"To Secure Improvements in Their Material and Social Conditions": Atlanta's Civil Rights Movement, Middle-Class Reformers, and Workplace Protests, 1960-1977

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B.A. in History, May 2009, St. Mary's College of Maryland

A Dissertation submitted to

The Faculty of
The Columbian College of Arts and Sciences
of The George Washington University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

January 10, 2020

Dissertation directed by

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Acknowledgements

I could not have completed this dissertation without the generous support of teachers, colleagues, archivists, friends, and most importantly family. I want to thank The George Washington University for funding that supported my studies, research, and writing. I gratefully benefited from external research funding from the Southern Labor Archives at Georgia State University and the Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Books Library (MARBL) at Emory University. At the Southern Labor Archives, Traci Drummond provided invaluable support and knowledge of Atlanta-related labor archives. I also want to thank the archivists at MARBL, the Archives Research Center at the Atlanta University Center, the Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History of the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System, the Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center, the Walter P. Reuther Library at Wayne State University, and the Library of Congress.

I have had the privilege to work with an amazing group of teachers and staff while studying at GW. First and foremost, I want to thank Eric Arnesen. Eric's patient guidance and advice has made me into a better researcher, writer, and historian. Erin Chapman, Andrew Zimmerman, Richard Stott, Katrin Schultheiss, and Ed Berkowitz all provided invaluable teaching and support. I want to thank Michael Weeks for always providing timely support. I want to give a special thank you to the late Leo Ribuffo, whose sharp wit, sense of irony, and probing questions shaped my understanding of American history. While at GW I also had the pleasure to meet and work with a wonderful group of colleagues. Andreas Meyris, in particular, generously provided me with chapter revisions that improved my dissertation immensely.

Outside of GW, I have had the remarkable luck to work with and learn from an amazing group of scholars. I especially want to thank the members of the DC Working Class History Group, especially Cindy Hahamovitch and Jay Driskell. From my first years in graduate school this group taught me about writing and collegial academic debate. I want to thank this group for the feedback they provided on two of my chapters. I also received invaluable feedback from panelists and commentators at Southern Labor Studies Association, Atlanta Studies, and Labor and Working Class History Association conferences.

Finally, and most importantly, I want to thank my family whose support means the world to me. My sister, Jessey, has always been there with support and provided valuable feedback to one of my chapters. My Aunt Jessie, when not globe-trotting, found the time to offer advice and revisions. Thank you to my mother for always being a source of support and to my father whose conversations about sports, music, and television provided a reprieve from thinking about my project. Finally, I do not have the words to express my gratitude to my partner, Niki. Her kindness, generosity, drive, and ambition will always be a source of inspiration. Niki's unceasing support and valuable advice was the only way I was able to finish my project. This took entirely too long, thank you for being there. I look forward to the next chapter of our lives now that we have Charlie with us.

Abstract of Dissertation

"To Secure Improvements in Their Material and Social Conditions": Atlanta's Civil Rights Movement, Middle-Class Reformers, and Workplace Protests, 1960-1977

This dissertation explores how middle-class black activists and reformers participated in protests to open up and improve workplaces for black workers in Atlanta in the 1960s and 1970s. While middle-class activists and reformers achieved some limited victories in these workplace protests, just as often the campaigns ended in defeats. There were significant obstacles to improving black worker rights and benefits in the form of recalcitrant employers and business-friendly politicians in Sunbelt Atlanta, but there were also important limitations in how middle-class activists and reformers approached these campaigns. This dissertation considers how middle-class activists understood issues of workplace and economic injustice and what strategies and tactics were best to bring about change. This dissertation also pays particular attention to the relationship between middle-class reformers and labor unions, both in the private and public sector. At times, black activists attempted to form a civil rights-labor coalition, at other times activists challenged discriminatory policies of labor unions and viewed unions as a hindrance to their goals. Scholars working in the framework of the Long Civil Rights Movement often emphasize how little the fight for economic justice played in the classical period of the civil rights movement (1954-1965). This dissertation, however seeks to add to a growing body of scholarship that emphasizes the persistence of the economic dimension of the civil rights movement by focusing on protests, boycotts, and strikes to improve Atlanta's workplaces. Middle-class black Atlantans led boycotts to compel employers to hire and promote more black workers and supported strikes by

workers seeking better working conditions, improved pay and benefits, and union recognition. Middle-class black activists and reformers, however, rarely viewed workplace protests as their number one priority, nor were workplace issues or labor organizing campaigns alone a real concern for these activists. Instead, activists and reformers acted when they viewed a workplace campaign as fitting into their larger vision of the black freedom struggle.

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Introduction

The July 6, 1963, issue of the *Atlanta Inquirer*, a newspaper founded in 1960 to publicize the black student movement, ran the headline "Civil Rights Protests Take New Twists Here."[1] Underneath the headline were two articles: "Students Protest Jobs Ban on Negro Liquor Buyers" and "Dobbs House Strikers March," which described two examples of civil rights activists' protests on behalf of black workers in the Georgia capital. The first article examined a boycott that the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights (COAHR), the student-movement group in Atlanta, organized against a white-owned liquor store located in an African American neighborhood that disproportionately employed white staff.[2] For the activists of COAHR this was not a one-off protest; one spokesperson promised that "We will carry our protest to every store in town where Negroes can buy but can't work." In fact earlier in the same issue, the *Inquirer* reported on a COAHR goal of "opening up at least 5,000 new jobs this year in areas now closed to Negroes."[3]

The other article described a three-hundred-person march of COAHR and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) members and black striking employees of the Dobbs House restaurant, coffee shop, and catering division at the Atlanta Municipal Airport. The workers, who were members of Hotel and Restaurant Employees Union (HERE) Local 151, had struck two months earlier in the hopes of forcing union

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[1] "Civil Rights Protest Takes New Twists Here," *Atlanta Inquirer,* July 6, 1963, 3.

[2] "Students Protest Job Ban on Negro Liquor Buyers," *Atlanta Inquirer,* July 6, 1963, 3.

[3] "Students Call Mass Meeting to Push for 5,000 New Jobs, *Atlanta Inquirer,* July, 6, 1963, 1.

recognition and a contract that improved wages and working conditions. Pamphlets distributed at the demonstration connected the strike to the ongoing civil rights movement. "Until Negroes are treated as human beings, they will not have decent jobs, decent homes or decent education," the pamphlet proclaimed.[4]

The *Inquirer* highlighted an aspect of the black freedom struggle that receives less attention than other more notable aspects of the movement like the sit-in campaigns and the fight against disenfranchisement. Black activists and reformers in Atlanta and the workers they supported used a variety of methods of public protest, including boycotts, strikes, marches, and pickets, in an attempt to force employers to change their practices and policies. They participated in campaigns against discrimination in hiring and promotions, segregation and harassment at work, low pay, long hours, little or no benefits, and other forms of exploitation in Atlanta's workplaces. Activists and reformers also came to the aid of black workers seeking to force companies to recognize their labor unions and sign collective bargaining contracts that improved wages and offered workers a grievance process. Some of the issues they raised were not the typical civil rights concerns but many of these activists understood how racism shaped nominally color-blind issues like pay, benefits, and promotions. They held a broad understanding of black freedom that included a more just workplace.

The *Inquirer* was not completely correct when it called these protests "a new twist." From the late nineteenth century, many African-American workers and African-American middle-class activists and reformers, though hardly all, have understood that

[4] "Dobbs House Strikers March," *Atlanta Inquirer,* July 6, 1963, 3.

confronting economic iniquities was an important aspect of the black freedom struggle. During the postbellum years, for instance, black Atlantans established mutual aid societies, often called secret societies, some of which were created to aid black workers. In 1881 a society of washerwomen led a strike of 3,000 workers that lasted three weeks.[5] During World War I, Atlanta's local NAACP, headed by Walter White, led a campaign against Georgia's "work or fight" compulsory work laws that forced not only war-eligible black men but also black women to work.[6] And in the 1930s, the Atlanta Urban League (AUL) created worker councils to help black workers organize unions.[7] Black Atlantans, of course, were not alone in attempting to challenge economic injustice. The "quest for economic justice," in the words of Charles Payne and Adam Green, has "defined some of the most challenging, imaginative – and underappreciated – campaigns" engaged in by African Americans to improve their "life conditions."[8]

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[5] For 19th century histories of African Americans in Atlanta addressing economic inequality see Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997). For more on Atlanta's black communities in the late 19th century see Jerry Thornberry, "The Development of Black Atlanta, 1865-1885" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 1977); Allison Dorsey, *To Build Our Lives Together: Community Formation in Black Atlanta, 1875-1906* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004).

[6] For more on the "fight or work" campaign and the broader black Atlanta politics of the early 20th century see Jay Winston Driskell, *Schooling Jim Crow: The Fight for Atlanta's Booker T. Washington High School and the Roots of Black Protest* Politics (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2014), 148-195.

[7] For more on the AUL and black politics more generally during the 1930s and World War II-era Atlanta see Karen Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

[8] Charles Payne and Adam Green, eds., *Time Longer than Rope: A Century of African American Activism* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 2-3.

Historians associated with the Long Civil Rights Movement (LCRM) historiography, however, argue that the economic dimensions of the civil rights movement were relatively absent during the classical phase of the movement, the period between *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and The Voting Rights Act (1965).[9] Scholars of the LCRM, which was popularly elaborated in a 2005 essay by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, identify the roots of the civil rights movement in black-led and interracial movements against racial oppression, segregation, economic injustice, and discrimination in the 1930s and 1940s. Scholars of the LCRM emphasize the alliance made between racially-egalitarian labor unions and civil rights activists, what Robert Korstad calls "civil rights unionists." These historians are particularly eager to highlight the role played by radicals – inside and outside the labor movement – especially members of the Communist Party in the civil rights movement of the New Deal era. For Dowd Hall, civil rights unionism signified the

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[9] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History* 91, no. 4 (2005): 1233–63; Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost: Labor, Radicals, and Early Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of American History* 75, no. 3 (December 1988): 786-811; Robert Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights: 1919-1950* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008); Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008); Jeanne F. Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York, 2003); Nancy MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Work Place* (Cambridge: Russel Sage Foundation; Harvard University Press, 2006).

movement's "commitment to building coalitions, the expansiveness of its social democratic vision, and the importance of its black radical and laborite leadership."[10]

Central to the Long Civil Rights Movement framework is the transformation that occurred in the late 1940s and 1950s, when fervent anti-communism helped extinguish the radical vision of civil rights unionism. That shift, Nancy Maclean argues, set "back equality in many areas, the red scare especially hurt the quest for jobs and justice."[11] When activists resurrected the civil rights movement in the mid-1950s, the institutional center of the movement had moved from labor unions to churches. More than thirty years ago, Nelson Lichtenstein and Robert Korstad wrote that "The disintegration of the black movement in the late 1940s ensured that when the civil rights struggle of the 1960s emerged it would have a different social character and an alternative political agenda, which eventually proved inadequate to immense social problems that lay before it."[12] The vision of possible freedoms, according to these scholars, had narrowed. Risa Goluboff convincingly shows how the NAACP's Legal Defense and Education Fund, a separate entity from the NAACP where Thurgood Marshall and other lawyers worked, "marginalized, cabined, and outright repudiated class issues through the complaints they pursued and those they ignored."[13] No longer was economic justice a priority; instead

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[10] Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement," 1245.

[11] Maclean, *Freedom is Not Enough,* 31.

[12] Korstad and Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost," 811. See also Nelson Lichtenstein, "Restating the Movement and Reframing the Law in Risa Goluboff's *The Lost Promise of Civil Rights," Law & Social Inquiry* 35, no. 1 (Winter 2010), 243-260.

[13] Risa Goluboff, "'We Live's in a Free House Such as It Is': Class and the Creation of Modern Civil Rights," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 151, no. 6 (June 2003),

organizations like the NAACP, the Urban League, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) focused on court cases, demonstrations, and legislation that would end segregation in public spaces and disenfranchisement.

LCRM scholars have marshaled convincing arguments that highlight the evolution of the black freedom struggle in the mid-twentieth century, but recently, some historians have pushed back on the supposedly stark divide between the class-focused thirties and forties, and the legal and church-based movement of the fifties and sixties.[14] This dissertation seeks to add to a group of works that call into question the Long Civil Rights Movements narrative of an evolution from expansive social democratic vision to a narrow movement concerned about voting and access to lunch counters. While not the dominant priority of the movement, organizations vital to the movement, such as the NAACP and SCLC, maintained a desire to challenge economic forms of racial oppression despite the chill of the Red Scare. Sophia Z. Lee, for instance, has shown that the NAACP, especially its labor director Herbert Hill, continued to fight for the rights of

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1979. See Goluboff's extended argument in Risa Goluboff, *The Lost Promise of Civil Rights* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[14] For criticisms of the Long Civil Rights literature see Eric Arnesen, "Reconsidering the Long Civil Rights Movement," *Historically Speaking* 10, no.2 (2009): 31-34; Eric Arnesen, "Civil Rights and the Cold War at Home: Postwar Activism, Anticommunism, and the Decline of the Left," *American Communist History* 11, no.1 (2012): 5-44; Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, "The 'Long Movement' as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies," *The Journal of African American History* 92, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 265-288; Steven F. Lawson, "Long Origins of the Short Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1968," in *Freedom Rights: New Perspectives on the Civil Rights Movement,* eds., Danielle L. McGuire and John Dittmer (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2011), 9-37.

black labor unionists against racist employers and labor unions.[15] Thomas F. Jackson has convincingly reinterpreted the much explored life of Martin Luther King Jr to show that King had always seen economic justice as central to the black freedom struggle.[16] William P. Jones took another heavily-explored topic, the 1963 March on Washington, and highlighted the central role played by black labor unionists in the Negro American Labor Council (NALC) in organizing the event.[17] While Anthony Chen and Timothy

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[15] Sophia Z. Lee, "Hotspots in the Cold War: The NAACP Postwar Workplace Constitutionalism, 1948-1964," *Law and History Review* 26, no.2 (2008): 327-377; Sophia Z. Lee, *The Workplace Constitution from the New Deal to the New Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). See also Reuel Schiller, *Forging Rivals: Race, Class, Law, and the Collapse of Postwar Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). For a more general look at the interest of traditional civil rights organizations with social welfare issues see Dona Cooper Hamilton and Charles V. Hamilton, *The Dual Agenda: Race and Social Welfare Policies of Civil Rights Organizations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

[16] Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights*: *Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Struggle for Economic Justice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). For other works on King's approach to economic issues see Michael Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007); Michael Honey, *To the Promised Land: Martin Luther King and the Fight for Economic Justice* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018); Gordon Mantler, *Power to the Poor: Black-Brown Coalition and the Fight for Economic Justice, 1960-1974* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Sylvie Laurent, *King and the Other America: The Poor People's Campaign and the Quest for Economic Equality* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2018).

[17] William P. Jones, "The Unknown Origins of the March on Washington: Civil Rights Politics and the Black Working Class," *Labor: Studies in Working Class History of the Americas* 7, no. 3 (2010): 33-52; William P. Jones, *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013). For other works that examine labor unions continued role in the civil rights movement see Robert Bissell, "'A Trade Union Oriented War on the Slums': Harold Gibbons, Ernest Calloway and the St. Louis Teamsters in the 1960s," *Labor History* 44 (2003): 49-76; Kevin Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism, 1945-1968* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), Ch. 5; Eric Arnesen, *Brotherhoods of Color: Black Railroad Workers and the Struggle for Equality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Roger Horowitz, *"Negro and White, Unite and Fight": A Social History of Industrial Unionism in Meatpacking; 1930-1990*

Minchin have shown how efforts to end workplace discrimination were always part of the civil rights movement's concept of freedom.[18]

Following the legislative victories of 1964 and 1965, scholars of the Long Civil Rights Movement agree that civil rights activists, like Martin Luther King Jr., turned their focus to the economic aspects of racial oppression. Works on the relationship between black civil rights activists and labor unions in the post-1965 South, however, are relatively few in number (but growing). Because of the involvement of SCLC, the Memphis sanitation strike in 1968 and the Charleston hospital strike in 1969 are an important exception. But even here, the case studies are often focused on one strike and do not give a good sense of the broader context of the developing relationship between the two movements either locally or nationally. Examining Atlanta from 1960 to 1977, this dissertation is able to show how ideas about workplace rights, unionization, and

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(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997); Marcia Walker, *Reverend Addie Wyatt: Faith and the Fight for Labor, Gender, and Racial Equality* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016). Max Krochmal uses the Birmingham protests in 1963 to show how African American workers were influenced by the civil rights movement and in turn influenced the movement, Krochmal, "An Unmistakably Working-Class Vision: Birmingham's Foot Soldiers and Their Civil Rights Movement," *Journal of Southern History* 76, no. 4 (November 2010): 923-960.

[18] Anthony S. Chen, *The Fifth Freedom: Jobs, Politics, and Civil Rights in the United States, 1941-1972* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Timothy J. Minchin, "Black Activism, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry," *The Journal of Southern History* 65, no. 4 (November 1, 1999): 809–844; Timothy J. Minchin, *The Color of Work: The Struggle for Civil Rights in the Southern Paper Industry, 1945-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Kevin Schultz, "The FEPC and the Legacy of the Labor-Based Civil Rights Movement of the 1940s," *Labor History* 49, No. 1 (February 2008), 71-92; Thomas J. Sugrue, "Affirmative Action from Below: Civil Rights, the Building Trades, and the Politics of Racial Equality in the Urban North, 1945-1969," *Journal of American History* 91, No. 1 (June 2004): 145-173 .

economic justice evolved, just as the interests and priorities of the larger black freedom struggle evolved. Changing ideas about poverty, coalition building, community control, and political power and the concurrent changes in politics, economy, and culture shaped how black activists approached workplace protests from 1960 through 1977.[19]

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[19] There are a few histories of southern civil rights activists supporting black workers and labor unions in their efforts to reform the workplace in the 1960s and 1970s. For Atlanta see Hartwell Hooper and Susan Hooper, "The Scripto Strike, Martin Luther King's "Valley of Problems": Atlanta 1964-1965,"*Atlanta History* 43 no. 3 (Fall 1999), 5-34; and the works by Joseph McCartin on the 1977 sanitation strike: Joseph McCartin, "Managing Discontent: The Life and Career of Leamon Hood, Black Public Employee Union Activist," in *The Black Worker: Race, Labor, and Civil Rights Since Emancipation,* ed. Eric Arnesen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); Joseph McCartin, "' Fire the Hell Out of Them': Sanitation Workers' Struggles and the Normalization of the Striker Replacement Strategy in the 1970s," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 2, no. 3 (2005): 67-92. The most thoroughly discussed campaign is the 1968 sanitation strike in Memphis where Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. See Joan Turner Beifuss, *At the River I Stand: Memphis, the 1968 Strike, and Martin Luther King* (Brooklyn, Carlson, 1985); Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road;* Laurie Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001); Laurie B. Green, "Race, Gender, and Labor in 1960s Memphis: 'I am a Man' and the Meaning of Freedom," *Journal of Urban Studies* 30, no. 3 (March 2004): 465-489; Steve Estes, "'I am a Man!': Race, Masculinity, and the 1968 Memphis Sanitation Strike," *Labor History,* 41 no. 2 (2000): 153-170. The 1969 Charleston hospital strike also receives attention because of the role of SCLC in the strike. See Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone: 1199SEIU and the Politics of Health Care Unionism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009); Jewell C. Debnam, "Mary Moultrie, Naomi White, and the Women of the Charleston Hospital Workers' Strike," *Souls: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture and Society* 18, no. 1 (January-March 2016): 59-79; Steve Estes, *Charleston in Black and White: Race and Power in the South after the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2016). Robert Widdell Jr. places a hospital union organizing drive into a larger narrative on the post-1965 black freedom movement in Birmingham, Alabama. See Widdell, *Birmingham and the Long Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), Greta de Jong's work on the black freedom struggle in the rural South foregrounds the economic dimensions of the movement. See de Jong, *A Different Day: African American Struggles for Justice in Rural Louisiana, 1900-1970* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); de Jong, *You Can't Eat Freedom: Southerners and Social Justice After the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2016). For other local studies that discuss economic dimensions of the movement in the South see Christina Greene, *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina*

The strikes in Charleston and Memphis also receive attention because they represent the promise of a civil rights movement - labor union coalition. For the most part, however, works that examine the relationship between unions and civil rights activists focus on the fissures between the two groups, how those conflicts influenced both movements, and how the conflicts shaped American liberalism in the decades after World War II. Some of the most interesting recent literature on the labor - civil rights divide has shown how liberal legal thought specifically and liberal political opinion more broadly "counterposed" protections for individual rights of minorities and the "democratic majoritarianism" of labor unions.[20] In the end, these scholars show that protecting individual rights for minorities won out over class solidarity. This literature highlights the contradictions in fundamental ideas about rights and solidarity at the heart of any labor civil rights coalition that made a long-term alliance difficult to sustain. My dissertation seeks to build on these studies by exploring the weaknesses of a labor-civil rights alliance even among activists, reformers, and organizers eager to build such a coalition. For the most part, the works in this vein lean heavily on the role courts and lawyers played in creating two contradicting legal regimes. My dissertation, instead, explores

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(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Emilye Crosby, *Little Taste of Freedom: The Black Freedoms Struggle in Clairborne County, Mississippi* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

[20] Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union: A Century of American Labor* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 178*;* Schiller, *Forging Rivals,* 5; See also Lee, *The Workplace Constitution;* Paul Frymer, *Black and Blue: African Americans, the Labor Movement, and the Decline of the Democratic Party* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008).

demonstrations, boycotts, strikes, and other public protests rather than legal disputes. It focuses on how these different civil rights-labor alliances developed and transformed from one strike to another over the course of nearly two decades. The weakness of any possible coalition was not just the result of different ideas about rights and solidarity, though those were crucial, but because the two parties were rarely on the same page. Black activists and labor organizers often communicated poorly, held different ideas about strategies, tactics, and end-goals, and did not share the same larger priorities.

Public sector workers and their unions are an important part of this post-1965 literature on civil rights and labor unions. Scholars like Joseph McCartin and Joseph Hower have shown that histories of public sector unions can complicate the traditional declensions narrative of American labor unions. At the same time that private sector union growth stalled and then declined, public sector unions, represented by unions like AFSCME and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), grew by leaps and bounds. Not only did these unions grow in size and power but public sector union members showed a willingness to strike unmatched by most American workers since the late 1940s. Studying public sector unions also switches the focus from white male factory workers to other groups, particularly black men and women of all races and ethnicities. African American men and women, who increasingly found well-paying jobs in the public sector in the post-civil rights era**,** were at the forefront of this labor militancy. These union members were inspired by the rhetoric and tactics of the civil rights movement and civil rights activists, especially in the late 1960s and early 1970s, supported black public worker strikes .[21]

[21] For a history of public sector unions prior to their expansion in the 1960s see Joseph E.

Historians have also shown that in the late 1960s and 1970s public sector unions played an important role in debates over not just worker and union rights but in debates over public services, municipal power, and the increasingly toxic issue of taxation. That the new militant demands of public sector workers coincided with the economic downturn of the 1970s and the municipal financial crises that followed led to a backlash against both public sector unions and costly public services. Conservatives and suburban homeowners may have led this backlash but as Joseph McCartin notes: "Increasingly liberals felt they had to resist public sector union demands as a way of establishing their credentials as tough-minded, growth-oriented politicians." Scholars have frequently used Maynard Jackson's decision to fire striking city workers in 1977 as an example of the

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Slater, *Public Workers: Government Employee Unions, the Law, and the State, 1900-1962* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); For the growth of public sector unions in the 1960s and 1970s see Joseph McCartin, "Bringing the State's Workers in: Time to Rectify an Imbalanced US Labor Historiography," *Labor* History 47, no. 1 (February 2006):73-94; McCartin, "Fire the Hell out of Them"; Joseph Hower, "Jerry Wurf, The Rise of AFSCME, and the Fate of Labor Liberalism, 1947-1981," (Ph.D. dissertation, Georgetown University, 2013); Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 181-183. For case studies of public sector unions see Francis Ryan, *AFSCME's Philadelphia Story: Municipal Workers and Urban Power in the Twentieth Century (*Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011); Paul Johnston, *Success While Others Fail: Social Movement Unionism and the Public Workplace* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Joshua B. Freeman, *Working Class New York: Life and Labor Since World War II* (New York: New Press, 2001) 201-227; Joseph McCartin, *Collision Course: Ronald Reagan, Air Traffic Controllers, and the Strike that Changed America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); For public sector unions and black workers see Robert Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom: Race and Labor in America Since 1865* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2007), 190-207; Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road;* Jane Berger, "When Hard Work Doesn't Pay: Gender and the Urban Crisis in Baltimore , 1945-1985" (PhD diss., Ohio State University, 2007), 118-171; Joseph Hower, "'A Threshold Moment': Public-Sector Organizing and Civil Rights Unionism in the Postwar South," in *Reconsidering Southern Labor History,* eds. Hild and Merritt, 203-220. For more on the important role of the public sector in African American employment see Michael B. Katz, Mark J. Stern, and Jamie J. Fader, "The New African American Inequality," *The Journal of American History* 92, no. 1 (June 1, 2005): 75–108.

turn even by purported liberal friends of labor away from supporting public sector unionism.[22]

My dissertation builds on this growing literature on public sector unionism. Studying these city worker strikes provides a lens into the intra-racial class divisions and the coalition building that went with the rise of black political power in Atlanta. I am interested in answering the question: How did middle-class black civil rights activists go from playing an important role in helping Atlanta's black city workers win their 1968 strike to providing almost no support for the workers 1977 strike? My dissertation agrees with works that show how the larger black community chose solidarity with Atlanta's growing black political regime over the striking black workers. Racial solidarity aided the striking workers in 1968, but by 1977 many leading black activists and reformers were now aligned with the success of black politicians and black public sector workers lost an important ally.[23] But my research also shows that the relationship between civil rights

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[22] McCartin, "Bringing the State's Workers in," 84; "For works that look at the backlash to public sector unions in the 1970s see Joseph McCartin, "A Wagner Act for Public Employees": Labor's Deferred Dream and the Rise of Conservatism, 1970-1976," *Journal of American History* 95, no.1 (June 2008), 123-148; Kim Philips Fein, *Fear City: New York's Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2017); Michael Spear, "A Crisis in Urban Liberalism: The New York City Municipal Unions and the 1970s Fiscal Crisis" (PhD diss., Graduate Center, City University of New York, 2005); Jon Shelton, "Against the Public: The Pittsburg Teachers strike of 1975-1976 and the Crisis of the Labor-Liberal Coalition," *Labor: Studies in Working-Class History of the Americas* 10, No. 2 (2013): 55-75; Jon Shelton, *Teacher Strike!: Public Education and the Making of a New American Political Order* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017).

[23] For more on Atlanta's city worker strikes see McCartin, "Fire the Hell out of Them"; Adolph Reed Jr., *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999)*;* Maurice J. Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca: Politics and Class in the Making of Modern Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017)*,* 87-88.

activists and black public sector employees was always tenuous. While there was legitimate concern over the wages and work conditions of city workers, especially poorly-paid sanitation workers, middle-class activists had less interest in helping AFSCME build a successful union in the city. In contrast to many studies, my dissertation examines both public and private sector strikes. This allows for a broader examination of the relationship between activists and unions. My dissertation looks closely at how civil rights activists and other black leaders thought about public sector unions. Their understanding of the role unions and workers played in the day-to-day functions of a city increasingly controlled by black politicians helped shape how black Atlantans responded to moments of crises like the strikes in 1968, 1970, and 1977.

This dissertation examines how middle-class activists in the 1960s and 1970s attempted to confront work-related forms of racial and economic injustice. It focuses on workplace-based protests from 1960, when students from Atlanta's complex of black colleges and universities led a series of sit-ins that prompted a new stage of the black freedom struggle in Atlanta, to 1977, when Maynard Jackson, the first black mayor of a major Southern city, fired more than 900 striking city workers and broke their strike for improved pay. My decision to begin with the 1960 sit-ins is influenced by Tomiko Brown-Nagin. She finds a significant divide between the civil rights of the earlier era, an approach she terms "pragmatic civil rights" with the more protest-oriented civil rights movement post-1960.[24] Workplace protests did not end in 1977, but the failed city workers' strike that year offers a fitting conclusion to this study as it highlights in stark

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[24] Tomiko Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent: Atlanta and the Long History of the Civil Rights Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1-14.

terms the limitations and weaknesses in middle-class black activists support of black workers in the city.

Protests were not the only way that African American reformers in Atlanta attempted to address inequities in workplaces. The Atlanta Urban League, as it had since the 1930s, believed the most effective way to bring about change was through negotiations with employers. And the NAACP, both the national organization and the local branch, negotiated with employers and utilized the courts to challenge discrimination at workplaces in Atlanta. By focusing on protests for workplace rights, I explore a less discussed aspect of the black freedom struggle in the sixties and seventies. Protests offer an avenue to explore how civil rights activists conceived of workplace iniquities, how these injustices fit into their larger understanding of black freedom, and how these ideas transformed over a decade and half as the movement itself evolved. Protests also offer an entry point into how civil rights activists sought to build coalitions with other black Atlantans and black-led organizations and with white-led organizations, particularly labor unions.

Atlanta's history of civil rights struggle, its racial and class politics, and its economic position make it a particularly illuminating case study. Mid-century Atlanta was the prototypical business-elite managed Sunbelt city.[25] Like many other Southern

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[25] Floyd Hunter used Atlanta as his model city for his landmark sociological study *Community Power Structure*. Because of the influence of Hunter's study, the press, critics, and even members of the power structure in Atlanta often used this term to describe the economic, political, and social elite of the city. Floyd Hunter, *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1953). For more on the power structure of Atlanta see Floyd Hunter, *Community Power Succession: Atlanta's Policy Makers Revisited*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Clarence N. Stone *Regime Politics:*

and Western metropolitan regions Atlanta's economy boomed in the 1950s and 1960s. An influx of federal government dollars – most noticeably into the Lockheed factory in suburban Marietta – and corporate capital moving south boosted the regional economy.[26] As the established financial center for the South, Atlanta was well situated when the regional economy grew, becoming a hub not only for banking but for regional headquarters of Fortune 500 companies and a growing locale for the convention and entertainment industry. Unlike many Northern rustbelt cities Atlanta had a diverse economy, not reliant on any single industry.[27]

As Sunbelt states in the South attracted workers and their families, generally to the suburbs, the metropolitan areas supplanted the traditional rural power structures – "the Rule of the Rustics" as V.O. Keys termed it.[28] Atlanta, while always the capital and largest city in Georgia, had its political power circumscribed until the early 1960s due to

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Governing Atlanta, 1946-1988 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989); Reed Jr., *Stirrings in the Jug*.

[26] Republican political strategist Kevin Phillips popularized the term "sunbelt" in 1969. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1969).

[27] For the economic development of Atlanta see Charles Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta: The Politics of Place in the City of Dreams* (New York: Verso, 1996); Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising: The Invention of an International City, 1946-1996* (Marietta: Longstreet Press, Inc., 1996); Irene Valerie Holliman, "From 'Crackertown' to the 'ATL': Race, Urban Renewal, and the Re-Making of Downtown Atlanta, 1945-2000" (PhD diss., University of Georgia, 2010); Vartanig G. Vartan, "Atlanta Rushes to National Role," *New York Times,* November 16, 1964, 49; Ada Louise Huxtable, "The New American City," *New York Times,* May 5, 1974, D21.

[28] V.O. Key Jr., *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Knopf, 1949). "Rule of the Rustics," was the title of chapter six on Georgia politics. For a look at mid-century Georgia politics as it pertained to work and labor unions see Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

Georgia's system of allocating representatives that favored rural areas. In replacing the old political order built on agriculture and absolute white supremacy, Sunbelt metropolises developed a new politics that centered on policies friendly to economic growth that attracted large corporations and white-collar employees. Policies created to attract capital included low taxes, business-friendly employment policies, state subsidized research and education centers, and a generally anti-labor union stance. Even as Atlanta city governance transitioned from white to African American controlled, despite fears from white civic leaders, much of the Sunbelt pro-growth politics remained. [29]

Along with a pro-growth policy, the other defining feature of the new Southern Sunbelt political order was racial moderation.[30] Beginning in the late 1940s, white civic leaders slowly got rid of de jure and other highly visible forms of racism, segregation, and discrimination, and adopted nominally "color-blind" policies. For Atlanta's white

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[29] There is an extensive literature on Sunbelt politics, culture, and capitalism. Works helpful for this project include Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South 1938–1980* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 1994) Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); James C. Cobb, *Selling of the South: The Southern Crusade for Industrial Development, 1936-90*, 2nd edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Julia Gunn "A Good Place to Make Money," Business, Labor and Civil Rights in Twentieth Century Charlotte," (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2014). Much of the discussion of the political developments in the Sunbelt focuses on the rise of conservatism. While the suburbs of Atlanta are an example of this political and cultural development, the political and cultural history of the city itself, largely because of black political power, had a different development. For the variety of Sunbelt politics and cultures see introduction and essays in Darren Dochuck and Michelle M. Nickerson, eds., *Sunbelt Rising: The Politics of Place, Space, and Region* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

[30] Matthew Lassiter has termed the emphasis on pro-growth and racial moderation the "Sunbelt synthesis." Lassiter, *Silent Majority,* 10-11.

civic elite, a public image of racial moderation was, in large part, an effort to shed the image of the Old South in order to attract northern and international capital to the region. Atlanta civic-leaders wanted to avoid national news worthy incidents like the backlash against school segregation in Little Rock, Arkansas. As Mayor William Hartsfield boasted, Atlanta was the "city too busy to hate." The image of racial moderation sold by Atlanta's white business elite was shared by other Southern cities like Richmond, Charlotte, and Dallas. For Atlanta, the political calculus worked; the metropolitan economy boomed throughout the 1960s and the city reaped national attention for both its new downtown skyscrapers and its "liberal" race relations.[31]

White civic leaders in Atlanta did not seek to dismantle Jim Crow out of charity. Time and again black activists forced the white power elite to reform practices of segregation and discrimination. In many ways black life in Atlanta, and the struggle against Jim Crow, was not that different from other southern cities like Birmingham, Durham, or Miami.[32] Like every locale, though, there were distinguishing features. One

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[31] For more on William Hartsfield see Harold H. Martin, *William Berry Hartsfield: Mayor of* Atlanta (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1978). For Atlanta's efforts to sell itself as "the city too busy to hate" see Virginia H. Hein, "The Image of 'A City Too Busy to Hate": Atlanta in the 1960s," *Phylon* 33, no. 3 (1972): 25-28; Ronald H. Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 29-36. For a positive response to white Atlanta's handling of the civil rights movement see Claude Sitton, "Atlanta's Example: 'Good Sense and Dignity,'" *New York Times*, May, 6, 1962, 246.

[32] Atlanta was, and is, well-known for its black middle class and the Auburn Avenue commercial district that served this community. But as Gavin Wright has shown Atlanta's black middle class as a proportion of the total population was not much larger than in industrial Birmingham, Alabama. Atlanta's African Americans made up 16 percent of the city's professionals, 8 percent of managerial occupations, and 19 percent of skilled workers, whereas Birmingham's African Americans made up 18 percent, 8 percent, and 16 percent respectively. Gavin Wright, *Sharing the Prize: The Economics of*

was the complex of majority- black colleges and universities west of downtown that included Atlanta University, Clark, Morehouse, Spellman, Morris Brown, and the Gammon Theological Seminary. Atlanta was also the headquarters of influential movement organizations including the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and the Voter Education Project.

The literature on Atlanta's black freedom movement often highlights intra-racial divisions. Two of those divisions are linked together: a generational and tactical divide. Prior to the student-led sit-in movement in 1960, Atlanta's civil rights movement was dominated by a middle-class black civic elite which worked through biracial negotiations with Mayor Hartsfield's administration to open some city jobs for African Americans and desegregate certain public spaces, like golf courses and bus lines. This black civic elite often preached moderation and compromise and knew how to exert political power, most effectively through the Atlanta Negro Voters League (ANVL), to force some concessions from the white elite. This was according to Tomiko Brown-Nagin the "pragmatic civil rights" approach.[33]

By 1960 the politics of compromise and concessions were not enough for some civil

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the Civil Rights Movement in the American South (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 130.

[33] Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent,* 2, 17-130; Stone, *Regime Politics,* 23-50; David Andrew Harmon, *Beneath the Image of the Civil Rights Movement and Race Relations, Atlanta, Georgia, 1946-1981,* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 3-126. For examples of similar middle-class reform efforts in other Southern cities see J. Mills Thornton, *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma* (Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 2002); William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

rights activists. Inspired by the success of the Montgomery bus boycott and the student sit-in movement that spread throughout the South, a new generation of activists brought an urgency and new set of protest tactics to Atlanta's civil rights movement. Many of these activists were young college students but there were also middle-aged men and women, businessmen, professionals, ministers, and housewives who pushed for a more dramatic challenge to Jim Crow. Unsurprisingly, this led to conflicts between the two generations of activists and reformers. The older generation, represented by men like A.T Walden, John Wesley Dobbs, and Martin Luther King Sr., were concerned that the new protest tactics would backfire and black Atlantans would lose many of the gains they had fought for. Nor did these older reformers want to lose the privileged position they held due to their relationship with the city's white elite. [34] By the early seventies, the new generation supplanted the older generation as Atlanta's black civic elite and turned their emphasis to gaining political power through the polls.[35]

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[34] For the division between the two generations see Martin Luther King Sr., *Daddy King: An Autobiography* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1980), 156-157; Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent,* 133-211; Harmon, *Beneath the Image of the Civil Rights Movement,* 127-176; Jack Walker, "Protest and Negotiations: A Case Study of Negro Leadership in Atlanta," in *Atlanta Georgia, 1960-1961: Sit-Ins and Student Activism, 1960-1961,* ed. Garrow, 31-58. See also Lonnie King, Interviewed by John H. Britton, The Civil Rights Documentation Project, Moorland Spingarn Research Center, August 29, 1967.

[35] The best single volume on black political power in Atlanta is Alton Hornsby Jr., *Black Power in Dixie: A Political History of African Americans in Atlanta* (Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2009). See also Stone, *Regime Politics*; Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca,* 50-168; Ronald H. Bayor, "African-American Mayors and Governance in Atlanta," in *African-American Mayors: Race, Politics and the American City,* eds. David R. Colburn and Jeffrey S. Adler (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 178-200; Gary M. Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn: The Saga of Two Families and the Making of Atlanta* (New York: Scribner, 1996), 397-493; Adolph Reed Jr., "A Critique of Neoprogressvism in Theorizing about Local Development Policy: A Case from Atlanta," in *Stirrings in the Jug*, 163-178; Mack Jones, "Black

A second significant division was the intra-racial class divide. Writing in the mid-1950s, James Baldwin observed that in Atlanta "[r]acial relations [were] manipulated by the mayor and a fairly strong Negro middle class. This works mainly in areas of compromise and concession and has very little effect on the bulk of the Negro population."[36] Baldwin was overstating things, and he wrote this before the victories of the early 1960s desegregated many downtown stores and restaurants, opening up public and private spaces to all African Americans. But it is true that the major victories of the civil rights movement did not fully and effectively challenge racial inequalities that overwhelmingly affected working class African Americans. As a "semi-invalid wife" with a husband only making forty dollars a week asked in a 1962 letter to the editor of the *Atlanta Inquirer:* "Is there not something you [Atlanta's black middle class] can do for us while you are getting integrated?"[37] The advent of black elected officials and black political power failed to respond adequately to these inequalities. By the early 1970s Atlanta may have become, at least according to *Ebony*, the Black Mecca, but as Julian Bond, student sit-in leader, SNCC activists, and a state representative, explained "This is the best place in the United States for a black if you're middle-class and have a college

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Political Empowerment in Atlanta: Myth and Reality," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 439 (September 1978), 90-117; Jessica Ann Levy, "Selling Atlanta: Black Mayoral Politics from Protest to Entrepreneurialism, 1973 to 1990," *Journal of Urban History* 41, No. 3 (2015): 420-443; Danielle Wiggins, "'Order as Well as Decency': The Development of Order Maintenance Policing in Black Atlanta," *Journal of Urban History,* OnlineFirst (January 2019): 1-17.

[36] James Baldwin, "Nobody Knows My Name: A Letter from the South," in *James Baldwin, Collected Essays,* ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1998), 199.

[37]"Letter to the Editor," *Atlanta Inquirer,* January 13, 1962, 1.

degree, but if you're poor it's just like Birmingham, Jackson, or any other place."[38]

Middle-class activists were not blind to the unequal distribution of benefits that resulted from the victories of the movement. In the 1960s and 1970s, as middle-class black Atlantans helped bring an end to segregation and found influence in city politics, they also sought to push the boundaries of the movement to other entrenched forms of discrimination and inequality. This dissertation focuses on the campaigns waged by middle-class black activists and reformers, including those associated with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and its economic arm Operation Breadbasket, men (for the most part, the people involved in this study were men) like Hosea Williams, Ralph Abernathy, Joseph Boone, John Middleton, Fred Bennette, and Martin Luther King Jr. Many, though not all, were middle-class ministers. From 1960 through the mid-1970s, they were at the forefront of efforts to help black workers reform workplaces across the city.

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[38] Phyl Garland, "Atlanta: Black Mecca of the South," *Ebony,* August 1971, 157. For more on the intra-racial class divide in the period under study see Hein, "The Image of 'A City too Busy to Hate," 205-221; Brown-Nagin; *Courage to Dissent,* 357-429; Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca: Politics and Class in the Making of Modern Atlanta* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Reed Jr., "A Critique of Neoprogressvism," in *Stirrings in the Jug,* 163-178; Peter Ross Range, "Making it in Atlanta: Capital of Black-Is- Beautiful," *New York Times,* April 7, 1974, 268, See also the rest of the essays in Reed Jr.,, *Stirrings in the Jug*, especially his essay "The Black Urban Regime: Structural Origins and Constraints," 79-115. For works that explore intra-racial class divisions in black communities outside of Atlanta see Adam Green, *Selling the Race: Culture, Community, and Black Chicago, 1940-1955* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007)***;*** N.D.B Connelly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Touré Reed, *Not Alms but Opportunity: The Urban League and the Politics of Racial Uplift,* 1910-1950 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008). Keona Ervin, *Gateway to Equality: Black Women and the Struggle for Economic Justice in St. Louis* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017).

Exploring how middle-class reformers supported workplace protests provides insight into how Atlanta's civil rights activists, many who played crucial roles in desegregating the city, as well as leading important campaigns across the South, approached questions of economic inequality. These activists saw the workplace protests as part of the civil rights movement that they had, in many cases, successfully led and believed applying the tactics and strategies that were previously effective could work to confront iniquities at the workplace. In translating civil rights tactics and strategies to workplace protests, these civil rights leaders also carried with them ideas and assumptions about class and status that served to reinforce intra-racial class inequality. This study adds to our understanding of how intra-racial class divisions were reinforced, even in campaigns that sought to bridge a gap between middle and working class black Atlantans. Finally, focusing on black middle-class reformers allows us to better understand the fraught relationship between labor unions and the civil rights movement. Middle-class activists often took the position that they were mediators for the black working class, and thusly were treated as such by labor unions. The limitations and weaknesses of any possible civil rights-labor coalition are best understood by examining the relationship between the leaders of the two movements.

By focusing on middle-class activists, this dissertation has the tendency to neglect the voice of Atlanta's black working class. In part this is because the history black middle-class activists and reformers offers a compelling story of hope and good intentions on the one hand and indifference and incompetence on the other. In part, though, it is because sources also tend to neglect the working class. The records of Atlanta activists, reformers, and politicians, and of Atlanta-based labor unions generally do not provide access to

working class voices. The records tend to mirror the paternalistic relationship that Atlanta's civil rights activists and labor leaders had to the black workers they attempted to support. Perhaps most frustratingly, it is difficult to discern just what memebers of the black working class thought of the support of black middle-class leaders. Throughout the period under study, black workers and their labor unions frequently reached out to black activists for support but we do not yet have a clear picture of how that support was received once a campaign ended.

These middle-class activists sought ways to expand the civil rights movement to respond better to the specific demands and grievances of the city's black working class, yet class-based assumptions still informed how Atlanta's civil rights activists approached campaigns on behalf of black workers. The activists and reformers in this study often disagreed with the "pragmatic civil rights," bi-racial negotiation style of politics practiced by men like A.T. Walden. Instead protests, boycotts, pickets, marches, and strikes, were the methods they chose to aid black workers. But these men continued to accept the hierarchy of leadership practiced by the previous generation. They assumed control of the campaigns, acted as the public voice of the workers, took control of strategies and tactics, chose targets with little input from workers, and led negotiations with employers without the workers' involvement. Often these middle-class activists were paternalistic in their relationship to the workers and their approach to the campaigns. These men believed they were leaders of Atlanta's black community, that they knew what was best for the black workers, and how to best achieve the goals of their campaigns.

This style of political leadership had long roots in Atlanta's black community and was adopted by Martin Luther King Jr. and SCLC. King and others founded SCLC as an

umbrella organization for activist black ministers, though as time went on other movement activists would also take leadership roles. As a result of the influence of ministers, King Jr. above all, SCLC practiced a top down approach to politics that emphasized charismatic leadership. Barbara Ransby compares the ministerial style of King to the missionary style of Ella Baker and other women activists raised in black Baptist churches. "Ministers directed their flocks; missionaries gathered people together." "Ministers," she added, "were trained to be shepherds of their flocks." Baker, who served as SCLC's first executive director, disagreed with this style of movement leadership. In Baker's view, Ransby writes, "most ministers expected to say their piece and have their congregations obediently carry out their decisions."[39] In Atlanta, middle-class black men speaking on the behalf of black workers practiced this top-down style of movement.[40]

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[39] Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 188-189, 192. SNCC activists also expressed frustration with the charismatic leadership style of King. They thought that they risked everything organizing in communities and then King would arrive, give a speech, and take all the credit and recognition. Some SNCC activists mockingly referred to him as "De Lawd." Taylor Branch, *Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years, 1963-1965* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 411; David Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986)*,* 423-424; Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 63. For an example SCLC's top-down organizing method shaping the organization's approach to electoral politics see George Derek Musgrove and Hasan Kwame Jeffries, "'The Community Don't Know What's Good for Them': Local Politics in the Alabama Black-Belt during the Post- Civil Rights Era," in *Freedom Rights,* eds., McGuire and Dittmer, 308.

[40]Along with a leader-driven style, the activists and reformers in this study also adopted from SCLC (and the previous era of elite black reformers in Atlanta) a gendered hierarchy. The leaders of the organizations and campaigns were exclusively men. The campaigns they supported, however, were often protests by black women workers, in the case of the Scripto strike over 700 black women, but women almost always played a secondary leadership position. Black women organized the workplace, they gave speeches at rallies, walked picket lines, and participated in boycotts. But it was it was men who made the headlines, it was men who negotiated with employers, and it was men

For these middle-class activists, opening up access to more jobs, organizing unions, and improving workplaces was not just about better pay or less exploitation for individual workers; they viewed their campaigns as benefitting the larger black community in Atlanta. As black workers won the right to employment, the right to join unions, and promotion to better positions, more money would enter the economy building the wealth of black neighborhoods throughout the city. These activists believed better jobs for black workers helped to make the black community more economically secure. For example, when a group of ministers, including Martin Luther King Sr., supported the strike at Dobbs House in 1963 they spoke about both the improvements to workers and the black community. "A better economic condition [for the Dobbs House employees] will not only improve their personal situation, but will enable them to contribute more to the welfare of the Negro Community and the city."[41] Middle-class activists and reformers may not have understood or been sympathetic to all of the issues facing black workers – especially campaigns by labor unions – but they could support a campaign that helped improve what they perceived as the wider black community. Racial solidarity, then, at times, helped paper over class divisions that otherwise may have prevented black community leaders from supporting workplace struggles. On other occasions, however, black middle-class

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who had the final say during the campaigns. For a discussion of sexism within SCLC see Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement,* 172-189. For a discussion of SCLC activists' paternalism towards Mexican-Americans and activists of other ethnicities during the Poor People's Campaign see Mantler, *Power to the People,* especially chapters four and five.

[41] Press Release, Negro Ministers of the City of Atlanta, ca. 1963, Box 1061, Folder 547, Joseph Jacobs Papers, Southern Labor Archives, Pullen Library, Georgia State University.

reformers interpreted protests by black workers as damaging to the black community. This was most obvious when many – perhaps most – middle-class reformers and activists declined to support the city workers on strike against the Maynard Jackson administration in 1977.[42]

Occasionally, activists had to form uneasy coalitions with labor unions that proved difficult to sustain. Black workers' experience with labor unions, as it was with any white-controlled institution in the city, was often shaped by racism from both their fellow union members and union representatives. Through much of the 1960s some unions, particularly those in the building trades, continued to deny membership, and, therefore, work to black workers. Other unions, like the International Association of Machinists that had organized the Lockheed plant in an Atlanta suburb, maintained separate locals for white and black workers until the early 1960s. And unions like the United Steel Workers, which nationally may have had a reputation as racially progressive, often had Atlanta locals with a white leadership and membership that were openly hostile to black workers, denied them leadership opportunities, and worked with

[42] My thinking about racial solidarity and conflicts over defining community are shaped by Reed Jr., "Sources of Demobilization in the New Black Political Regime: Incorporation, Ideological Capitulation, and Radical Failure in the Post-Segregation Era," in *Stirrings in the Jug,* 117-159; and Preston H. Smith, "The Quest for Racial Democracy: Black Civic Ideology and Housing Interests in Postwar Chicago," *Journal of Urban History* 26, No. 2 (January 2000): 131-157. The most well-known example of the conflict between public sector unions and black community control was the dispute that pitted New York City's teachers' union made up mostly of white teachers, the United Federation of Teachers, against the black-controlled Ocean Hill-Brownsville local school board in 1968. See Jerald Podair, *The Strike that Changed New York: Blacks, Whites, and the Ocean Hill-Brownsville Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Richard D. Kahlenberg, *Tough Liberal: Albert Shanker and the Battles over Schools, Unions, Race, and Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

employers to keep black workers in the lowest paid, least desired positions.[43]

While discrimination was common it was not the universal experience of black workers with unions in Atlanta. In 1960 African Americans made up a large portion of Atlanta's working class, though unions and employers denied black workers access to skilled and higher paying working class jobs. Moreover, because of occupational segregation, there were many industries, like commercial laundry services for example, or individual workplaces, like the Scripto pencil factory, that black workers made up a vast majority of the workforce. Unions interested in organizing these industries had to rely on the support of black workers. By the late 1960s, as service sector and public sector unionism grew, Atlanta's unorganized and disproportionately African American working class became an inviting target for organizing campaigns.[44] As majority members in these unions, black workers had the opportunity to shape union politics and the demands made on employers in these organizations. As a result, black workers in

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[43] For more on Lockheed and the IAM see Joseph M. Thompson, "Pens, Planes, and Politics: How Race and Labor Practices Shaped Postwar Atlanta," in *Reconsidering Southern Labor History: Race, Class, and Power,* eds. Matthew Hild and Keri Leigh Merrit (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2018); For segregation and discrimination at Atlanta's Atlantic Steel factory see Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 2001), 219-250; For a general discussion of racism in Atlanta unions, especially its building trades, see Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta,* 108-112.

[44] The most famous labor organizing campaign targeting Atlanta was run by the Alliance for Labor Action, the short-lived organization formed by the United Automotive Workers and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. For more on the largely unsuccessful partnership see Victor G. Devinatz, "To Find Answers to Urgent Problems of Our Society: The Alliance for Labor Action's Atlanta Union Organizing Offensive, 1969-1971," *Labor Studies Journal* 31 (2006): 69-91. Jefferson Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 44*;* Kevin Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism*, 246-248.

these situations often found unions to be a helpful ally to improve pay and reform practices at their workplaces.

In Atlanta, African American activists aided black workers both in their efforts to reform racist practices of labor unions and formed short-lived alliances with labor unions to improve jobs. The Atlanta Urban League, the NAACP, and to a lesser extent SCLC were active in pressuring labor unions to alter their racist practices. Activists, generally at the behest of black workers, also worked with unions during strikes. The most famous example of this alliance was the December 1964 strike at Scripto that included the support of Martin Luther King Jr. and SCLC. Perhaps the most successful of the alliances was between Atlanta civil rights leaders and the public sector union American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), though even here there were significant limits.

Forming alliances with labor unions proved difficult. Civil rights activists and union officials were rarely on the same page. Most unions, even those that represented mostly black workers, were led by white union officials. With the occasional exception, Atlanta's unions were reluctant to turn labor struggles into civil rights struggles. Often this insistence to minimize the civil rights aspects made it difficult for union officials to build coalitions with black community activists. Black activists were often indifferent to traditional labor struggles and the culture and processes of strikes and negotiations. Largely, these men, most of whom were born and raised in the anti-union South, did not grow up with a labor tradition. They viewed black worker protests through the lens of a civil right struggle and used the tactics and strategies successful in other civil rights campaigns to confront workplace inequalities. This often led to frustration with labor

officials and to efforts by black activists to supersede the decisions of union leaders.

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My dissertation is divided into six chapters. Chapter one examines efforts by civil rights activists to end employment discrimination in the early 1960s. It is particularly interested in boycott campaigns against companies that did not hire African Americans, or continued to segregate them in the lowest paid positions, led by college student activists of the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights (COAHR) and by Operation Breadbasket, SCLC's economic arm. This chapter explores how from the beginning of the protest-era in Atlanta, activists used the rhetoric and tactics they found useful to challenging segregation to challenge discriminatory hiring and promotion practices. Yet the chapter emphasizes the often ad hoc and incomplete nature of these protests, and the limits of boycotts and pickets to bring about substantive changes in Atlanta's workplaces. Especially for many ministers and activists of Operation Breadbasket, the campaigns they ran in 1963 and 1964 were only the beginning of their efforts to aid black Atlantans at the workplace.

Chapter two examines the complicated relationship between civil rights activists and labor unions. The first section of the chapter quickly explores the history of black Atlantans forming and joining labor unions since emancipation. Racism, harassment, discrimination, and segregation often defined black workers' experiences with unions. By the 1930s, black reformers outside of the labor movement were invested in organizing black workers into unions, opening up white unions that barred black members, and challenging racist union practices and policies. The second section of this chapter examines the effort by the NAACP and SCLC to end discrimination and segregation by

unions in the 1950s and early 1960s. This placed civil rights organizations in direct conflict with labor unions. The most well-known of these campaigns was the effort by the national NAACP, to end discrimination by the Atlanta local of the United Steel Workers, a union with a national reputation as racially progressive. This campaign made national news when the NAACP, at the urging of black steel workers, sued for the National Labor Relations Board to decertify the local.

At other times civil rights activists worked together with labor unions, often at the request of black workers. The last two sections of this chapter examine two such examples: a 1963 strike by black workers at the Dobbs House restaurant and catering divisions at the Atlanta airport and the 1964 strike by 700 black women at the Scripto, Inc. factory. Other than both receiving support from civil rights activists and other black community members, these strikes shared little in common. They affected different industries; the Dobbs House strike ended in complete failure for the workers while the Scripto strike was a victory for the strikers; the level of support among activists differed; and the commitment unions had for an alliance with black community leaders differed. This chapter highlights these differences to analyze when, how, and why support from activists and community members proved useful for workers and their labor unions. This chapter also shows how there were important limits to a labor-civil rights coalition even if this partnership resulted in a victory.

Chapter Three explores a series of strikes, pickets, and other demonstrations by black workers in 1972 and 1973. In a period one activist referred to as "strike fever," black workers walked off their jobs at places as varied as hospitals, factories, fast-food restaurants, and department stores. Their demands were also varied, ranging from better

pay, to union recognition, to an end to racial harassment. Hosea Williams, an SCLC activist, played a leading role in nearly all of these strikes and demonstrations. Williams provided support in the absence of unions which generally were not involved directly in these protests; either the workplaces were not organized, or the protests were led by a group of workers dissatisfied with their representation by the union.

The militancy of black workers in Atlanta was part of a larger global worker revolt of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Workers responded to strong economic conditions and the protest movements of the era by participating in both sanctioned and wildcat strikes at high rates throughout this period.[45] But the specific contours of the revolt in Atlanta were as shaped by the changing rhetoric, tactics, and goals of the black freedom movement as the classical period transitioned to the Black Power era.[46] By the early 1970s, workplace rights had become a central concern of some civil rights activists, but these activists had no single tried-and-true approach to the protests. Some activists, like Carl Farris of SCLC, still believed a coalition of labor and civil rights could effectively challenge economic inequality in the South. Yet, in the early 1970s, workers and community activists alike were drawn to Hosea Williams's loud and militant protest style. They were

[45] For more on the working-class revolt and labor unions in this period see Aaron Brenner, Robert Brenner, and Cal Winslow, eds., *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below During the Long 1970s* (London: Verso, 2010); Cowie, *Stayin' Alive;* Lane Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Kim Moody, *An Injury to All: The Decline of American Unionism* (London: Verso, 1988).

[46] Winston Grady-Willis pays particular attention to the Black Power movement in Atlanta. Winston Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid: Atlanta and Black Struggles for Human Rights, 1960-1977* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

also drawn to Williams's message and demands that combined traditional civil rights goals like the end of segregation and discrimination at the workplace, with Black Power-inspired rhetoric and goals that emphasized community uplift and control. These workplace protests ended by 1974 in part because the national economic downturn made it more difficult to openly protest jobs, and in part because many in the community, including Hosea Williams, turned their focus from the streets to the political halls of power.

Chapters four, five, and six provide more focus on Atlanta's political world by examining three strikes by blue-collar city workers, in 1968, 1970, and 1977. Chapter four explores the September 1968 wildcat strike by sanitation workers. Even though the local union, AFSCME District Council (DC) 14, refused to support the wildcatters, the national union, SCLC, and a significant portion of Atlanta's black reform community lent their support. This ten-day strike was an important victory for the city workers, bringing significant changes to a union long dominated by white supremacists as well as some reforms in the city's relationship with low-paid sanitation workers and the union.

The last two chapters examine the strikes by AFSCME Local 1644, which the local was renamed to following the 1968 strike, in 1970 and 1977. In scholarship on Atlanta, these two strikes are often discussed together because in 1970 as vice-mayor Maynard Jackson supported the strikers in opposition to Mayor Sam Massell who had fired the strikers. But in 1977,as mayor, Jackson, with the support of most of Atlanta's now politically well-established black reform community, quickly fired the striking workers from the same union.

There were important similarities between the two strikes that Jackson's differing approaches in the disputes overshadows. Most significantly, the union lost both times. 1977 was a clear victory for Jackson, but also in 1970 after more than a month-long strike, Sam Massell conceded nothing he had not already offered the union before the strike. Chapter five shows that even in 1970 many leading civil rights activists were hesitant at first to break with Sam Massell, the newly elected, outspokenly liberal mayor. Nor among the black community supporters of the strike was there a strong allegiance to the union. Instead, most supporters easily separated deserving black workers from an undeserving union. By 1977 then, as chapter six shows, it was not difficult for these reformers to abandon the union completely and support the city's first black mayor. Jackson effectively ended the strike when he fired the workers. The union would rebuild, and in the years to come some labor and civil rights activists would continue to try to build effective coalitions. Yet 1977 marks the point, a point many had already reached, where a generation of civil rights leaders in Atlanta ended their quest for a movement that sought to bring economic and civil rights justice to the workplace through strikes and protests.

The civil rights movement brought enormous change for African Americans, especially in Southern states where legal discrimination and disenfranchisement were more pronounced. But the changes to federal, state, and local law did not begin to challenge all forms of racial inequality. Activists and reformers at the time were certainly aware of the limitations of the movement. As Martin Luther King Jr. asked, borrowing from both Ella Baker and A. Philip Randolph, "What good does it do to a man to have

integrated lunch counters if he can't buy a hamburger?"[47] In Atlanta in the 1960s and 1970s, perhaps the American city best known for the diverging fortunes of its black middle and working classes, middle-class black activists and reformers sought to aid black workers in challenging racial and economic injustices at the workplace.[48] In the nearly two decades under study, there were some important victories but many defeats for these activists. Workers and their supporters faced enormous obstacles in bringing changes to their workplaces, but there were also important weaknesses to the kind of support middle-class reformers offered that limited their campaigns and, ultimately, the movement they sought to build.

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[47] "King Threatens Boycott to Aid Scripto Strikers," *New York Times,* December 21, 1964, 33.

[48] The best work on the diverging fortunes of black Atlantans in the late-20th century is Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca*.

Chapter 1: "If We Buy Their Products Then We Want Some Jobs": Operation Breadbasket's Selective Patronage Campaigns in Atlanta, 1962-1964

On October 29, 1962, the Atlanta chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) held a meeting featuring the renowned Philadelphia minister Leon Sullivan. Sullivan was present at the invitation of Martin Luther King Jr. to discuss his organization that used boycotts to compel employers to hire and promote more African American workers. By 1962, King and other members of the national SCLC**,** along with members of the local Atlanta chapter**,** sought ways to confront the income inequality and employment discrimination that helped to maintain America's racial caste system. Inspired by Sullivan's 400 Ministers organization, SCLC decided to found Operation Breadbasket to improve black employment opportunities in Atlanta. Operation Breadbasket, and selective patronage campaigns more broadly, offered the ministers a tool to challenge employment discrimination in the years before Title VII of the Civil Rights Act outlawed such discrimination.[49]

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[49] The most comprehensive work on Operation Breadbasket is Enrico Beltramini, "S.C.L.C. Operation Breadbasket, From Economic Civil Rights to Black Economic Power" (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 2013), 112-173. Other than Beltramini's dissertation, there is little that has been written about the founding of Operation Breadbasket and the organization's campaigns in Atlanta. Most historians of Atlanta's civil rights movement or SCLC give the organization a paragraph or two. For examples see: Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 223, 233, 297–298; Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid*, 37–38; Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights*, 138; Adam Fairclough *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 177; Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, 115. Historians have written more extensively on Operation Breadbasket's efforts in Chicago, which SCLC founded as part of its 1966 campaign. Breadbasket in Chicago received more attention because of the size of some of Operation Breadbasket's victories, the national attention that SCLC's 1966 campaign attracted, and the charisma of the Chicago branch director Jesse Jackson. For examples see: Enrico Beltramini, "Operation Breadbasket in Chicago: Between Civil Rights and Black Capitalism," in *The Economic Civil Rights Movement:*

The ministers of Breadbasket were not the only civil rights activists in Atlanta to use boycotts against employers. In the early 1960s, influenced by civil rights demonstrations from Montgomery to Greensboro to Philadelphia, black Atlantans turned to boycotts as one of their primary tactics to topple Jim Crow in the realm of employment. In the winter of 1960 and 1961, college students effectively used boycotts in conjunction with pickets and sit-ins to shut down the downtown in an effort to end discrimination at lunch counters. At the same time, these students, who were members of the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights (COAHR), boycotted and picketed several grocery stores located in majority-black neighborhoods to compel the stores to hire more black workers and above the lowest-paid, lowest-prestige positions. Despite meeting with only mixed success, student protesters continued using the tactic against discriminatory employees. Other community groups and civic leagues also adopted the boycott, often focusing on a neighborhood store where a specific injustice had occurred.[50]

African Americans and the Struggle for Economic Power, ed. Michael Ezra (New York: Routledge, 2013), 125-143; Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 442–443; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 527–574; Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America*, 349–350; Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights*, 281–282, 301–302; Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*, 417; Martin L. Deppe and James Ralph Jr, *Operation Breadbasket: An Untold Story of Civil Rights in Chicago, 1966–1971* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2017); Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road*, 179–182; Gary Massoni, "Perspectives on Operation Breadbasket in Chicago," in *Chicago in 1966: Open Housing Marches, Summit Negotiations, and Operation Breadbasket,* ed. David Garrow (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1989) 179-346; Mantler, *Power to the Poor*, 57-58; Gordon Mantler, "Black, Brown, and Poor: Martin Luther King Jr., The Poor People's Campaign and Its Legacies" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2008), 402-414. At least two SCLC leaders discussed Operation Breadbasket, in general terms or its campaign in Chicago in their memoirs. See Ralph David Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down: An Autobiography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991), 400–406; Andrew Young, *An Easy Burden: The Civil Rights Movement and the Transformation of America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 390–391.

Members of COAHR and Operation Breadbasket explicitly framed their boycott and protest tactics as more effective than the negotiation style of the previous generation of black civil rights leaders. Since World War II, leading black organizations in Atlanta, such as the NAACP and Atlanta Urban League (AUL), attempted to leverage the labor demands of a booming region into better jobs for African American workers. The AUL, Atlanta Negro Voters League (ANVL), and other elite African American reform groups in the city relied on the Atlanta-style of interracial politics: meetings and negotiations.[51] In confining their politics to the conference table, these organizations were able to influence white business leaders and politicians while maintaining political power within Atlanta's black elite. Protesters in the sixties often disparaged the tactic which they believed rarely led to concessions from employers. The Atlanta-style of biracial negotiations was enormously important in opening up cracks in Atlanta's Jim Crow laws and customs. But in the field of private employment, negotiations alone rarely achieved much.[52] In part, the

[50] Consumer boycott campaigns against employment discrimination during the 1960s is under discussed in civil rights historiography. For works that focus on these campaigns in some detail see Traci Parker, *Department Stores and the Black Freedom Movement: Workers, Consumers, and Civil Rights from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 148-182; Traci Parker, "Southern Retail Campaigns and the Struggle for Black Economic Freedom in the 1950s and 1960s," in *Race and Retail: Consumption Across the Color Line,* eds. Mia Bay and Ann Fabian (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015); Stacy Kinlock Sewell, "The 'Not-Buying Power' of the Black Community: Urban Boycotts and Equal Employment Opportunity," *The Journal of African American History* 89 no.2 (Spring 2004), 135-151; Robert E. Weems Jr., "African Americans Consumer Boycotts During the Civil Rights During the Civil Rights Era," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 19 (Spring 1996), 72-79.

[51] Since at least World War II, the NAACP, nationally and locally, had turned to the courts to fight employment discrimination. See Risa Goluboff, *The Lost Promise of Civil Rights;* Sophia Z. Lee, *The Workplace Constitution;* Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand*.

[52] The bi-racial negotiation method, when aided by the federal government's weak fair employment contract compliance orders, did help the AUL convince Lockheed in

limitations of this approach reflected Atlanta's black elites weak position vis-à-vis white employers. White employers were not open to conceding personnel power to an outside organization, nor were most willing to break Atlanta's strict Jim Crow employment traditions.[53] Without the compulsion of law, the carrot and stick of federal funding, or the strength of protest campaigns by black activists, white employers had little reason to change their employment habits.

COAHR, Operation Breadbasket, and the various ad hoc boycott groups that formed in the months and years after 1960 for the most part did not reject negotiations out of hand. In fact, these groups would have preferred for an employer to agree to open up positions when first contacted. But they also learned from the failings of previous employment efforts**,** recognizing that employers would often need to be coerced into ending discriminatory practices. In the 1930s and early 1940s black communities, particularly in northern cities, supported boycotts against employment discrimination, popularly called "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaigns, but these had fallen out of favor in the postwar years.[54] The success of the Montgomery bus boycott in 1955 and

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Marietta, Georgia, to promote fifteen black workers and the International Association of Machinists to eliminate, at least in word if not practice, segregated locals in 1956. Alton Hornsby and Alexa Benson Henderson, *Atlanta Urban League* (Lewiston, NY, Edwin Mellen Press, 2005)*,* 47-48.

[53] For more on civil rights in Atlanta before the sixties and the development of the Atlanta-style of biracial politics see: Jay Winston Driskell, *Schooling Jim Crow,* Karen Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta*; Hornsby and Henderson, *Atlanta Urban League, 1920-2000*; Alton Hornsby Jr, *Black Power in Dixie*; Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent*; Stone, *Regime Politics*.

[54] Activists did not completely abandon boycotts against employment discrimination in the immediate postwar years. See Parker, *Department Stores and the Black Freedom Movement,* 116-147.

the student-led sit-ins and boycotts throughout Southern cities in 1960 convinced civil rights activists and black communities to revive economic withholding campaigns to fight discrimination against black consumers and employees.

