

Dear Conpol Comrades:

This is a paper that is being given to a conference (Friday and Saturday at NYU) on “Democratizing Inequalities.” The premise of the conference is that while participation in civil society institutions—and the number of such institutions—has expanded in the last 30 years, inequality has too. Why?

I’m not entirely sure what I’m going to do with this paper. I’m not sure if there will be a volume produced from the conference, but I’d like to include this if there will be. If not, I’d like it to be a stand-alone piece.

My chronic problem is having complex and unfamiliar cases wedded to fairly complex (but necessarily so, I think) theoretical frameworks. What can I simplify here?

Further, does my larger point that we need to understand the genesis of strategic problems (dilemmas, sometimes) in order to think about what possibilities might be available to work them out make sense?

I’d appreciate any and all ideas about how to clarify the paper, deal with the case material better, and how to shorten it.

It’s very “drafty” at the moment, which makes it (1) a bit late, for which I apologize; and (2) good to workshop.

Thanks.

John

The Historical Dialectics of Participation and Cooptation: Notes from New York
John Krinsky

Department of Political Science
The City College of New York

INTRODUCTION

Sociologists of social movements often understand protest to rise and fall in waves or “cycles” (e.g., Tarrow 1994). One way of understanding the past forty years of growing participation of citizen groups in governance—e.g., the provision of social services, housing, banking services, and increasingly, in basic urban services such as security and parks—is to note that the civic infrastructure that arose partly as a consequence of social movement strategies in the late 1960s, and partly as a response to neoliberal urban disinvestment in the 1970s, was increasingly co-opted by elites as a replacement of the Keynesian welfare state’s service functions.

This paper proposes to shift the view of cooptation. First, drawing on the history of community and labor organizing in New York City in the 1960s and 1970s, it shows the ways in which both community-based and labor organizations sought to protect hard-won reforms in the face of periodically strong neoliberal retrenchment, and that these efforts resulted in a kind of stability for working-class organizations that had previously been elusive. At the same time, the compromises necessary to do so actually undermined the quality of the participation and representation these groups were able to foster. Second, the historical tensions in labor and community organizing did not emerge in the 1960s; because of the integration of radical and Progressive networks in the city in support of the New Deal and in opposition to machine politics, it is as important to recognize that the apparent cooptation of radical organizing from the late 1960s to the 1980s, was as much a division of radical networks and a separation of radicals from Progressives, as it was a question of getting leaders to buy into new forms of governance. Third, because of the ways in which the governance networks developed, it is difficult to clearly distinguish the state from civil society; as Gramsci (1971) indicates, to do so is to impoverish both concepts, and to ignore the systematic ways in which nongovernmental actors are brought into governance regimes. Further, depending on the ways in which this occurs, participatory organizations will have different relations to the kinds of substantive decisions that drive dynamics of inequality. In short, there is no reason simply to equate participation with democracy. Fourth, and finally, the sociological and political challenge posed by the history of the partial cooptation of labor and community organizing, and the differential integration of “participation” into neoliberal governance regimes, is to identify those existing coalitions, and existing institutional settings and levers that (a) have the potential to be expanded; and (b) if expanded, have the potential to alter significantly the decisions subject to more participatory governance.

This paper considers several strategic trajectories taken by poor people’s and labor organizations in New York City from the late 1960s until today. Though the temporal scope of the data means that the paper necessarily is somewhat impressionistic in a paper of this size, the object is not to exhaust the subject, but rather to indicate areas for further debate and study. In the first part of the paper, I outline an overall theoretical approach to the historical development of poor people’s and labor politics. In the second part, I turn to a brief outline of the historical

antecedents of activism in the 1970s, where we begin our story in the third part of the paper. Here, I present two episodes of post-fiscal crisis activism: one to preserve the gains of the pre-crisis municipal labor movement; the other to preserve affordable housing in the wake of large scale private-sector abandonment and public-sector neglect. In the fourth section, I skip forward thirty years to discuss how strategic dilemmas born in the 1970s and 1980s shape current dilemmas and possibilities for activism.

HISTORICAL DIALECTICS AND STRATEGIC DILEMMAS

Though Marxist ideas may be getting a better hearing during the current fiscal catastrophe than at any other time in the past thirty years, dialectical accounts of historical dynamics are still often held to be too unidirectional and deterministic to be of much use in historical analysis. Nevertheless, in this section, I will argue that historical, dialectical analysis helps us not only understand the historical development of the present, but also to understand the ways in which particular political dilemmas and problems appear today as legacies—and sometimes repetitions—of older ones without losing their quality as problems.

Three aspects of Marxist theory are particularly pertinent. First, it cannot be assumed that relations are one-dimensional: the caricature of one homogeneous class facing another homogeneous class in pitched battle is mainly analytically useless, if sometimes a useful political heuristic. It is, of course, fundamental to Marxist dialectics (and even to bourgeois economists) that capitalists compete against each other, as do workers; a range of self-employed, unemployed, and others also compose any given, real, class structure. Further, to the extent that classes exist, they do so in relation to each other, and these relations develop over time. In several ways, then, these developing relations are *contradictory*: In Marx's analysis of capitalism, classes do conflict, and yet the conditions of intra-class competition often results in cross-class cooperation. By extension, an important task of historical analysis should be concerned with understanding contradictory aspects of social action. As we analyze the ways in which the "civil society" that nurtured the expansion of labor rights and fought for tenants by providing organizational resources to their struggles became the civil society that dampened these very struggles, we should be alert to the Janus-faced tendencies of oppositional organizing.

Second, history is understood as a *totality* of relations, in which past, present, and future are interwoven (e.g., Ollman 2003: 166-7). Much as Emirbayer and Mische (1998) understand agency as "triadic," involving past-oriented habitual action, present-oriented problem-solving, and future-oriented projects, Marxist historical analysis understands that past, present, and future are also always present in agency. Contradictions in relations develop and become apparent over time, informing political projects of actors along the way. *Potential* solutions to problems are found in the recombination of past attempts, projected onto the future. Because agency is triadic in this way, and because relations are contradictory, strategic dilemmas and problems must be accounted for historically. The tendency, say, in simpler versions of game theory, to treat strategic dilemmas ahistorically—as if each actor were presented with decisions stochastically, or in institutional arenas whose history is left opaque, or even as institutional rules "abrade against each other" (Orren and Skowronek 1994)—typically fails to account for the durability of fundamental dilemmas and the partialness of strategic responses to them.

Third, understanding history as a totality of relations requires that we analyze actual relations at different levels of analysis, and from a variety of standpoints (Ollman 2003). This means that as we look at the ways in which leaders of community organizations and labor unions

decided to scale back their militancy, consolidate victories, and accommodate themselves to defeats, we should understand that a victory at one level of analysis—e.g., winning long-sought collective bargaining agreements, or financial stability through “agency shop” legislation—may be a defeat on another, such as the ability to mobilize to defend affordable housing programs or union jobs in the future. Taken from another angle, the concessions won by housing and labor groups can be seen against the larger canvas of global economic changes, through the closer lens of organizational development, and even through the lens of the leaders’ and activists’ cognition. We should expect that these will yield different pictures of what is occurring. But it would be a mistake to reify a micro-level (or macro-level) account as *the* one that deals with a reality (e.g., Jasper 2006). Instead, dialectical explanations are concerned with mediating among levels of analysis, and in understanding the *relation* of parts to wholes, abstract and concrete. Accordingly, in studying contemporary dilemmas in housing and community activism, it is important to understand that the boundaries of the “case” can be quite encompassing.

The task of a historical analysis that illuminates present dilemmas is therefore to uncover how these dilemmas were prepared, so to speak, as actors’ relations, as they unfolded, led to contradictions in their ability to carry their projects further, or at least on constant trajectories. By understanding how longer-term difficulties developed in the midst of shorter-term victories by labor and community organizers, we can also try to recover roads not taken, or even possibilities of renewed actions as historical circumstances change the nature of present and future dilemmas.

Accordingly, too, a dialectical analysis should be suspicious of cycle theories and of the apparent inevitability of the Michelsian Iron Law of Oligarchy (or any other invariant laws [e.g., Michels 1962; also see Meyer 2007]). Even Marxist dialectics talk about *tendencies* in capitalism (even if sometimes in law-like terms: e.g., the rate of profit tends to fall; it does not always, at all times and places, and a major problem for the governance of capital is to find new places for its expansion)¹. History is open to its “making,” and historical “things”—institutions, technologies, etc.—are unfolding relations, open to change, and always incomplete.

In the following section, I briefly characterize the development of a progressive governance regime in New York City between the end of World War Two and the fiscal crisis of the 1970s. Without this, it is difficult to understand what the fiscal crisis—long, and properly understood as a pivotal moment in urban politics—changed, and what it preserved in altered form.

