would send a postcard to everyone on the list. So we would have to do a mailing party . . . we would invite [unions] and some lefty radicals.

People would say, 'oh, we just learned so much' from us. Part of it was us trying to bring people along. And even when they didn't agree all the way, that was fine. We worked hard on that, talking to people and bringing them along.

Eventually we set up a process for dealing with controversial issues, which I think is still being used, where we would send a mailing to all our member organizations ahead of time, warning them that in the next month the steering committee would be talking about it. Then inviting them to come and talking to people ahead of time. So, we got the Firefighters and some of the more conservative unions who usually abstained when it was something they didn't feel like their members could necessarily support. The Teamsters too sometimes. . . . We did a bunch of work on police accountability. It was stretching the definition of workers' rights. . . . We were always figuring out how we could help people move as much as we could together. It didn't always work. . . .

But the unions generally liked our participation in things. With some organizations, there was a lot of pulling teeth. With others, they gave a lot of money anyway. SEIU always asked for a lot, lots of support. . . . There was still a bunch of more conservative unions — you know, the building trades just didn't like us from the beginning. . . . We eventually got the Carpenters engaged in a pretty big way. We built better relationships with a lot of [the trades], including the electrical workers. But the electrical workers . . . because their strategy was to work with the employers, they never joined Jobs with Justice. [Most of the challenges were] about the politics. Making sure we were thoughtful and didn't piss off or set ourselves up as an alternate labor council. The [Northwest Oregon] Labor Council didn't like us that much anyway. But I was always really careful about relationships.



IN LATE OCTOBER 1996, documentary filmmaker Michael Moore attended a Jobs with Justice rally in Portland, Oregon, in support of raising the state's minimum wage. Here, protesters gather in the Rose Quarter after first stopping at Tony Roma's restaurant.

Along with strengthening ties to the organized labor community, Butler and JwJ activists made fighting racism a primary activity. The formation of Portland JwJ in 1991 included in its Statement of Purpose that, in addition to pledging to defend workers' rights and supporting each other's struggles, the organization would "focus on abuse of civil rights and the struggles of exploited workers and their communities, especially people of color, immigrants and women."⁴⁰ Butler indicated that as JwJ grew, "we tried to deal with structural racism within JwJ and had lots of trainings . . . and tried to put communities of color at the center."⁴¹ Still, the organization

struggled to attract people of color. Harold Brookins, a JwJ co-founder and Black CWA activist, noted that "the fact is, there are not many people of color in Northwest unions," and JwJ and CWA often had to reach out to "national folks" to provide anti-racist trainers.⁴² As historian Nikki Mandell observes, this anti-racism agenda was "both inward- and outward-looking."⁴³ In addition to providing trainings for White staff and members and recruiting people of color to meaningful roles in the organization, JwJ actively supported the struggles of Black, Latinx, and immigrant workers. It worked on minimum-wage and immigrant-rights campaigns, formed an Immigrant

Rights Committee, supported VOZ Workers Education Project and workers' center, and joined local campaigns for police accountability.⁴⁴

Butler emphasized, "I wanted the work on racism to be primary. We were always trying to make Jobs with Justice not so White, which was a struggle all the time, maintaining relationships with a few people of color in the labor movement, bringing them in, and building the organization were really what I was focused on." Beginning in 1995, Portland JwJ launched a major effort to support low-wage workers, including many workers of color, by increasing Oregon's and Multnomah County's minimum wage. Together with the Rainbow Coalition and state labor unions, JwJ mobilized its constituencies to participate in trainings and educational forums, collect and deliver petitions, pressure the state legislature, and directly appeal to voters to raise the state's minimum wage through the initiative process.

The Rainbow Coalition was a member organization of J with J, [and] it . . . spearheaded building a living wage coalition. Living wage campaigns were just starting up. . . . We had a Living Wage lobby day [at the state capitol]. . . . There were about five or six bills that we were lobbying for.⁴⁵ None of them got a hearing. Avel Gordly was the [state representative] that was carrying the minimum wage bill and she felt very strongly and really mad at the Republicans who held the legislature, I think they were running both chambers at the time, [and] wouldn't even give it a hearing. We decided to do an initiative petition to raise the minimum wage in 1996. The unions got on board and they took it over in some ways, but

we did so much. They provided money to have a coordinator. . . . But most of the petition's signatures were gathered by volunteers. . . . Leslie Kochan, who helped organize her union at AFSCME, in DEQ . . . got a grant for Jobs with Justice and we got funding to do economics education around the minimum wage campaign [in 1996]. We did all of these trainings for petitioners. That helped set the context for them.