By 1960 black communities in Atlanta were well situated to use selective patronage to challenge Jim Crow policies. In 1960 African Americans were 38 percent of the population, although black purchasing power made up only 17 percent of the total retail sales in the metropolitan area.[55] There was a relatively large and growing black middle class which, despite the low median income of Atlanta's African Americans, had expendable income that retailers like department stores and car dealerships depended on. Black Atlantans also had the advantage of well-established black-owned businesses that could not fully substitute for white-owned businesses, but could offer an alternative when necessary. Finally, even if the traditional black leadership preferred the "Atlanta-style" negotiations with employers, there was a large and varied group of civic and religious leaders in Atlanta, including the students of COAHR, the ministers of Breadbasket, and the younger middle class educators and businessmen of the Atlanta Committee for Cooperative Action (ACCA), who supported and could lead selective buying campaigns.

Among these groups, Operation Breadbasket was particularly well positioned to succeed in a selective-buying campaign. As an ecumenical group of ministers, it had a built-in network of church-goers to spread word of a consumer boycott. In its first year, Breadbasket forced employers to hire or promote close to five hundred workers into

[55] Vivian W. Henderson, *The Economic Status of Negroes: In the Nation and in the South,* Southern Regional Council Publication no. 3: "Toward Regional Realism," 11, accessed at HathiTrust Digital Library.

positions traditionally only available to white workers or a select few African Americans. These five hundred jobs, as the spokesmen of Breadbasket never tired of reminding audiences, also meant upwards of a million extra dollars of income into Atlanta's black neighborhoods. The emphasis on income shows that the improvement of the economic standing of the black community at large was of particular interest to the ministers. The activists who supported boycotts proved that a united black community, working almost exclusively through black-led institutions and using protest-oriented tactics, could confront some of the most important employers in the city and challenge, though far from upend, entrenched patterns of employment discrimination.

Yet there were weaknesses to these tactics that limited the extent that selective buying campaigns could reform Atlanta's discriminatory employment practices. For one, the victories achieved were often small. Eighteen employees upgraded at one business, eight hired at another.[56] There were only so many jobs Operation Breadbasket could open up with each single campaign. It was also extremely difficult to scale up the protests. Successful selective buying campaigns, more often than not, required a highly focused target, generally one employer. Once one campaign ended then activists could move on to the next employer. Before the Civil Rights Act of 1964 there was no law banning employment discrimination, and neither COAHR nor Operation Breadbasket looked to install any sort of enforcement mechanism, like a committee specifically tasked for this purpose or an in-house employee organization that could monitor personnel policies to

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[56] Press Release, "Atlanta Employment Demands Met," No Date, Box 172, Folder 32, "Press Releases, 1962 to 1967," SCLC Records Proquest; "Fifth Baking Company OK's Ministers Request," *Atlanta Daily World,* March 14, 1963, 2.

ensure employers kept to their word. Employers frequently failed to maintain their side of the agreement and activists eventually had to return to the employer and renew their protests.

The weakness of Operation Breadbasket was also a product of the demographics of the boycott leaders and the heritage of the Atlanta Style of interracial politics. For the most part the leaders of the selective buying campaigns led by groups such as Operation Breadbasket were middle class black men. Power dynamics in the workplace between employees and employers were overlooked. In the early years, these activists focused almost entirely on discriminatory hiring and promotion practices and the desegregation of facilities. Protest leaders also did not receive much, if any, input from employees or potential employees. Operation Breadbasket, like the AUL in the fifties, had the final say on the targets of the boycotts and the demands that would be made. This allowed the leaders of boycotts to choose vulnerable employers and aim for achievable concessions, but it also limited the extent to which inequality was challenged in Atlanta's workplaces.

Atlanta's Employment Picture, 1960

In 1961 the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce began publication of a magazine called *Atlanta.* Part of the chamber's president and future mayor Ivan Allen's "Forward Atlanta" promotional program, the magazine advertised the appealing business climate of the city– the editors of the magazine called it "a top salesman for the top city of the top nation" – to corporations, executives, and other desirable white collar workers.[57]

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[57]Opie L. Shelton, "Only the Best Will be Good Enough for Atlanta," *Atlanta Magazine* 1 (May 1961), 8.

"Forward Atlanta" was part of a larger trend of Southern and Western cities' attempt to change their image as backwards, un-modern, and uninviting locales for investment and businessmen.[58] In an editorial in the inaugural issue, Opie Shelton, the executive vice president of the chamber, explained to potential new migrants how Atlanta in the sixties was no longer a backwards Southern city, what Shelton called the "Fried Chicken Capital of the World." Instead the "booming nerve center of the South" had a "broad-beamed face of fancy new skyscrapers, fast moving expressways, and plenty of bustle."[59]

Shelton's boasts were not just the hot air of a booster. By the early sixties, downtown Atlanta and its suburbs had changed dramatically, and the growth would continue throughout the decade. In the booming downtown and throughout the spreading suburbs, workers of all skills found jobs with relative ease. In 1960 Atlanta's unemployment was around 3.6 percent, which was well below the national average of 5.5 percent. And throughout the decade Atlanta's economy would continue to perform better than the national average.[60] A tight labor market – in addition to the relative increase of well-paying, white-collar jobs – meant that workers in Atlanta also saw rising wages and

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[58] For more on creating favorable business climates see Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism*; Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt*; Jefferson Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA's Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor* (New York: The New Press, 2001); Cobb, *Selling of the South*; Tami Friedman, "Communities in Competition: Capital Migration and Plant Relocation in the U.S. Carpet Industry," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2001).

[59] Opie L. Shelton, "Only the Best Will be Good Enough for Atlanta," *Atlanta Magazine,* 8.

[60] United States Census of Population 1960, volume 2: Characteristics of the Population, Part 12 Georgia, Table 73, 12-227; Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population, 1947-2015," accessed at http://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNU04000000?years_option=all_years&periods_option=specific_periods&periodsAnnual+Data.

household wealth. Business, many Atlantans wanted people to think, was the city's only business and that racial discrimination did not play the same role it did in the rest of the South. In contrast to Little Rock or Birmingham, Atlanta was, according to longtime mayor Williams Hartsfield, "the city too busy to hate."

Yet in 1960, despite what many of the city's leading white figures wanted the public to think, Atlanta's labor market was still ruled by white supremacist assumptions. Two maxims in particular defined the employment arrangement for a vast majority of black Atlantans – maxims that were in no means isolated to this former Confederate city; they were shared by employers from Maine to California. Black workers were always the "last hired and first fired," and as explained by the Southern Regional Council, "Negroes must not work on equal status with whites."[61] Even with the strong economy there was a gap between white and black unemployment rates in Atlanta. In 1960, the white unemployment rate was 3.2 percent while the black unemployment rate was 4.3 percent. In other words, African Americans, who made up 34 percent of the working-age population, made up 41 percent of the city's unemployed.[62]

The greater challenge for black Atlantans was the continued occupational apartheid. Nearly all skilled, well-paying, and high-status jobs were off limits to black men and women. Regardless of education, experience, or skill, African Americans had to take menial positions as laborers in factories or on construction sites or the lowest rung service

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[61] Southern Regional Council, "Atlanta: Negroes and Employment Opportunity in the South," 1962, 5, accessed at The Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change, thekingcenter.org (no longer active).

[62] Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta*, 112.

jobs such as domestic servants, janitors, and porters. In 1960, black Atlantans made up less than 17 percent of professional and technical workers, 18 percent of craftsman and foreman, and only 4 percent of managers, officials and proprietors. They made up less than 5 percent of sales and 11 percent of clerical positions, desirable jobs but without the status or pay of these other positions. Some factory workers certainly fit into this middle category, an occupation that in Atlanta was 46 percent African American. But the operator jobs black Atlantans had access to were often low paying positions or at factories that could not pay wages that, say, Ford or General Motors, two companies whose Atlanta-based factories largely refused to employ black skilled operators, paid. And among the least desirable occupations, those with low pay and low status, African Americans could be found disproportionately: 95 percent of private household workers, 73 percent of other service workers, and 78 percent of laborers in the city were African American.[63]

Even in relatively well-paying stable positions that a fortunate few black Atlantans could get, they rarely found the opportunity for advancement. A job working for the Post Office, for example, was one of the few stable middle class jobs available. But the black men who got these jobs – who were often overly-qualified college graduates – regularly complained about racist white supervisors and the lack of promotional opportunities.[64] And college-graduate women did not even have the Post Office as an opportunity. In

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[63] Employment data is from United States Census of Population 1960, volume 2: Characteristics of the Population, Part 12 Georgia, Table 74, 12-232.

[64] Charles A. Black "Sweeping Post Office Changes, Top Jobs Due for Negroes," *Atlanta Inquirer,* November 10, 1962, 1; "Negro Equal Opportunity in the Atl. Georgia Post Office -- A Farce," *Atlanta Inquirer,* August 7, 1965, 2.

Atlanta, another opportunity for well paying, high status jobs available to black college graduate men and women was found in Atlanta's well-established black economic, social, and cultural institutions. Among these, the best option for many college graduates was teaching at one of the six institutions of higher learning that made up the Atlanta University Center or one of the all-black public schools. There were also opportunities in Atlanta's many black-owned businesses, that were often located on the famed Auburn Avenue. But these businesses could only afford to employ a small percentage of Atlanta's black professional class. In the early sixties, black-owned Citizens Trust Bank employed about two hundred employees, the Milton and Yates drugstore franchise about sixty, and Atlanta Life Insurance and the *Atlanta Daily World,* the country's first African American daily, both employed around fifty workers each.[65]

These college graduates were the privileged few African Americans in Atlanta who graduated high school and had the resources to attend college. Among black Atlantans twenty-five years and older, the median school years completed was 7.9, which was higher than the median for African Americans in other Georgia cities but only 63 percent of the white median in Atlanta.[66] For those with only a high school degree or less, Jim Crow customs prevented virtually all training opportunities for skills that paid better than

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[65] Southern Regional Council, "Atlanta: Negroes and Employment Opportunity in the South," 11.

[66] United States Census of Population 1960, volume 2: Characteristics of the Population, Part 12 Georgia, Table 73, 12-227 and Table 77, 12-247; "Action for Democracy: Recommendations from the City-Wide Leadership Conference," November 1, 1963, Series 2 Box 25, Folder 8, MSS 532, Eliza Paschall papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia (Hereafter Eliza Paschall Papers).

laborer or menial service. By 1960 demand for more space for traditional education, due to a lack of investment in black schools, ended most skill training in the city's only black vocational school, Carver Vocational School.[67] Nor could those interested in trade skills turn to training outside the school; only the lathers' union offered an apprenticeship program for African Americans. The limited opportunity for education and training and the racist practices and assumptions of Atlanta's white employers and unions helped create a stark economic and social divide in a city that was growing wealthier by the day. It was, as one report explained, "famine in the midst of plenty."[68]

The lack of opportunity for blacks in Atlanta's labor market helped create a large disparity in income between whites and African Americans. In Atlanta in 1960, the average white family had an income of $6,984 while the average black family's income was $3,307. This income gap actually expanded in the previous decade as poor rural African Americans moved into the city by the thousands and, more importantly, as white families benefitted to a much larger extent from the region's post-war economic expansion. Between 1950 and 1960, white families' average income increased by nearly 50 percent while black families' average income increased by 31 percent.[69] The average black family's income in 1960 was less than the $4,000 poverty floor that the United

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[67] The Atlanta Committee for Cooperative Action, "A Second Look: The Negro Citizen in Atlanta," Series 2 Box 22, Folder 4, Eliza Paschall Papers, 2-3.

[68] Southern Regional Council, "Atlanta: The Negro and Employment Opportunities in the South," 12.

[69] Harold H. Martin, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronical of Its People and Events, Vol. III* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 344.

States Bureau of Labor statistics established in the early 1960s for a family of four.[70] For many individuals and families, $3,307 was a nearly impossible dream. In the early 1960s, employers only paid domestic workers, the occupation that still employed 42 percent of black women, $3.50 to $5.00 a day for up to fourteen hours a day, six days a week.[71]

This income inequality could also be seen in the differences in purchasing power and wealth accumulation. Fifty-seven percent of white Atlanta families owned homes but only 19 percent of black families did, and only 31 percent of black families owned an automobile compared to 78 percent of white families.[72] Instead of living in comfortable suburban homes near the factories and warehouses — and their available jobs — located on the periphery of the metropolitan, working-class black Atlantans lived in often dilapidated wood frame houses and garden apartments, subjected to the indifference of

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[70] Dwight Macdonald, "Our Invisible Poor," *The New Yorker,* January 19, 1963, accessed October 15, 2016, http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1963/01/19/our-invisible-poor.

[71] Dorothy Cowser Yancy, "Dorothy Bolden, Organizer of Domestic Workers: She Was Born Poor But She Would Not Bow Down," p. 53, Series II, Box 2, Folder 9, Dorothy Bolden Thompson Collection, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System.

[72] Martin, *Atlanta and Environs*, 344.; Earned income was not the main reason for the disparity in homeownership. Federal redlining, racist city planners, politicians, and realtors, and white neighbors willing and eager to terrorize prospective black homeowners played a larger role. For more on residential segregation nationally see Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago 1940-1960* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). For residential segregation in Atlanta see Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics*.

landlords and reliant on an underfunded public transportation system to get to and from work.[73]

Even with the income and wealth disparities, many back Atlantans and some whites recognized the importance of African American consumption to the local economy, and therefore the power and influence African American spending choices could have on the policies of stores, restaurants, and factories. Atlanta activists looking to challenge discrimination throughout the city, sought to use consumer boycotts to force employers to change their hiring and promotional practices.

Student Protests and Employment Discrimination

On March 9, 1960, students from the Atlanta University complex announced their plans for a sit-in campaign modeled after the student protests started that January in Greensboro, North Carolina, in a full-page ad in the *Atlanta Constitution* and the *Atlanta Journal* and a week later in the *New York Times*.[74] Written primarily by Spelman student body president Rosalyn Pope, the ad, entitled "An Appeal for Human Rights," explained in bold and clear terms that the students could not "tolerate, in a nation professing

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[73] For the predatory nature of landlords in Atlanta and SNCC's effort to challenge slumlords see . Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid*; Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent*. See also Connolly, *A World More Concrete*.

[74] For more on the Greensboro sit-in see Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights.* The best work on the origins and first campaign of the Atlanta student movement is a collection of essays edited by David Garrow. See David J. Garrow, ed. *Atlanta Georgia, 1960-1961: Sit-Ins and Student Activism* (Brooklyn, N.Y: Carlson Pub, 1989). For more on the sit ins in Atlanta see Cynthia Griggs Fleming, *Soon We Will Not Cry: The Liberation of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998); Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent*; Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid*; Kruse, *White Flight*.

democracy and among people professing Christianity, the discriminatory conditions under the which the Negro is living today in Atlanta, Georgia – supposedly one of the most progressive cities in the South."[75] To support their charge of discriminations, Pope and her co-authors listed statistics of racial inequality in Atlanta in education, jobs, housing, voting, healthcare, entertainment, and law enforcement. The students warned the reading public that they planned "to use every legal and non-violent means at our disposal to secure full citizenship rights as members of their great Democracy."

Six days after the ad ran, nearly two hundred college students in a highly coordinated maneuver held sit-in protests at ten restaurants and lunch counters at City Hall, the state capitol, Fulton County Courthouse, two federal buildings downtown, two railroad stations, and several bus depots. Police arrested seventy-three protesters that first day. [76]

Then in early April, Lonnie King, one of the leaders of the protest, and other members of COAHR began meeting with members of the Atlanta Committee for Cooperative Action (ACCA). ACCA was a political club made up of "younger middle-class activist" men such as Whitney Young, Carl Holman, and Jesse Hill. The students wanted to maintain momentum and were searching for new ways to challenge segregation in Atlanta businesses. Possibly influenced by a selective patronage campaign that had just begun in Philadelphia, the members of the ACCA suggested that COHAR establish a picket line and boycott against grocers who relied on black customers but hired few

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[75] "An Appeal for Human Rights," in *Atlanta Georgia, 1960-1961: Sit-Ins and Student Activism,* ed. Garrow, 183

[76] Vincent D. Fort, "The Atlanta Sit-In Movement 1960 -1961: An Oral Study" (Master's Thesis, Atlanta University, 1980), 27.

African Americans from the surrounding community. The members of COAHR at first were reluctant to participate; they feared that an economic boycott would not rouse enough interest from students and the community to gather mass support.[77] Even with these concerns, COHAR soon agreed to this new protest. In mid-April, King contacted the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company (A&P) but the company refused to negotiate. So on Friday, April 22, a week after some members of COHAR attended the founding conference of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) at Shaw University in North Carolina, Atlanta students established a picket at two A&P grocery stores that were located in the predominantly black neighborhoods around Auburn Avenue.[78]

Despite their hesitancy to enter into a boycott, students found the prospect of ending job discrimination important. Two years after the first sit-ins, a group of Atlanta-based civil rights activists under forty-five, in a survey by a political scientist, ranked "employment opportunity and nondiscriminatory advancement policies" as their top priority, above schools, housing, policing, and the continued segregation of eating and retail establishments. For upwardly mobile, ambitious, college students, it was especially important to end the legal restrictions and social customs that prevented black Atlantans from finding employment as professionals, managers, or most any white-collar job. Even with the educational opportunities provided by the Atlanta University, black students were still prevented from advanced training in "medicine, dental, nursing, architecture,"

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[77] Jack L. Walker, "Sit-Ins in Atlanta," in *Atlanta, Georgia, 1960-1961: Sit-Ins and Student Activism,* ed. Garrow, 70.

[78] "Facts Suggest New Effort to Negotiate Issue," *Atlanta Daily World,* April 26, 1960, 1.

and most engineering fields. "It remains a fact," the ACCA explained in "A Second Look," "that most of the graduates of our Negro institutions of higher learning must leave Atlanta if they hope to find positions on a par with their qualifications."[79]

In boycotting grocery stores to end hiring and promotion discrimination, the students and their adult advisors turned to a protest tactic that was popular in depression-era black urban neighborhoods: the "Don't buy where you can't work" boycott campaigns. These boycotts began in Chicago in the late 1920s, and spread to thirty-five cities in the 1930s and early '40s. The most well-known and largest of the "don't buy where you can't work" campaigns was held in Harlem beginning in 1934.[80]

In Harlem, the people and organizations who supported the boycotts supported them for different reasons. For black nationalists and black businessmen, a boycott of a white-owned store meant supporting instead black-owned stores. For middle class reformers, demanding an end to job discrimination meant the possibility of new middle class, white collar positions. For those on the left, the boycott could be used as outreach to the black working class. Despite the differences, the "don't buy where you can't work" campaigns maintained a similar strategy: the demonstrators would target stores in majority black neighborhoods, establish pickets, and begin an education campaign, passing out pamphlets and relying on supportive newspapers to spread word of the protest. Some of the boycotts were more successful than others; campaigns in Harlem in 1934 and

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[79] "A Second Look: The Negro Citizen in Atlanta," pamphlet by The Atlanta Committee for Cooperative Action, January 1960, Paschall Papers.

[80] August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Along the Color Line: Explorations in the Black Experience* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 321.

Cleveland in 1935, for instance, won nearly three hundred jobs that were previously unavailable for African Americans.[81]

Even though "don't buy" campaigns were primarily a Northern and Midwestern phenomenon, black communities in Southern cities occasionally used these boycott tactics. In Atlanta in 1935, a more or less spontaneous "buy nothing" campaign developed against an A&P grocery store, the same company COAHR and ACCA would target twenty-five years later. On Saturday, November 16, a group of west-side residents gathered around an A&P market at the corner of West Hunter and Ashby street to protest the beating of a black shopper by three white clerks. Due to the attack and the police presence, a raucous crowd quickly assembled; the *Atlanta Daily World*, perhaps hyperbolically, identified it as "a near riot." The crowd quickly focused its energy and protests at the market. One especially assertive man yanked a poster off a telephone pole and in black paint wrote: "Negroes Don't Trade Here Stay Out." Soon the crowd prevented others from shopping at the market. "Don't go in there, they don't want your business," one protester yelled at a potential customer.[82]

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[81] For more on the "Don't Buy" campaigns of the 1930s and 1940s see Meier and Rudwick, *Along the Color Line,* 307-402; Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Or Does it Explode?: Black Harlem in the Great Depression* (Oxford, Oxford University Press: 1991), 114-139; Kimberly L. Phillips: *AlabamaNorth: African-American Migrants, Community, and Working-Class in Cleveland, 1915-1945* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 190-225; Andor Skotnes, "Buy Where You Can Work": Boycotting for Jobs in African-American Baltimore, 1933-1934," *Journal of Social History* 27, no.4 (Summer 1994), 735-761; Derek Charles Catsam, "Early Economic Civil Rights in Washington, DC: The New Negro Alliance, Howard University, and the Interracial Workshop," in *The Economic Civil Rights Movement,* ed. Michael Ezra, 46-57; William Jones, "Trade Boycotts," *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* 18, no. 8 (August 1940), 238-241.

[82] "West-Siders Picket Store After Man is Jailed," *Atlanta Daily World,* November 17, 1935, 1. For more on this boycott see Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta,* 142-

While the protests continued at the store, two committees formed, both with the stated goal of ending employment discrimination at A&P grocery stores in majority-black neighborhoods. One group was made up of Atlanta's black elite, men who viewed themselves as the voice of African Americans in the city. This committee included attorney A.T. Walden, who at the time was the president of the local NAACP, Reginald Johnson of the Atlanta Urban League, and T.J. Ferguson, president of Pioneer Savings Association. The other committee was composed of representatives of the west-side neighborhood that shopped at the A&P. This committee included Frank Blackshear, the business agent for the bricklayers' union, J.W. Johnson, a local businessman, and M.C. Bradley, a social worker. The press and management at A&P, however, seemed to only consider the AUL/NAACP group as the legitimate representatives.[83]

The support of middle-class African-American reformers and the larger black community was for naught. Neither the AUL/NAACP committee nor the neighborhood committee could convince A&P to hire African-American clerks at their Ashby location. The store rejected the committee's demands after informing the AUL/NAACP in a two-hour meeting that the final policy choice would have to be made by "a higher authority." One way the A&P store was able to reject the committee's demands and outlast the boycott was that the company forced their black employees in local warehouses to shop at the Ashby store location.[84] While the neighborhood was not able to secure concessions,

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144. For a contemporary discussion of black Atlantans using their consumer power to affect change see Jesse O. Thompson, "All Things Being Equal," *Atlanta Daily World,* May 18, 1935, 2.

[83] "West Side Still Aroused Over A&P Store Incident," *Atlanta Daily World,* November 20, 1935, 1.

the community members maintained an informal boycott of the store, choosing to reward instead a local grocer who hired African American clerks. Even five years after the boycott, one observer noted that the A&P franchise's "business has dropped away to nothing and nearby stores employing colored clerks have flourished and created new employment opportunities."[85]

Throughout the spring and summer of 1960, the boycott of the two A&P stores failed to draw the same attention and support as the 1935 boycott. On April 22, the first day of the pickets – the same day coincidentally that a biracial group of Atlanta CORE members held a sit-in at Rich's department store – only four COAHR members picketed at each grocery store. On the picket line, the students carried signs that read "Make democracy work in our communities," "Our money isn't different why are our jobs," and "Negro Patronage should equal Negro Employment."[86] After the spring semester ended and many students left Atlanta, COAHR relied on an ever smaller group of protesters willing to picket the grocery store. As Ruby Doris Smith Robinson's biographer recounts: "On numerous occasions," Robinson, an Atlanta native and Spelman student, "was the only person marching around and carrying a picket sign…in the hot Atlanta summer sun."[87]

In the spring and summer of 1960, it was not employment discrimination but instead ending discrimination against black consumers that served as the top priority of the

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[84] "A&P Store Committee Reports," *Atlanta Daily World,* November 24, 1935, 1.

[85] Jones, "Trade Boycott," 241.

[86] "Negroes March at 2 Food Stores Here," *Atlanta Journal,* April 23, 1960, 7; "Youths Picket Two Food Stores, *Atlanta Daily World,* April 23, 1960, 1.

[87] Griggs Fleming, *Soon We Will Not Cry,* 55.

student protesters. One reason for this emphasis was that the experience of segregation and discrimination at stores and restaurants was a near universal experience for African Americans in Atlanta, particularly for college students who may not have yet had the shared experience of employment discrimination. Furthermore, by late spring, student protesters in Atlanta had proof that protesting discrimination against black consumers could be effective.[88] For proponents of "don't buy" campaigns it was more difficult to point to recent victories of that scale. And significantly, daily pickets and a community-wide boycott did not galvanize and excite students the same way as sit-ins. On the one hand, pickets could be exhausting all-day affairs and boycotts were often passive forms of resistance. A sit-in, on the other hand, was a direct confrontation with Jim Crow; non-violent protesters confronted angry employees and management, angry customers, angry counter-demonstrators, and then were hauled off to jail by angry police officers. Sit-ins forced these young protesters, no less angry, to place their reputation, their future, their health, and their life in jeopardy.[89] James Lawson called this action an "'actualizing of their faith…a witness of enthusiastic, but mature young men and women, audacious enough to dare the intimidations and violence of racial injustice."[90] This actualization of faith galvanized Atlanta students in a way that picketing and boycotts alone could not.

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[88] For a discussion of success of some sit-in campaigns, most notably in Nashville and Greensboro see Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights;* Carson, *In Struggle*; Christopher W. Schmidt, *The Sit-Ins: Protest and Legal Change in the Civil Rights Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018).

[89] While walking the picket line did not often put protesters in the direct line of ire like sit-ins, it was not without danger. Lonnie King, walking a one-man picket that summer, had "an acid-like substance" thrown on his face. "Acid Fluid Thrown on Picket King," *Atlanta Daily World,* July 30, 1960.

Lack of enthusiasm from students was not the only problem the picket and boycott campaign faced from Atlanta's black community. Like with the sit-ins in March, COAHR and their adult allies also faced opposition from black civic leaders, especially from C.A. Scott and his newspaper, the *Atlanta Daily World.* The opposition from Atlanta's only black newspaper was both commercial and ideological. Commercially, the newspaper profited from the advertisement space that A&P groceries bought, and the organ did not want to lose this revenue by supporting the protest. Lonnie King even alleged that C.A. Scott called him to persuade him to call off the pickets because the newspaper was going to lose nine thousand dollars in ad revenue.[91] This commercial incentive only made Scott and the newspaper's ideological opposition to protest tactics more trenchant. Scott and the editors at his newspaper believed the "pragmatic style" of civil rights reform would be far more effective than protests and boycotts. The editors at the *Atlanta Daily World* did not deny employment discrimination needed to be addressed, but they "firmly believ[ed] that there should be a sincere effort at negotiation to satisfy not only employment but any other question before resorting to drastic picketing."[92]

What the *Daily World* did not reveal in its editorializing about the virtues of negotiation versus protest, and perhaps did not know, was that the Atlanta Urban League

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[90] James Lawson, "Speech at Shaw University," in *Rhetoric, Religion, and the Civil Rights Movement,* eds. David W. Houck and David E. Dixon (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 356.

[91] Lonnie King, transcript of an oral history conducted 2013 by Emilye Crosby, Civil Rights History Project, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, 58.

[92] "Is This Type of Action Necessary in this Case?" *Atlanta Daily World*, April 24, 1960, 4.

(AUL) had attempted to negotiate with A&P a decade earlier. In May 1950, more than eighteen months after he initially raised his concerns that A&P only hired "people of Anglo-saxon descent" for manager and clerk positions, Robert Thompson, the industrial secretary of the AUL, met with executives from the grocery store chain. At this meeting, the A&P executives evaded any commitment to hiring African American clerks but did promise that "every consideration would be given to the proposal of using Negro personnel." Thompson came away from the meeting less than satisfied, convinced that "top management is not entirely interested in local employment patterns, but profit."[93] In other words, Thompson understood that A&P was unlikely to hire or promote African American clerks because at least when it came to confronting racial discrimination the store's national headquarters left responsibility with the local stores. Since the decision was left in local hands, the company was not going to challenge the white supremacist traditions of the city. As an Atlanta executive explained it to Thompson, A&P "would conform to local employment patterns in employing Negroes." Not conforming would hurt "white sales" and, therefore, the reputation of the grocer giant.[94]

As COAHR and ACCA realized in 1960, and the *Atlanta Daily World* still did not, negotiations without any real leverage were unproductive. To get A&P and other employers to change their employment practices, the students would have to maintain a sustained protest that would challenge the store's reputation and profits. Of course, in

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[93] Letter, RA Thompson to "JA," May 17, 1950, Box 274, Folder 7, Atlanta Urban League Records, Archives Research Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center (Hereafter Atlanta Urban League Records).

[94] Letter, RA Thompson to John A. Hartford, April 20, 1950, Box 274, Folder 7, Atlanta Urban League Records.

1960, with employment practices being only a secondary concern among student protesters, it was difficult to sustain an effective boycott campaign.

The *Daily World's* criticisms so angered COAHR that the students even considered picketing the company. Instead, with the financial and editorial help of Kossut Hill, Jessie Hill, Q.V. Williamson, and Carl Holman, COAHR started a rival newspaper, the Atlanta *Inquirer*, that would also serve as the official organ of the student movement. The *Inquirer,* whose first issue ran on July 31, and COAHR's newsletter, "The Student Movement and You," served as a connection between the student protesters and Atlanta's black communities. Communication between the students and the community was essential for their boycotts to be effective. Lonnie King explained that if COAHR really "wanted to get the broad-based community support" than the students "would have to get the public educated to what a selective buying campaign was all about;" what he called the "economic indoctrination campaign."[95]

While COAHR began preparations for a larger fall campaign to desegregate downtown, the students continued picketing and boycotting select grocery stores in the city. In late August, COAHR received some help against A&P when a group of black physicians joined student picketers and marched in front of one of the grocery stores for several hours.[96] Even with the support of influential allies, COAHR called off the picket and boycott of the two A&P stores because of a lack of progress before summer was over.

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[95] Lonnie King, transcript of an oral history conducted 1967 by John H. Britton, The Civil Rights Documentation Project, Moorland Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington D.C., 34.

[96] "Doctors Picket Edgewood Ave. Food Store Saturday," *Atlanta Daily World,* August 28, 1960, 5.

Instead, the students turned their attention to Colonial, the other major grocery retailer in the city. Here COAHR had better luck.

On September 3, COAHR set up a picket line at a Colonial store near AUC after the company refused to negotiate. On September 15, a different Colonial, south of downtown, promoted four black employees to clerk and checker positions. The *Daily World* speculated that these were the first African Americans "used in those positions at major chain stores in the Atlanta area."[97] Then on September 23, the Colonial store on Ashby Street, where COAHR established pickets, closed for renovations and opened a week later with seven new black employees in traditionally white positions.[98] It is not clear why Colonial was more responsive to the protests of the students. It was unlikely, as the *Daily World* argued, because "management took this action on its own accord."[99] It may have been a product of timing more than anything. The campaign against Colonial came right as the fall semester began which meant more students back in the city ready to continue the demonstrations from the spring. The campaign also came at the end of the summer of COAHR members selling their boycott campaign to the community. A larger contingent of student protesters plus a better informed community willing to support COAHR may have proved persuasive to executives of Colonial.

COAHR's quick success with Colonial augured good things for the student's planned "fall campaign." Throughout the summer, COAHR had convinced an increasing number

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[97] "Colonial Employs Negro Clerks Here," *Atlanta Daily World,* September 24, 1960, 1.

[98] "Crowds Gather at Reopening of Colonial Store," *Atlanta Daily World,* October 7, 1960, 1.

[99] "We Commend the Colonial Stores," *Atlanta Daily World,* September 25, 1960, 4.

of black Atlantans to boycott Rich's Department store. Not only did the students advocate that the community stop shopping at Rich's, they pushed for consumers to "close out your charge account with segregation, open up your account with freedom."[100] This was a difficult task because as Lonnie King put it, "a Rich's charge plate in the black community was like running water." Nevertheless, as summer turned to fall they received more and more support from the larger community.[101] In mid-September, John Wesley Dobbs, an influential leader in Atlanta's black community and grandfather of future mayor Maynard Jackson, returned his credit charge plate. The masonic grandmaster included a note explaining that since even his daughter, the world-renowned opera singer Mattiwilda Dobbs, could not "drink a cup of coffee, or eat a sandwich…without discrimination and humiliation," he was terminating his "business relationship" with the store.[102]

With the increased support for the community boycott, the students planned for the second-half of their strategy: sit-ins and pickets. COAHR decided to expand beyond their summer plan of just targeting Rich's, and instead protest all major downtown retailers, including Davidson's, Kresge's, Woolworth's, Walgreen, and Sears. Nearly all histories of the black freedom struggle in the city have retold the story of the winter campaign,

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[100] Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta,* 34.

[101] Howell Raines, *My Soul Has Rested: The Story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Deep South* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 87-88.

[102] Letter John Wesley Dobbs to Rich's Inc., September 16, 1960, Series 3 Box 37, Folder 2, Richard H. Rich papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University. For a study on the civil rights campaigns directed at department stores see Traci Parker, *Department Stores and the Black Freedom Movement.*

Martin Luther King Jr.'s arrest, and the controversial compromise that ended the sit-ins, so the details of the events do not bear repeating here.[103] For our purposes, it is important to note that the protests, for the most part, focused on the desegregation of consumer spaces. Ending segregation of public accommodations continued to motivate the college protesters and their supporters in the larger black community. The students did not ignore employment discrimination. In a meeting in October with Mayor William Hartsfield, who served as a proxy for business leaders who at the time refused to meet with the protesters, the students did call for the downtown stores to implement fair employment standards. But once COAHR and the targeted stores, with the aid of older African American reformers and the Chamber of Commerce, came to an agreement, it was the implementation of a desegregation plan for eating and shopping areas that received most of the focus. In the controversial March compromise, the merchants promised that they

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[103] For accounts of the fall and winter campaign see Raines, *My Soul is Rested,* 87-93; Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid,* 17-26; Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent,* 158-171; Kruse, *White Flight,* 180-193; Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn*, 258-264; Lefever, *Undaunted by the Fight,* 75-84. The fall campaign became national news when Martin Luther King Jr. was arrested along with thirty-five students at Rich's Department Store and John F. Kennedy's campaign intervened on his behalf. King was the only protester not quickly released from jail. Because he violated the terms of his probation for a previous arrest for driving without a Georgia license, Judge Oscar Mitchell sentenced King to four months-hard labor. Judge Mitchell's harsh ruling ended up playing a role in the 1960 presidential election held only two weeks later. After King was sent to the Georgia prison, Wyatt Walker, SCLC's executive director, Coretta Scott King, and Kennedy aide Harris Wofford pushed John F. Kennedy to act. Wofford convinced Kennedy to call Coretta King directly, while his brother Robert Kennedy, without JFK's knowledge, convinced Judge Mitchell to release King on bail. After Kennedy won the election and the African American vote three to one, observers pointed to Kennedy's help, and Richard Nixon's refusal to comment, as a key moment in swaying the decision for African American voters nationwide. See. Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America*, 76; Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 351-365; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross,* 143-149.

would desegregate their facilities after the court-ordered school desegregation the following September. In addition, the seventy-plus merchants agreed to hire back between 500 and 600 black employees who had been laid off during the protest.

The student protesters, including Lonnie King and Herschel Sullivan, the student representatives at the meetings with the merchants, disagreed with the final agreement, especially the delay in ending segregation, which they did not trust the merchants to actually implement the following Fall. The students had hoped for a faster resolution and one that encompassed more than just segregation at select lunch counters. Whereas the *Atlanta Constitution* and the *Daily World* reported just the two demands that merchants agreed to, SCLC's newsletter the *Student Voice* reported that the parties had agreed to "Adoption by the merchants a policy of upgrading and hiring Negroes in various job categories on the basis of merit."[104] Since this stipulation did not appear in the major dailies nor does it come in any of the many histories of the compromise it seems that the report by SNCC was more wishful thinking than anything else.

After the student-led protests in 1960 and 1961, boycotts against grocery stores and other retailers developed from time to time in different neighborhoods, often led by neighborhood civic organizations. In 1962, for instance, in a protest that mirrored the A&P boycott in 1937, the Georgia Avenue-Pryor Street Civic League led a two-week picket against the Farm Cut-Rate Drive-In Grocery after a night manager slapped customer Jessie Mae Jenkins whom he accused of shop lifting. The local civic league, led by Reverend C.D. Colbert of St. Stephens Baptist Church, attempted to get the store to

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[104] "News from the States," *The Student Voice*, 2 no. 1 (March 1961), 2.

hire black workers, but after the owner refused to negotiate, the picket line effectively ended his business, prompting him to sell the store to a new owner who met with the protesters and agreed to hire black clerks and butchers.[105] In another example, residents of the Grady Homes housing projects along with allied college students picketed one of the A&P stores that had also been the target of protests in 1960 that had only one black employee, a bagger.[106] Later, in August, after six months of negotiation and boycott, the owner of a Shoprite grocery store, laundry-mat, and Standard Service gas station came to an agreement with the Southeast Community Council to promote an employee at the grocery store to clerk and to lease the Standard Service station to "any Negro in the community."[107]

In June 1963, the student movement, at least for a moment**,** sought to make a more concerted challenge to employment discrimination. At COAHR's impetus, a group of students, allied adult civic leaders, and ministers held a meeting to reorganize the Student-Adult Liaison, which had become defunct after the sit-in campaigns ended in 1961. At this meeting the group agreed to focus its attention on employment discrimination. "An unrelenting fight," Dr. A.M. Davis told *The Atlanta Inquirer,* "will be waged to tear down racial barriers in every neighborhood store, every utility company, every private business, and every city, county, state and federal government agency."[108]

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[105] "Grocery Store Closes, Changes Ownership Here," *Atlanta Daily World*, February 16, 1962.

[106] "Edgewood A & P Boycotted, Picketed," *Atlanta Inquirer*, April 27, 1963, 1.

[107] "Pool Creek Boycott Lifted," *Atlanta Inquirer*, October 19, 1963, 2.

[108] "Students, Adults Declare War on Bias," Atlanta Inquirer*,* June 29, 1963, 1, 20.

Soon after the meeting, COAHR, now led by Larry Fox, announced a campaign to open up five thousand new jobs "in areas now closed to Negroes."[109] To open up those jobs, the students envisioned an army of over one thousand picketers.[110] Calling for these one thousand volunteers was hopeful and made good press, but over the summer of 1963, COAHR never showed the ambition to lead a campaign that could use even one hundred pickets. The student's target was a liquor store in a northwest neighborhood that had recently transitioned from majority white to majority black. The liquor store had four employees, in addition to the white owner, Raymond Parks Jr., three white and one African American. Parks refused to budge for several months — he claimed he could not add any new employees and refused to fire or diminish the hours of any of his current employees — even in the face of a near-total community boycott. The liquor store owner finally relented and hired two new black employees, one full-time and the other part-time in August.[111] This was a victory, but a limited one. Yet, prior to laws banning employment discrimination, these sorts of boycotts were one of the few means to add even a small number of jobs.

Atlanta Ministers and Employment Discrimination

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[109] "Students Call Mass Meeting to Push for 5,000 New Jobs, *"Atlanta Inquirer, July 6. 1963,*1.

[110] "Students Seek 1,000 Pickets to Expand New Job Push Here," *Atlanta Inquirer*, July 20, 1963, 8.

[111] "Pickets O.K. Use of Liquor, Wine Stores," *Atlanta Inquirer,* August 10, 1963, 2,10.

Student-led protests in Atlanta decreased after the March 1960 agreement between COAHR and the downtown merchants. The disappointment of the delayed desegregation and their frustration with the Atlanta's black elite gave some members of COAHR pause. Lonnie King left Atlanta in the summer of 1961 to attend law school at Howard University, while other members turned their focus to SNCC projects like supporting the Freedom Rides and the Albany, Georgia, movement. In Atlanta students still maintained sporadic efforts at desegregating lunch counters, retail spaces, and other public areas. Historian Alton Hornsby, who participated in the protests in 1960, explained that the limited desegregation agreement left a "crazy-quilt pattern of discrimination wherein a black person would have to carry a list of the open restaurants in his or her pocket to avoid embarrassment."[112] In addition to sporadic efforts at desegregating public accommodations, the students also joined with the dentist Roy Bell to fight against discriminatory hiring and patient care at the Fulton and DeKalb County-run Grady Memorial Hospital.[113] Into this vacuum stepped SCLC and Operation Breadbasket, eager to use public protest tactics to challenge employment discrimination.

Martin Luther King Jr. long viewed fighting economic inequality as an essential component of the civil rights movement. At first, high unemployment and employment discrimination were not King's primary targets in countering economic inequality. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, as historian Thomas Jackson points out, "King was clearly

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[112] Hornsby, *Black Power in Dixie*, 109.

[113] Hornsby, *Black Power in* Dixie, 110; Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid,* 34-35.

more concerned with housing and ghettos than jobs."[114] In this period he was especially insistent that President John F. Kennedy use his executive powers to end discriminatory housing and lending practices. Even though King prioritized housing segregation, he always understood that job discrimination was an important part of economic inequality, and he often voiced his opposition to job discrimination, unemployment, and racist labor unions.

Prior to the autumn of 1962, SCLC did not have the infrastructure nor the motivation to challenge employment discrimination in any sort of sustained manner. Typically, challenging employment discrimination and unemployment was the domain of civil rights groups and individuals more experienced in workplace issues like Herbert Hill and the NAACP's Labor Department, the Urban League, and black labor union leaders.[115]

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[114] Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights*, *126.* Jackson's work is the best work King's thinking on economic justice and how this shaped his activism. For more on King and economic justice see Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road;* Honey, *To the Promised Land;* Laurent, *King and the Other America*; Mantler, *Power to the Poor*; Mantler, "Black, Brown, and Poor"; Amy Nathan Wright, "Civil Rights 'Unfinished Business': Poverty, Race, and the 1968 Poor People's Campaign" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2007). King's published writings and speeches also offer an excellent introduction to his ideas about economic justice and civil rights. The three books he published each contain passages discussing poverty and economic inequality. See Martin Luther King Jr, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010; Harper & Brothers, 1958); King, *Why We Can't Wait* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010); King, *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010; Harper & Row, 1967). See also the edited collection of his speeches to labor unions, Michael Honey, ed. *All Labor Has Dignity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012). For general histories of King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference see Garrow, *Bearing the Cross,* Branch, *Parting the Waters*, Branch, *Pillar of Fire*; Taylor Branch, *At Canaan's Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-1968* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006); Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America.*

[115] For more on advocacy for fair employment policies before the Civil Rights Act see Anthony Chen, "The Hitlerian Rule of Quotas": Racial Conservatism and the Politics of Fair Employment Legislation in New York State, 1941-1945," *Journal of American*

But at the annual SCLC convention in Birmingham, Alabama, in September 1962, participants discussed "the alarming rate of unemployment in the Negro community South and North."[116] For the conference attendees there was a clear link between the high rates of black unemployment and discrimination in hiring and promotion practices. As Jackie Robinson reported from his column in the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the "organization decided there was a great deal of unemployment and lack of opportunity for advancement for Negroes simply due to their color."[117] For those at the SCLC convention, and later for the members of Operation Breadbasket, the need to fight Jim Crow employment patterns was not just for the dignity of the black worker and the moral injustice of discrimination and segregation, though it surely was that; it was also to confront the economic reality of high black unemployment and underemployment and the attendant impoverishment of black communities.

SCLC and Operation Breadbasket were not alone in their newly vocal concern over unemployment and poverty; but the activism of civil rights activists helped raise

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History 92 (March 2006), 1238-1246; Anthony S. Chen, *The Fifth Freedom*; Jennifer Delton, *Racial Integration in Corporate America, 1940-1990* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Merl Reed, *Seedtime for the Modern Civil Rights Movement: The President's Committee on Fair Employment Practice, 1941-1946*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1991); Nancy Maclean, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace,* (New York: Russel Sage Foundation, 2006); Kevin Schultz, "The FEPC and the Legacy of the Labor-Based Civil Rights Movement of the 1940s," 71-92.

[116] "Negro Ministers Unfold "Operation Breadbasket" in Atlanta," *Southern Christian Leadership Conference Newsletter* 1, no 8, December 1962, 3.

[117] Jackie Robinson, "Jackie Robinson Says: Time-Table of a Social Change," November 17, 1962, draft found in Box 35, Folder 7, Hunt Foods-Blueplate Div. -1962, Records of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, 1954-1970, Center for Nonviolent Social Change, Inc., Atlanta, Georgia, accessed at ProQuest History Vault, Civil Rights and Black Freedom Struggle (Hereafter SCLC Records ProQuest).

awareness about the problems of jobs and poverty across America.[118] This national conversation that grabbed the attention of policy makers, journalists, academics, and activists was also a product of the increased anxiety over the limitations of "a society of high and increasing affluence."[119] Two problems in the economy animated these concerns. First, and the most well remembered because of the War on Poverty, was the concern over the persistence of poverty; that America's new-found prosperity – the median income in 1960, $5,260, was 30 percent higher than a decade before – did not touch everyone.[120] The second anxiety of the early sixties was the uncertainty that the economic growth of the previous fifteen years could last much longer. There was a recession between 1957 and 1958 and again in late 1960 and early 1961.[121]

Most policy makers and journalists focused on structural explanations for those left outside of the economy, especially as it affected the hardcore unemployed and impoverished. The emphasis on the individual worker and the obstacles to his or her (although invariably the focus was on his) full-time employment, as opposed to the

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[118] Allen Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s*, Revised edition (Athens, Ga: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 120.

[119] John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1998), 243.

[120] James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974*, Revised edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 311. This anxiety was best expressed by Michael Harrington in his landmark study of poverty, *The Other America.* Michael Harrington, *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*, Reprint edition (New York: Scribner, 1997).

[121] "Labor Force Statistics from Current Population Survey: 1950-1960." Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed at https://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutputServlet. For an expression of this anxiety see "On 'Moving Again,'" *Washington Post*, April 3, 1961, A10.

functioning of the overall economy, drove the policies that became Johnson's War on Poverty. In the early 1960s, one explanation for structural employment received more attention than most: automation. With chronic unemployment and the advancement in production machinery and robotics, the late fifties and early sixties were ripe for a discussion about the repercussions of technology on employment.

The anxiety over automation in the early 1960s may have been overwrought. The concern over a large permanent class of unemployed former-blue class workers eased as unemployment dropped to 4 percent by the end of 1965.[122] Nevertheless, there was genuine reason for employees and their families in several basic industries to fear that robots were taking their jobs. "Everybody knew a frightening example," writes historian Allen Matusow. "Automation in Ford's Cleveland plant permitted 48 workers to make an engine block where once it had taken 400. Two men instead of 200 were assembling 1,000 radios a day in Chicago."[123]

For black Americans, the automation of unskilled and semiskilled jobs was another cruel reminder of their second-class citizenship in the United States. At the same time as efforts to reform employment discrimination laws advanced many of the jobs that these men and women had the training and skills for were becoming obsolete. To make it worse, at the exact time that industrial employers of black labor — like car companies and meat packing plants —automated their production, the cotton plantations of the deep South, the traditional employer of millions of black Americans, were in the final steps of

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[122] "Labor Force Statistics from Current Population Survey: 1950-1960." Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed at https://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutputServlet.

[123] Matusow, *The Unraveling of America*, 101.

completely mechanizing farming, causing widespread rural displacement. Black activists recognized the danger of automation. To an audience of autoworkers, Martin Luther King Jr, called automation "a blind monster which grinds out more cars and simultaneously snuffs out the hopes and lives of the people by whom the industry was built."[124] From the Reverend King to Whitney Young, the ever-moderate head of the Urban League, to the longtime socialist A. Philip Randolph, to the radical Marxist pamphleteer James Boggs, displacement by automation played an essential role in many black Americans understanding of the American economy and the potential promise of the civil rights movement.[125] "Yes, we want a Fair Employment Practice Act," the elder statesman Randolph told the crowd at the March on Washington in August 1963, "but what good will it do if profit-geared automation destroys the jobs of millions of workers black and white?"[126]

When the members of SCLC introduced Operation Breadbasket to Atlanta and the nation they emphasized the effects of automation on black unemployment. "The Negro is in a desperate situation as far as employment is concerned," Abernathy explained to a group of black Atlanta church and civic leaders in November 1962. "With automation

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[124] Martin Luther King Jr., "Speech to the United Automobile Workers Union, Detroit Michigan, April 17, 1961" in *"All Labor has Dignity,"* ed., Honey, 26

[125] For Whitney Young see Whitney Young, *To Be Equal,* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 11; For A. Philip Randolph see William P. Jones, *The March on Washington*, 189-192; For James Boggs see James Boggs, *American Revolution: Pages from a Negro Workers Notebook* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963).

[126] A. Philip Randolph, Speech at March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, August 28, 1963, in "Speeches by the Leaders: The March on Washington For Jobs and Freedom," Printed as a Public Service, The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, (New York), accessed at www.thekingcenter.org.

and its effect on the unskilled worker, the Negro must not continually be deprived of job opportunity and advancement." The SCLC activist warned that high black unemployment "might be a dilemma serious enough to shatter the very foundation of democracy."[127] Abernathy, to some extent, accepted that the kind of jobs unskilled and semiskilled industrial workers had relied on for at least a century (and that had allowed many white workers to advance to the middle class thanks to labor unions and the prosperity of post-war years) would soon no longer exist. Presciently, he recognized that if the civil rights activists could not force open white collar jobs, skilled blue collar jobs, and supervisor and management positions then there were soon not going to be any meaningful jobs for black Americans. Instead, college educated women would continue working as maids and college educated men as mail sorters, while many "Negro youth drop out of school in disgust each year because they know that even if they are trained, there are no jobs open to them beyond the level of menial servitude, because they are Negroes."[128]

To tackle the twin issues of employment discrimination and unemployment, SCLC found inspiration in a successful and popular boycott movement led by a group of African American preachers in Philadelphia. King, the national SCLC, and activists and ministers in Atlanta viewed a protest-oriented campaign attacking employment discrimination, especially one headed by ministers, as a promising opportunity that did not rely on the Kennedy administration. A church-led boycott would allow King to apply the minister-

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[127] SCLC Press Release, No Date, Box 120, Folder 5 Jan. - Mar. 1962, SCLC Records ProQuest.

[128] SCLC Press Release, "Negro Ministers Organize For Big Push in Employment," No date, Box 172, Folder 32 Press Releases - 1962-1967, SCLC Records ProQuest.

led SCLC to fight a problem he always considered as central to continued racial inequality in the United States.

The founder of Philadelphia's 400 Ministers was the Reverend Leon Sullivan. Born in 1922 in West Virginia, Sullivan was the preacher at Zion Baptist Church, one of the largest churches in Philadelphia. While still in West Virginia, Sullivan met the influential Harlem-based pastor, and future congressman, Adam Clayton Powell. With help from Powell, Sullivan enrolled in New York's Union Theological Seminary, and later Powell hired Sullivan as assistant pastor at Abyssinian Baptist Church. In addition to his studies and church work, Sullivan also delved into politics; he campaigned for Powell's first congressional run and worked for A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington Movement in 1941.[129]

After his appointment at Zion Baptist in 1950, Sullivan continued his community work. In the late-1950s, Sullivan ran an employment service for young black men and women. The service was successful in placing "thousands in jobs," but because of Philadelphia's racist labor market they were often poorly-paid menial jobs. An applicant's merit was not enough to alter the employment patterns; employers would have to be compelled to change their hiring practices. In March 1960, Sullivan and fifteen leading African American ministers in the city devised a plan to use churches to lead boycotts that would force employers to hire African Americans into new positions. The

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[129] For biographies of Leon Sullivan see Leon Sullivan, *Build Brother Build,* (Philadelphia: Macrae Smith Company, 1969); Guian A. McKee, *The Problem of Jobs: Liberalism, Race, and Deindustrialization in Philadelphia* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), 117–119; Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia*, (Philadelphia, Pa.: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 83–86.

inspirations for their plan were the student sit-ins spreading through the South and the pickets at Philadelphia Woolworths's in support of the Southern students. By June, the ministers, now calling their group "400 Ministers" even though Sullivan admitted they never had that many members, revealed to their congregations that they would begin a "selective patronage campaign."[130]

The 400 Ministers operated these campaigns in a highly decentralized organization. There was no one leader, despite the obvious influence of Leon Sullivan. Instead each target would get a different interdenominational group with one member chosen as the spokesperson. Then decisions would come to the whole organization where a unanimous vote was required. This decentralized organization was in place to assuage famously delicate egos and also to reduce ministers' vulnerability to legal attacks from the targeted businesses. The 400 Ministers held to a strict process for each patronage campaign. One minister told a reporter that it was the "best organized unorganized program you ever saw in action."[131]

The 400 Ministers approached their selective patronage campaign – the ministers avoided the word "boycott" because it felt it left them open to charges of illegally restraining trade – with a well-organized plan. First, the ministers had a specific goal in mind when they targeted an employer. Instead of a broad demand for hiring more black workers, the 400 Ministers chose to demand "sensitive" positions that were "visible to the

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[130] Countryman, *Up South,* 102-103.

[131] Hannah Lees, "The Not Buying Power of Philadelphia's Negroes, *The Reporter,* May 11, 1961, 34..

public – white-collar accountants and bank tellers, salesman and truck drivers."[132] Second, the group chose to target only one industry at a time, and their targets sold goods or services that were vulnerable to a boycott by black consumers. Third, the ministers had a precise procedure for launching their campaign. The interdenominational group assigned to the target would then research the target and determine appropriate demands. Then, after unanimous approval from members of the organization, the group would arrange two meetings with the employer, and in the second meeting present the employer with the demands. If after this second round of meetings the employer did not meet the demands, the 400 Ministers would try to persuade their congregation to boycott the employer. Significantly, the selective patronage campaigns avoided pickets or demonstrations, instead relying on networks that emanated out from their churches, especially women's social networks, but also civic and neighborhood associations, schools, black business owners, and the black press. The ministers and their networks were remarkably adept at spreading the message of a boycott throughout the black community. One newspaper estimated that after twenty-four hours 60 percent of black Philadelphians knew about a specific campaign.[133]

The first target of the 400 Minister's selective patronage campaign was the General Baking Company, which quickly agreed to hire more African Americans in sensitive positions. Their next target, another baking company, Tasty Baking, manufacturer of Tastykakes, refused to negotiate with the 400 Ministers and proved to be the most

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[132] Countryman, *Up South,* 103.

[133] McKee, *The Problem of Jobs*, 119–120; Countryman, *Up South*, 106–107.

intransigent employer the organization targeted. After an eight-week boycott that included African American retailers refusing to sell Tastykakes, the dessert manufacturer agreed to desegregate all its facilities and hired a total of ten African Americans in salesman-driver positions, clerical staff, and the icing and packaging departments.[134] The modest demands of the ministers – only ten new positions in a company that employed hundreds – was an intentional tactic to make victories more likely. Companies were more likely to comply with such a small demand, especially in order not to appear overtly racist in a purportedly racially liberal city.[135] Over the lifespan of the organization, from 1960 through 1963, the 400 Ministers successfully reached agreements with all twenty-nine companies it targeted. In addition to bakeries, the organization targeted firms involved in soda bottling, heating oil, newspapers, dairy, and groceries. Leon Sullivan also claimed that the 400 Ministers had come to agreements with another three hundred companies in the first round of negotiations. Through these boycotts and negotiations, the 400 Ministers claimed to create at least 2,000 new jobs for black Philadelphians.

In a city as large as Philadelphia two thousand new jobs was relatively insignificant, but in choosing to emphasize "sensitive" positions, the 400 Ministers was able to alter employment practices in many Philadelphia firms and open up higher status, more well-paying jobs for many in the city. Furthermore, as historian Matthew Countryman explained, the success of the 400 Ministers "helped shift concerns of black

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[134] Countryman, *Up South*, 105; McKee, *The Problem of Jobs*, 120–122.

[135] McKee, *The Problem of Jobs*, 122–123. For more on the willingness of some companies to comply with equal employment demands, and later affirmative action, in order to maintain a progressive social image see Delton, *Racial Integration in Corporate America, 1940-1990*.

Philadelphians from questions of equal opportunity to ones of socioeconomic equality."[136]

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Philadelphia's 400 Ministers may have been the most successful boycott campaign to desegregate labor markets of the 1950s and 1960s but it was certainly not the only one. Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) led campaigns in New York City, California, and North Carolina, and other activists, influenced by the success of the 400 Ministers, started boycott movements in, among other cities, Boston, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Cincinnati, and Chicago.[137] Martin Luther King Jr., too, was impressed by the success of Philadelphia's ministers, and in October 1962, the SCLC president, fresh from the disappointment of the Albany campaign, invited Sullivan to Atlanta to give several speeches on his experience fighting employment segregation. According to one biographer, Philadelphia's selective patronage campaign "fired King's imagination."[138]

SCLC used Sullivan's visit to Atlanta to introduce its newly planned selective patronage campaign to Atlanta's leading African American civic leaders, activists, and ministers. Among many of Atlanta's black church leaders there was real excitement for Operation Breadbasket, and thirty leaders from twelve different denominations met a week after the Sullivan presentation, "moved by the terrible injustice in the area of

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[136] Countryman, *Up South,* 109-110, 112.

[137] MacLean, *Freedom Is Not Enough*, 42; Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights*, 137–138; McKee, *The Problem of Jobs,* 123; Kinlock Sewell, "The 'Not Buying Power' of the Black Community," 135-151.

[138] Thomas F. Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights*, 138.

employment," to further discuss how best they could aid the organization. Student leaders "and all local civil rights groups" also "pledged their support and offered their commendation to the ministers." For these ministers and students, Operation Breadbasket's decision to challenge employment discrimination through boycotts and pickets — the use of pickets was one major difference between Operation Breadbasket and Sullivan's 400 Ministers — was welcomed. As Reverend John Middleton, the head of SCLC's Atlanta affiliate, explained, "Atlanta has a good record in her fight against segregation in public accommodations but we haven't done much in providing new opportunities for our people."[139]

Outside of the sporadic attempts by students in the summer and fall of 1960 to boycott grocery stores that did not hire black clerks, the major effort by black Atlantans to end employment discrimination in the early sixties was through the Atlanta General Citizens Committee on Employment and Economic Opportunity. The committee, which worked together with the national and local Urban League, consisted of many of Atlanta's leading black business and civic elite, including E.M. Martin, president of Atlanta Life Insurance, Q.V. Williamson, president of the all-black Empire Real Estate Board, and Johnnie Yancey, civic leader and wife of prominent physician P.Q. Yancey. The goal of the committee, like the Atlanta Urban League in the 1950s, was to negotiate directly with employers in hopes of "breaking the job opportunity bottleneck."[140] In early 1962, for

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[139] SCLC Press Release, "Atlanta SCLC to Launch 'Operation Bread Basket'," October 23, 196, Box 172, Folder 32 Press Releases - 1962-1967, SCLC Records ProQuest.

[140] "Citizens Committee Calls City-Wide Job Conference," *Atlanta Daily World,* May 13, 1962.

instance, the committee chose to focus on negotiations with Southern Bell, the Atlanta Transit Company, which operated the city bus system, and Mayor Ivan Allen. Except for their meeting with Allen, negotiations generally went nowhere. The subcommittees that met with the Atlanta Transit Company and Southern Bell "reported 'discouraging' results." In fact, the committee surveyed twenty-eight employers about hiring African-American employees, eighteen responded, and "only 4 finally furnished job openings to minority persons."[141]

The Committee did make gestures towards becoming a more inclusive organization, presumably willing to use protest tactics that took the organization outside of the conference room. In May the group held an open meeting to "re-think strategy," especially to discuss ways to develop a "unified community action" against employment discrimination.[142] Apparently the General Citizens Committee was uninterested in actually pursuing any new strategy because in November SCLC members in Atlanta criticized "a committee of Negro businessmen…which had little to show for its efforts other than promises to do better."[143] For more moderate-leaning citizens of Atlanta, which included most of the city's black ministers, Operation Breadbasket offered an organization not led by students but that was willing to challenge employment discrimination with something more than a strongly-worded letter.

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[141] "Unified Community Action" On Equal Job Opportunity," *Atlanta Daily World,* May 17, 1962, 1.

[142] "Unified Community Action" On Equal Job Opportunity," *Atlanta Daily World,* May 17, 1962, 1

[143] SCLC Press Release, "Negro Ministers Organize for Big Push in Unemployment," No Date, Box 122, Folder 18, SCLC Records ProQuest.

The leading members of Operation Breadbasket insisted on a bold approach to employment discrimination from the start. At a November 1962 meeting where the Atlanta SCLC considered Operation Breadbasket, Gerald Reed, a white dentist and chair of the branch's employment committee, brought up a concern that fellow white liberals had about the boycott campaign. They worried about "white employees being displaced by the Negroes who are hired out of fear of reprisal by selective buying." Dr. Reed thought that SCLC needed to be prepared with a reprisal to this accusation. The meeting attendees came up with three answers, two of which looked to deflect blame of any displacement onto the employers. First, the members believed that turnover and job growth would prevent much displacement. Second, companies should respect all employment contracts and not arbitrarily dismiss any employees. But their third response confronted the decades of racist personnel policy directly and argued that displacement might be a necessary part of the upheaval that ending Jim Crow employment practices required. "If companies had hired fairly on a non-discriminatory basis, the jobs requested would be held by Negroes now, and there wouldn't have been any need to replace anyone."[144] According to Ralph Abernathy, the ministers in Operation Breadbasket maintained this defiant stance when an employer raised this concern. "We were breaking eggs to make omelets," Abernathy recounted in his autobiography, "and we insisted that businesses not postpone their responsibility to correct an historical imbalance."[145]

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[144] "Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Atlanta Chapter SCLC," November 20, 1962, Box 51, Folder 14 "Georgia—Atlanta Chapter 1962-1966," SCLC Records ProQuest.

[145] Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down*, 404-405.

Atlanta was a suitable location for the organization because SCLC had already established a local affiliate that was looking to make its mark in the local activist scene. SCLC created an Atlanta branch of the organization in February 1962 at the request of John Middleton, a prominent preacher at Allen Temple AME, B.J. Johnson, minister at Greater Mt. Cavalry Baptist, and Roy Bell, an activist and dentist who led the challenge to integrate Atlanta's healthcare system. In a letter to Ralph Abernathy, the three explained that they desired a local chapter because they were "concerned with adding an additional direct action pressure group locally to the Atlanta scene."[146] The initial impetus for the charter was to gain help in the campaign to desegregate Grady Memorial Hospital, Atlanta's largest public hospital. In addition to the efforts at desegregating Grady Memorial, the group also led a voter registration campaign and through a community relations group sought to resolve various grievances that Atlantans brought to its office.[147] From November 1962 on, however, the Atlanta SCLC prioritized Operation Breadbasket.

Among the three men who petitioned Ralph Abernathy for a charter only Reverend John Middleton played a role in Operation Breadbasket. In addition to Middleton and Abernathy, who was the original call man (head of the new organization), Operation Breadbasket claimed to be an organization of four hundred ministers. This, of course, was

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[146] Letter. Middleton, et al. to Ralph Abernathy, January 19, 1962, Box 53, Folder 14 "Jan. 1962," SCLC Records ProQuest.

[147] Press Release, "Atlanta SCLC Calls Meet to Aid Birmingham Victims," April 12, 1962 and "Minutes of the Regular Meeting of the Atlanta Chapter SCLC," November 20, 1962, Box 51, Folder 14 "Georgia—Atlanta Chapter 1962-1966," SCLC Records ProQuest.

the same number Leon Sullivan's organization used in Philadelphia, and as in Philadelphia it was an exaggeration. Threatening employers throughout Atlanta with boycotts backed by four hundred churches certainly sounded more imposing. As far as a more realistic number, there were thirty-four church leaders who signed their name to an early appeal, but it is unclear how many churches beyond those thirty-four were willing to come to Breadbasket's aid in the case of a boycott or picket.[148]

Along with Middleton and Abernathy there was a small, ecumenical group of ministers that included Martin Luther King Sr., Oliver Wendell Holmes, J.D. Grier, E.R. Searcy, Howard Creecy, E.H. Dorsey, Fred Bennette, and Joseph Boone who maintained the organization and led most of the campaigns. Some of these ministers, like Abernathy, King, Middleton (who became the president of Morris Brown College in 1965), Grier (who became an Atlanta state representative in 1965), E.H. Dorsey (president of the Atlanta Baptist Ministers Union), and Holmes (the associate director of the Georgia Council on Human Relations), were well-established ministers and civil rights advocates. Because of their relatively esteemed position these ministers could garner respect, or at least receive a respectful hearing, from the white power structure accustomed to the Atlanta Style of interracial politics. Breadbasket's leadership also included ministers like Bennette and Boone who were slightly younger, more interested in direct action-action protests, and would eventually push the organization beyond just boycotts against employment discrimination.[149]

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[148] See signatures on Letter, Abernathy, et al. to "Brothers in Christ," November 16, 1962, Box 172, Folder 1 "1962," SCLC Records ProQuest.

[149] Beltramini, "S.C.L.C Operation Breadbasket," 135-145.

The first campaign for Operation Breadbasket began in mid-November 1962 when the organization approached Colonial Baking Company and demanded that it hire eighteen black workers in new positions. Bread-producing bakeries were Operation Breadbasket's first six targets. In the months leading up to the group's formation, John Middleton and Gerald Reed researched the best targets for their planned selective patronage campaign. They targeted bakeries, an industry particularly vulnerable to boycotts, because they sold perishable products and companies would have to literally throw out products – and profits – if the boycott was effective. To aid SCLC in their research on employment in Atlanta, three Spelman students under the supervision of Staughton Lynd interviewed black residents in public housing and managers at grocery stores to better understand the consumption habits of black Atlantans.[150]

At a meeting with Colonial Baking in mid-November, Operation Breadbasket learned that the bread company employed fifty-five African Americans out of a total work force of 275; with those fifty-five employees segregated almost entirely into sanitation and dish washing departments "with one or two in the garage and shipping departments." Among the eighteen employees, the ministers asked Colonial to hire office workers, driver salesmen, bakers, cake icers, distribution department workers, and an engineer.[151] Operation Breadbasket requested eighteen new employees based on the desired proportion of African American employees in each of the desired departments. For

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[150] Letter, Staughton Lynd to Ralph Abernathy, October 11, 1962, Box 172, Folder 2 "1963-1966," SCLC Records ProQuest.

[151] Letter, Abernathy, et al. to "Brothers in Christ," November 16, 1962, Box 172, Folder 1 "1962" SCLC Records ProQuest.

example, there were ten office workers all of whom were white, so the ministers asked for just one black office worker. But there were eighty-four driver-salesman (certainly the employees most visible to the large public, and therefore following Leon Sullivan's method a sensitive position) so Breadbasket asked for five new employees. The negotiation committee told Colonial Baking to comply with their demands within two weeks or face a boycott. Before the deadline, Colonial came to an agreement that partially complied with Breadbasket's demands and upgraded eighteen employees in the positions that the ministers requested; Breadbasket, though, had actually asked for the hiring of "additional workers" not just upgrades.

Despite the compromise, Operation Breadbasket took the promotion as a victory. Eighteen black Atlantans were now in better paid positions, positions with higher status, positions that could possibly lead to promotions into management and supervisory roles. At the same time, the ministers in Breadbasket were aware that eighteen promoted employees was a modest number. One Breadbasket minister explained that the appeals it made to employers were only "minimal requests. Their fulfillment demonstrates good-will of the companies at this point but we will continue our efforts for equal employment of all races."[152]

After their quick settlement with Colonial Baking, Operation Breadbasket targeted the other major baking companies in the metropolitan area. Over the next five months it reached agreements with five other firms: Merita, Southern, Atlanta, Dutch Oven, and Highland Baking Companies. Merita Baking, perhaps wanting to avoid the bad publicity

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[152] Press Release, "Atlanta Employment Demands Met," No Date, Box 172, Folder 32, "Press Releases, 1962 to 1967," SCLC Records ProQuest.

of a confrontation with the nationally-recognized SCLC, voluntarily began talks with the Atlanta Urban League about new hires while Breadbasket was still meeting with Colonial. Only Highland refused to change its employment practices until Breadbasket initiated a boycott and picket. The ministers demanded that Highland, who employed 149 workers, thirty-two of whom were African American, hire eight new employees: one office worker, two in the baking department, and five driver-salesmen.[153] Highland's initial response was to hire one black worker and promote another. The bakery then threatened Breadbasket that continued demands for improved employment would only result in "fewer jobs for Negroes," presumably because he would fire the black workers he currently employed.[154] Highland's threat did not deter the ministers, and after five weeks of failed meetings the civil rights organization began its boycott in mid-January 1963.