RADICAL NETWORKS, PROGRESSIVE GOVERNANCE: POSTWAR NEW YORK UNTIL THE FISCAL CRISIS

The “working class New York” of the postwar era was built on the core of the New Deal coalition (Freeman 2000). A variety of radical left-wing groups, including Communists and Socialists; trade and industrial unionists; civil rights activists and Garveyite and other black nationalists; and Christian, socialist, and anarchist pacifist groups formed a densely interlocking network of radical political tendencies (see, e.g., Biondi 2003; Isserman 1993). These cooperated—if sometimes tensely—with both Democratic and Republican inheritors of the Progressive tradition: economic elites who sought to keep politics and policy administration distinct for fear of the former polluting the latter; who favored civil service provisions, expanded affordable housing, and private-sector labor rights in order to ensure politically “neutral competence” (Kaufman 1956) in public services and to anticipate, and thus undercut, most

radical demands for greater equality, and political machines' ability effectively to offer patronage. Together, these groups had supported Roosevelt, as well as Mayor La Guardia (initially elected as a reform Republican), and even Robert Moses, the Parks Commissioner and master builder responsible for building thousands of units of public housing, hundreds of parks, and thousands of miles of highways with locally approved federal money in spite of his personal distaste for Roosevelt and La Guardia's politics as nearly "socialistic" (Caro 1975).

The radical-Progressive coalition shifted during the first post-war decade as Cold War anticommunism made non-Communists wary of working together with Party members and fellow travelers, whose organizational skill and energy fueled organizing on several fronts (Bellush and Bellush 1984; Biondi 2003; Freeman 2001). On the other side of the aisle, anti-Communism combined with growing public-sector and private-sector worker militancy to fuel a Republican backlash against the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (the "Wagner Act" after the New York senator) in the form of the Taft-Hartley amendments (see, e.g., Slater 2006). Among other provisions, Taft-Hartley made it illegal for Communists to be in leadership positions of unions. This combined with existing rivalries among unions with various political alignments within the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) to lead to a purge of Communist-associated unions and Communists from the labor movement from 1948 through 1951.

Public Sector Labor Relations

Included in the anticommunist purge was the United Public Workers (UPW), a union that began in welfare offices in New York in the 1930s, and that led public-sector unionism in spite of a lack of provisions for public-sector labor rights and collective bargaining. UPW's demise opened the field for New York's chapter of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), District Council 37 (DC 37) (Maier 1987; McCartin 2006). Between 1947 and 1964, DC 37, led by the energetic socialist, Jerry Wurf, grew by thousands of members, and came to represent a majority of public-sector workers in New York City. He was helped in some measure by Mayor Robert F. Wagner, Jr.'s executive orders in 1954 and 1958 requiring commissioners to negotiate with unions in their agencies if the unions represented a majority of workers. Though commissioners tried to manipulate this, and Robert Moses defied it completely, DC 37 gained significant numbers of members, and even forced the powerful Moses to negotiate. In 1961, Parks laborers under DC 37 were the first city workers to reach a negotiated contract with the City (Bellush and Bellush 1984; also Blackmar and Rosenzweig 1993). DC 37 grew more powerful, and was an important supporter of civil rights activities (co-founder and leader of the Congress on Racial Equality—"CORE"—James Farmer, Jr. worked as a DC 37 organizer for a time in the late 1950s). Nevertheless, the militancy of the Communists was largely pushed from the scene; where UPW had regularly included demands for better welfare benefits and treatment of recipients among its demands for better pay and treatment (Maier 1987; also see *New York Times* 1938), DC 37's was largely an energetic, if political, bread-and-butter unionism.

In 1965, welfare case workers organized under a smaller, independent union founded by former UPW members who had been exiled to outer-borough welfare offices struck in defiance of the state public employee labor law. They pressured the DC 37 union in welfare offices to walk off the job with them, and garnered support from constituencies as diverse as Black churches, civil rights organizations, and the Seafarer's International Union, whose beefy members supported picket lines (Maier 1987). As with their UPW forbears, the caseworkers

union, the Social Service Employees Union (SSEU) demanded better welfare services along with their key demand: a regularized collective bargaining regime to take the place of ad hoc bargaining by agency officials. The strike was resolved when the mayor agreed to set up a commission to study this demand and make recommendations.

Almost a year after the beginning of the SSEU strike, transit workers in the Transport Workers Union (TWU Local 100) walked off the job. Organized in 1934 by a group of Communists and Fenians before the subway system became public, the TWU was led by the voluble Michael Quill. Quill, a sometime Communist, and city council member on the American Labor Party ticket. Quill had long threatened strikes, but had reached last-minute accommodations with Mayor Wagner. Incoming Mayor Lindsay, who ran as a Republican reformer in the Progressive mold, and sensitive to the plight of African American New Yorkers, showed nothing but disdain for these choreographed negotiations, and so inherited a labor impasse and strike his first day on the job, January 1, 1966 (Freeman 2001). Lindsay's eventual settlement met nearly all of the union's demands, but not before the city was paralyzed for ten days. By year's end, Lindsay had taken the recommendations of the commission set up after the welfare strike and instituted an Office of Collective Bargaining, with tripartite (labor, management, and public) representation to adjudicate certification and bargaining, as well as grievances. The transit strike, however, created pressure on Governor Rockefeller to appoint his own state commission to rewrite public employee labor relations law. The result was the so-called Taylor Law, named for labor expert, George Taylor, the head of the state commission. The Taylor Law instituted regular collective bargaining procedures, mirroring most of those in the private sector, but forbade public-sector strikes upon penalty of a loss of two days' pay for each day on strike, the loss of any automatic dues checkoff procedures, jail time for strike leaders, and unlimited fines against striking unions. Though public sector unions complained bitterly, they acquiesced to the new bargaining regime, since it was most of what they fought for since their founding in the 1930s.

New York City's Economic Base Shifts

At the same time, radical networks were fracturing, both under the pressure of strategic disagreements about how to oppose the Vietnam War and generational shifts. However militant public sector workers felt—and they did strike in defiance of the Taylor Law several times in the early post-Taylor period—their leaders could not but notice a backlash against radicalism and against public-sector labor demands. Fuelling the backlash, in part, was the onset of a serious recession and accelerating job losses in middle-class, union jobs. During the 1960s, as New York City surrendered its longstanding port functions to the container-prepared Port of Newark, New Jersey, and as newly mobile capital sought cheaper labor and real estate, the city lost over a half a million manufacturing jobs (Freeman 2000; Tabb 1982). Increasing urban poverty among African Americans and Latinos along with easily accessible and affordable suburbs (due in large part to the efforts of Robert Moses' road-building in the 1930s through 1950s) enabled “white flight” and segregation. The city's tax base began to erode and its service needs to increase.

Housing Deterioration and Organizing

Another effect of job loss and segregation was widespread housing deterioration. Landlords began to under-maintain their properties as tenant incomes and profit margins decreased, and as tenants increasingly looked different than they did. By the mid-1960s, neighborhoods such as Harlem and Central Brooklyn, with large numbers of African-Americans,

began to organize to demand better housing and services. Their demands took several forms, but were often informed by the ethic of self-determination drawn from Black nationalism. They ranged from the Bedford-Stuyvesant Redevelopment Corporation, founded with a federal grant in 1967, to the Oceanhill-Brownsville Tenant Association, which emerged in 1972 from the legacy of the roiling strike pitting the Oceanhill-Brownsville school board against the Teacher's union—heavily Jewish and socialist—over the issue of community control in 1968 (see Podair 2002; Walkowitz 1999). By organizing against slum landlords and seeking to control housing and development resources, these groups were models for later organizing. In addition, longer-term organizing in neighborhoods, rooted in socialist politics and in opposition to Robert Moses' urban renewal plans, formed the basis of tenant groups in other neighborhoods, while at the same time, middle-income housing funded by unions, and a mix of federal, state, and local governments rose on blocks that had formerly been packed with tenements. Many of these were limited equity cooperatives that preserved subsidies by limiting the price for which an occupant could sell her apartment. These, too, developed strong, protective constituent groups. In spite of the significant shifts they represented in political networks as New York City's economic base shifted away from the transportation and light-manufacturing that had been the backbone of two decades of expansion, the mix between radicalism and accommodation with more elite government and private funders continued the form, if with altered content, of New York's Progressive governance.

CONTRADICTIONS OF CRISIS

Setting the Scene: The 1970s

Howard Cosell, the ubiquitous nasal-voiced sports broadcaster of the 1970s and 1980s, looked past the center field bleachers at Yankee Stadium during a 1977 World Series baseball game and intoned: "There you have it, ladies and gentlemen. The Bronx is burning." The camera, beaming its image across the United States, captured flaming tenements in New York's South Bronx in the midst of its epochal fiscal crisis of the mid-1970s. Across the city's poor neighborhoods, tenements burned, torched by arsonists paid by landlords whose insurance policies were worth more than their rent rolls, and occasionally too, by tenants desperate to skip to the front of public housing queues and to flee rapidly worsening conditions. For its part, the municipal government, forced by Wall Street bankers and the federal government into a deep austerity plan, closed firehouses in many vulnerable neighborhoods, ensuring that response times to fires would lengthen (Freeman 2000; Harvey 2005; Moody 2007; Wallace and Wallace 2001).

