

The Cleveland AFL-CIO

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Background on Cleveland and the Cleveland AFL-CIO

Cleveland is located in Cuyahoga County in Northeastern Ohio. The city of Cleveland is, in many ways, similar to other so called “rust belt” cities. The city’s population is declining: 467,851 people in 2002, a drop of two percent since 2000. Also similar to rust-belt cities, Cleveland has seen its outer suburbs grow in recent decades. In 2002, the metropolitan area, including Akron and Canton, had 2.9 million residents, making Cleveland Ohio’s most densely populated urban center. Cleveland, like other northern industrial cities experiencing decline, is a diverse city with a majority black population of 51 percent. The non-Hispanic white population makes up 38.8 percent or the bulk of Cleveland’s remaining population while there are 7.3 percent Hispanics and almost 3 percent other races in the city.¹ Over the proceeding four decades, there has been significant “white flight” to the suburbs surrounding Cleveland.

According to Zach Schiller, a researcher with Policy Matters Ohio, Cuyahoga County lost 18,000 manufacturing jobs between 2001 and 2003.² Since 1999, Ohio has lost a total of 244,000 jobs, 191,000 of them in manufacturing.³ The trend in job losses and de-industrialization that began in Cleveland in the 1970s continues up to this time. One result of that is that Cleveland’s economy is significantly depressed. According to the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, By 1999, the Cleveland metropolitan area’s share of national employment had slipped by 29 percent; population by 30 percent; personal income by 35 percent; and “Greater Cleveland had forfeited about \$35 billion in personal income to other regions over the ... decade [of the

¹ <http://www.city-data.com/city/Cleveland-Ohio.html>; October 17, 2004

² Interview with Zach Schiller

³ http://policymattersohio.org/media/CD_trade.htm; October 17, 2004

90s] because it couldn't maintain its 1990 share of the nation's population and per capita income."⁴ According to *USA Today*, Cleveland's residents suffer from a 12.2 percent unemployment rate and crushed by the loss of steel and other manufacturing jobs, the U.S. Census Bureau recently rated Cleveland as "the nation's poorest big city, putting it ahead of Detroit, Miami and Newark, N.J."⁵

Cleveland has a city council/mayoral form of government with a mayor, and 21 city council members elected by wards. Historically, the Democratic Party has controlled city government in Cleveland, although there have been Republican mayors, such as Voinovich (1979-1989). Jane Campbell is currently the Mayor of Cleveland. Mayor Campbell won office in a hotly contested election after Michael R. White, who served three terms and was the longest serving mayor in the history of Cleveland, decided not to run for re-election in 2001. Other big cities in Ohio have Democratic mayors, but other than the big cities the rest of Ohio is controlled by the Republican Party.

The Cleveland AFL-CIO

The Cleveland AFL-CIO was essentially moribund when John Ryan became the Executive Secretary in 1996. According to Anne Hill of SEIU, "there was basically a coup. The old guard had been in forever, and was not doing much." A group of people got together to talk about changing the leadership and running Ryan against the incumbent, who came from the Building Trades. In the end, Hill says, it "ended up as public sector versus the trades." The unions supporting a change of leadership included the AFSCME, UFCW, SEIU, AFT, and Firefighters. CWA (which was Ryan's union), split their votes.

⁴ <http://www.cleveland.com/quietcrisis/index.ssf?/quietcrisis/more/081201lost.html>, October 17, 2004.

⁵ http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2004-09-23-cleveland-poor_x.htm, October 17, 2004.

The election was divisive, with Ryan winning 54 percent of the vote. This meant that one of Ryan's first tasks was to repair relationships. Hill says that "John methodically went about winning them over, and he was successful." Many interviewees commented positively on Ryan's leadership skills – particularly his ability to mend fences with the Building Trades without alienating his initial base. Today, according to Ryan, "the Building Trades give strong, generous, and ongoing support."⁶

Work of the Cleveland AFL-CIO

According to John Ryan, the Cleveland AFL-CIO is involved in four main areas of work. This includes the United Labor Agency, Electoral Work, Jobs with Justice and Policy Matters Ohio.

The United Labor Agency

The United Labor Agency (ULA) was founded as a United Way Agency in 1972 by the Cleveland Central Labor Council, the Teamsters, and the United Auto Workers. In its earliest days, ULA functioned as the social services agency of the labor movement in Cleveland. Today the ULA serves union members and non-union members alike. According to the ULA website, its mission is to "strengthen the community by focusing the resources, compassion and commitment of the labor movement (www.ula-ohio.org, viewed October 3, 2004).

When the ULA began, it had four staff in charge of programs and a labor representative on the payroll. The ULA fell on hard times beginning in the 1980s. As Cleveland, its workers and unions experienced escalating de-industrialization and the attendant rising unemployment, the ULA came under intensifying financial strain. In response, ULA lost a clear sense of

⁶ Interview with John Ryan.

mission, fell deep into debt, and the agency and its staff became demoralized. John Ryan became president of ULA in 1987, and shortly afterwards, Dave Megenhardt became director. Since that time, the ULA has reorganized and paid off its debt and regained its focus of serving the needs of working people.⁷ Today there are thirty-five people on the ULA staff. There are twenty-three other ULA's throughout the country but the United Labor Agency in Cleveland is the largest.

The ULA Mission Today

The conventional Labor/United Way partnership today has a number of exemplary component programs. Primary among these is United Way's Day of Caring project and the Handicapped Ramp Program. Both create opportunities for union members to make concrete contributions to their communities by building handicapped accessible ramps for agencies or individuals and by participating as volunteers in other cleanup, painting, or light construction projects. Another prominent Labor/United Way collaboration is the National Association of Letter Carriers (NALC) Food Drive, a volunteer effort that collects nearly 70 tons of food for those in need on a single day of giving annually. Additionally, Labor and the United Way coordinate trainings for union members who then are able to refer coworkers to the appropriate social service agencies in their area if they find themselves in need. This program is known as the Union Community Activist Network (UCAN). The Labor/United Way partnership is an example of union volunteerism that generates little return to organized labor in the way of enhanced political prestige or power.