Oregon voters approved Measure 36 in November 1996, raising the statewide minimum wage to \$6.50 an hour. Together with thirty-five labor, religious, and community groups, JwJ also successfully convinced the city of Portland, in 1996, and Multnomah County, in 1998, to raise the minimum wage for service contractors, requiring contractors to raise wages and provide benefits for its low-wage workers, including janitors, security guards, and parking attendants — positions often held by workers of color.⁴⁶

By 1999, Portland JwJ was considered a vital supporter of labor and social justice struggles, so it was no surprise that Powell's Books workers — who had no previous union experience — turned to the coalition for assistance in establishing workplace representation. The Powell's Books campaign involved a broad community-labor coalition that helped workers organize the first union at the world's largest independent bookseller and showcased JwJ's ability to employ a variety of tactics and turn out large groups of people to support workers.⁴⁷ About the same time, the Portland coalition formed the Workers' Rights Board (WRB), based on an idea that had been

spreading across the national JwJ network. WRBs consisted of community leaders who could be called on to hear and bring attention to worker testimony when negotiations broke down.

Union activists credit the events of May Day 2000, International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) muscle, and the JwJ Workers' Rights Board hearing as turning the tide for the Powell's union's efforts to bargain a contract.⁴⁸ Portland activists involved with the 1999 World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle decided to revive the tradition of recognizing May Day (May 1) as International Workers' Day. Since 1889, that holiday had honored workers worldwide, except in the United States, by commemorating radicals convicted and hung for a bombing that killed some police in Chicago during a demonstration demanding the eight-hour workday. Activist groups who planned the May Day march and five hundred ILWU delegates gathering for their annual convention in Portland all decided to support an action by the union's Local 5 in front of Powell's Books. Before the May Day marchers could reach the bookstore, police beat, arrested, or dispersed them.⁴⁹ The police declined to halt the hundreds of ILWU demonstrators who made their way to Powell's for a dramatic rally, replete with giant puppets; three days later, Longshore workers and others in the labor movement returned for a "Hands Around Powell's" action.⁵⁰

When I saw you had a question about a particular [memorable] campaign, it was definitely the Powell's Bookstore

campaign [that I was] really proud of. I could tell it made an ongoing difference in our community. The workers at Powell's decided to organize . . . in 1999. They contacted us and we helped them go union shopping. They met with several different unions and decided they wanted to go with the [ILWU] because the Longshore would let them have their own local. And the Longshore has a huge democratic tradition. So that's what they decided.

I think they did the organizing in '99 into 2000. Then the contract campaign was 2000 on. So, we did a bunch of actions, inside and outside the [Powell's] store for many months. It was really fun. Mary Winzig was the President of the [ILWU] Local [5]. . . . She was a really awesome leader. The organizing campaign, they won a close vote. There was at least one person fired. [Owner] Michael Powell sent out a bunch of anti-union stuff to the workers. . . . Throughout the contract campaign, he had been saying that there would never be a closed shop at his store, that it was a civil rights issue, that people would not be forced to pay [union] dues. He was going to have an open shop. He was not going to have a union security clause in the contract. Well, this was unacceptable to the union. So, that was an issue. Wages and benefits were issues. So we decided this would be the first hearing of the Portland area Workers' Rights Board. . . .

It was May Day [2000]. . . the year that the cops tear-gassed and beat people and broke up the demonstration. We had a May Day march that was focused on different workers' rights issues, including health [care] and immigrant rights. Ramon Ramirez from the [Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste, or PCUN] Farmworkers spoke.⁵¹ . . . There were all of these kids and families and they [the police] sprayed tear gas at everybody. They hardly gave them any notice. I had left because I was going to Powell's to do a sit-in inside.



AT THE JULY 2000 JwJ annual meeting, Mary Winzig, then president of the ILWU Local 5 (left) stands with Margaret Butler just after hearing the news that workers bargained a union contract at Powell's bookstore in Portland.

We waited and waited and waited. Michael Powell never had cops come. Anyway, it was quite something. So, all of these things had been tried to pressure Powell's to settle the contract. . . . We had done so many things and Michael Powell never called the police on us, no matter how long we were in the store, [laughs] because he didn't want that publicity outside the store. . . . The Workers' Rights Board wrote [Powell] a letter and said, 'We would like to meet with you to talk about it.' [Powell said] 'No, it's not your business. We are going to settle at the bargaining table. No, I won't come to the hearing.' So the day of the hearing, he calls Diane Linn, who was on the [Multnomah] County Commission and Workers' Rights Board, and Diane Rosenbaum [WRB chair] and says he

wants to meet with some Workers' Rights Board people. So, Marty Hart-Landsberg and Diane and Diane and somebody else from the hearing panel . . . go to this meeting with Michael Powell. At that meeting, he basically said he wanted to get a contract. And he said he knew that any contract that was settled was going to include a union security clause. . . . We were at the National J with J conference in [July 2000] Massachusetts, I think, when it was settled. Mary Winzig was there, too. I remember just screaming! I was just so excited. That was really great, yeah. And we had to fight again, the next contract, as well. By the third contract, Michael Powell was saying, "I don't want anyone inside the store or outside the store. I want to get this settled."