The fiscal crisis, widely understood to be among the first large-scale experiments in neoliberal governance and crisis-mongering (e.g., Harvey 2005; Klein 2007) grew out of a confluence of factors that put New York's municipal government on shaky—but far from uniquely shaky—financial footing by the early 1970s. Much has been written about the fiscal crisis, its causes and its effects (e.g., Bailey 1984, Freeman 2000, Shefter 1992; Tabb 1982). Here, I want to highlight two effects, community management of tax-foreclosed housing and the agency shop.

Community Management of Housing

The burning Bronx was a symptom of a larger crisis of housing disinvestment and abandonment that had been percolating for a decade before Cosell's broadcast, and that would continue, though in somewhat abated form, until the 1990s (Bach and West 1993). The city's

loss of manufacturing jobs and the stagnation or loss of income at the bottom of the income distribution, along with the loss of population in the 1960s and 1970s meant that landlords in poor neighborhoods had a difficult time attracting tenants who could pay rents that would be sufficient to maintain an aging tenement housing stock, pay mortgages, taxes, water and sewerage fees, and generate profits. As a result, many landlords simply stopped providing regular maintenance, heat, hot water, or even emergency repairs, instead using the rent rolls to generate profit. These landlords also often stopped paying city taxes and water and sewerage fees (Bach and West 1993; Women's City Club 1977).

The city had the right to foreclose on properties for non-payment of taxes in proceedings called *in rem* ("against the thing") vestings. In 1977, in the midst of the fiscal crisis, and in hopes of capturing unpaid property taxes, the city passed a bill allowing it to initiate *in rem* proceedings after a year of nonpayment, instead of three. Property taxes are one of the only taxes over which the city has direct control, under its home rule charter by the State government. The result of the shortening of the *in rem* vesting period was not, however, a significant increase in property tax payment. On the contrary, it resulted in the city's taking ownership of increasing amounts of dilapidated, occupied and vacant property (Cotton 1996). Because of the fiscal issues involved, the city hoped to return this housing to private ownership as soon as it could, mainly through auctions. The auctions, however, often attracted unscrupulous buyers who would "milk" the buildings for a year of rents, provide no improvements, and neglect to pay taxes, only to lose the property again. Tenants paid dearly in worsening and unsafe conditions.

Tenant organizers pressed the city into curtailing the auctions, and in response, in 1978 the City formed the Division of Alternative Management Programs (DAMP). DAMP united several small programs, including a tiny Community Management Program that had been started in 1972, in which the housing would be given to community-based organizations to manage; the Tenant Interim Lease program (TIL), through which tenant associations could form cooperatives and purchase their buildings for a nominal fee; and a variety of programs designed to return properties to private, for-profit or public-private partnerships who would manage them responsibly. Another program, called the 7A program, allowed courts to appoint administrators for buildings whose landlords were neglecting them, but which did not qualify for *in rem* vesting. Often, community organizations and tenants' rights groups trained people to become 7A administrators (see Gillerman 1978; Baldwin 1981). Under 7A, tenants would pay rent into a separate account to which landlords would not have access until they paid for necessary repairs and ongoing maintenance.

The result was that tenant organizing and community-based groups around the city started to become managers of low-income housing. Though still, the bulk of the city's *in rem* stock was managed centrally by the city's housing agency (making it the second-largest public housing management entity in the US after the New York City Housing Authority², increasing amounts of low-income housing was coming into tenant and community control. Groups that had been militant tenant organizers, with roots variously in the Marxist Left of the 1970s or in Black nationalist circles (such as Oceanhill Brownsville Tenant Association), now professionalized and became community development corporations, loosely following the model developed by the Bedford-Stuyvesant Redevelopment Corporation.

"We are the landlords, now," said the director of the Oceanhill-Brownsville Tenant Association (Turetsky 1993) when interviewed on the changes wrought by grassroots housing advocates' successes. One-time tenant advocates-turned-managers learned how to evict tenants for nonpayment of rent, and how to put off tenant complaints about building services when their

building's finances were still in poor shape. In addition, many tenant organizing groups sought more educated "outsiders" in an effort to build both management and development staff. Since some expertise in housing finance helped when it came to layering the subsidies necessary to bring city-owned housing back online at affordable rents, and development fees helped support these organizations—and sometimes, to subsidize management—a cadre of professionals began to occupy positions in what had previously been radical networks. Sometimes, of course, the members were the same, outfitted with a new set of skills, but in the community housing movement, the professionalism of administration—if uneven—was nevertheless more along the lines of the Progressive than the radical vision for governance. The demands of housing development also could strain an organization's capacity to manage increased amounts of housing, and could distract from—or water down—tenant- or community-based processes of democratic governance where they existed. As a result, as one early leader in an organization that preserved and developed low-income housing in the South Bronx wrote in 1994, the tenant movement had transformed into a professionalized housing development and management sector that was simply "managing the crisis" of affordable housing for the City, but was increasingly distant from tenants' lives and unused to organizing and making demands on government (DeRienzo 1994; also see DiFilippis 2004; Krinsky and Hovde 1996).

Agency Shop

The New York City government shed nearly 60,000 jobs over the five years between 1975 and 1980, even while the municipal workers' unions invested nearly forty percent of their pension funds in technically valueless municipal debt in order to save the city from default (Moody 2007). In return, they preserved the system of collective bargaining for which they had fought for more than a quarter century, in spite of a blanket ban on strikes. For union leaders such as Victor Gotbaum of the DC 37 (who succeeded Wurf in 1964), the investment of union pension funds bought a kind of corporatism: labor would be guaranteed at least consultative status, even amid an enormous ideological and material assault by the banks and the federal government on New York's social democratic traditions. One of the important results of this was that DC 37 gained some credibility as an interlocutor—and not just a threat—in the state capital, Albany, where Republicans held sway in the State Senate. Moreover, DC 37 had set up a lobbying operation in Albany, and on the initiative of their chief lobbyist, had agreed to throw the union's electoral muscle behind some Republican State legislators who helped shepherd union-friendly bills through the normally hostile Senate. Further, at the same time, the lobbyist had been involved in the creation of the Public Employees' Conference (PEC), a coalition of public sector unions in the state. In 1977, the combination of the unions' having "saved" the City from default the year before with its pension funds, largely suppressing strikes in spite of severe austerity, and demonstrating their electoral strength and willingness to support labor-friendly Republicans resulted in the passage of an "agency shop" bill (Adler 2005). In an agency shop, where unions represent workers in a worksite and negotiate collectively bargained contracts, even workers who do not join the union (but who benefit from its contract) must pay dues or "agency shop fees" to the union. Combined with automatic dues check-off (which the unions had won earlier, and by which they could collect dues directly out of paychecks without having to chase members down to collect them), agency shop meant that in spite of the fiscal crisis, public-sector unions were put on secure financial footing for the first time. As the DC 37 lobbyist said in an interview years later, the agency shop

got a lot of people into the House of Labor where we could then talk about them actually taking a membership card but at least they'd be, you know, paying dues and, of course, it was a big money maker as well and there were an enormous number of free riders around...the state who got our benefits because it was mandated by the Taylor Law. You know, we had to represent them, but they didn't, you know, give us any money. And every year they'd come up and fight for agency shop and every year they got screwed, they just never got it and, you know, it was yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, but the Republicans didn't want to do it.... They thought that it was dangerous to give us agency shop. They understood a lot of money was at stake there and membership so...the people who came into PEC were in different stages of political development but together, I mean we were really, really big. You know, when you started to take a look, when you put all of the Upstate and Downstate unions together...there was a lot of muscle there (Adler 2005).

The problem was that the agency shop, while giving the unions a great deal more money and cementing their electoral and lobbying strength, weakened their local organization and presence at the worksite. The very condition of financial stability meant that public employee unions *no longer had to organize*. Moreover, their increasing inclusion as a junior member of the governing coalition meant that the union officials developed a stake in dampening rank-and-file militancy in order to ensure labor stability to the bankers and politicians who might otherwise use the powers they took during the fiscal crisis simply to cancel collective bargaining agreements (as they threatened to do with the 1976 Teacher's contract, which led to a several-day long strike before the Teachers relented and accepted concessions).

The Decline of Protest

In their groundbreaking work, *Poor People's Movements* (1979), Piven and Cloward argue that concessions made by the state to protesters "are rarely unencumbered." They continue: "If they are given at all they are usually part and parcel of measures to reintegrate the movement into normal political channels and to absorb its leaders into stable institutional roles" (33). In many respects, meeting public-sector bargaining demands and community-based housing programs fit this description perfectly. Piven and Cloward argue that the mass organization of industrial workers in the 1930s led to a serious decline in labor militancy as organizational procedures were set up to promote "responsible" collective bargaining. In much the same way, public-sector union leaders were concerned to appear as responsible partners, particularly during the fiscal crisis in the 1970s, when their ability to maintain the recently-won collective bargaining regime (which itself, like the Taylor Law, disappointed some of the more radical unionists of the SSEU) was threatened.

