

Promoting Economic Justice for Home Care Workers in Washington: From Warfare to Kumbaya

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Abstract

Home care workers constitute a large, geographically dispersed, low-wage workforce. Home care workers and their clients are among the poorest and most vulnerable members of society. This research examines the process by which the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 775, along with home care workers, and community groups successfully pressed for social and political changes in the state of Washington. It draws on interviews with leaders of SEIU Local 775 and staff of the SEIU National office in Washington, DC. Local 775's archival data including transcripts of media clips, letters to legislators, publicity materials, press releases, and news articles supplement the interview data.

In organizing home care workers, the SEIU and its partners used a variety of tactics including policy borrowing and tinkering, a ballot initiative, lobbying, and legislative politics. The keys to success in this case include an emphasis on providing civic education to coalition members, engaging coalition members in political action, and managing perceptions of legitimacy by forming alliances with other social groups. Specifically, the SEIU engaged in "symbolic management" by framing home care workers' demands as public needs, portraying home care workers' interests and goals as congruent with those of the community, and assembling broad-based coalitions around shared goals for the community. The model developed here turns a systems approach lens on the organizing campaign. It places the campaign in the context of the legal/political environment and proposes linkages between preconditions, union strategies/tactics, and outcomes.

Introduction

Americans are much less likely to be unionized than workers in almost all other OECD member countries (Schmitt and Mitukiewicz 2012). Union density peaked in the mid-1950s when one in three workers belonged to a union and has been steadily declining since. In 2012, only one of every nine American workers were union members (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013). How have unions contributed to their own problems? Some scholars criticize unions for abandoning Samuel Gompers' traditional bread and butter principles. Their support of progressive legislation has reduced the incremental benefits of unionism, so that "simply put, organized labor has, so-to-speak, shot itself in the foot and made itself obsolete" (Deitsch and Dilts 2006, p. 88).

A more popular belief in the academic community is that the traditional model of unionism is at fault. The business unionism model focuses on contract negotiation and enforcement and providing services to members such as health plans, insurance, and group legal services. Adhering to the business model, American labor unions chose not to participate in the social movements of 1960s. This failure to ally with social movements weakened the unions in their later struggles with employers (Turner and Hurd 2001). In the 1970s employers realized that they did not have to cooperate with unions. At the same time economic restructuring and labor market changes, along with the anti-union offensive of the Reagan-era further exacerbated labor's problems (Johnston 2000).

In response, scholars and practitioners alike have exhorted unions to innovate and adapt in order to revitalize the labor movement (Hurd and Behrens 2003; Fine 2005; Turner 2005). Many unions have recently begun to develop new strategies to regain lost ground. Some of the most promising strategies include: 1) political action (Hamann and Kelly 2003), 2) the formation of coalitions (Frege, Heery, and Turner 2003; Tattersall 2010), and 3) comprehensive restructuring (Hurd and Behrens 2003).

Furthermore, several labor organizations embraced social movement unionism, a new model of unionism that focuses on organizing the under-represented, low-wage service sector workers. Social movement unionism emphasizes rank-and-file leadership and direct action as the sources of collective power, social

justice frames, and progressive alliances (Voss 2010). SEIU, an early adopter of social movement unionism, has become “the fastest growing union in the United States” (Voss 2010, p. 375).

Unions have a long history of promoting civic education and political participation (Sinyai 2006). Indeed, political power is one indicator of successful union revitalization (Hurd and Behrens 2003). American labor unions have traditionally placed greater emphasis on membership density, viewing it as a precursor to increased political power (Hurd and Behrens 2003). Treating density as the primary source of union power is most appropriate when “a collective bargaining system exists, is functioning properly, and can be relied upon as a foundation of political and economic influence for the working class” (Sullivan 2010, p. 152). With the erosion of federal labor protections in the U.S. and little prospect of American labor law reform, unions had to shift their focus from union density to legislative and regulatory politics (Benz 2005).

Hamann and Kelly (2003) contend that political action alone is not enough; unions need to combine it with other tactics such as coalition building. Since public support is an important source of power for social movements, union campaigns backed by the wider community can have significant positive outcomes (Sullivan 2009). Sharing common concerns with other groups and organizations within a coalition allows unions to broaden their agendas and attract greater public approval and support, enhancing their political power as a result (Tattersall 2010). Unions organizing workers in the public sector are especially well positioned to exploit various sources of leverage and alliances. Public employers have multiple stakeholders and points of access, such as politicians and voters (Dixon and Martin 2012), providing unions with a variety of opportunities to exercise political pressure.

Unions need to frame their demands as public needs and develop strategies to assemble broad-based coalitions around shared goals for the community (Ashforth and Gibbs 1990, Fine 2005). Framing is an important element in the process of member mobilization and coalition building. Collective action frames allow groups to infuse their actions with a sense of efficacy and legitimacy. Through framing and mobilization, groups integrate individuals within larger entities and align with other groups (Fine and Harrington 2004; Snow et al. 1986). Using real-life stories and “quasi-mythical incidents”, unions

develop collective identities among members and mobilize supporters (Levesque and Murray 2010, p. 339). These stories, therefore, constitute an important source of power (Levesque and Murray 2010) that, depending on union framing capabilities, can determine union success.

Member activism and leadership are additional factors that may foster union renewal and determine union success. In analyzing the importance of union member activism to union renewal, Hickey, Kuruvilla, and Lakhani (2010) found that member activism was the source of union bargaining power in half of the analyzed cases. However, member activism is not a necessary or sufficient condition for union success. Paid union staff also play a central role in directing and implementing organizing campaigns on a consistent basis (Hickey, Kuruvilla, and Lakhani 2010; Voss 2010).

Hurd and Behrens (2003) identify comprehensive restructuring as a critical in union revitalization. Yet, unions face numerous obstacles to restructuring. These barriers stem from the need to balance both representation and organizing so that current members are satisfied and new members are willing to join. Local leaders are hampered by their need to attend to internal politics and by resistance from staff (Fletcher and Hurd 2001). At the same time, transition can occur when actors provide new perspectives on organizational goals and strategies, and attempt to bring about change (Voss and Sherman 2003).

Finally, local political, economic, and legal environments may determine the organizing strategies available to unions and, ultimately, the success of union renewal efforts (Mareschal 2006). Dixon and Martin (2012), for example, explain that “factors external to movements themselves weigh heavily on the likelihood of coalition work” (p. 948). Similarly, Tattersall (2010) contends that political contexts affect the actions of coalition members and the strategic choices of coalition partners determine coalition success.