Operation Breadbasket spread word of the boycott first by reaching out to affiliated ministers and church leaders who would inform their parishioners of a "selective buying campaign" – Breadbasket like the 400 Ministers were wary of the legal implications of a "boycott" – during their Sunday sermons.[155] Then Breadbasket distributed flyers throughout black neighborhoods asking people to avoid Highland Baking products and to support Operation Breadbasket by "buying bread, cookies and cakes only where you can

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[153] "Highland Baking Employment Chart", Box 172, Folder 21, "Georgia Boycotts—1962-1963," SCLC Records ProQuest.

[154] "Selective Buying Campaign Against Bakery Called," *Atlanta Daily World,* January 15, 1963, 3.

[155] "Atlanta Baptist Ministers Union in Busy Weekly Session; Hears Breadbasket Appeal; Pushes Drive to Aid Dr. B.J. Johnson," *Atlanta Daily World,* January 30, 1963, 3.

get a job without discrimination."[156] Breadbasket also reached out to over five hundred civil rights, civic, and community leaders to persuade their followers to support the boycott. In a final step, Breadbasket members asked housewives who were participating in the campaign to each call ten other women about the need to boycott Highland Baking. Operation Breadbasket recognized, as leaders of boycotts long understood, that the participation of housewives, the family member who actually did most of the shopping, was essential to an effective boycott. Despite the importance of the network of church women, the men of Operation Breadbasket maintained a monopoly on decision making and negotiations.[157]

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[156] Flyer, "Joining 'Operation Breadbasket,' Box 172, Folder 21, "Georgia Boycotts, 1962-1963," SCLC Records ProQuest.

[157] Throughout the twentieth-century women, who were the primary shoppers in a family, often served as the foot soldiers of consumer boycott campaigns. For general histories of consumer boycotts and the gendered division in protest labor see Lizbeth Cohen, *Consumers' Republic; The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003); Lawrence Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Some scholars of the civil rights movement have also emphasized the gendered division with men serving as the public face of the movement while women assumed less-celebrated organizing roles. See Charles Payne, "Men Led, but Women Organized: Movement Participation of Women in the Mississippi Delta" in *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers, 1941-1965,* eds., Vicki L. Crawford, Jacqueline Anne Rouse, and Barbara Woods (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 1-12; Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long?: African American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). SCLC, composed as it was of mostly male church leaders, in particular had a reputation for being uninviting to women in leadership roles. Operation Breadbasket, as an affiliate of SCLC, followed the same gendered organizational structure. Neither in public nor during their monthly meetings do women play any sort of leadership role. For an assessment of SCLC, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s, stance towards women in the movement see Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*, 170-208. Other scholars have sought to expand our understanding of the role of women in the black freedom struggle, highlighting the organizational leadership roles they held and their influence on strategy, ideology, and politics. For an important over view of this literature see Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne

The boycott continued for the rest of January and February without Highland or Operation Breadbasket yielding any ground. In early March, in an effort to bring more attention to their boycott and pressure management into negotiations, Breadbasket ministers began a picket in front of the bakery. Picketing was a tactic that Leon Sullivan purposely avoided because he thought it was too confrontational and, therefore, more likely to lead to a court injunction than just negotiations and a boycott. Ralph Abernathy also believed that picketing should be a last resort, that the real strength and priority of the campaigns would be the numbers involved in the boycott. "Nobody wants to go to jail. But everybody can sagely switch to another brand of bread or stop buying someone's soda pop."[158] Though small, the pickets were led by prominent Atlanta ministers including Abernathy, J.D. Grier, Fred Bennette, E.H. Dorsey, Martin Luther King Sr., and significantly Martin Luther King Jr.[159] After less than a week of picketing, Highland agreed to hire the eight employees that Breadbasket initially demanded.[160]

By mid-March, after an agreement with the Dutch Oven Bakery, Breadbasket had reached settlements with six baking companies that placed sixty-five African American workers into improved positions, that included combination of new hires and promotions. In each case the bakeries agreed to hire or promote the exact number of employees that

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Theoharris, and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Want to Start a Revolution: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

[158] Michael Creedman, "Integrating Payrolls: Negroes Press Boycotts to Enforce Job Demands." *Wall Street Journal,* January 8, 1963 found in Box 172, Folder 21, "Georgia Boycotts, 1962-1963," SCLC Records ProQuest.

[159] "Pickets Appear at Highland," *Atlanta Inquirer,* March 2, 1963, 3.

[160] "Fifth Baking Company OK's Ministers Request," *Atlanta Daily World,* March 14, 1963, 2.

Breadbasket demanded, which, of course, was part of Breadbasket's strategy; that their demands would be so minimal that it would be difficult for companies not to meet it. Additionally, the companies agreed to desegregate their facilities, including dining areas and bathrooms.[161]

Instead of emphasizing the newly-created sixty-five positions, Breadbasket, time and again, focused on the amount of new income that would now flow into Atlanta's black communities. After their first agreement with Colonial in December, the ministers bragged about 80,000 additional dollars added to the community; by March it was over $300,000. Even though, or perhaps because, it was abstract, emphasizing hundreds of thousands of dollars made Operation Breadbaskets victories sound more impressive than an additional sixty-five jobs from six factories. But the minister's focus on added income also made their efforts at opening up better job opportunities appear to be an investment for the whole community. There was now an additional $300,000 that could be invested into black-owned businesses and used to improve African American neighborhoods neglected by white-controlled investments.

Breadbasket representatives, however, were not always consistent with the numbers it presented to the public. During a fundraiser in March 1964, a journalist for the *Atlanta Inquirer,* heard different speakers brag that Breadbasket had secured 250 jobs and a million dollars and 750 jobs and 1.5 million dollars. "I can easily understand that the group's phenomenal growth might be difficult to chart down to an exact figure, but a 500

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[161] "Ministers Report Success With Another Bakery," *Atlanta Daily World,* April 6, 1963, 8.

job difference?" Charles Black asked. Black supported Operation Breadbasket's cause but found this "fabrication" troubling. [162]

Operation Breadbasket's next campaign, following the blueprint of Philadelphia's 400 Ministers, targeted a soda bottling company. For Leon Sullivan's group the first target was a Pepsi bottling plant; for Atlanta's ministers it was the Atlanta Coca Cola Bottling Company. Practically and symbolically targeting Coca Cola Bottling was more ambitious than Breadbasket's previous campaign against bakeries. For one thing, Operation Breadbasket chose to challenge a company led by Arthur L. Montgomery, one of Atlanta's most prominent civic leaders and future president of the city's Chamber of Commerce.[163] His position within Atlanta's white power structure could have influenced elite black Atlantans and made support for a boycott more difficult. Robert Woodruff, too, could have wielded substantial influence against Breadbasket. Even though the Atlanta Bottling Company was a distinct company that held franchising rights with the Coca Cola Company, Woodruff, the former president of the soda giant, Atlanta king-maker, and the most beneficent philanthropist in the city, would certainly not have looked kindly upon a protest against his product.[164] Perhaps most daunting, when after four months of

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[162] Charles A. Black, "Subjectively Speaking," *Atlanta Inquirer*

[163] For a thorough discussion of Montgomery and the bottling industry in Georgia see Mark Cheatham, *"Your Friendly Neighbor": The Story of Georgia's Coca-Cola Bottling Families* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1999).

[164] Operation Breadbasket and the national SCLC considered leading a nation-wide boycott against the Coca Cola Company. But that plan never went beyond the discussion stage. "International Boycotts Viewed by SCLC Chiefs," *Atlanta Inquirer,* October 5, 1963, 1. For discussions of Woodruff's civic leadership see Floyd Hunter, *Community Power Structure*; Allen, *Atlanta Rising: The Invention of an International City* (Marietta:

negotiation proved unsatisfactory and the Atlanta ministers called for a boycott in mid-August, they had the unenviable task of asking Atlantans to not drink Coca Cola. This was no small task in a city that prided itself as the home of one the world's most recognizable brands. As *National Geographic* put it a few years later: "Atlantans regard Coke with an affection that approaches passion."[165]

The ministers of Operation Breadbasket were aware that they could lose a public relations contest with the bottling company. In one press conference, Ralph Abernathy strategically recognized the importance of the Coca Cola brand to Atlanta while emphasizing that job discrimination still continued at the bottling company. "We do not wish to destroy the relative good image of Coca-Cola, but we must have better jobs for our people. Our people want freedom now."[166]

There were some dissenting voices among Atlanta's black elite, or what ministers of Operation Breadbasket viewed as "one or two instances of obvious intent to 'sabotage' their program."[167] The editors at the *Daily World* pressured Operation Breadbasket to end their boycotts because "talks and mutual Goodwill" were more productive than negotiations that followed a "long controversy." In the same editorial, the newspaper also attempted to undermine the Operation Breadbasket ministers by calling for a new

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Longstreet Press, 1996)*;* Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn,* 180; Stone, *Regime Politics,* 17, 59-60.

[165] William S. Ellis, "Atlanta, Pacesetter City of the South," *National Geographic*, February 1969, 264.

[166] "Atlanta Ministers Intensify Coke Effort Here," *Atlanta Inquirer*, September 21, 1963, 8.

[167] Atlanta Ministers Intensify Coke Effort Here," *Atlanta Inquirer*, September 21, 1963, 8.

committee that would also include members of ANVL – still led by the aging attorney A.T. Walden – and "business men of our racial group."[168]

Despite the pushback from editors at the *Atlanta Daily World* and some members of ANVL, who following the editorial offered to serve as a third party during negotiations, Operation Breadbasket received support throughout Atlanta's black communities. Some merchants placed signs in their windows alerting customers that there were "No Cokes For Sale."[169] Churches and schools were rumored to have "turned the company's soft-drink machines towards the wall."[170] Thanks to this community support, Operation Breadbasket successfully ended their campaign in early October, pleased with the bottling companies personnel changes.[171] When Breadbasket first approached the Atlanta Bottling Company in May it asked for the company to hire sixteen new employees in sensitive positions and to desegregate its facilities, even though the bottling company insisted its work spaces had been desegregated for years. In the final compromise, the company agreed to hire four new employees, review applications for new mechanics and office clerks, and upgrade at least eighteen black workers.[172]

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[168] "A Further Effort At Negotiation Should Be Made to Resolve the Issue With Coca-Cola," *Atlanta Daily World,* September 22, 1963.

[169] "Atlanta Ministers Boycott Coca Cola, *SCLC Newsletter* 1 No. 12, September 1963, 10.

[170] Report, "SCLC's Operation Breadbasket: How to Win Jobs and Influence Businessmen," October 1969, Box 578, Folder 25, Southern Christian Leadership Conference Records, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University (Hereafter SCLC Records Emory).

[171] "Talks Scheduled Monday On Issue of Coca-Cola," *Atlanta Daily World,* September 27, 1963, 1.

On October 19, to better organize and focus the disparate protests across the city – including these selective buying campaigns – leading black activists and reformers held a conference of over two hundred people from eighty-six groups.[173] At the end of day-long committee meetings, the activists agreed to form an umbrella organization called the Summit Leadership Conference (SLC) and released a report, *Action for Democracy,* which called for reforms in public accommodations, housing, education, voting, health and social services, political participation, law enforcement, and employment. The report, which was addressed to the white power structure**,** did not touch on the strategies that would be used to effect change. A consensus on strategies was not possible in a conference of two hundred activists. In the employment committee, for example, the discussion prioritized informational clearinghouses and job training programs, the kinds of solutions preferred by black civic leaders who shunned protest. Nevertheless, when the committee presented its conclusions, its first recommendation was the "intensification of selective buying."[174]

The emphasis of some at the summit on direct-action protests did not sit well with everybody. *The Atlanta Daily World* predictably worried that the influence of an "extremist leadership on Negro communities" could ruin the spirit of unity that came out

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[172] "Ministers Reach Agreement With Coca-Cola Bottling Co." *Atlanta Daily World,* October 10, 1963, 1.

[173] "Progress Report of the Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference," March 1964, Box 25, Folder 9, Eliza Paschall Papers; "Employment, Education Accommodations Tops," *Atlanta Inquirer*, October 26, 1963, 1.

[174] "Progress Report of the Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference," March 1964, Box 25, Folder 9, Eliza Paschall Papers.

of the Saturday conference.[175] The editors were not wrong to be skeptical about the extent of unity among black activists in the city. The same group of men who opposed the student activists in 1960 continued to oppose protest tactics, and the students and their allies, including the leaders of Operation Breadbasket, continued to doubt the efficacy of the elite's preferred backroom negotiations. For Operation Breadbasket and COAHR, however, the summit did lead to a closer working relationship, at least for the immediate future.

In early November, as the SLC presented its demands to the board of alderman and the Chamber of Commerce, Breadbasket, COAHR, and SNCC announced that it would begin a campaign to open up new positions at department stores and other retailers, including grocers, throughout the city. Retailers in the city were particularly aggressive at maintaining a solid white-line of demarcation between manual labor positions and clerks and sales positions. In the sixteen stores that the coalition surveyed there were 1,815 African American employees but only forty sales people out of two thousand, or only 2 percent. In negotiating with, and if necessary boycotting, all sixteen organizations at once Operation Breadbasket moved away from the formula devised by Philadelphia's 400 Ministers and towards the sort of city-wide protest that COAHR led in the winter of 1960. The decision may have been to expand negotiations beyond just one target at time because Breadbasket and COAHR intended to connect the campaign for jobs with a larger planned city-wide campaign against continued segregation in public accommodations.[176] The coalition's negotiations yielded results by mid-November. Both

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[175] "Saturday's Leadership Conference," *Atlanta Daily World,* October 22, 1963, 4.

Big Apple Groceries and Thrift City department store complied with the demands to hire twenty-six and twenty workers respectively. Two other stores, Kessler's and Zayre's, had agreed to changes but had yet to implement them. The largest department stores Davidson's, Sears, and Rich's had yet to comply satisfactorily. To force the department stores to act the coalition decided to lead a Christmas boycott.[177]

Like the 1960-61 campaign, the coalition focused most of its protests at Rich's. Despite its good reputation among some black Atlantans, Rich's was as guilty as any store in its discriminatory employment policy. Out of the 740 sales people in stores only six were African American. Nor was Rich's willing to alter this employment pattern. After not budging on their employment practices during the sit-ins in 1960 and 1961, Rich's in 1962 agreed to hire twelve African American workers; however, it only actually hired six. And in early 1963 the retail giant finally agree to hire forty-one African American saleswomen and one hundred other black employees, but the store's refusal to put the promise on paper made the students skeptical that Rich's actually intended to follow through with their promise.[178]

On November 21, over a month after representatives from Breadbasket first contacted stores, more than four hundred protesters, most of them students, led by Ralph David Abernathy and Larry Fox, marched from Morehouse College to the department store to

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[176] "Ministers, Students Mobilize Community For Possible City-Wide Demonstration," Atlanta Inquirer, November 16, 1963, 1-2; "March Leaders Talk of Open Protest," *Atlanta Inquirer,* December 21, 1963, 1.

[177] "Efforts of Ministers, COAHR Win Department Store Jobs," *Atlanta Inquirer,* November 23, 1963, 1.

[178]"'Don't Buy at Rich's,' Say Civil Rights Groups, *The Student Voice, Special Edition,* 4 No. 6, November 21, 1963.

kick off the holiday-season boycott campaign. The next day, Friday, November 22, Lee Harvey Oswald assassinated President Kennedy in Dallas. With the country in mourning, Operation Breadbasket and COAHR called off the protest indefinitely.[179] The indefinite moratorium became definite two weeks later when Abernathy announced that the coalition decided to end its campaign, claiming that the "gains made in getting Negroes hired in better jobs are considered sufficient to make the boycott unnecessary." Student leader Larry Fox agreed that "enough progress had been made to call off the immediate demonstrations and boycotts," but he suggested that his organization was not content with the deal. "Negotiations on jobs will continue with Atlanta stores," he told the press.[180] As with the bakeries and Atlanta Coca Cola Bottling **,** the number of workers promoted for each store was modest; however, compared to the level of occupational segregation in retail the modest numbers were still impressive. Rich's**,** though**,** clung to its discriminatory policies and refused to change its personnel policies, and a year later the ministers were still waiting for the department store to promote a promised sixty employees.[181] Overall retailers across the city agreed to promote 356 black workers to "sensitive" positions, 253 of those to sales positions.[182] Compared to Breadbasket campaigns earlier in the year, these were fairly significant victories.

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[179] Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid,* 42.

[180] "2 Groups Call Off Yule Store Boycott," *Atlanta Constitution,* December 7, 1963, 5.

[181] Minutes, Operation Breadbasket, November 1964 Meeting, Series II Box 1, Folder 5 Fred C. Bennette Jr. Collection, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System (Hereafter Fred Bennette Collection).

[182] "Business Protest Called Off Here," *Atlanta Daily World,* December 7, 1963, 1.

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By November 1964 the ministers of Operation Breadbasket began to expand the organization beyond the Atlanta metropolitan area. Turning the organization into a national boycott movement was always one of the goals of King and SCLC. There were discussions in summer 1963 to expand their Coca Cola boycott nationally, and in 1964 Breadbasket supported the striking workers at Scripto who demanded a raise and an end to discriminatory promotion practices by, in part, calling for a national boycott. To expand the reach of their boycotts, the ministers also helped establish branches outside Atlanta. Initially, Breadbasket was only able to create small, relatively inactive branches in Georgia cities Waycross, Marietta, Athens, and Columbus. The branches would come together occasionally to plan statewide campaigns. As Fred Bennette explained: "It came to our attention early…that many of the industries which we were contacting had their regional offices located in the city of Atlanta. With this fact being known to us, our efforts changed from one of local concern for employment to a concern for State-wide employment." In 1965, for example the Georgia Operation Breadbasket began negotiations with Royal Crown Cola and F.W. Woolworth. Soon the organization expanded outside Georgia; first into Southern cities like Jacksonville, Florida, and Dallas, Texas, and then like SCLC, itself, into northern cities.[183]

Operation Breadbasket met more success when SCLC introduced the organization as part of its new northern campaign against economic racism in Chicago in April 1966. In

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[183] Fred C. Bennette Jr., "A Report of Activities in Operation Breadbasket Department," July 19, 1965, Box 172, Folder 37, "Reports to Exec. Board – 1962-1965," SCLC Records ProQuest.

Chicago, Operation Breadbasket received a warm welcome from progressive ministers and activists who had a history of fighting against economic inequality. Operation Breadbasket in Chicago also had the good fortune of coming under the leadership of the charismatic minister Jesse Jackson. Just over a year into its existence, Breadbasket reportedly secured or improved more than 1,500 jobs and brought twenty million dollars into the Chicago's black communities.[184] Martin Luther King Jr. called the selective buying campaign in the Windy City the "most spectacularly successful program" of SCLC's time in the city.[185] Under Jackson's leadership, Operation Breadbasket became known for its promotion of black capitalism by compelling targeted businesses to divert money into African American companies, banks, and neighborhoods.[186] Jackson, one historian explained, "openly embraced capitalism's possibilities for black liberation."[187]

In Atlanta, Operation Breadbasket continued to be the leading economic-arm of the city's black freedom movement through the early seventies. The organization most consistently challenged racist employment policies in Atlanta from 1964 through 1967 when Fred Bennette served as its director. After the successes of Breadbasket's first year, the ministers eagerly entered into negotiations with dozens of employers across the

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[184] Chester Higgins, "Breadbasket Targets GM, Three Food Firms," *Jet*, July 27, 1967, 22.

[185] Beltramini, "Operation Breadbasket in Chicago: Between Civil Rights and Black Capitalism," 126.

[186] For works on black capitalism that arose alongside the Black Power movement see Beltramini, "Operation Breadbasket in Chicago"; Lauren Warren Hill and Julia Rabig, eds., *The Business of Black Power: Community Development, Capitalism, and Corporate Responsibility on Postwar America,* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2012).

[187] Beltramini, "Operation Breadbasket in Chicago," 130.

metropolitan region. It is difficult to tell just how successful Operation Breadbasket was in Atlanta. One 1968 Breadbasket pamphlet bragged that over five years the ministers in Atlanta obtained "5,000 jobs worth 22 million dollars a year."[188] Numbers like this from Operation Breadbasket itself were almost definitely inflated. Fred Bennette in a 1965 report even acknowledged that the Atlanta ministers could "not give a statistical breakdown." He explained that many employers refused to divulge much of their personnel information.[189] But annual reports sent to the national SCLC office do provide a glimpse into the many diverse industries in Atlanta that Operation Breadbasket targeted in the mid-1960s. In 1965, for example, Breadbasket "obtain[ed] some degree upgraded and new employment increased in salaries and benefits for Negroes," in at least twenty companies, including Sears, Gulf Oil, the Hapeville Ford factory, Avon Cosmetics, and Pepsi Cola. Two years later it targeted at least another twenty-three firms, and held meetings regarding state government employment with Governor Carl Sanders and various commissioners.

In July 1964 Congress passed the Civil Rights Act. Title VII of the act prevented employees from discriminating against employers based on sex, race, color, national origin, or religion. This law fundamentally altered the way activists and black workers could fight employment discrimination. In the early years of the law, the mechanisms for enforcing Title VII were weak, and as Nancy Maclean and Timothy Minchin have shown

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[188] Report, "SCLC's Operation Breadbasket: How to Win Jobs and Influence Businessmen," October 1969, Box 578, Folder 25, SCLC Records Emory.

[189] Fred C. Bennette Jr., "A Report of Activities in Operation Breadbasket Department," July 19, 1965, Box 172, Folder 37, "Reports to Exec. Board – 1962-1965," SCLC Records ProQuest.

it took workers, lawyers, and civil rights activists to force the government and employers to observe the new law. In Atlanta and elsewhere the NAACP took the lead in filing lawsuits. While many workers used lawsuits to enforce the law, other workers turned to Operation Breadbasket which continued to rely on negotiation and boycotts to force voluntary concessions, but within a markedly different legal regime than when the organization began in November 1962.[190]

Even in the post-Civil Rights Act era there was no shortage of employment discrimination cases for Operation Breadbasket. The eagerness with which Operation Breadbasket added new companies to their target list did leave some ministers worried that they were "spreading [them]selves too thin."[191] And it does appear that this concern was justified. While Breadbasket boasted about the numbers of firms contacted and the number of jobs upgraded and income made, it is also clear that the organization was not nearly as effective at holding companies to their commitment. In part this was because the ministers prioritized quantity of firms contacted over the quality of agreements reached. Employer concessions even one's that upgraded less jobs than Breadbasket requested could be used for good press.

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[190] For activists, organizations, and workers using Title VII and the newly created Equal Employment Opportunity Commission see Nancy Maclean, *Freedom is not Enough;* Timothy Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker: The Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry, 1960-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1999); Timothy Minchin, "Making the Best Use of the New Laws: The NAACP and the Fight for Civil Rights in the South, 1965-1975," *The Journal of Southern History* 74, no. 3 (August 2008), 669-702; Timothy J. Minchin, "Black Activism, the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and the Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry," 809–844.

[191] Minutes, Operation Breadbasket, April 28, 1965, Minutes, Operation Breadbasket, November 1964 Meeting, Series II Box 1, Folder 5 Fred Bennette Collection.

The temporary nature of the selective buying campaigns made it an imperfect tactic for holding employers to their agreements. Confronting companies on their racist policies, publicizing these policies, negotiating over personnel practices, and, if need be, boycotting the company were the primary mechanisms Operation Breadbasket had to change Atlanta's employment landscape. The organization of ministers, or any other organization that prioritized selective buying campaigns, lacked any real enforcement mechanism other than following up with firms and renewing a campaign of negotiation and boycotts. Once Breadbasket came to an agreement and moved on there was no one there to ensure that management kept their word. Or if the companies kept their word on initial hires there was rarely an employee group to pressure employers to advance the hiring of black employees beyond their initial token interests.

Without any enforcement mechanism after the pickets left the sidewalks and the shoppers returned**,** companies were free to return to their discriminatory practices. In 1963, for example**,** employees of a Colonial store where COAHR had picketed three years prior wrote to *The Atlanta Inquirer* complaining about practices that persisted at the store long after they should have been stopped. The employees expressed frustration with Colonial's return to discriminatory hiring and promotion practices and the treatment of the black workers in the store. In October 1960, the store hired five African-American clerks, but by 1963 there were only two black clerks who worked "alternate days." The employees also saw a decrease in the employment of black employees in the meat and produce departments, and the store had phased out "package boys," which had been a traditional position for black high school students. For the employees who did remain at the store there appeared to be very little hope for promotion. The authors of the letter also

pointed to the constant discrimination that the workers faced while on job. The supervisors, the Colonial Store employees wrote, "seem to think we do all the nasty work… without a doubt the white employees are excluded from nasty chores." The workers explained but that "there is also a lot of unnecessary harassment that we think should not be."[192]

It does not appear that the ministers of Operation Breadbasket made any sincere effort at attempting to solve this fundamental weakness. Rich's Department Store was a frequent return target of employment boycotts; civil rights activists, including COAHR and Operation Breadbasket, publicly pressured Rich's to change its employment practices in 1960, 1962, 1963, 1965, and 1973. And Rich's was only one of the most prominent intransigent employer. Thompson Boland-Lee shoe stores, Gordon Foods production plant, and Zaire's and Davidson Department stores were all approached by Breadbasket on at least two different occasions several years apart.[193] In part this blind spot in Operation Breadbasket's method can be attributed to the leadership of the organization. Like the national SCLC under King, the male ministerial leadership of Atlanta's Operation Breadbasket prioritized strong leaders. Through their practices the Breadbasket leadership showed an inclination to trusting their knowledge of the employment market and their negotiating skills over forming a partnership with workers at the sites that they

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[192] Letter to Editor, "Colonial Store Employees Dissatisfied," *Atlanta Inquirer,* May 11, 1963. 2-3.

[193] Fred C. Bennette Jr., "A Report of Activities in Operation Breadbasket Department," July 19, 1965, Box 172, Folder 37, "Reports to Exec. Board – 1962-1965;" Fred C. Bennette, "Operation Breadbasket Report," January 22, 1968 Box 172, Folder 38, "Reports to Exec. Board – 1965-1968, SCLC Records ProQuest.

protested. The ministers prioritized mobilization strategies that resulted in small concessions from employers and did not concern themselves with strategies to prevent employers from backsliding. Breadbasket, perhaps, would have been better off planning for companies to return to old practices, but the archives do not reveal any occasions when it discussed the possibility of creating some sort follow-up committee. Instead, the ministers simply moved on to their next target.

As Operation Breadbasket established itself as the major civil rights organization challenging employment discrimination in the following years, the minister's relationship with workers and their approach to broader issues of racism, discrimination, and predation at the workplace expanded to include other workplace conflicts, like union organizing and strikes. Black workers who were members of unions recognized that the ministers of Breadbasket were the organization in Atlanta best situated to support their campaigns for union recognition, improved wages, and better working conditions. The next chapter will discuss two mid-1960s strikes where labor unions and civil rights activists, including members of Operation Breadbasket, attempt to form a working partnership. The evolution of these activists, their increased interaction with workers and labor unions will be the focus of the next chapter, but it was these initial boycotts against employers engaged in discrimination that pushed the ministers to focus more broadly on worker rights.

Chapter 2: "A Model Project for Labor Unions and Civil Rights Cooperation": The Promise and Peril of Coalition Building

For contemporary observers 1964 appeared to be a moment of transition for the civil rights movement. The passage of the Civil Rights Act in July 1964 marked the end of the movement's first phase by successfully outlawing segregation in public accommodations. Yet inequalities persisted in nearly every aspect of American life. School integration had occurred only on a token basis, voting rights were still denied to millions of African Americans in the South, and, if anything, several metrics of relative economic standing, including unemployment and median income, had worsened for blacks since the mid 1950s.[194]

In remembering the second anniversary of the March on Washington, the editors of the leftwing civil rights journal *Freedomways* concluded that the civil rights movement, after the legislative success of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, required "a new manifestation of unity of the breadth of August 28, 1963, and new actions for full freedom, of the sweep and scope of the quarter million on that day."[195] Tom Kahn, a white activist who worked closely with Bayard Rustin, echoed the *Freedomways* editors: "the civil rights movement has entered a critical period. Without new tactics and fresh approaches its future success

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[194] Bayard Rustin, "From Protest to Politics: The Future of the Civil Rights Movement," *Commentary* (February 1965), in *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin,* eds., Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2005), 116.

[195] Editors, "August 28 – Anniversary of a Dream Reborn," *Freedomways, (*Summer 1965), 361.

is by no means assured."[196] While in 1965, Martin Luther King Jr. recognized the victories of the previous years as a "historic turning point for the civil rights movement," and a "maturation" of the movement that will require "new tactical devices" to "emerge."[197]

The most influential voice charting this transformation of the movement was Bayard Rustin. In his famous essay "From Protest to Politics," – ghost-written by Kahn – Rustin found in the years since the first sit-ins a "shifting focus of the movement in the South." The movement had turned its focus on issues that were "not *civil rights,* strictly speaking, but social and economic conditions." "It is now concerned," he continued, "not merely with removing the barriers to full *opportunity* but with achieving the fact of equality."[198]

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[196] Tom Kahn, "Problems of the Negro Movement," *Dissent* 11 no. 1, (January 1964), 108. For more Tom Kahn see Rachelle Horowitz, "Tom Kahn and the Fight for Democracy: A Political Portrait and Personal Recollection," *Democratiya* 11 (Winter 2007), 204-251.

[197] Martin Luther King Jr., "Let Justice Roll Down," *The Nation,* March 15, 1965, reissued *The Nation* online February 7, 2002, accessed at https://www.thenation.com/article/let-justice-roll-down-2/.

[198] Rustin, "From Protest to Politics," 115. Rustin and Kahn were not creating a new path for the civil rights movement out of whole cloth. Instead, they were invoking a vision of black freedom that black trade unionists, like A. Philip Randolph, had been fighting for over several decades. William P. Jones writes that "[w]hile liberals shied away from economic demands during the Cold War, black trade unionists insisted that access to jobs and union representation were even more critical in an era when automation and economic restructuring were destroying the entry-level industrial jobs that had provided black men with critical economic opportunities since the 1920s." William P. Jones, "The Unknown Origins of the March on Washington," 35. See also Jones, *The March on Washington,* especially 121-162. For more on Bayard Rustin see John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

Rustin had a specific vision for how the civil rights movement would succeed in this new stage. "The future of the Negro struggle," he explained, "depends on whether the contradictions of this society can be resolved by a coalition of progressive forces which becomes the effective political majority in the United States. I speak of the coalition which staged the March on Washington, passed the Civil Rights Act, and laid the basis for the Johnson landslide – Negroes, trade unionists, and religious groups."[199] Rustin believed that the new front of the civil rights movement would play out predominantly in the political sphere. For example, he, like many others, viewed factory automation as a threat to the working lives of all working-class Americans, but particularly harmful to precariously employed black workers. Rustin argued that the best policy solution for automation was a national full-employment law, something he believed a coalition of civil rights groups and labor unions was best suited to lobby for.

Rustin and Kahn's specific vision of "realignment" was shared by leading thinkers and activists like A. Philip Randolph, Michael Harrington, and to a lesser extent, King Jr. Rustin and the like-minded viewed their coalition as the left-wing of the Democratic Party. Central for them was an alliance between the civil rights movement and progressive labor unions. "The labor movement, despite its obvious faults," Rustin wrote, "has been the largest single organized force in this country pushing for progressive social legislation."[200] Kahn, likewise, argued that labor was "the single most powerful bulwark against conservative and reactionary forces."[201] At the 1961 AFL-CIO convention in

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[199] Rustin, "From Protest to Politics," 123.

[200] Rustin, "From Protest to Politics," 124.

Miami, Martin Luther King Jr., who often turned to Rustin for advice, outlined why this alliance was so important. "The two most dynamic and cohesive liberal forces in the country are the labor movement and the Negro movement," King announced. "Together we can be architects of democracy in a South now rapidly industrializing."[202]

Critics of the coalitionists argued that they were naïve to think that labor unions could be reliable allies for civil rights organizations. Socialist writer Julius Jacobson agreed that "the idea of a Negro-Labor alliance is an appealing one" but "so many of the unions have been taken over by aged, bureaucratic cliques that today, there is no solid alliance, certainly none below, of the Negro masses and the trade union movement."[203] Rustin, Kahn, and others were not oblivious to labor's shortcomings, especially when it came to labor's support of civil rights and treatment of black workers.[204] Despite increasing pressure from black activists, the AFL-CIO's indifference, and at times animosity, toward the black freedom movement continued. At the 1959 AFL-CIO convention, federation president George Meany, angry about A. Philip Randolph's call that "racially segregated

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[201] Kahn, *The Economics of Equality* (New York: League for Industrial Democracy, 1964), 64.

[202]Martin Luther King Jr., "If Negro Win, Labor Wins," in *"All Labor Has Dignity,"* ed. Honey, 42.

[203] Julius Jacobson, "Coalitionism: From Protest to Politicking," *New Politics* (Fall 1966), 49. See also Nat Hentoff, "Beyond Civil Rights: A Reply to the 'Coalitionists,'" *The Massachusetts Review* 6, no. 3 (Spring-Summer 1965): 581-587.

[204] Jacobson, Kahn, and Michael Harrington came out of a specific sectarian socialist milieu associated with Max Shachtman, a charismatic Polish-born, New York City-based socialist intellectual with close ties to Leon Trotsky. For more on the politics and ideology of the Shactmanites, as people associated with his organizations were known, see Maurice Isserman, *The Other American: The Life of Michael Harrington* (New York: Public Affairs, 2000), especially chapters 5, 6, and 9.

local unions be liquidated and eliminated**,**" lashed out at the eminent black labor leader: "Who the hell appointed you guardian of all the Negroes in America?" Two years later, the AFL-CIO executive council censured Randolph, blaming his criticism of the federation for "the gap that has developed between organized labor and the Negro community."[205]

Just as activists did nationally, in 1963 and 1964 black activists and reformers in Atlanta began to seek ways to expand the civil rights movement beyond the issue of desegregation. One new direction was to expand the rights of black workers at the workplace. In Atlanta, as with much of the rest of the country, creating a meaningful alliance with labor unions was nearly an insurmountable task. There was a long legacy of racism by Atlanta's white-led labor unions. Into the 1960s, as African American pressure nationally and locally led to some union reforms, white- led unions continued practices that harmed black workers. This brought unions into direct conflict with black union members and civil rights activists. In the most well-known dispute in Atlanta, Herbert Hill, the labor director of the NAACP, worked with black members of United Steel Workers Local 2401 (USW) to petition the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to decertify the local at Atlantic Steel because of a pattern of discrimination. Anti-black racism seriously constricted the possibilities of any alliance between civil rights and the labor movement.

Yet there were times when activists and union leaders sought to build such a coalition. During two strikes, at the Dobbs House restaurant and catering business at the Atlanta

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[205] Quoted in Robert Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom,* 169-171.

Municipal airport in the summer of 1963 and the Scripto, Inc. factory strike in winter 1964, influential black civil rights activists and community reformers came to the aid of black striking workers and their white union leadership. The Scripto strike of over 700 black women is far more well-known because of the involvement of Martin Luther King Jr. The Scripto strike also ended in a wage increase and other concessions from the company. It was a victory that seemed to some, including King, to be a harbinger of a larger alliance between labor and civil rights. Despite the victory, the strike revealed differences between even the most willing unionists and civil rights activists that served as impediments to any long-term movement. In contrast to Scripto, the strike at Dobbs House, largely by black employees of the airline catering division, barely made local news and ended in defeat and the permanent replacement of most of the employees. Yet, like Scripto, many prominent Atlanta reformers including Martin Luther King Sr. and Ralph Abernathy, at least for a brief moment in the summer of 1963, aided the strike. For many of these activists, Dobbs House was their first chance to attempt to broaden the local black freedom struggle into economic issues of interest to working class black Atlantans.

Crucially, during the height of the civil rights movement these were the two most prominent strikes in Atlanta by a majority black workforce during the classical phase of the civil rights movement. In the mid-1960s, some prominent Atlanta civil rights activists saw an opportunity to expand the definition of the black freedom struggle and work with both working-class black Atlantans and white-led unions to improve the economic standing and economic rights of all black Atlantans. Civil rights activists, preachers, and other black reformers offered their support because they viewed aid to the black workers

as part of the larger black freedom struggle. This shaped what issues activists chose to focus on, their rhetoric, the tactics they used, and the way they interacted with the largely white union leadership. Some, especially during the Scripto strike, talked about the possibility of a larger coalition with organized labor, but for most reformers the strikes were a partnership created to tackle temporary issues. That much of the black reform community in Atlanta viewed these strikes as relatively self-contained, temporary confrontations reflects the priority they gave the disputes in the hierarchy of issues that the black freedom struggle should confront. SCLC activist C.T. Vivian may have hoped that the Scripto strike represented "not just a protest but a movement," but for many activists these labor disputes were secondary concerns in their larger fight again Jim Crow.[206] Atlanta's black reform community provided its support and influence, but when either the strike ended or more pressing campaigns began, these activists moved on with little interest in building a larger movement.

Labor Unions and Black Atlantans

The history of labor unions and black Atlantans is a history of exclusion and separation. Excluding black workers from both better paying trades and the benefits of collective activity was not the only catalyst for organization on the part of white workers but it often animated collective action. In 1858, just eleven years after the city's founding, a group of white artisans petitioned the Atlanta city council to protect "resident mechanics of your city" against enslaved black "mechanics [who] can afford to underbid

[206] Paul Good, "Dr. King's Group Enters Labor Dispute in Atlanta," *Washington Post,* December 5, 1964, A12.

the regular resident city mechanics."[207] As trade union organizing spread in the decades after the Civil War, white unions frequently made the elimination of black worker competition a chief goal. In 1869, for example, the Atlanta Typographical Union passed a resolution prohibiting black workers from working presses within the union's jurisdiction.[208] In 1888 railroad mechanics in Atlanta formed the International Association of Machinists (IAM) and included an explicit ban on black workers.[209] In 1897 1,400 white women mill workers at the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mill successfully prevented the employment of twenty black women. After a five-day strike, the company agreed to fire the black workers. The victory led one historian to assert that "No other strike of mill workers in the New South had such a successful outcome."[210]

Union-led segregation and discrimination was not just an Atlanta phenomenon, or even just a Southern phenomenon; it existed across the United States. Some unions like the railroad brotherhoods and the IAM explicitly banned black members.[211] The majority

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[207] Outside of Atlanta, white Georgian workers protested even training enslaved African Americans in artisanal skills. Charles H. Wesley, *Negro Labor in the United States, 1850-1925: A Study in American Economic History,* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1927), 71- 72.

[208] Jerry Thornberry, "Development of Black Atlanta," 194.

[209] David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, The State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* **(**Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 198-201; Robert H. Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom,* 63-86.

[210] I.A. Newby quoted in Clifford M. Kuhn, *Contesting the New South Order: The 1914-1915 Strike at Atlanta's Fulton Mills* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 24.

[211] For more on the racist policies of the railroad brotherhoods see Eric Arnesen, "'Like Banquo's Ghost, It Will Not Down": The Race Question and the American Railroad

of unions that did not, explicitly or implicitly, prohibit African American members practiced biracial unionism, where separate black and white unions would join, often in response to a specific event. At certain times, in certain locations, and under certain conditions black and white workers joined together to form interracial unions.[212] Whether it was biracial unionism or the rare interracial union, white workers did not join with black workers out of a sense of working class brotherhood but instead out of necessity.[213] "The rule of admission of Negroes throughout the country," W.E.B DuBois wrote in

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Brotherhoods, 188-1920," *American Historical Review* 99, no. 5 (December 1994): 1601-1633.

[212] The United Mine Workers is the most famous example of a union occasionally organizing black and white workers together. See Daniel Letwin, "Interracial Unionism, Gender, and 'Social Equality' in the Alabama Coalfields, 1878-1908," *The Journal of Southern History* 61, no.3 (August 1995): 519-554; Brian Kelly, *Race, Class, and Power in the Alabama Coalfields, 1908-21* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 2001). For a look at the phenomenon of biracial unions more broadly in the late 19th and early 20th century see Eric Arnesen, "Following the Color Line of Labor: Black Workers and the Labor Movement Before 1930," *Radical History Review* 55 (1993): 53-87. See also Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[213] Herbert Gutman's exploratory essay on Richard L. Davis, a black organizer for the United Mine Workers at the turn of the twentieth century, provided inspiration and controversy for future research on black workers and labor unions in the 19th century. Herbert Gutman, "The Negro and the United Mine Workers of America, The Career and Letters of Richard L. Davis and Something of their Meaning: 1890-1900," in Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 119-208. For a critique of Gutman's essay see Herbert Hill, "Myth-Making as Labor History: Herbert Gutman and the United Mine Workers of America," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 2, no. 2 (Winter 1988): 132-200. See also the responses to Hill's essay, "Labor, Race, and the Gutman Thesis: Responses to Herbert Hill," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 2 (March 1989): 361-403; For more on the Hill-Gutman debate (which occurred after Gutman passed away) see Eric Arnesen, "Up from Exclusion: Black and White Workers, Race , and the State of Labor History," *Reviews in American* History 26, no. 1 (March 1998): 146-174; Eric Arnesen, "Passion and Politics: Race and the Writing of Working-Class History," *The Journal of the Historical Society* 6, no. 3 (September 2006): 327-339.

1902, "is the sheer necessity of guarding work and wages. In those trades where large numbers of Negroes are skilled they find easy admittance in the parts of the country where there competition is felt."[214]

Segregation, discrimination, and exclusion by white unions did not dampen the desire that many black workers had for organizing. In the years after emancipation, worker organizations, for both black and white workers, grew out of mutual aid and benevolent associations. Often called secret societies, they provided benefits for those who could not work and served as "outlets for education, trade association, and political and social expression."[215] Out of this secret society culture, William Finch, who later would become Atlanta's first black city council member, created one of the earliest black worker organizations in the city, the Mechanics and Laborers' Union. The union, historian Tera Hunter explains, "bridged the labor issues and Republican Party concerns."[216] From the same culture of benevolent associations, black washer women formed Washing Societies. One Washing Society formed in 1881 led a strike of washer women that was "the largest and most impressive among black Atlantans during the late nineteenth century." Over three weeks, the strike grew from twenty women to more than 3,000 black washerwomen.[217]

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[214] W.E.B. DuBois, ed., *The Black Artisan* (Atlanta: Atlanta University Press, 1902), 176. *The Negro Artisan* offers quick summary of the different relationships labor unions formed with black workers in the early-twentieth century. See pages 158-172.

[215] Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 70. For more on Reconstruction-era African American mutual aid societies see Peter Ratchleff, *Black Labor in Richmond, 1865-1890* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

[216] Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom,* 71.

Even if just fleeting, there was a moment in the late 1890s where white organized labor had to at least respect, if not accept, the power of organized black workers. However, this respect only went so far. Outside of the organizing of some mixed-race unions like the carpenters and bricklayers, the best example of white organized labor expressing solidarity with black organized labor was during the 1898 "Peace Jubilee" celebrating the end of the Spanish American War. After the organizers banned black union members from the parade, the white union members of the Atlanta Federation of Trade agreed to boycott the event. In a resolution announcing their boycott, the AFT declared that "a labor organization, regardless of the color of its members, is entitled to our respect, confidence, and esteem."[218] "Mixed race" unions also lasted for a few years in the late 19th and early 20th century, but eventually white carpenters and white masons created all-white locals. After creating their own locals, these white workers sought to monopolize the employment in their industries. "Experience has proven that when whites get separate charters," a student of Atlanta trade unions explained, "they soon cut Negroes out of better jobs and control employment of workers."[219] In part, because of this threat, black workers continued to attempt to organize their own unions.

As with the larger American labor movement, the 1930s serve as a turning point for the history of African American involvement in labor unions in the city.[220] For black

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[217] Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom,* 88.

[218] Leonard Hammock James, "The Policies of Organized Labor in Relation to Negro Workers in Atlanta 1869-1937," (MA thesis, Atlanta University, 1937), 27-34.

[219] Walter Drake Westmoreland, "Aspects of the History of Negro Trade Unionists in Atlanta, 1933-1942" (MA thesis, Atlanta University, 1942), 15.

Atlantans, the Great Depression began with brazen attacks on their right to even hold a job. Desperate for work, white working-class Georgians and their allies demanded black workers be removed from their jobs, even from those once considered to be beneath white labor, like bootblacks and caddies. In 1930, this demand manifested into the short-lived fascist Black Shirt movement. The Black Shirts led marches and rallies demanding the removal of black Atlantans to rural areas and threatened leading businesses, including Rich's Department Store and Coca Cola, with boycotts if they did not fire black workers.[221] While extreme**,** the Black Shirts desire to exclude black workers was not an exception. Forcing black workers further down the employment ladder was common practice in Atlanta during the Depression.[222]

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[220] For the growth of labor unions in the 1930s see Robert H. Zieger, *The CIO, 1936-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Beth Tompkins Bates, *The Making of Black Detroit in the Age of Henry Ford* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012)*;* Michael Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers,* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993)*;* Nelson Lichtenstein, *Walter Reuther: The Most Dangerous Man in Detroit* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Steven Fraser, *Labor Will Rule: Sidney Hillman and the Rise of American Labor* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); Steve Fraser, "The 'Labor Question'," in *Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order,* eds. Steve Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 55-84; Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor: Black and White Workers in Chicago's Packinghouses, 1904-1954* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

[221] For more on the Black Shirt movement see Glenda Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919*-1950, 106-112; Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta,* 98-99; James J. Lorence, *The Unemployed People's Movement: Leftists, Liberals, and Labor in Georgia, 1929-1941* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 38-40.

[222] Quoted in Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of the Twentieth Century Atlanta,* 99. For more on Atlanta during the Great Depression see Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta;* Clifford M. Kuhn, Harlon E. Joye, and E. Bernard West, *Living Atlanta: An Oral*

In the face of the threat of unemployment, from both the depression and racist white actions, black workers in Atlanta increasingly organized to protect their jobs. Two organizations played a key role in helping black workers organize into labor unions during the Great Depression: the Atlanta Urban League (AUL) and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). In the 1930s, middle-class African American reform groups like the NAACP and the Urban League underwent what historian Thomas Sugrue calls a "proletarian turn," and focused more on supporting black workers through worker-created organizations. [223] In 1934 the National Urban League, for example, created Worker's Councils to organize black workers to confront the segregated AFL unions.[224] These councils provided a "crash course in labor organization" so that black workers could "exert determined, constant and insistent pressure through a united organization." In Atlanta, the AUL launched Worker Council's in nine different fields: brick masons, house painters, carpenters, roofers, post office messengers, railroad firemen, cleaners and dyers, janitors, and drug store employees.[225]

While the AUL successfully aided skilled construction workers, the CIO sought to organize industrial workers of all races, skills, and position. From its founding in 1935 the CIO recognized the need to organize all employees in factories on an equal basis

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History of the City, 1914-1948 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 197-231; Lorence, *The Unemployed People's Movement.*

[223] Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty,* 35; Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom,* 107-108, Beth Tompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

[224] For more on the Urban League's Worker Councils see Touré Reed, *Not Alms But Opportunity*, 107-138.

[225] Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta,* 145

regardless of race. In part this was a principled belief by some white organizers, influenced by socialists and communists, in the righteousness of interracial organizing. More commonly, it was out of the pragmatic understanding that in many northern cities African American workers made up a significant proportion of industrial labor.[226] Unions established working partnerships with civil rights groups like the NAACP and the National Negro Congress, and the CIO supported federal civil rights initiatives like the war-time Fair Employment Practices Committee (FEPC). In the 1930s and 1940s, the CIO was probably the most powerful white-dominated organization in the country advocating on behalf of a racially egalitarian vision. Willard Townsend, the black president of the CIO-affiliated United Transport Service Employees of America, wrote that "one of the bright spots in an otherwise dark picture of race riots, lynching, job

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[226] For more on the labor unions, particularly the CIO and its local affiliates, and black workers during the mid-twentieth century see Zieger, *Race and Labor* 112-138, 154-174;, Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union,* 75-84; Alan Draper, "The New Southern Labor History Revisited: The Success of the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers Union in Birmingham, 1934-1938," *Journal of Southern History* 62 (February 1996): 87-108; Michael Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights*; Rick Halpern, *Down on the Killing Floor;* Robert Korstad and Nelson Lichtenstein, "Opportunities Found and Lost," 786-611; Robert Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism;* William P. Jones, *The Tribe of Black Ulysses: African American Lumber Workers in the Jim Crow South* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005); Alex Lichtenstein, "'Scientific Unionism' and the 'Negro Question': Communists and Transport Workers Union in Miami, 1944-1949," in Robert H. Zieger, ed. *Southern Labor in Transition, 1940-1995* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997); Kevin Boyle, "'There are No Union Sorrows That the Union Can't Heal': The Struggle for Racial Equality in the United Automobile Workers, 1940-1960," *Labor History* 36, no. 1 (Winter 1995): 5-23; Kevin Boyle, "The Kiss: Racial and Gender Conflict in a 1950s Automobile Factory," *Journal of American History* 84, no. 2 (September 1997): 496-523; Judith Stein, "The Ins and Outs of the CIO," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 44 (Fall 1993): 53-63; Michael Goldfield, "Race and the CIO: The Possibilities for Racial Egalitarianism During the 1930s and 1940s" *International Labor and Working Class History* 44 (Fall 1993): 1-32; Ray Marshall, *The Negro and Organized Labor* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965); Timothy Minchin, *The Color of Work;* Reuel Schiller, *Forging Rivals*; Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand.*

discrimination, and the brutal treatment of the Negro in the armed services is the aggressive fight being waged by the Congress of Industrial Organization along the racial front."[227]

Compared to many northern cities, the CIO had difficulty in establishing a substantial toehold in Atlanta, or practically any Southern city.[228] The anti-union stance of Southern politicians certainly served as an obstacle. Another issue the CIO had with organizing in Atlanta was that the city was made up of hundreds of smaller factories manufacturing a diverse range of products. The CIO's desire to organize all workers in a factory, including black workers, also created difficulties. The twin charges of race-mixing and communism that employers and politicians used against CIO organizers proved effective at turning many Southern white workers against unions. Black workers were also often discouraged from supporting unions by the threat of white violence, at times from the Ku Klux Klan, or discriminatory treatment from employers far more willing to fire black workers than white workers. Despite these difficulties, two years after the CIO created an office in Atlanta in 1940, the federation had organized forty locals, with about half of the locals including African-American members. Altogether there were more than 2,000 black Atlanta workers organized into the CIO in these first few years, more than 75 percent were concentrated in six locals..[229]

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[227] Willard Townsend, "Citizen CIO," *The Crisis,* October 1943, 299.

[228] In 1946 the CIO began a well-publicized campaign to organize Southern industries called "Operation Dixie. The campaign was a failure. In 1949, the CIO had the same number of members in the South as it had when the campaign began. See Barbara S. Griffith, *The Crisis of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

Walter Drake Westmoreland believed the arrival of the CIO to Atlanta was the most important event in the history of black labor unions in the city. In just a few short years the CIO "touched more" black workers "than any previous labor body" and has "caused...the Negro to become a more integral participant in the labor movement in this city." Overall, Westmoreland argued that "the advent of the CIO in Atlanta...has been of great benefit to the Negro workers."[230] Westmoreland did not elaborate on what the "great benefit" was, but it is clear from his examples that the CIO brought immediate improvements to wages for black workers. A newly formed all-black union of quarry workers, for instance, won "one of the best" contracts "obtained by any CIO union in the state" following a nine-month strike.[231] Yet, for as much as the CIO, especially those in national leadership positions, imagined a color-blind set of workplace rules and traditions that allowed black and white workers to come together as equals, the federation could not and often would not overturn deeply entrenched practices and traditions of white supremacy. Not in the factories and not in the union halls.

Even if union leadership was willing to support black workers in the abstract, white workers generally did not want to work alongside black workers. In white-dominated CIO locals, union leaders prioritized the concerns of white workers, if not outright ignoring the concerns of black workers. Nor were white union leaders at any level of the CIO much interested in challenging the structural racism that kept black workers in the lowest paid positions in plants. For example, the CIO's commitment to

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[229] Westmoreland, "Aspects of the History of Negro Trade Unionists in Atlanta," 43.

[230] Westmoreland, "Aspects of the History of Negro Trade Unionists in Atlanta," 55-56.

[231] Westmoreland, "Aspects of the History of Negro Trade Unionists in Atlanta," 53.

employee protection though seniority by a department basis – instead of seniority factory-wide – often kept black workers in the lowest, most undesired positions.[232]

The experience of black workers in Atlanta's interracial CIO unions was no exception. Segregation, discrimination, and racist harassment were still more often than not the defining experience of black Atlantans working with white coworkers and for white employers. When more than 850 steel workers, 40 percent of whom were African American, went on a three-week strike in 1941, black and white workers met separately. Joseph K. Gaither of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee explained that the union used its black members to organize black workers and its white members to organize white workers. "We have used them on the picket line to talk to Negro workers. They do not picket white workers. They do not meet with white union members but hold their meetings at the Y."[233] In their final contract agreement, the union agreed to continue the racial wage differential that allowed the company to continue to pay black workers less than white workers for the same work.[234]

Given the occupational segregation of Atlanta's labor market, interracial workplaces were far from universal. Many of the unions created in this period, like that of the aforementioned quarry workers, were composed almost completely of African

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[232] For seniority in the CIO and the role it played in maintaining segregated factories see Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom,* 166-167; Lichtenstein, *State of the Union,* 73-75; Nelson, *Divided We Stand;* Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy*, *and the Decline of Liberalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

[233] "Steel Strike Picture Untrue Union Says," *Atlanta Constitution,* November 6, 1941, 2.

[234] Westmoreland, "Aspects of the History of Negro Trade Unionists in Atlanta," 47-49.

American workers. Maybe the most successful, and certainly most active, of these majority black unions in the New Deal/ World War II era was the Laundry Workers International Union.[235] The commercial laundry industry was one of the few in Atlanta outside of traditional domestic labor that hired black women, employing more than 2,000 black women in the 1940s.[236] In 1943, laundry workers participated in at least four strikes, one of which was a successful "city-wide" strike that involved 1,400 workers and lasted six weeks.[237] At that time, there were two segregated locals, but by 1945 the locals merged. E.L Abercrombie, a white international representative would lead the local into the 1970s, but most of the local union officials beneath him were African American.[238]

During this period of immense union growth, black civic and religious leaders maintained support for unionization efforts among black workers. During a 1943 strike

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[235] The laundry workers were affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Though less discussed than the CIO, the AFL also experienced an enormous increase in membership in the 1930s and 1940s, see Christopher L. Tomlins, "AFL Unions in the 1930s: Their Performance in Historical Perspective," *The Journal of American History* 65, no.4 (March 1979), 1021-1042. For the AFL's response to CIO's efforts at organizing African Americans in Atlanta see Ferguson, *Black Politics in New Deal Atlanta,* 228.

[236] Prior to commercial laundry services, black women in Atlanta had worked as washerwomen, in and outside of their employer's home. Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom,* 74-97.

[237] "Third Strike in Month at Local Laundry Thursday," *Atlanta Daily World,* May 29, 1943, 3; "Laundry Strike in Second Week," *Atlanta Daily World,* October 19, 1943, 1; "1,200 Laundry Workers Strike for Higher Pay," *Atlanta Daily World,* October 8, 1941, 1.

[238] Joseph Jacobs, Interviewed by Clifford Kuhn and Millie Biek, August 16, 1991, 47, P1991-01, Series B. Public Figures, Georgia Government Documentation Project, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library; "Atlanta Laundry Workers Strike," *Pittsburgh Courier,* October 23, 1943, 15; "Death of Unionist James Gause Shocks Atlanta," *Jet,* October 21, 1965, 29.

by laundry workers, a group of black church leaders in the Interdenominational Ministers Alliance published a letter "urging" the striking workers "to hold out to the end." The ministers saw the laundry workers' strike for improved wages as a "just cause" and believed their strike was a "forceful protest in strict accord with the finest traditions of democracy." That the workers "employed all legitimate means for the ultimate triumph" was a "tribute to the philosophy and purpose of the labor movement, and an inspiration to twelve million Americans struggling to free themselves from economic bondage."[239] This was an unequivocal endorsement from leading black ministers not only of the strike by laundry workers, but of strikes and labor unions as a tool of freedom for black workers.

The members of the Interdenominational Ministers Alliance were not alone among black Atlanta ministers who supported labor unions. The most well-known and influential supporter of black Atlanta's growing labor movement was the Reverend William Holmes Borders of the Wheat Street Baptist Church. In the 1940s, Holmes and his church provided space and institutional support for the burgeoning labor movement. Borders, the *Daily World* wrote, "needed no introduction for his fearless position in defense of labor."[240] In this period, Borders frequently invited organizers, workers, and labor advocates to use his Wheat Street church as a meeting space. In 1943, the striking laundry workers met at the large church. And in 1946 Wheat Street served as the central

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[239] "Ministers Tell Strikers to Hold Out To The End," *Atlanta Daily World,* October 15, 1943, 1.

[240] "Labor Speaks Sunday, September 2, At 3 P.M. at Wheat St. Bapt. Church," *Atlanta Daily World,* September 1, 1945, 4. For more on William Holmes Borders see James W. English, *The Prophet of Wheat Street: The Story of William Holmes Borders A Man Who Refused to Fail* (Elgin, Ill.: David C. Cook Publishing Co., 1973).

meeting place for a steelworkers-led strike of five hundred black women at the Scripto, Inc. factory. In addition to providing much needed space for striking black workers, Wheat Street was ideal for hosting organizing campaigns by unions, including Hotel and Restaurant Workers, to reach out to the black working class. A. Philip Randolph, the head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, also frequently spoke at Wheat Street when he was in Atlanta.[241]

Challenging Racism in Organized Labor

As with rest of the country, the laborite spirit of the 1930s and 1940s dissipated in Atlanta in the 1950s. The anti-radicalism of the Cold War together with expanding prosperity changed the political priority of many Americans.[242] Employment did not leave the purview of leading civil rights reform groups nationally, and in Atlanta

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[241] "Laundry Union Votes Return," *Atlanta Constitution,* November 22, 1943, 11; "Labor Speaks Sunday, September 2, At 3 P.M. at Wheat St. Bapt. Church," *Atlanta Daily World,* September 1, 1945, 4; Joel W. Smith, "Picket Line Continues at Scripto Plant," *Atlanta Daily World,* November 30, 1946, 1; Spike Washington, "Forget Party Labels, Labor Leader Asserts," *Atlanta Daily World,* March 8, 1944, 1; "Randolph Speaker on Monday Night," *Atlanta Daily World,* May 13, 1945; "Atlantans Hear Randolph at Labor Mass Meet," *Atlanta Daily World,* October 30, 1946, 1.

[242] Eric Arnesen, in an essay that challenges the Long Civil Rights Movement consensus writes: "The following is now conventional wisdom: Anticommunist persecution undermined civil rights by labeling them 'subversive.'" His essay and footnotes offers a comprehensive accounting of this "conventional wisdom." Alex Lichtenstein in a reply to the essay writes that "as Arnesen's copious footnotes suggest, there really is no 'consensus' on the demise of these aspects [the economic dimensions] of the movement." Eric Arnesen, "Civil Rights and the Cold War at Home: Postwar Activism, Anticommunism, and the Decline of the Left," *American Communist History* 11 no. 1 (2012), 6. Alex Lichtenstein, "Consensus? What Consensus?" *American Communist History* 11 no. 1 (2012), 51. See also Arnesen's response: Eric Arnesen, "The Final Conflict? On the Scholarship of Civil Rights, the Left and the Cold War," *American Communist History* 11 no. 1 (2012): 63-80.

specifically, even if the priority these organizations gave employment fell a few rungs down the ladder.[243]

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the national NAACP, through its labor director Herbert Hill**,** began a campaign to root discrimination and segregation out of labor unions. This brought the NAACP into confrontations with the CIO and unions like the steel workers, UAW, and ILGWU that, at times, had viewed the civil rights organization as an ally. Nationally, these unions were regular supporters of civil rights legislation and helped fund civil rights organizations. Yet, these unions also often did not actively promote policies to aid black union members and they often refused to act to change racist practices within individual locals. This was the case for the United Steel Workers (USWA), whose civil rights record, one historian wrote, "combined cloying self-congratulations, even out-right fabrication, with increasingly lackluster performance."[244] The USWA's unwillingness to honestly confront racism in its ranks led to a direct confrontation between the union and the NAACP at Atlanta's Atlantic Steel factory.

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[243] Risa Goluboff explored how in the 1950s NAACP lawyers marginalized cases related to employment and economic discrimination in favor of a strategy that focused on desegregation of schools and public accommodations. Goluboff, *The Lost Promise of Civil Rights*. Other scholars have noted that the NAACP, through Herbert Hill and the labor department, continued to tackle economic and employment discrimination, particularly discrimination by labor unions. See Sophia Z. Lee, *The Workplace Constitution*; Sophia Z. Lee, "Hotspots in a Cold War"; Schiller, *Forging Rivals: Race, Class, Law, and the Collapse of Postwar Liberalism*; Frymer, *Black and Blue*; Nelson, *Divided We Stand,* 219-250. William P. Jones found that "although black trade unionists failed to sustain links between civil rights and labor activism at the national level, they retained considerable influence in local movements for economic justice and racial equality." Jones, "The Unknown Origins of the March on Washington," 38.

[244] Nelson, *Divided We Stand,* 226.

The conflict began in 1957 when eight black steel workers from Local 2401 complained of discriminatory treatment by both their employers and their union. Among their grievances were a pay differential even when completing the same tasks, faster promotion tracks for white workers, and the absence of black union officials in the local.[245] A 1961 investigation by the United States Commission on Civil Rights found "virtually total racial segregation within the plant." Atlantic Steel maintained segregation on the factory floor through separate lines of promotion. Promotions were given by seniority within the lines of promotion of particular job classification. The Commission found within one department there were thirty job classifications, nineteen of which were filled entirely by white workers and eleven entirely by black workers.[246] Fearful of alienating white union members, neither the local nor the international had much incentive to aggressively challenge the white supremacist practices at the plant, while Atlantic Steel chose to let the union initiate any changes.[247]

By 1960, however, as pressure from rank-and-file members and the NAACP continued, the international union called for some changes to the lines of promotion in

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[245] For a summary of the black steelworkers' complaint and the NAACP's initial investigation see Memorandum, Herbert Hill to Roy Wilkins, Re: The Atlantic Steel Company, Atlanta, Georgia, May 27, 1958, Part III, Box A182, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Records, MSS 34140, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC, (Hereafter NAACP Records).

[246] "Employment," 1961 Commission on Civil Rights Report, Book 3, 136-137

[247] In 1962 David E. Feller of the USWA apologized to Roy Wilkins that personnel policy changes had been so slow at Atlantic Steel because the union had to "overcome both resistance of a substantial number of the workers…and the company's opposition." David E. Feller to Roy Wilkins, November 9, 1962, Part III, Box A193, NAACP Records.

the new contract with Atlantic Steel. In the 1961 contract, the company agreed to the local union's position that "no line of progression should be composed exclusively of either white or colored workers."[248] Then in 1962 the union and the company added a clause in the contract that further strengthened anti-discrimination policies at the plant. "Neither the company nor the Union will discriminate against any Employee in the Bargaining Unit in the application of the provisions of this contract."[249] This clause, according to the USWA, allowed workers to go through the union grievance process to file any claims of discrimination.

Black steel workers were most frustrated with the reforms to the lines of promotion policy. The new rule ending formal separate lines of promotion came with an important caveat: years of seniority earned by workers could not retroactively transfer to a new line of promotion. In other words, black workers stuck in a poorly paid semi-skilled job for twenty years could be hired into a different occupational category, but they would lose all the benefits and security of their accrued seniority. Beginning in 1962, the company hired black workers into lines of progression that had previously been all white. But as veteran black steel worker Julius Wynn explained "it those colored employees

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[248] Nelson, *Divided We Stand,* 240. For a broader history of the USWA's efforts to end discriminatory seniority and promotion policies see Stein, *Running Steel, Running America,* 50-53.

[249] Letter, David Feller to Edwina Smith, July 2, 1963, Box 34, Folder 13, SCLC Records ProQuest. In 1962 the international union pressured companies to add the anti-discrimination to contracts nation-wide. Judith Stein shows that in Birmingham, Alabama, there was disagreement among black workers over the effectiveness of the new single lines of promotion. Stein, *Running Steel, Running America,* 52-58. See also Letter, David E. Feller to Roy Wilkins, November 9, 1962, Part III, Box A193, NAACP Records.

with the least seniority who bid on and take jobs in the white line of progression as they have nothing to lose because if a layoff were to come, they would be the first to be laid off having the least seniority on the colored promotional line."[250] Several black steelworkers and their allies in the NAACP viewed the policy as nothing more than a continuation of the two lines of promotion. Without seniority protection there was little reason for experienced black workers to apply for a promotion in a different department. Frustrated with the limits of the new policy and the continued disinterest in truly battling discrimination from the union, a group of black workers met with the NAACP and agreed to petition the National Labor Relations Board to decertify the union.[251]

This was a bold and aggressive action by the NAACP and black steel workers. The NAACP filed three decertification cases against labor unions in the fall of 1963. The organization filed a suit for decertification against the Seafarer's International Union in San Francisco and it joined a segregated local in a case against the Independent Metal Workers Union in Houston. The most consequential of these cases was the suit against the Independent Metal Workers, known as the *Hughes Tool* case. The day after the Civil Rights Act was passed in July 1964, the NLRB ruled that the Constitution did not allow the federal agency to sanction segregated locals, segregated apprenticeship programs, segregated jobs, or discriminatory promotional practices of unions.[252]

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[250] "Statement of Julius C. Wynn," October 30, 1962, Part V, Box 660, NAACP Records.

[251] "Motion to Rescind Certification," National Labor Relations Board Case No. R-2964, October 29, 1962, Part V, Box 660, NAACP Records; Nelson, *Divided We Stand,* 241.

[252] The best work on the NAACP's decertification campaign is Sophie Z. Lee, *The Workplace Constitution,* 142-153; For more on the campaign to end discrimination at

The blatant segregation and discrimination at Hughes Tool made it a relatively easy case for the NLRB to decide. This was not the same for the NAACP's charges against Local 2401, which had just successfully advocated for an end to official separate lines of promotion and the inclusion of an anti-discrimination clause.[253] Yet, despite repeated meetings with the NAACP and black workers, USWA refused to budge any further. NAACP head Roy Wilkins had concluded that "nothing has produced meaningful change."[254] In a letter to Wilkins, Gloster Current, an NAACP administrator, admitted that the case against Local 2401 was weak, but that the organization's efforts in favor of black workers was "received with wide acclaims by our own rank and file." The case was weak because Atlantic Steel and the USWA had just instituted color-blind policies with regard to lines of promotion, even if the fact that black workers lost seniority served as a disincentive to black workers interested in transferring. Current suggested that the NAACP must keep "pushing against all obstacles, even if we do overstate our case from time to time."[255] Current was correct that the NAACP had likely overstated their case against Atlantic Steel. In April 1963, the National Labor Review Board's general

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Hughes Tool Company see Michael R. Botson Jr., *Labor, Civil Rights, and the Hughes Tool Company* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2005).

[253] "NAACP Asks NLRB to Decertify Steelworkers' Atlanta Local," *Atlanta Daily World,* November 3, 1962, 1.