The AFL-CIO/United Way partnership is robust in Cleveland. The ULA, in addition, does social service work, but also experiments with programs aimed to enhance the power of

⁷ Interviews with John Ryan and Dave Megenhardt.

Cleveland's working class. On the social service end of the spectrum, ULA runs a dislocated worker program—presently there are 62,000 dislocated workers in Cleveland and 277,000 in Ohio. Within this program, ULA helps workers find work and offers classes on how to look for a job. Many in the program are in their 40s and have some type of basic skills problem. There are more women in the program than men, 60% of the participants in the dislocated worker program are African-American from the predominantly African-American East-side of Cleveland. This program also helps with retraining workers who are heading for jobs in trucking or nursing. Presently ULA is trying to work with the Chamber of Commerce on a program to upgrade nurses' skills.

Historically, ULA has played an important role in Cleveland as an organization lending a hand to other organizations just starting out. One of the first agencies to “spin-off” from ULA was a kidney dialysis program that brought dialysis directly to where those in need lived. ULA still runs a durable medical equipment program that brings high cost medical equipment, like wheel chairs, directly to people in need.⁸ Recently, ULA provided seed money to Policy Matters Ohio, a new public policy research center focusing on Ohio and the Cleveland area. Currently, ULA is developing a community hiring hall. This hiring hall will be a non-profit temporary employment agency serving displaced and homeless workers. Ideally, the hiring hall will insure that the workers who use it will get paid and earn living wages. ULA has helped with seed money and has worked to establish a Board and find a line of credit for the hiring hall. The Service Employees International Union, Local 3 and United-HERE are also involved in this project. The idea for this effort came from the Day Laborers Organizing Committee—a non-AFL-CIO affiliated community organizing effort. Leaders from the Day Laborers Organizing

⁸ Interview with Dave Megenhardt.

Committee came to the ULA and “pitched the idea.”⁹ The ULA effort in support of Policy Matters Ohio differs from a conventional Labor/United Way type partnership because it seeks to enhance the effectiveness of progressives and the working class as they seek to shape public policy in Ohio. ULA’s contribution to the formation of a community hiring hall aims to help to organize the unorganized. The Labor/United Way partnership avoids such explicit power building activities.

For years Cleveland’s African-American and other minority residents have been pressuring city government to insure that people living in Cleveland will have access to jobs on Cleveland’s publicly funded construction projects. In June of 2003, the Cleveland City Council passed the *Fannie M. Lewis Cleveland Resident Employment Law* to encourage construction contractors to hire locally. Since this law passed, the Cleveland Building and Construction Trades unions have worked to establish a pre-apprenticeship program that guarantees a slot in a union apprenticeship program to those minorities who complete the pre-apprenticeship training. ULA is providing technical expertise and seed money to the Union Construction Industry Partnership (UCIP)—a 30-plus year old joint contractor/construction union partnership organization—to set up The Apprenticeship Skills Achievement Program (ASAP). UCIP is founding the ASAP Board currently and it will be made of a majority of UCIP members. ULA will have the finance Directors spot on the Board. According to Nadine Champagne, UCIP-ASAP’s Director, the program’s resources allow for pre-apprenticeship classes of twenty to twenty-five students. As of fall 2004, nineteen students have graduated from training and fourteen students have been placed in one or another of the building trades apprenticeship programs.¹⁰ According to John Ryan, the number of apprentices has picked up more recently.

⁹ Interview with Dave Megenhardt.

¹⁰ Interview with Nadine Champagne.

The UCIP-ASAP program has the potential to improve community labor relations in Cleveland by contributing to dissolving the historic barriers to high-paying construction jobs erected in the past by the Building Trades. This effort is essential to the enhanced prestige of organized labor in Cleveland and to the wellbeing of the broader community.

In the more traditional social service realm, ULA also runs a construction program designed to keep the housing stock in the city of Cleveland in better shape. Area residents who qualify for the program and want to renovate and repair their homes are able to place a second mortgage on their house for \$15,000. These program participants are not charged interest on the mortgage and if they sell their house within thirty-years they must pay the program back. If they keep the house for 30-years, they do not have to pay the money back.

Finally, in an effort to increase democratic participation in Cleveland, ULA has formed the Greater Cleveland Voter Registration Coalition (GCVRC), a nonpartisan organization. The coalition is composed of fifty community organizations targeting voter registration in the city's neighborhoods. One precinct in the city raised voter turnout from 30 to 66 percent due to the effort so the GCVRC. These kinds of programs serve as a "bridge between the community and labor."¹¹

When asked about the future of ULA in Cleveland, all those involved said that funding for future programming and program development is a constant worry. All agreed that labor's shrinking base brought on by continued de-industrialization and the lack of successful organizing is a grave concern and threat.

Electoral Work

¹¹ Interview with Dave Megenhardt.

As Ryan worked with labor leaders to get the ULA program back up and running, he also worked on a program to build political power. Cleveland AFL-CIO leaders knew that they wanted to build a stronger labor presence in city politics, and that they wanted to change the way that labor council endorsements were done. The labor council came up with a political program, which SEIU State Council President Anne Hill says is one of the most developed aspects of the council's work. Part of the plan involved requiring every member local to assign a political coordinator to work with the council. According to former SEIU Local 47 political director Pam Rosado, the job of the political coordinators is to serve as liaison between the Cleveland AFL-CIO and the locals. The political coordinators work together to make draft plans and make proposals, then go back for the approval of the members in their local. The coordinators have worked to get rank and file union members involved in various ways. For example, the Cleveland AFL-CIO has helped set up meetings between elected representatives and union members in their home districts. According to Rosado, this has allowed the members to see that their representatives aren't that different from themselves. It can give them confidence to speak up on their issues, and to consider running for office someday. It also helps show the representatives the "real face" of labor: they hear directly from union members about workers' issues, rather than hearing it from a paid political lobbyist.