In the paragraphs that follow, we examine how the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 775, along with home care workers, and community groups successfully pressed for social and political changes in Washington. Their victories include establishing a quasi-public employer of record for collective bargaining purposes, organizing 26000 home care workers, achieving substantial

improvements in compensation, and giving home care workers and clients a voice in the process through which their services are delivered.

Conceptual Frameworks

This campaign targeted an unrepresented, low-wage, predominantly female and minority workforce. Two existing models provide a useful framework for examining conditions under which the SEIU was able to bring about positive political change. Charlwood (2004) specifies four preconditions for union success in the political arena: a) inelastic demand for labor; b) strong incentives for collective action such as the desire for workers' wages to keep pace with inflation; c) ideological resources; and d) favorable rules and laws. This model is depicted in Figure 1.

(Insert Figure 1 here)

Demand for labor needs to be inelastic so that pay raises do not lead to disproportionately large job cuts. This is more likely to be the case if product/service demand is inelastic, if workers cannot easily be replaced by machines or computers, and if labor costs are a relatively small proportion of overall expenses. The ideological resources are "Marxism and socialism" (p. 382), but could refer to any reasons for collective action that transcend narrow self-interest. Charlwood (2004) expresses pessimism about unions' chances of renewal in situations with high levels of competition, low inflation, declining support for socialist ideals, and a hostile legislative climate in which elected officials distance themselves from the labor movement.

Economic pressures and competition also play a major role in Turner's (2006) theoretical framework, see Figure 2. In this framework, economic pressures cause employers to demand more work for less pay. Some employers try to achieve this goal through cooperative labor relations, while others engage in union busting. In either case, the optimal union response is "integration" (p. 85), which means coalition building. When employers want to cooperate, expansive integration is possible in which the parties work together to achieve common political goals. If employers would rather destroy the union, activist integration is a necessary form of resistance. Labor movement renewal can only be brought about through expansive and activist integration. We utilize both Charlwood's (2004) preconditions framework

and Turner's (2006) sustained participation framework in analyzing how the SEIU overcame numerous obstacles to organize homecare workers in Washington.

(Insert Figure 2 here)

Methodology

This paper draws on findings from a qualitative exploratory study. The choice of a qualitative framework stemmed from the nature of the research problem. Qualitative methods allow for an in-depth exploration of social and political processes and “are particularly appropriate for studies of culture, power, and change” (Whipp, 1998, p.58). This study focused on the strategy that allowed SEIU Local 775 to empower of a low-wage workforce and gain sufficient political power to demand improved work conditions and pay in the home care sector in Washington.

Interviews and union documents served as primary data sources in the study. Interviews were conducted with three political and administrative staff members of SEIU Local 775, including David Rolf (President), Suzanne Wall (Secretary-Treasurer), and Adam Glickman (Communications Director). A fourth interview was conducted with Howard Croft, National Home Care Director, SEIU Washington, DC. Their accounts provide a unique insider's perspective into the organizing and contract campaigns.

Interviews were conducted in person and by phone in November and December of 2004. Each interview lasted from 30 to 90 minutes. A responsive interviewing model (Rubin and Rubin, 2005) was employed to gain a deep understanding of the union organizing strategy in Washington. Conversational guides, broadly outlining relevant topics for discussion (Patton 2002; Rubin and Rubin, 2005), helped maintain consistency across interviews without sacrificing flexibility to explore new themes.

Documents and video materials provided by SEIU Local 775 staff supplemented data gathered from interviews. The packets of documents provided by the union contained transcripts of media clips and copies of newspaper articles, opinion pieces, press releases, presentation materials, leaflets, and letters to legislators from union leader, home care workers, and coalition members. The union-compiled information packets dated from 2002 and 2003 and reflected union efforts in the home care contract

legislative campaign. A union-produced video tape, containing testimonies from home care attendants and union leaders, provided additional insights into the organizing campaign.

Case Study: Organizing Home Care Attendants in the State of Washington

Policy Developments in the State of Washington

In 1970 the state of Washington partnered with the federal government to establish a joint program to pay people to provide care for the ill, disabled, and elderly in their own homes. In an effort to minimize costs, limit the state's liability, avoid the prospect of unionization, and provide consumers with control over their caregivers, the government defined careworkers as "individual contractors" rather than as public employees. According to Howland (2003) this arrangement allowed the government to "maintain the legal fiction" that the consumers of home care were hiring owner-operated businesses to provide care, while the government was merely serving as the consumers' "fiscal agent" by providing wages to homecare workers. By 2003, over 26,000 "individual contractors" were performing home care work in the state of Washington. Building on previous successes in this sector in California (Delp and Quan 2002) and Oregon (Mareschal 2007), the Service Employees International Union targeted Washington's home care workers.

In July 2001, supporters of I-775, The Homecare Quality Initiative, submitted 300,000 petitions to put the measure on the November ballot (Ostrom 2001a). I-775 proposed the creation of a Home Care Quality Authority that would recruit, set standards, provide training, and develop a registry of qualified workers. In addition, I-775 would allow home-care workers to bargain collectively. Members of SEIU and their allies campaigned for passage of I-775.

In November 2001, against opposition from the Washington Research Council, a fiscally conservative watchdog group (Washington Research Council 2001); various newspapers' editorial boards including *The Seattle Times* and *The Seattle-Post Intelligencer* (Ostrom 2001b), and the Washington Protection & Advocacy System, an advocacy organization for the disabled (Jordan 2001), roughly 62% of voters in Washington approved I-775 (Cook 2001). During the 2002 legislative session, the legislature

incorporated the text of the initiative into state law. In May 2002 the Governor appointed the nine-member board and in June 2002 the board held its first meeting (Home Care Quality Authority 2006).

Thus, Washington became the third state to adopt the public authority model (Cook 2001). In August 2002 homecare workers voted overwhelmingly to join the SEIU. The next step was to negotiate and ratify a collective bargaining agreement. Initially, the parties appeared to be making rapid progress. In just over one year the home care workers had voted to be represented by a union, which negotiated a contract calling for a two dollar hourly pay raise, workers' compensation benefits, and health care for those who worked more than twenty hours per week. The workers ratified the contract by a nine-to-one margin (Cook 2002).