[254] Herbert Hill, "Race and the Steelworkers Union: White Privilege and Black Struggle," *New Politics,* 8, no. 4 (Winter 2002), accessed at http://nova.wpunj.edu/newpolitics/issue32/hill32.htm

[255] Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America: Race, Economic Policy*, *and the Decline of Liberalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 344 fn. 81.

counsel, Stuart Rothman, upheld the regional NLRB's rejection of the NAACP's case. Rothman even added that the USWA "far from encouraging or even tolerating discriminatory working conditions, had in fact utilized its bargaining strength to the end of eliminating existing disparity."[256]

Throughout the rest of the 1960s, Nathaniel Brown and other dissident black steelworkers maintained pressure on Atlantic Steel and Local 2401. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act and the creation of Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Brown filed employment discrimination charges against Atlantic Steel. In 1969, the EEOC, in contrast to the NLRB's ruling half a decade earlier, ruled that "the company's method of applying seniority to job classifications plainly did not constitute a 'bona fide seniority system."[257]

Before the EEOC though, twenty-five black steel workers turned to another civil rights organization, SCLC, for help. SCLC met with the steelworkers in spring 1963, at a moment when, as we saw in chapter one, the organization was seeking to expand into issues of employment and work. SCLC agreed to help the steelworkers, and, as it did with employees at the local Kraft factory, the organization made a complaint with the Kennedy administration's President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. SCLC targeted both the company and the union. The charges included the existence of segregated facilities, black workers receiving less pay for the same jobs, an "unequal

[256] "N.A.A.C.P. Rebuffed in Attack on Union," *New York Times,* April 10, 1963, 36.

[257] Bruce Nelson, "'CIO Meant One Thing for the Whites and Another Thing for Us': Steelworkers and Civil Rights" in *Southern Labor in Transition, 1940-1995,* ed. Robert Zieger (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 137.

representation of union officials," and the persistence of two lines of promotions; these were essentially the same complaints levied by the NAACP.[258]

At least some members of SCLC, however, hoped to use a different approach than the NAACP. In an unsigned report on the conditions at Atlantic Steel, SCLC, without naming names, criticized the NAACP's "frontal attack" that "may yield short-term results, but it may also, in the end, destroy the union, since a union cannot exist long with deep and bitter cleavages inside its ranks." "Organized labor," the author of the investigation asserted, was "fighting a desperate battle to organize the South," while "management waits in the wings to use whatever it can to rid itself of the union." The author, however, did not have a real solution to discrimination and segregation in unions. The report merely suggested that the first step for SCLC was to meet with the international union and Local 2401 "to find orderly procedures for full and true integration on union members."[259]

It is not clear why the author thought SCLC would have more success in meeting with USWA officials than the NAACP, which, had been meeting with the USWA leaders for years. Herbert Hill told the *New York Times* of "interminable discussions" and "endless memos" with the union. Its decision to file for decertification came after it had attempted many other less confrontational avenues for reform.[260] There was only so much

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[258] Memorandum, SCLC to President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity, et al.,"RE: Discriminatory Practices Within Atlantic Steel," no date, Box 34, Folder 13, SCLC Records ProQuest.

[259] Report, "Racial Relations Among Members of United Steel Workers Union Employed by Atlantic Steel Company, Atlanta, Georgia," July 15, 1963, Box 34, Folder 13, SCLC Records ProQuest.

the civil rights organizations could do to end racist practices within labor unions. No matter what some progressive labor leaders said, or how much money they donated to civil rights causes, until they voluntarily reformed themselves, civil rights organizations and black workers would be forced to use state instruments to bring about change.

Even with the readily apparent limits to a civil rights-labor alliance, there were civil rights leaders and strategists who believed that relationships with unions should be prioritized over challenging unions on all instances of discrimination. There were financial reasons to pursue this relationship, as labor unions like the UAW and the United Packinghouse Workers Union were important funders for organizations and marches. There were also political reasons to create a coalition with labor unions. Unions, like the UAW and the USWA, were influential political lobbying organizations for progressive legislation including the civil rights act. Some civil rights activists recognized unions in their primary role as organizers of workplaces and representatives of workers provided benefits and security to black workers, that were otherwise unattainable. "Negroes are almost entirely a working people," Martin Luther King Jr., explained to the labor officials at the 1961 AFL-CIO convention. "Our needs are identical with labor's needs: decent wages, fair working conditions, livable housing…conditions in which families can grow, have education for their children, and respect in the community."[261] Unions that were interested in supporting black workers could work to improve wages and benefits,

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[260] John Pomfret, "Drive to Open Jobs to Negroes," *New York Times,* October 17, 1962, 22.

[261] Martin Luther King Jr., Speech at AFL-CIO Fourth Constitutional Convention, December 11, 1961 in "All Labor Has Dignity," in "All Labor Has Dignity," ed. Honey, 38.

challenge different forms of exploitation, harassment, and discrimination, provide a counter to employer's authority, and give workers a collective voice.[262] In the mid-1960s, during strikes at Dobbs House and Scripto, Inc., black workers, unions, and civil rights activists and other black community leaders sought to build alliances to improve the working conditions and pay of black workers.

Dobbs House Strike, Civil Rights Activists, and Choosing Priorities

On May 26, 1963, Walter Rugaber of the *Atlanta Journal* reported that "Atlanta's first labor dispute in the low-wage restaurant industry is rolling along a bitter path at a series of eating and airplane catering units at the municipal airport."[263] The strike of nearly three hundred workers, organized by Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) Local 151 in both the Dobbs House restaurant and catering department**,** began on April 16, 1963. It quickly became clear that this strike would not easily be settled. Dobbs House, whose corporate headquarter was in Memphis, Tennessee, showed little interest in seriously negotiating, while the striking workers showed a level of militancy and solidarity not often found in the city. Yet, the solidarity of the workers was not enough to keep Dobbs House from replacing the strikers.

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[262] Collective bargaining between firms and unions provided one significant avenue for Americans to receive social welfare benefits like health care that other nations often offered by "virtue of citizenship alone." See Lane Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door,* 15-22; Jennifer Klein, *For All these Rights: Business, Labor, and the Shaping of America's Public-Private Welfare State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

[263] Walter Rugaber, "Restaurant Tie-up at Airport Rolls on Bitter Path Here," *Atlanta Journal,* May 26, 1963, 10.

Because of the intransigence of the employers, Local 151 recognized that it needed allies in the community. The union turned to the well-organized network of Atlanta's black ministers and civil rights organizations. Through the ministers, the union hoped for access to their church members, support on the picket lines, and the political strength to influence the city government which owned the airport and provided Dobbs House with a monopoly contract. The support of civil rights activists, though, was cautious, inconsistent, and largely ineffective. Both the union and the activists struggled to come to terms with what it meant to have an effective coalition. Six months into the strike, most of the civil rights activists, who showed great enthusiasm early in the strike**,** had turned their focus to a renewed campaign to desegregate downtown. The striking workers were left with little support and while they remained out on strike for several more months, the company effectively broke the strike by January 1964.

The strike began on April 16, 1963, when more than two hundred and fifty workers, mostly from the catering department and nearly all of whom were African American, refused to show up for work. The strike, officially, was the result of an impasse in negotiations. More than a year earlier, HERE began to organize workers at the restaurant, coffee shop, and catering department.[264] In October 1962, the workers, by a margin of

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[264] HERE had a presence in other Dobbs House locations including Houston and Birmingham. For HERE's activity in Houston see Dobbs Houses Company, Inc. and Local 63, Restaurant, Cafeteria, and Tavern Workers, affiliated with Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartenders International Union, AFL-CIO, Case No. 23-CA-1220, January 12, 1962; For Birmingham see Dobbs Houses, Inc. and Hotel and Restaurant and Bartenders Union, Local 886, AFL-CIO, Case No. 10-CA 4684 February 7, 1962. Histories of HERE, as with the histories of most service-sectors unions, are relatively few in number. For histories of both the national union and/or specific locals see Matthew Josephson, *Union House Union Bar: The History of the Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartenders International Union, AFL-CIO* (New York:

nearly two to one, voted in favor of union representation. For workers at the Atlanta airport, union representation offered the opportunity to improve wages and hours and protect against exploitation, harassment, and indignity at the work place.

The most important issue for the workers was increased and standardized pay. There were wide variances in pay throughout the different departments. Those in the catering division, because they participated in interstate commerce, were paid the federal minimum wage of $1.15 an hour. Other employees were paid as low as seventy-five cents an hour, and waitresses, who also made tips, received only two dollars a day. The differentials in pay also appeared to workers to be arbitrary. For example, one cook made only eighty-five cents an hour while a newly hired busboy made ninety cents an hour. Outside of the restaurant's waitresses, nearly all employees were African American, so it does not appear that this wage discrepancy was racially-based, instead it was just an example of arbitrary pay policies of the company.[265]

Workers were also upset about the poor quality of food provided by the company, which the employees believed reflected a lack of respect. In November 1962, for example, the company gave its catering department workers day-old food that had been prepared for a cancelled flight. "The food was cold," according to one union member,

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Random House, 1956); Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing it Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Julius Getman, *Restoring the Power of Unions: It Takes a Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Thomas Jessen Adams, "The Servicing of America: Political Economy and Service Work in Postwar Southern California," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2009), 146-175.

[265] Harmon G. Perry, "Strike at Dobbs in Second Week," *Atlanta Daily World*, April 24, 1963, 1; Walter Rugaber, "Airport Restaurant Strike Looks Toward the Long Haul," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution,* June 23, 1963, 6; Walter Rugaber, "Restaurant Tieup at Airport Rolls on Bitter Path Here," *Atlanta Journal,* May 26, 1963 10.

"and after one of the employees had tasted it and said it wasn't any good, the rest of us decided not to eat it, so we didn't eat that day." Management still charged the employees for the meals. And then in February and March, at least twice, workers in the catering department refused to eat meals but were still charged, once because they observed a supervisor deliberately stick his hand into a pot of liver, and once because of the quality of goulash that the company served. There was also speculation by at least one employee that only the black workers had to pay for food, while the white employees got to eat first and ate for free.[266]

Old and terrible tasting food was hardly the worst indignity Dobbs House employees suffered. Women complained that management, who were all white men, would frequently walk into the bathrooms under the pretense that they were checking to see if employees were avoiding work by hiding out in the bathrooms. Even more egregiously these striking women also claimed that management would try to "inspect their undergarment." During negotiations, the union sought to establish a policy that prohibited male managers and supervisors from entering into the women's bathroom and changing room. [267] Grievances revealed the larger issue of poor treatment and management's casual indifference towards its black employees. Union representation, these workers believed, could protect them from harassment, capricious behavior, and everyday indignities that they as black workers under white bosses were more vulnerable to.

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[266] Affidavit of Marshall B Race, April 23, 1963; Affidavit of Willie Carrecter, April 23 and 25, 1963; Affidavit of Christine Sturdivant, April 23, 1963; All in Box 1062, Folder 553, Joseph Jacobs papers.

[267] "Dobbs House Strikers Vow Vote War," *Atlanta Inquirer,* March 7, 1964, 8.

From the beginning of HERE's organizing campaign, Dobbs House management showed no interest in cooperating with the union. Prior to the election, management fired at least two women for their pro-union stance.[268] Once Local 151 won the election, Dobbs House refused to enter negotiations until it absolutely had to, and then it showed little interest in compromising. The company was particularly adamant that it would not change its wage schedules.[269]

When the workers refused to return to work on April 16, management worked quickly to break the strike by hiring African American replacement workers, some of whom came from Atlanta or were bussed in by Dobbs House from surrounding towns.[270] The company also hired guards from Southern Detectives, a private security firm well known for its work in breaking strikes. Management officially claimed it hired private security to protect the replacement workers from picketers.[271] Fights and other violent incidents did break out between pickets and replacement workers. On one occasion, two carloads of strikers and strike supporters fired bullets into the car of a mother whose two daughters

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[268] Dobbs Houses, Inc. and Hotel and Restaurant Employees and Bartenders International Union, AFL-CIO, Local 151, Case No. 10-CA-5276, February 7, 1964.

[269] Affidavit of Marshall B Race, April 23, 1963, Box 1062, Folder 553, Joseph Jacobs papers; Walter Rugaber, "Restaurant Tieup at Airport Rolls on Bitter Path Here," *Atlanta Journal,* May 26, 1963, 10.

[270] "Dobbs House Strikes Still Bottle-Necked by Negro Scabs," *Atlanta Inquirer,* December 21, 1963, 1; Harmon G. Perry, "Clashing Workers Face City Trials," *Atlanta Daily World,* May 5, 1963.

[271] Flyer, "Join the Hotel Workers in Their Strike Against Dobbs House," no date, Box 1062, Folder 551, Joseph Jacobs Papers; Walter Rugaber, "Restaurant Tieup at Airport Rolls on Bitter Path Here," *Atlanta Journal,* May 26, 1963, 10. **"**Join the Hotel Workers in Strike Against Dobbs House," *Journal of Labor,* June 7, 1963, clipping found in Box 1062, Folder 553, Joseph Jacobs Papers.

continued to cross the picket line.[272] But the Southern Detectives were also there to harass and intimidate the striking workers walking the picket line. Striking workers provided numerous examples of harassment by private security, sometimes aided by local police, including threats with dogs and at gun point.[273]

From the beginning of the strike, HERE received support from both the Atlanta Labor Council (ALC) and the Georgia State AFL-CIO. On May 22, a month after the strike began, the ALC passed a set a resolutions calling on union members "not to patronise Dobbs Houses**,**" protested the use of East Point, Georgia, police officers to transport replacement workers across the picket lines, and donated $500 to the strike fund. [274] Then at the AFL-CIO state convention in Savanah, the executive committee gave unanimous support to the strike and raised $250 in support. Most of the labor councils' efforts on behalf of the strike came in lobbying the city of Atlanta to support the workers.[275]

Dobbs House was too successful at replacing the striking workers for traditional strike tactics to be effective at coercing concessions from the company. But because the city owned the municipal airport and because Dobbs House held a city-granted monopoly on catering and dining services at the airport, the union hoped it could convince Mayor

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[272] Flash Dodson, "Mother of Ten Suffers For Crossing Dobbs House Picket Line," *Atlanta Inquirer,* June 29, 1963, 9.

[273] For incident with dog see Affidavit of Cecil Brooks and Barbara Bell, June 21, 1963, Box 1062, Folder 551, Joseph Jacobs papers; For incident with gun see Affidavit of Betty Zellars, June 4, 1963, Box 1062, Folder 551, Joseph Jacobs Papers.

[274] "Resolution on Dobbs Houses, Inc. Strike," *Journal of Labor,* May 24, 1963.

[275] "Join the Hotel Workers in Their Strike Against Dobbs House," *Journal of Labor,* June 7, 1963.

Ivan Allen and the alderman to influence the company. The labor leaders emphasized what they saw as illegal and outlandish actions by Dobbs House, in hopes of getting the local government to act. They appealed to the city to investigate the restaurant for serving alcohol to minors, called on the health department to investigate poor food handing, and requested politicians to take a stand against some of the anti-strike tactics of the company. While the lobbying did lead to the restaurant receiving an alcohol-license suspension, it did little to move the scales in favor of the strikers.[276]

As it became clear that the union could not prevent the use of replacement workers and force management to the negotiating table, HERE looked to the community for help. Marshall Race, a white Fulton County-born international representative of HERE and longtime fixture in the Atlanta labor movement, had no connections to leading black ministers nor does it appear that he worked closely with striking workers to develop any relationships. Instead, Race and attorney Joseph Jacobs, who had strong ties to the Atlanta labor movement, relied on Harold Arnold, the vocational secretary of the Atlanta Urban League, to facilitate a relationship. Through Arnold, Local 151 gained the support, if at times tepid, of many of the most influential black religious and civic leaders in the city.[277]

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[276] Sally Rugaber, "Labor Grievances Presented to Mayor," *Atlanta Journal,* June 27, 1963; Walter Rugaber, "Airport Restaurant Strike Looks Toward the Long Haul," *Atlanta Journal and Constitution,* June 23, 1963. 6; "Dobbs Airport Liquor Store License Suspended by Alderman," *Journal of Labor,* June 14, 1963, 1.

[277] See for example note from Joseph Jacobs about Harold Arnold facilitating meetings between Local 151 and Baptist ministers, July 19, 1963, Box 1064, Folder 549, Joseph Jacob Papers.

The summer of 1963 was a propitious time to for the union to reach out to Atlanta's black leaders. After a lull in concerted civil rights demonstrations, organizations across the political spectrum from the cautious Atlanta Negro Voters League (ANVL) to the militant students in SNCC sought ways to work together to more forcefully challenge segregation and discrimination. In May, students in SNCC and COHAR participated in a series of sit-ins at downtown restaurants. After confrontations at the Pickrick restaurant, where the proprietor, future segregationist governor Lester Maddox, physically forced protesters out, and at Leb's Restaurant, the Chamber of Commerce, under pressure from Ivan Allen, agreed to ask all businesses to end segregation.[278] Despite the agreement of the Chamber of Commerce, it would take months more protest for most downtown stores and restaurants to agree to end segregation in their places of business.[279]

As the students began to ramp up their public demonstrations, they also renewed the Student-Adult Liaison to better communicate with other civil rights leaders in the city. As we saw in the previous chapter, one of the primary targets of the renewed Student-Adult Liaison was employment discrimination.[280] Then on October 19, representatives of all the leading civil rights groups and black civic organizations in the city formed an umbrella

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[278] Maddox was at the center of white racist resistance against any white moderate compromises with black civil rights activists from the late 1950s when he ran a weekly column by buying ad space in local newspapers through his single term as governor that ended in 1970. For more on Lester Maddox see Kruse, *White Flight,* 194-203, 220-230.

[279] For a discussion on the Atlanta student movement's activities in the summer of 1963 see Grady-Willis, *Challenging Apartheid,* 38-41.

[280] Hal Gulliver, "Negroes Unite for Jobs Push," *Atlanta Constitution,* July 9, 1963, 3.

organization**,** the Summit Leadership Committee, to coordinate strategies to confront Jim Crow laws and customs

Initially, the Dobbs House strike received support from a wide swath of Atlanta's black reform communities. Members of the AUL, ANVL, Operation Breadbasket, and SNCC all offered support for the strikers. Local 151 also got support from a group of ministers from the Atlanta Baptist Ministers Union and the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance. Leading this group was J.H. Lockett, a veteran minister who headed Friendship Baptist Church near the airport in College Park, Georgia. The most prominent names in the minister group were William Holmes Borders and Martin Luther King Sr. King played an especially vocal role in meetings with the union and led a group of ministers to urge Mayor Allen to lend his support for the strike.[281] King had long been one of the most esteemed ministers in Atlanta and often took part in the bi-racial negotiations that slowly dismantled parts of Jim Crow Atlanta in the 1940s and 1950s. Like many black elite reformers, King was hesitant to support the student movement that arrived in the city in 1960, but he empathized with the students' position. "Many of us hoped it would not come to such a point. And many of us knew it had to," King wrote in his autobiography. By 1963, King was more supportive of direct action campaigns, especially the work of Operation Breadbasket. King was an active member of the

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[281] "Employment, Education Accommodations Tops," *Atlanta Inquirer,* October 26, 1963; "Historic Summit Conference," *Atlanta Inquirer*, November 18, 1963, 18. For a perspective from the older generation of black leaders see "Saturday's Leadership Conference," *Atlanta Daily World,* October 22, 1963, 4; Eliza Paschall recognized that a split between "conference" and direct action still existed between activists but that few in the SLC rejected the efficacy of direct action protests. Eliza Paschall, "The Summit's Main Issue," *Atlanta Inquirer,* January 18, 1964, 2.

organization; he would negotiate with employers, use his pulpit to spread word of boycotts, and when necessary walk picket lines. Coming to the aid of striking black workers then was a logical step for King now that he was invested in using direct action tactics to improve the employment opportunities for black workers.

Local 151 certainly coveted the endorsement of someone held in as high esteem as King, but in reality his support did little to change the fortunes of the striking workers. As we'll see, the minister's support did not bring more press coverage of the strike and it did not change Mayor Allen's stance on the strike – nor did it did convince workers or consumers to stop crossing the picket line. Of course, it did not help that King's and other civil rights activists' support was only temporary, as soon as activists renewed demonstrations to end segregation downtown, black supporters of Local 151 moved on from the strike.[282]

The union hoped that Atlanta's black leaders, particularly its most influential ministers, could do three things for the strikers. First, the ministers could participate on picket lines. Other black Atlantans could not "be as free as ministers," Martin Luther King Sr., claimed in a meeting with Local 151. Therefore, ministers from across the city should take an active and visible role in protesting the treatment of the organized workers at Dobbs House.[283] Reverend J.H. Lockett, a member of Operation Breadbasket, for

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[282] Martin Luther King Sr., *Daddy King: An Autobiography*, 157. For more on King's history of activism see Stephen N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 10; Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent,* 144.

[283] Handwritten note, "Meeting with Ministers," June 1963, Box 1061, Folder 547, Joseph Jacobs Papers.

instance, called on volunteers from the Atlanta Baptist Ministers Unions to walk the picket line and participate in "coffee-sipping campaigns" where participants would hold up seats in the café and restaurant during rush hour to prevent new customers from being served.[284]

Second, the ministers could educate their congregation about the strike. King Sr. hoped that he and other ministers could "get people to see this [the treatment of Dobbs House strikers by management] is as a sin & worse."[285] The union hoped ministers could convince others in the community to join in the protest at the airport and to convince working-class black Atlantans to not cross the picket line as replacement workers. Dobbs House brought in replacement workers with relative ease, and convincing black Atlantans not to scab was one of the primary goals of the strikers and their community allies.

The union believed that black ministers were well positioned to persuade community members not to scab. They also hoped that in the summer of 1963, as civil rights demonstrations peaked throughout the country, racial solidarity may have the effect of convincing black Atlantans to not work at Dobbs House. A pamphlet advertising the support of black ministers was mostly a call for workers to stop scabbing. On the front of the pamphlet was the photo of a mother on the picket line with her three young sons, each son holding a different sign targeted at replacement workers: "Don't Take My Mommie's Job," "Don't Take My Bread," and "Scabs Will Make a Slave of Me." The pamphlet also contained a direct appeal for racial solidarity from the "Ministers Committee." "We

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[284] "Weekly Meeting Held by Baptist Ministers," *Atlanta Daily World,* July 20, 1963, 5.

[285] Handwritten notes of meeting, June 1963, Box 1061, Folder 647, Joseph Jacobs Papers.

cannot win our fight for basic human rights, for civil rights, and job opportunity if we 'SCAB' on our own people," the religious leaders declared. [286] Despite the arguments by Dobbs House management that it was a "purely economic strike" that was "entirely different from the civil rights issue," black reformers recognized how black workers' fight for improved pay and union recognition were of piece with their larger mission.[287]

When discussing the strike, the ministers emphasized that improved pay and working conditions were important for the workers and the larger black community. In a letter explaining their support of the strike, the ministerial alliance wrote: "A better economic condition will not only improve their personal situation, but will enable them to contribute more to the welfare of the Negro Community and the city." The ministers were also concerned that the Dobbs House's use of "Negro strikebreakers" was "not good for the Negro community." The ministers meant that the strikebreakers added tension within the black community and that they took jobs "away from workers who are trying to get a better living for themselves." The focus on community improvement was the same logic used by Operation Breadbasket when it emphasized the income added to the black community when a company agreed to hire or promote more black workers. Improvements at the workplace were a concern for these ministers but they were not a priority. Instead what was important to them was how improved wages and working

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[286] Pamphlet, HERE Local 151, "Don't Take My Bread," Box 1062, Folder 553, Joseph Jacobs Papers.

[287] Walter Rugaber, "Airport Restaurant Strike Looks Toward the Long Haul," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution,* June 23, 1963, 6.

conditions furthered their goal of improving the economic and social standing of Atlanta's black community.[288]

The third job of the religious and civic leaders was to lobby the mayor and board of aldermen, an approach they had traditionally favored. The ministers hoped to convince Mayor Ivan Allen to act on two fronts: the mayor could "demand…immediate and continuous negotiation, or failing that, that [labor and management] submit all issues to final and binding arbitration," and call for a public investigation into whether the city should continue or terminate their lease with Dobbs House.[289]

Local 151's representatives met with Mayor Allen on several occasions, joined both by city and state AFL-CIO leaders and by groups of black ministers. At the meeting with the mayor, the ministers, led by Martin Luther King Sr., stressed the damage that the strike was doing to the city's self-made image as the "city too busy to hate." From the moment William Hartsfield popularized the phrase, activists had called upon the city's white leadership to live up to the motto. On this occasion, the ministers expanded its meaning, portraying the "hate" in the phrase as representing any continuing form of oppression, discrimination, segregation, or exploitation of black Atlantans, including the poor pay and mistreatment of black workers. Allen was not sold. The strike was not "entirely a race issue," he insisted, instead it was "fundamentally a dispute between management and labor." Allen refused to intercede in the dispute. Labor disputes**,** he told

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[288] Press Release, Negro Ministers of the City of Atlanta, ca. 1963, Box 1061 Folder 547, Joseph Jacobs Papers,

[289] Press Release, Negro Ministers of the City of Atlanta, No date, Box 1061, Folder 547, Joseph Jacobs Papers.

the group**,** were not the jurisdiction of city government but instead should be left up to the NLRB. Though Allen did promise to stay impartial and told labor leaders that the city would offer "full protection" of their rights.[290]

Joining the ministers in support of the Dobbs Strike were student activists from COAHR and SNCC. That summer SNCC worked with the Voter Education Project to register voters, and it worked with civic organizations in the city's impoverished southeast neighborhoods to advocate for improved city services.[291] In addition, as we saw in the previous chapter, COHAR, rather disjointedly, began a campaign of pickets and boycotts to force employers to hire more black workers. SNCC representatives were intentional in working on projects that expanded the reach of the civil rights movement. These young activists believed the movement up to that point had not focused on the particular ways racism affected poor and working class African Americans. "Time has now come to take this big industrial area and establish a program that will make the low income laborers, the domestics, the unemployed, aware that there is a *Civil Rights Movement,*" wrote Debbie Amis, a bi-racial Philadelphia-born SNCC activist and Communist Party member.[292] "The movement has all but snubbed and neglected the people who live with whatever changes are made." In order to reach these people in the

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[290] "Allen Pledges Impartiality at Airport," May 30, 1963, *Atlanta Constitution,* located in Box 1062, Folder 553, Joseph Jacobs Papers; Handwritten Notes, "Meeting with Mayor," June 26, 1963, Box 1061, Folder 547, Joseph Jacobs Papers.

[291] Debbie Amis, "Report from South East Atlanta," October 1963, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Microfilm, Reel 37 Series XV: 42.

[292] Ben Sears, "Debbie Amis Bell: Memories of Freedom Rider," *People's World,* March 29, 2012, accessed at https://www.peoplesworld.org/article/debbie-amis-bell-memories-of-a-freedom-rider/.

community Amis and others in SNCC considered creating coalitions outside of the civil rights movement, specifically with labor unions.[293]

In a report on SNCC's activities in Atlanta in 1963, Amis, SNCC's field secretary, suggested that there was "a need to build stronger unity with the community by relating to other groups." "Primarily," she had "in mind the organized labor groups." Amis did not elaborate on what she found appealing about building a closer relationship with labor unions, but she did have two campaigns she thought offered guidance for future alliances between the student movement and organized labor. One was a short but successful campaign by car wash employees to win a contract. The other was the student's support of the Dobbs House strike. [294]

Representing SNCC in its work with Local 151 and the striking Dobbs House workers was Mike Sayer, a white New Yorker whose father was a school teacher and labor organizer. In 1961, Sayer left Brooklyn to join the movement in Mississippi. Like many in SNCC, he was not afraid to challenge people and institutions, even allies, whose tactics and strategies he disagreed with. While he brought student activists to the picket line, Sayer used the opportunity to call out the union for "not giving proper leadership"

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[293] Field Report, Debbie H. Amis, "Atlanta," December 16, 1963, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Microfilm, Reel 37 Series XV: 42; "Students Call Mass Meeting to Push for 5,000 New Jobs, *Atlanta Inquirer,* July, 6, 1963, 1. SNCC's efforts in southeast Atlanta were a precursor to their long-term work in urban community organizing, the Atlanta Project, which focused mainly on the Vine City neighborhood. See Grady-Willis, *Challenging Apartheid,* 84-87; Brown-Nagin, *Courage Dissent,* 266-272.

[294] Field Report, Debbie H. Amis, "Atlanta," December 16, 1963, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee Microfilm, Reel 37 Series XV: 42.

and to criticize the ministers.[295] Race and Local 151 put up with Sayer's public criticisms, in part, because he continually brought student activists to the picket line.

While Race may have just merely put up with the student activists, some black union members looked to build a stronger coalition between the striking workers and the student movement. On July 1, two hundred and fifty people, mostly striking workers, their families, and student activists, marched, unannounced, through downtown to bring attention to the two-month long strike. Marchers carried signs that read "We Want Higher Wages," "Don't Cross Picket Lines," and "Support the Movement for Negro Rights." The march, apparently, was the idea of Joe Burley, a black striking worker and the chairman of Local 151's activity committee. Burley also joined civil rights activists at sit-in protests at Dobbs House and Toddle House – a franchise recently bought by Dobbs House – locations that still discriminated against black customers.[296]

The strikers' participation in the march and Burley's participation in sit-in demonstrations reveals a divide between Marshall Race and at least some of the black union members. The workers planned and held the march without the knowledge of Race. This did not sit well with the head of Local 151. Race's immediate response was to distance HERE from the march. He was frustrated that the neither strike leaders nor the student activists had involved him in the planning of the march. [297] Following the march,

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[295] Handwritten note, July 3, 1963, Box 1061, Folder 547 Joseph Jacob Papers.

[296] For more on Burley participating in sit-ins see Handwritten Note, July 9, 1963, Box 1061, Folder 547, Joseph Jacobs Papers; For more on Burley's participation in the July 1 march see Handwritten Note, July 1, 1963, Box 1061, Folder 547 Joseph Jacobs Papers; "March by 250 Negroes Backs Restaurant Strike," *Atlanta Constitution,* July 2, 1963, located in Box 1062, Folder 553, Joseph Jacobs Papers.

Race told the press that "aid and assistance [from community supporters] is welcomed" but "that such aid must be done under direct leadership of the union." Race also "called his strike leaders into a meeting" after the march, and "made it very clear that the union is the certified bargaining agent for the workers and would have to maintain full leadership.[298] Race wanted the support of activists but he was not willing to share any of the leadership responsibilities with community supporters. For Race, the Dobbs House strike was not about building a civil rights-labor coalition, he simply thought that civil rights activists could be useful in winning the strike.

Whatever interest black leaders and civil rights organizations had in the strike in the summer of 1963 dissipated by the fall. At the founding meeting of the Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference (SLC), that October, there was no discussion of the Dobbs House strike, or any discussion of helping black workers in labor unions. Instead the employment subcommittee focused on ways that its members could convince private and public sector employers to end job discrimination, and how they could improve "lines of communications…to the masses" about job opportunities.[299] Following the success of the meeting, ministers of Operation Breadbasket and student activists agreed to coordinate a campaign against employment discrimination at department stores. Again, civil rights

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[297] Handwritten Note, July 1, 1963, Bo 1061 Folder 547, Joseph Jacobs Papers.

[298] Walter Rugaber, "City 'Drags Feet,' Café Strikers Say," *Atlanta Journal,* July 2, 1963.

[299] "Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference Workshop Report," October 19, 1963, Box 25, Folder 8, Eliza Paschall Papers, See also the Summit's final report "Action for Democracy," November 1, 1963, Box 25, Folder 8, Eliza Paschall Papers.

activists concerned about employment discrimination could have thrown support behind the Dobbs House strike but instead chose a different set of targets.[300]

Civil rights activists' relative indifference towards the Dobbs House strike was most glaring during a renewed effort at desegregating restaurants in late 1963 and early 1964. One of the main targets of the renewed sit-ins was Toddle House, a franchise of "quick service" restaurants that Dobbs House took over in 1962. Over the summer, activists had sporadically participated in sit-ins at the restaurant, but were unable to make a real impact until late December when they were joined by some high profile participants.

On December 21, a group of SNCC members visited with Oginga Odinga, Kenya's Minister of Home Affairs, who was touring the United States after accepting Kenya's admission into the United Nations. Knowing they would not be served, members of the group took Odinga to a Toddle House restaurant for coffee. After the restaurant refused them service, nineteen activists led a sit-in and were promptly arrested. Viewing the arrests, Odinga released a statement noting that the United States "practices segregation — which is what we are fighting in Africa." Following the arrests, James Foreman, SNCC's executive director, called for a nation-wide protest of Toddle House and Dobbs House restaurants. [301]

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[300] "Operation Breadbasket Says Department Stores are Next," *Atlanta Inquirer,* October 26, 1963, 1,3; "Ministers, Students Mobilize Community for Possible City-Wide Demonstration," *Atlanta Inquirer,* November 16, 1963, 1; "XMAS Boycott Called," Special Section, *The Student Voice,* November 21, 1963, 2.

[301] For a narrative of the protest accompanied by Oginga Odinga see H. Timothy Lovelace, "Making the World in Atlanta's Image, 396-399. For SNCC's actions after the arrests see "Protesters Will Spend Christmas in Jail," Special Section, *Student Voice,* December 23, 1963.

Although the protests did not spread across the country, at least twelve Toddle Houses in the metropolitan region experienced demonstrations that winter. The campaign in Atlanta gained even more media attention on Christmas Eve when Lillian Gregory, the wife of comedian Dick Gregory, who was six months pregnant, was arrested for participating in a sit-in at a Toddle House. On January 2, after closing down several Atlanta-area restaurants for three days in order to avoid protests, Dobbs House came to an agreement with SNCC to end segregation at its Atlanta franchise. Significantly, throughout the confrontation, the activists did not raise the issue of the strike at the airport.[302]

At least one observer associated with the student movement expressed disappointment in Atlanta's civil rights movements laser-like focus on public accommodations during their fall and winter campaign. "What Happened to Jobs, Educations, Health Et Al?" asked the headline of an editorial in the *Inquirer.* The author of the piece directed his/her frustration at the leadership of the Summit Leadership Conference, which it meant Atlanta's black reform elite, though the student movement was also guilty of narrowing its winter campaign. The editorial accused "someone" of "leaving only Public Accommodations as the only critical grievance or goal of the Negro community." The author warned that after the sit-ins in 1960, activists had "let off the

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[302] "Three SCLC Staff Members Go to Jail in Desegregation Attempt in Atlanta," *SCLC Newsletter,* January1964, 1-2; "'Open City' Drive Begins," *The Student Voice,* January 14, 1964, 3; "Gregory, SNCC Workers Close Dobbs House Restaurants Here," *Atlanta Inquirer,* January 4, 1964, 1,3, and 9. For more on the "Open City" drive in the winter of 1964 see Grady-Willis, *Challenging Apartheid,* 43-55; Kruse, *White Flight,* 215-219; Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent*, 231-243.

pressure and permitted lunch counter desegregation alone to be the only critical goal when jobs were sidetracked."[303]

Local 151 may have been disappointed by the lack of support provided by civil rights activists, but there is no evidence that the white union leaders attempted to reciprocate support for the activists' campaigns. There were discussions, instigated by civil rights activists, that the activists would support the strike while the union aided the sit-in movement at non-integrated Dobbs House locations in the area. But Marshall Race apparently only saw the sit-ins as an opportunity to spread the union into other Dobbs House restaurants.[304]

There also was interest, at least, from some civil rights activists about the possibility of a labor civil rights coalition as a result of the strike. Both Clarence Coleman, southern regional director of the National Urban League, and Ralph Abernathy spoke of this possibility in meetings with the labor leaders. Neither the white leadership of Local 151, who had near complete control of the union, nor Atlanta's labor leaders were as interested or optimistic about that potential. In large measure this was this was because most unions did not want to alienate racist white workers.

Coleman asked labor attorney Joseph Jacobs about how the civil rights movement and Atlanta's labor movement could "draw a closer tie" together. Jacobs explained that labor

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[303] "What Happened to Jobs, Education, Health Et Al?," *Atlanta Inquirer,* January 18, 1963, 2.

[304] For discussions between Local 151 and civil rights activists about expanding the protest to other Dobbs Houses see Handwritten notes, June 12,1963 and June 14, 1963, Box 1061, Folder 547, Joseph Jacobs Papers; Handwritten Notes July 3, 1963 and July 5, 1963, Box 1062, Folder 549, Joseph Jacob Papers.

leaders in Atlanta did not think groups like Urban League and the Summit League were that interested in developing a relationship with labor. Jacobs also expressed concern that civil rights organizations would take over strikes of black workers because "all colored [will] keep together" and "call [the] shots." When Coleman asked about Atlanta's labor leaders' interest in publicly endorsing the sit-ins, Jacobs explained that he was not sure it was the right time but that he thought labor was "headed that way."[305]

The reluctance Jacobs expressed in his conversation with Coleman can also be gleaned from how Race and Jacobs handled the issue of race and discrimination during the strike. Even though they reached out to black ministers, black civic leaders, and civil rights activists, both Marshall Race and Joseph Jacobs tried to avoid making the strike too much about race or civil rights. As we'll see in the next section this stands in stark contrast to the union representatives of the International Chemical Workers Union who emphasized that racial discrimination was at the root of the workers' grievances with Scripto management. Discrimination is brought up by Dobbs House workers in affidavits, for example, one woman claimed that "so far as I know only the colored employees pay the 50 cents cost of the lunch and the white employees get their lunches free."[306] But official union documents – which had to be approved by Race – do not discuss discrimination.[307] In addition, it appears that Race and Joseph were concerned that the

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[305] Handwritten Notes on Telephone Conversation, July 1, 1964, Box 1062, Folder 552, Joseph Jacobs Papers.

[306] Affidavit, Christine Sturdivant, April 23, 1963, Box 1062, Folder 553, Joseph Jacobs Papers.

strike may have appeared to be only about black workers. In Jacobs files there is a draft of letter that the ministerial alliance sent to Ivan Allen. The opening line reads: "We, ministers are calling on you as Mayor of the City of Atlanta to assist us in helping the Negro Community in raising the economic level of our people." In Jacobs handwriting, there is an edit at the end of the sentence that added the clause "and all workers." The implication was that the strike could not just be about black workers, even though all but a handful of the strikers were black. Atlanta labor leaders, like Race and Jacobs, could not accept any vision for the city's labor movement that was not intentionally universal.[308]

Perhaps the white labor leaders' need to minimize race hurt the opportunity to create a more sustainable coalition during this strike. For most civil rights activists, creating a coalition with organized labor was not the primary purpose in supporting the strike. As Mike Sayer admitted, the only reason the student activists were involved in the strike was because almost all of the strikers were African American; most of the students were not interested in it solely as a labor issue. Nevertheless, Sayer suggested that an effort be made to convince more of the white workers, most of whom stayed on the job, to join the strike. He believed that allowing white workers to tell their own stories about working conditions at Dobbs House would have led to greater solidarity between white and black workers. Sayer did acknowledge the problem at the center of this desire, a truly nearly insurmountable problem; the involvement of the student movement made "white workers

[307] The one exception is the pamphlet created by the Ministers Committee and approved by Local 151. See Pamphlet, "Don't Take My Bread," no date, Box 1062, Folder 553, Joseph Jacobs Papers.

[308] Press Release, Negro Ministers of the City of Atlanta, No date, Box 1061, Folder 547, Joseph Jacobs Papers.

scared." But if there was more emphasis placed on organizing white workers, black community allies, not to mention black workers, could be more wary of supporting the strike and it was "possible to fracture [the fragile community-labor alliance] over racial issues."[309]

Local 151 and the larger Atlanta labor movement's involvement with the strike effectively ended on January 24, 1964. Dobbs House management announced that it would no longer negotiate with the union. January 24 was exactly one year after the NLRB certified Local 151 to represent the workers, and Dobbs House argued, with no proof, that it no longer had majority support from the workers. Of course, Dobbs House was likely correct that a majority of its employees did not support the union since it had effectively permanently replaced all striking workers. With Dobbs House cutting off negotiations before a new election, HERE and the local AFL-CIO decided to cut their losses and move on.[310]

In March 1964, the strikers still maintained the support of south Atlanta civic leaders Benny T. Smith and Robert Barnes, the president and vice-president of the Atlanta Civic Council. As with Local 151, the strikers and civic leaders chose to maintain their pressure on the city. Smith, for example, met with Ivan Allen and alderman Richard Freeman, who headed the aviation committee, though the politicians only said that they would "look into the matter," the same stance they had taken since April 1963. At this point, politics were also the main focus of the remaining strikers. Betty Turner, chairman of the "action

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[309] Handwritten note, "Meeting with Students," June 28, 1963, Box 1061, Folder 547 Joseph Jacobs Papers.

[310] "Dobbs House Denies Union," *The Journal of Labor,* January 31, 1964, 1.

committee" for the strikers, promised that the workers would register voters and campaign against politicians who "could settle this strike if they wanted to but have refused to do anything because all of us, except one, are Negroes." "If our voices are not heard at the negotiations table," another striker promised, "we will be heard at the polls." The strikers' actions did continue to draw some political interest. The Fulton County Citizens Democratic Club, founded as a way for black Democrats to participate in the party, appointed a committee headed by Leroy Johnson to investigate the strike. Johnson and others in the group were involved in meetings with the union months earlier, so it is not clear what more they expected to learn about the conflict. The last minute interest of the local civic groups and politicians changed nothing.[311]

Two hundred and fifty former Dobbs House employees were still out on strike in December 1964, twenty-one months after they first walked out on their jobs. That month, as the attention of most Atlanta civil rights and labor organizations was on the Scripto, Inc. strike, Virginia Love, a representative of the Dobbs House strikers, met with the ministers of Operation Breadbasket. The striking workers, she claimed, were still receiving "donations but seeing no activity," presumably she meant from allies in the community. A month after Love's presentation a Breadbasket committee met to discuss the strike, but it is not known what if anything was the result of the meeting. The Dobbs House strike was not brought up again in the monthly Breadbasket meetings.[312]

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[311] "Dobbs Strikers Vow War," *Atlanta Inquirer,* March 7, 1964, 1, 8.

[312] Minutes to Operation Breadbasket Meeting, December 13, 1964, Series II, Box 1, Folder 5, Fred Bennette Collection.

The last time the permanently replaced strikers appeared in the news was a short blurb in the *Daily World* in late February 1965. Columnist Harmon Perry, writing a month after the successful Scripto strike seemed to presage a civil rights-labor alliance, was frustrated that the striking workers at Dobbs House did not receive the same support. The strikers, Perry noted, "had been persistent in their effort to secure better job benefits" in spite of "abandonment by union leadership" and without "any concern from Negro leadership and the general public." "The finger of blame" for the failure of the Dobbs House strike, "can be rightfully pointed first at the union which has proven ineffective in its duty and at an unconcerned and disinterested community." Perry, however, was optimistic that "the Negro in the South [was] beginning to realize his alignment with organized labor as another avenue in his economic advancement," and that the alignment of organized labor and "a community concerned with the economic betterment of its citizens" could overcome "greater lines of resistance" than shown by Dobbs House.[313]

Scripto and the False Promise of an Alliance

Less than a year after civil rights and labor leaders abandoned their support of the Dobbs House strike, a walkout by nearly seven hundred African American women at the Scripto, Inc. factory renewed the possibility of a civil rights-labor alliance in Atlanta. Despite superficial similarities, both had majority African American workforce, support from Atlanta's organized labor, and the aid of civil rights leaders, there were important differences between the two protests. Unlike the Dobbs House strike, the Scripto strike

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[313] Harmon Perry "Focus on the Atlanta Scene," *Atlanta Daily World,* February 28. 1965, 4.

became national news when Martin Luther King Jr., announced that he and SCLC would put their full weight behind the workers and their union representatives in the International Chemical Workers Union (ICWU) Local 754. The Scripto strike also contrasted with the Dobbs House strike because the striking workers' chief complaint was explicitly about racial discrimination. Scripto, the striking women charged, kept black women – the vast majority of the workforce –in low-paid jobs, while skilled better paid jobs went almost exclusively to white men. And significantly, the Scripto strike ended in a victory for the striking workers. For participants and observers alike the victory appeared to be the first step toward a formative civil rights-labor alliance in the South. This alliance, though, never developed, and many of the weaknesses of a possible alliance can be seen in this victory.

Scripto had a unique place in Atlanta's history. The company was founded in 1919, when Monie Furst bought the defunct National Pencil Company factory from his father-in-law. The original factory, infamously, was the location of the murder of Mary Phagen in 1913, whose death led to the lynching of Jewish factory supervisor Leo Frank.[314] For a time, the company was the sole manufacturer of pencil lead in the country; it was also an innovator in new mechanic pencil technologies, and diversified into the production of butane lighters. In the mid-twentieth century it was a successful company that not only

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[314] For more on the Leo Frank case see Nancy MacLean, "The Leo Frank Case Reconsidered: Gender and Sexual Politics in the Making of Reactionary Populism," *The Journal of American History* 78 no. 3 (December 1991), 917-948; Steve Oney, *And the Dead Shall Rise: The Murder of Mary Phagan and he Lynching of Leo Frank* (New York: Vintage Books, 2004).

dominated its market share nationally but also expanded its production internationally to Canada, England, Australia, and Mexico.[315]

In 1931 Furst moved production to a brand new, city block-sized factory on Houston Street just off of Auburn Avenue. At the new location, Scripto became well-known for its employment of black women. By the early 1960s, African American women made up 85 percent of the factory's workforce. Scripto, especially in the 1940s and 1950s, was one of the few employment opportunities for black women outside of domestic service, laundry, and other low-paying service jobs. In fact, some white housewives even complained that because of Scripto "you couldn't get a cook in Atlanta."[316]

The international reach of Scripto and the decision by the company to hire predominantly black women brought the company acclaim from the region and nation-wide. In 1962 the Greater Atlanta Council on Human Relations, an interracial coalition of racial liberals, congratulated then Scripto president, James V. Carmichael, on receiving the E for Export Excellence Award from the U.S. Department of Commerce. In the congratulatory note, the Council added that "[i]n view of your non-discrimination merit employment practice, it is of particular significance to Atlanta and the South."[317] And Benjamin Mays, the esteemed president of Morehouse, wrote in an affidavit on behalf of the company, that "Scripto is not an anti-Negro enterprise and for anyone to so categorize

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[315] Charles A. Black, "Scripto Strikers Here Call for Word-Wide Boycott of Boycott," *Atlanta Inquirer,* December 5, 1964, 1.

[316] Quoted in Hooper and Hooper, "The Scripto Strike," 8.

[317] Press Release, Greater Atlanta Council on Human Relations, May 7, 1962, MSS 532, Series 1.1, Box 2, Folder 7, Eliza K. Paschall Papers.

it as such would be an injustice to the reputation it has earned in the Negro community over the years."[318]

Less than two years later, however, a majority of the black women working at the factory, tired of low pay, poor treatment, dangerous working conditions, and continued discrimination, revealed the hollowness of Scripto's reputation for non-discrimination employment practices. "For years we were afraid to speak out but now we are not afraid," one striker told reporters. "Scripto is rotten in its relationship to Negro employees. The years of degradation, humiliation, and inferiority are just about over for us."[319]

Much like at Dobbs House, the Scripto strike was the culmination of more than a year-long effort to win a collective bargaining contract. In September 1963, workers successfully voted for International Chemical Workers Union Local 754 to represent them. The vote for Local 754 was close, 519 to 428, and management believed that not enough workers favored a union to be willing to fight for a contract. Like many companies in the Sunbelt region at the time, Scripto stalled during negotiations. By November 1964, the workers were fed up. The day after Thanksgiving, November 27, nearly all of the first shift walked into a meeting with ICWU representative Jerry Levine, an international representative from Brooklyn, and demanded a strike vote. The strike demand caught Levine off guard and he suggested the workers delay any strike vote until after Christmas, but he eventually assented and an overwhelming majority of the

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[318] Benjamin E. Mays Affidavit, no date, Box 1, Folder 6, Scripto Strike Records, Southern Labor Archives, Georgia State University Library, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia, (Hereafter Scripto Strike Records).

[319] "Scripto Employee Tell of Bitter Experiences," *Atlanta Inquirer,* December 5, 1968, 1,3.

workforce, about 85 percent, voted in favor of a strike. Nearly 700 employees, all of whom were black women in unskilled positions, went out on strike. No workers in skilled positions, including six black men, joined the women on strike.[320]

Because of how close the vote in favor of ICWU representation, the solidarity shown in the early days of the strike caught management off guard. Yet there were factors, both long in the making and immediate, that created conditions for collective action by a vast majority of the factory's black workers. Significantly, there was already a tradition of unionism at the Scripto plant. In 1946, as I discussed above, the United Steel Workers with the help of local black preachers, including Reverend William Holmes Borders, organized workers at the plant. After a strike to force a contract, Scripto fired all but nineteen of the strikers, ending the steel workers' campaign for the time being. Six year later, however, in 1952, the steel workers again worked with the black women employees— this time at Scripto's short-lived ordnance plant. And again, Scripto fired many of the leading women behind the strike. Even though both campaigns ended in defeat they provided many Scripto workers, 183 women had worked there at least fifteen years, with a history and familiarity of labor organizing, how campaigns worked, how to build solidarity in the plant, and what they could expect from their employer.[321] This recent memory of labor activism separated the Scripto workers from the strikers at Dobbs House who had no such legacy to build on.

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[320] Hooper and Hooper; Vartanig G. Vartan, "Civil Rights Group Backs Scripto Strike in Atlanta," *New York Times,* December 17, 1964, 46.

[321] Hooper and Hooper, "The Scripto Strike," 18; see also Thompson, "Pens, Planes, and Politics," in *Reconsidering Southern Labor History,* eds., Hild and Merrit, 223-238.

Like the steelworkers in the 1940s, the ICWU worked with local black preachers to help organize workers outside of the factory gates. Martin Luther King Sr., again, was especially active in supporting the organizing campaign in 1963 and 1964. King and other preachers had direct connections with workers and a connection to the community that the labor organizers, both white and black, did not possess. Many of the striking women were members of the churches near Auburn Avenue. Strike leader Mary Gurey, for example, was an influential member at Ebenezer Baptist who had discussed the organizing campaign with Martin Luther King Sr. several times before the strike.[322] Strikers also had support from E.R. Searcy, the minister of Mt. Zion Second Baptist Church and a prominent member of Operation Breadbasket. Strikers held meetings at Mt. Zion Second Baptist church, right across the street from the factory, every Tuesday.[323] Levine and the ICWU clearly understood the important role the church and preachers held for many of these women. With this in mind, the ICWU had hired James Hampton, an experienced African American organizer and Baptist preacher, to lead the organizing drive in 1962. As Hooper and Hooper describe, Hampton, despite his organizing experience, first and foremost identified as a preacher.[324]

Not all influential local black ministers who worked near Auburn Avenue supported the strike. William Holmes Borders, who had made a career, in part, by connecting his large church and his teachings with a call for social activism and supported the 1946

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[322] Hooper and Hooper, "The Scripto Strike," 13.

[323] Raleigh Bryans, "Scripto, Union Slate Meeting On Strike," *Atlanta Journal,* December 1, 1965, 15.

[324] Hooper and Hooper, "The Scripto Strike," 6.

Scripto strike, refused to support the strike in 1964. Workers walking the picket line accused Borders of steering replacement workers to employment at the factory and even using a church van to help workers cross the picket line. Borders denied any such aid, but refused to change his mind.[325] Most contemporary observers and historians chalk up Borders' lack of support for the strikers to his friendship with James Carmichael the long-time Atlanta-based business leader and politician.[326] Borders' position against the strike highlights the difficulty black workers and unions had in building alliances with black civic and religious leaders in Atlanta.

In addition to the long organizing campaign, there were more immediate factors that that influenced the workers' decision to strike. Levine suggested that the women no longer wanted to wait for management to negotiate in good faith.[327] After losing its NLRB appeal in July 1964, and finally agreeing to negotiate with the ICWU, Scripto management attended negotiating meetings but showed little interest in coming to any quick compromises. For example, the initial demand by the union was a 25 cent raise an hour for the lowest paid workers. Scripto came back with the offer of a 2 percent raise for all unskilled workers (about 20 cents more a day) and 4 percent for skilled workers. Scripto added insult to injury when it offered this raise in lieu of the normal Christmas bonus[328] It certainly would have been clear to the Scripto workers that the union vote was

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[325] Jondelle Johnson, "Borders Denies Scripto Picket-Crossing Charges," *Atlanta Inquirer,* January 9, 1965, 1.

[326] Hooper and Hooper, "The Scripto Strike," 16; Honey, *To the Promised Land,* 91.

[327] Transcript of Meeting, R.T. Blackwell and Jerry Levine, no date, Box 172, Folder 39, SCLC Records ProQuest; Hooper and Hooper, "The Scripto Strike," 11.

not enough to bring about serious changes; instead they would have to try to force Scripto to act by way of a strike.

In addition to the heel-dragging by Scripto, relations between workers and management had deteriorated in the weeks leading up to the strike after a worker died on the factory premises. In late October, Margaret Brown, a molding machine operator, died after suddenly falling ill at work. After Brown fainted, the supervisor had her taken outside to get some air; where neither her coworkers, nor an ambulance that arrived thirty minutes later, were able to resuscitate her. Following her death, other Scripto employees accused the supervisor of negligence because he simply had Brown taken outside and laid on a stretcher, instead of quickly seeking medical attention.[329]

This was not the only incident in recent memory for the striking women. Working in the factory was dangerous, and many employees believed the company did not care enough about their working conditions. In 1962, for instance, twenty-year old Martha Ann Arnold lost her left hand after she reached into a machine that she believed was switched off. Scripto management evinced shockingly little sympathy for the injury. A personnel department employee told the press that Arnold would be allowed to return to work but "with the understanding that she is expected to carry her share of the load."[330] Another worker, Hattie Johnson, lost two fingers on her right hand, and later her job, in a

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[328] "Charge 'On Job' Discrimination; Union Strikes Ball-Pen Plant," *Chicago Daily Defender,* November 30, 1964, 3; Charles A. Black "SNCC Asks Suspension of Scripto Federal Contract," *Atlanta Inquirer,* December 19, 1964, 16.

[329] Jondelle Johnson, "Scripto Woman Employee Dies in Alley of Plant After Fall," *Atlanta Inquirer,* October 24, 1964, 1.

[330] "Scripto Employee Loses Hand In Machine," *Atlanta Inquirer,* July 28, 1962, 1.

workplace accident. Johnson, a member of the Atlanta chapter of SCLC, became an active presence during the strike, giving speeches about the dangers of factory work and the indifference of management.[331]

Dangerous workplace conditions and the poor relationship with Scripto management were common talking points during strike, but the most common grievance was low pay. Initially the workers demanded a twenty-five cent raise, but by fall 1964 they had lowered the amount to an eight-cent-an-hour raise. The striking women emphasized that low-wages were a product of racial and gender discrimination that resulted in very few black workers in any skilled positions and all black women — 85 percent of the workforce — in the lowest paid "unskilled positions." In fact, Scripto employed only six black workers, all men, in "skilled" positions. The lowest paid women at the factory made $1.25 an hour, which over forty hours a week for fifty-two weeks was only $2,600 hundred dollars — four hundred dollars below the federal government's poverty line. Nor was there any room for promotion for these women. The workers felt their charges of discrimination were validated when in November, the company only offered a two percent increase for unskilled workers and four percent increase for skilled workers.

Scripto defended its hiring and promotion policies by claiming — as nearly all employers did at that time — that there simply were no qualified black workers for skilled positions in the factory. Scripto vice president J.E. Aderhold explained that "We need tool-and-die makers, but you can't find Negro tool-and-die makers in Atlanta." He added that all the unskilled workers happened to be black women because the "plant is in

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[331] "World-Wide Boycott Possible Against Scripto for Wage Bias," *Atlanta Inquirer,* December 5, 1964, 1.

a colored section and white women just don't apply."[332] According to Scripto's management, it was merely responding to the labor market. And it is certainly true that in a market defined by racial discrimination and segregation, black workers rarely had the opportunity to learn occupational skills, and white and black women often did not work in the same industries. Scripto, though, was not outside of this market but participated in shaping it. As the black workers demanded, Scripto had the power to provide training and offer opportunities for advancement to their low-paid low-skilled black women employees, they simply chose not.

The striking workers and their allies in the civil rights movement and ministerial ranks saw the union as an institution that would work on the black workers' behalf to challenge segregation at the workplace. Levine and the ICWU fully embraced the strike as a struggle against racial discrimination and exploitation. Early on in their organizing campaign – more than a year before the strike – the ICWU used rhetoric that spoke specifically to the history and experience of the black workers. One handout read: "Scripto employees are not slaves! They are entitled to the same rights and protections any other American citizen enjoys!"[333] During the strike, workers and their allies continued to reference slavery, carrying placards on the picket line that asserted "We Won't Be Slaves No More."[334] Levine also fully adopted the workers' stance that Scripto

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[332] Paul Good, "Dr. King's Group Enters Labor Dispute in Atlanta," *Washington Post,* December 5, 1964, A12.

[333] ICWU Handout, "What You May Expect Scripto to Do During the Next Few Days," September 11, 1963, Box 1, Folder 3, Scripto Strike Records.

[334] Vartanig G. Vartan, "Civil Rights Group Backs Scripto Strike in Atlanta," *New York Times,* December 17, 1964, 46.

practiced employment discrimination. In a letter to AFL-CIO president George Meany, Levine explained that "we considered the offer [of different wage increases for skilled and unskilled workers] racial discrimination."[335] And Levine told reporters that "We feel the wage offer discriminates against the Negro employe."[336] In embracing the strike as, in part, a civil rights campaign, Levine and the ICWU separated themselves from nearly every other white labor official in Atlanta. Even in a case like the Dobbs House strike, where the strikers were nearly all African American and the campaign sought out aid from the black community, Marshall Race and the other white union leaders were careful to not emphasize issues specifically related to racial discrimination and exploitation.

When SCLC came to the workers' aid it was the issue of racist hiring and promotion practices and the low wages of the black women that the civil rights activists fully embraced. In a telegram to Scripto chairman James Carmichael sent on November 29 announcing his support of the strike, King Jr. explained "this is a time for the removal of racial barriers, and the strengthening of democracy. Yet Scripto seems to persist in a racially unjust, anti-union policy."[337] Operation Breadbasket grounded its support in opposition to Scripto's discriminatory hiring and promotion practices. In a resolution announcing support for the pickets and boycott on all Scripto products, the ministers of Operation Breadbasket condemned the company because it had "failed to eliminate job

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[335] Jerry Levine to George Meany, December 16, 1964, Box 1, Folder 4, Scripto Strike Records.

[336] Vartanig G. Vartan, "Civil Rights Group Backs Scripto Strike in Atlanta," *New York Times,* December 17, 1964, 46.

[337] Telegram, Martin Luther King Jr. to James V. Carmichael, November 29, 1964, Box 1, Folder 8, Scripto Strike Records.

discrimination." "More than 700 Scripto employees are Negro and less than 10," the resolution highlighted, "classified as skilled personnel."[338]

Like most employers involved in labor conflicts with black workers at this time, Scripto managers attempted to define the dispute as merely economic. They vehemently denied the charges of racial discrimination and segregation and argued that the charges were "injected by the union after the strike was called."[339] It was management's bet that if it could define the dispute as one over wages and union recognition rather than racial injustice then it had a better chance of defeating the strikers. It is telling that when Scripto made some concessions in a meeting with Levine in late December, the concessions related to the discrimination charges. Management offered a 4 percent raise to all employees – rather than the initial offer of 2 percent to unskilled workers -- and promised to offer training and promotion options for workers in unskilled positions. Levine turned the deal down because the wage increase was insufficient and Scripto failed to offer the dues checkoff. Scripto, likely, was willing to concede here because it would lessen the damaging charges, the charges that brought national attention to the strike, that Scripto discriminated against its black women employees.

The support of black religious and civil rights leaders-was critical to the strike's success. That the strikers received the level of support from the community they did was, in part, lucky timing. The strike began in late November 1964 and ended in January 1965, after the presidential election and before SCLC's participation in the campaign for voting

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[338] Resolution by Operation Breadbasket, Box 299, Folder 17, SCLC Records Emory.

[339] Vartanig G. Vartan, "Civil Rights Group Backs Scripto Strike in Atlanta," *New York Times,* December 17, 1964, 46.

rights in Selma, Alabama. There was no other major campaign for Atlanta's civil rights activists and black religious leaders to prioritize in this period. In contrast, during the Dobbs House strike, activists showed interest in aiding the strike, but their priority, especially by October 1963, was the campaign against desegregation in the downtown Atlanta.

King and other members of SCLC, especially its affiliate director C.T. Vivian, saw the strike as a chance to build a working coalition between the civil rights movement and the labor movement in the South. They believed that the alliance created during the Scripto strike could be the beginning of a new phase of the civil rights movement, where a coalition of civil rights groups and progressive labor unions targeted economic injustice and exploitation of the black working class. In an interview in early December, King explained his larger vision for SCLC's relationship with labor union. SCLC "decided that now is the time to identify our movement very closely with labor." When a journalist asked if Scripto was the just the beginning of a larger movement King replied "That is right. There will be many more to follow." C.T Vivian also made it clear to SCLC affiliates that the Scripto strike could be the beginning of an ongoing relationship with the labor movement. "Atlanta will become a model project for labor unions and Civil Rights cooperation," he wrote in a mailer about the boycott. "We must not fail."[340] Even more so than King, Vivian pushed for SCLC to use the strike to build a relationship with labor unions. Born in Missouri and raised in southern Illinois, Reverend C.T. Vivian had more personal experience with unions than many of the southern preachers in SCLC. Adam

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[340] Letter, C.T. Vivian to Affiliate Leaders, December 7, 1964, Box 299, Folder 17, SCLC Records Emory.

Fairclough explained that "Vivian's outlook had a tinge of the Old Left radicalism of the Roosevelt era. An admirer of Bayard Rustin, he had an interest in broader social and economic issues that unusual in SCLC."[341] Vivian believed that success in the Scripto strike could lead larger things for a civil rights labor alliance. "Let us see here in Atlanta that this is not just a protest but a movement."[342]

While Vivian was enthusiastic about the possible labor civil rights alliance, he was under no illusions that most of organized labor, especially in Atlanta, could be counted on as true allies for the civil rights movement.[343] Forty years later, in an interview with Michael Honey, Vivian was still frustrated by the lack of support the civil rights movement and black workers received from the labor movement. "We depended on labor to deliver [support for civil rights causes] for us and it didn't happen," he explained to the historian. Even if the support was less than satisfactory, Vivian still believed that labor was "one of the only allies that black people really had, and one of the only one that needed us as much as needed them."[344] King too shared in Vivian's frustration with many labor unions. "Today when sentiment for equal rights is powerful, labor is timid," King

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[341] Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America,* 168.

[342] Paul Good, "Dr. King's Group Enters Labor Dispute in Atlanta," *Washington Post,* December 5, 1964, A12.

[343] For more on labor unions and the civil rights movement, especially at the national level, see Jones, *The March on Washington*; Judith Stein, *Running Steel, Running America,* 69-120; Robert Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom,* 164-174; Kevin Boyle, *The UAW and the Heyday of American Liberalism,* 161-184; For the relationship between Southern state AFL-CIO conferences and the civil rights movement see Draper, *Conflicts of Interest.*

[344] Honey, *To the Promised Land,* 90.

explained to the Illinois State AFL-CIO Convention just months before the Scripto strike. "Much of labor has the posture of a moderate, and some of it is reactionary."[345] Speaking before Local 1199, a New York-based union that organized non-professional workers and actively sought to help the black freedom movement, King admitted that "there are times…that I'm often disenchanted with some segments of the power structure of the labor movement…If all labor would emulate what [1199] have been doing over the years our nation would be closer to victory in the fight to eliminate poverty and injustice."[346]

The coalition formed between SCLC and the ICWU did not go unnoticed by the press. For the national press, the strike seemed to augur a turning point in the civil rights movement and the labor movement. As Charles J. Levy, writing in *The Nation,* saw it: "The Atlanta [civil rights-labor] coalition offers a chance to revitalize both the civil rights and the trade union movements."[347] And Vartanig G. Vartan of the *New York Times* predicted that "any future alliance between civil rights organizations and labor unions may hinge upon the outcome of the Scripto situation."[348]

In Atlanta newspapers, both white and black owned, the implications of the Scripto strike for a civil rights-labor alliance went largely uncommented on. The

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[345] Martin Luther King Jr., "Labor Cannot Stand Still Long or it Will Slip Backward," speech before the Illinois State AFL-CIO, October 7, 1965, in *"All Labor Has Dignity,"* ed. Honey, 117.

[346] Martin Luther King Jr., "The Other America," speech before Local 1199 Salute to Freedom, March 10, 1968, in *"All Labor Has Dignity,"* ed. Honey, 154.

[347] Charles J. Levy, "Scripto on Strike: The Race-Wage Picket Line," *The Nation,* January 11, 1965, 32.

[348] Vartanig G. Vartan, "Civil Rights Group Backs Scripto Strike in Atlanta," *New York Times,* December 17, 1964, 46.

Constitution barely even covered the strike, while the *Journal's* coverage focused on the claims of the two opposing parties: that according to the strikers and their allies Scripto discriminated against black women, or according to management that this was a typical labor dispute over wages and representation. Unsurprisingly, the black-owned newspapers gave the strike much more coverage. The *Inquirer* was outspoken in its support of the strike. "We applaude [sic] the announced determination of the employees, unions ministers and SCLC," the editors wrote, "to see that there is a just settlement of the strike in the interest of the hundreds of workers now being inconvenienced by Scripto's niggardly policy."[349] In its coverage, the *Inquirer* focused on plight of the workers, their demands, and the boycott instigated by SCLC; the importance of a possibly burgeoning civil rights-labor alliance was not considered.

Nor did the *Daily World*, which covered the strike more closely than any outlet, discuss the implications of a possible alliance. The strike was an important local matter that required attention because of the involvement of over 700 black working-class women and many of the leading black ministers and civil rights activists in the community. While the *Daily World* editors were sympathetic to the workers claims of mistreatment, they believed, as was their long-standing position, that the strike was deleterious for the workers and the community and could be resolved by both parties maintaining open communication. The editors were careful to not side with either position but did "agree with those who advocate a resumption of talks between the two sides."[350] The *Daily World* went so far as to schedule a meeting of black civic leaders,

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[349] "Scripto Strike is Long Overdue," *Atlanta Inquirer,* December 5, 1964, 4.

who went unnamed, to call for a resumption of talks. As with William Border Holmes, there was a segment of elite black reformers in the city who did not openly side with the strikers. Some like C.A. Scott and the *Daily World,* called for open communication, others like Jesse Hill attempted to serve as third party mediators.[351] Even with national attention and the support of Martin Luther King Jr., the strikers could not garner the outspoken support of many important black civic and religious leaders. Despite attempts to shape the strike as part of the next frontier of the civil rights movement, many did not treat it as such.

In addition to bringing the strike to the attention of the national press, King and SCLC aided the strikers by implementing a nation-wide boycott. Since the founding of Operation Breadbasket two years earlier, the boycott had been SCLC's preferred strategy to convince companies to changed their personnel politics. The Scripto boycott would be SCLC's first experiment at a nation-wide boycott, but it was part of SCLC's increasing belief in the efficacy of this tool. During the Atlanta campaign to end segregation in downtown businesses in January 1964, SCLC executive director Reverend Wyatt Tee Walker outlined a plan for activists that included a multi-city boycott. Then during the Scripto strike, King also called for a nation-wide boycott of everything produced in Mississippi because of the state's "mockery of law and justice "in the wake of the murders of civil rights workers James Chaney, Michael Schwermer, and Andrew

[350] "Let Talks Resume in The Scripto Controversy," *Atlanta Daily World,* December 13, 1964, 4.

[351] Hooper and Hooper, "The Scripto Strike," 17.

Goodman.[352] Following the Selma voting rights campaign, SCLC again considered a national boycott of a state's industries, this time Alabama.[353]

SNCC too aided the strikers. Scripto had two production contracts with the federal government, and SNCC chair John Lewis hoped to convince government officials to force Scripto into making concessions during the strike. Lewis wrote to the administrator of the General Services Administration, the department awarding Scripto the contracts, urging the GSA to "suspend the contract until the strike is over and the workers are back at their jobs." Lewis emphasized that the only way Scripto was able to submit the winning bid for the contract was because "low wages they pay their Negro employees." Black workers, Lewis explained, remained in the lowest paying jobs because "the company continues to hire whites to fill vacant skilled positions rather than promote competent Negroes."[354] Lewis' letter did not go unnoticed; the GSA administrator informed Lewis that the department would make all necessary data available to the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity.[355] Along with lobbying the federal government, SNCC also asked its members to spread word of the boycott.