Ryan spoke about three specific electoral issues that the Cleveland AFL-CIO has played a major role in. First is the School Bond issue campaign of 2001. According to the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, labor unions emerged as "major players in the campaign for the Cleveland schools bond issue" in early 2001.¹² The bond issue, Issue 14, would raise \$335 million for new schools and school repair, would bring in \$500 million in matching state funds, and would issue a \$46

¹² Angela Townsend, "Unions back bond issue for schools in Cleveland; It's about kids, not mayor, leader says," *Plain Dealer*, April 12, 2001, Page 1B.

million levy on voters for school maintenance. At the time, Cleveland schools were in bad shape. In 1998, the state gave control of the school system to Cleveland mayor Mike White, whom the unions had had a rocky relationship with.¹³ White and school system CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett were counting on the bond issue to help pull them out of a deep hole.

Despite the fact that Issue 14 was seen as “the mayor’s issue,” and that the history of relations between White and the labor movement were not great, the Cleveland AFL-CIO took on the work of getting the issue passed. The bond was of particular importance to the Cleveland Teachers Union (CTU), who came out early in support and announced that it would give \$30,000 and paid staff time to the effort. The Building Trades were also interested, as the money would mean more construction jobs. When the labor council endorsed the campaign, Ryan noted, “I’m very proud of Cleveland-based unions that are affiliated with us. No union has raised an objection to supporting this issue based on some relationship with the mayor.” He then promised to add more money to the CTU’s, and to mobilize 3,000 union members to get out the vote. Ryan noted that the 3,000 volunteers would work on contacting all 42,000 union members who lived in Cleveland, by phone or on the job. “We’ve spent the last four years building a volunteer base, and the ability to run a strategic campaign,” Ryan said. “This would be a very important race for us to win.”

The bond issue was controversial. In part, voters were wary of new taxes. But in particular, they recalled a 1987 \$60 million school bond issue for school repairs. That issue passed, but was soon mired in problems. An audit found severe mismanagement of funds, mostly regarding money spent by the school’s building and trades department which overspent its budget. For this reason, the NAACP initially came out against Issue 14, citing concerns about

¹³ In 1996, during contract negotiations between the mayor and CTU, the mayor referred to the teacher’s union as “lunatics running the asylum.” (Sheridan 2001).

accountability of public spending. Although they changed their stance a week later, it was clear that there were mixed feelings about Issue 14. Two days before the election, Chris Sheridan of the *Plain Dealer* wrote, “The impossible uphill sales job that was the Cleveland schools bond issue is a dead heat.”¹⁴

In the end, Issue 14 passed. The headline in the *Plain Dealer* read, “Labor Helps Deliver a Solid ‘Yes.’”¹⁵ Ryan said the effort was “the largest campaign supporting public education in the history of our Labor Federation.”

The second major electoral event was the mayoral campaign later that year. Mike White had been mayor in Cleveland for 12 years. When he decided not to run again 10 people stepped up to run, including 6 people that had previously received an AFL-CIO endorsement for other races. According to Pam Rosado, “many of these were friends of labor so we needed a process to choose one to endorse.” In fact, the *Plain Dealer* stated that within a few hours of White’s decision not to run, three candidates had called John Ryan, seeking the council’s support. The Cleveland AFL-CIO was concerned that there could be internal divisions about which candidate to back. In the end, the political coordinators helped develop a plan to make the decision. They decided to hold a “Listen Up Forum,” where all 10 candidates were invited to attend. Rather than listening to candidate’s stump speeches, the format was for union members to speak about their issues. The Council worked to get every local to select a member to speak. For example, SEIU 47 had a health care worker talk about health care issues and hospital closures. Rosado says that “there was also a postal worker, tradesmen, steelworkers, IBEW members – all spoke to specific issues.” Rosado and AFL-CIO field mobilization staff member Harriett Applegate went over their testimonies with them. The mayoral candidates had to listen to the testimonies, and then

¹⁴ Chris Sheridan, “Bond effort gains traction,” *Plain Dealer*, May 6, 2001, Page 1G.

¹⁵ Mark Naymik, “Labor helps deliver a solid ‘yes,’” *Plain Dealer*, May 9, 2001, Page 1A.

had two minutes total to respond to the issues by saying what they would do if elected mayor. The political coordinators also did turnout, to make sure their members were in the audience. Rosado, who chaired the event, noted that “It was jam-packed – active and non-active members were there.” The event received a lot of press, and many we interviewed remarked that the forum was a success.

The Labor Council coordinated thousands of phone calls from its phone banks, sent mailings to tens of thousands of voters, and knocked on thousands of doors. The Labor Council even had John Sweeney come to town and campaign on behalf of Campbell, who remarked, “It shows that the AFL-CIO in Cleveland has attracted national attention by the passion and energy it has put into this campaign.”¹⁶ In the end, Campbell won with 54 percent of the vote.

In that same election cycle, the AFL-CIO also asked candidates for city council to sign onto the Workers Bill of Rights, which included the right-to-organize, keeping public services public, and support for schools and health care. The council endorsed twenty candidates who signed the pledge, and eighteen of those won.

The third was a Cuyahoga County Commissioners race in 2002. The current mayor, Jane Campbell, had been one of three County Commissioners when she decided to run for mayor. Since she still had time left on her term when she took the mayoral office, a special election was held to fill her seat. Tensions arose early, when two candidates emerged for the job. According to some observers, “the good old boys” wanted Irish candidate and County Recorder Patrick O’Malley, while much of the labor movement was behind State Rep. Peter Lawson Jones – who would have been the first African-American Democrat to hold a County Commission seat. Because it was a special election, the choice fell to the 1600 Democratic Party precinct captains to vote and select a candidate. According to Rosado, there were some vacancies in the Precinct

¹⁶ Michael O’Malley, “AFL-CIO leader leads Campbell drive,” Plain Dealer, October 24, 2001, Page B2.

Captain positions, and the labor political coordinators worked to get labor people elected for those spots. They then campaigned intensively for Jones. Jones won the Precinct Captain vote easily, and went on to win against his Republican challenger in November. For Ryan and Rosado, the Jones election was important because it showed that labor could be a force in the election, but also because it was a case that could have been divisive among Labor Council affiliates but wasn't. Not all the unions endorsed Jones, but all unions still maintained unity.