Nevertheless, three significant caveats are important. First, concessions, however encumbered, are not always disappointing. They are, after all, concessions. For housing and labor organizers at the time, these concessions often felt like victories or at least partial victories important enough to be defended, and even an indication of their growing power. For housing organizers—even radical ones—the 7A and community management programs represented a breakthrough in that the state was willing to underwrite a level of decommodification of housing. For housing activists in the 1970s, who had developed a critique of capitalist housing policy, and who subscribed to the cooperativist and participatory currents of New Left thought, curtailing tax

auctions and bringing housing under community control, enabling tenants to “fire” their landlords if their landlords were milking their buildings for rent without providing services, was an indication of the power of their view of housing as a right, and not of paltry concessions. And though it would be a few years until the city agreed to help community housing organizations to set up Community Land Trusts—private, community-controlled entities that kept housing off the speculative market—the ideas of decommodification began to inform mainstream housing policy on the local level (also see Achtenberg and Marcuse 1983). Moreover, community development assistance groups such as the Pratt Center for Community and Environmental Development (which had earlier helped form the Bedford-Stuyvestant Redevelopment Corporation) began to flourish as mediators between grassroots organizations and government officials.

For public-sector unions, the establishment of collective bargaining and agency shop in the course of seven years was seen among their activists as a partial a victory after the beating they took during the fiscal crisis and the strengthening of anti-strike penalties under the Taylor Law. Nevertheless, by enabling unions to gain financial stability for the first time, the agency shop law also demonstrated to unions their potential to gain leverage over their bosses through electoral activity. For public sector unions, moving activity from the streets to the ballot box seemed less like demobilization than an exercise of newly found institutional leverage and entrance into a quasi-corporatist arrangement with the city’s leaders.

Second, not all concessions are the same. The form of what is conceded matters greatly to what the potentials are for challengers to build on the concessions. And it matters in two distinct, but related ways: First, when public sector unions finally secured collective bargaining rights, SSEU, whose strike catalyzed the process, was upset that issues dealing with the quality of service (and by extension, welfare benefits and rules) were made explicitly un-bargainable. For most of the other public-sector unions, whose traditions did not include making claims directly in solidarity with the public they served, gaining something close to regulatory parity with private-sector workers—who also did not bargain about customer service—was an enormous victory, as was agency shop. That the Office of Collective Bargaining rules would reinforce a distance between unionized city workers and the public who depended on them; that agency shop would reinforce a distance—even in the more participatory unions—between staff and members (just as giving tenants and their advocates an opportunity to take over their slum housing from their landlords would result in a growing distance between staffs and constituents of community groups) was probably not anticipated. Instead, containment of union demands through tougher anti-strike provisions in the Taylor Law (which *were* clearly meant to drive a wedge between union leaders and their more militant rank-and-file activists) and a scaling-down of tenant militancy through small-scale alternative disposition programs were more likely envisioned as blunter instruments for selective demobilization. Nevertheless, it was the internal changes that resulted from unions and community organizations’ successes in realizing key programmatic goals amid a general shift away from the type of welfare state capable of delivering on these goals’ promise that has made it more difficult for them to reorganize to meet today’s organizational challenges.

Along with this organizational shift is the second way in which the type of concession granted makes a difference. This is a cognitive shift among organizational leaders about what their organizations and movements entail. I will have more to say about this with the third caveat. But the point here is that the reforms won by public-sector labor unions and community housing activists not only changed the “problem space” of their work, but also changed the alliance structure within which they worked—and were a result, too, of some of these changes

already in development. In most respects, the OCB and Taylor Law effectively ended the long, residual, and radical influence of the UPW within the municipal labor movement. By removing the possibility—rarely actually achieved, but always there in demands—of community-oriented claims in labor contract negotiations, it reinforced a vision of public-sector labor as a kind of unitary interest in the pluralist mold. Even when the municipal labor movement would later try bargaining *en bloc* (rather than having individual unions fight each other, an equally prevalent tendency), it viewed labor, and sometimes public-sector labor, in excessively narrow political terms. In the housing and community development movement, as James DeFilippis demonstrates well, getting into the housing business led many groups to become increasingly insular in their areas of political activity and policy expertise.

The third caveat, however, is that the dichotomy between “government” and protesters in Piven and Cloward’s work is perhaps drawn too strongly,³ and finds clear echoes in more recent work that tries to outline “civil society” as a sphere of activity distinct and apart from the state. When discussing public-sector workers, at least, one problem is that public-sector workers work for and in the government. And, as suggested earlier, a sharp distinction between the state and civil society (or social movements) would have to ignore the radical-Progressive network that governed New York City in the New Deal and postwar (and pre-crisis) era, and that persisted beyond the crisis era in ways that annealed labor radicalism from the ore. Though fairly few open socialists and Communists worked in policymaking capacities in municipal (or state) government, Communists’ influence within the American Labor Party, and persistent, significant cooperation through the 1950s and 1960s between socialist-led public sector unions like DC 37 and even some community-based housing organizations and tenant rights groups and the administrations of mayors Wagner (1954-1965) and Lindsay (1966-1973) on issues relating to labor, housing, and civil rights made contention in New York City a matter of sometime allies turning on each other. Nevertheless, to the extent that anticommunism was a leitmotif running at least from the early 1950s through the 1970s within this network, public performances associated with Communist strategy, such as making common cause between municipal workers and relief recipients were never meaningfully picked up by noncommunist segments of the public-sector labor movement. Within the housing field, radicals and Progressives made common cause against bad landlords and poor housing conditions and for increased numbers of subsidized housing units; but a program of decommmodification, while making some headway, nearly always ran, ultimately, into official resistance. But as with labor, broad areas of cooperation made a radical-Progressive coalition fairly durable. This was, perhaps, especially true after 1966 and Lindsay’s mayoral victory, when in spite of his Republican Party affiliation, the mayor’s clear sympathy with civil rights, interest in better governance, and distance from Democratic clubhouses drew significant numbers of educated, liberal young people into government who had sympathy with the poor, African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and other workers’ increasingly difficult economic plight. These people spanned the radical and Progressive networks, in spite of tensions that sometimes characterized union-municipal relations.

These caveats prompt a focus on an important practical question. What role did the Taylor Law and agency shop, or the expansion of community-based housing disposition programs play in separating and specializing groups of people who are working together on a number of issues (labor rights, civil rights, welfare rights, housing rights for tenants) that they often see as intertwined? Note that the mechanism of demobilization is different from that imagined to be inevitable by Michels. Rather than the formalization of organizations leading inevitably toward oligarchy, the insularity of leadership, and the decline of grassroots support, I

am interested in how “winning” reforms may lead radical activists to parcel off parts of the larger totality of economic, political, and social relations, and to think less systematically and programmatically about the future. Where an organizational hopelessness or cynicism can lead to a *politique du pire*, more dialectical analysis demands an understanding of the historical composition of contemporary strategic dilemmas.⁴

REVITALIZING OR GETTING STUCK?

Setting the Scene: 2010

Since its fiscal crisis in 1975-77, the New York City has not known a five-year stretch without a budget crisis, and concomitant demands for severe cuts. During the 1980s, this was largely due to the withdrawal of federal aid under President Ronald Reagan. During the 1980s and 1990s, moreover, income inequality grew rapidly, with the top quintile of income earners the only ones whose real income increased over both decades, while the bottom quintile’s earnings fell. This was a result of the city’s near-total dependence on Wall Street and on industries related to the finance, insurance, and real estate (FIRE) sectors (McCall 1998; Parrott 2001). When, however, these sectors faltered, as they did in 1982 and 1987, and again with the “dot com” boom and bust in the late 1990s, and again in the late 2000s, the municipal government’s tax shortfalls became severe.

From the 1980s through the 2000s, the rampant disinvestment and abandonment of the housing stock abated, replaced in most part by gentrification. Tourism—and hence, too, a focus on downtown real estate and expansion of low-wage service jobs—grew into an important second support for the city’s economy as manufacturing continued its secular, but precipitous decline. As the fiscal crisis wound down, many of the jobs lost to the public sector returned for about ten years before the severe downturn prompted by the Wall Street crash of 1987 resulted in bond-raters insisting on layoffs during the one-term mayoralty of Democrat David N. Dinkins (1990-1993) (Hackworth 2002; Sites 1997). Under Dinkins’ successor, Republican Rudolph W. Giuliani (1994-2001) the quasi-corporatism that characterized the post-crisis regime’s settlement to rehire union workers after layoffs and to work with even sometimes-critical nonprofit groups finally frayed decisively in the face of a strong program of privatization, workfare, and neglect of low-income housing needs (Krinsky 2007b; Moody 2007; also see Niblack 2001).