Butler recalled that JwJ had many victories during the 2000s, but they were often fleeting, due to the mobility of capital and employers' ability to resist union efforts, de-unionize, or shut down altogether. Butler recalled some of the important campaigns during those years, both wins and losses, including a long strike by United Auto Workers that eventually ended with management closing the plant in Tigard; the success of the Parry Center for Children's organizing campaign; and the unsuccessful campaign to organize workers at Providence Health System. Alongside those campaigns, JwJ was continuing its community support work and establishing important traditions.

In 2006 . . . there was another May Day march . . . that was the Day Without an Immigrant march . . . We were involved in the planning of it. We helped lead it. . . . [U.S. Rep. Jim] Sensenbrenner had a bill in Congress that would have come down really hard on anyone who supported undocumented people in any way. So, the whole immigrant community was up, and all over the country there were huge marches, and in Portland there were 40,000 people, and it was the biggest, most amazing thing. . . .

I was really pleased with all of the things we were able to accomplish. And the ways in which we used solidarity to help educate people and help them get a broader view of what we were fighting and what we were up against. I think we did a good job of that as well. We did it through social events [such as] our annual dinner. . . . It was great. We would do a slideshow of all the stuff we had done and fun we had had. . . .

We had things we did every year. The fundraisers every year . . . became the Scrooge party after Dr. Seuss's estate

threatened to sue Jobs with Justice [for using the "Grinch" as the theme]. It was really a fun idea. It came from some other [JwJ] coalition. It started and then it spread through the network. Every December, we would have a party where we elected the worst boss of the year and we presented them with the Grinch or the Scrooge of the Year Award. I always wrote a Dr. Seuss poem for the presentation. . . .

The way it worked was you paid for votes [for Scrooge of the Year]. You bought a ticket to the party for fifteen bucks and you got fifteen votes with it. Then you could buy more votes at the party. And if a union really wanted [its nominee] to win, it would come in with a big check and bought all the votes. So we said, 'Corporate style democracy, the more money you have the more votes you get!' [laughs] It was very fun. We raised two to three thousand dollars every time. Then every "nominee" for Scrooge or Grinch of the Year had an opportunity to do a skit at the party or make a presentation to try and get votes. Some of those were hilarious and really good. That still goes on. Then we had an annual dinner every year and a Salsa Party every year in September. We did a silent auction with that and raised about three thousand dollars with that as well. That was fun. Those were the traditions.

Much of JwJ's work happened in committees, which members formed to work in coalition with other social justice groups and to focus on important issues, such as healthcare, racial justice, and climate. The Immigrant Rights Committee worked on campaigns and supported the VOZ Workers Education Project and workers' center.⁵² Butler was particularly proud of helping initiate the Faith Labor Committee in 2003, to expand and deepen relationships

2009 "SCROOGE OF THE YEAR"

Carole Smith, Superintendent of Portland Public Schools

*In the cold of December as Christmas drew near
In Portland's great schools a Grinch did appear
Removed from the classrooms' daily triumphs and pain
Somewhere deep inside her she lost sight of the main
Ways in which schools reached their goals and do their work
That's through excellent teachers who never shirk
Increases in class size and stress and state testing
Will work at a fast pace with so little resting
Yet this Grinch has offered longer hours and furloughs
Teachers have said no to what you propose
We call on this Grinch to let your heart grow
Honor your workers and not just for show
Think of the teachers who day after day
Work with our children, don't send them away
Without a fair contract, let's settle this quick
The election in January will be here in a tick
We should work together and put First things first
Contract now then the ballot or things will get worse.
In the past loyal teachers have been key to winning
These measures which set all our heads to spinning
Teachers have phonebanked and canvassed each time
Made sure schools are supported fought for each dime.
Let's settle the contract and all stand united
Working together we'd sure be delighted
To make sure each supporter gets out in the field
Standing together what power we wield.
We call on the school board and Superintendent
Support the teachers and get this breach mended
Let's see your heart grow as you bargain this week
The fair contract now that our dear teachers seek.*

— Poem by Margaret Butler

with faith communities and involve them more in the work of JwJ. Those relationships also drew JwJ, and the labor movement more broadly, into faith justice struggles, which included the issue of wage theft, the church-based Sanctuary Movement that supported immigrant workers, and the ongoing work of the Albina Ministerial Alliance Coalition for Justice and Police Reform.⁵³ “I really do think it made a difference in that we really had a set of faith leaders that we could go to. I think doing the faith labor work, they felt it was more of a two-way street than just asking them to serve on the Workers’ Rights Board here and be a faith person there.”

The 2008 economic crisis presented even greater challenges to the labor movement. Because of its networks and relationships, JwJ was able to respond quickly, if not successfully, to the moment. Butler recalled both enormous possibilities that the crisis presented and frustrations about the limits of coalition work and reflected on how she measured success.