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[352] "King: Boycott All Mississippi Goods," *Atlanta Journal,* December 11, 1964. The NAACP and CORE joined SCLC in the call to boycott products manufactured in Mississippi. "Urge Total Boycott of Miss.: Farmer, King Advocate Step," *The Baltimore Afro-American,* December 19, 1964; "'No Sale' Sign Hung Up: Store Rejects Southern Goods," *The Baltimore Afro-American,* January 16, 1965, 14.

[353] Garrow, *Bearing the Cross,* 414-418.

[354] Letter, Lewis to Bernard Boutin, December 9, 1969, Box 1, Folder 4, Scripto Strike Records Southern Labor Archives, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia.

[355] Press Release, "Scripto's $1/2 Million Contracts Under Investigation, SNCC Told," January 9, 1965, Box 299, Folder 17, SCLC Records Emory.

Boycotts take time, energy, support, and crucially boots on the ground. Operation Breadbaskets boycotts in Atlanta, for example, required the participation of a network of preachers persuading their congregation to boycott products and for the implantation of pickets at stores and bakeries. These were localized boycotts, targeting a single business or a few locations downtown, not a nationwide boycott, and the effect of Breadbasket boycotts were often only small concessions from employers.[356] In modern American history, the best example of a successful nationwide boycott was the United Farm Workers boycotts against grape growers. The success of this boycott depended on the activity of volunteers and farmworkers in cities across the country spreading word of the boycott, picketing grocery stores, attending meetings with civic leaders.[357]

C.T. Vivian certainly understood the work required to hold an effective boycott. As SCLC's affiliate director, Vivian was in charge of coordinating the boycott with affiliate branches of SCLC across the country.[358] In a letter to affiliates dated December 10,

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[356] SCLC activists continued to hold onto the belief in the effectiveness of consumer boycotts to aid workplace disputes. During the 1969 Charleston hospital strike, Andrew Young suggested to Stanley Levison that bringing in national labor leaders would have little effect on the strike unless "those labor folks would agree to boycott South Carolina products." Levison quickly quashed the suggestion, telling Young: "You can't do that. You tend to raise that [boycotts] all the time. It's an impossibility – not unless there was a celebrated product." Telephone Conversation, Stanley Levison and Andrew Young, May 2, 1969, Folder 001607_009_0469, FBI surveillance of SCLC via surveillance of home telephone of Stanley Levison, former adviser to Martin Luther King Jr., May 1, 1969-May 17, 1969, accessed at ProQuest History Vault, Civil Rights and Black Freedom Struggle (Hereafter Levison FBI Transcripts).

[357] For more on United Farm Workers boycott see Frank Bardacke, *Trampling Out the Vintage: Cesar Chavez and the Two Souls of the United Farm Workers* (London: Verso, 2012); Lauren Araiza, *To March for Others: The Black Freedom Struggle and the United Farm Workers,* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

Vivian laid out a series of steps that activists should take to implement the boycott. He instructed the affiliates to "organize a telephone committee" to contact other local organizations and churches informing them of the strike, "form teams of three" to go store to store asking merchants not to sell Scripto products, make and distribute leaflets, and "picket any merchant that does not comply."[359] It is difficult to discern how the local affiliates responded to the boycott request. There is no evidence in Atlanta, for example, that SCLC or other activists, set up pickets outside stores selling Scripto supplies. Although he was not a reliable source Scripto president Carl Singer told the press that the boycott "had no effect on company sales."[360] Crucially, there also was not really enough time between the call for a boycott and the end of the protest on Christmas Eve, a period of two weeks.

As with the Dobbs strike, the Scripto strike and the boycott were supported by local Atlanta labor leaders. At their December 9 meeting, the executive board of the Atlanta Labor Council agreed to give full support to the Scripto strike. Also like the Dobbs House strike, the loudest support for the strike from the ALC came from the top echelon of leadership. Wiley Montague, president of the Georgia AFL-CIO, insisted that Atlanta

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[358] SCLC was not a membership organization, instead when it was organized in 1958 as an umbrella organization with local affiliate organizations paying a small fee in return for representation to SCLC convention and advice and assistance from SCLC leadership. Most often these were local newly organized minister-led organizations modeled after the Montgomery Improvement Association that was formed to support the bus boycott in 1956. And all but one, a fundraising organization in Los Angeles, were located in the South. Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America,* 32.

[359] Letter, C.T. Vivian to Affiliate Leaders, December 7, 1964, Box 299, Folder 17, Southern Christian Leadership Conference Records.

[360] "Scripto Boycott 'Has No Effect,'" *Chicago Defender,* December 24, 1965.

labor needed to back the striking women, and even promised to donate five dollars of his own a week to the strike fund.[361] Montague also walked the picket line along with the striking women and civil rights activists. Other white labor leaders joining Montague on the picket line included J.O. Moore, president of the ALC, J.W. Giles, an IBEW official, and Nicholas Bonanno, an international representative for the ILGWU. Bonanno believed the strike was particularly important opportunity for Atlanta labor to organize more black workers. "If we lose this strike," he told a reporter, "we will lose strength, power and idealism." More so than most in Atlanta's white labor organizations, even among these labor leaders eager to support strikes by majority-black workforces, Bonnano wanted to harness the energy and influence of the civil rights movement for the Atlanta labor movement.[362]

Of course, not everybody in the Atlanta labor movement supported King and SCLC's involvement in the strike. At one Atlanta Labor Council meeting, a member warned "You better be careful about that Scripto strike — Martin Luther King is trying to run it."[363] His exact complaint with King was not clear, though it is not difficult to assume that racism and disregard for the civil rights movement informed his complaint.

By late December negotiations reached a stalemate. Scripto, as we saw earlier, offered a four cent across the board raise in order to "resolve this totally unnecessary

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[361] "W.H. Montague of Georgia Dies," *AFL-CIO News,* July 6, 1968, 3.

[362] "Labor Council Pledges Full Support to Scripto Strikers," *Journal of Labor,* December 11, 1964, 1

[363] Charles J. Levy, "Scripto on Strike: The Race-Wage Picket Line," *The Nation,* January 11, 1965, 32.

disruption."[364] After negotiations broke down, Carl Singer, who replaced Carmichael as Scripto president just prior to the strike, bypassed the union and began negotiations with Martin Luther King Jr. directly. Over the course of four meetings that were kept secret from Levine and the ICWU, King and Singer, both of whom were eager to end the strike, reached an agreement that SCLC would end its boycott and Singer would re-implement the Christmas bonus.[365]

Shortly after King and Singer came to an agreement on Christmas Eve, SCLC held a meeting at Ebenezer Baptist to inform the union and striking workers of the Christmas truce. Crucially, the meeting was not to let the workers vote on a proposal, but instead was just to inform them of the agreement. This meeting was also the first time Jerry Levine had heard about the truce. Shocked and frustrated, and thinking it was just a proposal, he immediately tried to talk King out of the deal. Fred Bennette, the young Operation Breadbasket activist and a mentee of both reverends King, also opposed the agreement and asked Andrew Young, who was running the meeting, "Why don't you let the professional negotiators do the negotiating."[366]

The agreement was, according to federal mediators involved, "a good will agreement" that opened the door for final negotiations between the union and the company. After King went around his back, Jerry Levine no longer had the standing to continue to represent the workers in the negotiations. Instead labor lawyer Joseph Jacobs

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[364] Hooper and Hooper, "The Scripto Strike," 21.

[365] Hooper and Hooper, "The Scripto Strike," 23.

[366] Hooper and Hooper, "The Scripto Strike," 24.

and ICWU vice-president Harley Thomas took the lead. Under the final agreement, Scripto agreed to a four percent raise for all 900 employees and another four percent raise for each of the final two years of the contract. In addition, Scripto agreed to not fire any employees, neither the striking workers nor their replacements, and agreed to one of ICWU's main demands, the deduction of union dues from employees' checks. The company also agreed to begin an apprentice program to train women for better paying skilled positions.[367]

The strike was unambiguously a victory for the workers, the ICWU, and SCLC. They had won a contract with a wage increase, albeit far removed from their initial demand of 25 cents, automatic dues collection, and the promise of a program for internal promotions. The black ministers who were heavily involved in Atlanta's civil rights movement, provided key organizational support for the strikers from the beginning of the organizational campaign through the strike. Churches, especially Ebenezer and Mt. Zion Second Baptist**,** were the most common meeting space for the strikers. Ministers used their sermons and church space to advertise the strike. And churches also served as a network outside the plant where Scripto employees could discuss workplace and strike issues among themselves and with others in the community.

Civil rights activists and other black community allies also helped shape the narrative of the strike. As we have seen, Scripto wanted to depict the strike as a standard labor dispute and frequently disputed charges that it discriminated against its black women

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[367] "Scripto Signs Union Contract," *Washington Post,* January 21, 1964, A4; "Three-Year Pact Ends Local 754 Strike at Scripto," *The International Chemical Worker,* January 1965, found in Box 1, Folder 10, Scripto Strike Records.

employees. From the beginning of the strike, however, discrimination was the common charge adopted by SCLC, Operation Breadbasket, and other allies. As Scripto understood, this made it seem even less sympathetic and put it in a difficult position to win the public relations battle. The strikers were aided in the public relations department by the involvement of King Jr. His support and presence on the picket line automatically made the strike a national story.

Historian Gordon Mantler argues that King "undermined the process" when he secretly met with Scripto president Singer and called off the boycott. He certainly usurped power and made a unilateral undemocratic decision to negotiate secretly with Singer, but it is not clear just how much more Scripto would have conceded without King's intervention. In the prior year plus of negotiations Scripto had not budged. The strike did force the company to pare down its production, but the factory was still running and the company was able to bring in replacement workers. There was little in Atlanta's labor history to suggest that these striking workers alone – whose skills the company viewed as easily replaceable – would have been able to force a concession from the company.

At the same time, it is clear that the boycott, as SCLC half-heartedly implemented, effective. The strike, after all, was not the main priority for many of the civil rights activists. Those working in SCLC and SNCC both prioritized the voting rights campaign in Alabama that was soon to become a national news story. Continued engagement with the strike, likely, would have fallen by the wayside for many of these activists, as had happened during the Dobbs House strike. In the end, the striking women won many of

their demands, even if the raise was far less than they had envisioned, and King and SCLC were able move on to their voting rights campaign in Alabama.

But what did the victory say about the future of the civil rights-labor coalition, which some major national newspapers believed was the true significance of the strike? Outside of the 1968 Memphis sanitation strike, the Scripto strike is the most well-known of Martin Luther King Jr's involvements with union struggles. It is also a clear example of the potential promises but also weaknesses of SCLC's participation in labor disputes. As his biographer Thomas Jackson found**,** "King remained ambivalent toward labor and unwilling to spend time or resources supporting local union organizing."[368] While he supported the right to organize and believed black workers needed labor unions, just as organized labor needed to accept black workers, his support for unions was, as C.T. Vivian explained, more "intellectual than experiential." King may not have known, and certainly was not that interested in, the culture, norms, practices, and customs of organized labor. He was a middle class, southern Baptist preacher, he certainly did not have much experience with labor unions prior to the late 1950s. Yet it is not exactly as Lauren Araiza argues that "In supporting the Scripto strike, King was therefore ministering to his flock more than demonstrating his support for organized labor."[369] King, influenced by A. Philip Randolph, Bayard Rustin and others, genuinely believed in the important role labor unions could play in the lives of the black working class, and the crucial role labor unions could play in a larger political alliance.

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[368]Jackson, *From Civil Rights to Human Rights,* 88.

[369] Araiza, *To March for Others,* 117.

Sometimes, however, the expectations and demands of his civil rights movement did not align with the labor movement. By late December King was the face of the strike. His support was the reason that the national press, including the *New York Times,* the *Washington Post,* and the *Wall Street Journal,* covered the strike. Likely, King wanted a victory but also wanted the strike to end quickly. John Aderhold, a Scripto executive who attended at least one of the meetings between King and Singer, told an interviewer that King had mentioned that he would have preferred to be spending his time in preparation for the voting rights campaign in Alabama. But he also wanted a victory, not only for the workers, but also for SCLC to hang their hats on. Bad press from a defeat would have fallen harder on King and his organization.[370]

Scripto seemed to some of the participants as a perfect jumping off point for a larger alliance between organize labor and the civil rights movement. King's decision to go behind the back of Levine apparently had little impact on the desire of Levine or the ICWU to advance a working relationship with SCLC. Levine, years later refused to blame King, for SCLC's decision to call of the boycott, instead he blamed King's aide Andrew Young. "Young, you know, went down and withdrew the boycott for the Christmas bonus, I do know that."[371] Perhaps because SCLC did help in the victorious strike, and because of the national publicity that the strike brought the ICWU, the unions' leaders were careful to not openly discuss any frustration with King and SCLC. Instead the union continued to look for ways to work with the civil rights organization. In late

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[370] John Aderhold, Interviewed by Hartwell and Susan Hooper, June 24, 1996, Box 1, Folder 13, Scripto Records.

[371] Hooper and Hooper, "The Scripto Strike," 24.

1965 the ICWU and SCLC held discussions about formalizing an alliance. In meetings attended by Harley Thomas and Randolph Blackwell, SCLC's Program Director, the ICWU offered to fund and train an SCLC staff member in the "union's policies, practices, and history" in order for the staff member to serve as a liaison between the two organizations. Thomas also offered to pay the salary and expenses of any staff members that SCLC lent to the union to aid in organizing other plants in the South. The union leader thought that SCLC would be particularly important in connecting the union with "Negro residents [in the communities the ICWU was organizing] who abilities and influence could be available to the Union as it seeks to establish confidence of the community toward the aims of the Union." Specifically, the ICWU wanted SCLC to help organize "the U.S. Gypsum plant in Greenville, Miss., where there are 800 persons employed, with more than 70% Negro." SCLC, however, did not move forward with the Greenville campaign or with the ICWU more generally.[372]

In Atlanta, Jerry Levine tried to develop an alliance between local labor unions and civil rights activists. In March 1965, Jerry Levine wrote letters to labor leaders Jimmy Hoffa, George Meany, and Walter Reuther, announcing the creation of The Alliance for Social, Economic, and Political Progress. The Alliance was made up of a collection of civil rights, religious, and labor leaders from Atlanta. Atlanta civil rights leaders and their labor allies hoped to build off their victory during the Scripto strike two months earlier. "With the successful conclusion of the Scripto strike," Levine explained, "the informal

[372] Memorandum, "A Proposal," International Chemical Workers Union to Southern Christian Leadership Conference, November 24, 1965, Box 174, Folder 7, "Memoranda – 1965-1966, SCLC Records ProQuest.

group which helped the ICWU win decided to continue working together for their mutual benefit." Levine served as the secretary of the new Alliance and E.H. Dorsey, the pastor at Tabernacle Baptist Church, was the group's president. Dorsey, as a member of Operation Breadbasket and the president of the Baptist Ministers Alliance was in an ideal position to bring black religious and civil rights leaders on board to the new organization. Joining this group was a collection of prominent labor leaders, including the president of the Georgia State AFL-CIO, Wiley Montague. While he did not join the group, J.O. Moore, the president of the Atlanta Labor Council**,** did endorse the Alliance. An announcement in the Atlanta-based *Journal of Labor* explained that the Alliance planned to "involve itself with job training, equal employment, and voting opportunities."[373]

The Alliance, however, disappeared almost as soon as it was formed. In the same March 1965 letter to national labor leaders, Levine requested material – cars, specifically – for the "voter registration campaign of Dr. King's SCLC in the Black Belt of Alabama." The Alliance also led an effort that same month to reform the discriminatory hiring practices of the Georgia State Labor Department.[374] After March, the Alliance all but disappears from the record. There were meetings advertised until December 1965, with Levine replaced by E.H. Dorsey by the summer, but little else apparently was accomplished.

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[373] "New Organization to Coordinate Activities of Labor, Religious, and Civil Rights Groups," *Journal of Labor,* March 19, 1965.

[374] Letter, Robert Carey to Joseph Boone, March 26, 1965, Series 1.1 Box 4, Folder 5, Eliza Paschall Papers.

After 1965, the moment for a coalition between labor and civil rights, nationally and in Atlanta, largely passed for the time being. There were a few exceptions, as we will see in later chapters, in Atlanta none more important than the alliance between public sector workers, AFSCME, and civil rights activists. If anything, civil rights activists spent more energy in the following decade looking to expand the black freedom struggle into the workplace. The economic dimension remained alive and well but the form that it assumed was different than the classic alliance model some envisioned. By the early 1970s the campaigns that developed in Atlanta often focused on the development of black-led organizations both inside and outside the workplace. Much like with USW Local 2401, unions were often in opposition to the organizing, demonstrations, and strikes of the black working class. As the 1960s turned into the 1970s, the main disputes that civil rights activists participated in at the workplace were about the wielding of black social, political, and economic influence within white-controlled institutions.

Chapter 3: Strike Fever, Hosea Williams and the Struggle for Workplace Rights and Community Power in Atlanta, 1972-1973

In the early 1970s, strike fever swept through Atlanta. From Spring 1972 to Fall 1973 black workers participated in strikes, pickets, and boycotts at more than two dozen workplaces. Rank-and-file strikes, like these in Atlanta, erupted throughout the United States and Europe in the late 1960s and 1970s. Workers struck for a variety of reasons: unresponsive unions, automation, low pay, factory speed ups. Strong economic conditions – a tight labor market and expanded prosperity – that were products of the last years of the post- World War II economic growth, provided workers with the extra security to walk off their jobs. Just as influential were social and political protests of the previous decade, including radical student movements, global anti-colonialism, anti-war resistance, and the civil rights movement radicalized workers.[375]

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[375] For works on the rank-and-file and labor union movements of this period see Brenner, Brenner, and Winslow, eds., *Rebel Rank and File*; Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit? Politics, Labor, and Race in a Modern American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Cowie, *Stayin' Alive;* Lane Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door: Union Organizing in the 1970s and the Roots of a New Economic Divide* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Moody, *An Injury to All*; Aaron Brenner, "Rank-and-File Rebellion, 1966-1975," (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1996); Kieran Walsh-Taylor, "Turn to the Working Class: The New Left, Black Liberation, and the U.S. Labor Movement (1967-1981)." (PhD dissertation, University of North Carolina, 2007). For works on the changing economic conditions in postwar America see Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence* (London: Verso, 2006); Patterson, *Grand Expectation*. For postwar economic changes in Atlanta see Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta*; Allen, *Atlanta Rising*; Irene Valerie Holliman, "From 'Crackertown' to the 'ATL'."

Black Atlantans, inspired by the black freedom movement and aided by veterans of the civil rights movement, protested at least two dozen workplaces that included Holy Family and South Fulton Hospitals, Church's Chicken and Red Lobster, Citizens Trust and C&S banks, Sears, J.C. Penney's, and Rich's department stores, Reed's Drugstore, and Nabisco and Mead Packaging factories. The size of the protests ranged from a seven-week strike of over seven hundred employees at a Mead Packaging factory to a three-woman strike at Atlanta Hospital. Grievances varied from protest to protest; some concerned union representation and illegal terminations, while others objected to unsafe working conditions, dismally low wages, or unjust promotional practices. The most frequent complaints dealt with racial harassment and racial discrimination. Even the protesters whose demands had little do with directly alleviating the effects of discrimination identified racial inequality as the underlying cause of their workplace discontent. Neither labor unions, often led by white men, nor white coworkers showed much interest in supporting these protests. These were campaigns led by black workers for black workers. It is not surprising then that these workers placed their workplace protests within the tradition of Atlanta's black freedom movement. As striking hospital workers put it, "the labor struggle here is no different from the one that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. waged in Memphis, Tenn. or Dr. Ralph David Abernathy waged in Charleston, S.C."[376]

To right these wrongs, workers sought help from civil rights leaders, particularly

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[376] Press Release, Holy Family Hospital Employees for Better Working Conditions, no date, Box 1002, Folder 24, Atlanta Labor Council Records, Southern Labor Archives, Special Collections Department, Pullen Library, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia, (Hereafter ALC Records).

those associated with SCLC. It made sense that workers who understood their protests as an extension of the civil rights movement would turn to veterans of SCLC for help. After all, SCLC, particularly after the Memphis sanitation strike, sought to place workers' rights into its vision of the civil rights movement. In the post-King years, SCLC struggled for funding, support, and victories, yet some of their most meaningful efforts came from aiding black workers' struggles for racial and economic justice.[377]

Among SCLC activists in Atlanta, Hosea Williams was the most vocal and influential supporter of the strike wave. Beginning with the Holy Family Hospital protest in March 1972, African American workers turned to Williams and his newly created SCLC branch, Metro Atlanta/DeKalb SCLC, to provide institutional support and leadership. Williams, often stubborn, volatile, inconsistent, and arrogant, could be extremely difficult to work with. Despite a troubled reputation, his connections to Martin Luther King Jr., his skills as an organizer and public speaker, and the respect of Atlanta's black working class afforded Williams a certain amount of influence throughout the city.

In protesting discriminatory practices at the workplace, Williams and the workers hoped to force companies to improve their conditions, pay, and benefits, open up access

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[377] Outside of works on the Poor People's Campaign, there is actually very little written on SCLC in the years after King's assassination, For more on the post-King years see David L. Chappell, *Waking from the Dream: The Struggle for Civil Rights in the Shadow of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Random House, 2014); Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone: 1199/SEIU and the Politics of Healthcare Unionism*, Second edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 129-158; Fairclough *To Redeem the Soul of America*, 385-422. For works on the Poor People's Campaign see Laurent, *King and the Other America;* Mantler, *Power to the Poor;* Amy Nathan Wright, "Civil Rights 'Unfinished Business': Poverty, Race, and the 1968 Poor People's Campaign" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2007).
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to better jobs, recognize labor unions, and invest in the black communities in which the companies were based. Protesters tied together demands for better wages, rationalized personnel policies, and safer working conditions historically associated with labor unions, the civil rights movement's long struggle for better access to jobs, and ideas of community improvement, self-determination, and black institutional control identified with the Black Power movement.[378] In pressing companies to invest more heavily in both their employers and the surrounding community, the protesters criticized the unequal distribution of opportunities and wealth in a prospering Southern city and attempted to redistribute these resources.

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[378] The literature on Black Power is extensive and growing. For works helpful to this project see Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1967); Peniel Joseph, "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 96 no. 3 (December 2009): 751-776; Peniel Joseph, *Waiting 'Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America*, (New York: Holt Paperbacks, 2007); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003); Countryman, *Up South;* Devin Fergus, *Liberalism, Black Power and the Making of American Politics, 1965-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009; Rhonda Y. Williams, *Concrete Demands: The Search for Black Power in the 20th Century* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Cedric Johnson, *Revolutionaries to Race Leaders: Black Power and the Making of African American Politics* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2007). For the Black Power movement in Atlanta see Grady Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid;* Derrick E. White, *The Challenge of Blackness: The Institute of the Black World and Political Activism in the 1970s* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2012). For works that discuss the Black Power movement in the workplace see David A Goldberg and Trevor Griffey, eds., *Black Power at Work: Community Control, Affirmative Action, and the Construction Industry* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); Erik Gellman, "In the Driver's Seat: Chicago Bus Drivers and Labor Insurgency in the Era of Black Power," *Labor* 11, no. 3 (2014): 49-76; Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit;* Ruth Needleman, *Black Freedom Fighters in Steel: The Struggle for Democratic Unionism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); David Goldberg, *Black Firefighters and the FDNY: The Struggle for Jobs, Justice & Equity in New York City* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017); Kieran Walsh-Taylor, "Turn to the Working Class."

In the early 1970s, Williams was not the only SCLC activists to attempt to use strategies and tactics of SCLC in support of southern workers. After SCLC's involvement in the Charleston hospital strike in 1969, the organization created the Program for Organizing the Working Poor to expand its efforts in aiding workers, specifically black Southern workers, seeking to build union power at the workplace. Heading up the Labor Program, as it was informally called, was Carl Farris, a black SCLC staff member. Farris had a vision for a renewed interracial labor movement in the South led by SCLC. Like Hosea Williams, Farris did not think labor unions were equipped to lead a new a labor movement, but unlike Williams, Farris still believed unions – as legal representatives for bargaining units – had an important role to play in a coalition. By 1970, SCLC had entered organizational decline which it never recovered, and as a result the Labor Program was underfunded and understaffed. Farris's vision for an SCLC civil rights-labor coalition offers a valuable counterpoint to the workplace campaigns Williams supported in the same period.

Despite large ambitions, workers in Atlanta often returned to their jobs with little to show for their efforts. In Atlanta, the scales leaned so far in favor of employers that workers alone were not strong enough win their demands or even get recognition. But there is little evidence that Hosea Williams's support helped the protesting workers either. Williams was erratic, combative, and rather authoritarian with his leadership of protests. Moreover, he relied on public demonstrations, pickets, marches, and rallies, to win protests. These public protests may have garnered media attention, but rarely were they large enough or effective enough to move employers to agree to Williams's and the workers' demands. Nevertheless, time and again in these two years of fairly constant

protest, black workers reached out to Williams for support.

As black workers walked off their jobs throughout metropolitan Atlanta, they placed themselves within Atlanta's long black freedom struggle. Despite the civil rights victories of the previous decade, black workers still found discrimination rampant in Atlanta's workplaces. Where other workers turned to lawsuits, or on occasion help from their union, these workers chose to walk off their jobs, turned to Hosea Williams and other veterans of SCLC's direct action campaigns, and publicly demanded an end to racial and economic injustices.

Carl Farris and SCLC's Labor Agenda

Former and active SCLC activists played a key role in Atlanta's strike wave as advisors, community mobilizers, and negotiators. However, he tSCLC that Atlanta's protesting workers turned to for help was a shell of the organization that led victorious non-violent campaigns in Birmingham and Selma. In the immediate aftermath of the assassination of King, money and volunteers flooded into SCLC. But because of the failures of the Poor People's Campaign and the public squabbling amongst organization leaders and allies, SCLC squandered much of this momentum. As Andrew Young, former King aide and future Atlanta congressman and mayor, explained in 1969, "the toll of some ten years of constant pressure is beginning to tell on all us all."[379]

In the years after 1968, SCLC, now under the leadership of Ralph David Abernathy, continued to organize against racial and economic oppression. SCLC led campaigns for

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[379] Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America,* 392; "SCLC, Battered, Fatigued by '60s, Plans Rejuvenation by '71," *Baltimore Afro-American,* January 10, 1970, 18.

school desegregation and voter registration in places like Perry, Alabama, and Sandersville, Georgia.[380] Yet the focus of the organization in the post-King years was the fight against poverty and economic exploitation. Jack O'Dell, a former Communist Party member and executive director of SCLC, wrote in July 1970 that "the heart of SCLC work today is increasingly the working poor to secure improvements in their material and social conditions."[381] Not everyone in SCLC agreed with this stance. Some, including Hosea Williams, argued that discrimination and segregation should remain the organization's target. Others, like James Bevel, believed that SCLC should expand its anti-war efforts.[382]

In addition to the continuing efforts of Operation Breadbasket and the organization's support of striking sanitation workers from Atlanta to Detroit, SCLC in the post-King years aided striking hospital and steel workers in South Carolina and Birmingham, allied with Caesar Chavez's Farmworkers Union and the National Welfare Rights Organization, and created its own, largely neglected and unsuccessful, labor and poverty division to more effectively aid workers across the country. By far the most well-known of these campaigns was the Charleston hospital workers strike.

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[380] Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America,* 394.

[381] Memorandum from Jack O'Dell, July 29, 1970, Box 200, Folder 33, SCLC Records Emory; For more on Jack O'Dell see Nikhil Pal Singh, ed., *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Black Freedom Movement Writings of Jack O'Dell* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2010).

[382] Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America,* 394.

The Charleston strike began on March 20, 1969, two days after the Medical College Hospital of the University of South Carolina (MCH) fired twelve non-professional workers, who were all union members. For more than a year, workers attempted to meet with the hospital administration to resolve grievances over racial discrimination, low pay, and mistreatment from supervisors. After months of frustration, union organizers from Local 1199 Drug and Hospital Employees Union, a radical union from New York that had succeeded in organizing non-professional hospital workers most of whom were people of color, helped organize a Local 1199-B at MCH in October 1968. Then on March 18, the administration agreed to meet with union leaders, but the meeting broke down and one hundred workers in favor of the union gathered to protest. The next day, hospital administration fired twelve leading activists and incited a strike of over 450 MCH non-professional workers and at least sixty more workers from nearby Charleston Hospital.[383] The strikers demanded "union recognition, an end to discrimination in wages and hiring practice," and "the rehiring of the twelve workers who had been fired."[384]

By the end of March, SCLC leadership, including Ralph Abernathy, Andrew Young, and Hosea Williams, arrived in Charleston to help the strikers. Local 1199 and SCLC had a long relationship. Local 1199 donated time and money to SCLC causes and Martin Luther King Jr. often gave speeches at 1199 events. King even called it "my favorite

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[383] For the Charleston strike narrative, I consulted Fink and Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone*, 129-158; Jewell C. Debnam, "Mary Moultrie, Naomi White, and the Women of the Charleston Hospital Workers' Strike": 59-79; Jack O'Dell, "Charleston's Legacy to the Poor People's Campaign," *Freedomways* 9, no. 3 (Summer 1969): 197-211.

[384] Jack O'Dell, "Charleston's Legacy to the Poor People's Campaign," 200.

union."[385] In 1968 Local 1199, until then focused on New York City hospitals, decided to start a nationwide campaign with the theme "union power, soul power," and union leaders asked Coretta Scott King to be the honorary chair of their National Organizing Committee. Additionally, Moe Foner of 1199 reached out to SCLC to work closely together on the national campaign, including sharing staff, training SCLC members in union organizing, and choosing targets for shared SCLC/1199 campaigns.[386] Foner believed that the hospital "strike can only be won if it's made a labor-civil rights issue… The only way to do that is to convince SCLC to come in."[387]

With the support of SCLC, the strike turned into a massive civil rights campaign. As with their previous campaigns, SCLC intended to lead a campaign of massive civil disobedience that would effectively shut down downtown Charleston. In doing so, the civil rights group hoped to bring national attention to the strike and to force Charleston business leaders to put pressure on the state-run hospital administration and on South Carolina politicians. To that end, SCLC led daily marches and rallies downtown that resulted in confrontations with police. By the end of April nearly 500 protesters were arrested, including Ralph Abernathy and Hosea Williams. On Mother's Day, SCLC and 1199 held a march and rally of over 10,000 people that included Coretta Scott King and United Auto Workers president Walter Reuther.[388]

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[385] Fink and Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone,* 103.

[386] Telephone Conversation, Moe Foner and Stanley Levison, September 9, 1968, Folder 001607_008_0867, Levison FBI Transcripts**;** Fink and Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone*, 128; Arthur Elias, "The Charleston Strike," *New Politics* (Summer 1969), 18.

[387] Fink and Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone,* 138.

Neither the strike nor the community support were able to change the hospital administrators' firm stance against the strike. Throughout the dispute, the hospital had the continued support of South Carolina's politicians and white business elite. While both MCH and Charleston County Hospital had to cut back some services, they were able to successfully bring in replacement workers. What brought the strike to a close was the intervention of the federal government. First the Department of Health Education and Welfare threatened to cut off grants to the hospital and cited the firing of the twelve union members in addition to thirty-seven civil rights violations. This threat led to negotiations between the administration and the striking workers. But on June 5 when it appeared an agreement was in place, South Carolina congressmen Mendel Rivers and Strom Thurmond convinced HEW to back off their threat and the negotiations ended.

Two weeks later, both the Labor Secretary George Schultz, who renewed threats of a funding cutoff, and Nixon White House aide Harry Dent, an influential South Carolinian, convinced the administration of MCH to rehire the twelve fired workers and all of the strikers. The strike also pressured the state to raise minimum wage for state employees (which included all MCH employees) from $1.30 to $1.60. Initially, the administration agreed to a grievance procedure that allowed for the participation of "a union grievance committee member to assist workers in the grievance process" and an employee credit union that 1199-B argued would "allow a form of dues checkoff."[389] The hospital never allowed dues checkoff, however, and according to Fink and Greenberg the hospital

[388] For SCLC's participation in strike see Fink and Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone,* 140-144; O'Dell, "Charleston's Legacy to the Poor People's Campaign."

[389] "Hospital Strike in Carolina Ends," *New York Times,* June 28, 1969, 1.

"undermined the union's authority in the grievance system by limiting the number of times that the same person could serve as a grievant's representative."[390] Less than a month later the Charleston County Hospital also came to the same settlement with its sixty striking workers.[391] By then 1199 and SCLC had moved on to Baltimore to help organize workers at Johns Hopkins University Hospital.[392]

Even though the strike essentially ended in a stalemate – the strikers got their jobs back but they did not get the union recognition they had demanded – 1199 and SCLC spun it as a clear victory for the workers and the alliance. "Charleston Strike Won!" ran the headline of a Local 1199 pamphlet. Both the union and SCLC emphasized that the victory was the result of a labor-civil rights coalition. "We won this strike because of a wonderful marriage—the marriage of SCLC and Local 1199," declared Andrew Young. An 1199 pamphlet reminded readers that "the historic labor-civil rights unity in Charleston was the key to victory."[393] Jack O'Dell wrote that "the Charleston hospital workers have given us *one model* for beginning to develop a nation-wide mass movement of the poor." That model was the "unity between the community-organizing techniques developed during the civil rights era of the Freedom Movement and the working class organizational techniques of the strike action developed by the labor movement."[394]

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[390] Fink and Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone,* 155-156.

[391] "2D Hospital Ends Carolina Strike," *New York Times,* July 19, 1968, 1.

[392] For more on the 1199 and SCLC in Baltimore see "Union Power, Soul Power: Unionizing Johns Hopkins University Hospital, 1959, 1974," *Labor History* 38 no.1 (1996): 28-66.

[393] Pamphlet, "Charleston Strike Won!," Box 133, Folder 27, SCLC Records ProQuest.

Hoping to build off of the momentum from the Charleston strike, SCLC established a Hospital and Service Workers Organizing Committee, later broadened to the Program for Organizing the Working Poor.[395] SCLC placed veteran activist Carl E. Farris, who served as the project director during the Charleston strike, as the National Labor Coordinator to oversee the program. Yet even with the good press of the Charleston strike, SCLC struggled to raise funds. By 1973, SCLC, which had once employed 125 people, was down to a staff of nineteen. As a result, the Program for Organizing the Working Poor was understaffed and underfunded. In late 1971, Farris complained that "the Labor Program has been without organizing staff capable of performing the task delegated to this program." Farris only had one "unexperienced and unsuitable staff person" working under him when SCLC helped a United Steel Workers (USW) strike in Georgetown, South Carolina. A year later during a campaign with hospital workers in Birmingham, Farris worked with "two national SCLC staff and seven local affiliate personnel."[396]

Farris, a Missouri native, became involved in the civil rights movement in Chicago and was the director of a CORE freedom house in the city in 1964. Farris joined SCLC during the Selma to Montgomery March a year later. Following Selma, Farris stayed on with the organization as a full-time employee, first working with Hosea Williams registering voters in Mississippi, and then working in South Carolina with Dorothy

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[394] O'Dell, "Charleston's Legacy to the Poor People's Campaign," 208-209.

[395] "Recommendations to SCLC Executive Staff Meeting," August 4, 1969, Box 60, Folder 9, SCLC Records Emory.

[396] Letter, Carl E. Farris to Stoney Cooks, November 10, 1971, Box 60, Folder 17, SCLC Records Emory; "SCLC's Birmingham Labor Organizing Project," Box 200, Folder 14, SCLC Records Emory.

Cotton and the Citizenship Education Program.[397] In South Carolina on SCLC business, Farris supported the hospital workers strike in Charleston, an International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) textile strike in Florence, and a strike by United Steel Workers (USW) in Georgetown.[398] Farris full-heartedly supported SCLC's focus on labor issues, but like many men who became SCLC activists, he had a large ego and was difficult to work with. Andrew Young found Farris, who Young called "an old line socialist from Chicago," to be "one of the brightest guys on the staff…but is so damn crazy."[399]

Even with his colleague's misgivings about his personality, Farris's enthusiasm for SCLC's intervention into the labor movement and his understanding of political economy, interracial coalitions, and worker mobilization informed the Labor Program's efforts. To Farris, organizing the unorganized was the most effective strategy for fighting poverty, the goal of the Poor People's Campaign. Once organized, he argued, "the poor…will be able to effectively act in their own behalf on changing societal conditions that prevent them from achieving a cultural and material life compatible with dignity and health."[400] The Program for Organizing the Working Poor intended to find labor unions to

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[397] Obituary, *Los Angeles Times*, October 22, 1979; "Civil Rights Organizer Carl E. Farris, 40, Succumbs," *Baltimore Afro-American,* October 27, 1979, 2

[398] Carl Farris to Dorothy Cotton, January 28,1969, Box 615, Folder 8, SCLC Records Emory; For more on the Florence textile strike see "SCLC Aids Striking S.C. Garment Workers," *Jet,* December 26, 1968.

[399] Telephone conversation, Andrew Young and Stanley Levison, June 19, 1969, Folder 001607-009-0601, Levison FBI Transcripts.

represent workers while also having SCLC serve as the representative to the workers within the union.

Farris thought that hospital and other service workers in the South should be the main target of SCLC's organizing efforts. The apparent success of the Charleston Hospital strike, "a partial flowering of our experience with labor," hinted at the potential of organizing hospital workers. It had "established the model for massive labor involvement, just as Montgomery did for the Civil Rights Movement." Beyond his experience in Charleston, Farris chose to focus on southern workers, specifically, because a vast majority of them were unorganized and "the most oppressed," many without basic rights guaranteed by the federal labor law. Despite their economic standing, Farris believed that the demand for hospital and other service workers, like maids and sanitation workers, would give the workers leverage in strikes that factory jobs in industries like textiles did not. Although his logic was flawed – factory owners' profits could take an immediate hit with an effective textile strike – he did recognize the importance and potential of service workers in a post-industrial economy.[401]

Farris was also drawn to these workers because of, as he put it, "the near balance among ethnic groups" – which he meant white and black workers.[402] He believed black Southern workers would be receptive to SCLC leading a labor organizing campaign. "The movement," he explained "is a recent part of the Southern worker's

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[400] Carl Farris, "A Proposal to the United Church of Christ for Financing a Hospital and Service Organizing Committee for SCLC," Box 145, Folder 22, SCLC Records ProQuest.

[401] Farris, "A Proposal to the United Church of Christ."

[402] Farris, "A Proposal to the United Church of Christ."

experience…The black worker participated in the movement on a massive scale. He participated by attending meetings, contributing money, marching, sitting-in, and going to jail."[403] Farris also maintained hope in the white working class. As he learned from the strikes in Florence and Georgetown, there was the potential for interracial solidarity in union drives. In 1970, at a Georgetown, South Carolina, steel mill, black and white workers "came together and built a very effective…union, and struggled there together for about six months."[404]

The Georgetown steel strike began on August 15, 1970, when more than 400 hundred workers, black and white, walked of the job. The workers were frustrated that the company refused to bargain seriously with the United Steel Workers, which had won an NLRB election in April, and struck for union recognition, dues checkoff, an improved grievance procedure, and improved safety measure. Eight weeks into the strike the union reached out to SCLC for support. Carl Farris claimed that both the black and white workers agreed to support from the civil rights organization. SCLC sought to help the striking workers by getting support from the broader community, especially from churches. Here SCLC had limited success, only two local black churches and no white churches offered support to the strikers. Farris also led the striking workers on multiple marches, one that led to the arrest of more than two dozen workers. In December, the steel workers and SCLC were aided by a federal court ruling ordering the company to

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[403] Farris, "A Proposal to the United Church of Christ."

[404] Discussion with Carl Farris by Jack O'Dell, SCLC Staff Retreat, Camp Calvin, Hampton, Georgia, February 26, 1971, Box 606, Folder 8, SCLC Records Emory.

negotiate with union. Eventually, in February 1971, the workers and the United Steel Workers won union recognition, dues checkoff, and a raise.[405]

Because of his experience during the Georgetown strike, Farris even thought that white workers could be convinced that a SCLC-led campaign would be the best vehicle to end their class exploitation. His reasoning: white southern workers had seen first-hand the victories that SCLC won in Birmingham and Selma, and therefore these workers were now "open-minded and knowledgeable of one method capable of changing life conditions." For Farris, the possibility of organizing both black and white workers – what he frequently referred to as "the working poor" – was both a rebuke to Black Power, "an effective alternative to the Black Manifesto," and to the conservative governments of the South. [406]

While Farris believed in the power of an interracial labor movement, he was less certain about the usefulness of labor unions. Unions, Farris believed, should be used as collective bargaining agents, but that leadership, strategies, and campaigns should come from SCLC. "Let us speak frankly," he wrote, "that even though labor is capable financially manpower wise, it cannot be expected to initiate the drive to organize" the unorganized.[407] Farris was also not convinced that labor unions could be depended on to lead campaigns to organize traditionally non-union industries. He thought that "Most

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[405] For more on the Georgetown steel workers strike see Carl E. Farris, "The Steelworkers' Strike in South Carolina, *Freedomways* (Second Quarter 1971), 178-190; "Striking S.C. Steel Workers Stage March, *The Register: Danville, Va.,* Sunday, November 15, 1970, 15C.

[406] Farris, "A Proposal to the United Church of Christ."

[407] Farris, "A Proposal to the United Church of Christ."

unions do not trust any force outside the traditional structure of organized labor when it comes to their taking in a group of workers organized by such a force."[408] Despite apprehensions from both SCLC and the labor movement, campaigns like those in Memphis, Charleston, Florence, and Georgetown led Farris to believe a productive relationship was possible.

Initially, Farris thought that Atlanta would be the ideal location to launch a campaign to organize hospital workers. Among the factors that made Atlanta suitable were the Alliance for Labor Action – the short-lived partnership between the United Auto Workers and the Teamsters that chose metro Atlanta as its first organizing target – a ministry which because of the work of Operation Breadbasket had a "considerable protest alertness," a large black college student population, and the 5,000 nonprofessional workers in the metro's thirty-five hospitals.[409] Very little came of this plan, though. There was a short-lived but unsuccessful effort to organize Georgia Baptist Hospital and meetings, but little else, were held with AFSCME Local 1644 at Grady Memorial Hospital.[410]

Instead, in late 1971 a group of workers from the University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) Hospital reached out to SCLC for support. In January of that year

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[408] Carl Farris and Ralph Abernathy, "Report on SCLC's Labor Program for Organizing the Working Poor," Box 615, Folder 27, SCLC Records Emory.

[409] Memorandum, "Atlanta Project for the Hospital and Service Worker's Committee," Carl Farris to Ralph Abernathy, October 1, 1969, Box 615, Folder 17, SCLC Records Emory.

[410] Carl E. Farris, "A Report on the Recent Activities of the Labor Program for Organizing the Working Poor, February 16, 1971, Box 615, Folder 27, SCLC Records Emory.

black workers from the hospital with the help of community activists formed the Public Employees Organizing Committee (PEOC). By early 1972, the hospital worker organization, with the help of SCLC, the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights, which was SCLC's local affiliate, and local welfare-rights activists, had spread to nine hospitals and three nursing homes in the city. SCLC leaders, including Joseph Lowery, the chairman of SCLC's executive board, and Ralph Abernathy attended meetings and gave speeches to PEOC members. Meanwhile, Carl Farris and the Labor Program worked with PEOC to organize the city's hospital and nursing home workers, sign up workers to the PEOC, and connect the PEOC to other Birmingham community leaders.[411]

The primary goal for Farris was to find a labor union that would officially represent the workers. According to historian Robert Widell there were reports that both Local 1199 and AFSCME had explored the possibility of organizing Birmingham hospital workers, but neither union decided to pursue an organizing campaign. When Farris approached Local 1199 about the possibility of working with the PEOC, the union told him that it "did not have sufficient man power to do our job in Birmingham due to our involvement in the North."[412] In May 1972, the Laborers International Union, which was in the process of organizing public sector workers throughout Alabama, agreed to work with the PEOC to gain union recognition and bargaining rights. Even though the PEOC

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[411] For more on the PEOC's hospital campaign see Robert Widell, *Birmingham and the Long Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 94-131.

[412] Memorandum, "Birmingham Labor Organizing Project," Carl E. Farris to Andrew Young, June 9, 1972, Box 615, Folder 15, SCLC Records Emory.

and SCLC that they had signed up thousands of workers across the health care field in Birmingham, only workers at the Fairview Nursing Home successfully voted for LIU representation.[413]

Hospital workers in Birmingham faced enormous obstacles in winning union recognition. Neither workers at non-profit hospitals nor state hospitals, like UAB which was the epicenter of organizing activity in the city, fell under jurisdiction of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA). Hospital administrators certainly were not willing to accept union recognition without a fight. There were also internal divisions between PEOC and the LIU, that hampered any possible success. By Fall 1972, PEOC members at several local hospitals were ready to participate in a mass strike. At a rally that also included a speech by Joseph Lowery, Farris told the crowd of more than a 1,000 that "We have the strength now and when the administration [at UAB] tells us…we will not talk, we are calling a strike in Birmingham. We will strike every hospital in Birmingham."[414] The LIU was far less eager for a strike. Union leaders repeatedly counseled UAB Hospital workers to delay any strike, giving various reasons, including that the PEOC needed to sign up more workers, that helpful legislation would soon pass, or that the workers could strike once other local hospitals were also ready to strike. PEOC leadership did not think these were legitimate excuses, after all it had spent more than a year successfully organizing at

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[413] For more on union participation with the PEOC see Widell, *Birmingham and the Long Black Freedom Struggle,* 94, 115. For more on the campaign see Widell, 105-111; "Fairview Locks Out Union Workers," PEOC Newsletter, "Getting It Together," April 1972, Box 342, Folder 3, SCLC Records Emory.

[414] Quoted in Widell, *Birmingham and the Long Black Freedom Struggle*, 122.

UAB, and instead believed "that the union was killing the organizing drive."[415] Soon momentum in Birmingham waned and the organizing campaign ended.

While Farris initially advocated for the LIU, he too believed it was not that supportive of the PEOC campaign in Birmingham. Farris was frustrated that LIU did not embrace his own vision for a social movement unionism inspired by SCLC. That is the union did not support the marches, rallies, and acts of civil disobedience that Farris believed could help revive the labor movement. Instead the LIU acted with caution, likely justified given the difficulty of winning a union campaign in public and non-profit hospitals in a city hostile to organizing. "When a union sets out to organize workers the leadership tends to view the situation as a business one and as an investment of their membership's dues," Farris complained to SCLC about LIU's actions. "Therefore, the union organizers tend to cling tenaciously to methods that have worked for them. They are most reluctant to try any new approaches." [416]

Birmingham was the last major project that Carl Farris worked on with SCLC. Farris would continue fighting for workers' rights in the South. In fact, in the mid-1970s, before his untimely death in 1979, Farris suppressed his suspicion of labor unions and joined the Amalgamated Clothing Workers and Textile Union (ACTWU) with former SCLC activists Leon Hall and James Orange during the campaign against J.P. Stevens.[417]

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[415] "Next Time, It'll Be the Workers," *Southern Patriot,* April 1974, 4-5.

[416] Carl Farris and Ralph Abernathy, "Report on Labor Program for Organizing the Working Poor," ca. 1971, Box 615, Folder, 27, SCLC Records Emory.

[417] Carl Farris and Leon Hall, "A Call to Action on the J.P. Stevens Campaign," *Freedomways* 17, no.3 (1977): 135-142.

While Farris never successfully implemented his mass organizing drive of white and black hospital and service workers, he did not leave SCLC believing his efforts were a complete failure. Most important to him was that his projects "demonstrated the feasibility of workers being able to organize initially on their own strength."[418]

The Activist Career of Hosea Williams

Hosea Williams did not share Farris's enthusiasm about using SCLC to build a new labor movement throughout the South. Where Farris had a vision for a new labor movement led by SCLC and aimed at organizing the unorganized, Williams attempted to shape the strikes, pickets, and boycotts of 1972 and 1973 in terms of black community power. Traditional labor unions played no part in Williams vision of worker power. To force concessions from employers, Williams turned to what he knew best: mobilizing direct-action protests.

Williams was born to blind parents in 1926 on the Florida-Georgia border and raised by his grandparents after his mother died. Severely injured while fighting in Germany during World War II, Williams returned home only to be beaten for using the whites-only water fountain in Americus, Georgia. Williams then attended Morris Brown College, thanks to, as he claimed, the charity of his friend Cheney Griffin, the brother of future segregationist Georgia governor Marvin Griffin. After earning a graduate degree in chemistry from Atlanta University, Williams began working as a research chemist for the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Savannah, Georgia. In part because of the guilt he felt

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[418] Carl Farris, "A Proposal to Initiate Organization Among Unorganized Workers in the South," ca. 1975, Box 412, Folder 1, SCLC Records Emory.

over his comfortable middle class life, Williams became active in the city's civil rights movement in the early 1960s.[419] While vice president of the Savannah NAACP, Williams led an effective voter registration campaign called the Chatham County Crusade for Voters. Then as protests spread throughout the port city, Williams led marches twice a day.[420]

A strong speaker and a clever organizer, Williams's efforts in Savannah caught the attention of Martin Luther King Jr. From 1964 until King's assassination, Williams served as one of the civil rights leader's top aides, though not without controversy. He often clashed with other members of SCLC, especially James Bevel and Andrew Young. Young would complain that "Hosea is so damned sensitive that he really cries and pleads, and Martin comes to his defense."[421] Following the Selma campaign, where he along with John Lewis led the march on Bloody Sunday, SCLC placed Williams in charge of their voter registration program, Summer Community Organization and Political Education (SCOPE). But unlike the Chatham County Crusade for Voters, SCOPE was not all that effective; it was "a shambles" according to one historian of the organization.[422] Many field workers complained that Williams, when they could find him, would berate

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[419] David S. Morrison, "The Pro and Con of Hosea Williams," *Atlanta Weekly*, May 24, 1981, 12.

[420] For more on Williams's background see Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America,* 94-95; David S. Morrison, "The Pro and Con of Hosea Williams," *Atlanta Weekly*, May 24, 1981, 11-12; Hosea Williams, Interviewed by Mel Steely, May 15, 1998, Georgia Political Papers and Oral History Program, University of West Georgia, accessed at http://ohms.galileo.usg.edu/viewer.php?cachefile=dlg/phc/williams19980515.xml.

[421] Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America,* 346.

[422] Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America,* 346.

and bully them.[423] Williams also had a penchant to make self-destructive decisions, particularly when alcohol was involved. Nonetheless, King respected Williams's courage and his ability to motivate crowds, and frequently defended Williams to the executive board when Williams's personality rubbed some the wrong way.

Williams took away from the successes of SCLC that mobilizing people into public protests and mass marches was critical to achieving change. "I never believed that any progress can be made other than through confrontation," Williams once told an interviewer. "I think you had to take" white people "to some type of physical confrontation and hurt his pocketbook was the main way — boycotts and things of that sort — to bring him around, to really convince him."[424] He understood there were limits to what protest could achieve, but he "did not want to see SCLC become another NAACP or Urban League."[425] Being able to sit at a negotiating table with opposing parties, which Williams believed was the job of the NAACP and Urban League, was important, but he did not want SCLC to abandon its direct action protests. This belief in the particular calling of SCLC and the power of protest guided Williams's efforts in 1972 and 1973.

Although aiding workplace protests consumed most of his time with the Metro Atlanta-DeKalb SCLC, Williams did not envision leading strikers on the picket line when he requested his own SCLC affiliate office. Williams, actually, was slow to accept SCLC's turn towards the fight for economic justice. His primary goal, the one objective

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[423] Branch, *At Canaan's Edge*, 526.

[424] Raines, *My Soul Is Rested,* 435.

[425] Transcribed conference call including Hosea Williams, Stanley Levison, Walter Fauntroy, Ralph Abernathy, Andrew Young, June 5, 1969, Levison FBI Transcripts.

he always stressed in executive meetings, was voter registration in the South. He showed little interest in reforming the economy. King even teased Williams for being a capitalist.[426] In the years following King's death, Williams's attitude towards fighting for economic justice changed. In part this was because, like many among the leadership of SCLC, he desired to follow through with King's goal of fighting poverty. He was also reacting to the times. In the late sixties and early seventies, different strategies for fighting for economic justice — wild cat strikes, welfare protests, black capitalism—were swirling around the civil rights movement and the larger American public. Still, it seemed more likely that Williams would follow the lead of civil rights activists like Jesse Jackson and Floyd McKissick and become an advocate of black capitalism rather than taking the lead in a series of strikes throughout Atlanta.[427]

Even as he became a full-time activist, Williams did not give up on his earlier vocation of entrepreneur. In Savannah, in addition to being a research chemist, he started a pest extermination company, a barbecue stand, and a bill collection service.[428] Then in 1967, Williams sought to combine his activism with his entrepreneurship. Living at the time in Kirkwood, an Atlanta neighborhood in DeKalb County, Williams saw that as whites were moving out of the area income, revenues, taxes, and services followed. To counteract this flight, and to make a profit in the process, Williams and several investors,

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[426] Branch, *At Canaan's Edge*, 555.

[427] On Jesse Jackson see Beltramini, "Operation Breadbasket in Chicago," On Floyd McKissick see Devin Fergus, *Liberalism, Black Power, and the Making of American Politics, 1*96-231.

[428] David S. Morrison, "The Pro and Con of Hosea Williams," *Atlanta Weekly*, May 24, 1981, 12.

mostly ministers in the neighborhood, made a failed attempt at starting a Kirkwood shopping center.[429] Then they set their sights on building an affordable housing complex. Williams turned to SCLC in February 1972 for support, though "it would not cost one cent nor would any staff be needed until the program began to bring in money."[430] He thought that his initial project in Kirkwood could then be expanded into a national program for SCLC. All he wanted from SCLC was a chartered branch in Atlanta, most likely so his organization could have the imprimatur of the national organization. Ralph Abernathy obliged Williams with his own charter, creating a branch of SCLC that was effectively independent from the national office, called the Metro Atlanta-DeKalb SCLC. But the new organization did not pursue the housing project. Instead, Williams responded to the call for support from twelve protesting workers at a small hospital in southwest Atlanta. His support of what became the Holy Family Hospital picket then grew into a two-year campaign of supporting protesting black workers at workplaces across the Atlanta metro area.

Race, Community, and Coalitions during Strike Fever

Williams brought to these protests his own ideas about labor organizing, coalition building, community empowerment, and protest tactics. Some of his ideas were shared by

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[429] Letter, Harry Wachtel to J.N. Shopshire, July 16, 1969, Box 57, Folder 13, SCLC Records Emory.

[430] Hosea Williams to Stoney Cooks, February 8, 1972, Box 35, Folder 6, SCLC Records Emory.

his fellow activists and workers and other ideas reveal where Williams left a clear imprint on the workplace protests of the early '70s.

Williams was not interested in working with labor unions. Like Carl Farris, Williams disapproved of most unions. He did not see the value in unions as he believed they existed in Atlanta, and only rarely did he show any interest in working with them. "I'm very pro-labor," he argued, but he wanted "to see the unions keep their commitments to their members and not sweetheart shops." Williams was likely implicitly criticizing the campaigns of the Alliance for Labor Action, specifically the union contracts won by the Teamsters. This attitude, of course, did not make Williams or the protests he led appealing to labor unions. He once told a reporter that "conventional labor in this town is as anti-Hosea as management."[431]

Williams's criticisms of organized labor rarely included explicit criticism of discrimination and racial exclusion. Instead, his criticisms were similar to the New Left's attacks on labor. For many in the New Left, organized labor was a moribund bureaucracy, not interested in organizing new workers, unresponsive to worker demands, and openly opposed to the changing social and cultural norms of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Williams agreed with all of this.[432] In 1972 he argued that "[t]here is no viable,

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[431] "Hosea Williams: Bridge Between Poor and Non-Poor," *Atlanta Voice,* November 3, 1973, 9.

[432] The best study of the New Left and organized labor is Peter B. Levy, *The New Left and Labor in the 1960s* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press: 1994); see also Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union,* 165-171. For more general histories of the New Left see Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); James Miller, *Democracy is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

national organized labor movement in America today." "In most instances," Williams explained, "labor leaders have performed an unholy alliance with management and there is, as a result, no difference between the two. Most labor unions have fallen into the hands of fat, rich, insensitive labor leaders, whose programs are irrelevant to the working poor…most labor leaders dictate to the workers and do not allow the workers to determine their own destiny."[433] Williams's rhetoric would have been right at home in Atlanta's New Left student paper *The Great Speckled Bird.* According to one *Speckled Bird* journalist, the "labor bureaucracy," led by "George Meany, sell-out president," had "been successfully integrated into the Amerikan (sic) corporate government as a tool for keeping the workers in line."[434]

Some black trade union members at organized workplaces in the city shared these criticisms of their own unions. As frustrations mounted at both the Mead Packaging plant and at a Nabisco factory, black workers felt ignored by their union representatives. "Our union wasn't doing anything for us," a striking Mead worker said of Printing Specialties and Paper Products Union, Local 527 in Fall 1972. This woman had joined more than 600 of her black coworkers in a wildcat strike, demanding an end to discrimination in promotion and hiring practices and an improvement in safety conditions at the plant.[435] "We could ask for different things or ask for their help and they would shoo us off." "See

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[433] Ira Johnson, "Poor People's Union," *The Atlanta Voice,* December 9, 1972, 1.

[434] Jon Jacobs, "Who Gets the $$?" *The Great Speckled Bird,* September 20, 1971, 7.

[435] Among all the strikes in 1972 and 1973, the Mead strike stands out because of the participation of communist October League activists who had taken jobs at the plant earlier in the year to organize. For more on the Mead strike see Kieran Walsh-Taylor, "Turn to the Working Class," 59-108.

at Mead people tried going through the union, putting in grievances through the union," a strike leader explained, "but they were acted on so slowly, and most of the time not acted on at all."[436] The strike leaders at Nabisco, who led a wildcat strike of 200 black workers after the termination of an employee and the racial harassment by a supervisor, alleged that "Local #42 [of the American Bakery and Confectionary Workers Union] are not responsive to the needs of ALL the workers at NABISCO." "Union members," they continued, "must support each other and put a stop to this union sell-out."[437]

In the late 1960s and through much of the 1970s, workers across the country shared these same frustrations over their unions, and like the workers at Mead and Nabisco participated in wildcat strikes. Radical black auto workers at Chrysler's Dodge Main plant in Detroit formed the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM), an exclusively black organization that confronted the racism in both factory management and the United Auto Workers. "The UAW bureaucracy," DRUM declared in a newsletter, "is just as guilty, its hands are just as bloody as the racist management of this corporation."[438] In July 1968, DRUM led 70 percent of Dodge Main's black workforce on three day wildcat cat. Soon DRUM, renamed the League of Revolutionary Black

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[436] "Wildcat at Mead," documentary produced by the October League, 1972, film accessed at https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/328-wildcat-at-mead.

[437] Flyer, "Nabisco on Strike," Nabisco Strike Committee, Box 679, Folder 5, Joseph Nelson Papers, Southern Labor Archives, Special Collections Department, Pullen Library, Georgia State University (Hereafter Joseph Nelson Papers).

[438] Newsletter, *drum* 1 no. 2, LRBW Publications, D.R.U.M (Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement), Folder: 100388-001-0335, Module: The Black Power Movement: The League of Revolutionary Black Workers, 1965-1975, accessed at ProQuest History Vault, Civil Rights and Black Freedom Struggle.

Workers, expanded into auto factories in the Detroit area and around the country, participating in wildcat strikes and other protests. By 1972, riven by internal disputes, the League had lost much of its momentum and was effectively finished as an organization. DRUM's discontent with both its employers and its union was shared by workers, white and black, across the country.[439]

White workers, too, formed independent worker organizations, protested their unions, and participated in wildcat strikes. In the 1960s and 70s wildcat strikes were ubiquitous in Appalachian coal mines. For example, historian Cal Winslow writes that "in the coalfields, between 1974 and 1975, there were nine thousand strikes, 99 percent of them wildcats." The coalminer insurgency, and the United Mine Workers opposition to reform, led to the formation of the Miners for Democracy (MFD). In 1972, the MFD's slate of rank-and-file candidates successfully defeated "one of the country's most corrupt and deeply entrenched union bureaucracies."[440]

In Atlanta, striking black workers and Hosea Williams believed that workers should have union representation, but those unions should be responsive to their needs. "Workers need a union for job protection and to help us fight for our rights," wrote the

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[439] Kieran Taylor, "American Petrograd, Detroit and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers," in *Rebel Rank and File: Labor Militancy and Revolt from Below During the Long 1970s,* eds. Brenner, Brenner, and Winslow, 311-334; Heather Ann Thompson, *Whose Detroit,* 108-126; Dan Georgakas and Marvin Surkin, *Detroit: I Do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution* 2nd edition (Cambridge: South End Press, 1998).

[440] Cal Winslow, "Overview: The Rebellion from Below, 1965-1981," 2, and Paul J. Nyden, "Rank-and-File Movements in the United Mine Workers of America, Early 1960s-Early 1980s," both in in *Rebel Rank and File,* 173-197; Cowie, *Stayin' Alive,* 30-38; Thomas Geoghegan, *Which Side Are You On? Trying to be for Labor When its Flat on its Back* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1991), 9-39.

leaders of the Nabisco strike. "But if union leadership won't protect our jobs and won't fight for our rights, then we have to act…That's not breaking up the union in the long run, it makes the union stronger."[441] Where Nabisco employees wanted to reform their union, Williams in his egotistical manner believed he should create his own union. In November 1972, after a year of working with protesting workers, Williams announced that he was forming the Poor People's Union (PPU) to "organize the working poor extensively to upgrade their total family's and community's quality of life." Ralph Abernathy and the National Distributive Workers of America (NDWA), headed by influential black union leader Cleveland Robinson, provided early support for the union. However, neither the national SCLC nor the NDWU actually played much of a role in the union. In fact, the PPU was a relatively insignificant organization. In 1973, the union, run by a small staff, participated in a few of the strikes, and in the ensuing years it did successfully organize a commercial laundry business and a couple of nursing homes, but it did little else.[442]

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[441] Flyer. "Wildcat Strike: A Victory for One is a Victory for All!," Box 679, Folder 5, Joseph Nelson Papers.

[442] Press Release, December 7, 1972, Series V, Subseries D, Box 4, Folder 1, Hosea L. Williams Collection, Reverend Hosea L. Williams Papers, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African-American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System, Atlanta, Georgia, (Hereafter Hosea Williams Collection); Ira Johnson, "Poor People's Union," *Atlanta Voice,* December 9, 1972, 1; Letter, "Contract Negotiations Between Kathy Crawford Nursing Center and The Poor People's Union of America," Arthur E. Simpson to Hosea L. Williams, May 13, 1983, Series V. Subseries D, Box 4, Folder 2, Hosea Williams Collection; Letter, Hosea Williams to Arthur Montgomery, August 20, 1974, Series V, Subseries B, Box 2, Folder 15, Hosea Williams Collection.

For our purposes, the PPU experience reveals how Hosea Williams often emphasized the goal of an interracial working class coalition. "We will attempt to organize all unorganized workers, irregardless of their race, creed, religious affiliation," Williams announced at the founding of the organization.[443] Throughout the two years of protests, Williams frequently discussed the strikes in universal class terms. He argued that the protests, though often incited by discrimination against black workers, were about all workers versus management. He often turned to a favorite line when speaking to crowds. "This is not a fight between black and white, no, this is a fight between the haves and the have-nots, the rich and the poor, the needy and the greedy."[444] Williams suggested that an interracial alliance should be the ultimate goal, but he was not naïve enough to believe it would be easy to achieve. "When the poor white man wakes – I know he's asleep – together we can turn this country around," Williams told a crowd of mostly black hospital workers on strike at South Fulton Hospital.[445]

This talk was a standard, boiler plate paean to interracial working class solidarity, and it was also empty rhetoric. Largely his discussion of working class solidarity was just Williams attempting to maintain the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr's. vision for

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[443] Press Release, December 7, 1972, Series V, Subseries D, Box 4, Folder 1, Hosea Williams Collection.

[444] Williams had used a similar phrase since at least 1970. Frank Frosch, "SCLC Starts Long March to End in Atlanta, Sat.," *Atlanta Daily World,* May 21, 1970, 2. Steve Wise, "Tell 'em We Hell on Wheels," *The Great Speckled Bird,* December 11, 1972, 3; Marjorie Jordan, "Sears Strikes," *The Great Speckled Bird,* August, 7, 1972; 9; "Wildcat at Mead," documentary produced by the October League, 1972.

[445] Steve Wise, "Tell 'em We Hell on Wheels," *The Great Speckled Bird,* December 11, 1972, 3.

America in his final years. By 1967 King believed that "Negro problems go beyond race and deal with economic inequality, wherever it exists. In the pursuit of these goals, the white poor became involved, and the potentiality emerges for a powerful new alliance."[446] During the wave of protests in 1972 and 1973, however, Williams never actually made an effort at engendering interracial class solidarity. His support during these years was only for protests by black workers. And despite his rhetoric, the demands he and the workers made overwhelmingly had to do with racial harassment and discrimination. Interracial solidarity may have sounded good to Williams, but the strikes he aided were for black workers seeking to improve the workplace experiences specific to black workers.

In many of these workplaces a vast majority of the strikers were black, making interracial organizing a moot point. In workplaces with a significant number of white and black workers, all but an exceptional few white workers refused to participate in the strikes. Furthermore, protesters and their allies, for the most part, were simply not concerned with building solidarity across racial lines. During most of the strikes, black workers had specifically race-based grievances. In July 1972, for example, the demands of workers involved in a walkout at several Sears facilities in the metro area centered on "equal opportunity for advancement of Blacks to better paying, more responsible positions, better representation of Black employes throughout the organization; equal administration of compensation, and equal administration of working rules."[447] A month

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[446] Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here, Chaos or Community?*, 17.

[447] Memorandum, "Sears Atlanta Employes," July 20, 1972, Series V, subseries B, Box 2, Folder 13, Hosea Williams Collection.

later, the Mead Caucus of Rank and File Workers sent management a list of demands and grievances. "The Mead Corporation, historically and presently, has been guilty of blatant acts of discrimination against Black people and against women in particular," it charged. "This discrimination is apparent in the present policies concerning hiring, advancement, and training of employees."[448]

Black workers understood that their focus on discrimination would not appeal to most of their white coworkers. The manifesto that the Mead workers gave to management attempted to hedge its complaints about discrimination with more universal grievances. "While this document speaks to particular discriminatory practices against Black people and women, it is also," the manifesto authors assured, "in the interest of the entire work force."[449] In order to forcefully lay out their grievances and demands, workers chose to be explicit about how discrimination led to the strikes and that companies needed to implement race-based policies. These workers and their supporters were not willing to sublimate their demands in hopes of achieving interracial working class solidarity with their white coworkers.[450]

Time and again, protesting workers, Williams, and other supportive community members expanded their criticisms of racism beyond the workplace. The protests, they

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[448] Mead Caucus of Rank and File Workers, "Black Manifesto," August 1972, Box 679, Folder 2, Joseph Nelson Papers.

[449] Mead Caucus of Rank and File Workers, "Black Manifesto," August 1972, Box 679, Folder 2, Joseph Nelson Papers.

[450] Gregg Michel found this dynamic during organizing campaigns at Johns Hopkins University Hospital. "By 1974 the union's "deracialization" [of the content of their organizing campaign] had attracted whites to the union but decreased its effectiveness at the hospital." Michel, "Union Power, Soul Power," 29.

argued, were aimed at helping Atlanta's black communities. For some, like John Long, the leader of a walkout at South Fulton Hospital in late 1972, workers' protests drew attention to how employers were neglecting the surrounding community. "The few people who are walking this picket line every day are not walking for a job, we are walking for respect and dignity…of our black sisters and brothers. We are walking because this hospital refuses service to the black community. They tell you to go to Grady…This strike involves everyone one of you."[451] In focusing on alleged discrimination against patients, Long hoped to get community members to aid the workers.