In addition to the above, John Ryan notes that the labor movement helped elect a few union members and activists to suburb City Council positions. He states, "Those members went on to play key roles in political fights - one in an upper middle class, white suburb and one in the poorest, African American suburb (Independence and East Cleveland)." Despite the success, the Council has not yet created an on-going program to duplicate this work.

Pam Rosado mentions that the political work of the council is not limited to electing candidates, but has also focused on policy issues. This includes the work of the Council in passing the citywide living wage ordinance and the state level Needlestick Bill.

Living Wage Campaign

The Cleveland living wage campaign began in 1997 (?). It was spearheaded by Jobs with Justice, with a large role by the Labor Council and unions, as well as the religious community, health care activists, and others based in Cleveland. Although the city was controlled by a totally Democratic City Council, the campaign had to work hard to move council members to support the ordinance.¹⁷ For three years, the living wage coalition worked to build their organization, do public education and outreach, and pressure their council members. They eventually got an ordinance passed in 2000. The ordinance required firms holding city service contracts or

¹⁷ This is not uncommon. The Democratic Party has not been a natural supporter of the living wage movement. In fact, the Democratic Leadership Council has come out in opposition to living wage campaigns in some cities.

receiving economic development assistance of at least \$75,000 to pay their workers \$8.20 per hour (to rise to \$8.70, then to \$9.20 in the third year after the effective date of the ordinance, then indexed for inflation). The ordinance also stated that at least 40 percent of new hires in city-subsidized development must be residents of Cleveland. The living wage coalition has not yet been able to win a living wage ordinance at the county level. This is an on-going project, and likely to be a priority issue for 2005.

Needlestick Bill

Another victory that Cleveland AFL-CIO members played a role in was getting a statewide Needlestick Bill passed. This bill requires the use of retractable needles in hospitals and health care facilities in order to reduce needlestick injuries. There was a bill at the federal level that was going nowhere, so supporters turned to the state level. The bill was a big concern for SEIU, which represents 15,000 health care workers in the state, AFSCME with 9,000 health-care workers, and the Ohio Nurse's Association. It was also a concern for custodians and housekeeping workers who could get needlesticks from laundry. The Cleveland AFL-CIO helped the efforts to get the bill passed. In fact, the bill was sponsored by a Democratic legislator from Cleveland. The Democrats have been out of power in the state for 15 years and have a hard time getting their bills passed. But Rosado was one who helped coordinate bus trips to the state capitol so union members could talk to legislators. When Ohio passed the bill, it became the 7th state to do so. After that, the federal legislation was passed.

Other campaigns

In addition to the victories listed here, the Cleveland AFL-CIO has also been active on a number of other fronts. They helped to create an Rx coalition and a Retiree Council. Ryan states,

“Our Retiree Council was instrumental in starting and pushing forward a program that resulted in Ohio’s Rx Best program.” This work also laid the groundwork for a new coalition to defend Social Security.

The Cleveland AFL-CIO has also had some difficult times. In 2003, Issue 15 was put on the Cuyahoga County ballot. The Issue would approve a human services levy to raise about \$137 million a year, through higher property tax assessments. The levy was going to be a tough sell to voters, but would result in much-needed revenue for vital services such as foster care and elderly services. However, many of the non-profit agencies that would receive the money were anti-union. SEIU Local 1199, based in Columbus, approached the County Commissioners and offered to put \$500,000 into passing the levy if it would include card-check/neutrality language. The Commissioners refused, so 1199 decided to fight the levy. Initially, the Cleveland AFL-CIO had worked with 1199 to pressure the County Commissioners. However, almost all other Labor Council unions supported the levy, and in the end, the Council chose to remain neutral on the Issue. As 1199 waged a strong campaign sent out mailings against the levy, the city’s labor community was divided. Editorials in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* called on John Ryan to come out in favor of Issue 15, and against 1199’s anti-levy campaign tactics. A week before the election, the labor council voted to endorse Issue 15. The Issue passed by a slim margin, but some argued that the impact on solidarity within the labor movement was long-lasting.

Jobs with Justice

Jobs with Justice (JwJ) was established in Cleveland in 1992. According to past JwJ staff member Steve Cagan, JwJ was formed by the most progressive people in the labor movement – who were also the most marginalized within the CLC. At the time, John Ryan was president of

his CWA local, and he and a few others had led a successful fight within CWA to maintain democratic control of their own local. The group was viewed with suspicion by the established labor leadership, and the then CLC president sent a letter out warning people about this “so-called group calling themselves Jobs with Justice.”

In the early days, Ryan served as the unofficial staff of JwJ. In the early days, Ryan invited Bob Strommen, a United Church of Christ minister to speak at a rally. Strommen stayed involved with the group, and eventually became co-chair of JwJ, with Ryan. In 1996, when Ryan was elected Executive Secretary of the CLC at the head of a progressive slate from several unions, the JwJ chapter went into a period of reduced activity. The local JwJ leadership decided that a full-time staff person was critical to growth. They raised money through donations from internationals and hired the first staff person in 1997: Steve Cagan, a well-known community activist.

Today, JwJ receives its money from several sources. First, from union dues. The typical large union gives \$1- 2,500 per year in dues, while smaller ones give \$1-400 per year. Money also comes from Greater Cleveland Community Shares, the annual “Spring Celebration” luncheon fundraiser, a fall rank and file fundraising appeal, and from foundations. Overall, about 1/3 of the budget comes from foundations. CWA gives 1/3 of secretary time. There are also other organizations that pay dues to JwJ, including a number of faith-based groups including the Western Reserve Association of the United Church of Christ, the Presbytery of the Western Reserve, the Episcopal Diocese of Ohio, and the Catholic Diocese of Cleveland.

Of all the areas of work that the CLC is engaged in, we encountered the most disagreements about the role of JwJ. In fact, when we conducted our interviews, Steve Cagan had just quit his JwJ position after seven years. According to Cagan, part of the problem was that

there never was a clear agreed-upon mission for the organization. Therefore, there was also never a clear defined role for the staff. Cagan states that organizations and people need to have goals to know if you've achieved something. But there were never clear goals or criteria, so it was hard to know what JwJ was accomplishing.