In 2008, when things happened fast and there was the [federal] bailout going through, we did actions right away. Basically our message was, ‘Why are you bailing [bankers] out? You should be putting more money towards the people hurt by this whole thing. Where’s our bailout?’ . . . We did an economic crisis town hall in January of 2009. . . . What we were doing was giving people a frame for this economic crisis we were in. We had 850 people who came to it. We were trying to get a common sort of understanding and commitment to

*action together out of it. . . . There were two or three follow-up things that happened but it didn’t work the way that we hoped it would work. . . . What we were hoping to do was to be able to break out of the thousand people or so that we could mobilize and be able to take to the streets in a much bigger way. One of the things that came out of it, that was good, was what we call the Portland Rising Project, [a project promoting good jobs, a strong public sector, and healthy communities] which I’m sure is still going on . . .*⁵⁴

The key [to mobilizing] was having a group of leaders who were connected to each other, and trusted each other, and could make decisions to move. . . . We were able to move pretty quickly when we needed to. There were times when something would come up and I would [say] ‘Oh no, there is no way we can do that. We have ten things we are already doing. NO. NO. NO.’ Then somebody would convince me that we have to. [laughs] That if we don’t do this, it won’t happen, and somebody needs to be out there in public about this. I remember quite often, especially with Jobs with Justice, where you have so many things going on at the same time, it’s easy to feel like we were overwhelmed, we’re stretched too thin . . . and we needed to focus more, but things would happen where you just have to do it. I sort of felt that way when the United Students Against Sweatshops came to us with the Nike hearing. ‘No. We really can’t add this to the plan. Here it is, a month away, and you want us to do this?’ They said they would do all of the work — yes and no — but it was completely worth doing. It was a really good thing to do and . . . we were really bad at getting media attention — and that one got lots of media attention because it was Nike.

So we did all these things to try and build bigger. We kept thinking, ‘now is

the time’. . . . When Wisconsin [protests over Gov. Scott Walker’s attempts to curb unions] happened, we did three solidarity rallies with Wisconsin. We were so excited that there was this huge thing going on and that they were getting solidarity from all over the world. It seemed really exciting. Then ‘Occupy’ [nationwide Wall Street protests over economic inequality], too. All of these things, we put a lot of energy into doing stuff with [Portland] Occupy.

MADÉLINE BISGYER: How do you feel about how those things sort of ended up?

Well, we did not succeed in doing what we had wanted to do, and that was not so great. . . . But I would get up at the J with J dinners and say things like, ‘the unjust system we are a part of works to keep people separated. So every time we stand up for each other, we take a step towards a better society, because capitalism wants us to be just workers and consumers and when we build these relationships and take action together, we are transforming something there.’ And it got bigger every year. So, yeah, that was good. We can’t measure our victories only by the outcomes because everything is temporary and easily taken away. So, you have to measure your success by how many pledgers, how many people are turning out, how many organizations, and what are you building.

In 2011, which marked the twentieth anniversary of Portland JwJ, Butler began thinking about transitioning to other work and opening space for new leadership. She helped the coalition through some rough transitions and then was hired as Executive Director of the American Association of University

Professors (AAUP) Oregon in October 2014. AAUP attracted her because it was organizing both unions and associations — that is, it was developing chapters at universities and colleges that did not have union recognition in order to build worker power, something she believed needed to be a priority in the labor movement. She retired in May 2017 and has remained active in worker and climate justice movements in Portland.

Margaret Butler’s reminiscences are important for understanding how she became a labor activist and leader as well as how a key social justice organization addressed the economic challenges of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Her words reveal that as an organizer — in a job notorious for burning out even the most committed people — she kept her “eyes on the prize” and found joy in the relationships she formed and the actions she took to improve workers’ lives.⁵⁵ Portland JwJ influenced local and regional workplace struggles and politics as well as a national movement that linked labor and community groups in coalition. Both successes and setbacks marked these years, but as Butler emphasized, “we can’t measure our victories only by the outcomes.” She hinted that the struggles sow the seeds for potential change in the future, something difficult to measure in the present. In reflecting on the accomplishments and disappointments of JwJ, and on the lack of democracy and income inequalities that accompany capitalism’s power and persistence, Butler concluded that



MARGARET BUTLER (left) poses for a photograph with her twin sister, Gillian Butler, at the Portland Jobs with Justice tenth anniversary dinner in Portland, Oregon. At that time, Gillian was a 911 dispatcher and AFSCME activist.

labor unions are compelled to rethink organizing strategies:

We need a movement of working people that's broader than unions. How do we build that? Jobs with Justice, [it] still seems to me, is the best shot at doing it. It's rooted in the community with labor support so that labor is also supporting other forms of worker organizing, like the Day Labor Center. So that we can connect all of these dots and put people in action together and build the relationships that people will need to make real change. It still makes sense to me, unless all you are thinking about is electoral stuff. And the labor movement, too much, is focused on the losing pathway of supporting corporate Democrats. Then, how do you change that dynamic? You have to have a big enough grass-roots movement in the streets. We've

seen some pretty big actions this year [2018]. Maybe that's the beginning of what we need. But we didn't see it just with J with J. That's what I think. So, I spent some time, afterwards, feeling like I put my whole life into trying to build this movement and we didn't succeed. That's really a sad thing. But, anti-capitalism is a huge project, right?⁵⁶ [laughs] We haven't built what we need to do that, and more people do understand, so that's what I hold onto. We helped, and my life has been about helping lots and lots of people see that their struggle is not a unique struggle. That their situation is not a unique situation, and that if people come out together to support each other, then we can all win more victories. So, I'm pleased about that. That's not enough, and I'm not satisfied, and I hope to live to see the big changes that we need to happen.