One of Hosea Williams's contributions was his effort to connect the labor disputes to the problems of black, especially poor black, communities. For Williams one way to improve poor black neighborhoods was by increasing the influence of black-led banks and stores in those communities. Since the employers that black workers protested were almost always for-profit enterprises benefitting from both the labor and capital of a black-majority city, Williams thought the businesses should also pay some of that profit back to the community. Almost every list of demands that a Williams-led protest presented contained calls for that business to invest in black-owned banks, black-owned suppliers, and even, at times, black foundations like the United Negro College Fund. Williams did not claim credit for coming up with these demands. But since from July 1972 on they appear with similar language in nearly every protest he was involved in, it is likely

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[451] Steve Wise, "Tell 'em We Hell on Wheels," *The Great Speckled Bird,* December 11, 1972, 3.

Williams authored the demands for community investment. Workers continued to turn to Williams for support and continued to approve of his use of these demands. In an era when white flight of capital and services depleted important resources from Atlanta's black neighborhoods, Williams and the workers he aided challenged the companies that they picketed to redistribute some of their funds back into the community, specifically to black-controlled institutions.

The July 1972 strike by more than 400 black Sears warehouse and store workers best represents Williams's effort to tie together workplace protests over racial discrimination with a challenge to the distribution of goods, services, and income in the city. During the eleven-day strike in July 1972 workers with Hosea Williams's support presented a list of demands, which they called the "Black Manifesto" – a title that other protesting workers would use to present grievances and demands throughout 1972 and 1973 – to the corporation that sought to end racial discrimination at the workplace and lessen inequality in black communities. This was also one of the few strikes that was nearly a complete victory for the protesters.

In the Sears workers' "Black Manifesto" Williams and the protesters made explicit connection between their demands for affirmative action and the improvement of the community. They called for "the adoption of a policy to hire blacks in all positions until their numbers are proportionate to the amount of patronage that Sears receives from blacks in the area in which the installation is located."[452] As long as Sears depended on black costumers, and in Atlanta, the workers claimed, African Americans made up 60.5%

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[452] Edgar Smith, "Sears Strike Over Black Workers Win Significant Concessions to Their Demands," *Atlanta Voice,* August 5, 1972. 1.

of the stores' customers, it needed to help black communities in return by providing more employment. In addition to hiring more employees from local black neighborhoods, the protesters demanded more investments from Sears to "help black people establish their own economic base" and "help stop the slums and save the black community by aiding the black community in eliminating unemployment." Specifically, they asked Sears to increase deposits in the black-owned Citizens Trust Bank and that the retailing giant use more black-owned suppliers.[453]

Remarkably, after eleven days of pickets, Sears agreed to thirty-nine of forty-two demands including an Affirmative Action Committee – that would be composed of six employees elected by their peers to give oversight on personnel changes in each store and warehouse – increased deposits at Citizens Trust Bank, and an extra vacation day that workers could use to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. Williams, in his typically hyperbolic, self-promoting fashion, told a crowd of strikers that the protest was "the greatest victory for Black people in Atlanta since the passage of the 1965 Federal Voting Rights Bill."[454]

The demands Williams made to companies to help support black-owned businesses and other black controlled institutions show how he was influenced by the ideas and politics of the Black Power movement. Observers then and now have included a broad spectrum of black politics and culture into the Black Power movement of the late

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[453] "Black Employees of Sears, Roebuck, & Company Black Manifesto," no date, Series V Subseries B, Box 2, Folder 13, Hosea Williams Collection; "Sear Boycott Threatens to Escalate Nationwide," *Atlanta Voice*, July 29, 1972. 1.

[454] Marjorie Jordan, "Sears Strike," *The Great Speckled Bird,* August 7, 1972, 8.

1960s and early 1970s. The movement included both advocates of black capitalism, like Floyd McKissick, and revolutionaries like Max Stanford of the Revolutionary Action Movement.[455] For our purposes, a definition by Rhonda Williams helps us better understand how Black Power influenced Williams's activism in this era and the

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[455] A small group of Atlanta civil rights activists played an important and controversial role over the general public's attempts to understand and define Black Power. The Atlanta Project, a SNCC branch focused on urban political organizing and tenant rights campaigns, sought to redefine the racial dynamics of SNCC by questioning the effect of white privilege in civil rights organizing and the role of white organizers in SNCC. At a March 1966 SNCC staff meeting, three months before Stokely Carmichael famously exclaimed "Black Power" at a rally in Greenwood, Mississippi, Atlanta Project members, including Bill Ware, Donald Stone, and Roland Snellings, advocated for the self-determination of black SNCC members and the exclusion of white members. In three position papers, the men argued that whites "have an intimidating effect" and their presence "perpetuate existing attitude[s]" that "blacks are 'dumb'" and "whites are 'smart'." "Thus," the activists explained, "an all-Black project is needed in order for the people to free themselves." Ware and his associates extended their analysis beyond their own organization and argued that "[i]f we are to proceed towards true liberation, we must cut ourselves off from white people…We must form our own institutions, credit unions, co-ops, and political parties, write our own histories." In August 1966, a synthesis of the three papers was released to the *New York Times* which attributed the Atlanta Projects stance to the entire SNCC organization. Even SNCC chairman Stokely Carmichael, who believed that white SNCC workers should work in white communities, was irritated at his organization's connection with this particular interpretations of black power. He "viewed it as strident and a distortion or misinterpretation of black power."[455] For the general public, however, SNCC was now associated with the stark racial separatism of the Atlanta Project. Then in December 1966, SNCC adopted the Atlanta Project's black separatism. In a contentious nineteen to eighteen vote, with twenty-four abstaining SNCC voted to exclude its remaining white members. Hasan Kwame Jeffries argues that Stokely Carmichael and SNCC's version of Black Power, instead, developed from their political organizing work in Lowndes County, Alabama. Jeffries also argues that one of the Atlanta Project author's, Roland Snelling, was an "agent provocateur for RAM [Revolutionary Action Movement] assigned to infiltrate SNCC to make it more militant and nationalistic." "Excerpts from Paper on Which the 'Black Power' Philosophy is Based," *New York Times,* August 5, 1966, 10; Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S Apartheid,* 87-90; Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent,* 504 fn. 68; Carson, *In Struggle,* 240-242; Hasan Kwame Jeffries, "SNCC, Black Power, and Independent Political Party Organizing in Alabama, 1964-1966," *The Journal of African American History* 91, no. 2 (Spring 2006), quote on page 186.

workplace protests of 1972 and 1973. According to Williams, Black Power was a movement "undergirded by race consciousness and pride, nationhood, self-determination and sovereignty, Black Power is a politics…[that] demanded the authority to control decisions, as well as resources, impacting black people's lives and circumstances."[456] By 1972 black activists' use of boycotts and protests to compel companies to invest in black-owned banks and other black-owned businesses was not uncommon. For example, when Jesse Jackson took control of Operation Breadbasket in Chicago in 1967, he added this demand to the organization's campaigns. Martin Luther King Jr. explained that Operation Breadbasket in Chicago sought "to stop the drain of resources out of the ghetto with nothing remaining for its rehabilitation."[457] For Hosea Williams, the strikes he supported were an opportunity to press white-owned businesses located in a city that was by then 50 percent African American to redistribute capital to black institutions like stores, banks, and charities. Black Atlantans may not have had the authority to control Sears, but

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[456] Rhonda Y. Williams, *Concrete Demands: The Search for Black Power in the 20th Century*, 4.

[457] For Jesse Jackson's role with Operation Breadbasket see Beltramini, "S.C.L.C. Operation Breadbasket," 229-269; Memorandum, "Report on Operation Breadbasket," Jesse L. Jackson to Martin Luther King Jr., et. al, December 27, 1967, Box 578, Folder 22, SCLC Records Emory; King, *Where Do We Go from Here, Chaos or Community?,* 154. In 1970 the United Negro Protest Committee of Pittsburgh's NAACP local chapter boycotted Sears and included demands for the company to make deposits in local black-owned banks. That same year in Atlanta, a group of activists presented to newly elected mayor Sam Massell a "Black Manifesto" which included the request that the city use the black- owned Citizens Trust Bank as a depository and the "city use of services of black owned and operated businesses." Joe W. Trotter and Jared N. Day, *Race and Renaissance: African Americans in Pittsburgh since World War II* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 112; Boyd Lewis, "Black Manifesto Presented in Full for the First Time," *Atlanta Voice,* January 18, 1970, 12.

Williams and workers could use the power they had to compel Sears to help support black-owned businesses in the city.

Williams's demands for donations and deposits in black-owned institutions, particularly his demand that companies donate to the United Negro College Fund (UNCF), caused a backlash from the wider Atlanta public. Williams included requests to donate $20,000 to the UNCF in the list of demands to at least three companies: Sears, Mead, and Greyhound. When Williams and the workers presented the request to Greyhound, Mayor Sam Massell charged that the demand for the contribution was "approaching extortion." John Middleton, the local chairman of the UNCF and a former member of Operation Breadbasket, was forced to issue a press release denying any knowledge of the demand and denouncing Williams's attempt to get contributions through a labor dispute. The *Daily World* then congratulated Massell's denunciation and Middleton's disavowal of "any shenanigans that may or may not be going on."[458]

The extortion charge hovered over Williams's campaigns in 1972 and 1973. In 1972, an investigation by the Fulton County District Attorney's office concluded that his demands "border on extortion." The prosecutors pointed to a Georgia law that stated that "a person commits theft by extortion when he unlawfully obtains property…by threatening to bring about or continue a strike…if the property is not demanded or received for the benefit of the group in whose interest the actor purports to act."[459]

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[458] "Massell Denounces Hosea Williams For Fund Demands," *Atlanta Daily World,* October 26, 1972, 1; "A Justified Challenge, *Atlanta Daily World,* October 27, 1972, 4; Press Release, "Statement by: John A. Middleton, General Chairman Atlanta UNCF Campaign," no date, Series V, Subseries E, Box 4, Folder, 4, Hosea Williams Collection; "A Justified Challenge," *Atlanta Daily World,* October 27, 1972, 4.

Neither the prosecutors or any company chose to press charges. But accusations of extortion were about more than just lawfulness of his demands; they implied impropriety by Williams, that he was acting for his own financial benefit.

Richard Rich, chairman of the executive committee of Rich's department store, called Williams "a charlatan and a drunkard and an extortionist." For this comment, Williams unsuccessfully sued Rich for six million dollars. During a deposition for the lawsuit, Rich explained he did not mean that Williams "himself" asked for a "considerable settlement"; instead he meant that Williams was using a strike with "no valid reason" to demand money for SCLC, black banks, and other black-led institutions. That Williams included his former (and future) organization, the national office of SCLC, in his list of contributions from Rich's certainly could have appeared to some as an impropriety. However, one journalist wrote that "[a]ccording to those who know Williams insist that he deals above-board and that the only money gets out of the labor disputes is contributions from strikers to offset expenses." But extortion was not out of the realm of possibilities. While Williams only faced insinuations of extortion, Atlanta-based Reverend Clarence Quinn was convicted of taking donations to his church from two grocery stores after he threatened to picket if the stores did not increase wages. The rumors that Williams benefitted financially from his leadership cannot be proven from the record. But it is clear that companies and their allies were willing to quickly allege such charges.[460]

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[459] Barry Henderson, "Mead Strike Demands Illegal," *The Atlanta Constitution,* September 28, 1972, 1A.

[460] "Black Protests Take Aim at Business," *Atlanta Journal,* August 15, 1973,1A, 12A; Deposition of Richard H. Richard in Hosea Williams v. Richard H. Rich, Superior Court

The criticisms of Williams's heavy-handed demands for donations came from people that were not inclined to support the protests or Hosea Williams. The editors of the *Atlanta Daily World*, as we have seen, did not support the use of protests of any sort. In the case of the strive wave of 1972-1973, the editors were hard pressed to figure out why black workers and their allies would target employers that the newspapers saw as doing more good than harm for black Atlantans. Referring to the seven week strike at Rich's Department Store, the editors wrote that they "deplore seeing a minority of employees harass a good business and jeopardize so many more members of our racial group who are also employees." Then during the Sears strike, *Daily World* editors reminded its readers that the workers and Williams were protesting a company that was "a substantial donor to the United Negro College Fund."[461]

Along with the editors of the *Daily World*, Atlanta's labor movement was bewildered and frustrated by the string of strikes and found Williams-led protests to be ineffective and counterproductive. Ralph Meers, president of Printing Specialties and Paper Products Union, Local 572, that represented workers at Mead, believed that striking black workers were bringing unnecessary chaos to a labor-management system that unions had fought hard to develop. He believed the question was "whether you're going to have jungle warfare or abide by legal procedures." While Atlanta's black elite sympathized with the striking workers, in part, because of the legacy of racism in labor unions, labor leaders

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of Fulton County, Atlanta, Georgia, June 14, 1973, Series 2, Box 27, Folder 8, Richard H. Rich Papers; Prentice Palmer, "Williams Loses in Rich's Suit, " *The Atlanta Journal,* October 6, 1976, 8D. "Extortion by Minister Alleged Here," *Atlanta Constitution,* January 7, 1973, 6A; "Quinn Loses Appeal," *Atlanta Constitution,* June 28, 1975, 11A.

[461] "Harassment of Rich's" *Atlanta Daily World,* April 24, 1973, 6; "The Sears Situation," *Atlanta Daily World,* July 27, 1972, 4.

deflected such charges. John White, head of the Atlanta Labor Council insisted that there were "a hell of a lot more blacks [in unions] than the Bar or the American Medical Association." Wright, seemingly uninterested in the voluminous record of complaints made by workers, wondered why Williams chose to support the campaigns he did. "It is impossible for me to believe Mr. Williams couldn't find people who need help worse. You can always find somebody that's been crapped on."[462] Jim Sala, regional director of the AFL-CIO did not "consider" the strikes to be "labor disputes – in spite of all the hoopla," he asked, "what do we see accomplished? There's no grievance procedure, no recognition clause – these are simply pressure tactics which polarize black and white workers."[463]

At least one group that worked with Williams during a strike was also critical of his leadership style. After the Mead strike ended, the October League complained that Williams "attempted to hold down the level of militancy, focus the publicity on himself, and minimize the role of the worker in leading their own struggle."[464] The October League believed that Williams was too eager to enter negotiations with Mead and take credit for any victory. The League was not wrong to make this criticism. After a reporter questioned Williams association with the communist October League, Williams explained that the League was "just trying to ride the back of SCLC to respectability."[465]

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[462] Black Protests Take Aim at Business," *Atlanta Journal,* August 15, 1973,1A, 12A.

[463] Paula, "Strike," *The Great Speckled Bird,* July 30, 1973, 9; "Black Protests Take Aim at Business," *Atlanta Journal,* August 15, 1973,1A, 12A.

[464] "Wildcat at Mead," documentary produced by the October League, 1972, film accessed at https ://www.versobooks.com/blogs/328-wildcat-at-mead.

Williams had an authoritative style of leadership and an abrasive interpersonal style that could make creating coalitions even over a strike that only lasted a few weeks difficult to sustain.

In contrast to the October League, most workers at Mead, however, appreciated Williams's support. "He was an opportunist," one October League member explaining the striking workers' feelings towards Williams, "but he wasn't just an opportunist. He was a leader, someone who could bring something to the struggle."[466] It is difficult to discern exactly how most workers felt about the support Williams provided. This is a problem of sources that time and again privilege the voices of activists, union reps, and community leaders over the workers. However, it is telling that despite the widely-known baggage that Williams brought with him to a campaign, black workers in the city repeatedly sought out Williams support. These workers had grievances with their employers they wanted resolved and either they did not have union representation or they felt their union representatives were not up to the task. Williams and his colleagues provided support and a relatively influential presence for black workers with few other options.

Despite the criticism of Williams's participation in these strike he maintained support from other black civic leaders. Ralph Abernathy only played a significant role in the Rich's department store strike in April 1973, but the SCLC president was consistently by Williams side throughout the two years of protests. Abernathy, for example, led a "silent prayer" at a rally towards the end of the Holy Family Hospital protest in April 1972. The

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[465] Jim Stewart, "New Mead Disorders Predicted," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 9, 1972, 13A.

[466] Walsh-Taylor, "Turn to the Working Class," 93.

SCLC president was also alongside Williams when he announced the end of the Sears strike a few months later and was with him when Williams announced the formation of the Poor People's Union that December. [467]

In May 1973, Abernathy took over the leadership of a strike by 300 hundred black Rich's employees after Williams was sent to jail for refusing to pay a fine related to an arrest five years earlier. The workers went out on strike in late March after frustration with Rich's response to their demands to end discrimination in their hiring and promotion practices. Abernathy led marches and pickets and was arrested, but stepped aside once Williams got out of a jail a week later. The strike ended on May 22, with the employees winning little from Rich's except for the department store agreeing to following equal employment law, holding "meetings between Rich's management and personnel to review upgrading of blacks," and the creation "a special grievance committee." The company also agreed to hire back striking workers but did not promise that they would be in the same positions of earn the same wages since many of the positions were filled by replacement workers.[468]

Among the black middle class, outright denunciation of Williams's participation in the protests was rare. For many commenters, sympathy with the workers outweighed concerns for the targets chosen or the demands made. Lyndon Wade, director of the

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[467] Heeler McCartney and Gregory Jaynes, "2 Arrested in Scuffle at Hospital," *The Atlanta Constitution,* April 29, 1972, 12; SCLC & Sears Sign Revolutionary Covenant," *Atlanta Voice*, November 4, 1971, 1; Press Release, December 7, 1972, Series V, Subseries D, Box 4, Folder 1, Hosea Williams Collection.

[468] Mike Raffauf, "Hosea Williams Jailed, Abernathy Leads Strike," *The Great Speckled Bird,* 3; "Rich's Strike Ends," *The Great Speckled Bird,* May 28, 1973, 5.

Atlanta Urban League (AUL), for instance, agreed with the *Daily World* that Williams could have chosen which strikes to support more wisely. Tension…has got to be controlled. It can't be allowed to deteriorate until it destroys the fabric that is holding us together." But Wade was sympathetic to the protesters because of their continuing struggle against "institutional racism." "Let's face it," he explained to a reporter, "a company can have a policy of equal promotion and grievance mechanisms, but it also has got to have people willing to activate them…We may as well have the black and white signs back up when we talk about equal opportunity and promotion."[469]

During the seven-week strike at Rich's department store, Jesse Hill, an insurance executive and black civic leader, was largely supportive of the workers' cause. Hill, in fact, had been in negotiations with Rich's to improve its personnel practices just before the strike. He believed "the strikers brought to the attention of management some items that have probably never been focused on that way," but he also believed that the strike should have been settled in the first week. During the strike, the wealthy Hill "sympathized with the strikers," helped pay bonds for those arrested, and "helped with some of the hardship cases of people who were out on strike." "My relationship with Reverend Williams and the strikers was always good," he added. Throughout the two years of strike fever, Atlanta's black elite, whether it was Hill giving financial aid or Andrew Young and John Middleton serving as mediators, aided Williams and the strikers, even if they did not necessarily agree with the tactics.[470]

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[469] "Black Protests Take Aim at Business," *Atlanta Journal,* August 15, 1973,1A, 12A.

[470] "I Couldn't Be Another Hosea," *Atlanta Voice,* June 2, 1973, 2.

The protest that garnered the most unity from Atlanta's black communities was an eight-week picket at Holy Family Hospital in Southwest Atlanta by twelve laid off employees, all of whom were black women.[471] The protest began as a campaign by workers to organize a union and win recognition from the hospital. On the surface, this was not the type of protest that would have drawn in a large cross section of black Atlanta's activist, reform, and political communities. The protesters made up only a small minority of the hospital staff and their demand for a union election was not an especially salient issue for many black Atlantans. Moreover, the workers' desire for a union was opposed by a large majority of the staff, who also happened to be African American. Many in the surrounding black communities came to the support of the strikers in part because they were animated by the stark difference in the racial composition of the patients and the staff and the administrative leadership of the hospital. Nearly all the patients that Holy Family hospital served were black as was much of the staff and doctors at the hospital, but the administrative positions and the board of trustees continued to be white. For supporters of the strike the labor dispute was viewed as a white hospital administrator treating black workers unjustly, and the indifference of a white-controlled board of trustees. A protest over collective bargaining rights became a protest over the institutional control of a hospital. As an editor at the *Atlanta Voice* put it: "keeping Holy Family Hospital 'open at any cost'" cannot come "at the cost of maintaining racial

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[471] Two Masters theses discuss the Holy Family Hospital strike. Alfred J. Stovall, "The Atlanta Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Hosea Williams: 1972-1975," (MA Thesis, Atlanta University, 1977); Monica Waugh-Benton, "Strike Fever: Labor Unrest, Civil Rights and the Left in Atlanta, 1972." (MA Thesis, Georgia State University, 2006), 45-49.

equality and surety of equal and fair play." "In no case," the editor continued, "can the black population permit the taking over of its affairs by whites of questionable desires…This is what happened after the Civil War."[472]

Labor and Community Control at Holy Family Hospital

When the Catholic Medical Missionary Sisters opened Holy Family Hospital in 1964, it was "Atlanta's first fully integrated medical facility" and one of three hospitals in the city that routinely accepted African Americans who could pay for services.[473] The congregation built the hospital in a majority white neighborhood, but one that would soon transition to majority black as white residents "sold their homes to blacks and fled with more than deliberate speed to suburbia." Quickly the hospital transitioned from serving majority white patients to having a black patient population "now totaling 95 percent."[474] In 1968, the Sisters informally ceded control of the hospital to "a group of private individuals who operate under the old non-profit charter."[475] Holy Family Hospital by 1972 was overwhelmingly a black institution. Ninety-three percent of its doctors and

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[472] Editorial, "The Holy Family Hospital Crisis," *The Atlanta Voice,* March 25, 1972, 2.

[473] "Ground Breaking for Holy Family Hospital Held," *Atlanta Daily World*,1 July 2,1962, 1; Roger, "Workers Struggle at Holy Family Hospital, The Great Speckled Bird, March 27, 1972, 4; United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, "Report on Atlanta, Georgia Hospitals," August, 1966, Box 84, Folder 9, Sam Massell Papers, MSS 695, Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center (Hereafter Sam Massell Papers).

[474] Jim Wooten, "Strike Talks Stymied, Hospital Pickets Say," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 30, 1972, 2A.

[475] Roger, "Workers Struggle at Holy Family Hospital," *The Great Speckled Bird,* March 27, 1972, 4.

nearly all of its nursing and non-professional staff were African American. But the board of directors, administrators, and administrative staff remained largely white. Thirteen out of eighteen members of the board of directors and, the protesters claimed, 90 percent of the administrative personnel were white.[476] The fact that a white-majority of board and trustees and administrative positions continued to run a black-staffed hospital that served black patients in a black community was a focal point for the protesters and their allies. The criticism of white control of the hospital, and a call for more equitable distribution of African Americans in leadership, persuaded the larger community to support the labor dispute.

By 1972, healthcare, boosted by government investment, was one of the fastest growing industries in the country; the industry was "the 1960s greatest gold rush," according to Barbara and John Ehrenreich.[477] Hospitals, private, public, and non-profit like Holy Family, were "the single largest component [of the health care industry]…absorbing thirty-seven cents of every dollar spent on health care in the United States."[478] Between 1960 and 1975, hospital employment grew by 114 percent, whereas manufacturing only grew by 17 percent.[479] Among hospital employees there was a wide

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[476] Boyd Lewis, "Picketing Goes on at Holy Family Hospital," Atlanta Voice, March 25, 1972, 2; Holy Family Hospital Employees for Better Working Conditions, "Read the Truth about Holy Family Hospital,", Box 154, Folder 17, Grace Towns Hamilton Papers, MSS 597, Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center.

[477] Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich, *The American Health Empire: Power, Profits, and Politics* (New York: Random House, 1970), 94.

[478] Michel, "Union Power, Soul Power," 30.

[479] Fink and Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone*, 1.

chasm between those who did and did not benefit from this growth. Doctors, administrators, and supervisors all reaped the benefit of increasingly profitable sector. "Hospital service workers," Karen Brodkin Sacks explains, "were not among the beneficiaries of healthcare expansion."[480] Nurses, who were overwhelmingly women, ultimately found themselves somewhere between; how much they benefitted financially depending on training and licensing.[481]

The quick growth of hospitals and the increasingly restive labor force made hospitals fertile ground for labor organizing in the 1960s and 1970s. Nonprofessional workers, like nurse's aides and cafeteria workers, clerical staff, and nurses were all receptive to organizing. Local 1199 was on the forefront of the new field of labor organizing. Local 1199 was joined by the SEIU, AFSCME, and even the American Nurses Association, a professional organization rather than a union, to organize hospital workers and fight for collective bargaining rights.[482] Federal law, however, slowed the progress of hospital

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[480] Karen Brodkin Sacks, *Caring By the Hour: Women, Work, and Organizing at Duke Medical Center* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 37.

[481] Brodkin Sacks, *Caring by the Hour,* 197-200.

[482] Despite the importance the industry has played in the American economy since the 1960s, there has been surprisingly little written about the history of healthcare workers and their organizing campaigns. This is even more true for works on nurses and their unions. See Fink and Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone;* Michel, *"Union Power, Soul Power;"* Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein, *Caring for America: Home Health Workers in the Shadow of the Welfare State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Bruce Nissen, "A Different Kind of Union: SEIU Healthcare Florida from the Mid 1990s through 2009," in *Life and Labor in the New New South* ed. Robert H. Zieger (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2012), 289-313; Jewell C. Debnam, "Mary Moultrie, Naomi White, and the Women of the Charleston Hospital Workers' Strike," 59-79.

unions. The National Labor Relations Act did not recognize bargaining rights for non-profit hospitals until 1974.[483] In Atlanta, nonprofessional workers at Grady Memorial Hospital, mostly African American, agreed to join AFSCME District Council 14 in 1963 and nurses at DeKalb General Hospital, mostly white, resigned *en masse* to protest the hospital's refusal to recognize their local of American Nurses' Association in 1969.[484] Then during strike fever of 1972-1973, Holy Family's protest was joined by protests at Atlanta Hospital and South Fulton Hospital.[485] For many of these hospital workers, as was the case across the country, the demands for justice and equality of the black freedom movement inspired their newfound militancy.[486]

Holy Family nurses had discussed union organizing throughout much of 1971. The hospital administration took a hardline stance and acted immediately against the nascent organizing. According to one former nurse who had been fired for charges of alleged "incompetence," "troublemakers or potential troublemakers were asked to leave or were fired." The terminations, however**,** did not stop their efforts. Twenty-eight employees

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[483] Workers could organize at private, for-profit hospitals, and public hospital labor law varied by state. Lane Windham found that after the law changed in 1974 non-profit hospital workers "drove through a massive effort at unionization as soon as they could do so." Windham, *Knocking on Labor's Door*, 45.

[484] "Report Grady Hospital Employee Organization," *Atlanta Daily World,* October 6, 1963, 4; Cathleen Conway Johnson, "The Troubles with Angels of Mercy: The Mass Resignation of Registered Nurses at DeKalb General Hospital, Decatur, Georgia, January 22, 1969" (PhD. Diss., Emory University, 1994).

[485] Carrol Crawford, "Atlanta Hospital," *The Great Speckled Bird,* September 25, 1972, Ira J. Johnson, "Christmas on a Picket Line," *The Atlanta Voice,* December 23, 1972, 1.

[486] Throughout their studies of hospital workers Karen Brodkin Sacks and Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg emphasize the important role the black freedom movement played in hospital worker organizing. Brodkin Sacks, *Caring by the Hour;* Fink and Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone.*

contacted the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 554 in Fall 1971 over frustrations with recommendations made by a recently instituted policy committee established by hospital administrator Lee Nichols. The committee recommended improved benefits, but not enough of an improvement to satisfy the employees; nor did the hospital do an effective job at communicating the policy changes. "Apparently," a report on the labor dispute concluded, "word of impending benefit improvements had not filtered down to employees in the lower echelons."[487] Nurses also complained of mistreatment and negligence by supervisors and an unsafe working environment. One nurse was allegedly attacked by the white husband of a patient, and another nurse, unwell and under doctor's orders to rest, was forced to work the ICU or be fired, "only to end up there herself, 'bleeding profusely.'" Director of Nursing Florence Pecora, a white woman, came under especially harsh criticism from the employees. Pecora had, protesters charged, "been cruel to the black nurses."[488] One former employee complained that "the ability to get along with Miss Pecora, and not the level of professional quality determined promotions and getting good assignments." "Morale among nurses plunged," the same employee alleged, "when Miss Pecora took over."[489]

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[487] Jim Wooten, "Strike Talks Stymied, Hospital Pickets Stay," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 30, 1972, 2A.

[488] George M. Coleman, "Protests Ring At Holy Family Hospital," *Atlanta Daily World,* March 16, 1972, 1.

[489] Former Holy Family Nurse Challenges Reasons For Laying off ICU Staff," *The Atlanta Voice,* April 1, 1972, 1. These complaints align with the conclusions Karen Brodkin Sacks made about the persistent role of paternalism played in labor relations for nonprofessional hospital workers. "Arbitrariness adhered to these jobs." Brodkin Sacks, *Caring by the Hour,* 38-39.

The hospital workers, apparently with relative ease, signed up 250 employees out of nearly 400, and in early 1972 petitioned the National Labor Relations Board for an election. The employees, however, were ineligible for a NLRB-sanctioned election because as a non-profit hospital Holy Family did not fall under the Taft-Hartley Act. Ignoring the opinion of SEIU Local 554, which believed it could prove Holy Family was not organized as a non-profit and therefore could win bargaining rights, forty workers organized the Holy Family Hospital Employees for a Better Working Condition (HFHE) and reached out to the civil rights activists to help establish a union and win recognition from the hospital. Local 554, of course, disagreed with this strategy. It blamed "Miss Patricia Ivy," a registered nurse and leader of the organizing committee, "and her special interest group along with" Williams and Joseph Boone, a former SCLC activist and head of the Metro Atlanta Summit Leader Conference, who had caused "employees at Holy Family Hospital naturally [to become] confused as to the proper course obtaining an employee organization."[490]

It is not clear why the workers, who had earlier reached out to SEIU, would be so quick to cut ties with the union. The organizing committee merely sent a note to Local 554 that its "services were no longer needed."[491] Local 554, named The Federal and City Service Employees, had been around since the 1950s. In the late 1960s the local had about 850 members, most of them worked at the Atlanta General Depot, an army depot in

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[490] Clarence E. Crayton to All Employees of Holy Family Hospital, March 6, 1972, Box 1002, Folder 24, ALC Records.

[491] Employees Negotiating Committee for a Union of Holy Family Hospital to President of SEIU Local 554, March 2, 1972, Box 1002, Folder 24, ALC Records.

the city, and in several downtown office buildings. It does not appear that Local 554 had worked to organize any other hospitals in the city. Significantly, it was a black run union, all of the executive positions in 1972 were held by African Americans. Clarence E. Crayton, a black Atlantan and international organizer for the SEIU, served as president. Unlike other protests in 1972 and 1973 the members of the HFHE did not oppose the union because of any concern about racist neglect from a white union leadership.[492]

The speed with which Ivey and her coworkers chose to pursue representation without the help of Local 554 suggests they had little faith in the union's ability to circumvent existing labor law. This was probably a safe bet for the workers, after all, it would be another two years until Congress amended the Taft-Hartley Act and voluntary hospitals were no longer exempt.[493] But it is also possible that the small group of employees most interested in worker representation did not identify labor unions as the only or best representation. Civil rights activists, like Williams and Boone provided organizing and protest experience, connections to black activist networks, name recognition that could bring the strikers more press, and had a well-known history in Atlanta of supporting black workers. The members of HFHE were confident that with the help of Williams and Boone they could organize their own, non-NLRB, independent union at the hospital and

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[492] For more on SEIU Local 554's leadership see Memorandum, Clarence E. Crayton to Val Cox, Sr., February 22, 1971, Box 5, Folder 62, LR001715, SEIU Secretary-Treasurer's Office: Affiliate Officers Collection, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

[493] Fink and Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone*,167-68.

receive recognition from the administration.[494] As it turns out this confidence was misplaced.

Regardless of who aided the workers, Lee Nichols, the hospital administrator, refused to meet with the members of the HFHE or their representatives. At this point, Andrew Young, head of the CRC, intervened and convinced Nichols to allow for an employee representation election. Nichols agreed to hold an employee representation election on March 9, which Young would supervise. In order to undercut the efforts of the protesters, he held the election just two hours after meeting with the CRC head. In this election, which Young and Medical Chief of Staff Dr. Bernard J. Bridges denounced as unfair, a large majority of the workers — 188 to 28, which was less than half of the employees eligible to vote—voted against electing a union.[495] Many of the workers who voted against the HFHE were satisfied instead with the creation of an "Employees Relations Committee," essentially an employee-elected grievance committee that would meet with the administration.[496] That a majority of workers signed cards with the SEIU but then rejected the HFHE suggests that a majority of workers present for the vote were as against the leadership of the HFHE, who were responsible for ending Local 554's involvement at the hospital, as they were against the idea of worker representation.

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[494] Flyer, "Read the Truth about Holy Family Hospital," Holy Family Hospital Employees for a Better Working Condition, Box 61, Folder 1, SCLC Records Emory.
[495] "Read the Truth About Holy Family Hospital," No Date, Box 61, Folder 1, SCLC Records Emory; "End of the Hospital Dispute," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 2, 1972, 6.

[496] Jim Wooten, "Strike Talks Stymied, Hospital Pickets Stay," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 30, 1972, 2A; Memorandum, Florence M. Pecora to Nursing Service Personnel, February 11, 1972, Box 1002, Folder 24, ALC Records; Stovall, "The Atlanta Southern Christina Leadership Conference and Hosea Williams," 40.

Throughout the protest, the hospital used this election as justification for not meeting with the protesting workers and their advisors.[497]

Then on March 13 the hospital administrator only angered the workers seeking recognition more when he moved twelve registered nurses and licensed practical nurses, all women, who were members of the organizing committee to the intensive care unit and then shut the unit down and laid off the workers.[498] Nichols claimed it was standard procedure to close the unit and place employees on leave when not in use. The hospital employees argued they were fired for their organizing activities. These twelve women along with Williams and Boone decided to set up a picket and present the board with a list of demands. [499]

Since the top priority was gaining recognition for employee representation, the list focused on the rights of an employee representative group including the right to elections, employer recognition, dues check-offs and the right to collective bargaining.[500] In addition, the committee included demands for improvements to worker benefits, twelve sick days, expanded vacation, improved healthcare, and a wage hike. The committee also called for the hospital re-organize its leadership structure. First it demanded the

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[497] "End of the Hospital Dispute," Atlanta Daily World, May 2, 1972, 6.

[498] "Former Holy Family Nurse Challenges Reasons for Laying off ICU Staff," *The Atlanta Voice,* April 1, 1972, 1. Roger, "Holy Family," *Great Speckled Bird*, April 3, 1972, 7.

[499] Jim Wooten, "Strike Talks Stymied, Hospital Pickets Stay," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 30, 1972, 12-A

[500] Holy Family Hospital Employees for Better Working Conditions, "Demands," Box 154, Folder 17, Grace Towns Hamilton Papers.

termination of Lee Nichols and the Director of Nursing, Florence Pecora. Second, HFHE called for the creation of a "Hospital Operation Policy Board that will be responsible for final decision-making in carrying out policy of the Board of directors," and that this board "should consist of one-third management, one-third professional, and one-third non-professional staff."[501]

Conspicuously, the demands made no explicit reference to race or discrimination. The closest the committee comes to making a race-based demand was "that all BOARDS, AUTHORITIES, commissions, and/or committees should be thoroughly representative of the total constituent associated with the Hospital."[502] The lack of race-based demands is especially striking because race and racial inequality, quite overtly, shaped the rhetoric of the protesters and the narrative they constructed to explain how conditions at the hospital reached a breaking point.

Because the patients, healthcare-providing employees, and community were mostly black while the board of trustees and administration were mostly white, the HFHE argued that Holy Family Hospital could not have the best interest of the workers or community in mind. "The truth of the matter is," the protesters bluntly wrote in one pamphlet, "the majority of Board members of Holy Family are rich white people who live on the West side of Atlanta; they are insensitive to the Black community; and they are just not going to labor and sacrifice for any institution that serves mainly the Black community."[503]

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[501] Holy Family Hospital Employees for Better Working Conditions, "Demands," Box 154, Folder 17, Grace Towns Hamilton Papers.

[502] Holy Family Hospital Employees for Better Working Conditions, "Demands," Box 154, Folder 17, Grace Towns Hamilton Papers.

Hosea Williams did his part to shape the labor struggle into a challenge against white control over black institutions. The board of trustees, Williams explained to the press, "feel like they just have to dominate black folk."[504] Williams also suggested that if the hospital were to close due to the protest – "a hospital spokesman denied that there were any plans to close" – then "we will demand that [the Medical Missions Board of the Catholic Church] donate it to the black community for reparations."[505]

This racial disparity provided a reason for the black Atlantans outside of the hospital to see in the worker protest a battle for black institutional control. [506] The protesting workers were only a small minority of the work force. Even though the rushed elections that Nichols held were questioned by the strikers and observers, like Andrew Young, a majority of workers still voted against the HFHE. In constructing a narrative where the white leadership of the hospital not only hurt the workers but also hurt the black community relying on the hospital's services, the protesters found a way to win the support of community members who may have been more hesitant to support an organizing drive.

The role of Holy Family Hospital in Atlanta's healthcare community made it an important institution not just for those that relied on its services but for many African

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[503] Holy Family Hospital Employees for Better Working Conditions, "Read the Truth about Holy Family Hospital," Box 154, Folder 17, Grace Towns Hamilton Papers.

[504] Roger, "Holy Family," *The Great Speckled Bird,* April 3, 1972, 7.

[505] Chuch Bell, "If Hospital Closes, Blacks to Seek It," *The Atlanta Constitution,* May 1, 1972, 2A.

[506] For discussion of the significance of institutional control to the Black Power movement see Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, *Black Power*; Robert O. Self, *American Babylon,* 215-327.

Americans throughout the city. By 1972, Holy Family had "one of the largest groups of black medical specialists in the Southeast, a favorite hospital among black physicians."[507] The importance of the hospital to black Atlantans could also be used against the protesters. For instance, it "grieved" the *Atlanta Daily World* "greatly to see a dispute which began last year by a comparatively few employees has developed to the point of jeopardizing the Holy Family Hospital which is essential to the health of thousands of members of our racial group and other citizens as well."[508] Nevertheless, the protesters' narrative of white control over a hospital that employed and served mostly African Americans resonated with some in the city. Now that Atlanta was a majority-black city, many African Americans no longer content with a subordinate role were intent on gaining political, economic, and institutional power from the white power structure — from a small hospital in Southwest Atlanta to city hall. As one editorial about the hospital put it: "But now it's just another example of whites running the lives of blacks, and some people in the black community won't like it until blacks can run a few things down town."[509]

At first the picketing was small, there were thirty-five protesters the first week and many of them were community members who came with Williams and Boone. But as Nichols and the hospital board cracked down on the protesters and continued to refuse to negotiate with HFHE, community support for the demonstrations strengthened.[510] Soon

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[507] "Businesses Target of Black Protest," *Atlanta Journal*, 12A.

[508] "End the Hospital Dispute," *Atlanta Daily World*, May 2, 1972, 6.

[509] "The Holy Family Hospital Strike," *Atlanta Voice*, March 25, 1972, 2.

residents turned to other health care institutions for care. By late-April the hospital was more than two-thirds vacant.[511]

It is not completely clear to what extent the rest of the hospital staff participated in the protests. Reverend Elias Hardge of Southwest Community Groups Association, who authored a report on the labor dispute, described a divide between "the strikers" and "the majority of loyal workers who have kept the hospital open."[512] The *Daily World* reported that "a majority of the employees expressed some resentment against the discharged employees the SCLC and Rev. Hosea Willaims [sic]."[513] When the protests first began, the *Atlanta Inquirer* reported that only 10 percent, or about 40 employees, of the hospital staff joined the protest, however they did not strike.[514] But by mid-April a sizeable minority voiced their support of the striking workers. At least 100 employees signed a petition that called for Holy Family to meet HFHE's demands. That at least 70 more employees signed this petition than voted for HFHE weeks earlier may speak to both the conditions under which Lee Nichols held the election and a negative response by employees to Nichols ensuing treatment of HFHE leaders. [515]

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[510] Roger, "Workers Struggle at Holy Family Hospital, *The Great Speckled Bird*, March 27, 1972, 4.

[511] Jim Wooten, "Strike Talks Stymied, Hospital Pickets Stay," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 30, 1972, 12-A

[512] Candy, "Holy Family Strike Continues," *The Great Speckled Bird*, April 10, 1972, 5

[513] "Hospital Trustee Head and Employees Seek Unity at Holy Family," *Atlanta Daily World,* May 4, 1972, 1.

[514] "Holy Family Hospital," *Atlanta Inquirer,* May 6, 1972, 1.

[515] Roger, "Hospital Strike Reaches Decisive Phase," *The Great Speckled Bird*, April 24, 1972, 8.

As with employees, doctors at Holy Family were split over the protest. Dr. William Holmes Borders Jr., the son of the famed Wheat Street Baptist preacher, was the most vocal physician in opposition to Lee Nichols decision to close the intensive care unit and layoff the leaders of HFHE. By mid-may Borders and twenty-one other doctors, out of a staff of fifty-nine, presented the board of trustees with a petition to end the dispute. The doctors called for the board and Nichols to "[b]ring all involved employees…back to work immediately," to "render any back pay dues these employees," and to change the "composition of the Trustee Board" to "include one-third of its membership, non-hospital based physicians, and "one employee, elected at large by his or her peers."[516] Nichols and the board agreed that the hospital would hire back the employees but refused to give back pay, a stipulation that the protesting workers refused to accept. At this point a few of the doctors offered to cover the employee's back pay, but this donation never came to fruition.[517]

Throughout the eight-week protest, Williams, Boone, and other civil rights activists maintained a presence on the picket line despite charges from the hospital that they were "outside agitators." For these activists supporting black workers in a hospital serving a black community was an extension of the civil rights movement of the early and mid 1960s. Boone, like Williams a former King aide, told the press that, "We are following in

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[516] Stovall, "The Atlanta Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Hosea Williams," 42-43; Memorandum, The Holy Family Employees for Better Working Conditions to All Staff & Employees of Holy Family Hospital, no date, Box 154, Folder 17, Grace Towns Hamilton Papers.

[517] Flyer, "Boycott of Hospital Still On," Holy Family Hospital Employees for Better Working Conditions, no date, Box 342, Folder 30, SCLC Records Emory.

the footsteps of Rev. Martin Luther King. We are taking the necessary step to drive the devil out of Holy Family Hospital."[518] In addition to Boone and Williams, the protesting workers were joined on the picket line by a group of black activists that included Al McClure, the director of the Atlanta branch of the NAACP, to Willie Ricks, the former SNCC activist and popularizer of the term "black power." The dispute at Holy Family, which started as a protest by twelve fired workers, but grew to a conflict over who controlled an essential health care provider in a majority black neighborhood, united a range of black political act that few other protests in Atlanta at the time could.

The non-violent protests, however, were met with arrests and on Thursday, April 27, violence. Two days earlier, Williams, Boone, McClure, and youth leader Reverend Arthur Langford set up a tent to maintain a prayer vigil and "live only on salted water."[519] Then on Thursday night, gun fire rang out on the hospital grounds as Boone sat in the tent with Langford, who would be elected council member two years later, and Willie Ricks. A bullet struck Ricks as he stepped out of the tent to investigate and moments later another bullet struck Langford, still sitting in the tent. Both activists were rushed to Grady Memorial Hospital with non-critical wounds.[520] The shooting pushed community support in favor of the workers, breaking an intransigent administration. Over five hundred people reportedly attended rallies in support of the workers the weekend after

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[518] "4 Rights Leaders Begin Fast at Hospital," *Atlanta Voice,* April 29, 1972, 1.

[519] "4 Rights Leaders Begin Fast at Hospital," *Atlanta Voice,* April 29, 1972, 1.

[520] Jim Wooten, "Strike Talks Stymied, Hospital Pickets Stay," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 30, 1972, 12-A; Roger, "Holy Family Strikers Win," *The Great Speckled Bird,* May 8, 1972, 6.

the shooting. And, just as importantly, influential black leaders in the city like Julian Bond, Leroy Johnson, Marvin Arrington, Ralph Abernathy and Jesse Hill expressed their support for the twelve fired protesters.[521]

As a result of a bad publicity from the shooting, the board agreed to reenter negotiations the following Monday. Included in the negotiating meeting with the board were a group of doctors, Williams, and Boone, with Andrew Young, Julian Bond, and Reverend Elias Hardge serving as mediators.[522] In late March, the workers had already narrowed their list of demands down to three: that the workers be reinstated with back pay and no reprisals, that Nichols sit down and talk to the workers, and that a new representative election be held.[523] In the final agreement ending the strike, the workers won reinstatement, all charges were dropped, and a new representative election was schedule. The hospital**,** though**,** would not pay the workers back pay for the time they did not work. Young and the CRC, however, were able to convince a group headed by African American businessmen Jesse Hill and Bill Calloway to create a fund that would finance the twelve workers**'** back pay.[524] In discussing the end of the protest, Hosea Williams once again invoked his former boss at SCLC when he, wrongly, proclaimed that the protest received more support "than for anything that has happened in Atlanta since Dr. Martin Luther King died."[525]

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[521] Roger, "Holy Family Strikers Win," *The Great Speckled Bird,* May 8, 1972, 6.

[522] "Explosive Dispute at Holy Family Ends," *Atlanta Voice*, May 6, 1972, 1.

[523] Roger, "Holy Family," *The Great Speckled Bird,* April 3, 1972, 7.

[524] Roger, "Holy Family Strikers Win," *The Great Speckled Bird,* May 8, 1972, 7.

The next day, Tuesday, May 3, the board of trustees suspended Lee Nichols, his assistant, and his secretary because the board had been "informed that some members of the administration had some knowledge about the shooting."[526] On Wednesday, the Atlanta Police Department charged the suspended hospital administrator with aggravated assault in the shooting of the Ricks and Langford.[527] Following a hung jury, and despite eye-witness testimony from his own bodyguard that Nichols was indeed the shooter, a jury acquitted the former hospital administrator in February 1974.[528]

For supporters of HFHE the disappointment with Atlanta's justice system just added to their continued disappointment with organizing attempts at Holy Family Hospital. The workers who supported a union could not convince their co-workers to vote for union representation. On June 8, less than a month after the protesting workers went back to work and the hospital resumed regular services, 167 workers voted against joining the independent union and 79 voted in favor.[529] For some workers frustration with the hospital management continued to simmer. A year after the protest, workers held a meeting with the Metro Atlanta-DeKalb SCLC because "dissension is all over the hospital and just about every department is ready to walk out."[530]

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[525] Chuck Bell, "Holy Family, Workers Okay Terms to End 7-Week Strike," *Atlanta Constitution* May 2, 1972.

[526] Gregory Janes, "Hospital Chief is Charged in Shooting," *Atlanta Constitution,* May 4, 1972.

[527] Gregory Janes, "Hospital Chief is Charged in Shooting," *Atlanta Constitution,* May 4, 1972.

[528] "Holy Family Boss Gets Off," *The Great Speckled Bird,* February 11, 1974, 6.

[529] "Hospital Workers Vote Down Union," *The Atlanta Constitution,* June 9, 1972, 2A.

HFHE did not get the union it desired, but the community soon saw their demands for black community control fulfilled. In 1973 the hospital formally passed ownership of the hospital to what newspapers vaguely referred to as "the community." It is not clear from available records exactly how the hospital was funded, but African Americans now served as both the hospital administrator and the head of the board of trustee. Hospital representatives and journalists referred to it as a "black-owned medical facility."[531] In 1975 to emphasize community control of the hospital, the board renamed it Southwest Community Hospital. Presidents of the board of trustees in these years included Eddie Lomax, a black business executive and Reverend Elias Hardge, who played a prominent role in mediating the 1972 dispute. During the ownership transition the protests were not acknowledged, but given the timing of the transition – a year after the dispute – it is likely that the protests had some effect. When Nichols was suspended then fired, Dr. Bernard J. Bridges, the African-American chief of staff of the hospital, became interim administrator, and then Arnett W. Mumford, the son of a legendary black college football coach, was hired as the new administrator. Community control of a hospital in a majority-black community became the rallying cry of a protest began by workers calling for union recognition, and it eventually became the one victory of the month long protest.[532]

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[530] Meeting Flyer, May 29, 1973, Series V Subseries B, Box 1, Folder 9, Hosea Williams Collection.

[531] "Holy Family Hospital Planning Name Change," *Atlanta Daily World,* October 6, 1974; 1; Frederick Allen, "Agency, Hospital Locked in Battle," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 11, 1978, 1C.

[532] "Employees at Holy Family Will Vote on Union Issue," *Atlanta Daily World,* December 12, 1974, 1; "Dinner Honors Staff, Board of Holy Family," *Atlanta Constitution,* October 23, 1972, 4B; "Dr. Broyles Named Chaplain," *Atlanta Constitution,* May 25, 1974, 12A.

Even though the Holy Family Hospital protest was not a victory for the workers seeking union representation, Williams bragged that "the Holy Family victory should say to the power structure of Atlanta that poor people won't take it any more."[533] The protests at the hospital, the brazen response of the administration, and the eventual support from the community helped sparked a series of strikes, boycotts, and pickets that spread across the city over the next eighteen months. During the picketing, Williams and the workers stressed that the well-being of the hospital employees, patients, and community was dependent on black institutional control. This link between work, community, and self-determination played out in dozens of other workplaces throughout the city.

From Protests to Politics

Over the next year, Williams came to the aid of at least twenty-eight worker-led protests across the city.[534] At nearly every protest he was involved with he included demands for the businesses to help fund black institutions in the city. The results of the strikes, pickets, and boycotts were mixed and none achieved the victories of the Sears strike. Williams's own rash behavior – his short attention span and indifference to long-term organizing – often served as a hindrance. "If Hosea were stable," one labor leader suggested, "he'd be one hell of a man to contend with. But he's like a rubber ball, bouncing from one thing to another without any logic."[535] Events around a Reed's Drug

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[533] "Explosive Dispute at Holy Family Ends," *Atlanta Voice*, May 6, 1972, 2.

[534] See List of strikes, undated, Series V, Subseries B, Box 1, Folder 1, Hosea Williams Collection.

[535] "Black Protests Take Aim at Business," *Atlanta Journal,* August 15, 1973, 12A.

Store strike reveal some of the limits of Williams's protest strategy. In March 1973, twenty employees in several Reed's stores throughout the city turned to Williams to assist them in a strike demanding an end to discrimination, harassment, and intimidation. Williams and the small staff of the Metro Atlanta/DeKalb SCLC willingly aided the workers at six locations. Three weeks later**,** though, with the boycott effectively slowing down business, Williams abruptly switched his attention away from Reed's and instead focused his resources on a larger target: Rich's Department Store. As a result, the protests ended and the workers not fired returned to work. At the end of May, once he negotiated a settlement with Rich's, Williams attempted to restart the "work-stoppage boycott strike" at Reed's, but no workers were willing to risk their job again and only SCLC employees walked the picket lines.[536]

By Fall 1973, Williams turned his attention away from workplace protests and instead focused all his energy and limited resources on his campaign for the newly created city council president seat. At the beginning of the year, Williams had no intention of running. He chose to enter the race as a protest candidate when he became aware of a bargain between the city's black and white leadership. According to some reports, the white civic elite had agreed to support the favored African-American candidate for mayor, Maynard Jackson, if the black elite supported the white business community's chosen candidate for council president, banker Wade Mitchell.[537] Mitchell did not even make it to the run-off. Williams, with little funds and a small staff, finished a surprising second in the general

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[536] Paula, "SCLC Pickets Reeds Again," *The Great Speckled Bird,* June 18, 1973, 6.

[537] Mike Raffauf "Maynard Making Good (Friends)," *The Great Speckled Bird*, July 9, 1973, 5; Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn*, 419-420.

election, but in the run off finished several thousand votes short of up-and-coming white liberal Wyche Fowler. Surprisingly during his campaign, Williams did not focus much on the eighteen months of labor protests**;** instead he stuck to the topics dominating the election: crime, the police department, the new city charter, and annexation.

After the election, Williams refocused his time on his Metro Atlanta/DeKalb SCLC. Upon his return, however, Williams announced a change in tactics in the fight against economic and racial injustices. The Poor People's Union that he founded in December 1972 would continue its efforts to organize the unorganized, but with limited resources and little success. More importantly, he decided to switch his efforts from direct action on the picket line to back room negotiations with employers. As one newspaper put it: Williams "believed he can accomplish a great deal by sitting down with businessmen and using moral and economic arguments to try and get them to hire more black people."[538] In addition, Williams decided to focus on creating businesses that would benefit the black community. In part this was a certainly a practical response. By the end of 1973 the economy was slumping and the effects of the oil-shortage were beginning to be felt.[539] Workers became less willing to confront their employees through strikes and pickets. But this transformation was also part of a larger shift in the tactics of SCLC. By that summer, the SCLC executive board called for a switch towards advocacy of black capitalism, similar to the actions of Jesse Jackson and his newly created organization, PUSH.[540] But

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[538] Jon Jacobs *"Atlanta SCLC Implements New Program," The Great Speckled Bird,* December 10, 1973, 10.

[539] Stein, *Pivotal Decade;* Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence*, 99-184; Patterson, *Grand Expectations,* 783-790.

most importantly, the victories of Maynard Jackson, as Atlanta's first African American mayor, and his own surprising success— he received 44,000 votes — seemed to convince Williams that he could play within the system.[541]

During the workplace protests in 1972 and 1973 black workers, Hosea Williams and allies melded civil rights and labor movement tactics of protest with the rhetoric and goals of the Black Power movement to attempt to challenge workplace injustices, racial discrimination and the unequal distribution of money, goods, and services. Williams's efforts however accomplished very little. By the end of 1973 and the election of Jackson, many of the professional activists decided to reorient their challenges on white supremacy from protest to politics. Williams, the consummate agitator, had even become convinced that African Americans in Atlanta had made enough headway into the city's traditional power structures that change no longer needed to come from "some type of physical confrontation."[542] In an interview after the landmark election, Hosea Williams explained to a reporter: "I got to where I am today…with my dungarees, my balled fists, my marches and picket signs…I feel like I'm in a position now to do a bigger thing, a more representative thing."[543] As we will see in the next three chapters, however, entering electoral politics did not mean that workplace protests were a thing of the past. Just as private sector workers across the country participated in a workplace protests in

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[540] Mike Raffauf, "SCLC Begins New Era," *The Great Speckled Bird,* August 27, 1973, 9.

[541] Jon Jacobs, "A New Thrust," *The Great Speckled Bird,* November 12, 1973, 4.

[542] Raines, *My Soul Is Rested,* 435

[543] "Hosea: Bridge Between Poor and Non-Poor," *The Atlanta Voice,* November 3, 1973, 9.

the late ‘60s and ‘70s, the public sector led by the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) participated in strikes at an unprecedented rate. In Atlanta black city workers, many of them sanitation workers, held strikes in 1968, 1970, and 1977.

Chapter 4: Civil Rights Unionism and the Public Sector: The 1968 Atlanta Sanitation Strike, Poverty, and Community Support

On September 3**,** 1968, the day after Labor Day, more than one hundred black sanitation workers walked off their job at a northeast substation. By that Friday, more than seven hundred striking workers, nearly all black but joined by a few white men, had shut down all trash pick-up in the city. The city refused to allow the remaining workers, mostly white truck drivers, to go on runs, fearing reprisals from the striking workers. This was a non-sanctioned wildcat strike, but it was not a surprise; both city officials and the sanitation workers' union, Local 850 of AFSCME's District Council (DC) 14, knew that the workers were frustrated with continued discrimination in hiring and promotions, poor working conditions, and low pay. Though union officials knew how disgruntled the workers were and warned city officials about a possible walkout, they refused to support the strike. J.W. Giles, head of DC 14, called the strike "an unauthorized and illegal work stoppage," warning his members that their actions threatened to ruin ongoing negotiations. Throughout the ten-day strike, the sanitation workers received no support from the local AFSCME union and minimal support from any other local union. AFSCME, which had built up a relationship with the city since the Great Depression, did not want to create an unnecessary conflict with the mayor and aldermen. And just as importantly, the racist white leadership of DC 14 and Local 850 felt no empathy for or solidarity with black sanitation workers striking for better pay.

In place of local union leaders, AFSCME international representatives and the SCLC stepped up to represent the workers, aided to a lesser extent by a collection of black civic leaders and politicians, local religious leaders, and representatives from the AFL-CIO.

Strikers and their allies were prepared to follow the example of the March 1968 Memphis sanitation strike, but instead, the city and workers in Atlanta came to an agreement that included a 14.5 percent wage increase after just ten days. AFSCME and SCLC saw the agreement as a victory and reconfirmed the power of the informal partnership they created months earlier in Memphis. A raise with no repercussion against even the wildcat strike leaders was certainly a success. The inaction of the local AFSCME officials finally gave Jerry Wurf, the president of the international, the motive to remove the racist leadership of the Atlanta union and restructure the organization more to his new vision of public sector unionism. With the changes to leadership and structure, the newly named AFSCME Local 1644 became an important instrument for black public employees in Atlanta looking to improve their wages and working conditions.

Yet, contrary to what the sanitation workers and AFSCME might have imagined and wished for, the strike did not change the public sector labor relations in the city. Mayor Ivan Allen and the white mainstream press viewed the strike resolution as much a victory for the city as AFSCME had viewed it as a success for the sanitation workers and public sector unionism in Atlanta. It was certainly a public relations victory for Allen and his administration. The mayor**,** while holding the line with negotiations**,** was not unduly antagonistic to AFSCME or the strikers. The mayor's response to the strike was another chance for Allen to prove that Atlanta was the "city too busy to hate." The strike was a protest over poverty-level wages – specifically poverty-level wages of black Atlantans – a problem that the mayor and the press agreed was perhaps the city's major concern, one that the city needed to resolve in order to further the goal of ending racial inequality. The resolution became another example of the responsible white and black leaders of the city

coming together, just as they had in ending the sit-ins in 1961, or as they had to help the city move on after the civil disturbances in Summerhill and Dixie Hill in 1966 and 1967. In representing this strike as another incident in their history of improving race relations in the city, the mayor and the white press wrote labor unions and labor relations out of the story. It appears the mayor nor other city administrators learned anything about public sector labor relations from this strike. The September 1968 strike — the only extended public sector strike in Atlanta in the 1960s and 1970s that did not include mass firings — did not become, as AFSCME may have imagined, a blueprint for progressive labor relations in Atlanta.

This unintentional outcome of the partnership between public sector unions and civil rights organizations in Atlanta reveals a critical limit to this alliance. Unionized black public employees found important allies in black civic, religious, and civil rights leaders, but only as long as these leaders continued to consider organized labor, workplace rights, and more broadly the end of the impoverishment and exploitation of the black working class as priorities in their version of the black freedom movement. Without community support, there were too many impediments — a hostile legal system, an antagonistic political structure, and the continued racism of white local labor leaders and union members, to name three — for AFSCME to be able to win meaningful concessions for black public sector workers in Atlanta.

These troubles, however, were not apparent in September 1968. In fact, a series of intersecting interests meant that conditions were remarkably favorable for a victory for the sanitation workers. The "revolt of public employees," the wave of strikes and protests of public employees across the country that had begun in the mid-1960s, had finally

reached Atlanta's black sanitation workers. Jerry Wurf and other AFSCME international representatives were eager to bring their brand of militant public unionism to Atlanta and to supplant the racist and conservative trade unionists that ran the local. SCLC's leaders saw the strike as an opportunity to continue their poor people's campaign, just as Martin Luther King Jr. had in Memphis. SCLC, despite the embarrassment of the Poor People's Campaign in Washington, DC, that June, was still an influential and well-funded organization. The group particularly held influence with many of Atlanta's white elite who did not want to appear to be attacking Martin Luther King Jr's legacy. The strikes association with the Memphis strike and King's assassination months earlier, and the support of SCLC, helped the striking workers gain allies from much of the black civil rights, political, and religious infrastructure in the city. The strike leader's emphasis on poverty-level wages helped the sanitation workers gain sympathy and support even from black leaders who generally opposed militant labor actions. Poverty, frequently part of the discourse on civil rights since early in the decade, had become a major part of the national conversation on social and racial issues in 1968 thanks in part to debates surrounding riots and the publicity of the Poor People Campaign. Because the strike became part of this poverty discourse, striking workers gained sympathy, if not outright support, from an unlikely source: the city's white press. Furthermore, this combination of civil rights and anti-poverty rhetoric almost assuredly played a factor in Mayor Allen's relatively benign approach to the strike. With a non-hostile mayor, a sympathetic press, and important allies both nationally and locally, the sanitation workers were able to win a salary increase. Perhaps more importantly, the wildcat strike finally pushed AFSCME

international to remove the racist leadership of the local, allowing for the advancement of black union leaders and the advancement of new goals, strategies, and tactics.

This chapter begins by exploring the interconnected histories of AFSCME and of black sanitation workers in Atlanta before the 1968 strike. This long history shows the amicable relationship that AFSCME had established with the city that complicates the general narrative of an anti-union South. This history also demonstrates how white supremacy shaped public sector unionism in Atlanta and how black workers attempted to navigate and challenge it. Then the chapter looks closely at the 1968 strike – what caused it, how relevant parties reacted, and how the strike was resolved. This section discusses how black reformers often found themselves in support of public sector workers, the importance of their support, but also some of the weaknesses of this community-labor alliance. This final section also pays particular attention to how the rhetoric of poverty, amplified by the strikers, the union, their allies, and the city press, helped the relatively weak sanitation workers win concessions from the city.

AFSCME in Atlanta

Atlanta city workers had organized collectively in various ways for most of the twentieth century. In the first few decades, the organizations they established were, at times, informal and ad hoc; workers would come together to voice a particular grievance or walk off the jobs together for better pay.[544] There were also more formal associations

[544] "Cart Drivers Are on Strike," *Atlanta Constitution,* January 23, 1906; "Negro Cart Driver's Strike Nearing End," *Atlanta Constitution,* May 23, 1919; "Negro Teachers Claim More Pay," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 21, 1920, 6.

like the Atlanta Public School Teachers' Association, organized in 1905, and a local of the International Association of Fire Fighters, organized in 1918.[545] Public sector workers in the city became more active in formal organizations in the 1920s.[546] Among the organizations founded in that decade was the City and County Service Association, a group of white city and county office workers that would later become AFSCME Local 1644.

In 1935 the City and County Service Association, now renamed the City and County Employees Union No. 17-212, joined with municipal unions across the nation to form the National, State, County and Municipal Employees Association affiliated with American Federation of Government Employees, the union for federal government workers. A year later, the AFL chartered the organization, under the new name the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME).[547]

Leading this movement was Arnold Zander, a representative of the Wisconsin State Employees Association (WSEA). Founded in 1932, the WSEA was an organization of white-collar state employees that quickly established itself in Wisconsin politics when it worked closely with progressives to prevent the newly elected governor from ending the state's civil service system. Zander brought the WSEA's focus on civil service to

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[545] Barbara Joye, and Arlon Kennedy, "Governmental Labor Relations in Atlanta," Research Atlanta*,* 1975, 3-6; Dorothy Cowser Yancy, "The Spectre of Public Unionism from 1966 to 1976: A Critical Analysis of Labor Policies of the City of Atlanta," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Atlanta University, 1978),13-14.

[546] Joye and Kennedy, "Governmental Labor Relations in Atlanta," 6.

[547] "Atlantan To Attend Convention of Union," *Atlanta Constitution,* May 20, 1937, 3; "Employee Union in the State Expands," *Atlanta Constitution,* December 4, 1935, 20.

AFSCME, and the goal of protecting and growing merit systems throughout state and local governments guided the union in its first two decades. AFSCME did not rely on traditional union techniques — strikes and collective bargaining were almost universally illegal to public workers at the time — and instead relied on political advocacy. Without the same legal and political protections the private sector labor unions gained from the Wagner Act and war-time policies, AFSCME still grew from around 10,000 members in 1936 to 70,000 in 1945.[548]

By the 1950s, AFSCME was firmly established and had renamed itself District Council (DC)14 with separate locals representing employees at City Hall, the Fulton County court house, non-teaching staff in the Atlanta public schools, the city's health department, and sanitation workers, white and black, in Atlanta and DeKalb county. DC 14 proved its new influence when in 1959 Atlanta's board of alderman passed an ordinance allowing for automatic dues checkoffs of union fees. Checkoffs provided the union with more financial security and was an implicit message by the city that DC 14 was the de facto union representatives of its employees.[549]

Atlanta's move towards a more formal relationship with its public sector union placed the city in a larger national movement towards formalized relationships between the state and public sector unions. In 1958 New York City Mayor Robert Wagner Jr., in large part due to pressure from AFSCME, gave city workers collective bargaining rights. And a

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[548] The best work on early public sector unions is Slater, *Public Workers*. For more on the early development of AFSCME see Francis Ryan, *AFSCME's Philadelphia Story,* 66-68; Joseph Hower, "Jerry Wurf," 61-64.

[549] Barbara Joye, and Arlon Kennedy, "Governmental Labor Relations in Atlanta," 9.

year later, Wisconsin became the first state to recognize public sector collective bargaining. Then in 1962, John F. Kennedy, gave his own influential imprimatur to formal relations with public sector unions when he signed Executive Order 10988 that allowed for public sector collective bargaining among federal employees.[550]

Atlanta never extended collective bargaining rights to its employees. Even mayors Sam Massell and Maynard Jackson, who called for more formalized labor relations, never attempted to institute collective bargaining. Even if collective bargaining had the support of local politicians state courts likely would have overturned it. Georgia courts had, on several occasions, ruled that collective bargaining by state actors was illegal. Even though there was no legislation barring collective bargaining for public employees, the courts ruled that collective bargaining could only be legal if the legislature explicitly allowed it, otherwise formal contract negotiations between the state and a third party was an "unlawful delegation of state power."[551]

Through the 1970s Georgia courts only allowed for three protected rights for most non-emergency public employee unions: the right to form a union, the right to negotiate, although without an eventual contract, and the right to dues checkoff.[552] By 1960 Atlanta

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[550] McCartin, "A Wagner Act for Public Employees," 126; Nelson Lichtenstein, *State of the Union*, 181-183.

[551] In 1971 the Georgia legislature did pass a law allowing for the firemen to collectively bargain with consolidated city-county units with populations between 20,000 and 150,000 people. In intention and effect this law only allowed firemen and their union representatives in Chatham County/Savannah to sign a collective bargaining contract with their employer. The Georgia Supreme Court overturned this law. See Yancey, "Spectre of Public Unionism," 16-23.

city workers represented by AFSCME had these privileges, giving DC 14 relatively more security than other public sector unions in the South. Alabama and North Carolina, for example, outright banned public sector unions in 1958 and 1959 respectively.[553] And beyond prohibition, municipalities throughout the South fought against public sector organizing efforts. Historian Michael Honey showed that in the early 1960s Memphis public works managers targeted men connected with organizing efforts with punishment and dismissal; Julia Gunn found that in 1959, just two years after AFSCME chartered a local and won a few demands in Charlotte, a campaign led by the Chamber of Commerce pressured the city council to outlaw police and firefighter unions and prevent collective bargaining for any public sector union. This pressure led later in the year to the state banning all public sector unions.[554]

By the time AFSCME chartered its first local in Charlotte, the organization had worked with the city of Atlanta for more than twenty years. The city and the union had developed a relationship and the union rarely attempted to push beyond its boundaries with the city. There was no attempt, for instance, to organize police officers. And significantly, the early organization was made up of white white-collar workers, in many

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[552] Police were not afforded even these rights. In 1953, Georgia legislators banned police from organizing. J. Ralph Beird, "Labor Relations Policy for Public Employees," *Georgia Law Review* 4, no. 1 (Fall 1969), 118; Ga. Code Ann. § 54-909.