Republican-Independent Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg (2001-present) took over in the immediate aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks that sent the city’s already-faltering economy into a tailspin. As the city recovered over the next several years, it did so both because the financial sector generated enormous profits through derivatives, credit default swaps, and other instruments that poured money into real-estate development and consumer loans, and because real estate developers began aggressively to gentrify neighborhoods in a larger swath of the city than had previously been the case. In the meantime, in spite of an announced intention to cut homelessness in half, Mayor Bloomberg has presided over a worsening homelessness problem—worse even than it was during the height of the Crack epidemic of the late 1980s (Coalition for the Homeless 2010).

Bloomberg has also had alternatively hot and cold relations with DC 37 and other city unions. Bloomberg’s enormous personal wealth (he is the richest man in the city) neutralizes to some degree the unions’ electoral operations: the mayor’s willingness to spend upwards of \$100 million on his own campaigns means at once that the unions have less to offer candidates and that they risk extremely difficult negotiations if they cross him. Bloomberg has negotiated tough

contracts with public sector workers' unions, and has sought state legislation to limit future pension obligations by creating a new tier of public pensions for new hires (Greenhouse 2006). He has overseen significant privatization and contracting-out of public services, and it has now become commonplace for public amenities, such as parks, to be run by private organizations (often modeled on post-fiscal crisis-era organizations like the Central Park Conservancy and the Prospect Park Alliance). Epitomizing the fiscal-crisis-era rift that drew Progressives decisively away from the left, Bloomberg's rhetorical focus on good government, measurable performance, and fiscal discipline—and his hostility to grassroots politics—echo 19th century elite Progressives' politics more than they do the politics of the coalition into which they were drawn by the radical upsurges of the 1930s or the optimistic politics of the early Lindsay administration.

Developed and Developing Dilemmas: Labor

During the 1990s, Mayor Giuliani rapidly expanded the city's workfare program, the Work Experience Program (WEP), in an effort to reduce the welfare rolls and to realize savings in low-skilled city employee positions. WEP workers were not defined as employees under law, and though they worked alongside DC 37 members, were entitled to virtually none of the protections that the union had won for its members over time (e.g., Diller 1998; Krinsky 2007a). DC 37's leadership and the leadership of many of its locals had become so distant from their members—and their members so distant from involvement in the union—that the union fraudulently passed the 1995 contract over the vote of the rank-and-file. Side agreements to the contract covered DC 37 members who had to supervise WEP workers, and so gave WEP the union's imprimatur. WEP's expansion would become a visible symbol to many outside and inside the union of DC 37's lack of effectiveness (Greenhouse 1999).

By 1998, the union was in near total disarray as the vote fraud scandal broke along with disclosure of massive graft in two of the union's biggest locals. More than half of the Council's local presidents went to jail; nearly all had supported the mayor. DC 37 was put into receivership by its parent union in 1999. Part of the administrator's strategy to signal a change at the union was a much harder line against WEP including belated lawsuits against WEP's displacement of unionized workers in city agencies (Greenhouse 1999). Nevertheless, DC 37 emerged without important structural reforms in 2002 under the directorship of Lillian Roberts, a former DC 37 organizer and associate director from the 1960s and 1970s who was important for the union's final, large growth spurt.

By 2010, WEP had contracted considerably as a portion of the city's workforce for a variety of reasons.⁵ But a successor program—the Job Training Program or JTP—had largely taken its place in the agencies that used WEP the most, such as the Parks Department and the Department of Sanitation. JTP began in response to a vigorous organizing campaign by several poor people's organizations that had united in their opposition to WEP in the late 1990s (Krinsky 2007). Originally proposed to be 18-month transitional jobs with an education and training component, it was enacted for 11-1/2 months. Unlike WEP, JTP is employment. JTP workers are paid a wage, not their welfare benefits and they are associate members of the union (they can be represented in grievances and bargaining, but have no voting rights or representation structure). When JTP was originally enacted, the wage varied depending on the task, and was commensurate to union rates. In 2004, in an effort to save money, the Bloomberg administration slashed the wages to a uniform, lower rate, and cut the program to six months (Lagorio 2004). Even so, JTP workers tout the program over WEP, arguing that JTP pays a wage, where WEP does not. Some also benefit from the training programs offered to JTPs in basic job skills, but

also in more specialized ones, such as commercial driving and horticulture. Moreover, in the context of the “Great Recession,” even a six-month job at \$9.22 an hour, followed by unemployment benefits and the possibility of being hired back as a seasonal worker is better than many JTP participants might get on the private market. A subpar training job in 2006 could, even two years later, become something relatively better than workfare and many entry-level jobs available in a depressed market.

JTP workers are members of an “association” under DC 37—in short, not a full-scale local. They pay agency shop fees, but discounted. Their temporary status means that they get fairly little representation from the division that services them. More than permanent workers, JTPs are likely to let potential grievances go, as filing them would hurt their chances (slim, at any rate) for permanent hire, and the grievance machinery too slow to make much difference. Their subordinate status within the union is justified by their being limited to six-month (and in rare instances, nine-month) positions.⁶

Dealing with JTPs is symptomatic of union’s response to the challenges of a neoliberalizing workforce: it did little organizing and arranges its relations with rank-and-file workers to minimize their power within the union or its locals, and to distance the union from accountability. This is not to say that DC 37 is simply interested in exploiting its members. It is not. The problem is that since agency shop was granted, DC 37 leaders have had considerable internal predictability, and new categories of workers upset this.⁷ DC 37’s organizing campaigns among new categories of worker (one directed at WEP workers in 1997 and 1998, and the others directed at workers for the Central Park Conservancy in the mid-1990s and again in 2008) were generated from without, paid for by the parent union, and inadequately staffed. Since the 1970s, there has been no culture of organizing within the union. Even before this, radicals within the union provided this, whether affiliated with Socialists, Communists, or the New Left.

To the extent that JTPs have a vocal advocate, it is an antipoverty group, Community Voices Heard (CVH). Founded in 1996 by a couple of veteran organizers and a group of women who were homeless or on welfare, CVH seeks to inject the voices of the poor into public policy debates. CVH was among the first organizations to attempt to organize WEP workers in the 1990s, and was a key member of the coalition fighting for the initial transitional jobs legislation, and has tracked the program in its various iterations with advocacy reports (e.g., Community Voices Heard 2006). CVH’s longtime position—dating from JTP’s first, longer and better-waged iteration—is that it should be expanded on the basis that employment is better than workfare. This is the case, even as JTP has been degraded as a labor contract.⁸

Since DC 37’s receivership, however, CVH has a history of working alongside the union on WEP and JTP issues. DC 37’s organizing director sought out CVH to lead its community support team when it began its Central Park Conservancy worker campaign. Both concur that JTP should be expanded as part of a larger expansion of the unionized public workforce that would replace the private contractors whose numbers have mushroomed and who do work once assigned to municipal workers (see Garrido 2009). The problem is that the more of the less-expensive JTP slots the city creates, the less it has to fund other new slots. One possibility is that if the city created new JTP slots, they would come at the expense of contracted, private-sector jobs that may themselves be unionized (Sims 2009a, b). This would create tensions between public- and private-sector unions and be difficult to justify.

The result is a dilemma about consolidating and building on victories, but on victories whose value has, nevertheless, declined. To understand this dilemma in its specifics, however, we have to understand its development out of previous struggles around labor and welfare, and

particularly the ways in which previous efforts to consolidate victories (i.e., DC 37's acceptance of OCB and the unions' establishment of agency shop in the late 1960s and mid-1970s) helped to curtail more radical possibilities that had earlier been instantiated in union activity. Thus, today's dilemmas assume that a group like CVH will not attempt to represent JTPs in collective bargaining in spite of the group's commitment to democracy among its members and the poor, and that DC 37 will have nothing to say about welfare policy in negotiations and bargaining either its own contracts or conditions of JTP employment. Arguably, however, any strategy that seeks to combat the creation of a substratum of workers in the public sector has to be willing to challenge the institutional walls that have gone up—and are protected—after community groups and unions snatch small victories from rounds of punishing struggle.

Developing and Developed Dilemmas: Housing and Homelessness

The essential problem facing housing activists was that the nature of their victory with respect to city-owned housing—effecting a fairly substantial decommodification of housing for the poor—came at the cost of organizing. As DeFilippis (2004: 109) notes, drawing on Raymond Williams' distinction between alternative and oppositional politics, nonprofit, community-controlled housing became an alternative amid the continuing dominance of—and continuing crisis in—private-sector rental housing. This came at the cost of the groups sponsoring community-controlled housing becoming less oppositional than before. Two models of community-controlled housing that came to some prominence in the early 1980s sought to redress the tension between development and management on one hand and organizing on the other (the symptom of which was the shift to alternative politics from oppositional). These models, Mutual Housing Associations and Community Land Trusts (MHAs and CLTs) are (1) expansionist, geared toward taking increasing amounts of housing off the market, mainly as a curb against gentrification; (2) depend on strong resident control, and thus continual organizing among residents; and (3) have a built-in element of outside expertise and community stakeholders on their boards (DeFilippis 2004, Ch. 4; Krinsky and Hovde 1996). The idea behind this is to build local alliances with an organized political presence to support the goal of continual decommodification of affordable housing, while modeling good, resident-oriented management. DeFilippis notes, moreover, that MHAs and CLTs, because of their built-in focus on, have not only transformed housing tenure, but transformed neighborhoods in which they have developed. Stability of tenure also means a greater ability of residents to *respond* to organizing efforts, and at least several MHAs and CLTs have been linked to improving neighborhood safety and services, even while continuing to serve very poor populations.