NOTES

1. Andy Banks, "The Power and Promise of Community Unionism," *Labor Research Review* 1:18 (September 1991): 27.

2. Studies of community unionism in the first half of the twentieth century include Elizabeth Faue, *Community of Suffering and Struggle: Women, Men, and the Labor Movement in Minneapolis, 1915–1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Laurie Mercier, *Anaconda: Labor, Community, and Culture in Montana's Smelter City* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001); and Matthew M. Mettler, "AFL Community Unionism: The Des Moines Department Store Strike of 1939," *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas* 11:1 (Spring 2014), 77–102.

3. A host of scholars have examined labor's free-fall in the late twentieth century. See, for example, Charles Craypo and Bruce Nissen, eds., *Grand Designs: The Impact of Corporate Strategies on Workers, Unions, and Communities* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 1993); Daniel Nelson, *Shifting Fortunes: The Rise and Decline of American Labor, from the 1820s to the Present* (Chicago, Ill.: Ivan Dee, 1997); Norman Caulfield, *NAFTA and Labor in North America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: the 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: New Press, 2010); Nelson Lichtenstein and Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, eds., *The Right and Labor in America: Politics, Ideology, and Imagination* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Lane Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Alexis N. Walker, *Divided Unions: the Wagner Act, Federalism, and Organized Labor* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

4. By 2015, the rate had fallen to 11 percent. Megan Dunn and James Walker, "Union Membership in the United States," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 2016, p. 1–3, <https://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2016/union-membership-in-the-united-states/pdf/union-membership-in-the-united-states.pdf> (accessed

February 25, 2022); Brantly Callaway and William J. Collins, "Unions, Workers, and Wages at the Peak of the American Labor Movement," Working Paper 23516, National Bureau of Economic Research, June 2017, p. 1–6, 22–23 https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w23516/w23516.pdf (accessed February 25, 2022).

5. Bill Fletcher, Jr., "Labor Needs to Embrace Social Justice Unionism," *In These Times*, November 6, 2019, <https://inthesetimes.com/article/rank-and-file-strategy-unions-left-labor-movement-solidarity-divided> (accessed February 25, 2022).

6. For descriptions of new labor movement configurations, see Steven K. Ashby and C.J. Hawking, *Staley: the Fight for a New American Labor Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Dorothy Sue Cobble, *The Sex of Class: Women Transforming American Labor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Ruth Milkman and Ed Ott, eds., *New Labor in New York: Precarious Workers and the Future of the Labor Movement* (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2014); and Fran Quigley, *If We Can Win Here: The New Front Lines of the Labor Movement* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).

7. Andrew Gomez, "Organizing the 'Sweatshop in the Sky': Jono Shaffer and the Los Angeles Justice for Janitors Campaign," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History* 15:2 (Spring 2018), 9–11, 15–19; Timothy J. Minchin, "A successful union in an era of decline: interrogating the growth of the Service Employees International Union, 1980–1995," *Labor History* 61:3 (January 2020), 309, 312. During an era of union decline, by 1994 Justice for Janitors campaigns in other cities added 30,000 members to SEIU.

8. Ruth Milkman, "The New Labor Movement: Possibilities and Limits," *Contemporary Sociology* 27:2 (March 1998): 126. In their prescient critique at the time, Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello questioned whether a "new" AFL-CIO, with its rigid structures and dated approaches to organizing workers, could really reverse trends, since

workers faced the accelerated mobility of capital in a globalized economy. "A 'New Labor Movement' in the Shell of the Old?" *Labor Research Review* 24:1 (June 1996): 5–22. The authors advocated new, broader coalitions, such as Jobs with Justice, worker centers, producer and consumer cooperatives, health and safety groups, political and issue coalitions, among others, for organizing workers and improving their fates.

9. Women's overall percentage of union membership continues to grow; today it is at over 44 percent. Kayla Blado, Dan Essrow, and Lawrence Mishel, "Who Are Today's Union Members?" Economic Policy Institute, August 31, 2017, <https://www.epi.org/publication/who-are-todays-union-members> (accessed February 25, 2022); John Budd, "Can a Resurgence in Labor Unions Help Working Women?" Gender Policy Report, University of Minnesota, March 8, 2021, <https://genderpolicyreport.umn.edu/can-a-resurgence-in-labor-unions-help-working-women> (accessed February 25, 2022).