The contract negotiated by labor and management did not fare as well in the state legislature. Although the House voted in favor of the contract (Ammons 2003b), the State Senate resisted intense pressure from the SEIU (Ammons 2003a) and refused to hold a ratification vote (Queary 2003). During a special session, the legislature sidestepped the issue of formally rejecting the contract. Instead, the legislature used the budgeting process to grant workers a raise of 75 cents per hour, with no new benefits (Shannon 2003a).

Then in 2004 the parties negotiated a new contract. Specifically, the new contract included a raise of 50 cents per hour, health insurance benefits, workers compensation benefits, and language making it clear that home care workers were not state employees (Thomas 2004). With the SEIU's support, the legislature also amended the law that enabled the creation of the Home Care Quality Authority and governed collective bargaining. Under the amended law, the union bargains directly with the Governor. The Governor then submits a request for funding to the legislature as part of the normal budgeting process. The legislature must then approve or reject the funding request as a whole. Should the legislature reject or fail to act on the request, the collective bargaining agreement is then reopened expressly for the purpose of renegotiating the funds required to implement the agreement.

In 2004, the SEIU donated \$1.4 million to the campaign of Governor Christine Gregoire, a Democrat who won an extremely close contest (McGann 2005). With an ally at the state capitol and

collective bargaining rights secured for home care workers, the union has expanded its influence in related sectors. In late 2005, over 5000 in-home child care workers voted to join the SEIU (McGann 2006). In 2006, workers at eight nursing homes joined Local 775. The union persuaded management to refrain from actively opposing the organizing campaign in exchange for its help in raising Medicaid reimbursements for the nursing homes (Stucke 2006). The SEIU broadened its membership base and its support among state legislators. It endorsed dozens of Republican incumbents in the 2006 elections who had voted in favor of union-backed legislation (Thomas 2006).

Organizing Model and Political Context

According to Howard Croft, to date, SEIU's primary focus has been on organizing home care attendants/personal care workers—the lowest skilled, lowest wage workers in the home care segment of the health care industry. The SEIU's strategy for organizing home care attendants differs depending on the service delivery mode:

If the state is involved in paying home care workers, states often argue that home care workers are private contractors. The state contends that they [the home care workers] do not have an employer. The client hires, supervises, trains, and fires the home care worker. This relationship between the state, the consumer of home care services, and the home care workers is labeled 'consumer-directed care.'

The public authority model is the method used to organize workers in a consumer-directed setting. This involves building alliances with consumers, not interfering with consumer directed care. The union only uses the public authority model when no employer of record is present. As Croft explains,

The only public authorities in existence were created by the SEIU. The public authority gives voice to employees and voice to consumers. It becomes the employer of record for collective bargaining purposes only. Under the public authority the employees do not strike.

David Rolf was an important figure in the drive to organize home care workers in California (Takahashi 2003-4), and when he moved to Washington he saw an opportunity to achieve similar successes. In his own words:

It was the same set of circumstances we found in Oregon and California: large groups of unrepresented workers lacking legal rights and representational rights. In 2000 I recommended to the SEIU national officers that we could get a campaign here. It was not a difficult decision to begin an organizing of workers in this industry in Washington.

The International provided funding and organizing staff to support the campaign in Washington.

However, the ballot initiative was not the first attempt made by the union to secure collective bargaining rights for home care workers. Building on the successful creation of public authorities in California and Oregon, the SEIU approached state legislature with a proposal to establish a similar program in Washington. As Rolf explains:

We began by introducing legislation and by attempting to assemble a small coalition of supportive organizations. We had the support of the human service bureaucracy, a fair amount of opposition from the homecare agency community and from the case management community, and, frankly, indifference from the Governor, but a lot of legislators just had no idea of what we were talking about. Some were not even aware that the state ran a homecare program and that 26,000 workers were in poverty without access to bargaining rights.

The state legislature in Washington is a part-time citizen legislature, with fewer policy staff and a less professionalized political atmosphere than in California. Ultimately, it was not the ideal legislative environment in which to propose big new concepts. The bill that would have created a public authority in Washington died during the legislative session and as Rolf notes, the SEIU “really had no idea how long it might take for the Legislature to deal with this issue we just decided to put it on the ballot.”

Three years after the ballot initiative had been approved, SEIU Local 775 secured legislative approval of the first collective bargaining agreement for home care attendants. The political context facilitated the signing of the agreement. Adam Glickman identified three elements in the political context that were crucial in achieving a first contract:

One, the budget climate improved and our dollar figure went down, so it was a lot easier economically. But then, more importantly, the Republican leadership and the Republican control

of the Senate changed hands. So our two chief nemeses among the Senate Republicans who were in the leadership left and were replaced by moderate suburban Republican, one a former Democrat. And then on the democratic side what made the difference was that frankly it was an election year, and the Democrats weren't willing to cross hairs with us leading up to an election year, and so it moved quickly through the Democrats. We were able to move it quickly through the Republicans, with our relationships both with the leadership and with the Budget chair. One of the reporters called it something like 'warfare to Kumbaya' between 2003 and 2004. 2003 was civil war, and 2004 was this nice, happy, we all love each other, no problems.

In addition to the favorable political context, the union strategy was essential for the success of the organizing campaign among home care workers in Washington. The strategy implemented by the union comprised four main components: political action, coalition building, worker empowerment, and union restructuring. An overarching campaign message served as the foundation of the union strategy. The campaign portrayed the needs of home care workers and their clients as congruent, helping the union manage perceptions of legitimacy.

Union Strategy to Success

Political Action

Although the union attained collective bargaining rights for home care attendants through an effective ballot initiative, the control over state budgets ensured that legislators maintained the power to set wages and benefits for workers in the industry. To obtain better work conditions for its members, the union had to engage in political action. The union employed several tactics in the political action campaign such as holding rallies at the Capitol Campus, holding a vigil at the Senate Majority leader's home, enlisting a Republican senator's own priest to lead a rally urging him to support the union (Howland 2003), hiring a woman dressed as Marie Antoinette to hand out slices of cake in front of the legislative cafeteria, sending a satirical e-mail message to legislators threatening to move home care workers to another state (mocking corporate threats to relocate) (Condon 2003a), and offering to give Democratic lawmakers a remedial lesson in bargaining (Condon 2003b).

Ensuring the visibility of home care workers in the campaign represented an essential component of the unions' strategy-to-success. Home care workers directly participated in the campaign by attending rallies, writing letters to legislators, and submitting opinion pieces to newspapers. Local media and union produced materials further reflected the worker's voice. In addition to sharing their stories through the media, home care workers engaged in direct communication with legislators through calls, emails, and personal visits. Home care workers and campaign allies initiated approximately 50,000 legislative contacts over the two-year legislative campaign. According to the union representatives, having home care workers and their clients tell their stories directly to legislators at the capitol or in the district was a key part of the lobbying campaign. Glickman explained that what made the difference was really putting workers in front of their legislators.