Some others we interviewed disagreed with Cagan's assessment. For example, Bob Strommen felt that there was a clear vision that the organization would focus on rights in the workplace, and that JwJ would not be an "Alinsky-style community based or congregation-based organization" – in part because such an organization already existed in the city (NOAH).¹⁸

According to Ryan, the three core areas of work for Cleveland JwJ have been (1) fighting for collective bargaining rights and supporting union organizing, (2) health care, and (3) fair trade (JwJ has been part of the ULA Fair Trade Committee). In Ryan's vision, JwJ is strongest on mobilizing. The CLC does a lot of community work directly, where there is not a good fit with JwJ. But the difference is, when community groups come to the CLC, they are an invited guest. When they participate in JwJ, they are an equal partner.

The coalition has a steering committee, which is the highest authority. Each community or labor group belonging to the coalition had one vote, and this body needed to approve anything crucial. According to Cagan, in the early days of JwJ, this group was very active, with lively meetings where people could hear reports on what is going on, get inspired to do more work, and stay in touch/network with one another. The main leaders of member groups would attend, which would make it easy to make decisions.

Cagan sees three problems that started early on. First, in the first five years that the lively steering committee meetings happened every month, there was only one disagreement. For

¹⁸ The Northeast Ohio Alliance for Hope (NOAH) is a congregation-based community organization associated with the Gamaliel Foundation.

Cagan, this was a sign that people were holding back. Although everyone loved the meetings and looked forward to them, the fact that so little disagreement came up suggests that not everyone was truly open about their opinions.

The second issue was the lack of clarity around the role of the staff person. Cagan's job title was coordinator, but he feels he would have been more effective if he was given full reign to organize and act as a leader. Third, Cagan argues that many of the people in the coalition that come straight out of a labor background do not really get the labor-community coalition idea. They "take strength" from other groups – they went into the coalition not to give but to get. Even though each member of the coalition technically had one vote, Cagan said that the big locals had the most power because they brought in the most resources. The community groups had no resources and would sometimes get shut out. In the long-term, some of the community partners got fed up with that. In part, Cagan says, it might have been easier to deal with if the coalition was more up-front about its goals: for example, it might have just said that it was a group that was created to bring community and faith-based groups in to support labor. However, the rhetoric of the coalition was that it was a true coalition, organizing together for the long haul. For Cagan, the problem was that the coalition was never clear with itself about its role, and its goals. While the coalition wanted to believe they were in the work for the long-haul, they were not willing to commit the staff time and resources necessary to do this hard work. For Cagan, this was a major tension and one of the things that ultimately led him to leave his job. He felt that in order to build a true coalition, he would have had to do more work on the behalf of community groups – including possibly working on community issues that were not clearly labor issues.

One area that this comes up is in the underlying tensions that exist in the city between the African-American community and unions. Several people we interviewed referred to a history of

exclusion of African-Americans from the mostly white building trades. Over the years, labor had made efforts to repair these relationships, while the city itself pushed this along with ordinances that required a certain number of city residents to be hired on public construction projects. Yet some feel there is still more work to be done to improve the situation, including a need for public discussion and perhaps a public apology from union leaders for the past. Others say that while there are strong relations between leaders of the two groups, most of the labor leaders are limited in developing deeper ties because they still don't really understand the politics within the black community, including the history of a deep nationalist tendency and focus on electoralism.

It must be noted that there are differences of opinion when it comes to assessing Jobs with Justice in Cleveland. Some supporters say that the organization has had tremendous achievements and did do exactly what it was supposed to do. One anonymous source suggested that the tensions that arose were personality issues between John Ryan and Steve Cagan. Another person thought the differences were political differences about how to organize, and that "both sides have a point."

According to Bob Strommen, the challenge of building trust between the African-American and labor communities has been "a real and deep issue." However, he feels that JwJ and the AFL-CIO have worked hard to break the barriers. JwJ's support for food service workers organizing at Case-Western University had opened a space for the communities to work together and begin building relationships. Unfortunately, when the International union pulled out of the campaign it was a real set-back to these efforts.

Despite the problems he saw with JwJ, Cagan speaks enthusiastically about the work JwJ did on the living wage campaign. The campaign "was a real movement" for two years – the coalition was grassroots, diverse and broad, and people realized that building the movement was

as important as winning the ordinance. Cagan also says that JwJ “was the hottest thing in Cleveland” from 1998-2001 because it ran successful support programs for organizing and contract campaigns. Michael Charney of the CTU adds that in the late 1990s, “JwJ went from a nice idea to a powerful organization.” They had a lot of success in labor support work, establishing a Worker’s Rights Board, winning the living wage ordinance, organizing big rallies, and building the coalition. In early September 2001, Cleveland hosted the national Jobs with Justice convention, which brought almost 1,000 people to the city.

The increased level of activity prompted the leadership to hire another full-time staff member, Susan Hagan, in the Spring of 2001. Hagan was a construction electrician, and a well-known activist in Hard Hatted Women and other organizations. She comes from a prominent progressive family involved in electoral politics, labor and community organizations.

Unfortunately, this momentum slowed considerably beginning in 2003. The reasons for this included the impact of 9-11, the messy ending to the dynamic HERE campaign at Case-Western University, a failure to sustain energy in the living wage coalition to work on implementation issues, and the internal tensions within JwJ mentioned above. It also corresponded to a notable decline in organizing in what had become a very dynamic Cleveland labor movement with a lot of organizing effort in the late 90s.

Policy Matters Ohio

The fourth major project of the CLC was John Ryan’s role in helping create a 501(c)3 research organization, Policy Matters Ohio. Policy Matters was established in 2000 through a confluence of forces. First, John Ryan had been interested in establishing a regional think tank in the model developed in other cities. Second, Amy Hanauer, a public policy analyst who had

previously worked for the Center on Wisconsin Strategy and Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership moved to town and produced a State of Working Ohio report that generated extensive media coverage. Third, the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) was starting to provide technical support to enable local think tanks in an EPI model to emerge. After the report publication, Amy met with Cleveland Teachers Union activist Michael Charney and his wife, state senator CJ Prentiss, and eventually John Ryan. The CLC raised about \$30,000 in seed money, provided office space and support, and Policy Matters was launched in January 2000, with a board of labor, community, and academic leaders. Within a year, Policy Matters secured a \$150,000 grant from the Gund Foundation, which allowed the organization to grow. Hanauer hired Zach Schiller, a former business reporter for the *Plain Dealer* and *Business Week* as Research Director.