10. Dorothy Sue Cobble traces labor feminists' post-World War II efforts to achieve pay equity and work-family balance in "Halving the Double Day," *New Labor Forum* 12:3 (Fall 2003): 62–72; and *The Other Women's Movement: Workplace Justice and Social Rights in Modern America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

11. Table 2.5 "Women's Representation in Selected Major U.S. Unions," in Gill Kirton, Geraldine Healy, Sally Alvarez, and Risa Lieberwitz, "Gender, Work and Unionism in Comparative Context," in Kirton and Healy, eds., *Gender and Leadership in Unions* (New York and London: Routledge, 2013), 41.

12. Butler recalled that she rarely felt limited because of her gender in CWA and noted that there were several women presidents of the local, including Linda Rasmussen and Karla Floyd. Interview with author, January 21, 2022.

13. Eric Larson's book, *Jobs with Justice: 25 Years, 25 Voices* (Oakland: PM Press, 2013), features oral history interviews with 25 JwJ activists (including Margaret Butler) about their coalitions' work. He argues that two principal themes dominate the interviews, which describe JwJ's goals and successes:

"winning concrete victories and transforming relationships through coalition work" (vii). For more on JwJ's history, and some critiques of its community-based strategies, see David Dobbie, "Evolving Strategies of Labor-Community Coalition-Building," *Journal of Community Practice* 17:1–2 (2009): 107–119; Sarita Gupta, "Announcing a New Chapter for Workers' Rights," Jobs with Justice blog, June 12, 2012, <http://www.jwj.org/blog/announcing-new-chapter-workers-rights> (accessed February 25, 2022); Mark Vorpahl, "What Can We Learn from 25 Years of Jobs with Justice?" *Labor Notes*, September 04, 2013, <https://www.labornotes.org/blogs/2013/09/what-can-we-learn-25-years-jobs-justice> (accessed February 25, 2022); and Eric Larson, "Ode to the American Century: Ambivalent Americanism and the Founding of the Jobs with Justice Coalition," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 12:3 (2015): 53–74.

14. See Nikki Mandell, "Building Solidarity for 30 Years: Portland Jobs with Justice," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 123:1 (Spring 2022): 40–79. To see an overview of the contents of the Portland Jobs with Justice Records from 1988 to 2019, see <https://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv884666> (accessed March 8, 2022).

15. "Mission" and "About," Portland Jobs with Justice, <https://jwjpx.org/about> (accessed February 25, 2022).

16. Interview with Jill Pham by Laurie Mercier, August 25, 2021; Jill Pham staff bio, <https://jwjpx.org/jill-pham> (accessed February 11, 2022).

17. Kai Ryssdal and Richard Cunningham, "Is a new labor movement brewing?" *Marketplace*, October 1, 2021, <https://www.marketplace.org/2021/10/01/is-a-new-labor-movement-brewing> (accessed February 25, 2022); Ian Kullgren, Brian Eckhouse and Deena Shanker, "U.S. Labor Unions Are Having a Moment," *Time*, October 17, 2021, <https://time.com/6107676/labor-unions> (accessed February 25, 2022); Don McIntosh, "Union reaches agreement with Burgerville," *NW Labor Press*, November 17, 2021, <https://nwlaborpress.org/2021/11/union-reaches-agreement-with-burgerville> (accessed February 25, 2022).

18. The Oregon Labor Oral History Program (OLOHP) is built on the work begun in the 1980s by former Oregon AFL-CIO officer Nellie Fox Edwards and collects oral history interviews with individuals who have advocated for working people of Oregon, including public figures, union members and leaders, and workers. The program accomplishes this work in affiliation with the Pacific Northwest Labor History Association and with the support of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757, volunteers, and students. The OLOHP collection is housed at the Oregon Historical Society and features a growing collection of over 800 hours of recordings with men and women in the labor movement, where the 10-hour recording with Margaret Butler is deposited. Laurie Mercier and Aaron Jesch created a partial verbatim transcript of the interview, selections from which are featured here. OHS Research Library, SR OLOHP, <https://digitalcollections.ohs.org/oregon-labor-oral-history-program> (accessed February 27, 2022).

19. Interview with Butler by the author.

20. The independent union formed when the employer was the Library Association of Portland, a private non-profit that received 90 percent of its funding from Multnomah County; the Library Association turned over the Library building and contents to the county in 1990, and the Multnomah County Library Union became part of AFSCME Local 88. Interview with Butler by author; "Multnomah County Library History," <https://multcolib.org/about/multnomah-county-library-history> (accessed March 8, 2022).

21. Re-evaluation (RC) or co-counseling was developed in 1950 by Harvey Jackins, a former communist and labor organizer in Seattle, with the aim of helping people work through past emotional pain through peer listening. RC spread outside of Seattle and became popular in the 1970s. "A Very Brief Look at the History of RC," Re-evaluation Counseling, September 23, 2021, <https://www.rc.org/publication/theory/origin> (accessed February 25, 2022).