The teachers spent a million dollars on TV ads and full-page newspaper ads, and did a 3000 teacher march in Olympia, but nobody else really on a sustained, intense basis put their constituents in front, one-on-one, five-on-one, ten-on-one, with their legislators in their areas the way we have in the last couple of years. [...] When you put somebody making \$7.18 an hour taking care of an Alzheimer's patient in front of the legislators, what can they say? Their stories are so compelling, and the issue is so obvious that once you put the human face on it, from their district, from their community, certainly by the end there were very few people in the legislature who would ever say, "No, we shouldn't do this."

The union supported workers in their communication efforts with legislators and supplemented these efforts by sending letters to senators and representatives, urging them to support home care workers and approve sufficient funding to implement the collective bargaining contract. In addition to direct letters to legislators, the union representatives wrote opinion pieces in local newspapers and used radio and television ads as part of their communication campaign with legislators, home care workers, clients, and the broader public. The union ads emphasized the benefits of home care to clients, described the poor work conditions in the home care sector, and questioned the priorities as well as the leadership of politicians enacting tax breaks for corporations while imposing cuts on health insurance for children and

opposing the campaign for improved work conditions in the home care sector. The ads asked campaign allies to contact their senators and representatives and urge them to support quality care for seniors and honor the home care contract. To illustrate, a television ad stated,

As we age we all want to live with dignity in our own home. But what have our legislators done to support quality home care for seniors? Representative Wallace voted to protect home care services, and to honor the state's contract with home care workers. Senator Benton voted to force seniors onto a waiting list, and he failed to honor the state's contract with home care workers. Call Senator Benton today. Tell him to follow Deb Wallace's lead and to support quality home care for seniors.

Unlike in previous organizing efforts, the union supported candidates in their reelection campaigns regardless of their political party affiliation. Candidates favoring better pay and improved work conditions for home care workers received the union support. Perceptions of disloyalty on the part of Democratic politicians to workers and the values of labor prompted union representatives to pursue a broader political campaign and focus on candidates from both parties. SEIU's willingness to support candidates from both political parties has proven to be an important source of political power. Glickman explained,

I think we sent a pretty clear message both to Democrats that we weren't always going to support Democrats regardless of what they did and regardless of who the Republican was, and to Republicans that we could take you out if we chose to or we could help keep you in office if we chose to, depending upon how you behaved. And so there were Republicans who behaved very well and we supported them and helped them get re-elected, and then there were Republicans who behaved very badly, and we helped take them out.

In a newspaper interview (Thomas 2006), David Rolf concurred: "Our members do not care about Democrat vs. Republican. It is not the union's role to be a subsidiary of either the Democratic Party or the Republican Party."

Supporting candidates in their reelection campaigns provided union leaders with increased leverage when addressing politicians in an effort to secure funding for better wages and work conditions in the home care sector. To hold politicians accountable to their promises, union leaders, in their public communications, referenced policy briefs and campaign materials produced by the candidates from both parties during their election and reelection campaigns in which they committed to support living wages for home care workers. Furthermore, union leaders portrayed the vote for the Senate budget, which included funding for home care, as an opportunity for politicians to demonstrate their commitment to improved work conditions in the home care sector. For example, David Rolf, in an address to legislators stated,

Both major political parties campaigned last year for legislative majorities in Washington State. Notably, despite many disagreements over taxes, social policy, transportation issues and the economy, both parties agreed on one thing: long-term care workers should be paid a living wage. The principle of living wages for long-term care workers was prompted by both the Republicans and the Democrats in policy briefs and campaign materials available on the parties' websites. Today's vote on the proposed Senate Budget provides legislators from both parties with an opportunity to live up to the principles they campaigned on.

Coalition Building

Forming and mobilizing coalitions with diverse groups was another essential component of the SEIU's strategy. SEIU formed coalitions with consumers and their families as well as consumer groups. Clients supported the campaign by participating in rallies along with their caregivers and helping disseminate the union message through letters to legislators, opinion pieces in local newspapers, and direct communication with politicians. The Washington Council for Senior Citizens and the Washington State Senior Citizens Lobby were among the consumer organizations that supported home care workers in their campaign. Moreover, the union sought and received the support of several legislators and the Home Care Quality Authority.

The union saw consumers and their families as essential partners in the campaign. The congruence of worker and consumer interests explains the partnership between the two groups. Rather than establishing a purely formal relationship with home care consumers and consumer groups, SEIU actively engaged clients and their families in the campaign. Wall elaborates on the advantages of this approach,

I think the mistakes a lot of the other campaigns tend to make is to assume that in every state that there is a fully mobilized consumer rights front, and while there certainly is in some states it's not our strength in Washington state. Having said that, I think we do a much better job of actually showing that grassroots presence of the consumers and their families as well as the workers, so where in other states they've spent a lot of energy putting together coalitions that are largely paper tigers, those organizations typically are not very well self-organized or mobilized. Instead, we've gone directly to the people providing the services and the people getting the services, and put them into motion in a much more direct way, meeting with their legislators.

Another key element of the SEIU's strategy has been to focus on the big picture. SEIU helped establish and supported advocacy organizations that advanced the cause of home care workers. Several examples are illustrative of SEIU's coalition building strategy. In 2004, SEIU Local 775 helped build an advocacy organization called Washingtonians for Health Care. This organization was created to help get the message out to the larger population that long-term care is part of the crisis in health care. As Wall described the situation, "We've been reaching out to other sectors of voters to tap into their sense of insecurity on health care issues." In addition, SEIU 775 home care workers joined activists from the Washington Tax Fairness Coalition to demonstrate against tax cuts given to corporations each year in the context of budget cuts on health insurance for children and working adults.

A broader initiative implemented by SEIU at the national level, which had important implications for home care workers in Washington, was the "Put Families First" campaign. SEIU established this unique coalition campaign among health care workers, hospitals, long-term care providers, consumers, and community organizations in 2003. Aiming to secure Congressional support for emergency state aid,

in several weeks, the campaign: 1) mobilized nurses, home care workers, hospital and nursing homes employees and administrators, and school employees to make calls and send postcards, e-mail, and faxes to Congress; 2) brought together health care workers and patient advocates for lobby visits with members of Congress; and 3) ran televisions and radio ads in several key districts. The campaign obtained \$20 billion dollars in emergency aid for states facing increasing health care costs out of which the State of Washington received approximately \$400 million.