The problem, however, remains that *organizationally*, housing management and resident organizing can be difficult to balance, and the pressures exerted on “regular” community housing development organizations are little different for MHAs and CLTs. Further, as DeFilippis indicates, the political valences of mutual housing and land trusting are often either difficult to communicate to residents, or simply not communicated:

The members of most of the collectives do seem to recognize that they are involved in something different from the norm. But that does not necessarily mean that they view themselves as doing something politically significant...An important reason for the apparently limited politics of those involved is the source of capital for these organizations. These organizations rely on capital from without to acquire their assets or property. This capital comes primarily from the

state and foundations, to sets of institutions that are rarely interested in funding local organizations that define themselves as oppositional to capital (2004: 149-50).⁹

The history of MHAs and CLTs, is, therefore, mixed. While many of the MHAs and CLTs that were founded in New York City in the late 1980s and early 1990s remain, they have not expanded as they hoped—stymied in large part by the development priorities of mayors Giuliani and Bloomberg and by a fall-off in federal housing subsidies—and most have not been able to combine successfully the community and resident mobilization and self-help elements of the model with the more mundane tasks of housing management. Several have had extremely low levels of resident involvement. As with unions, this can lead to scandals and crises in which board or staff members mismanaged or embezzled funds. In this, too, they were no different from the other nonprofit housing organizations whose more evident distance from organizing and resident power they had hoped to avoid.

Tellingly, however, two of the groups that initiated organizing against WEP in the 1990s were initially housing organizing groups that implemented mutual housing models. They embraced the models precisely because they sought to develop, but also to continue organizing. The most recent call for setting up a CLT and MHAs comes from Picture the Homeless (PTH), a homeless activist group that formed in 1999, and was staffed initially by former CVH members and staff (one of whom lived through another MHA-creation process in the 1980s).

Noting that the city spends upwards of \$800 million per year on its shelter system, and that housing affordability is based on area median incomes—including tony Westchester County—putting most affordable housing out of reach of households that are coping with homelessness, and noting further that the bursting of the housing bubble has left New York littered with half-finished and underoccupied housing, PTH is trying to get city and bank officials to set up a foundation for homeless people and a CLT with some of the vacant or underused housing that will ensure affordability into the future. Some housing could be taken through tax foreclosure; others, it argues, could be taken through eminent domain (Markey 2010). One way the group is trying to do this is by staging occupations of vacant land or buildings owned by banks that were bailed out with federal funds. This echoes both the experience of some of PTH's staff in squatting during the 1980s on the Lower East Side, and, perhaps more directly, that of ACORN, a group that initiated a squatting campaign in Brooklyn in the mid-1980s (and would organize WEP workers ten years later) that later led to the formation of an MHA. Nevertheless, at the moment, PTH is not squatting buildings, but engaging in demonstrations and working with sympathetic legislators. The question is whether even if they initially win their demands in the short term, the longer-term effort to expand will demand a change in tactics.

THE DIALECTICS OF PARTICIPATION AND COOPTATION

Gramsci called the distinction between the state, or “political society” and civil society “methodological” rather than real. Most of the \$800 million spent on the shelter system in New York City is channeled through contracts to nonprofit organizations, some of which started as grassroots efforts to help the homeless in the 1980s, and became ever more professionalized. Private groups administer an extensive emergency housing system without which government

would have to provide services directly (leaving the services open to agency shop, and union regulation) or not provide them at all (with severe consequences for the government's popular legitimacy, as thousands of people, including children, would be on the streets; and for its legal legitimacy, since a Depression-era state constitutional provision mandates state provision for the indigent). In the area of public-sector labor politics, Maier (1987) argues that public sector unions "manage discontent" of workers, in part because the unions that have survived have done so by being selected as partners of government over the more radical unions with an organizing bent.

Nevertheless, it is also the case that more poor people got involved in controlling their housing, whether through nonprofit community development corporations, MHAs, or CLTs than would have otherwise. Though some of the resident- and community-controlled housing has fallen on hard times because of insufficient capital reinvestment or internal governance problems, there has long been evidence that these housing models have succeeded relative to private, for-profit or continued public management in providing safe, decent, and affordable housing. On the labor side, historian Joseph McCartin argues that without the stigma of communism, public sector unionism grew by leaps and bounds after the UPW was crushed in 1950 (2006: 77-8); and without doubt, a financially stable union movement has both been the bulwark of New York City's middle class as private-sector jobs have declined dramatically in quality and pay, and given more municipal workers the opportunity to have a hand in governing the workplace. That private, non-unionized workers and volunteers in "civil society," along with a variety of nonstandard workers in welfare-to-work contracts now provide the great share of social services to the poor, childcare, security, sanitation, and increasingly, parks maintenance (and do so in cities around the world as the new, privatized style of governance spreads through policy networks) continues to erode the gains made by public sector unions—gains facilitated, in many ways, by the financial stability of check-off and agency shop.

Internal Relations, Contradictions, and Strategic Dilemmas

As Ollman (2003: Ch. 5) indicates, levels of analysis, or nested scales of abstraction and generality are fundamental to Marxist thought. Like Dewey (1938)—who was also deeply influenced by Hegelian dialectics—Marx understood complex and changing relations among people as a "totality" or unified whole, whose various shifting aspects could only be discovered by the process of abstraction (or subjecting some aspects and not others to examination). The trick was to understand how these abstractions were related to each other in order to discover the ways in which contradictions emerged in the whole, even if at different levels of generality. Ollman argues that this approach is fundamental to a theory of "internal relations," or the position that parts of the whole—and changing wholes—should be understood as *relations*, rather than as separate, component parts. Abstraction, therefore, is a process by which these relations are pulled out and examined as they change.

There are alternatives. Among the most common are rational-choice, game-theoretic, and even behavioral-economic individualisms. Even James Jasper's (2006) more dynamic approach that focuses on strategic action among "players" facing "strategic dilemmas" in institutionally defined "arenas"—which is an exercise in abstraction that properly indicates the multifacetedness of any decision—tends to focus so exclusively on decisions that players make, that it loses a sense of how the arenas in which they "play" develop, interpenetrate, and how the players themselves develop and learn through and across arenas. To some extent, the theory of multi-level games (e.g., Tsebelis 1991) comes closer in approximating the kinds of dynamics

described here, but even there, we would need to put the decisions and decision-space on the much more general canvas of the developing crisis of Keynesian governance of capital in order for the entire set-up to make any sense¹⁰. To be sure, one could decompose the entire workings of global capitalism into a series of billions of individual decisions—of the masters of industry deciding where to invest down to the once-welfare reliant home-child-care worker deciding whether to take on another charge, or the teenage boy in the Congo deciding whether it is worth it for him to harvest Coltan today—but doing so would be losing the forest for the trees.

Because dialectics focuses simultaneously on multiple levels of abstraction and multiple registers of change, it leads the analyst to focus on the ways in which people's actions play out across time, and at multiple levels of relational reality. Unintended consequences are expected. But the benefit of dialectics is to train an eye on which strategic dilemmas are likely to crop up given certain of actors' decisions, and why these dilemmas will pose themselves as such. At the heart of the perspective, when applied to political activity, is the idea that because institutions, organizing capabilities, shared understandings of stakes and goals change at different rates and are never finished changing, contradictions appear that may be experienced as dilemmas or strategic problems (but may not, though they continue to develop). Marx contended that economic relations tend to change more quickly than do most other aspects of social life and collective governance, and that this leads to incommensurability between the two, and ultimately, to conflict between members of rising classes and members of ruling classes whose economic foundations for rule are in the process of being undermined. This contradiction between the means and relations of production (understood at one level of generality) gets played out politically (at another level of generality), and shapes the dilemmas, strategic thinking, and cultural understandings of the variety of conflicting social actors (at a third level), the outcomes of which may change the relations of dominance among members of opposing (or allied) classes, and may even alter the relations of production.