While some of the 501(c)3 organizations linked to CLCs in other cities are engaged in organizing as well as research, from the start Policy Matters was largely a research and policy advocacy organization. In part this was because the presence of an active Jobs with Justice chapter made it unnecessary to establish another body to coordinate organizing work. In addition, Hanauer's background was primarily in the policy and research arena. Therefore, Policy Matters began with the mission of broadening the debate around economic policy in Ohio, engaging in research that would promote policy decisions benefiting the Ohio community, and providing a voice for workers in state policy debates.

Everyone interviewed for this report had high praise for the organization. Policy Matters has been quite successful in producing timely reports, getting media attention, conducting outreach and trainings, and establishing a reputation for high-quality research. By 2004, Policy Matters had grown to four staff persons in Cleveland and opened an office in Columbus; with an

annual budget of \$350,000. The organization has 20 board members, including seven from labor unions. State AFL-CIO president William Burga serves on the board of directors, and John Ryan is Chair.

Although Policy Matters is located in Cleveland, has a primarily Cleveland-based board and was initiated with support from the local labor council, it has focused mostly on statewide issues so far. However, they have done some local reports, such as two assessing the implementation of the Cleveland living wage ordinance, one on the Earned Income Tax Credit in the county, one looking at the biotechnology industry in northeast Ohio, two on the Cleveland school voucher program and one on day laborers in Cleveland. It is currently working on a number of locally-based projects that may assist local legislative campaigns. In addition, Policy Matters produced a report for the labor council to use in assisting organizing drives. It included maps of each ward in the city of Cleveland, the employers located there by broad industry type, and where the organized shops were.

Hanauer and Ryan communicate regularly, but the CLC does not have control over the work of Policy Matters. According to Hanauer, the research agenda is established based on the board priorities and a list of criteria. The criteria include asking whether the research will lead to policy change, examining funding opportunities for the work, looking at data availability and staff ability to conduct the research, reviewing whether similar projects have been successful elsewhere, and determining whether the research exposes a problem facing working families. Zach Schiller said “Policy Matters is fairly independent, which I think has served the organization well. A think tank that immediately looked like a tool of the labor movement would not have much traction in the media. John has been smart to weigh in when his voice is needed, and to allow us to make our own choices otherwise.” Yet everyone interviewed portrayed the

relationship between the organizations as mutually supportive and respectful. Thus, while Policy Matters Ohio can be considered a project that John Ryan and the Cleveland Labor Council helped form, it is certainly not a subsidiary of the Labor Council. Rather, Cleveland unionists see the work of Policy Matters as benefiting the labor movement primarily on the state level, and in creating an atmosphere more hospitable to working class issues.

When asked about the successes of Policy Matters, Ryan stated that the best work of the organization was probably on Labor Day 2003. The organization had written a report on job loss in the state. According to Ryan, the Ohio AFL-CIO did “an in-your-face rally” with the Policy Matters report numbers to back them up. They got media attention all over the state, particularly because it was right around the time that President Bush came to Ohio. Ryan cites this as an example of the mutually beneficial relationship between Policy Matters Ohio, which has academic credibility, and the labor movement.

Building Power at the Local Level: Assessing the Work

We now turn to an assessment of the work of the Cleveland AFL-CIO for the past several years, according to six dimensions. While there are other measures one could use to evaluate the work, the six we use are: real victories, organizing, preparing for governance, shifting the terms of debate, leadership development, and coalition building. It should be noted that this assessment is based on work through 2004. The labor movement as a whole is undergoing significant changes, and the work of the Cleveland AFL-CIO is dynamic. For some of our measures, it may be too soon to make a useful assessment. In other cases, the analysis provided below may offer helpful guidance for other labor councils looking to build, and the Cleveland AFL-CIO in assessing future directions.

Organizing

The activities of the Cleveland AFL-CIO have not yet translated into large-scale organizing victories needed for reversing the trend of falling union density. However, there are few locations in the country that have been able to do this. It is also clear that while a labor council can do much to assist new organizing, ultimately the responsibility lies with the affiliates.

At the same time, the labor council has stepped up its effort to provide organizing resources by hiring a full-time organizing coordinator in 2002. The labor council has conducted trainings with affiliates on how to improve organizing (with assistance from the ULA School for Workers), including strategic planning and coordination between unions through the Organizers Roundtable, and research on potential multi-union organizing drives. Steady efforts by affiliates and the council have yielded some success, including organizing over 2,000 new workers since 1998. This includes “400 Head Start workers, 300 Cuyahoga County Juvenile Court employees, 400 housekeepers and 100 car dealership mechanics and factory workers.”¹⁹ According to an Cleveland AFL-CIO Annual Report, the labor council also “collectively helped IAM members at Key Gas and NABET/CWA members at WVIZ Channel 25 to negotiate their first contracts; assisted winning organizing campaigns at Cuyahoga County Juvenile Court (SEIU Local 47), Hyatt Hotel (HERE Local 10) and City of Brooklyn (AFSCME).”

On-going campaigns include efforts by UFCW Local 880 to organize workers at Marc’s discount stores and at Wal-marts in the area; the plumbers, pipefitters and sprinkler fitters at Steingass Mechanical Contracting Inc.; Teamsters Local 407 (not part of the labor council) to organize 200 part-time dock workers at a new FedEx facility; a multi-union effort at a wall-to-

¹⁹ Alison Grant, “Labor looks for rebirth; Unions intensify efforts to reverse years of declining membership,” *Plain Dealer*, March 10, 2002, Page G1.

wall campaign at Wiseco Piston Inc.; the Actors Equity/Musicians Unions at Playhouse Square.; and the Day Laborers Organizing Committee.