Worker Empowerment

A third element that ensured the success of the SEIU Local 775 in Washington was treating home care workers as essential partners in the campaign, creating opportunities for their participation and empowerment. The union empowered workers by giving them a voice in the campaign and cultivating their political power. Suzanne Wall described the political empowerment process as follows:

As we're organizing workers in the long-term care industry, in every conversation with workers we include talking about political power. So when we're house visiting and first trying to get them to join the union, we ask them to join the union, join the political action fund which we call the political accountability fund, and we ask them to register to vote, and register to vote by mail. It's one single conversation about, so who makes the decisions right now that you should only make \$7.18 an hour and have no health care, isn't that outrageous? Here's the guys who make that decision, and here's how we'll get them to change their evil ways.

The union attempted to build the campaign around home care attendants and their needs. It was important for the campaign not to lose sight of the primary goal of improving workers' lives and giving them a voice in the process. As David Rolf explained, "What workers expect from their union leaders is that we are going to get up early in the morning and go to bed thinking about how to empower workers, how to give them more benefits and rights on the job. Union officers do not win or lose their reelection campaigns on the strength of the community coalition they have built, because those people do not vote in union elections." Similarly Suzanne Wall noted, "We do the big picture while we're always bringing it home too, but this really has to be about workers having a voice in the process."

Workers are a source of power to unions. Therefore, mobilizing a large number of workers and ensuring their commitment to the campaign goals was an important step in securing better wages and work conditions in the home care sector. Workers recognized the importance of their participation in the campaign. Twila Neisinger, a home care worker, explained, “We have more bargaining power. They’ll listen to more than if it’s just one person trying to fight. And we’ll get a contract and we’ll get better training. We’ll have a network where, if you are sick, we can get someone else in there. We’ll have our taxes taken out and benefits like medical and dental and vacation.” (“Washington’s Home Care” 2002). Maria Billups, another home care worker, concurred, “And the only way the change comes is from people coming together and really standing and using their voices to change what’s out there.”

Comprehensive Restructuring

Finally, in the background of these efforts was support from the SEIU at the national level for organizing, as noted above, and for restructuring around industry lines. Both at the national and local levels, SEIU leadership recognized the need to return unions to their roots as social movements and implement innovative organizing practices. Glickman explained,

We believe that too much of labor is not innovative. Too many of the Labor Unions do things in the same way they did it in 1955. A company that hadn’t changed the way they functioned since the mid-fifties, would have gone bankrupt a long time ago. The Labor Movement has to decide – “Are we on the side of relevance and effectiveness or on the side of irrelevance?” In terms of its membership strength, Labor has been headed downhill for the last thirty years. There is a lower percentage of workers who belong to Labor Unions that any time since the beginning of the Great Depression. SEIU is growing. Our #1 goal is to grow unions to include more of those workers who currently have no voice at work through a strong, united organization of workers. Local 775 has close to 30,000 members who are long-term care workers, up from about 2000 three years ago. SEIU has more than 1.8 Million members, up from 1 Million just 12 years ago. So clearly, unions can still grow, and workers still have a hunger for unity and strength. So the question is: how can the labor movement reinvigorate itself to grow to meet the demand?”

In Washington, SEIU focused on both mobilizing home care workers and restructuring the organization to meet the needs of the campaign and its beneficiaries more effectively. When the campaign to organize the consumer-directed home care workers began, it was launched by Local 6, an amalgamated union that in the words of Suzanne Wall, “represented every group from bowling alley workers, to factory workers, janitors, home care workers, and hospital workers.” Local 775 was created out of Local 6 as part of an internal process within the SEIU to unite long-term care workers, who were previously spread out over several different SEIU locals. The ultimate goal of this strategy was to create one unit to organize the entire long-term care industry in Washington State. Glickman explained that Local 775’s bargaining for the consumer-directed home care workers, “is going to drive wage and benefit standards for the entire industry. We’re really setting the standards for home care workers, we’re not anywhere near there yet in nursing homes, but that’s the next thing we need to do.”

Restructuring opened the door to new ways of organizing and more diverse strategies. In Washington, union leaders saw an opportunity in broadening their political action methods, recognizing the need to engage workers and community members in their efforts. David Rolf explained,

We need to change the way we spend our dollars and too many politicians are cowards when it comes to revenues. This is the reason we don’t have a single party strategy. For example, we have supported a handful of Republicans who have helped SEIU do the right thing for workers. Labor can’t simply depend on Democrats. We need to start looking at other institutions, other structures, other ways to mobilize workers and the community to elect pro-worker candidates, hold politicians accountable and win progressive social change.

Persuasion in Organizing Home Care Workers

Union arguments in the campaign centered on real-life stories describing physical and emotional challenges associated with low pay and lack of benefits experienced by home care workers, the importance of home care to clients, and the cost-effectiveness of home care relative to care provided in

institutional settings. Glickman summarized the campaign's message as "home care is good, people need to stay in their own homes, workers need to be paid a living wage to help so that seniors can live in their own home." Statements made by workers aligned with the overall message of the campaign. Workers primarily focused on describing the nature of home care work, the poor work conditions, and their commitment to the job notwithstanding the challenges that home care entails. Rodney LeClaire (2003), explained in an opinion piece published in a local newspaper,

I am a home care worker. I care for Billy Lee Graves, a terminally ill patient, in his home. The type of personal care I provide for Billy – cooking, cleaning, shopping and paying bills – is important to many elderly and terminally ill people. It is more personal, efficient and comfortable. Billy prefers to be in his home rather than a care facility. It is rewarding work. The problem is I only make \$7.68 per hour without health benefits and have no workers compensation coverage if I were to get hurt on the job. I am trained in other fields of work that offer better benefits. However, I choose to do this work because the clients need us.

The stories of Dana Simmons and Lynell Price further reflect the commitment that home care workers have for their work and clients. Despite the low pay that compelled Lynell to take other jobs in addition to caring for two elderly women, she stated, "I keep going back. I care. It's the Christian way, taking care of each other. Besides, I'll be old some day" (Shannon 2003b). Dana, a Spokane mother of three, left her airport security job to take care of her mother who had suffered brain damage (Rosler 2003). Dana chose to leave her better-paid job instead of placing her mother in an adult home (Rosler 2003). As in Dana's case, for many home care attendants, family ties are the source of commitment to work and clients.