For public-sector workers in New York, a contradiction between the changing relations of production in private enterprise during the New Deal, and their exclusion from the new institutional frameworks governing labor was severe, and strained the coalition between working class organizations and radical groups and Progressives. Public-sector unions sought parity with private-sector workers, and as the postwar welfare state grew so too did their numbers and their potential for disruption. In the early 1960s, the Wagner administration was faced with labor demands that stemmed from his attempt to cement an alliance with organized labor, but contradicted by his strategy of playing labor organizations against each other. Trying to outwit DC 37, the Wagner administration empowered a social workers' union led by former UPW stalwarts, underestimating their militancy and failing to recall the older union's propensity to broaden struggles and build coalitions with clients. Wagner's gambit failed, and the Welfare Strike succeeded, fueled by solidarity from DC 37 and other labor unions, as well as the by civil rights and welfare rights organizations that began to flourish in the milieu of protest that had not begun to crest even three years earlier. The resolution of the strike and the near-parity of public- and private-sector worker status that resulted was itself freighted with contradictions at multiple levels of analysis: First, by rendering non-workplace demands unbargainable, the new labor framework struck at the heart of SSEU's radical unionism, and so partially accomplished what Wagner could not. Second, public-sector and private-sector labor are different relations, and without the ability to bargain on service quality, public sector unions were more susceptible to being portrayed as working against the public interest. Third, parity with private sector workers came amid massive changes in New York City's economic base, which in turn, made it difficult

for unions to reap significant new rewards from bargaining. The fiscal crisis, therefore, found New York City's unions at their institutionally strongest point, but one in which the power that unionists could wield on the polity was increasingly restricted. Agency shop, which cost the city and state nothing, recognized that public sector unions were less able to fight through industrial action than through electoral muscle. The erosion of workplace rights with privatization and workfare shows that the reduction of public sector unions to an electoral interest group has weakened them considerably.

For housing groups, the contradictions that led to the housing crisis were similar to the ones facing the newly institutionalized labor unions: the city was in a fiscal crisis born largely of a shrinking local tax base and decreasing federal funding. The expansive state and local funding that built or guaranteed low- and moderate-income housing in vast urban renewal tracts was withdrawn during the Nixon administration, partially replaced by block grants. New York's government, facing rising homelessness, widespread disinvestment and abandonment, and a shrinking city (the loss of the legitimacy of local arrangements demonstrated with feet) gained the ability to apply federal block grant funds to underwrite its housing rehabilitation and management efforts. I have already argued that both housing and labor groups were so woven into the fabric of New York City's coalitions that the decision to "engage" or not developed gradually and not as an "eventful" choice¹¹. And for housing groups as well as labor unions, the consequences of the *type* of engagement eventually negotiated were demobilizing in the longer term. Further, they have fed the increasing privatization of the local welfare state, the labor consequences of which unions only recently have begun to address, and as much through legislative as through worksite activity.¹²

IN PLACE OF A CONCLUSION

Among the important insights that emerge from Gramsci's understanding of the state and civil society is a keen sense of the contradictory internal relations of governance. There is no "engagement dilemma" (Jasper 2006) as such—a dilemma for activists about whether to engage a fight—but only dilemmas about how to engage the fight, and about the timing and potential consequences of engagement. Gramsci understood that in contemporary democracies, by and large, "civil society," or the arenas of governance that rely on the generation of consent, will be the terrain of contention. The martial metaphor Gramsci used to describe struggles in civil society was probably the most horrific he could conjure: trench warfare. Subject to long periods when contending actors are dug into their institutional routines, which may become undermined over time; subject to sudden shifts that can undo years of an actor's advances; and ultimately reliant on winning over significant numbers of others whose institutional concerns may be tangential to one's own, the metaphor suggests a long view of political engagement marked by frequent defeats and the possibility of advance.

For groups like CVH and PTH, which have expanded their scope of activity, but equally for unions like DC 37 that face decreasing relevance, the solidification of neoliberal governance since the 1980s presents an important strategic problem of the same sort that Gramsci described more than seventy years ago: *How* can they engage in opposition to a broad project of governance that continually undermines the basis of popular power, even while maintaining the ability to organize this opposition by winning, consolidating, and managing concrete concessions that lessen the blows to the material wellbeing of their constituents? At the moment, CVH has

no official standing in representing JTPs, though the group has negotiated on JTPs' behalf in the past. Similarly, PTH has no official standing as a representative of homeless people, and no role in providing housing. Groups like CVH and PTH, in not being as institutionally constrained as an organization like DC 37, have the ability to be more creative, and to develop ideas about larger political program in a way that groups that are already involved in service-delivery cannot. Like the UPW, which insisted on joining workplace and non-workplace demands, and like the housing groups that looked to MHAs and CLTs in order to preserve an explicit role for organizing, PTH and CVH already have *at least* the outlines of a broader political vision¹³. The difficulty will be to move unions in a way that coaxes their resources into new modes of organizing. Even here, there are some hopeful signs from the union movement in organizing “nonstandard” workers, such as home-daycare providers and in working more closely with immigrant workers’ centers, these efforts have been driven from without, either by workers’ centers or by antipoverty groups like the now-defunct ACORN (which had experience in anti-WEP organizing and MHAs). And in their taking part in the Right to the City Coalition—a broad contact group of grassroots organizing outfits in New York (and in cities around the world)—they are already be working toward the articulation of a broader politics. The important element, from a dialectical point of view, is whether they can succeed in avoiding siloed, laundry-list politics that narrow the scope of challenge, and reconnect with a politics that, like UPWs, joined labor and community concerns, now, perhaps from the other side.

REFERENCES

- Achtenberg, Emily Paradise, and Peter Marcuse. 1983. “Toward the Decommodification of Housing: A Political Analysis and a Progressive Program” in *America's Housing Crisis: What is to be Done?* Ed., Chester Hartman. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Adler, Norman. 2005. Interview.
<http://library.albany.edu/speccoll/findaids/apap015/ADLER05.pdf>
- Bach, Victor and Sherece Y. West. 1994. *Housing on the Block: Disinvestment and Abandonment Risks in New York City Neighborhoods*. New York: The Community Service Society of New York.
- Bailey, Robert W. 1984. *The Crisis Regime: The MAC, the EFCB, and the Political Impact of the New York City Fiscal Crisis*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Baldwin, Susan. 1981. “Evicting the Landlord.” *City Limits* (February) 5-7.
- Bellush, Jewel and Bernard Bellush. 1984. *Union Power and New York: Victor Gotbaum and District Council 37*. New York: Praeger.
- Biondi, Martha. 2003. *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Blackmar, Elizabeth and Roy Rosenzweig. 1992. *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

- Caro, Robert. 1975. *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York*. New York: Knopf.
- Clark, Andy. "Economic Reason: The Interplay of Individual Learning and External Structure." Pp. 269-290 in *The Frontiers of the New Institutional Economics*. Edited by John N. Drobak, and John V. C. Nye. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Coalition for the Homeless. 2010. Basic Facts About New York City Homelessness. Website. Online at <http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/pages/basic-facts>.
- Community Voices Heard. 2006. Parks Opportunity Program (POP) External Monitoring Report. New York: Community Voices Heard.
- DeRienzo, Harold. 1994. "Managing the Crisis." *City Limits* (December): 25.
- Dewey, John. 1938. *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. New York: Hold, Rinehart, and Winston.
- DeFilippis, James. 2004. *Unmaking Goliath: Community Control in the Face of Global Capital*. New York: Routledge.
- Diller, Matthew. 1998. "Working Without a Job: The Social Messages of the New Workfare." *Stanford Law and Policy Review* 9,1: 19-43.
- Emirbayer, Mustafa and Ann Mische. 1998. "What is Agency?" *American Journal of Sociology* 103: 962-1023.
- Freeman, Joshua. 2000. *Working Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II*. New York: The New Press
- Freeman, Joshua. 2001. *In Transit: The Transport Workers Union in New York City, 1933-1966*, 2nd Edition. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Garrido, Henry A. 2009. Massive Waste in a Time of Need. White Paper. New York: District Council 37, AFSCME.
- Gillerman, Margaret. 1978. "7-A Law Gives Tenants a Way to Seize a Building—Legally." *City Limits* 3 (August): 8-14.
- Gramsci, Antonio. 1971. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. Translated and edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith. New York: International Publishers.
- Greenhouse, Steven. 2006. "City's Pension Cut Proposal May Set Negotiating Pattern." *New York Times* (June 6).
- , 1999. "Vowing to Go From Scandal to Strength, Union Looks for a Fight." *New York Times* (July 12).