[553] In Atkins v. City of Charlotte (1969) a three-judge district court overturned North Carolina's ban on public sector unions. The court held that the ban was unduly broad and an impingement on firefighter's constitution rights. For an extensive look at public sector organizing in Charlotte see Gunn, "A Good Place to Make Money"; For more on public sector union laws in the 1950s and 1960s see J. Ralph Beird, "Labor Relations Policy for Public Employees," 110-133.

[554] Michael Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road*, 67-68; Gunn "A Good Place to Make Money," 52-54.

ways peers of the elected and appointed officials of the city. As white-collar workers who were first and foremost concerned with developing and protecting civil service law, city officials, such as the long-time personnel director, Carl Sutherland, saw the union as useful in defending merit reform. This understanding between union and city resulted in the occasional appointment of DC 14 leaders to the civil service board. By working closely with city officials, and always remaining politic when asking for changes on wages and hours, DC 14 was able to maintain a friendly relationship with the city.[555]

Ivan Allen, the Chamber of Commerce president turned mayor, exemplified the approach that Atlanta's urban regime took towards public sector unions. Allen was "the embodiment of the business elite" supported by the leading businessmen in the city.[556] Like Hartsfield before him, Allen believed that what was good for business was good for Atlanta, and that as a member of Atlanta's business elite he was best to lead Atlanta's economic growth. Yet Allen, unlike members of Charlotte's Chamber of Commerce, did not view AFSCME as a threat to Atlanta's development. During the 1961 mayoral campaign Allen expressed his support for the union's right to negotiate with the city, the continued automatic deduction of union dues, and promised to support efforts to reduce non-emergency workers to a forty-hour day.[557] These were not just campaign promises

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[555] Barbara Joye, and Arlon Kennedy, "Governmental Labor Relations in Atlanta," 9.

[556] For more on Ivan Allen see Ivan Allen with Paul Hemphill, *Mayor: Notes on the Sixties,* (New York City: Simon and Schuster, 1971); Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn*; Frederick Allen, *Atlanta Rising,* 128-153.

[557] Letter, Allen to J.L. Carr and John Nix, August 14, 1961, Box 36, Folder 5, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, Local 1644 (Atlanta, Ga.) Records, L1986-44, Southern Labor Archives, University Library, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia, (Hereafter AFSCME Local 1644 Records).

either. In the first couple years of his administration, Allen supported aldermanic ordinances that increased wages and changed the work schedule for non-emergency employees to a forty-hour work week.[558]

The good relationship between the city and DC 14 depended on the union accepting its own minor role in city affairs. Its members could petition the alderman, participate in personnel hearings, write letters to the mayor, but had to accept the final decisions of the elected and appointed officials. The city expected, and DC 14 was effective at, what Jerry Wurf disparagingly called "collective begging."[559] By the mid-1960s, however, public employees were no longer content with begging for better wages and working conditions.

With the election of Jerry Wurf to the head of AFSMCE in 1964, the international union transformed the practice of public sector unionism to a stance similar to private sector unions. Wurf did not oppose AFSCME's traditional interest in expanding and defending civil service systems, but he believed the system, while providing employment security, did not provide dignity and democratic means for workers who, like workers in the private sector, should have the opportunity for bilateral negotiations over wages, benefits, and workplace conditions. Most controversially, Wurf believed public sector workers should have the same rights as private sector workers, including the right to strike. Wurf's vision for public sector unionism was enormously popular among public workers, and AFSCME's membership grew from 230,000 in 1966 to 460,000 in 1970.[560]

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[558] "City Employees and Council 14 Adopt a Resolution of Appreciation," *The Journal of Labor,* April 13, 1962.

[559] Hower, "Jerry Wurf," 17.

[560] Hower, "Jerry Wurf," 239.

Wurf's new vision for public sector unionism was not the only catalyst for increasing public worker militancy. As Wurf took control of AFSCME, public workers from many different professions — firemen, policemen, teachers, sanitation workers, hospital workers — turned to more confrontational tactics including strikes. Before the mid-1950s public sector strikes were rare, but by the mid-1960s these strikes – almost universally illegal for public employees – spread quickly, rising from 142 in 1966 to 411 in 1969.[561] Observers, inside and out of the labor movement, had various interpretations for the increased militancy. Some, including Wurf, believed that public workers had tired of being second-class workers and now sought parity in pay and power with unionized private sector workers. These workers did not want to miss out on the relative prosperity and rising material comfort of the 1950s and 1960s. Others, particularly journalists, attributed the militancy to the general nation-wide disaffection that could be observed most starkly in the growing protests over Vietnam. Others pointed to the rights movements of the era – most notably the civil rights movement and later the women's liberation movement – as a significant influence on the rising militancy of the public workers.

Black Sanitation Workers and AFSCME

In Atlanta, sanitation workers, both black and white, were the city workers most willing to strike. Nearly every year of the Second World War either trash truck drivers, garbage men, or trash collectors walked off their jobs to demand a pay increase.[562] Then

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[561] Hower, "Jerry Wurf," 220.

after two decades of relative labor peace, sanitation workers, a job increasingly made up of African Americans among all wage scales, renewed their pressure on the city to increase wages, benefits, and to end segregation and discrimination. This pressure came to a head in a wildcat strike in September 1968. That the workers struck surprised few. Along with teachers, sanitation workers were one of the most active groups of public workers in the late 1960s.[563] From Bakersfield, California, to St. Petersburg, Florida, sanitation workers, often aided by AFSCME, demanded that city officials treat the essential services they provided with more respect. Strikes by sanitation workers rose from an average of sixteen a year during the first half of the 1960s to thirty-eight a year in the second half.[564] Many black workers and their allies viewed these strikes as part of the black freedom movement. They connected their struggle for dignity on the job with the larger struggle for dignity in a racist society.

Atlanta had long employed black men in the sanitary and street sweeping positions, some of the city's dirtiest, poorest paying jobs. Until the Great Depression black men occupied nearly all non-supervisory positions in the sanitary department, including cart drivers, the garbage and trash men who assisted the drivers, and street sweepers. White men often refused to take these jobs, which they viewed as beneath the dignity of even

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[562] Atlanta sanitation workers were not alone in striking during World War II. For another war-era sanitation strike see Ryan, *AFSCME's Philadelphia Story,* 65-94.

[563] Joseph McCartin writes that sanitation workers were "the militant vanguard of the public sector movement" in the 1960s. McCartin, "Fire the Hell Out of Them," 72.

[564] McCartin, "Fire the Hell out of Them," 72.

the poorest white man. Of course, black men also often only turned to these positions as a last resort.[565]

With the onset of the Great Depression, both black and white men, desperate for any source of income, coveted sanitation jobs. As with many other jobs in the city that were once considered beneath the dignity of white labor, white workers now demanded that they replace black workers in the sanitary department. Atlanta's sanitary department responded by firing their black truck drivers and hiring white drivers at one hundred dollars a month, forty more than the department paid black drivers. The city then hired back the black workers as garbage and trash men at wages below what they made as drivers.[566] It would be another three decades before the city once again hired black garbage truck drivers.

Now confined to the lowest paid positions in the department, black workers continued to organize and fight for better pay. Sanitation workers struck at least once a year between 1941 and 1945, in what the *Atlanta Constitution* called the "annual labor war."[567] These strikes, like the jobs in the sanitary department, were strictly divided by race. Either, as in 1941 and 1942, the black garbage men – often referred to as helpers or laborers – struck for a higher pay, or as in 1943, 1944, and 1945, the white truck drivers, machine operators, and mechanics went on strike. In 1941 nearly two hundred black

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[565] "Sanitary Wagons Idle; City Can't Hire Drivers," *The Atlanta Georgian,* November 9, 1906, 3.

[566] James D. Anderson*, The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935,* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988)*,* 233.

[567] Lamar Ball, "Atlanta Studies Plan to Lease Trash Job," *Atlanta Constitution,* July 19, 1943, 10.

laborers won a fifty cent raise after the workers gained the support of Teamsters Local 450, and the white truck drivers, who had just left AFSCME to join the Teamsters, threatened to strike if they also did not also get a raise. Following that four-day walkout, the black laborers joined Local 450, but the relationship lasted less than a year. The next year when the helpers again struck, the Teamsters expelled the workers from their union and the Atlanta Federations of Trade loudly condemned the strike. The lack of support did not help the strikers, but what broke the strike was the willingness of the white sanitary workers, in defiance of AFL rules, to allow prison laborers to ride on their trucks.[568] The white sanitary workers' unwillingness to build a relationship with black laborers also weakened the drivers' negotiating position. In 1945, for the third straight summer, the white machine operators walked off the job, this time because the alderman approved a pay raise for black workers to keep the position competitive in a tight market without also raising the white workers' wages at the same time. The city took a firm stance against the drivers, who had the support of the AFT, and replaced the drivers. Most black laborers, despite reports of threats at their homes, crossed the picket line and the city quickly resumed services.[569]

One aspect of the black garbage collectors' militancy that confounded the sanitary department and newspapers was the group's organization and collective action. When the laborers walked out in July 1941, the head of the sanitary department believed that the

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[568] "Garbage Strikers Warned City Will Beat Walkout," *Atlanta Constitution,* July 23, 1942, 4; "Prisoners Doing Work of Strikers," *Atlanta Daily World,* July 25, 1942,1; "Garbage Strike Ends; More Back Than Are Needed," *Atlanta Daily World,* July 26, 1942, 6.

[569] "Garbage Loaders Given Death Threats," *Atlanta Constitution,* August 25,1945, 2.

"garbage collectors are not organized as far as I know." Yet he did add that the strike had "all the earmarks of a well-organized and planned walk-out."[570] The walkout so impressed the sanitary chief because the black sanitary workers were indeed members of a worker organization: The Sanitary Helper's Union.[571] The first appearance of the Sanitary Helper's Union in the press was not until two months after the 1941 strike, but it is likely that this organization, if not yet in name, existed since at least the summer of 1940 when the garbage collectors won a raise after threatening to strike.[572] By the 1950s black laborers had established a working relationship with AFSCME. But the organization, now called Local 846, had an "in and out experience" until 1959, when the union, along with the rest of the city locals in DC 14 , won the privilege of automatic dues withdrawal.[573] As with the Sanitary Helper's Union during the war, Local 846 remained an all-black local within a white-led union.

AFSCME DC 14, like nearly every other white-led institution in Atlanta, followed the city's Jim Crow practices. Until 1963, all but one of the locals in Atlanta were lily-white, leaving the black-led Local 846 to attempt to represent all organized black city and county workers. Because of hiring discrimination in Atlanta and Fulton County, the majority of Local 846's members were the lowest-paid garbage and trash collectors, but the union also represented custodians working for the school system and county

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[570] "City Garbage Piles Up as 175 Here Walk Out," *Atlanta Constitution,* July 23, 1941.

[571] "Observance of Labor Day to Be Varied," *Atlanta Daily World*, September 1, 1941.

[572] "Observance of Labor Day to Be Varied," *Atlanta Daily World,* September 1, 1941, 1; "Request to Put Garbage Cans on Curb Made," *Atlanta Daily World,* July 21, 1941, 2.

[573] Proceedings the Third Annual Convention, Georgia State, AFL-CIO, 1959, 28-29.

courthouse. All of the leaders of the local came from the ranks of garbage and trash collectors. Yet these leaders had limited influence, mostly at the job site, serving as an intermediary between workers and supervisors. During negotiations with the mayor, civil service board, or aldermanic board, DC 14 lumped Local 846 together with the rest of the city locals, with the exception of the white sanitary workers, in a group called the Atlanta City Employees Union under the leadership of the head of Local 850. Despite this limitation imposed by the white leadership of DC 14, Local 846 allowed black public sector workers, especially sanitation workers, to have an organization to challenge racism at their workplace, in city policy, and within Atlanta's organized labor movement.

From 1961 to atleast 1965, the president of Local 846 was Edward Bradford. Born in Fulton County and raised in Atlanta, Bradford was thirty years old and had worked in the sanitary department, likely as a low-paid garbage collector, for five years when the local elected him as president in 1961.[574] In addition to aiding sanitation workers Bradford sought to organize more black city workers, playing an important role in organizing not just black but also white service workers, mostly clerical workers, custodial staff, and nurses' aides, at Grady Memorial Hospital in 1963. The impetus for the organizing campaign came from the local chapter of the NAACP which reached out to representatives of the AFL-CIO in Washington, DC, and DC 14 to organize the hospital workers.[575] After the initial interest from the NAACP and the AFL-CIO, it was Bradford

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[574] Leola Kendrick Lassetter, "In the Spotlight with Atlanta's Labor Leaders," *The Journal of Labor,* March 19, 1965, 1.

[575] "Report Grady Hospital Employee Organization," *Atlanta Daily World,* October 6, 1963, 4; "Hospital Authority to Hear Grady Workers Pay Demands," *Atlanta Inquirer,*

who continued to visit the hospital, passing out leaflets, educating employees about their workplace rights and the benefits of joining unions, and signing them up for the newly created Local 797.[576] Bradford's work paid off professionally when AFSCME hired him as a full-time organizer, one of the first African Americans in the South to hold that position in the union. Meanwhile Local 797 at Grady Memorial, a major employer for African American women in the city, became the first integrated local in DC 14. While relatively small at first, the local became an important defender of working class health services in the city and a source of leadership for AFSCME in Atlanta by the 1980s.

As Bradford worked to expand AFSCME in Atlanta, he also called upon the city to upgrade its apprenticeship and training programs. "There are so many workers who do not know how to do their jobs and the supervisors do not know how to instruct them," he claimed.[577] When Bradford explained his desire for revamped training programs in 1965 he spoke in universal terms — all city workers would benefit from such a program. Yet, undoubtedly, Bradford championed an improved program because of the opportunities he believed it could create for black city workers. For the union leader, focus on training was, in part, a product of his position as a city worker and representative who recognized how training could help sanitation workers and improve the services they provide. But emphasizing new opportunities for training also placed Bradford within a larger

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September 21, 1963, 1, 19; "500 Grady Workers Meet Organize for Wage Fight," *Atlanta Inquirer,* September 28, 1963, 1.

[576] "Grady is Unionized," *Atlanta Inquirer,* October 12, 1963, 1,7, 10.

[577]Leola Kendrick Lassetter, "In the Spotlight with Atlanta's Labor Leaders," *The Journal of Labor,* March 19, 1965, 1.

consensus on what unskilled workers, particularly unskilled black workers, needed now that the Civil Rights Act banned employment discrimination.[578]

Edward Bradford used his position with Local 846 to expand the benefits of unions to more African American public sector workers and to advocate for better employment policies by the city. However, he recognized that most unions in the city and the state opposed black workers' rights. Bradford and his union called on the Georgia labor movement to support efforts by civil rights activists. In 1962 Bradford and three other members of Local 846, along with a dozen other black union members from various locals across the state, proposed a resolution at the annual Georgia AFL-CIO convention calling for the state organization to oppose "any usurping of constitutional rights and freedoms the United States citizens" and to "join any association seeking to litigate any infringement upon such rights." The resolution, which carefully omitted any direct references to civil rights protests or rights of African Americans, was in direct response to the Georgia state assembly prohibiting "picketing state properties without permission." The authors hoped to convince the convention that it was in the best interest of organized labor to oppose legislation that could hamper unions' right to picketing. "The experience of the American labor movement," the authors wrote, "is that where the rights, privileges or freedoms of an individual group are limited…it soon follows that the rights, privileges or freedoms of all citizens are affected."[579]

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[578] For more on job training as part of the effort to improve black employment in the city see "Report of the Mayor's Temporary Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination in Employment," April 2, 1963, Box 84, Folder 4, Sam Massell Papers.

[579] Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention, Georgia State, AFL-CIO, May 14, 17, and 18, 1962, Brunswick, GA, 72.

Local 846 and its fellow black unionists had reason to be moderately confident that the resolution had a chance to pass at the convention. A year earlier pressure from labor leaders in Atlanta convinced the board of alderman to not pass an ordinance banning "mass picketing" targeted at anti-segregation protests but, the AFL-CIO leadership worried, would also be used against labor. [580] At the Georgia convention, however, Local 846 and its allies did not find the same sympathy for this vision of shared interests between labor and civil rights. There the convention quickly, and with little comment, voted for "no action" to be taken on the resolution.[581]

The international union also played an important role in reforming the racist practices of the local AFSCME union. In the mid-1960s, the organizers and representatives that AFSCME sent to Atlanta from Washington sought to integrate DC 14, expand organizing efforts to black public sector workers, and challenge the racism of DC 14's leadership. While Bradford was integral to organizing Grady Memorial Hospital, international representatives also aided members at the hospital and other locations, like the public schools, where a majority of non-professional workers were African American.

At the prodding of the international, AFSCME locals in Atlanta began to integrate. The reorganization of Grady Hospital workers in 1963 was the first integrated public sector union in the city. Then the next year Local 315 integrated black custodians at the county court house into its local. Some members of DC 14, unsurprisingly, were resistant

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[580] "Anti-Picket Bill Deferred on Plea of Labor Leaders," *Atlanta Daily World,* February 22, 1961, 3.

[581] Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention, Georgia State, AFL-CIO, May 14, 17, and 18, 1962, Brunswick, Georgia, 72.

to integration. In 1964, another local that also represented courthouse workers, along with Local 315, disbanded their charter and left AFSCME instead of integrating.[582]

Locals 850 and 846, the two largest locals, did not combine into a new integrated Local 850 until 1965. As with many black-led segregated locals, the leadership of 846 was likely resistant to losing the independence and influence it held before DC 14 folded their union into the white-led Local 850.[583] The leadership of the new Local 850, after all, was the white leadership of the old Local 850. As for Edward Bradford and the other leaders of Local 846, their recorded involvement with AFSCME ended with the merger. It is unclear if all the members left the sanitary department, or if they disavowed participation in labor activity, or if they simply did not support the strike, but leadership of Local 846 – the organizers, representatives, and stewards of Atlanta's black sanitation workers for the first half of the 1960s – are completely absent from the records of the 1968 strike. John Nix, head of Local 850, explained that joining Local 846 with Local 850 would make the sanitary union more effective. While certainly this is true, the consolidation also allowed the local white leadership of DC 14 to curtail some of

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[582] Joseph Mayton to Jerry Wurf, July 30, 1964, Box 7, Folder 46, AFSCME Central Files Department Records, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan.

[583] The opposition to mergers by some all-black locals deserves more study. For quick discussions of this phenomenon see Minchin, *The Color of Work,* 209-211; Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class,* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 26; Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand,* 133-135; Herbert Hill, "Racism Within Organized Labor," *Journal of Negro Education* 30, no. 2 (Spring 1961), 111-113*;* Ray Marshall, "The Negro and Organized Labor," *Journal of Negro Education* 32, no. 4 (Autumn 1963), 378-381.

influence held by African American unionists in DC 14, an important goal for a leadership intent on maintaining a union led by white men.[584]

As the local unionists and AFSCME's international leadership worked to rid their union of racial discrimination, the leadership of DC 14 increasingly found its relationship with union headquarters in Washington, DC, strained. The leaders of DC 14 were most interested in consolidating their power and keeping AFSCME in Atlanta as white as possible. In no uncertain terms, the leadership of DC 14 made it clear that it preferred to keep any new black city workers from joining their union. Leaders of DC 14 expressed a strong antipathy towards international representatives who organized African American workers. DC 14 vice president W.E. King "bawled" out John Kissack, a textile organizer who AFSCME hired in Atlanta, "for going to a custodian class" and "signing up six new members for Local 20. King asked Kissack 'what the hell are you doing organizing those 'niggers'?" And after Kissack set up an organizing committee for Local 797, King asked him if he was "going to be like Al Gross [an AFSCME international representative] and only organize 'niggers'." King also suggested that the local of the Atlanta Family and Children Services, Local 1800, should be "dissolved" because "as long as it is run by those 'niggers' no one would join it." King and another union representative were particularly contemptuous that one of the representatives sent to Atlanta by the international, James Howard, was African American. They attempted twice to suspend Howard and made it clear that they did not want him anywhere near the union office.

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[584] John Nix, "City Employees Local Unions 850 and 846 Merge," *Journal of Labor,* October 1, 1965.

The hostility of the council leaders alienated several locals which sought separation form DC 14, and appealed to international representatives that "the racist leadership…must be eliminated at once" so that the public sector labor movement in Atlanta could "survive."[585] The international, however, did not make substantial changes to the leadership of DC 14 until September 1968, more than a year after representatives made these charges, when the council's actions, or rather inactions, during a wildcat strike by the primarily black sanitation workers gave AFSCME ample reason to remove the leadership.

Leading up to the Strike

Long before the wildcat strike, the union recognized the growing dissatisfaction and militancy of the sanitation workers. As early as July 1966, AFSCME attorney Joseph Jacobs warned the city that "any increase [in pay] which is not adequate…will not be sufficient to insure the continuation of the many services so necessary and essential to the citizens of Atlanta."[586] By the next year, the union was nearly certain that workers would strike if the city did not significantly improve their wages.

Like the year before, that December the city gave the sanitation workers a 4 percent wage increase – within the city's civil service system this was a "one step" increase – when the union asked for a three step, or around 13 percent increase. This one-step raise

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[585] Letter, Unknown to Robert Hastings, April 28, 1967, Box 2, Folder 3, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

[586] Letter, Joseph Jacobs to Ivan Allen, July 22, 1966, Box 36, Folder 12, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

gave the lowest paid workers in the city, the trash collectors, an hourly wage of $1.66.[587] Al Gross warned that the one-step raise would do little to placate what he saw as the "acute dissatisfaction of City Employees, which is spreading to epidemic stage." "The officials of the City of Atlanta," Gross warned, "could very well be jeopardizing labor peace with such meager wage increase."[588] J.W Giles, recently placed as the director of DC 14, distanced the union from any action that the sanitation workers – who he claimed felt "quite a bit of unrest" – planned to take. Answering a reporter's question about the possibility of a strike, Giles assured the journalist that if a strike came "it would come spontaneously from the membership" and added that the union leadership "would not advocate it."[589]

Alderman Milton Farris responded to the DC 14's warnings of dissatisfaction among city workers by feigning surprise that the union would air such concerns. The one step raises in 1966 and 1967 "had done far more to improve salaries and wages for City employees that had been done in many years in the past."[590] And despite the disavowal of

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[587] Trash collectors picked up larger household items and yard refuse, while the better paid garbage collectors picked up the trash placed in trash cans. See Community Relations Commission, "The Human Aspects of Atlanta's Waste Collection System," May 28, 1970, 10-12, Box 6, Folder 14, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

[588] "City Employes Brand Pay Hike Inadequate," *Atlanta Journal*, Jan. 1968, in Box 36, Folder 18, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

[589] News Clip, WSB-TV, December 19, 1967, wsbn52606, WSB Newsfilm collection, reel WSBN1426, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Ga., accessed at http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/news/id:wsbn52606

[590] Letter, Milton Farris to Albert Gross, December 26, 1967, Box 36, Folder 23. AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

any action from local AFSCME leaders, the public works department head Ray Nixon blamed the union for "stirring up the employes and trying to get them to strike."[591]

He and other city officials misread the workers' discontent. With city officials and politicians unwilling to take the union's warnings seriously, sanitation workers and other city laborers decided to express their dissatisfaction more clearly. On January 9 nearly all sanitary workers refused to work for the day, and then a week later about two hundred city workers walked off the job. The workers' claimed they refused to work because of wintry conditions.[592] However**,** one sympathetic union official explained that workers also walked off the job because of the paltry one-step raise and "the poor treatment given to city workers." "I think it's going to get worse as the year goes on," the official warned.[593]

For most of 1968, and for much of the previous two or three years, workers did not use organized actions to express their grievances with low pay, discrimination, and poor working conditions. Instead sanitation workers on an individual basis simply left and found a better paying job, or confident in their job security, skipped certain particularly demanding days. Prior to the September 1968 strike, it was not labor actions that most concerned city officials but the high rate of turnover and absenteeism. For city officials

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[591] Alex Coffin, "Mayor Cites Problems in Trash Pickup," January 18, 1968, *Atlanta Constitution,* 6.

[592] Alex Coffin, "Mayor Cites Problems in Trash Pickup," January 18, 1968, Atlanta *Constitution,* 6.

[593] News clip, WSB-TV, January 16, 1968, wsbn52850, WSB Newsfilm collection, reel WSBN1435, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, Ga., accessed at http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/news/id:wsbn52850 January 16, 1968

the high turnover rate and absenteeism made it difficult to maintain the proper sanitary standards that its residents expected and paid for. The sanitation workers too recognized that turnover made their jobs more difficult. Among the common sanitation worker complaints were that "there were not enough men to do the work" and that there was often "one truck crew trying to cover two routes." But the solutions used by Ivan Allen and his public works department only further alienated the sanitation workers.[594]

By early 1968, the worker absenteeism became a major problem for the city. Of the budgeted one thousand positions, at any one time, the city managed to only have about 750 sanitation workers on payroll. And every day the city could expect at least a quarter of those employees to not show up to work. On Mondays and Tuesdays, the especially strenuous workdays, absenteeism in the late 1960s rose to between 40 and 50 percent.[595] Much of the turnover can be attributed to the readily available jobs for even low-skilled workers caused by the booming regional economy and the uncompetitive wages offered by the city. The 4 percent increase the city gave to the sanitation workers was well below the average wage increase for unskilled workers in Atlanta. According to a Bureau of Labor Statistics study unskilled factory workers' wages increased an average of 9.8 percent between May 1967 and May 1968. The average wage of a janitor, a position that factories more often than not filled with low-skilled black workers, in an Atlanta-based plant jumped from $1.67 to $1.88.[596] Even more remunerative were readily available

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[594] Community Relations Commission, "The Human Aspects," AFSCME Local 1644 Records, 8.

[595] Community Relations Commission, "The Human Aspects," AFSCME Local 1644 Records, 8.

construction laborer jobs in the city's downtown and expanding suburbs. Union wages for construction laborers, which were available especially in the construction of the city's skyscrapers, averaged $2.70 an hour.[597] Even non-union construction laborer jobs paid more than sanitation workers. One report suggested that non-union wages for laborers was 25 percent less than union wages, which would still pay unskilled workers more than two dollars an hour.[598]

It was not just finding a better paying job, however, that resulted in the high rates of turnover and absenteeism. Garbage collection was a dirty, demanding, and dangerous job. Carrying and dumping garbage was extraordinarily filthy; bagging garbage was not yet expected of homeowners; instead**,** a week's worth of kitchen leftovers and trash was just dumped into metal bins. It was also more strenuous than just about any other job. Garbage collectors walked ten to twelve miles collecting garbage from the back yards of residents**,** lifting tubs weighing sixty to one hundred pounds. In the late sixties the National Safety Council rated solid waste collection the second most dangerous occupation after logging. In addition to the strains of lifting and walking, the trucks presented their own dangers, causing injuries and even on occasion death. Just riding on the sides and backs of the trucks was dangerous. In 1957 an Atlanta sanitation worker died after he fell off the back of a truck, and in 1962 one worker died and three were

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[596] "Salaries of Atlanta Office Workers Jump 5 Per Cent in Span of One Year," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 7, 1968, 49.

[597] Union Wage and Hours Building Trades, July 1, 1968, Bulletin No.1621, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 18.

[598] Compensation in the Construction Industry, Employment Patterns, Union Scales and Earnings: Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, No. 1656.

injured when their truck crashed. The compactor that collected the trash in the truck also mutilated limbs and killed workers. In another accident in 1962, a truck compactor crushed a worker while he was reaching for a shovel and his coworker accidentally switched on the machine.[599]

In addition to the danger of the job and its low pay, the continued discrimination and segregation that black workers experienced on the job generated discontentment among black garbage and trash collectors. Atlanta did not hire African American equipment operators and drivers until 1961.[600] In July 1970 black workers still made up 76 percent of laborers in the then renamed public works department and only 21 percent (out of a total of 158) of the better paying, cleaner, and safer truck drivers, mechanics, and equipment operators.[601] While the city did begin to hire more black truck drivers, it still resisted hiring African Americans into supervisor and management positions in the public works department. In 1970, only "two out of fifty-two supervisory personnel" were African American.[602]

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[599] Community Relations Commission, "The Human Aspects," AFSCME Local 1644 Records; "Thrown From City Sanitary Truck, Man Died Friday," *Atlanta Daily World,* December 14, 1957, 1; "City Employe Killed, 3 Injured in Garbage Truck," *Atlanta Daily World,* August 22, 1962, 1; "Sanitary Department Worker Killed," October 6, 1962 Atlanta Daily World, 1.

[600] "City Improving Negroes Job Lot," *The Atlanta Journal,* March 21, 1961.

[601] Community Relations Commission, "Minority Hiring and Promotion Practices, City of Atlanta," July 31, 1970, 22, Box 43, Folder 1, Andrew Young Papers, Archives Division, Auburn Avenue Research Library on African-American Culture and History, Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System, Atlanta, Georgia (Hereafter Andrew Young Papers).

[602] Community Relations Commission, "The Human Aspects," AFSCME Local 1644 Records, 26.

City officials claimed they had difficulty finding qualified black applicants to hire as truck drivers or more advanced supervisory roles. Yet, the city did not put much effort into recruiting more black equipment operators. The public works department's one notification for promotions and hiring opportunities was pinned to bulletin boards in the substations. Through 1970 the city made no effort to publicize promotions in the city's black newspapers or neighborhood newsletters, nor was there a sanitary division newsletter that could inform employees of opportunities.[603] While the sanitary division made little effort to open up better paying jobs for black workers it also sought to maintain the color line in the division by only hiring black workers for the lowest paying jobs. One white job applicant recalled applying for a position as a garbage collector, yet the hiring manager, despite the applicant's inability to drive, insisted he apply to be a driver or look for work somewhere else.[604]As with many departments in the city, even with changes to city policy and the support for equal employment opportunity from the mayor, those with final hiring decisions in the sanitary department worked to keep the department segregated.

The city's first solution to the high turnover problem only increased the sanitation workers' dissatisfaction. Beginning in 1966 the city and public works department agreed to hire casual laborers as trash collectors and pay them a daily rate of $11.22, or two dollars less than the lowest paid trash collector. Every morning trucks would drive to the

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[603] Community Relations Commission, "The Human Aspects," AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

[604] Letter, Dan Ackron to Eliza Paschall, January 17, 1968, Series 2, Box 34, Folder 6, Eliza Paschall Papers.

corner of Decatur and Central, known locally as Hungry Corner**,** and hire, depending on need, often more than one hundred men.[605] White employers had used Hungry Corner, near present day Georgia State University, to hire black day laborers since before emancipation when enslaved men would gather there to hire themselves out.[606] Neither the city nor the garbage collectors particularly liked the use of day laborers. For the city it was an "embarrassing expedient" that forced the city to "adapt" its "treasured civil service" to hire day laborers. Day laborers were often inexperienced, unfamiliar with routes and techniques, and the city could not depend on their labor for more than that day. Sanitary division officials tried to convince these workers to take full time jobs by emphasizing the better pay and benefits – the city, after all, did provide sanitation workers with pensions, group insurance, and hospital pay.[607]

Despite the two dollar pay raise of a full-time job, there were advantages to remaining a day laborer. For one, even casual laborers could find better paying construction jobs. Nor did casual laborers, who were paid daily, have to wait two weeks to get a paycheck. Because sanitation workers were so poorly paid it could be difficult to cover expenses for two weeks. In addition to undermining their wage demands, and their inefficient work, this unfair advantage seemed to bother full-time workers the most. Instead of working to solve many of the underlying issues that led to high workplace

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[605] Raleigh Bryans, "New Image for Garbagemen," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 21, 1968, 18A.

[606] Marc Wortman, *The Bonfire: The Siege and Burning of Atlanta,* (New York: Public Affairs Books, 2009), 81.

[607] Raleigh Bryans, "New Image for Garbagemen," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 21, 1968, 18A.

dissatisfaction and the resulting turnover, the city sought to replace the workers with cheaper labor, which only increased the discontent of the garbage and trash collectors.

One sanitation worker offered a simple answer to their problems: "Do away with casual laborers with a wage increase [then] the city would be an inviting enough job to attract ample employees."[608] Yet the Sanitary Department head Ralph Hulsey – a former police officer the promoted in 1968 specifically to alleviate workplace discontent – did not believe that "higher pay and attractive fringe benefits…themselves hold promise of an ultimate solution" for the disgruntled workers. While he promised to push for better wages during the next budget cycle, Hulsey during the summer of 1968 focused on other ways to improve worker morale. Hulsey emphasized changes like getting to know workers, more modern human resource practices, new uniforms and a new logo, all of which the workers requested. These were important issues to workers, yet the changes Hulsey made and promised to make were not enough.[609] The Tuesday after Labor Day workers at the Liddel substation held a wildcat strike that within 48 hours spread throughout the whole sanitary division.

Support for the Strike

The strike began on Tuesday, September 3, when about one hundred black workers – half of the staff – walked off of their jobs at the Liddel substation in northwest Atlanta.

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[608] Handwritten suggestion note, 1970, Box 37, Folder 40, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

[609] Raleigh Bryans, "New Image for Garbagemen," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 21, 1968, 18A.

The workers had one bold demand: $100 take home pay per week for the lowest-paid workers. Over the summer District Council 14 had already negotiated a two-step raise, about 8.5 percent, that would go into effect the next January, but workers insisted on a higher raise immediately.[610] J.W. Giles, director of DC 14, quickly condemned the walkout as an illegal wildcat strike and told the workers he would recommend that the city fire them.[611] Despite the appearance of spontaneity – the press called it an unorganized walkout – the strikers, who were nearly all African American, had, in fact, planned this strike. The preceding Friday, August 30, city officials in cooperation with Giles and DC 14 delivered a letter to sanitation workers warning "any work stoppage of any nature with the express consent of Local Union 850… shall be considered an unauthorized and illegal work stoppage."[612] None of the leaders of former Local 846 helped lead the strike – it is not even clear if any were still sanitation workers in 1968 – but it is likely, given the organization of the strike, that many of the strikers had experience in the former segregated local. Giles, in an oral history three decades later, implied that John Kissack instigated the strike. While Kissack may have advised the leaders of the strike, it is unlikely that he started it. It took several days for the international to join the strike, and Kissack likely would not have started the strike

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[610] Raleigh Bryans, "City Garbage Men Refuse Wage Offer," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 8, 1968, 1.

[611] J.W. Giles, Interviewed by Chris Lutz, September 11, 1995, Voices of Labor Oral History Project, Southern Labor Archives. Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University.

[612] Letter, R.E. Hulsey and J.W. Giles to All Employees, August 30, 1968, Box 36, Folder 23 AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

without a prior discussion with international representatives.[613] A day later the majority of workers, more than five hundred out of seven hundred, mostly black but joined by a few white workers, walked off their jobs without the union's support. By Friday, there were no crews working; city officials refused to let some willing truck drivers go out because they claimed there was the threat of violence.

Without the support of the local, the striking workers turned to SCLC for assistance. Because of its involvement in the Memphis sanitation strike six months earlier it made sense for the striking workers to reach out to SCLC. Moreover, throughout the decade, outside of allies in the international AFSCME, civil rights groups and black-led civic organizations in Atlanta were frequently the only help that black public sector workers could find.

Black activists in Atlanta had a long history of successfully using their political power to create and improve public sector jobs for African Americans. Historians have often identified black Atlantan's efforts to improve public services – which went hand-in-hand with opening up public sector employment – as an important goal in the black freedom struggle in the city.[614] In *Schooling Jim Crow,* Jay Driskell shows how in the early 1920s a mass black political movement coalesced over the efforts of black Atlantans to use a special election for city bonds, the only local elections African Americans could participate in in the city, to demand the funding of a black high school.

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[613] J.W. Giles, Interviewed by Chris Lutz.

[614] There is still much for historians to learn about the important role of public sector jobs in African American history. In addition to the works cited in this chapter two other works that can serve as a starting point are Katz, Stern, and Fader, "The New African American Inequality," 75-108 and Berger, "When Hard Work Doesn't Pay."

Employment was certainly not the top priority of the effort to open the school, but it did open up a few, much-needed, positions for black educators in the city.[615] And Tomiko Brown-Nagin argues that a failed 1945 NAACP lawsuit to force the city's school board to pay black teachers the same as white teachers, supported by the Georgia Teachers and Education Association (GTEA), the state's black teacher organization, and prominent black Atlantans like Martin Luther King Sr. and A.T. Walden, "constituted the most unapologetic and uncompromising stand for equality that Atlanta's black leadership had taken thus far."[616]

Then in 1948, leading black Atlantans convinced Mayor William Hartsfield to hire the city's first black police officers. The city's employment of black officers is regarded by most historians as the first real victory of black Atlanta's modern civil rights movement, and the birth of a working political relationship between black Atlantans and the city's white political and business elite. Since the turn of the century, black Atlantans had lobbied local politicians to hire black police officers. Calls for black officers in Atlanta became more vociferous in the late 1930s and early 1940s as other southern cities began to hire black police officers.[617] In 1946 the United Negro Veterans and its Women's Auxiliary led a rally in front of city hall calling for the city to hire black

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[615] Jay Winston Driskell Jr., *Schooling Jim Crow,* 196-234.

[616] Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent,* 93.

[617] For a look at the introduction of black police officers in another Southern city see N.D.B. Connolly, "Games of Chance: Jim Crow's Entrepreneurs Bet on 'Negro' Law and Order," in *What's Good for Business: Business and American Politics Since World War II,* eds. Kim Phillips-Fein and Julian E. Zelizer (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012), 140-156.

officers. Less confrontationally, a committee that included John Wesley Dobbs, C.A. Scott, Warren Cochrane, Martin Luther King Sr., William Holmes Borders, and A.T. Walden negotiated with Mayor Hartsfield to integrate the department. At first Hartsfield dismissed this lobbying, but by 1946 he recognized the increasing political power of black Atlanta and promised the committee "If you have 10,000 registered voters in Atlanta I might talk to you [about hiring black officers.]"[618] The increased pressure on Hartsfield coincided with an increase in voter registration efforts by black political and civic leaders. For a February 1946 special election for an open congressional seat, more than 6,800 black Atlantans registered and helped Helen Mankin Douglass win the election. Then after Primus King won his federal court case against Georgia's white primary in March of that year, an intensive voting registration drive resulted in more than 24,000 registered black Atlantans.[619] The success of the registration drives convinced Hartsfield and his chief of police, Herbert Jenkins, to support the integration of the police department, and in December 1947, the city council voted to hire eight black policemen.

Hartsfield, Jenkins, and the city aldermen placed severe restrictions on these new police officers. Black officers could only patrol majority black districts, could not arrest white suspects, and had to radio a white officer to make the actual arrest. Furthermore,

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[618] Gary M. Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn,* 148. For more on the desegregation in the Atlanta police department see David Andrew Harmon, *Beneath the Image of the Civil Rights Movement and Race Relations: Atlanta, Georgia, 1949-1981,* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 24-33; Kruse, *White Flight,* 33-34; Clarence N. Stone, *Regime Politics,* 28-30; Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta,* 173-177.

[619] C.A. Bacote, "The Negro in Atlanta Politics," *Phylon* 16, no. 4 (4th Quarter, 1955), 348.

they could not use the downtown police station, and instead were required to use lockers in the basement of the Butler Street YMCA. Nor were these eight men allowed civil service status, which prevented them from receiving certain salary and promotion privileges.[620] As one author wrote, Hartsfield "maintained the increasingly thin veil of white supremacy while simultaneously allowing blacks a tangible sign of progress."[621]

While many of the efforts of black activists went towards ending discrimination in the city's hiring and promotional practices, some in the 1960s also looked for ways to improve wages and workplace conditions for black public sector workers. Often public employee allies saw their support as part of a larger campaign to improve services received by all black Atlantans. In the early 1960s, activists and civic leaders were particularly active in supporting low paid workers at Grady Memorial Hospital. Until the hospital fully desegregated under a federal mandate in 1966, civil rights organizations frequently challenged the racist policies of the Fulton and DeKalb County-administered hospital. As the only hospital for people without medical insurance and one of the few hospitals in the city to accept black patients prior to desegregation, Grady was particularly important to community members seeking to improve health care access across the city.[622]

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[620] Resolution, Office of City Clerk, December 4, 1947, Series 2, Box 23, Folder 12, Eliza Paschal Papers; Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn* 162-163.

[621] Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn,* 163.

[622] The first modern hospital in the city to provide health care to only African Americans was Hughes Spalding Pavilion built in 1952. Like Grady, Spalding Pavilion was controlled by the Fulton DeKalb Hospital Authority. See Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth-Century Atlanta,* 163-165.

For some, improving services at the hospital meant improving work for Grady's low-wage staff. In 1963, a year into a campaign by at least a dozen organizations to desegregate Grady, black non-professional staff – nurse's aides, maids, janitors, cafeteria workers – reached out to the Atlanta NAACP for help in improving wages and workplace conditions. Dr. C. Miles Smith, president of the Atlanta branch, and Jesse Hill, an executive board member, successfully negotiated an increase in salary, and reached out to DC 14 representatives and the AFL-CIO in Washington to organize the workers into a union.[623] Two years later a group of civil rights activists, civic reformers, ministers, and labor leaders renewed pressure on the hospital administrators. At a meeting at Fort Street Methodist Church, whose minister J.D. Grier was an Operation Breadbasket member, the group agreed to petition the hospital director "to guarantee to every employee of Grady Hospital a truly living wage" which the group said amounted to $3,000 a year or at minimum $1.50 an hour.[624] The pay raise was important to the health care of Atlanta's black working class community, they argued, because of the "necessary service [the employees] render to the smooth functioning of Grady Hospital."[625]

Civic reformers also believed that improving wages and working conditions for garbage collectors would improve much needed city services for Atlanta's majority-black neighborhoods. Concerns over sanitary conditions in black neighborhoods—— as opposed

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[623] "500 Grady Workers Meet, Organize For Wage Fight," *Atlanta Inquirer,* September 28, 1963, 1.

[624] Petition signed by J.D. Grier and R.B Carey, May 27, 1965, Series 1.1, Box 4, Folder 5 Eliza Paschall Papers.

[625] Petition signed by J.D. Grier and R.B Carey, May 27, 1965, Series 1.1, Box 4, Folder 5 Eliza Paschall Papers.

to the faux concern about dirtiness and disease commonly brought up by racist whites who associated uncleanliness with blackness — was common but became amplified in the late 1960s by the civil rights movement, the War on Poverty, and the response to civil disturbances and riots in cities across the country. In 1967, the Community Relations Committee (CRC) – a municipal human service organization created in response to the civil disturbance in the Summerhill neighborhood in September 1966 – held a series of town hall meetings in several working class neighborhoods throughout the city. Many of the twenty member CRC were surprised to learn at these meetings that people living in these neighborhoods often shared the same complaints – cleaner neighborhoods, safer streets, better policing, better healthcare, and more jobs. One participant living in west Atlanta complained that she "put trash on the streets" and that it "stays two or three weeks." Another informed the CRC that "Sanitary department has left trash on Haygood and Violet Streets for two weeks." These town hall meetings revealed the CRC that Atlantans in these neighborhoods demanded better services from the city. For Edwin Moody of Southwest Atlanta that meant these neighborhoods needed "tax dollars" – that they needed to "start to spend funds to labor where it has been neglected...in Mechanicsville, Summerhill, Pittsburgh."[626]

The CRC, like the sanitary department and the garbage collectors, interpreted the dilemmas of poor sanitation service in part as a labor issue. Linking services and jobs

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[626] Community Relations Commission, "Minutes of Mechanicsville-Pittsburgh Meeting," April 5, 1967, Series 1.1 Box 12, Folder 1, Eliza Paschal Papers; See other neighborhood hearings in same folder. Improving municipal services was a target for activists in other cities as well. See for example Brian Purnell, "'Taxation without Sanitation is Tyranny': Civil Rights Struggles Over Garbage Collection in Brooklyn, New York During the Fall of 1962," *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 31, no. 2 (2007): 61-88.

allowed the CRC to emphasize two of the major concerns of poor and working class African Americans in Atlanta. In a summary report, the CRC noted the "continuous call for more of all services – streets paved, sidewalks paved, trash picked up, garbage collected." Yet it would be difficult to begin to alleviate these issues without an improvement in employment in the constantly labor-short sanitary department. The racial inequality of basic and essential city services received by residents of black neighborhoods could not be disentangled from the poor pay and poor treatment of the primarily black sanitation workers.[627]

For the CRC, sanitation employment would only improve if workers could find dignity on the job. Here dignity was tied to the material well-being of the worker. Improved wages and improved benefits would improve the dignity of the job. The sanitation workers were not paid enough for "a family man" concerned with providing just the bare essentials for his family. The CRC also implied that the civil rights and Black Power movement had played a role in the labor shortage because "many [workers] have listened and heeded lectures on self-respect and ambition and are not content to collect trash as a permanent career." Of course, labor shortages in the department that dated back to the turn of century suggest-that most workers did not require lectures about self-respect and dignity to look for better work when it was available. The CRC's recommendations to improve sanitation work differed little from the recommendations made by the union or administrators like Sutherland and Nixon. It recommended improved wages and benefits and to shorten the pay period to once a week. The CRC,

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[627] Community Relations Commission, "Dilemmas of the City," September 1967, Series 1.1 Box 12, Folder 3, Eliza Paschal Papers.

however, did not include any mechanisms for achieving these recommendations; they were simply suggestions it believed the city should take up. Whereas the NAACP in 1963 recognized that a labor union was best suited to aid the hospital workers with their complaints, the CRC seemed to suggest that this was an issue the city would voluntarily address.[628]

In 1970, after the second sanitation strike in eighteen months, the CRC returned to the issue of sanitation workers' discontent, this time going in much more detail. In a fifty-page report, the CRC demonstrated in great detail the unsatisfactory working conditions of trash and garbage collectors, their poor pay, and the discrimination that black workers continued to face. To improve the workplace, the commission recommended improving wages, a more concerted effort at training and promoting workers from within the department, and changes to the city's garbage practices that would make collection easier and less dangerous. Yet, again, despite two recent labor actions there was no discussion of the role that unions played or could play in improving pay and conditions for the workers. Given that the report was written in response to a strike, the erasure of AFSCME is conspicuous. Since this report was written for the city administrators whose relationship with the union was in shambles after the 1970 strike, perhaps the CRC did not believe discussion of the union was appropriate or productive. But it is also likely that this interracial group of middle-class reformers, and an important bridge between the city and

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[628] Community Relations Commission, "Dilemmas of the City," September 1967, Series 1.1, Box 12, Folder 3, Eliza Paschal Papers.

its black citizens, did not recognize the union as an important player in Atlanta's policy making apparatus.[629]

Civic reform groups like the CRC were clearly sympathetic and alert to the dissatisfaction and anger of the city's black public employees. Yet, they practiced the "Atlanta style" politics of negotiations that left little room for the participation of a perceived outsider group like AFSCME. There were real limits to the change that this approach could bring for the city workers. The Atlanta style was most effective in reforming the city's discriminatory hiring and promotion policies, but reform groups did not have the interest or personnel to maintain pressure on the city to improve wages, or keep an eye on the day-to-day conditions of the workplace. These were tasks best suited for a labor union. But without the support, or even acknowledgement, by groups like the CRC, the union had real difficulty in influencing the city on these same issues that middle-class reformers regularly admitted were critical problems facing the city.

Of course, not all middle-class reformers and activists in the city were so indifferent to public sector unions. As the revolt of the public workers spread across Atlanta, some black leaders sought to aid the workers and their unions. The most well-known and most active of these groups was SCLC. A year and a half before SCLC's famous role in the Memphis sanitation strike, Martin Luther King Jr supported an interracial group of striking firefighters in Atlanta. In September 1966, five hundred fire fighters in a break-off union struck for the second time in four months. The confrontation began in spring when hundreds of firefighters left the long established International Association of Fire Fighters Local 134 because of their frustration with their union's relationship with the

[629] Community Relations Commission, "The Human Aspects."

city. The firefighters, left out of the city's recent reduction in working hours, demanded shorter working hours and an increase in pay, which the city ignored, and the IAFF, in the words of a leader of the disgruntled workers, "showed no concern or interest" in the workers' demands.[630] In response to the inaction of the city and the IAFF, about two thirds of the 700 member IAFF left to form the independent Atlanta Fire Fighters Union (AFFU). The new union had two immediate demands: a fifty-six-hour work week and an extra one hundred dollars a week. The leaders of the union saw themselves as part of the "the revolt of public employees."[631] Jack Martin, president of the AFFU, provocatively claimed that "municipal employees must be freed from this near state of bondage." He hoped that his union "struck the first blow," and "call[ed] on all municipal employees" to "help put an end to the deplorable conditions."[632] For Martin and the AFFU, striking the first blow meant a more confrontational approach to the city including pickets and two work stoppages.

After picketing city hall on multiple occasions to no avail, in June 1966, 631 members of the AFFU, including all black firemen, walked off their jobs for two days. The city and AFFU agreed to use a third party mediator to hash out an agreement, but in

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[630] The IAFF did press the city to drop hours from 60 to 56, but accepted the alderman's rejection of the proposal. Most firefighters wanted the union to take a more militant stance with the city. Memorandum, James I. Martin, "Resume of Atlanta Fire Fighters, Inc.," no date, Box 757, Folder 13, Atlanta Fire Fighters Union, Independent (Atlanta, Ga.) Records, L1977-11, Southern Labor Archives, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library. (Hereafter AFFU Records).

[631] Jerry Wurf, "The Revolution in Public Employees," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 30, no. 2 (December 1970): 134.

[632] Memorandum, James I. Martin, "Resume of Atlanta Fire Fighters, Inc., no date, Box 757, Folder 13, AFFU Records.

September the union rejected both the mediator's suggestions and the altered proposal of the city – that included a pay raise and reduction to 56 hours – and went on strike for a second time in three months. Ivan Allen responded by first suspending close to five hundred striking workers and then ten days later firing 362 firefighters who remained on strike. Atlanta was able to keep several firehouses open by relying on the two hundred firefighters who never left the IAFF, transferring police to the fire department, and recruiting strike-breaking firemen from across the region. Soon the city broke the strike and rehired more than 350 of the fired strikers; however, the fire department hired them at starting salary and stripped them of seniority. For Allen this was an illegal strike by essential emergency workers who "creat[ed] a public hazard," there was no question to the mayor that the unprecedented action required a strong response.[633] After breaking the strike, and the independent AFFU, the mayor and board of alderman held to their initial proposal and gave the firemen a two-step pay raise and reduced their working hours.

Support for the firemen's demands came from across a broad political spectrum. The firefighters' confrontation with the city, in fact, may have been the only time that the segregationist restaurant-owner and future governor, Lester Maddox, and Martin Luther King Jr. fell on the same side of an issue. In June, Maddox, who was just months away from winning the gubernatorial election, wrote to Allen that the "wage and hour demands are just and due." He promised that after he was elected governor, he would find new sources of revenue for municipalities so that "the just demands of firemen, law

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[633] Statement to Press, Ivan Allen, June 7, 1966, Box 14, Folder 11, Ivan Allen Policy and Programs in City of Atlanta Records, Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, Georgia, (Hereafter Ivan Allen Records).

enforcement, other personnel" could be met. Martin Luther King Jr, just weeks removed from the disappointing conclusion of SCLC's Chicago campaign, also urged Mayor Allen to settle with the underpaid firefighters. He too connected the benefits of a public sector job to the essential services the job provided. "If a city is to progress," he reminded Allen, "it's citizens must prosper and its city services must be maintained at a maximum of efficiency."[634] In early October, King and ten other ministers, black and white, met with Allen, the board of alderman, and the board of firemasters to reopen negotiations and to find a way to bring the fired firemen back to work under fair terms. King, like many who wrote Allen, emphasized the poor pay but also the threat to public safety caused in part by the city's intransigence. Because of his national recognition and reputation for protest, there was concern about what King's next step would be, but the city officials convinced King and the religious leaders that there was nothing more the city could do and reassured him that fire departments were appropriately staffed.[635]

One group that was particularly concerned about King's involvement in the strike was organized labor. There were a few locals that supported the firefighters including Local 212 of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and Local 218 of the Laundry, Dry Cleaning, and Dye House Workers.[636] But most national and local unions maintained

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[634] Telegram, Martin Luther King, Jr to Ivan Allen, September 30, 1966, Box 14, Folder 10, Ivan Allen Records.

[635] Raleigh Bryans, "King Urged to End Firemen Support," *Atlanta Journal,* October 6, 1966, 1; Marion Gaines, "King Meets Allen Asks Fire Talks," *Atlanta Constitution,* October 6, 1966, 1.

[636] Telegram, Local 122 International Ladies Garment Workers Union to Ivan Allen, September 6, 1966; Telegram, E.L. Abercrombie to Ivan Allen, August 26, 1966, Box 14, Folder 10, Ivan Allen Records.

support of IAFF Local 134, claiming that firefighters were members of an unsanctioned union participating in an illegal strike. George Meany, president of the AFL-CIO, called the efforts of the AFFU "a vicious campaign" against IAFF Local 134 and urged "moral support" for the workers who remained with 134. While Georgia AFL-CIO president James Moore, during the first strike in June, assured the city that the state AFL-CIO did not "subscribe nor condone the action of the so-called 'Firefighters Independent Union.'" The stature that Martin Luther King Jr. brought to the strike threatened these unions leaders who hoped to end the job action and the AFFU. In early October, before King met with city officials, both the national president of the IAFF, William Buck, and Don Slaiman, head of the civil rights department of the AFL-CIO, attempted to dissuade King from supporting the striking firefighters. Both union officials hoped to play on King's stated "support for the basic principles of the trade union movement and the AFL-CIO." They emphasized that the striking firemen were "formerly members of an AFL-CIO affiliated union and as such were sworn not to strike," and that there was "no trade union justification whatsoever…to form a separate unaffiliated organization." Their emphasis missed the mark. [637]

King, as he showed with the Scripto strike, was not all that interested in the norms, traditions, and inner workings of organized labor. In the firefighters' strike, King was most concerned with supporting the workers' right to strike and aiding workers he felt were paid at "poverty level" and their families who had to find other sources of income

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[637] Raleigh Bryans, "King Urged to End Firemen Support," *Atlanta Journal,* October 6, 1966, 1; Memorandum, Earl Landers to Ivan Allen, October 4, 1966; Letter, William D. Buck to Martin Luther King, Jr, October 8, 1966; Press Release, George Meany and William Buck, September 8, 1966, all in Box 14, Folder 12, Ivan Allen Records.

during the strike. Beyond the broad desire to aid worker rights, fight poverty, and ensure city services, King did not show much interest in the details of the strike. This certainly frustrated members of the traditional labor movement who wanted King as an ally of organized labor on their terms. Nor was King's relative disinterest in the nitty gritty details of a labor negotiation helpful to the workers he sided with. The meeting King and his group had with the mayor was more of an informational meeting for the religious leaders than negotiations for the terminated firemen. Even with these crucial shortcomings, because of King's stature and reputation, and his growing focus on economic inequality and poverty, labor unions and striking workers sought his support. Since public sector unions and workers were increasingly active in labor disputes, and since some of the most militant public sector jobs disproportionately employed black women and men influenced by the civil rights movement, King and SCLC became key allies to the increasingly militant public sector workers.[638]

Even with their new reputation for supporting public sector workers, Ralph Abernathy and the rest of SCLC's leadership hesitated to aid the wildcat strike in Atlanta. Just as with the Memphis strike months earlier, some within the organization were not enthusiastic about jumping into another strike. Hosea Williams, who was generally eager for confrontation, preferred that SCLC not get "locked up in Atlanta" because it would

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[638] For more on the connection between militant public workers and the civil rights movement see Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road;* McCartin, "Fire the Hell out of Them"; Robert Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom: Race and Labor in America Since 1865* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 190-198; Joseph Hower, "'A Threshold Moment'," 201-227; Fink and Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone*, 129-158; Jewell C. Debnam, "Mary Moultrie, Naomi White, and the Women of the Charleston Hospital Workers' Strike," 59-79; Jack O'Dell, "Charleston's Legacy to the Poor People's Campaign," 197-211.

"take out the sting" of their planned nationwide get-out-the-vote campaign for the upcoming presidential election.[639] Additionally, SCLC did not want to back the workers without word that AFSCME's international leadership would condone the wildcat strike. A working relationship between SCLC and AFSCME had only existed since the beginning of 1968 and Abernathy did not want to unnecessarily antagonize an important ally in the labor movement.[640]

The Memphis sanitation strike in March 1968 fundamentally reshaped both organizations. The immediate cause of the strike of nearly 1,300 black sanitation workers occurred on February 12 when Memphis city officials refused to recognize the union.[641] In the weeks prior to the union's meeting with the city, two incidents outraged the sanitation workers to the point of protest. On January 30, due to inclement weather the Sewers and Drains division sent home black workers without pay while allowing white workers to remain on the clock. Then two days later, as rain continued to inundate the city, two black sanitation workers were killed while waiting out the rain in their truck when the hydraulic ram malfunctioned and crushed them to death. Two weeks later, after a demonstration turned into a confrontation between police and marchers, the strike, in the words of historian Laurie Green, "turned into a mass movement involving thousands

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[639] Raleigh Bryans, "Garbage Heap Still Growing; City Seeking Strike Truce," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 5, 1968, 14.

[640] Raleigh Bryans, "Garbage Collection at 'Grinding Halt'," *Atlanta Journal*, September 5, 1968, 14.

[641] For accounts of the Memphis sanitation workers strike see Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road;* Laurie Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality;* Joan Turner Beifuss, *At the River I Stand: Memphis,* Steve s, "'I am a Man!'," 153-170; James Lawson, "Forty Years since King: The Memphis Sanitation Strike" *Labor,* 5 no. 1 (2008): 9-13.

of black Memphians."[642] The most enduring image of the strike-turned-mass movement was that of marchers, men and women, holding signs in simple black text with white background proclaiming "I *Am* a Man," a slogan that Bill Lucy, an AFSCME official, explained emphasized the workers' demands for dignity and respect at the workplace.[643] As the strike continued, Reverend James Lawson, the activist and mentor to the Nashville student movement of the late 1950s, convinced a reluctant Martin Luther King Jr. to visit Memphis in order to give support and to bring national attention to the strike.

King and his aides were reluctant to visit Memphis because SCLC and its supporters were deep into the planning stages of the Poor People's Campaign scheduled for that Summer and did not want the organization to get distracted by the Memphis campaign.[644] King though understood that the strike in Memphis was part of the fight against poverty that he planned to bring to the nation's capital, and he agreed to give a speech on March 18.

That night, in front of a crowd of 25,000, King connected his campaign against poverty to the audience's support of poorly paid striking workers. "You are reminding, not only Memphis, but you are reminding the nation," he told his audience, "that it is a crime for people to live in this rich nation and receive starvation wages."[645] Seeing the

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[642] Laurie Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality,* 280.

[643] Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality,* 282; Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road*, 212; Steve Estes, "'I am a Man!'"

[644] Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road,* 292; Garrow, *Bearing the Cross*, 601-605.

[645] Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road,* 298

response of the crowd that night, King decided to help lead a march in Memphis and lent his aide James Bevel to help organize the demonstration.

On March 28 King returned to Memphis to participate in the march, only for a hundred or so militants and high school students organized by a group called the Invaders to break off and smash several store front windows. This incident made King and SCLC question the organization of the Memphis protest and even led King to question whether SCLC should remain involved in the strike. Some staff including Andrew Young "felt [King] had no business going to Memphis."[646] However, the organization decided it could not leave Memphis, especially because it embodied their mission of the Poor People's Campaign, and agreed to take a more influential role in organizing another demonstration. Before they could march, however, James Earl Ray assassinated King on April 4 as the civil rights leader stood on his balcony at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis. Two weeks later, mayor Henry Loeb agreed to a "memorandum of understanding" with AFSCME that included a 15 cent raise, recognition of seniority, and dues checkoff. [647]

The tactics of the Memphis strike, King's death, and the eventual victory of the sanitation workers shaped the immediate futures of AFSCME, SCLC, and black sanitation workers across the country. For SCLC, King's assassination during a strike practically ensured that the organization, now led by King's close friend Ralph David Abernathy, would look to aid black workers engaged in labor disputes in the future. In the days and weeks after King's death, however, SCLC's initial concern centered on the

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[646] Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America,* 372.

[647] Honey, *Going Down Jericho Road,* 490-492.

future of the Poor People's Campaign. The campaign began on May 12, when busloads of participants arrived in Washington, DC, and established Resurrection City on the national mall. The whole campaign was a logistical nightmare made worse by the poor planning and frequent organizational infighting. The Poor People's Campaign was a "positive embarrassment to the SCLC," concluded historian Adam Fairclough.[648] Despite the debacle of the campaign in Washington, Abernathy and the leadership continued to treat the fight against poverty as a priority. Immediately after the end of the Poor People's Campaign, Abernathy and other SCLC members went to St. Petersburg, Florida, to support a months long sanitation strike. Campaigns for economic justice, especially labor disputes, became the SCLC's most publicized actions in the late sixties and early seventies.[649]

As for black sanitation workers, both the tragedy in Memphis, but also the eventual victory for the union provided unorganized, low paid, and disaffected city employees across the country with a template of civil rights unionism that could force city officials to concede to worker demands. In the four and a half months between when Memphis strike ended in April and the Atlanta strike in September, black sanitation workers in St. Petersburg, Cleveland, Miami, and Baltimore participated in movement-influenced

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[648] Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America,* 386.

[649] For works on SCLC in the post-King years see Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America,* 385-405; Ralph David Abernathy, *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down,* Leon Fink and Brian Greenberg, *Upheaval in the Quiet Zone,* 129-158; David L. Chappell, *Waking from the Dream.*

strikes.[650] After their own local refuted the strike and abandoned them, reaching out to SCLC made perfect sense to the Atlanta sanitation workers.

It also made perfect sense that AFSCME international leadership would aid the Atlanta wildcat strikers. For AFSCME, the Memphis strike provided the union with moral creditability and a reformulated mission. AFSCME president, Jerry Wurf, quickly recognized the advantages to connecting his union with the civil rights movement. This connection became**,** in the words of Wurf, "a vital ingredient in the growth and style of our union."[651] As Joseph Hower, a Wurf biographer explains, the Memphis strike convinced the union leader to fuse the social movement tactics and strategies with the militancy and traditional labor union demands of collective bargaining that he pushed the public sector union towards since his election as president in 1964.[652] In fact, on September 3, 1968, the first day of the Atlanta wildcat strike, Wurf sent Abernathy a note suggesting that AFSCME and SCLC enter into a more formal relationship. "It seems almost axiomatic that there should be a joint endeavor by the SCLC and the AFSCME," Wurf explained. "Our commitment is so widely known and accepted that it is most appropriate for us to be considered the vehicle by means of which a bond of the civil rights and labor movements could form a united effort."[653] Following a summer where

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[650] See McCartin, "Fire the Hell out of Them, 77; Raleigh Bryans, "Garbage Trucks Move Again as Settlement Starts Cleanup," *Atlanta Journal,* April 13, 1968, 1.

[651] Jerry Wurf, "A Fair Share of Power," quoted in Hower, "Jerry Wurf," 254.

[652] Hower, "Jerry Wurf*,"* 256.

[653] Letter, Jerry Wurf to Ralph Abernathy, September 3, 1968, Box 17, Folder 5, SCLC Records Emory.

SCLC joined AFSCME-led sanitation strikes in St. Petersburg and Miami, Atlanta became the fourth city where the two organizations worked together.

After a quick investigation into the strike, on Thursday, September 6, two days after the wildcat strike began, Jerry Wurf assigned Morton Shapiro, the union's southeast director, Malcolm Blackburn, a white Canadian preacher in Memphis who became involved with AFSCME during the strike, and James Howard, an AFSCME representative in Atlanta, to organize the strike and negotiate with the city. At their first press conference, Shapiro announced that the workers demanded 100 dollars gross pay and "decent working conditions," though Shapiro did not elaborate on what this would entail. When asked about the city's stance that it was unlawful to raise wages until the next budget, Shapiro responded "That's the city's problem."

The strong and defiant stance of the international representatives mirrored that of the striking workers. When asked if he would miss his salary if the strike continued too long, one black sanitation worker replied "Not too much. I ain't making nothing no way…I'm doing without anyway."[654] The black workers expressed their militancy collectively when they soundly rejected the city's first offer of a 13 percent pay increase, which would have increased the lowest wage rate from $1.66 to $1.88. The vote also revealed the racial divide between the white and black sanitation workers; only white workers voted in favor of the deal while the black workers "stood as one and shouted their rejection of the proposal."[655] The solidarity and militancy led a *Constitution* reporter

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[654] News clip, WSB-TV, WSB Newsfilm collection, reel WSBN1497, Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, The University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, GA, accessed at http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/news/id:wsbn54774.

to observe, not incorrectly, that "the strike gave every sign of taking on civil rights overtones as a similar one in Memphis did earlier this year."[656]

Over the next few days, the strike began to look even more like the Memphis movement as SCLC and other community and church leaders joined the striking workers in rallies and marches. At a rally on Sunday, September 9, Shapiro announced the creation of a steering committee "to plan action in connection with the strike." The interracial committee included SCLC members Joseph Lowery, Andrew Young, and Joseph Boone, who was also head of the Metropolitan Atlanta Summit League, Charles Morgan of the Atlanta branch of the American Civil Liberties Union, and E.T. Kehrer, head of the AFL-CIO's civil rights division. The rallies and marches also brought other leading black Atlantans such as board of education member Horace Tate, state senator Leroy Johnson, state representatives Ben Brown, Julian Bond, and John Hood, John Lewis and Vernon Jordan of the Southern Regional Council, Reverend A.M. Davis of the Atlanta NAACP, Bishop J. D. Grier, Reverend Howard Creecy, Reverend A.D. King, Martin Luther King Jr's brother, and the white reverend and head of the anti-poverty driven Emmaus House, Austin Ford.[657]

Not everyone was accepted as an ally. Before one mass meeting, union leaders prevented members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) from

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[655] Raleigh Bryans, "City Garbage Men Refuse Wage Offer," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 8, 1968, 1.

[656] Raleigh Bryans, "City Garbage Men Refuse Wage Offer," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 8, 1968, 1.

[657] Alex Coffin, "Injunction to Halt Garbage Walkout Sought by Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 10, 1968.

entering the church and participating. James Howard told the press that "we've had trouble getting the SNCC people out of here."[658] It is not clear why the leaders of the meeting did not welcome SNCC. The group could have been disruptive; the radicalism and heightened sense of emergency in the politics of the late 1960's had certainly created an environment where disruptive outbursts were common, and SNCC activists in Atlanta were known to be particularly outspoken. But just as likely the union and allies used their rejection of SNCC – which they openly shared with the white press – to signify the type of racial politics acceptable in the coalition. For the most part, the men, of whom all but two listed by the newspapers were black, who supported the strike were prominent middle-class reformers, activists, religious leaders, and politicians. Since SNCC's formation in 1960, moderate and reformist black Atlantans had often used SNCC to represent the extreme of the civil rights movement. This divide only widened as SNCC, at the forefront of the Black Power movement, adopted more militant stances on the appropriateness of interracial coalitions and the inadequacy of non-violent protest. By late 1968, the organization had lost much of its influence nationally and locally, but it still served as an intimidating symbol of black extremism that more moderate actors could triangulate their own politics against.[659]

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[658] Raleigh Bryans, "City Garbage Men Refuse Pay Offer," *Atlanta Journal and Atlanta Constitution,* September 8, 1968, 10A.

[659] The best work on the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee is still Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s.* For Carson's discussion of SNCC's "Atlanta Project" see 191-198. For more on SNCC in Atlanta in the late 1960s see Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid,* 59-140; Harmon, *Beneath the Image of the Civil Rights Movement and Race Relations,* 177-230; Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent,* 253-304.