Several other workers shared their stories, emphasizing the challenging aspects of the job. Workers mentioned safety and lack of benefits as important concerns. Leticia Vargas, a home care worker, expressed her concern with lack of benefits as follows, "You have to think of the future, of the family. You may think I don't need anything, I'm okay, but really you're not. If you get sick, no one will

just give you the medicine. No one will give you a doctor's visit. You have to pay it out of your pocket. And how can you, if the pay isn't enough?"

The lack of health insurance and workers' compensation left home care workers in Washington without affordable health care options in the event of illness or injury, carrying negative implications for their physical health and financial stability. The story of Pamela Martin of Spokane described in a letter to legislators and reported in the Spokesman Review (Lisa Brown 2003) is illustrative of the safety concerns and the potential consequences of work injuries faced by home care attendants. Pamela suffered a serious back injury when her client fell on her. Despite the injury, Pamela continued to work part-time to pay her bills. Nevertheless, she could not make her house payments and lost her home to foreclosure.

In order to succeed, the campaign had to address the needs and concerns of multiple audiences. Although aimed at improving work conditions in the home care sector, the campaign had to be framed as serving larger goals. Focusing on the needs of the clients and their families, in addition to the needs of home care workers, helped the union establish partnerships with consumer groups and strengthened their case before legislators and the general public. Suzanne Wall notes, "we're really finding that the concern about what's going to happen to my mom, my grandmother, just hits home for people."

Throughout the campaign, the union, home care workers, and their allies provided several arguments in support of better pay and work benefits for home care workers. Arguments mostly focused on constituents' preferences and costs of care. The union used the outcome of the ballot initiative that allowed home care workers to unionize and bargaining collectively as evidence of citizens' support for improved work conditions in the home care sector. To the same end, the union used the results of a public opinion survey that showed an 82 percent support among voters of a new contract that would have provided home care attendants with workers' compensation and an increase in wages to \$9.75 per hour.

The preference of clients as well as that of many aging adults to stay in their own homes was another argument used by the union and its supporters in the campaign. Homecare worker Vickie St. Martin noted, "I want people to understand one of these days they might be in a position where they will need to decide if they want to be at home or in a nursing home, and they won't have a choice because

there's no programs for them to say "oh, I'd like to stay at home and dictate my medications, dictate what care I get" (Washington News Service 2001). The increasing demand for home care services further supported the union's cause.

Arguments related to costs centered on the quality of care and cost implications of institutionalized care for state budgets. Dana Simmons explained, "I can't give quality care at \$7.68 an hour. It's a struggle. [...] That's why turnover in the jobs is so high" (Roesler 2003a). High turnover rates among home care workers threatens their ability to provide quality and reliable care to clients (Shoemaker 2003). The difficulty of finding and keeping home care workers, in turn, threatened the ability of clients to remain in their own homes and avoid institutionalization (Olympian 2002). The union and home care workers further argued that institutionalized care, in addition to being contrary to clients' preferences, was substantially more expensive than home care. In discussing the cost of home care relative to institutionalized care, Valentina Howard, a home care attendant who helped with insulin injection, cooked, and cleaned for her mother, stated, "Look how much money I'm saving them. I don't even get \$1,000 a month" (Roesler 2003b). Similarly, Rodney LeClaire (2003) explained, "Home health care saves big amounts of dollars for the state. If all clients were in care facilities, it would cost the state three or four times more than providing quality home care services."

The union and its members attempted to define low wages and poor work conditions in the home care sector as more than a political issue. The campaign emphasized the larger, moral dimensions of the demands for better pay and work benefits. David Rolf, for example, declared for a newspaper, "We are here to take back what is ours" (Cook 2003). At a House appropriations hearing, Randolph Decker, a home care worker, explained "All we are asking for today is to give us some dignity and respect" (Associated Press 2003). The union and its members also used the themes of unity, dignity, voice, and respect to mobilize new members and gain the support of the public. In a message to caregivers and voters, Phet Singkeo associated the poor work conditions in the home care sector with lack of respect for workers and their clients and emphasized the importance of unionization in gaining the respect that workers deserve,

“In our community is really important that we take care of someone we love or elders especially in Asian culture it’s a way of respecting our elders. But as caregiver and clients, we do not get the respect that we deserve. Too often we are invisible, both to the public and to the politicians who decide how much we get paid. Most of us only make \$7.68 per hour with no benefits, and no sick leave or vacation pay. Funding for programs for seniors and people with disabilities is always in danger of being cut. Over the last two years, we have begun to join together. We are building a movement to bring real change, so that we will no longer be invisible. Soon you will be getting a ballot in the mail asking if you think caregivers in Washington State should form a union. [...] Join hundreds of thousands of caregivers across the country creating a stronger voice for our families and for our future. Vote yes! I am voting yes!”

The union used several strategies to convey their message more effectively. Notably, Sherry Beebe, a former home care worker for Senator West’s mother urged the Senator to honor the home care union contract. Senator West opposed funding for improved pay and work conditions in the home care sector. Having a home care worker for Senator West’s mother address the Senator added a personal dimension to the message. Challenging politicians to experience the work conditions in the home care sector was another strategy used by the union and its members. Michael Hunnel (2003), a home care worker, in a letter to the editor of Yakima Herald Republic stated,

If any politicians have any questions whether home health-care providers need raise and benefits or not, I, as a home health-care worker, and Carolyn Riley, as my client, have a challenge.

Become a home health-care provider for a disabled and/or senior citizen to live a normal life in his or her own home: helping one person get into and out of bed, getting dressed and undressed, preparing meals, feeding, laundering, transporting, bathing, going to the bathroom, keeping the house clean, and whatever else the client’s needs may be for comfort and safety in his or her own home. Try earning \$7.68 an hour having to provide a roof over your own bed, utilities, food and clothing, toiletries and auto insurance (to take your client to appointments and shopping). Not to mention having enough money left over for medical, dental, visual, Labor & Industries, and

paying taxes at the end of the year. See if you can afford a vacation! Then you'll see whether home-care workers need a raise and benefits. How many politicians on a regular basis socialize with someone who earns \$7.68 an hour? Why?

Additional strategies included portraying politicians as out of touch with the public's priorities, using "stunt" leaflets to contrast tax breaks for corporations with funding cuts to home care services and health care for children, and identifying by name, in television and radio ads, politicians who supported and opposed funding for improved work conditions in the home care sector, among others.