A few organizing efforts have resulted in defeat. This includes the campaign by HERE Local 10 to win a card-check neutrality agreement for cafeteria workers at Case Western Reserve University and a SEIU District 1199 campaign to organize about 400 blood and lab technicians at the Northern Ohio Blood Services Division of the American Red Cross.

Real Victories

Although there have not been large-scale organizing gains to date, the Cleveland AFL-CIO has won some concrete victories. It is beyond doubt that turning the United Labor Agency (ULA) around represents a real victory for the Cleveland AFL-CIO. What was an institution in crisis a short time ago, deep in debt and suffering from the double burden of a diminished reputation in Cleveland and a demoralized staff, is now a vibrant institution making significant contributions to working-class Cleveland. Today there are thirty-five people on the ULA staff. The ULA dislocated worker program helps workers find employment and offers classes on how to look for a job. Recently, ULA provided seed money to Policy Matters Ohio, a new public policy research center focusing on Ohio and the Cleveland area. ULA is working with the Day Laborers Organizing Committee, SEIU local 3, and UNITE-HERE to develop a community hiring hall. Ideally, the hiring hall will insure that the temporary workers earn living wages. ULA is providing technical expertise and seed money to the Union Construction Industry Partnership (UCIP) to set up The Apprenticeship Skills Achievement Program (ASAP). Thus far, nineteen students have graduated from UCIP-ASAP training and fourteen students have been placed in one or another of the building trades apprenticeship programs.

Preparing for Governance

The Cleveland AFL-CIO has clearly developed the capacity to influence local political campaigns, including voter registration, phonebanking, door-knocking, and GOTV (get-out-the-vote). Anne Hill of SEIU notes that over the years, the labor council has been able to get more and more locals to participate in their political work. Hill says that Ryan is very strategic about this. For example, during a recent national AFL-CIO Jobs Bus Tour, Ryan made a point to get locals not usually active in council work to find speakers for the rally.

As of May 2004, eighteen out of twenty-one City Councilmembers had signed off on the Worker Bill of Rights. The Cleveland AFL-CIO told each council member exactly how many calls, letters, and door-knocks the labor movement did for them (the council's calling center tracks calls). Michael Charney of the CTU notes, "The AFL has shown that their endorsement matters. They have turned people out to make a difference in races." Hill notes that all three of the County Commissioners were endorsed by the AFL-CIO, and that two of those would not have been elected without the unions' work.

The labor movement has not yet made a significant move toward getting its own members into elected office, as has been done in a few other Union City areas like San Jose, California. Pam Rosado notes that the Cleveland AFL-CIO has worked on developing the political confidence of union members, and getting some of them in Precinct Captain positions. However, to date, there have not been any members specifically groomed to run for higher-level office. In some cities, labor leaders see this step as key to influence over the political process. On the other hand, labor leaders have been selected to serve on influential city commissions. For

example, John Ryan serves on the Cleveland-Cuyahoga County Convention Facilities Authority and previously served the Greater Cleveland Film Commission.

Some also note that the labor council could do more to work on accountability: holding representatives to the promises they made during the campaign. Anne Hill remarks that there have been some serious disappointments with city and county officials, and that even among those candidates who sign the Workers Bill of Rights, “it’s rare for them to go to the mat for labor.”

It is also worth mentioning the role of the Cleveland AFL-CIO in the November 2004 elections. Even though Kerry lost in Ohio, he won by a large margin in Cuyahoga County: 218,000 votes, more than 42,000 more than Gore received in 2000. Many unionists were sure that Kerry would win the state, given that they knew they surpassed all of their turnout goals by the end of election day. This suggests that the Cleveland AFL-CIO (working with others in the area) has developed a strong capacity to mobilize voters. This speaks well for their future efforts in Cuyohoga County elections. However, it is clear that the exceptional efforts in the Cleveland area were not enough to win the election in the state, and that Cleveland unions can only do so much on their own.

Shifting the Terms of Debate

In addition to the victories listed above, the Cleveland AFL-CIO has also been successful in shaping political dialogue within the city, in favor of greater attention to labor issues. John Ryan is frequently quoted in the local media, and others in the labor movement are called more regularly as well. Anne Hill of SEIU notes, “This is a major change from five years ago.” According to Zach Schiller of Policy Matters Ohio, the Jobs with Justice luncheon is just one

example that shows how seriously the local politicians take the labor movement. Schiller remarked that many local politicians show up – “they feel the need to be there.” The Cleveland business paper, *Crains Business*, agrees. In 2003, the paper named Ryan the fourth most influential person in Cleveland.

Interviewees also commented on the successful work of Policy Matters Ohio in influencing policy debate. The research group has been cited frequently in the local and state papers, including feature reports on Policy Matters studies.

It is difficult to measure the degree to which debate on key issues in the city has shifted as a result of the power of the AFL-CIO. One indicator of change is that neither the mayor nor city council has brought up the issue of privatization, even though there have been deep budget problems. National AFL-CIO regional staff Harriet Applegate says that the work of the Cleveland labor movement has also had an impact in terms of awareness on organizing issues. “We’ve had an impact with changing attitudes on organizing,” Applegate said. “The local politicians are much more aware of this. There have been some high profile campaigns. There has been some Voice@Work training – politicians and some religious leaders are getting it more now. JwJ has been a big help on this over the years.”

It seems that the labor movement has had less success in shifting the terms of debate around economic development. While the Cleveland AFL-CIO has played some role in some campaigns dealing with development, it has not been a major focus. Therefore, the mayor still talks about business climate without necessarily mentioning union jobs. According to Policy Matters Ohio reports, the city has not been effectively enforcing the city living wage ordinance for new economic development projects. Although the mayor made a small nod toward

improving the enforcement, little change has occurred, and there is little media attention on worker's issues when it comes to city development projects.