- Hackworth, Jason. 2002. "Local Autonomy, Bond-Rating Agencies and Neoliberal Urbanism in the United States." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 26, 4 (December): 707–25.
- Harman, Chris. 2007. "The Rate of Profit and the World Today." *International Socialism* 115. Online at <http://www.isj.org.uk/?id=340>
- Harvey, David. 2005. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- . 1999. *The Limits to Capital*, 2nd Ed. New York: Verso.
- Isserman, Maurice. 1993. *If I had a hammer... The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Kaufman, Herbert. 1956. "Emerging Conflicts in the Doctrine of Public Administration." *American Political Science Review* 50, 4: 1057-1073.
- Klein, Naomi. 2007. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Krinsky, John. 2007a. *Free Labor: Workfare and the Contested Language of Neoliberalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2007b. "The Urban Politics of Workfare: New York City's Welfare Reforms and the Dimensions of Welfare Policy Making." *Urban Affairs Review* 42, 6: 771-798.
- Krinsky, John and Colin Barker. 2009. "Movement Strategizing as Developmental Learning: Perspectives from Cultural Historical Activity Theory" in *Culture, Protest, and Social Movements*, edited by Hank Johnston, Ashgate, 209-225.
- Krinsky, John and Sarah Hovde. 1996. *Balancing Acts: The Experience of Mutual Housing Associations and Community Land Trusts in Urban Neighborhoods*. New York: The Community Service Society of New York.
- Lagorio, Christine. 2004. "Parks Program Withering." *City Limits*. Online at http://www.citylimits.org/content/articles/viewarticle.cfm?article_id=3067
- Lewis, Lynn. 2007. "Empty Buildings – Crowded Shelters." Speech at Columbia University, New York City, November 30. www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdUpWDj4DEQ
- Maier, Mark H. 1987. *City Unions: Managing Discontent in New York City*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Markey, Eileen. 2010. "A Push to Lodge Homeless in Vacant Buildings." *City Limits* (May 12). Online at http://www.citylimits.org/news/article_print.cfm?article_id=3992

- McCall, Carl H. 1998. "New York City's Economic and Fiscal Dependence on Wall Street." Report. Office of the State Comptroller.
- McCartin, Joseph A. 2006. "Bringing the State's Workers In: Time to Rectify an Imbalanced U.S. Labor Historiography." *Labor History* 47 (1): 73-94.
- Meyer, David S. 2007. *The Politics of Protest: Social Movements in the America*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Michels, Roberto. 1962 [1915]. *Political Parties*. New York: Collier.
- Moody, Kim. 2007. *From Welfare State to Real Estate: Regime Change in New York City, 1974 to the Present*. New York: The New Press.
- Niblack, Preston. 2001. "The Municipal Workforce: Big As A Decade Ago, But Composition Has Changed." *Inside The Budget*. New York: Independent Budget Office (December 11).
- Office of the Mayor. 1997. *Mayor's Management Report*. New York: City of New York.
- Ollman, Bertell. 2003. *Dance of the Dialectic: Steps in Marx's Method*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
- Orren, Karen and Stephen Skowronek. 1994. "Beyond the Iconography of Order: Notes for a 'New Institutionalism.'" Pp. 311-365 in *The Dynamics of American Politics: Approaches and Interpretations*, edited by Laurence C. Dodd and Calvin C. Jillson. Boulder: Westview Press.
- Parrott, James A. 2001. "Bolstering and Diversifying New York City's Economy." Pp. 46-53 in *Rethinking the Urban Agenda*, edited by John Mollenkopf and Ken Emerson. New York: Century Foundation Press.
- Piven, Frances Fox and Richard A. Cloward. 1979. *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Podair, Jerold. 2002. *The Strike That Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sewell, William H., Jr. 1996. "Three Temporalities: Toward an Eventful Sociology." Pp. 245-280 in *The Historic Turn in the Human Sciences*, edited by Terrence J. McDonald. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Sims, David. 2009a. "DC 37 Calls Job-Training Workers Money-Savers, Urges Program's Expansion." *The Chief/Civil Service Leader* (March 6).

- , 2009b. “To Replace Private Building Maintenance with City Staff Represented by DC 37” *The Chief-Civil Service Leader* (July 17).
- Sites, William. 1997. “The Limits of Urban Regime Theory: New York City Under Koch, Dinkins, and Giuliani.” *Urban Affairs Review* 32, 4 (March): 547-8;
- Shefter, Martin. 1992. *Political Crisis/Fiscal Crisis: The Collapse and Revival of New York City*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Tabb, William K. 1982. “The New York City Fiscal Crisis.” In *Marxism and the Metropolis: New Perspectives in Urban Political Economy*, 2nd Edition. Edited by William K. Tabb and Larry Sawers. New York and Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Tait, Vanessa. 2005. *Poor Workers’ Unions: Rebuilding Labor from Below*. Boston: South End Press.
- Tarrow, Sidney. 1994. *Power in Movement*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Tilly, Charles. 1997. *Durable Inequality*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Turetsky, Doug. 1993. “*We Are the Landlords Now...*” *A Report on Community-Based Housing Management*. New York: The Community Service Society of New York.
- Walkowitz, Daniel. 1999. *Working with Class: Social Workers and the Politics of Middle Class Identity*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Wallace, Deborah and Rodrick Wallace. 2001. *A Plague on Both Your Houses: How New York Was Burned Down and National Public Health Crumbled*. New York: Verso.
- Women’s City Club of New York. 1977. “With Love and Affection”: A Study of Building Abandonment. New York: Women’s City Club of New York, Inc.

¹ For a probing discussion of debates around the falling rate of profit, see Harman (2007); also see Harvey (1999).

² The New York City Housing Authority is charged with the operations of federally funded public housing, of which there are more than 150,000 units in the city.

³ It is, perhaps, a bit unfair to complain about characterizations made in a groundbreaking book nearly forty years ago, especially since, in spite of its opening chapters’ claims about the structuring of protest, Piven and Cloward’s book is centrally concerned with *government* in the form of electoral institutions and their relationship with protest groups’ decisions on organization.

⁴ Note, too, that I do not discount the onslaught of neoliberal “rollback” imposed on the city, its unions, and its housing and community organizations during the fiscal crisis. The point is that the fiscal crisis, while preparing the way for a deepening neoliberalism in part by sundering the Progressive-radical coalition in many ways (and notably strongly in the rhetorical alliance between good government and hostility toward public workers, and organizational innovation of privatization programs), it also resulted in securing organizational stability in labor politics, and in creating new organizations across the housing field.

⁵ These reasons include a range of incentives in federal welfare laws to shift costs around. Because Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for the long-term disabled is federally funded, states have moved significant numbers of

welfare recipients onto SSI, thereby reducing their obligations under Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) the welfare program that emerged from the federal welfare law of 1996. TANF also gives credit to states that have reduced their welfare rolls so that the percentage of welfare recipients required to be in “work activities” is somewhat reduced. Thus, past a certain point of reduction in the rolls, it is no longer necessarily cost-effective to run a large workfare program. Also, the unions’ lawsuits against displacement, though unsuccessful, were unsuccessful on procedural grounds, not on substantive ones; it became clear that the city would have to tread more carefully when assigning WEP workers. Moreover, because WEP workers’ schedules are set by their benefit allocations, the program is difficult to administer at the worksites, as WEP workers have often widely divergent schedules.

⁶ This does not stop “regular” seasonal employees from being represented by other locals. In a way, this is an inverse logic to that used by DC 37 in the early 1970s, when organizers from a welfare-rights group built an organization of workers in an early workfare program. Then, the organization sought to build its own union (it even worked with the United Electrical workers, one of the CIO unions that left the CIO in order to avoid its anticommunist purges) or to have its own local within DC 37. But fearing the power a large, new local could have, DC 37 argued for these workers to be split among its locals, and their power diffused. See Tait (2005: 91-96).

⁷ In other words, except in cases of blatant corruption and in locals in which avoidance of member participation was accompanied by embezzlement, this is a case of what Tilly (1997) called “opportunity hoarding” rather than “exploitation.”

⁸ It turns out that even supervisors and administrators in the Parks Department find the degradation of the contract difficult to deal with—JTPs disappear at the point where they become knowledgeable, reliable workers—and there is currently talk of lengthening the tenure of the job again.

⁹ Capital funding is important to protect time for organizing, but also to protect the resident or community ownership. Funding through loans or through tax credits risks alienating control over the assets.

¹⁰ I should note here, too, that rational choice models, such as those upon which even Tsebelis depends only begin to make what sense they do if one has already accounted for the socio-historical “scaffolding” of this rationality (e.g., Clark 1996; for a more general perspective, see Krinsky and Barker 2009).

¹¹ For the sense of “eventful,” see Sewell (1996).

¹² Recent successful union drives have combined workplace activity and legislative activity. The United Federation of Teachers, for example, worked with the community organization ACORN, to organize—and then get the right to represent—home daycare workers. These workers have contracts with the city, but were generally understood to be independent contractors. UFT and ACORN made the case that their labor contracts were far closer to public employment than to independent contract. Service Employees Local 1199 has raised wages for home health aides through living wage legislation and through legislative action to increase reimbursements from Medicare and Medicaid. And Service Employees Local 32BJ has launched a successful organizing campaign for building security guards, and has raised wages in some of the local industry’s largest companies. Each of these campaigns has made the privatization of formerly public work a central theme.

¹³ A recent article (Markey 2010) on the campaign launched by PTH through the Right to the City Campaign—a coalition of grassroots activist groups that also includes CVH—suggests that this broader vision’s articulation in PTH and Right to the City’s vacant buildings campaign has made an impression on some owners: A vice president of the Real Estate Board of New York comments: “The call for the confiscating of private property for ideological reasons is the most startling since the Russian Revolution.”