Discussion

If the SEIU's tactics could be emulated with similar success in all other economic sectors, the decline of the American labor movement would be quickly reversed. Since this is not the case, unions need to know where their efforts would be most likely to bear fruit. In this section, we review the preconditions to political success framework (Charlwood 2004) and the sustained participation model (Turner 2006) to test the models explain what actually happened in Washington.

Turning first to the framework proposed by Charlwood (2004), demand for home care aides' labor is certainly inelastic, as this is one of the fastest-growing occupations in the United States and also one of the lowest-paid. The abysmal compensation rates would seem to provide ample incentives for collective action. Moreover, home care workers forge deeply emotional bonds with their clients, due to the intimate nature of the services that they provide. This creates a relationship of mutual trust which is necessary for collective action to occur (Kahan 2003).

The ideological resources are also abundant, as an overarching goal is to improve the quality of life for senior citizens and people with disabilities. By building a relationship with the recipients of care, caring laborers develop an ethic of care. That is, in performing their jobs caregivers' interests are expanded beyond a narrow self-interest to include clients' interests (Folbre 1994). Thus, it has been suggested that caring laborers are more receptive to union organization because they are more likely to view their work in broad social terms and to develop class consciousness. Through caregiving they are able to transcend the individualist orientation that market forces promote (Jones 2001).

Turner's (2006) model also appears to gain some support from the case of Washington's home care workers. The record clearly shows that SEIU Local 775 engages in both activist and expansive integration. It is also undeniable that the campaign in Washington has been an enormous success for the union. This bolsters Turner's (2006) claim that activist and expansive integration are the two most fruitful strategic choices for the American labor movement.

On the other hand, neither model fits perfectly with what transpired in this case. Home care is very labor-intensive, and Charlwood (2004) predicts that unions are less likely to succeed when labor costs represent a high percentage of total expenses. Turner (2006) stresses foreign competition as the key driver of the modern labor relations dynamic. However, globalization appears to have only a very tangential relationship to the events in Washington. The state's largest private-sector employer, Microsoft, seems to have little to fear at this point from foreign competition, nor do the home care aides have to worry that their jobs will be exported to another country. Indeed, one of the tactics the SEIU employed during the contract campaign was a mock threat to move home care workers to another state.

What appeared to make this campaign successful? The model depicted in Figure 3 turns a systems approach lens on the organizing campaign. It places the campaign in the context of the legal/political environment and establishes linkages between the preconditions to success in the political arena, union strategies/tactics, and outcomes.

(Insert Figure 3 here)

The SEIU pursued combined strategies of organizing, political action, coalition building, and restructuring and employed a number of tactics identified as critical to revitalizing the labor movement. To begin with, the SEIU decided to organize despite the existing policies, which treated home care workers as independent contractors without the right to join a union. In other words, it had to adapt to the existing legal political environment. Favorable rules and laws came about as the result of political activities at various levels. These include changing the state constitution through the ballot initiative process, negotiations with the public authority and the state legislature, and securing support of the

executive branch of state government. The existing political opportunity structure, with multiple points of entry, facilitated the SEIU's ability to organize home care attendants and increase its power and influence.

The SEIU stressed civic education of members and political action. As Suzanne Wall mentioned the organizing campaign was linked to conversations about political power, voter registration, mobilization, and political accountability. This approach helped create member activists. Thus, the campaign represented a return to the model of unions as schools of democracy (Sinyai 2006).

In addition, the SEIU engaged in expansive coalition building. The SEIU assembled a coalition of workers, consumers, and their families. They mobilized this coalition to meet directly with legislators, creating a "purple presence" at the state capitol and in legislators' home districts. The SEIU tapped leaders of faith-based groups including a Republican senator's own priest to support their cause. And the SEIU created a new advocacy organization, Washingtonians for Health Care. This broad-based coalition garnered media support, as evidenced in the clips discussed above.

Finally, at the national level the SEIU supported organizing home care/personal care attendants. The SEIU provided both funding and staff for the campaign in Washington state. At the same time, the SEIU helped create Local 775 through a restructuring process designed to build power in the long term care segment of the health care industry.

Conclusion

Organized labor in the U.S. faces daunting challenges. The path to revitalization and renewal is strewn with obstacles. It seems obvious to many observers that the labor movement must become more innovative if it wishes to reverse the decades-long decline in U.S. union density. The SEIU appears to be a good role model, in that it is one of the very few unions that is enjoying growth in membership. The strategies and tactics employed by the SEIU may provide a framework for other unions to adapt to the political and economic environment in which they operate and improve the voice and working conditions of their members.

The tactics the union used would not be equally effective in every situation. As David Rolf explains it, "I think in each of the homecare campaigns the SEIU has run successfully, we have tried to

engage one of the right tools to address the challenge at hand. Any specific tactic has to be matched correctly with the challenge.” So while it is helpful to enumerate the specific techniques that led to the victory in Washington, other unions should not expect similar results by using these same tactics in different contexts.

What we really need to understand better is why some unions are more effective than others at political behavior. The SEIU is younger and more oriented towards the public sector than other unions, which may be why it is so innovative (Kearney 2003). The fundamental question is, do immutable differences between unions lead to their differing levels of political effectiveness, or is there some organizational knowledge that can be transferred from the more successful unions?

The most appropriate way to examine this issue in future research may be the comparative case study method. Specifically, it would be illuminative to examine not just organizing successes but also failures. The problem as in all such research is to gain cooperation from the unions. It is hardly an enticement for any organization to be invited to participate in a case study designed to compare and contrast it to a competitor that is performing better. If the large, old labor organizations cannot adapt to today’s political and economic climate, then it will be a long time before union membership begins to rise in this country. The American labor movement does not have time to wait. More than a handful of unions need to achieve significant organizing successes if the long-term trend of declining American union density is ever to be reversed. The willingness to innovate, or institutional vitality as Hurd and Behrens (2003) label it, needs to be diffused throughout the labor movement