22. Interview with Butler by the author.

23. Butler continued her union leave of

absence until the telephone operating offices closed in Portland in 1998. Interview with author.

24. Butler and Steve Early outline the mobilization structure and how CWA successfully employed in contract negotiations with AT&T and US West in 1989, in "Mobilization CWA," *Labor Research Review* 10:1(1991): 7–31.

25. Larry Cohen, "Stand Up! Fight Back!" in Eric Larson, ed., *Jobs with Justice: 25 Years, 25 Voices* (Oakland, Calif.: PM Press, 2013), 4.

26. Cohen, "Stand Up!," 2–5.

27. M.H. Cooper, "Organized labor in the 1980s," *Editorial Research Reports*, Vol. 1 (1985), <http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre1985061400> (accessed February 25, 2022); Gail Wells, "Restructuring the Timber Economy," Oregon History Project (updated March 17, 2018), <https://www.oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/restructuring-the-timber-economy/#.YdCno1mlaUk> (accessed February 25, 2022); Marcus Widenor, "Pattern bargaining in the Pacific Northwest lumber and sawmill industry:1980–1989," in *Labor in a Global Economy: Perspectives from the U.S. and Canada*, eds. Steven Hecker and Margaret Hallock (Eugene: University of Oregon Labor Education and Research Center, 1991).

28. For more on the 1988 Portland Jobs with Justice rally, see Mandell "Building Solidarity for 30 Years," 40–42.

29. The National Rainbow Coalition, launched in 1984 by Rev. Jesse Jackson after his run for the Democratic Party presidential nomination, tried to unite working and poor people to expand social programs in opposition to President Ronald Reagan's cuts to domestic spending. In 1968, Fred Hampton of Chicago's Black Panther Party had created the first Rainbow Coalition that sought to unite Blacks, Whites, and Latinos in the city to protest police brutality, gentrification, and poverty. "A Brief History," Rainbow/PU\$H Coalition (2021), <https://www.rainbowpush.org/brief-history> (accessed February 25, 2022); Jacqueline Serrato, "Fifty Years of Fred Hampton's Rainbow Coalition," *South Side Weekly* (September 27, 2019), <https://southsideweekly.com/fifty-years-fred-hampton-rainbow-coalition-young-lords-black-panthers> (accessed February 25, 2022).

30. Many unions had long supported policies — such as health care, an increased minimum wage, local education funding, and other initiatives — to support their communities as well as a larger working class beyond their union members. Joseph A. McCartin traces the rise of new labor-community campaigns and coalitions in the twenty-first century, in “Bargaining for the Common Good,” *Dissent* (Spring 2016) <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/bargaining-common-good-community-union-alignment> (accessed March 8, 2022).

31. Interview with Lorene Scheer, group interview with JwJ founders, by Madeline Bisgyer, Aug. 17, 2018, OLOHP, SR11027_S08, OHS.

32. This structure involves a worker talking to five to ten co-workers and engaging them in supporting the union. In addition to heading the Portland IBT local, Tom Leedham was a leader in the national reform movement, Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), which started in Ohio in 1976 after the mysterious disappearance of IBT president Jimmy Hoffa. TDU began in the 1980s to eliminate corruption and financial abuse within the union and to win the right to vote for international officers. The grassroots member campaign resulted in a federal consent order in 1989, which granted direct election of officers. In 1998, 2001, and 2006, Leedham and the TDU slate sought unsuccessfully to oust James Hoffa, Jr., as long-time president of the Teamsters, with the pledge to mobilize new members, devote resources to organizing instead of officer salaries, and win better contracts and pensions from employers. “The History of Teamster Corruption, Rebellion, and Reform,” Teamsters for a Democratic Union, 2018 <https://www.tdu.org/history?page=1> (accessed February 25, 2022); Jim Larkin, “Which Way for the Teamsters?” *The Nation* (October 8, 2001), 20–24; Chris Kutalik, “Reforming the Teamsters: An Interview with Tom Leedham,” *Labor Notes* (March 1, 2006), <https://labornotes.org/2006/03/reforming-teamsters-interview-tom-leedham> (accessed February 25, 2022).

33. The NLRB was established in 1935 to enforce the National Labor Relations Act, which for the first time in U.S. history established

the rights of workers to fairly select a union of their choice, bargain collectively, and prevent management interference with that process. Importantly, the legislation excluded a significant number of workers, including agricultural and domestic workers, who were primarily Black, Latino, and immigrant, and public-sector employees and independent contractors, which would make up a larger portion of the workforce by the twenty-first century.

34. Milkman, “The New Labor Movement,” 127.

35. Butler interview with author.

36. Butler’s frustrations with the NLRB are echoed by many unions and labor studies scholars, who have for decades argued for legislative labor law reform and that the outmoded agency has failed to protect workers’ rights. See, for example, William B. Gould, IV, *Agenda for Reform: The Future of Employment Relationships and the Law* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press 1996); and James A. Gross, *Broken Promise: The Subversion of U.S. Labor Relations Policy* (Philadelphia, Penn.: Temple University Press, 2003).