Leadership Development

Of the six criteria listed in this section, one of the ones we heard the most comment on was the need for more leadership development. Several interviewees noted that the Cleveland labor movement “does not have a deep bench.” While many people commented on Ryan’s exceptional leadership qualities, they noted that “if John were to leave, there is not another person with those skills to step in right now.” Furthermore, there are few others who are willing and able to put in a lot of time into building the labor council. Anne Hill remarked that while there are many skilled staff and leaders in the national labor movement, there are not many in Cleveland. “It’s not like D.C.,” Hill said. “The unions are under such attack all the time, so most leaders need to focus on their own union. There are not enough people left to work in other arenas – public policy, Jobs with Justice, community boards, etc.” One problem mentioned is that when leaders do emerge from the rank and file, they tend to get picked up to work for their internationals and move out of the area. Hill says that Internationals need to think about developing their own leaders and staff without poaching the best from the Locals. Another problem is that while some of the younger talented people are eager to move to cities like Los Angeles or New York, few want to move to Cleveland.

Coalition Building

The other criteria most frequently mentioned as a trouble spot for the Cleveland AFL-CIO is the issue of coalition building. Everyone interviewed about this topic acknowledges that

the labor council has made a lot of progress, particularly in comparison to previous labor leaders in the city and other cities. Jobs with Justice has been especially helpful in building relationships between labor and community. John Ryan has taken leadership on issues typical labor leaders have avoided or opposed, such as speaking at anti-war rallies.

At the same time, interviewees noted just how difficult it is to build real and lasting relationships, for several reasons. Some of these were mentioned above: the challenge of building coalitions between groups that have a lot more money and members (unions) and groups with little resources (community organizations); developing a common agenda between wide-ranging coalition partners; repairing a history of racial tensions; and getting the labor movement to be serious about working on coalition partner's issues even if they are not priority labor issues. According to Harriet Applegate, when it comes to coalition building, "Cleveland doesn't have the answer yet. . . . It's tough to find time to do it right. We all know you can't just rent a preacher to come to events. On the other hand, we don't know how to do it right." The result, according to Jobs with Justice activist Bill Callahan, is that "African-American churches are labor's friends, but not really partners."

Challenges and Recommendations

The Cleveland AFL-CIO has made a significant impact on Cleveland politics. Under the leadership of John Ryan, the labor council has developed greater internal cohesion within the labor movement, built a solid political program capable of getting labor candidates elected, created a space for labor's voice in local debate and media, and achieved some key victories. The labor council has played a large role in building the capacity of the labor movement, through the growth of ULA, Policy Matters and Jobs with Justice. Those organizations have in turn provided

much needed programs and services to union members and the community, ranging from very basic services such as kidney dialysis, to economic and policy research with a worker focus. John Ryan has served as a role model for labor leaders in other cities, as well as union and community leaders within Cleveland.

In assessing the work of the Cleveland AFL-CIO to date, we find that there are some major challenges to be addressed. We list these below, along with some recommendations for action in some cases.

1) Economic Constraints

While most interviewees commented on the labor council's success at getting candidates elected, others pointed to some severe limitations the labor movement faces in terms of building power. For example, Michael Charney of the CTU comments about the labor movement, "We have influence. But the reality is that we're helping to administer over the decline of the city. There is no real control where it matters – no control over capital flight. It's Lowell, Massachusetts in the 1870s." This has been evident in the reports released by Policy Matters Ohio and other data that shows the extent of job loss. From 1990 to 2000, manufacturing employment in the Cleveland area declined by just under 20,000, from 269,971 to 250,853, while union membership in manufacturing dropped over 30,000, from 71,985 to 41,852.

During this same period, union membership declined overall in the Cleveland area labor force from 15.7 to 10.1 percent.²⁰ The decline in overall union membership equates to falling union capacity, fewer union activists to engage in electoral work and organizing campaigns, fewer dollars in union coffers available for member education, paying innovative union staff, and campaign contributions. All observers we talked to agreed that the number one challenge facing

²⁰ <http://www.unionstats.com>, viewed September 23, 2004.

labor in Cleveland is the challenge posed by diminishing resources as a consequence first, of ongoing de-industrialization and de-unionization and second, as a result of the lack of success at new organizing. With a shrinking union base, it is difficult to see how the Cleveland AFL-CIO will continue to translate recent successes into future successes.

2) Strategic Planning.

Within the face of job loss and union decline it is more important than ever to engage in strategic planning. Yet a few interviewees noted that this is an area in which the Cleveland AFL-CIO could improve. One person noted that although the labor council does go through an annual process to develop an agenda for the coming year, it is not as effective as it could be. For example, although 30 people might attend a planning meeting, only about 5 speak. Some say Ryan is simply stretched too thin to give adequate time to planning the most effective use of time at the annual meetings. A few interviewees suggested that the group would benefit from bringing in outside facilitators who are trained in conducting strategic planning sessions. Another idea proposed was that a self-selected group of people agree to spend a day together discussing sharp, provocative questions, again led by an outside facilitator. This would provide an opportunity for critical reflection and discussion on long-term visions and challenges.

3) Building Coalitions

Cleveland is not unique in struggling to build strong-community ties, but the challenge is enhanced by the longtime tensions between segments of the labor movement and the African-American community. The Cleveland AFL-CIO has made efforts to build trust, and has had some success. According to Bob Strommen, the current efforts to provide building trades

apprenticeships for African-American Cleveland residents could potentially do much to further develop this trust.

It is not clear how these efforts will play out in Cleveland, but all interviewees acknowledged the need for continued efforts on coalition building. Some interviewees suggested that the living wage campaign offered a moment when deeper relations were built because it was an issue that more clearly appealed to a wide range of interests. Others said that the Case-Western organizing campaign also offered that possibility before it was stopped from above. The challenge now is to find other issues with similar appeal. One possibility is health care, as it is an issue of concern to workers or all wage levels, unemployed persons, employers, health-care workers and unions, and community groups. Jobs with Justice has done work on health care, but to date, it hasn't been a focus of the labor council. In other communities Jobs with Justice chapters have found that campaigns for Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) can also appeal to a broader range of organizations. In a CBA campaign, coalitions pressure city council members and developers to agree to a range of demands in order to get particular economic development projects approved. These demands could include project labor agreements for new construction, and card-check neutrality agreements, local hiring, child care, health care and living wage mandates for employers leasing space in the new development. It could also include environmental clean-up requirements or other environmental standards, among other things. Again, when done correctly, a CBA campaign could appeal directly to a wide range of organizations thereby laying the groundwork for deeper coalition building.