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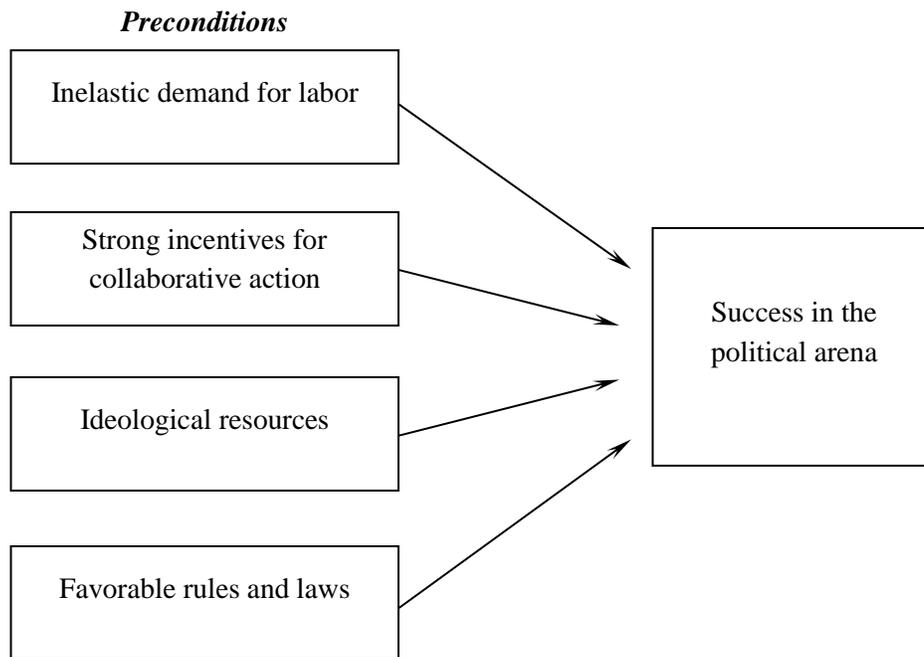


Figure 1: Preconditions for Success (adapted from Charlwood 2004)

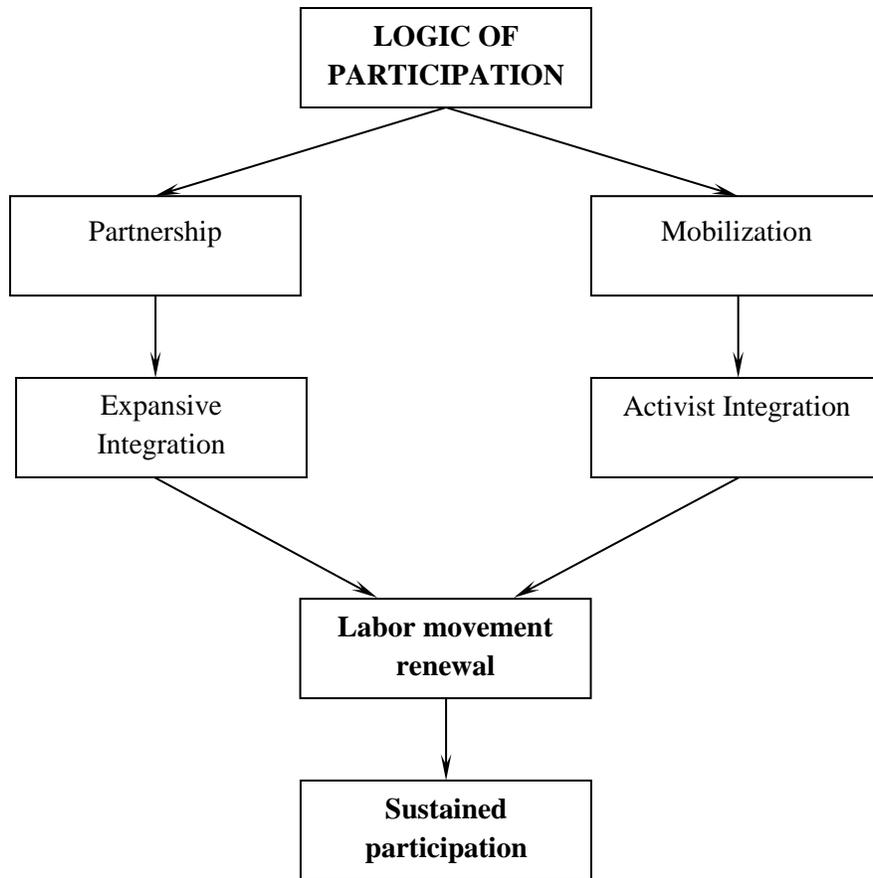


Figure 2: Logic of Participation (adapted from Turner 2006)

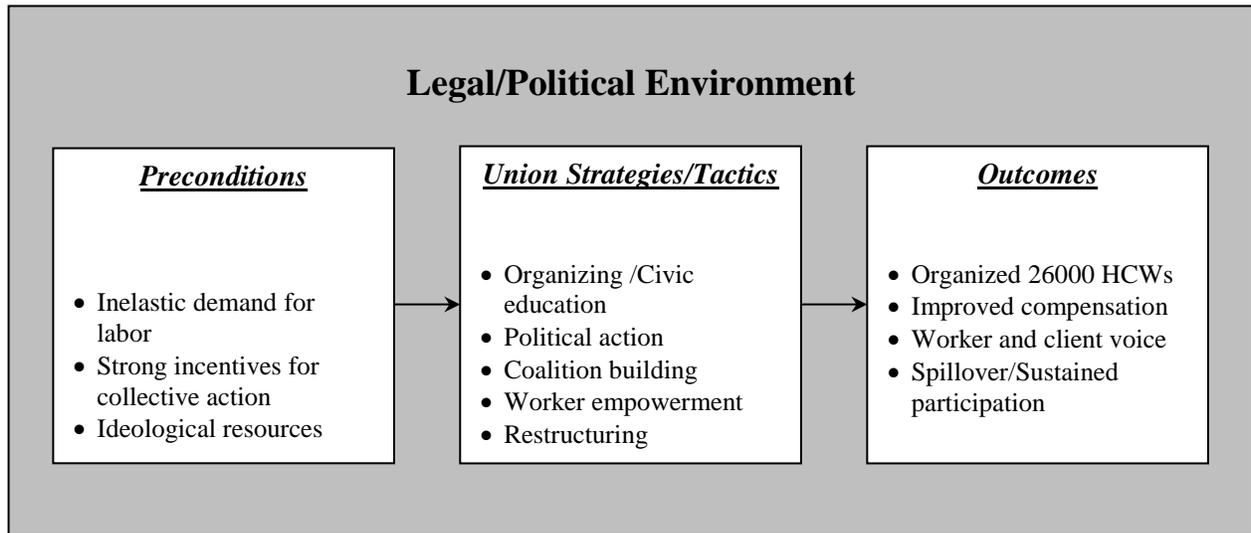


Figure 3: Political Change and Sustained Participation