37. UFCW 555 History, <https://www.ufcw555.org/local-555-history> (accessed February 25, 2022).

38. Margaret Butler and her husband Rich Peppers shared parenting, and each took nine months of leave from work to care for their baby. Interview with author.

39. AFSCME Council 75 provided the first office space.

40. Statement of Purpose, Coll. 827, box 8, folder 1, OHS Research Library.

41. Margaret Butler, comments at JwJ exhibit advisory committee meeting, April 13, 2021.

42. Harold Brookins, comments at JwJ exhibit advisory committee meeting, April 13, 2021.

43. Mandell, “Building Solidarity for 30 Years,” 70.

44. *Ibid.*, 54; communications with author, December 19, 2021, and January 22, 2022. In 1998, the Day Laborer Project formed to end Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids of immigrant workers in the Central

Eastside Industrial District and to reclaim wages stolen from these workers. The project became VOZ Workers’ Rights Education Project in 2000. VOZ, “Our Mission,” <https://portlandvoz.org/who-we-are/our-mission> (accessed February 25, 2022).

45. Living Wage campaigns had spread across the country during the 1990s to address the fact that the federal minimum wage for full-time workers was not adequate for lifting families above the poverty line. Often organized by local chapters of Jobs with Justice and the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), by 1999 over thirty cities had living wage ordinances. Leah Samuel, “Living Wage Campaigns Become a Movement,” *Labor Notes* (July 3, 1999), <https://labornotes.org/1999/07/living-wage-campaigns-become-movement> (accessed February 25, 2022); Bruce Nissen, “Living Wage Campaigns From a ‘Social Movement’ Perspective: The Miami Case,” *Labor Studies Journal* 25:3 (Sept. 2000): 29–31.

46. In 1996, Living Wage coalition members pressured the Portland city council to pass an ordinance that affected fewer than 150 workers, but as Jamie Partridge noted, it “was written to have a sequel.” The 1998 measure included more workers and benefits, and by extension preserved public-sector jobs by making contractors less attractive. Stephanie Luce, “Living Wage Campaigns, Part 2: Challenges Facing the Movement,” *Against the Current* 77, November–December 1998, <https://againstthecurrent.org/atc077/p1782> (accessed February 25, 2022); “Portland City Council okays new living wage,” *NW Labor Press*, May 1, 1998, <https://nwlaborpress.org/1998/wage.html> (accessed February 25, 2022). See also Mandell, “Building Solidarity for 30 Years,” 54–56.

47. For more on the Powell’s campaign, see Ryan Thomas Wisnor, “Workers of the Word Unite! The Powell’s Books Union Organizing Campaign, 1998–2001,” (MA thesis, Portland State University, 2017), 4–67. As Wisnor notes, a flurry of bookstore worker organizing campaigns — largely unsuccessful — erupted across the country at large retailers Borders and Barnes & Noble between 1996 and 2003.

48. Wisnor, “Workers of the Word Unite!” 157–58.

49. As *Willamette Week* reporters described it, a large contingent of police “clad in fearsome black riot gear, unleashed a new style of militarized crowd-control tactics, with appalling results.” Nick Budnick, Aaron Scott, Becky Ohlsen, and Zach Dundas, “May Day Melee,” *Willamette Week*, March 8, 2005, <https://www.wweek.com/portland/article-4199-2000.html> (accessed February 25, 2022).

50. Butler interview with author; Wisnor, “Workers of the Word Unite!” 163–68.

51. The Farmworker Union was formed in 1985 and has become the largest Latinx organization in Oregon. PCUN, “About Us,” <https://pcun.org/about-us> (accessed February 25, 2022). For a history of PCUN, see Mario Jimenez Sifuentez, *Of Forests and Fields: Mexican Labor in the Pacific Northwest* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016).

52. VOZ, “Our Mission,” <https://portlandvoz.org/who-we-are/our-mission> (accessed February 25, 2022).

53. Mandell, “Building Solidarity for 30 Years”; Butler interview with author.

54. “Portland Rising History and Mission Statement,” Portland Jobs with Justice, <https://jwjpgdx.org/portlandrising> (accessed February 25, 2022).

55. Despite talents, visions, and commitments, few people remain in labor and community organizing jobs for long, given the long hours, intense campaigns, and often low pay. See, for example, Kim Fellner, “Hearts on Fire (Fighting Organizer Burnout),” *ShelterForce*, January 1, 2000, <https://shelterforce.org/2000/01/01/hearts-on-fire-fighting-organizer-burnout> (accessed February 25, 2022).

56. As Eric Larson concludes, the success of Jobs with Justice, both locally and nationally, may well be due to its persistence and survival in such a hostile era for workers and social justice struggles. Larson, *Jobs with Justice*, ix–x. See also CWA, “Portland Jobs with Justice,” https://cwa-union.org/pages/portland_jobs_with_justice (accessed February 25, 2022).