Just as conspicuously absent from the mass meetings, marches, and protests were women. Women do not appear in any of the historical records of the strike. In contrast to the two later sanitation strikes in Atlanta, wives of the workers did not reach out to the wives of politicians or apparently join the workers on marches. Nor were black women who were members of DC 14, mostly employed at Grady Memorial Hospital or in the school system, involved in supporting the strike. This most likely was because the strike, even with the support of the international, was still unsanctioned by these women's union leaders in DC 14. Nor were there any prominent black women mentioned as members of the coalition. In part, this was a product of timing. Two activists, Ethel Mae Matthews of the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO) and Dorothy Bolden of the National Domestic Workers Union (NDWU), were active allies in 1970 and 1977. But in 1968, Matthews had just helped organize the Atlanta chapter of the NWRO in July and Bolden was still participating in the founding meetings of the NDWU.[660] These pro-working class, anti-poverty activists did not yet have the footing or voice that they would even two

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[660] Dorothy Bolden's efforts to organize, support, and train Atlanta's domestic workers made her one of the best known Atlanta activists of this period. Bolden founded the National Domestic Workers Union in 1968 with the help of the AUL and the Georgia Human Relations Commission and funding from federal anti-poverty and work-training grants. The NDWU, despite its lofty name, was neither a national organization or a union. In reality it was an advocacy, training, and placement organization that sought to improve wages and working conditions of domestic workers in Atlanta. For more on Dorothy Bolden and the NDWU see Premilla Nadasen, *Household Workers Unite: The Untold Story of African American Women Who Built a Movement* (Boston, Beacon Press, 2015), 33-43; Dorothy Sue Cobble, "A Spontaneous Loss of Enthusiasm": Workplace Feminism and the Transformation of Women's Service Jobs in the 1970s," in *Rebel Rank and File,* eds,. Brenner, Brenner, and Winslow, 347-353; Elizabeth Beck, "The National Domestic Workers Union and the War on Poverty," *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* 28, no. 4 (December 2001): 195-210; Lars Christiansen, "The Making of a Civil Rights Union: The National Domestic Workers of America," (PhD diss., The Florida State University, 1999). For more on Ethel Mae Matthews see fn. 934.

years later. Of course, Matthews and Bolden, while the two most prominent women activists of this period, were not the only black women who may have supported the strike. Leroy Johnson and Ben Brown were state representatives and both participated in the meetings, but another representative, Grace Towns Hamilton, does not appear in the records. Nor are fellow unionists like the women in International Chemical Workers Union at Scripto or members of the textile or laundry unions. It could be that these women were not interested in aiding the sanitation workers, but it is more likely that AFSCME, SCLC, and the other supporters did not reach out to prominent women or likely allies. For the leaders of the strike women only played the role of a rhetorical prop. They were the invisible wives and daughters supported by hardworking sanitation workers deserving of more pay.[661]

Among all the strike supporters, SCLC, specifically Ralph Abernathy, Hosea Williams, and Andrew Young, took the lead in aiding AFSCME and the strikers. At that first rally on September 9, SCLC members suggested to the crowd that they adopt tactics used in the Memphis strike including marches and a boycott of downtown stores. "We've got to march in the streets and keep our dollars in our pockets," Hosea Williams explained to the audience. "But we're not here to destroy Atlanta, but to save Atlanta."[662]

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[661] For a discussion of sexism within SCLC see Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement,* 172-189. For more on the ways male leaders overshadowed female activists see Robnett, How Long? How Long?; Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance – A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), especially 84-135.

[662] "Mayor Threatens Garbage Strikers With Dismissals," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 9, 1968, 9.

A boycott campaign never developed, however, most likely because the strike only lasted ten days. Instead SCLC and its community allies held nightly rallies at churches, marched with the workers to city hall, supported the strikers on the picket lines, and through Ralph Abernathy aided AFSCME in negotiations. On Tuesday, September 11, Abernathy, Williams, Young, and Joseph Lowery were among eighty protesters arrested and charged with disorderly conduct for blocking trucks attempting to leave a sanitary department substation. Just as important as their actions, the presence of SCLC helped convince observers that this strike was part of a new era of civil rights movement, one focused on fighting poverty and economic inequality.

Poverty and Municipal Politics

One of the most common rhetorical devices used by civil rights activists, labor leaders, and striking workers was to emphasize the poverty-level wages of the sanitation workers. Significantly improved wages, after all, was the one concrete demand made by the wildcat strikers. SCLC, despite the public relations setback of the failure in Washington, DC, viewed its support of the strike as "just another part of our Poor People's Campaign to make this nation face up to poverty and racism." The organization promised to "plague…Atlanta and any other place in America if necessary to get justice for poor people."[663] AFSCME representatives too turned to anti-poverty rhetoric. Low wages were not the only concern of the union leaders; they also sought, among other things, to expand the role of the union in the city's personnel policy-making apparatus

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[663] Press Release, SCLC, September 11, 1968, Box 341, Folder 11, SCLC Records Emory.

and to strengthen respect for public sector workers. But the international representatives did emphasize the poverty-level wages of the striking workers. Fighting poverty was a priority for most of the leaders of the strike, but most also realized that discussion of low wages and poverty was a smart strategy. Focusing on the poverty wages of the workers made the press and public sympathetic to their demands. It also forced Atlantans in power to take seriously their frequent denunciations of poverty. "We want to test the citizens of Atlanta — those people who say 'Yes, we have got to fight poverty,'" Morton Shapiro told the press. "I want them to put their money where their mouth is."[664]

By 1968 poverty had been in the public discourse for several years, but in Atlanta it became an increasing concern for business leaders, politicians, and the press. This new attention was largely the product of pressure brought by black Atlantans. The Allen administration was exceptionally concerned with the Atlanta's image as the "city too busy to hate," and as civil rights activists and black civic leaders turned their attention more and more to economic inequality and poverty the city followed suit, at least rhetorically. Especially after the civil disturbances in the Summerhill and Dixie Hills neighborhoods, in 1966 and 1967, city leaders ramped up their call to fight poverty.[665]

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[664] Raleigh Bryans, "City Garbage Men Refuse Wage Offer," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 8, 1968, 1.

[665] Ivan Allen created Economic Opportunity Atlanta (EOA) in November 1964 in response to Congress passing the Economic Opportunity Act that August. The EOA was, according to Tomiko Brown-Nagin, "a proving grounds for the War on Poverty." Eventually the EOA established fourteen Neighborhood Service Centers to administer the federal money and provide services, such as employment counseling and family planning to the poor. Allen established a non-profit Board of Directors headed Boisfeuillet Jones, a close associate of Coca Cola magnate Robert Woodruff that would "determine the policies for the community action agency." Allen, Jones, and early EOA head Charles Emmerich intended the EOA to be administered like the rest of the city: by members of

In the Summer of 1967, investigators working for the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, better known as the Kerner Commission, interviewed leading lights in the city about the relatively mild civil disturbances in Atlanta and what the civic leaders thought could prevent future incidents. These interviews reveal how many of Atlanta's civic leaders, at least in conversations with the investigators, viewed continued racial discrimination and economic inequality as important causes of poor black Atlantan's anger. Richard Rich, the head of Rich's Department Store, explained how he believed more low-income housing, from both private and public sources, was necessary to alleviate the slum conditions in certain neighborhoods. Billy Sterne, the president of the Chamber of Commerce and Trust Company of Georgia, bragged that the Chamber of Commerce "endorsed, although not unanimously, local poverty programs," which he thought was "unusual" for local chambers of commerce. He also pointed out the chamber's efforts, working alongside African American civic leaders, to improve employment opportunities in Atlanta. And Ivan Allen III, the mayor's son and president of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, prided his organization on its efforts to build

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the white business and political elite. Soon middle-class black organizations successfully advocated for the EOA to hire black administrators and workers. The most controversial aspect of the Economic Opportunity Act was the insistence in the bill that the poor have "maximum feasible participation" in anti-poverty programs. Despite pressure from some community groups, the EOA never truly pursued policies that allowed poor Atlantans to run anti-poverty programs. "Economic Opportunity Atlanta, Inc. – A Brief History, 1964-1971," Economic Opportunity Atlanta, Inc., 1971, accessed at "Planning Atlanta, A New City in the Making, 1930s-1990s," Georgia State University Library Digital Collections; Dan Sweat, Interviewed by Clifford Kuhn, November 22, 1996, P-4, Series P. Dan Sweat (P), Georgia Government Documentation Project, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library; Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent,* 258-259. For more on the War on Poverty and community programs in other locations see the essays in Annelise Orleck and Lisa Gayle Hazirjian, eds., *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964-1980* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

recreation facilities in poor black neighborhoods and providing jobs to young men who were habitually unemployed. Despite the big talk of these business leaders, the commission investigators were left unimpressed by the actual commitment of these men to fighting poverty. The interviewers did not believe that "the chamber or Mr. Stern (sic)" were very "concerned about the problems of the Negro community." Instead, they concluded that "the Chamber's sole concern was to protect its image." The sanitation strikers and their supporters hoped the dispute would highlight the disjunction between the rhetoric of these men and their actual actions and force city leaders to act on their anti-poverty rhetoric in a meaningful way. [666]

From the beginning of the walkout, it was apparent that there were influential voices in Atlanta, particularly in the press, who saw the strike as an opportunity to materially improve the standing of poor Atlantans. Editorials in the *Constitution* and the *Journal,* both known for their pro-corporate civic boosterism, were remarkably sympathetic to the wildcat strikers despite the growing mounds of trash. "The Atlanta citizens and government need to look at and remember the importance of the sanitation men's work…and determine to relieve the poverty of the workers it calls upon to do this essential job," one editorial reminded its reader.[667] Another agreed that "the strike served a valid purpose: it brought to the city's attention that many public employees…are doing

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[666] Atlanta, Georgia, Kerner Commission files, June-October 24, 1967, Folder 001346-023-0103, Civil Rights during the Johnson Administration, 1963-1969, Part V: Records of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (Kerner Commission) accessed at Black Freedom Struggle in the 20th Century: Federal Government Records, ProQuest History Vault.

[667] "Sanitation a Necessity," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 5, 1968, 4.

difficult jobs for insufficient pay."[668] Jim Rankin of the *Constitution* believed that raising the wages of the "unconsciously large number of public servants who do not make enough to keep body, soul and family" was the ideal way to fight poverty. Increasing the pay of men, as traditional heads of the household was the major concern for Rankin, as with a majority of War-on-Poverty era advocates. More income for men, who did "essential" but "unsavory" work was "an opportunity to take a considerable number of people off of welfare rolls." If welfare programs, as some argued, created "listlessness**,**" then improving wages of those willing to work should be the answer for those honestly concerned about poverty. In addition to reducing the population on welfare, improving pay of sanitation workers would help aid black families. "Men may return to families they abandoned" because the family could not receive welfare if he had lived there, and "his wife may elect to stay home with her children."[669]

Here Rankin was clearly influenced by Daniel Patrick Moynihan's analysis of African American poverty in *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action,* better known as the "Moynihan Report." The popular and controversial report, originally written for the Johnson administration in 1965 when the author was an assistant secretary of labor, stated that "at the heart of the deterioration of the fabric of Negro society is the deterioration of the Negro family."[670] Slavery, Moynihan argued, "destroy[ed] the Negro

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[668] "Reason Prevails," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 14, 1968, 2A.

[669] Jim Rankin, "Poverty and Garbage," *Atlanta Constitution* September 11, 1968, 4.

[670] Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," March 1965, Office of Policy Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor accessed at

family" allowing "white America" to break "the will of the Negro people."[671] Policies and practices in the ensuing century actively worked against black Americans' efforts to create a stable family life. For Moynihan, the destruction of the black family led to a "tangle of pathologies" including "aberrant, inadequate, or antisocial behavior," and the creation of a matriarchal society at odds with most American's familial practices.[672] Moynihan was careful not to provide specific solutions other than directing "a national effort" to "strengthen the Negro family." His focus on the effects of black male unemployment and underemployment – with little discussion of the working life of black women – on the deterioration of the black family, however, does suggest that he believed improving black male employment was essential to improving the black family.[673]

Moynihan's analysis of black poverty was not novel; his discussion of the breakdown of the black family was borrowed from E. Franklin Frazier, and his discussion of the "tangle of pathology," a term he borrowed from the psychologist Kenneth Clark, was essentially the concept of a culture of poverty, commonly used by poverty experts like Oscar Lewis and Michael Harrington.[674] Moynihan was certainly not original in

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https://web.stanford.edu/~mrosenfe/Moynihan%27s%20The%20Negro%20Family.pdf, 5.

[671] Moynihan, "The Negro Family," 30.

[672] Moynihan, "The Negro Family," 30.

[673] For more on the Moynihan Report see James T. Patterson, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Moynihan Report and America's Struggle Over Black Family Life*, (New York City: Basic Books, 2010); Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), *196-210;* Michael B Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: America's Enduring Confrontation with Poverty,* 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

[674] For the influences on Moynihan see, Katz, *The Undeserving Poor.*

emphasizing the unemployment and underemployment of the male wage earner as central to the continued deterioration of the family, which was long the normal assumption for reformers, activists, labor leaders, and other policy makers. This centering of the male wage earner in theory and policy, though, was undergoing increasing criticism by the time Moynihan published his findings in late 1965.[675] In fact, Moynihan's contention that black maternal-headed households were inherently deviant brought particular condemnation from Moynihan's critics, especially from those involved in the civil rights movement and increasingly influenced by Black Power.[676] Yet, as Rankin's editorial shows, despite the controversy of the report, its linking of continued anti-black racism, black male unemployment, and most importantly the absence of male-led black families, with the problem of black poverty proved persuasive to many. Moynihan's patronizing discussion of poor and working-class black culture as a "tangle of pathology" provided a description of black life that many, even well-meaning, white observers could agree with. It became an acceptable attack on racism and poverty without indicting more trenchant

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[675] For more on the development of work-based and gendered social security and welfare policies see Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Jennifer Mittlestadt, *From Welfare to Workfare: The Unintended Consequences of Liberal Reform, 1945-1965,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); For works on challenges to male-centric social security policies see Premilla Nadasen, *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States,* (New York City: Routledge, 2005); Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesars Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013); Rhonda Y. Williams, *The Politics of Public Housing: Black Women's Struggles Against Urban Inequality,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[676] For a discussion of the contemporary criticism of Moynihan's thesis see Katz, *The Undeserving Poor,* 58-68.

economic dysfunctions, like structural unemployment and automation.[677] For Rankin and others, black sanitation workers' demands for better wages appeared to be an effective solution to what Moynihan termed the "new crisis in race relations."[678]

Like the white press, Mayor Ivan Allen, by the late sixties, expressed interest in fighting poverty. From the beginning of his first term, Allen worked to project the image of himself as a pro civil-rights mayor. As the movement, and the country as a whole, shifted in mid '60s to focus on the perpetuation of poverty, especially black poverty, Allen too followed. The mayor increasingly discussed the problem of poverty after the spread of civil disturbances in Atlanta and cities across the country. After the Summerhill disturbance in September 1966, Allen argued that "ignorance, poverty, and lack of opportunity" were the catalysts for the day's events.[679] Allen was surprisingly effective at communicating just how racist policies and practices affected black poverty differently than white poverty. The difference-between white and black poverty, he explained, was that African Americans "have been confined legally by laws almost into the areas of poverty. There was a difference between having hope and opportunity, and having hope and opportunity denied by law."[680] Thanks to the established black leadership in the city

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[677] See Touré Reed, "Why Moynihan Was Not So Misunderstood at the Time: The Mythological Prescience of the Moynihan Report and the Problem of Institutional Structuralism," nonsite.org 17, September 4, 2015, accessed at https://nonsite.org/article/why-moynihan-was-not-so-misunderstood-at-the-time.

[678] Moynihan, "The Negro Family," preface.

[679] "Allen Calls Rioters Poor and Ignorant," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 28, 1966, found in Series 1.1, Box 10, Folder 11, Eliza Paschall Papers.

[680] News clip, "WSB-TV news film clip of Mayor Ivan Allen commenting that African Americans are locked into poverty by discrimination, Atlanta, Georgia, 1968 March

and the concern of white political and business elites, Allen claimed that Atlanta was "closer than any other American city to reaching out and eliminating slums and poverty."[681] Of course, this was hyperbole. Atlanta was no closer to ending poverty – and in some ways a great deal farther – than any other city. But it was the kind of talk that the sanitation strikers hoped to use against the mayor.

The striking workers and SCLC stressed the disconnect between the anti-poverty talk and the actions of the Allen and the rest of Atlanta's white power structure. At a rally one striking worker, Finley Holmes Jr., demanded to know how a city could afford to pay for "a new Civic Center complex, a stadium and swimming pools" while still paying employees a poverty wage.[682] SCLC echoed Holmes's criticism. In one pamphlet it expanded the meaning of the city's slogan "The City Too Busy to Hate." For SCLC, the city should not brag that it was "too busy to hate" as long as poverty and slum conditions still existed. Hate was about more than Jim Crow segregation and discrimination. The city's spending priorities, SCLC argued, did nothing to eliminate poverty. It was the city "that spends millions of dollars on a sports stadium, but only whitewashes the unsightly shanties." It was "the city that brags about big skyscrapers downtown but says nothing about the slums and poverty less than one mile from downtown." It was "the city where

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1," *Ivan Allen, Jr. Digital Collection*, Georgia Tech University, accessed October 18, 2018, https://ivanallen.iac.gatech.edu/omeka/items/show/381.

[681] "Allen Calls Rioters Poor and Ignorant," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 28, 1966, Series 1.1 Box 10, Folder 11, Eliza Paschal Papers.

[682] Alex Coffin, "Mayor Threatens Garbage Strikers with Dismissals, *Atlanta Constitution,* September 9, 1968, 9.

taxpayers, including garbage workers, pay their Mayor 400 dollars a week, but the Mayor says garbage workers cannot be paid one fourth of his salary."[683]

In the light of the priorities and spending choices of the Allen administration, the mayor's calls to end poverty rang hollow. The city had the money to pay the workers, which would have both helped hundreds of workers receiving poverty and near poverty wages and most likely improved trash and garbage services throughout the city, but instead the city chose to invest in projects that often only benefited the wealthiest. These criticisms were important because they connected the demands of a relatively small group of city employees to the role the city played in perpetuating racial and class inequality throughout the city. The strike, they emphasized, was not just about worker's pay. It was an effort to challenge the Allen administration to do better on their promise to fight discrimination and poverty.

The workers and SCLC were certainly right to point out the discrepancy between the city's spending priorities and Allen's anti-poverty rhetoric. The Allen administration, like nearly every municipal administration in the country, used federal urban renewal funds to redevelop their downtown business, entertainment, transportation, and hospitality infrastructure, while in the process displacing tens of thousands of primarily black residences. As urban scholar Charles Rutheiser explained, "Allen reconfigured the city into a publicly subsidized support structure for private capital."[684]

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[683] Press Release, SCLC, September 11, 1968, Box 341, Folder 11 SCLC Records Emory.

[684] Rutheiser, *Imagineering Atlanta,* 49.

The project that Allen was proudest of was the construction of a major league baseball stadium just south of downtown. One of Allen's top priorities as mayor was to bring a professional baseball team to the city; this acquisition would raise the profile of a city whose boosters aspired to build into a New York City, Chicago, or Los Angeles of the South. Allen and the city chose to build the stadium in the Rawson-Washington project area that displaced the interracial working class neighborhoods of Mechanicsville and Peoplestown. Many of the black residences displaced by the clearance moved to the neighboring and increasingly overcrowded Summerhill neighborhood. The overcrowding exacerbated problems of poverty and governmental neglect that had already existed in Summerhill. On September 6 a police officer shot Harold Prather in the neighborhood which led to a confrontation between angry black citizens and the police. The civil disturbance in Summnerhill and its proximity to the brand-new, publicly-funded, eighteen-million-dollar stadium was only the most glaring example of the ways Atlanta's budget and spending decisions not only neglected working-class, especially black, communities but actively made their residents' lives worse. The striking workers' argument that the city could have spent more wisely, and justly, on its low-paid employees and essential services in its neighborhoods was indisputable, but the city also faced real obstacles to raising revenue to improve wages and services.[685]

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[685] Following the police shooting, SNCC activists including Bill Ware, head of the Atlanta Project, rode around on a sound truck denouncing police brutality. Police responded to the crowds by firing warning shots into the air and then firing tear gas into the crowd. During the Summerhill civil disturbance several buildings caught fire including the Sexton Brothers Fire Company that rioters firebombed with a Molotov cocktail. There were fifteen injures and seventy arrests. A second confrontation between black Atlantans and police occurred less than a year later in the Dixie Hills neighborhood. Frustration in the neighborhood grew over a June week as black residents

In the post-World War II years, as public spending increased, all local governments in the United States relied heavily on funding from the state and federal level.[686] For the Allen administration, and every other Atlanta mayor, it was much easier to find funds from the federal government than from the state. In 1964, the city hired Dan Sweat to serve as a liaison between the Johnson administration and the city to ensure it received all the Great Society funding it could, including participation in the Model Cities Program.[687] Getting funds from the state of Georgia was more difficult. Local politicians had long found themselves at odds with the rural-controlled, conservative state assembly. As the Allen administration sought to increase social spending in the city, it could not

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expressed their anger with police. First, a crowd of three hundred gathered after police arrested three black teens after a scuffle with a security guard at a local restaurant. Then two days later, tempers flared after police shot and wounded a black teen for attempting to disable a burglar alarm. That night a crowd of a 1,000 led by SNCC activists, including Stokely Carmichael, confronted police. Police fired warning shots into the air and the crowd responded by throwing bottles and rocks at the police. The next day, even though the crowd of protesters dwindled to less than two hundred, the police presence increased. After "an incendiary device" was thrown at police by teens, an officer accidently shot and killed a 48-year-old observer. No further confrontations occurred after the shooting. In response to SNCC's actions during the disturbance over 1,000 community residents signed a petition demanding the group leave the neighborhood. For more on the civil disturbances in Summerhill and Dixie Hills see Grady-Willis, *Challenging U.S. Apartheid,* 114-135; Irene V. Holliman, "From Crackertown to Model City: Urban Renewal and Community Building in Atlanta, 1963-1966, *Journal of Urban History,* 35 no.3 (March 2009); Atlanta, Georgia, Kerner Commission files, June-October 24, 1967; "Social Blight and Its Causes" Community Council of the Atlanta Area, Inc., February, 1966, Series 2, Box 30, Folder 1, Eliza Paschall Papers.

[686] See Robert O. Self and Thomas J. Sugrue, "The Power of Place: Race, Political Economy, and Identity in the Postwar Metropolis," in Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig, eds. *A Companion to Post-1945 America,* (Malden MA: Blackwell, 2006), 21-36.

[687] Dan Sweat, Interviewed by Clifford Kuhn, November 26, 1996, P-6, Series P. Dan Sweat (P), Georgia Government Documentation Project, Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University Library, Atlanta. 2-12.

turn to the state house for help. To make matters more difficult for the city, state politicians held much of the power over what taxes municipalities could levy. Atlanta could increase revenues by increasing fees for services or licenses and by issuing new bonds, but the most effective source of revenue that the city controlled, and therefore the one most consistently raised, was property taxes.[688]

The state's control over Atlanta's revenue collection meant that Atlanta officials had real budgetary constraints that limited the wage and benefit increases it could provide the city workers. It also could have had the effect of creating the illusion of a zero-sum game between underpaid city workers and tax-paying homeowners (categories that overlapped). It is revealing though that in 1968, with the national tax-payer revolt still a decade off, the tradeoff between city services and taxes was not yet the primary concern of most observers. In fact, during the 1966 fire fighter strike, several Atlantans who identified themselves primarily as taxpayers – one even signed his telegram "A taxpaying citizen" – were less concerned about the effect of a pay increase and more worried that Allen's hardline approach to the fire department led to understaffing with inexperienced workers. "What are we tax-payers supposed to do?" asked another writer, after calling Allen a "nut." "Sit and bite our fingernails into the quick hoping a fire won't break out in our homes or schools?" Though there were already grumblings about the "dollar squeeze" caused by high taxes and inflation in the national press, in Atlanta at least, the concern was not about taxes versus services, but about how the city could best use taxes

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[688] Steven R. Gretenstein, Ned O'Hearn, Barbara S. Wyne, "The Urban Fiscal Crisis in Atlanta," Research Atlanta, Inc., 1979, ii.

to improve services and provide just wages.[689] By the outbreak of the 1970 sanitation strike, there was recognition by the press that homeowners had become overburdened by the property taxes. But as an editorial in one local newspaper pointed out, the workers "doing backbreaking stinking labor" were right "to expect a living wage" and it was up to state General Assembly to devise "a constructive program of tax relief."[690] Even though there were real restraints on the revenue the city could raise to pay the sanitation workers, many in the city viewed the striking workers as hard-working, underpaid employees who provided an essential service. In 1968 there was a general agreement that there was revenue to be found, either from the city's budget, or from the state assembly, expanding the city's taxing powers to pay the workers. "It is never pleasant to pay more taxes," Eugene Patterson, the *Constitution*'s Pulitzer Prize winning editor wrote, "yet rarely has the justice of an increase been more apparent."[691]

The Strike Ends

The sympathy for the strikers had its limits. Despite Eugene Patterson's claim that "the editor's mail indicates that Atlantans do care about these men," the newspapers still found the occasional citizen displeased with the strike. C.M. O'Donnell suggested that Allen fire the "striking garbage and get the garbage pickup done just as you got the fire

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[689] For discussion of inflation in the national press see Joe McGinnis, "The Dollar Squeeze," *Life Magazine,* August 15, 1969, 20-25.

[690] "Wrong Emphasis in Strike, *The Southdale Sun* reprinted in *Atlanta Constitution*, April 4, 1970, 4A.

[691] Eugene Patterson, *The Atlanta Constitution,* September 14, 1968, 4.

put out without the strikers [in 1966]." And A.L. Andrews suggested to "fire all of them" because the striking workers were already "getting much more than they are worth."[692] For most, though, it was not the original walkout itself but what they saw as the increasing militancy of the workers that turned them against the strike.

While the white press was supportive of the workers' demands it soon concluded that it was time for the strikers to return to their jobs and let the elected leaders resolve the issue. Then the workers and their allies took their strike too far when they participated in acts of civil disobedience that blocked garbage trucks from leaving their stations. This action, which led to the arrest of more than eighty protesters, was "emotional overkill" and a "desperation measure… that was hardly appropriate" especially since the mayor had expressed a willingness to negotiate. Tellingly, some journalists were especially critical that "some people who are speaking for the strikers make no distinction between" Atlanta, "which demonstrably wants to reach a fair settlement," and Memphis, "where that was resisted." Memphis's resistance, like the resistance of Little Rock in 1957 and Birmingham in 1963**,** was seen as a vestige of the Old South, in contrast with the racially progressive Atlanta that the white power elite imagined they had built. Leading Atlantans understood that they needed to improve the near-poverty wages of the black sanitation workers and were willing to negotiate. The strikers, journalists argued, had "made their point" and should now "return to work, draw their pay, protect Atlantans' health and to conclude their grievances at the bargaining table."[693]

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[692] Letters to the Editors, "Mayor Should Fire Striking Garbagemen," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 10, 1968, 5.

No one was more keen to separate the image of Atlanta from that of other southern cities like Memphis than Ivan Allen. Yet, he was not willing to offer more than the 13 percent wage hike he had already promised. In an attempt to scare the sanitation workers back to jobs, Allen threatened to fire anyone who continued to participate in the illegal strike. He had fired public sector strikers two years earlier during the firemen strike. In this crisis, though, Allen was clearly hesitant to follow through with his threat. For one thing, the manpower crisis in the sanitary department meant that it was unlikely that the city would be able to find enough replacement workers to competently resume garbage service. For another, Allen, probably more than any other elected official in the South, was concerned about his image as pro-civil rights racial progressive. He was, after all, the only Southern mayor to give testimony in favor of the Civil Rights Act in 1963.[694] Allen also received national attention in April when he rushed to aid Coretta Scott King in the hours after her husband's death, and he received praise from the press for Atlanta's handling of King's funeral. As we have seen**,** Allen had become ever-more willing to connect the fight against poverty to the expanding rights and liberties of black Atlantans.

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[693] "Settle It at the Table," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 11, 1968, 4; Eugene Patterson, "Why the Overkill," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 11, 1968, 4; "This Isn't Memphis," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 10, 1968, 4.

[694] On July 26, 1963, before Senate Committee on Commerce, Ivan Allen stated that "the point I want to emphasize again is that now is the time for legislative action. We cannot dodge the issue…We must take action now to assure a greater future for our citizens and our country…Now the elimination of segregation, which is slavery's stepchild, is a challenge to all of us to make every American free in fact as well as in theory." While Allen advocated for the immediate passing of a public accommodations law, he suggested that Congress "grant a reasonable time for cities and businesses to carry out this function before Federal intervention." "Statement of Ivan Allen, Jr. Mayor of Atlanta, GA.," Civil Rights – Public Accommodations, Hearing before the Committee on Commerce, United States Senate, 88th Congress, 1st Session, July 26, 1963.

The mayor was not yet ready to fire black sanitation workers just months after Martin Luther King Jr. died supporting the exact cause.[695]

Even though the Allen administration refused to fire the striking workers, it did file for an injunction against AFSCME and the striking workers. The injunction, which the Fulton Superior Court duly issued, declared the strike illegal and demanded that workers cease picketing or otherwise restraining the work of others and to return to work. The injunction, however, did not deter the strikers.[696] Calling the injunction forced labor, Shapiro exclaimed that "[w]e formally abolished slavery 100 years ago. No court order can force these men to work."[697]

Despite the dogged stance of the union and sanitation workers, Allen, the board of alderman, and the public works department refused to budge from their 13 percent raise. The city negotiators flatly rejected the union's demand of at least a four-step raise, nor did they accept the union's request of a compressed period to reach top pay, which took five years' experience. With the threat of a mass firing, the court-issued injunction, and the realization that the city was unlikely to give anymore, Shapiro and Abernathy decided to convince the strikers to end the walkout. Most workers, however, refused to give in,

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[695]Raleigh Bryans, "City Garbage Men Refuse Wage Offer," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 8, 1968, 1; Ivan Allen, *Mayor: Notes on the Sixties*; Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn,* 352-363; "Leaders at Rites: High and Lowly Join in Last Tribute To Rights Champion," Homer Bigarts, *New York Times,* April 10, 1968, 1.

[696] City of Atlanta v. The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees Union, AFL-CIO, et al., September 9, 1968, Box 344, Folder 16, SCLC Records Emory; Alex Coffin, "Injunction to Halt Garbage Walkout Sought by Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 10, 1968.

[697] Alex Coffin, "Garbage Strikers to Defy Court," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 11, 1968, 6.

and in a long meeting on Thursday, September 13, a large majority again voted against the city's 13 percent offer. Many strikers did not think that any concessions on their part were necessary because more than two hundred public works employees, including street sweepers, laborers, and water plant employees, also joined the strike. Nevertheless, the strike leaders continued to look for a way to bring their strike to an end. On Thursday afternoon a group of ministers led by Abernathy convinced the city to expand the pay raise to all public works department employees – which would increase the lowest wages from $1.66 to $1.88 – and to promise to research a compression of the time to top pay. After pressure from both the union and SCLC the workers on September 14, only a day after they rejected the city's offer, agreed to the settlement and ended the eleven-day long strike.[698]

Shapiro and Abernathy claimed victory for the sanitation workers. SCLC president compared the win to the campaigns in St. Petersburg and Memphis earlier in the year, and called Atlanta the "greatest victory." And Shapiro thanked SCLC for its support and promised that "next time we have a fight in Atlanta, I need your help."[699] Abernathy was not just gloating. Atlanta strikers did win more money than the strikers in Memphis and St. Petersburg. In Memphis the striking workers eventually won a guarantee of three straight years of raises, eighteen cents the first two years and fifteen cents the third. In St. Petersburg the workers won nothing. In May, the city fired fifty wildcat strikers and then

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[698] Alex Coffin, "Pay Raise Wins 450-23, Ending Garbage Strike," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 14, 1968, 1, 10.

[699] Alex Coffin, "Pay Raise Wins 450-23, Ending Garbage Strike," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 14, 1968, 10.

fired 150 more men who went out on strike in solidarity. Like Memphis, this led to two months of demonstrations and ended after a riot tore through the city in August. St. Petersburg agreed to hire back the workers but did not give a pay raise.[700] In Atlanta, the 13 percent raise was certainly a victory for the striking workers — this was a 21 cent an hour increase or more than eight dollars a week extra for the lowest paid workers — but it was hardly the 100 dollars of take home pay a week they initially demanded. Nor was it applied immediately as the workers had hoped, it was also only one step — about 4.5 percent — more than the local union leaders had bargained for earlier the summer. Few of the peripheral complaints of the black sanitation workers were addressed by the agreement either. The city continued to hire day laborers, and many of the complaints about old, broken machinery and substandard locker rooms continued. Shapiro and Abernathy did get Mayor Allen to agree to the city "upgrading opportunities/promotions within the department."[701] As we saw earlier, by 1970 the city did increase the hiring of black workers as drivers, but promotion into supervisor and management positons were still rare.[702]

While the public works department employees had to wait until January for their raises, there was one immediate change for those organized workers. As directed by Jerry

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[700] McCartin, "Fire the Hell Out of the Them," 74-76. For more on the outcomes of these strikes and others in 1968 and 1969 see "Strike Survey," in Memorandum, E.H. Underwood to Charles Davis and Jay Fountain, March 19, 1970, Box 106, Folder 1, Sam Massell Papers.

[701] Meeting Note, "Requests to the City," no date, Box 341, Folder 11, SCLC Records Emory.

[702] Community Relations Commission, "The Human Aspects," 26.

Wurf, the international vowed to replace the leaders of DC 14 immediately. "This has been a legitimate strike from people who were just sick and tired of being mistreated," Shapiro explained, and AFSCME would not condone the DC 14's public opposition to their members' action. On the day that the union announced the end of the strike, Shapiro announced that the union heads – he only named J.W. Giles specifically – who opposed to the strike were "finished in this union," and that James Howard would head DC 14 in the interim.[703] By the November 1968 the three largest Atlanta-based locals, 850, 797 (that represented Grady Memorial Hospital workers), and 20 (that represented nonprofessional employees of the Atlanta schoolboard), in DC 14 combined to form one large Local 1644. Local 1644, a majority of its members African American, then elected James Howard as president.[704]

The consolidation of locals angered Local 850, which challenged the move. The merger also put off some of the smaller, white-majority locals. Local 1202, representing DeKalb County Board of Education employees, ended its charter out of "great concern about the Civil Rights overtone which dominate the recent garbage strike in Atlanta" and because the international destroyed the autonomy of the DC 14. The leaders of Local 1202 warned that AFSCME "has chosen a course of suicide for the Public Employees of the South." Given that the largest local in the city and several smaller locals had a majority black membership, the emphasis on civil rights was not going to do much

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[703] Alex Coffin, "Pay Raise Wins 450-23, Ending Garbage Strike," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 14, 1968, 10.

[704] "Garbage Strike Leader Elected Union President," *Atlanta Constitution,* November 23, 1968, 3.

damage to many employees view of public unions in Atlanta. If anything the new focus on black workers and issues of equal rights energized public workers in Atlanta, as it did across the nation. However, the leaders of Local 1202 were right in one sense. Because the new public sector labor unionism encouraged militancy and confrontation it did leave AFSCME in Atlanta vulnerable to overreach and backlash from city politicians, as happened after the 1970 strike.[705]

Allen may have conceded to an unplanned pay-raise for city workers, but the strike was certainly a public relations victory for the mayor and the city. Allen was relatively diplomatic with AFSCME, once it became involved in the strike, and made himself available for negotiations. Compared to Henry Loeb, the mayor of Memphis during the sanitation strike, Allen looked like the model of a sympathetic, fair, and progressive urban leader who ably avoided crippling labor strife. And even compared to his successors, the mayor avoided a contentious negotiation with AFSMCE that would lead to mud-slinging from both sides.

The mayor's smooth handling of the strike allowed Allen and the press to fit the strike within their narrative of Atlanta as "the city too busy to hate" run through cooperation between white and black leaders. In doing so, the mayor and his allies in the press deliberately prioritized the role of black leaders and minimized the role of AFSCME and the sanitation workers who initially led the wildcat strike. As one

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[705] Resolution, Local 1644, American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees, AFL-CIO, March 4, 1969, Box 1063, Folder 575, Joseph Jacobs Records, Southern Labor Archives. Special Collections and Archives, Georgia State University; Minutes of Meeting, Greater Atlanta Public Employees, District Council 14, AFSCME, AFL-CIO, December 12, 1968, Box 36, Folder 13, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

editorialist wrote "The level-headedness and the good faith of Atlanta's white and black leadership was demonstrated once again yesterday by settlement of the two-week garbage strike."[706] Allen's remarks supported the press's interpretation. At the press conference announcing the end of the strike, Allen thanked those who worked toward a solution to the conflict. He specifically singled out SCLC, naming in particular Abernathy, Young, and E.H. Dorsey, without mentioning AFSCME or any of the union representatives.[707] For Allen, this was another of the many confrontations of the civil rights movement that he faced during his tenure as mayor. And it was another resolution he sought to spin to show that he was a racially liberal mayor intent on helping the movement to the extent he could. Public sector union leaders, white or black, did not fit into this narrative. Allen was not interested in legitimizing a more militant city union by placing the leaders as co-equals in the negotiations.

The city did not just ignore the union, however. Allen's administration had not shown any interest in developing an antagonistic relationship with AFSCME. But following the consolidation of the local, the new Local 1644 effectively run by James Howard and Morton Shapiro, sought to implement Jerry Wurf's vision of a new, more confrontational public sector labor movement with increased pressure on public officials to improve wages and benefits. In May 1969 the city and Local 1644 signed their first memorandum of understanding, a legally non-binding agreement. [708] Decades later, local

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[706] "A Just Settlement," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 14, 4.

[707] Alex Coffin, "Pay Raise Wins 450-23, Ending Garbage Strike," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 14, 1968, 10.

AFSCME union leaders still regarded the memorandum of understanding as an important milestone that represented a major difference between labor relations in Atlanta and other booming, anti-union Sunbelt cities.[709] In addition to noting rates of pay along with policies on hours, overtime, and holidays that were established by the aldermanic finance committee and the personnel department, the memorandum of understanding was important for two reasons. First it established a more formal process for workers presenting their grievances to the city. Second, the city gave AFSCME the right to "counsel the employee and assist him" during every step of the grievance process.[710] This first memorandum also established precedent for other government agencies in the city to sign agreements with AFSCME.

Formalizing the grievance process and allowing for union representation was undoubtedly valuable to organized public workers in Atlanta. Along with the union lobbying the mayor and alderman for raises to wages and benefits – which the union never had much leverage over – representing workers with grievances was the most important service the union could provide city and county workers. It was also the union-provided service with which workers would have the most personal experience. The memorandum allowed union officials to aid workers in their day-to-day disputes with

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[708] See reference to memorandum in Letter, Tom Evans to Benjamin Mayes, January 30, 1970, Box 5, Folder 3, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

[709] Hattie Powell, "Are Sanitation Workers Better Off Today?," *Atlanta Daily World,* April 2, 1998, 1.

[710] For an example of a "Memorandum of Understanding" see Memorandum of Understanding between Local 850 and Grady Memorial Hospital, Box 1, Folder 12, AFSCME Local 1644 Records, Southern Labor Archives; for more on the "Memorandum of Understanding" see Yancy, "The Spectre of Public Unionism," 106-107.

their supervisors over such mundane, but important issues as work rules, pay and benefit issues, and workplace conditions. It also helped protect workers against arbitrary and exploitative treatment by their supervisors, sexual harassment, and racial discrimination.

What the memorandum of understanding did not do**,** though**,** was fundamentally change labor relations between the union and the city. As Allen explained in an interview in the late 1970s, the agreement "did not impose upon the city any obligation it didn't already have."[711] Since it was not legally binding – that would have required legislation by the state assembly – there was little, except the influence of the relatively-uninfluential AFSCME**,** to compel the city to follow the agreement. And sure enough, when city politicians chose to, like when Massell chose to punish AFSCME for the 1970 strike, they altered the agreement. Nor did the memorandum implement a more formal bargaining procedure between the city and the union. The mayor expected the union to provide the personnel board and the aldermanic finance committee with its requests, which then would be taken into account. Like in 1968, there was no mechanism for bargaining when the union or workers wanted their demands to be heard as more than mere suggestions. In effect, the asymmetrical bargaining relationship between the city and union stayed in place. This, given the growing militancy of the public sector employees and their new union leadership, all but guaranteed more labor discord in the coming years.

Between 1968 and 1977, city workers in Atlanta participated in three major strikes that each lasted more than a week. The 1968 strike was the only one that ended in a victory for the workers. The striking workers received a much-needed pay raise. Even

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[711] Yancy, "The Spectre of Public Unionism," 106-107.

more significant, the wildcat strike convinced international representatives to finally reform the Atlanta local and remove the racist white leadership from direct control of the majority black sanitation workers. The 1968 strike also stands out because of the relatively accepting stance that white politicians and white press took towards the striking workers. In contrast to Mayors Sam Massell and Maynard Jackson, both of whom had stellar liberal records, the business-oriented moderate Ivan Allen never fired the workers. Finally, the 1968 strike was exceptional because of the near unanimous support that the striking workers received from black community leaders. Nearly all black activists and civic leaders publicly supported the strike. At this moment in September 1968, these activists, reformers, and politicians understood the sanitation workers demands for money as an important part of the struggle to improve the lives of all black Atlantans. Just eighteen months later, when these same workers went out on strike again, they would not find the same warm support from all black Atlantans.

Chapter 5: "A Hang Up About Unions": The 1970 AFSCME Strike and the Weakness of the Civil Rights-Labor Coalition

Eighteen months after their settlement with Ivan Allen, workers from the public works department, a vast majority of whom were black sanitation workers, again walked off their jobs. Like the September 1968 walk out, this strike, which began on March 17, 1970, was the result of a dispute over wages. And international representatives of AFSCME and SCLC were again the most public representatives of the striking workers. But there were important differences between the two disputes. The 1970 strike was significantly longer; it lasted thirty-seven days, largely because the recently-elected mayor Sam Massell aggressively opposed the union demands. Massell quickly fired the striking workers and was hostile to union representatives. The union was equally aggressive in its demands. In contrast to the 1968 strike this was not a wildcat but a planned confrontation, demanded by workers and led, in large measure, by members of AFSCME international, against a mayor the union hoped to be able to influence. Crucially the strike largely ended in a defeat for the union. More than 2,000 workers did receive a small (4 percent) raise, but the amount of money the city spent on wages was actually less than its initial offer to Local 1644 when the union first threatened to strike.

During the 1970 strike, the union did not receive the same level of support from Atlanta's black leadership – political, religious, and civic – as it did in 1968. In that earlier strike, black Atlanta's leadership class nearly unanimously supported the strike. But in 1970, many in this leadership class refused to support Local 1644 and the striking workers.[712] Some, like Leroy Johnson, openly supported Massell and called for the union

to end the protests. Other community leaders did not take a side and attempted to serve as mediators between the union and the city officials. This opposition was not universal, as Local 1644 and the striking workers did receive some support from influential black Atlantans like Lonnie King and Ralph Abernathy. Abernathy's SCLC, as in the 1968 strike, were particularly active in its support, leading marches and demonstrations at downtown stores.

One of the most significant differences between the two strikes was the mayor who chose to face off against the city workers. Sam Massell, more so than Hartsfield or Allen before him, won the election because of black voters. For the first time, elite black Atlantans believed they had a city government that would work for their behalf. It is not a coincidence that four of the most prominent supporters of Massell during the strike, Leroy Johnson, Jesse Hill, Sam Williams, and Martin Luther King Sr. were also the four most prominent black supporters of Massell's mayoral candidacy in October 1969.[713] These men were not looking to publicly oppose the mayor, particularly over what many perceived as simply a labor dispute rather than a conflict about black civil rights. The *Atlanta Daily World,* another supporter of Massell during the election, explained to its readers that the strike "is not a civil rights issue. It is an economic issue. It is a question of ability to pay if we are to have a solvent city government."[714]

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[712] The striking workers were members of Local 1644 but throughout the strike community members, whether they supported the strike or not, made a careful distinction between the union and the striking workers.

[713] Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta,* 43.

[714] "Let's Have This Meeting," *Atlanta Daily World,* March 29, 1970, 4.

Even the relationship between Local 1644 and its black supporters revealed a weakness in any possible AFSCME-civil rights coalition in Atlanta. Community activists were slow to provide anything beyond verbal support for the striking workers. There was a reticence by some leading civil rights organizations to oppose Massell by supporting the strike. SCLC president Ralph Abernathy supported the strikers from the beginning but, apparently due to internal conflicts, SCLC did not provide material and personnel support until two weeks into the dispute. Furthermore, when Atlanta black leaders did support the strike, rarely was the support for the union. Instead they consistently phrased their support as for the impoverished black workers. Sometimes supporters would go so far as attack the union while supporting the striking workers. Hosea Williams, who led striking workers through marches and demonstrations at downtown stores explained that "We made it plain that we were not anti-City Hall nor were we pro-labor union, that we were committed to helping the poor city workers…we were fighting for the just meager demands of the workers."[715] A labor dispute in itself was not enough to garner support from black community leaders; instead support came when it could be viewed as part of the black freedom struggle. In return, the support the Local 1644 received from civil rights activists was not enough to alter the outcome of the strike.

Sam Massell Stands His Ground

Months before the strike, Local 1644 made it clear that it wanted to play a larger role to play in city politics. One way it hoped to get in a position of power was to actively

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[715] "Charge Atlanta 'Sell Out': Say Black Leaders Are No Leadership There," *Chicago Daily Defender,* April 30, 1970, 8.

participate in local elections more than it had in the past. With funding from the international, the AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education (COPE), and the A. Phillip Randolph Institute, Local 1644's members campaigned diligently for Sam Massell. Despite serving as the vice-mayor since 1962, Massell billed himself as the "people's candidate" candidate and an obvious choice for AFSCME to support. Rodney Cook, a moderate Republican state delegate, was the preferred candidate of Atlanta's white power structure; Cook even had the backing of Ivan Allen. [716] At his inauguration Massell portrayed his victory as one for the "man on the street" both black and white, as opposed to a victory for the bankers and Coca Cola executives. The new mayor suggested he won because he gathered "the broadest base ever assembled;" it was "a coalition of blacks, low and middle-class whites, liberals and conservatives, fragments of the business community and organized labor." Local 1644 hoped that because of its support during Massell's run, his liberal politics, and campaign rhetoric about his administration serving all Atlantans, rich and poor, black and white, the union could exert more influence in city hall.[717]

Local 1644 began negotiations with the city in October 1969, prior to Massell's election. That month the union proposed a set of demands, divided into two categories: priority and long-term items. The priority items included a $6,000 minimum yearly salary, a $75 per month raise for all city workers, and improved health insurance. The

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[716] "1969 Atlanta Election Report," no date, Box 10, Folder 33, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

[717] Boyd Lewis, "Massell Vows New Deal for Atlanta's Poor," *Atlanta Voice,* January 11, 1970, 1.

long-term items were even more ambitious; the union called for retirement pay after 35 years of service and a thirty-five-hour work week. Aldermen, who had passed a two-step raise of approximately 8.5 percent in January 1970, scoffed at these requests.[718]

As AFSCME presented its plan for city workers, its negotiations with the school board over wages for non-accredited workers – mostly the cafeteria and custodial employees – unraveled. In November "more than 200 of the lowest paid employes" protested at a school board meeting "in support of legalized collective bargaining, better wages, and improved working conditions."[719] When the school board delayed a promised pay raise the following month, the local threatened to strike. At the time, the union quickly backed down and promised it would not act until Massell's new administration and new board members took office in January. Despite some sympathy for the poorly paid school employees, most board members were prepared to stand firm rather than compromise. The school board even hired the law firm Thompson, Ogletree, Haynesworth, and Deakins, a South Carolina based firm well known for anti-unionism. That the board of education met the union's aggressiveness by hiring a law firm experienced in handling labor conflict shows how local politicians were already willing to challenge AFSCME in a way Ivan Allen did not in 1968.[720]

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[718] Michael Wright, "City Pay Raise Okayed Amid Swipes, Atlanta Constitution, December 16, 1969, 16-A; Bob Goodman, "Garbage Power," *Great Speckled Bird*, March 23, 1970, 4.

[719] Courts in Georgia consistently ruled against legalized public sector collective bargaining, but like Atlanta city officials, the board of education allowed AFSCME to represent workers during negotiations. Yancy, "Spectre of Public Unionism," 16-23; Mike Bowler, "Workers Protest Wages at School Board Meeting," *Atlanta Constitution,* November 11, 3A.

Despite the actions of the board of education, AFSCME was confident that the city would increase wages and benefits for low-paid city workers largely because it believed Massell was an ally. But the union also understood that he alone could not increase wages unilaterally; this was something that required a vote from the board of aldermen. In 1970 the aldermanic board was still disproportionately white and conservative. Even with the increased power of the black electorate, only four black aldermen served on the nineteen-person board. Significantly, one of the newly elected black alderman, Joel Stokes, who as an executive of the black-owned Citizens Trust Bank, chaired the finance committee, the legislative committee that handled the budget and city wages. Second to Massell, Stokes, who *Jet* magazine called "the most powerful alderman in Atlanta," was the city politician most involved in handling the strike.[721] While he maintained sympathy for the strikers and continued to negotiate with the union when Massell refused to, Stokes publicly continued to claim the city could not meet the union's demands. Ultimately it was the finance committee's decision on March 16 to not increase wages that led to the strike.

By mid- March, the union and city had been in negotiations for two months. Initially, the union demanded a one-step pay raise for all employees, an increase in minimum wage, and city-funded life insurance. During the negotiation sympathetic city leaders, including both Massell and Stokes, explained that they wanted to raise wages again but that there was simply no money. Stokes and vice-mayor Maynard Jackson even

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[720] "No City Walkout is Seen by Union," *Atlanta Constitution,* December 16, 1969, 7B; For more on Thompson, Ogletree, Haynesworth, and Deakins see Gunn, "A Good Place to Make Money," 183.

[721] John H. Britton, *"*Atlanta Begins Decade with Blacks in Key Positions," *Jet,* January 29, 1970.

reached out to Georgia state legislators to see if they could aid the city, but the assembly refused to act.[722]

The union and elected officials had a deadline of March 31, after which the city legally could not add costs to the budget. Stokes claimed that the city had money tied up in other investments including a new coliseum. So when the finance committee voted to not recommend a pay raise to all city employees on Monday, March 16, despite claims by union officials that Stokes had promised that the finance committee would act, AFSCME announced a one-day strike that led some 2,500 city workers, three-fourths of whom were black, to walk off the job the following day. When the vast majority of the city's blue-collar workers refused to come into work on March 17, the city agreed to increase the minimum hourly wage from $1.88 to $2.13 and to provide a $5000 life insurance policy. Union representatives, which at this time included Morton Shapiro, the white area director for AFSCME, Local 1644 president Claude Holt, a black employee in the Water Department, Tom Evans, the black associate director for District Council 14 who had experience working with SNCC and SCLC, and Marvin Bradford, the white director of what was left of District Council 14, agreed to let the striking workers vote on the city's offer.[723]

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[722] Press Release, "Statement of Mayor Sam Massell," March 25, 1970, Box 106, Folder 1, Sam Massell Papers.

[723] Michael Wright and Alex Coffin, "Union Rejects Offers by City, Goes on Strike," *Atlanta Constitution,* March 18, 1970, 1A; Boyd Lewis, "City Workers Strike; Wage Demands Unmet," *Atlanta Voice,* March 22, 1970, 1; Memorandum, "Cost of Raising All Employees to a Minimum of $2.13 Per Hour," Box 106, Folder 1, Sam Massell Papers; Memorandum, E.H. Underwood to Charles Davis and Jay Fountain, March 19, 1970, Box 106, Folder 1; Chester Higgins, "Atlanta's Garbage Strike," *Jet,* April 9, 1970, 8.

That night, city workers voted against the offer, agreeing to remain on strike. The city's offer only raised the wages of a few hundred workers and came nowhere close to a one-step raise for all city workers. Voters rejected the offer, chanting "Tear it up!" Shapiro called the offer "totally insignificant." Jesse Epps, a veteran of the 1968 Memphis strike who was now an assistant to Jerry Wurf, called the proposed deal an "outright insult" and promised that "city functions would grind to a halt until the union's demands were met."[724]

That one of Wurf's closest aides was already involved in the strike shows the interest that AFSCME international took in winning the strike. Atlanta was a promising target for the organization. A victory would have further entrenched the union within the city, which could have provided AFSCME a foothold into a region all unions wanted to expand into. The sanitation workers' 1968 victory and the alliance with black religious, civic, and civil rights leaders would had given the union confidence it could win more concessions from the city, especially since it viewed Sam Massell as a friend to labor. By the second week of the strike Jerry Wurf traveled to Atlanta to try to push through an agreement with the city.[725]

Before Wurf arrived, however, Massell fired the striking workers. On Wednesday March 18, Massell warned the nearly 2,500 striking workers that whoever remained out after that Friday would be terminated. Friday came and the mayor promptly fired 1,400

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[724] Boyd Lewis, "City Workers Strike; Wage Demands Unmet," *Atlanta Voice,* March 22, 1970, 1; "Garbage Power," *The Great Speckled Bird,* March 23, 1970, 4.

[725] For an overview of AFSCME's efforts in the South in the late 1960s and 1970s see Hower, "'A Threshold Moment," 203-220.

city workers. A week later about 900 workers remained out on strike, the rest returning to work. Of the city workers who remained off the job 660 were in the sanitary division, 195 in the water department, and 50 in streets and sewers.[726] Massell then refused to even recognize publicly that there was a strike, as fired workers could not strike.

The mayor established himself as the primary obstacle to the workers, going above and beyond to antagonize the union and the strikers. The day before the terminations, Massell attempted to lead several dozen strike breakers through the picket line at one of the city's substations. The mayor then placed all police officers on seven-day duty with overtime pay – a bit of irony that was not lost on the strikers protesting their lack of pay – and asked Governor Lester Maddox to alert the National Guard to stand by "in the wake of 'rumors' of violence."[727] To top off his week of aggressive maneuvers, Massell recruited prisoners from the city jail to replace the strikers.[728] The mayor had, in the words of one writer, struck "back at strikers with the vengeance reminiscent of an early textile mogul."[729]

The strike was an early test for Massell to prove that he could govern in a way that Atlanta's business leaders found acceptable. While Massell's campaign rhetoric may have

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[726] Alex Coffin, "Massell Fires 1,400 as Strike Talks Fail," *The Atlanta Constitution,* March 21, 1970, 1A; Alex Coffin, "900 Fired Reported Reinstated," *Atlanta Constitution,* March 28, 1970, 1A*;* Alex Coffin and Harold Kennedy, "Sides Holding Firm in Strike," *Atlanta Constitution,* March 30, 1970, 1A.

[727] Bill Shipp, "Massell Request Granted," *Atlanta Constitution,* March 20, 1970, 1A.

[728] "Union to Fight Atlanta Over Use of Prisoners," *Atlanta Daily World,* March 24, 1970, A7.

[729] Phil Garner, "Lesson Overlooked," *Atlanta Journal,* no date, in Carl T. Sutherland Scrapbook Box 4, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

intentionally excluded the business community, he did serve as vice-mayor for eight years and understood the significance of financial and political support from the city's elite. Massell's decision to please the city leaders paid off. Less than a week into the strike, the *Atlanta Journal* reported that "those in the business community who doubted Massell's credentials as a businessman and an administrator and opposed his election are displaying a pleasant surprise at the mayor's handling of the strike."[730]

The city's white press applauded Massell's strong stand. "Massell," an editorial argued "stands up in a baptism of fire."[731] The support for this hardline stance from Atlanta's leading white newspapers was in contrast to the support those newspapers gave Allen for acting magnanimously during the 1968 strike. In large part, this was because they no longer had as much sympathy for the striking workers' plea to raise wages. "Considering the pay raises the city recently has granted, this issue has no merit," ran another *Journal* editorial. "The city cannot afford to give into these demands now," the editors continued. "They are not so much the demands of the poor and oppressed as the demands of political brigands who would like to capture City Hall and subjugate the mayor."[732] Without sympathy for the workers, the press and City Hall were able to portray this strike as a conflict between the rightfully elected mayor and an unelected special interest group looking to unduly influence the city.

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[730] Raleigh Bryans, "Massell Stand Up In a Baptism of Fire," *Atlanta Journal,* March 22, 1970.

[731] Raleigh Bryans, "Massell Stand Up In a Baptism of Fire," *Atlanta Journal,* March 22, 1970.

[732] "Siege of Atlanta," *Atlanta Journal,* March 20, 1970, in Box 106, Folder 1, Sam Massell Papers.

According to Sam Massell, the striking workers were just dupes in the union's power grab. "My heart goes out to the worker" Massell explained in a television appearance on March 25, "who has apparently been made a tool of a small band of power-seeking union bosses."[733] "Somebody is trying to stir these people [the striking workers] up," Massell told the press a day later. "The only thing the unions got going for them now is to establish a reign of terror."[734]

The union members, though, were not blindly following the lead of the union. From the time negotiations began city workers, especially those in the water and sanitary departments, led the call for better pay and a strike if the city did not concede. In early March the *Constitution* recognized that "perhaps the union leaders had no alternative but to stand firm [during negotiations]; their workers didn't show any sign of being willing to wait until September for raises."[735] The workers were even wiling to overturn an agreement made by their local leaders. On March 25 over 800 striking workers "overwhelmingly rejected" a deal reached by city officials and local AFSCME officials. The agreement was essentially the same offer that workers voted against on March 16, but it also allowed all strikers to return to their old positions. Jerry Wurf believed there were two reasons why the workers voted against the strike. First, the strikers did not think the deal was a "reasonable and rational offer." The pay raise was only going to affect around two hundred workers, after all. Second, the workers were angry at police violence

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[733] News Release, "Statement of Mayor Sam Massell," March 25, 1970, Box 106, Folder 1, Sam Massell Papers.

[734] "City Garbage Strike Comes to a Halt," *Atlanta Daily World,* March 26, 1970, 1.

[735] "Strikes," *Atlanta Constitution,* March 24, 1970, 4A.

on the picket lines that resulted in injuries to three strikers. Wurf was suggesting that Massell's strong-armed tactics only emboldened the strikers. One union official, possibly frustrated at the workers' decision, explained to the press that "you've just got a militant rank-and-file here."[736]

The March 25 deal and resulting vote revealed a small split in the union. Marvin Bradford supported the deal and told the press that "[i]t is the consensus of the negotiating team that the agreement will be acceptable."[737] After the vote against the offer, a reporter observed that Bradford was "grim-faced and tight-lipped." As the director of DC 14, Bradford oversaw locals throughout the metropolitan area. His desire to end the strike may have reflected the views of union members outside of those in Local 1644. (He was also tellingly the only white leader of local AFSCME.) Then again, his position as head of the district council could not have been the only reason that Bradford chose to push for an agreement. Tom Evans, the associate director of DC 14, did not support the agreement. In fact, he walked out of the meeting "after a heated exchange with the mayor." There was no international representative at the meeting, Morton Shapiro had gone to the hospital earlier in the day with a kidney ailment. But that night at the meeting to vote on the agreement, Jerry Wurf, having flown down after Shapiro's illness, publicly opposed the deal. Outside of Bradford and his few allies, the

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[736] Alex Coffin and Michael Wright, "City Workers Reject Pact with Massell," *Atlanta Constitution,* March 26, 1970, 1A.

[737] Michael Wright and Alex Coffin, "Agreement Reached in City Strike," *Atlanta Constitution,* March 25, 1970, 1A.

international and local union leaders overwhelmingly supported the strike. As Johnny Long, a low ranking local official, explained: "I'm with the men all the way."[738]

Striking workers found inspiration in the support they received from their local union leaders. Several workers spoke of the positive transformations made by the union since the personnel changes implemented after the 1968 wildcat strike. "The union's changed and we've got better sympathy with the Union. It's 100% strong where it used to be 10%, 15% or 20%," explained shop steward Gene Truelove. Striker Thomas Baker mentioned that he had been in the union eleven years and when he started "the union wasn't any good, but we have a pretty good Union now." For these striking workers "a good union" meant a union more responsive to their demands; in the spring of 1970 that meant better pay. "These men out here need more money. That's the truth," Truelove added. "We're expecting that one step – we're expecting [Massell] to keep his word on it."[739]

After Massell fired the striking workers and Shapiro left the negotiations, Jerry Wurf and Bill Lucy, the secretary-treasurer of AFSCME, arrived to lead negotiations.[740] Wurf's decision to personally intervene in the strike only exacerbated the already poor

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[738] Alex Coffin and Michael Wright, "City Workers Reject Pact with Massell," *Atlanta Constitution,* March 26, 1970, 1A.

[739] "Strike Story," *The Great Speckled Bird,* March 30, 1970, 3.

[740] Wurf and Lucy took a lead in negotiations after Morton Shapiro, AFSCME's southeast area director and lead negotiator during the 1968 Atlanta strike and a 1969 Charlotte strike, had to check into the hospital with a kidney ailment. Alex Coffin and Michael Wright, "City Workers Reject Pact with Massell," *Atlanta Constitution,* 1A; Gene Guerreo, Jr., "Strike: Slim Victory," *The Great Specked Bird,* 5; For an unflattering portrayal of Shapiro's role in an earlier Charlotte strike see Gunn, "A Good Place to Make Money," 157-158.

relationship between the union and the city. In early April, relations between the two parties dissolved almost beyond repair. During one contentious closed door meeting, Massell and Wurf broke out into a yelling match overhead by reporters standing outside. The AFSCME president called Massell "a contemptible liar" and an "irresponsible little man."[741] As the union and City Hall dug in, both sides looked for allies in the black community.

A Mixed Response from Black Atlantans

Early in the strike, observers commented on the lack of support that the strikers received from black politicians, activists, and reformers. In contrast to 1968, Raleigh Bryans of the *Atlanta Journal* observed, "the strikers have not garnered the massive civil rights involvement that they probably expected."[742] AFSCME international representative James Howard also recognized that the strike did not have the support of many influential black Atlantans. On March 24, Howard told attorney Joseph Jacobs "that the black community…were dodging calls and were supporting Sam." The union rep specifically named "Rev. King, Sr., Senator Johnson, Alderman Williamson, and the black insurance executive [most likely he was referring to Jesse Hill]" Howard claimed to have "relayed the true facts to the International office, that the strike is deteriorating." Given the strikers

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[741] Alex Coffin, "Meeting of Mayor, Union Chief Erupts into Wild Shouting," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 1, 1970, 1; "Massell, Union Talks Again End in Dispute," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 2, 1970, 20A; Alex Coffin, "Massell Warned by Wurf," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 3, 1970, 1.

[742] Raleigh Bryans, "Massell Stand Up in a Baptism of Fire," *Atlanta Journal,* March 22, 1970.

nearly unanimous opposition to the agreement two days later this was an incorrect assumption, and "[Morton] Shapiro told him to stay away." At the time of the strike Howard was already in conflict with the international and, unlike 1968, he played no role in the rest of the strike.[743]

Raleigh Bryans reasoned that strikers did not quickly garner support from black Atlanta because many African American leaders viewed the newly-elected Sam Massell as an important ally. He won, after all, in large part due to African American votes, and had campaigned on expanding political power and civil rights for black Atlantans. Once elected, Massell acted quickly to prove that it was not all just empty campaign rhetoric.

Massell, for a white Southern mayor, was exceptionally progressive in challenging the continued effects of Jim Crow. He was not a racial moderate like Ivan Allen, who prided himself on his pro-civil rights record, but who only sought only to remove the most overt Jim Crow barriers of segregation and discrimination after pressure from black Atlantans. For example, Massell, following a dawning consciousness among white liberals in the late 1960s, understood that ending the employment barriers for African Americans was not enough; affirmative action in hiring and promotion would be necessary. While campaigning, Massell was open about his support for preferential employment practices. "We've got to hire a lot of Negroes — not firing White persons or hiring unqualified Negroes — but it's obvious that we'll hire a lot of Blacks," the candidate explained.[744] Soon after taking office, Massell met with the municipal

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[743] Meeting note, James Howard with Joseph Jacobs, Box 1064, Folder 577, Joseph Jacobs Papers.

personnel board to devise ways that the city could improve its hiring practices. "I do not have specific formula" for closing the gap between white and black city workers, he told the board. "If I had a particular figure, I would say 50% black persons should be employed above the menial positions." Massell explained that his office already practiced this blunt form of affirmative action hiring: "We have three more Steno spots that we will fill with black persons. So far, we can't find anyone to fill these three positions, but we are not going to a hire a white girl."[745]

The black leader most vocal and active in his support of Massell was state senator Leroy Johnson, at the time probably the most influential black politician in Atlanta. Johnson, a protégé of attorney A.T. Walden, was the first African American hired as a Fulton County prosecutor and later elected as the first black state senator in Georgia since Reconstruction. Called by the *New York Times* "the single most powerful black politician in Dixie," Johnson's power came from his ability to get tens of thousands of black Atlantans to vote for his preferred candidate and his willingness to support and work with white politicians, sometimes in opposition to other black candidates or politicians. In the 1969 mayoral election, after deciding not to run for the position because he did not think the city was ready to elect a black mayor, Johnson put his sizable political influence behind Massell instead of supporting the black candidate Horace Tate. In the first round

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[744] Massell quoted in memorandum "A Plan for Equal Employment in City of Atlanta Government," Lynn Westegaard to Sam Massell, no date, Box 105, Folder 2, Sam Massell Papers.

[745] Meeting Minutes, City of Atlanta Personnel Board, January 29, 1970, Box 105, Folder 2, Sam Massell Papers. For more on the opening of public sector jobs as a result of African American voting power see Wright, *Sharing the Prize,* 202-208; Peter Eisinger, "Black Employment in Municipal Jobs: The Impact of Black Political Power," *The American Political Science Review* 76, no. 2 (June 1982), 380-392.

of elections, Massell received 49 percent of the black vote. Tate, who received support from Ralph Abernathy and Coretta Scott King, was convinced that it was Johnson's campaigning that won Massell those votes. In the new mayor, Johnson saw a liberal who supported policies that could help black Atlantans. And in successfully maneuvering enough black voters for Massell's victory – 90 percent of black voters voted for Massell in the run-off – Johnson knew that he would have tremendous influence in the administration. Johnson viewed himself as the leading black political voice in Atlanta, so when black city workers went out on strike Johnson attempted to steer the conflict towards a favorable denouement for the mayor.[746]

Johnson was not always opposed to unions, or even strikes by Atlanta's public sector workers. In 1968 he openly supported the garbage strikers. A new administration, however, meant new political possibilities for the state senator.[747] Early on in the strike, Johnson positioned himself as a neutral, working to keep lines of communication open between the city and the union and calling for concessions from both parties.[748] By April, as AFSCME refused to budge on its demand for a one-step raise, Johnson publicly sided with Massell. On April 7, Johnson announced to the press that "the city had moved from

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[746] Stephen Lesher, "Leroy Johnson Outslicks Mister Charlie," *New York Times,* November 8, 1970, 2, 34. For more on the first generation of black politicians in the South during the civil rights movement and the moderating effect of electoral politics see Steven F. Lawson, *Running for Freedom: Civil Rights and Black Politics in America since 1941,* 4th Edition (West Sussex, UK: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 150-184.

[747] Alex Coffin, "Injunction to Halt Garbage Walkout Sought by Atlanta," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 10, 1968, 1, 10.

[748] Alex Coffin, "Massell Warned by Wurf," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 3, 1970, 1.

a point it said it wouldn't…now it's time for the union to give a little."[749] The state senator made his position even more clear when he went on television to debate strike-supporter and SCLC member Joe Boone.[750]

Joining Johnson in opposition to the strike was the editorial board of the *Atlanta Daily World.* Like Johnson, the editors of the *Daily World*, chief among them its long-time owner C.A. Scott, were strong supporters of Massell. The paper supported Massell's effort, only two months into office, to hire and promote more African Americans into the city administration. The paper also thought that the Massell administration offered an opportunity for black Atlantans to wield significant influence in municipal politics. "It is most illogical for our people to get or let anyone put them in a position of opposing Mayor Massell," explained the editors, "whom they played such an important role electing to office."[751] In the editors' view, the strike threatened to divide what they considered a unified political bloc. This separated the *Daily World* from a politician like Leroy Johnson who parroted the Massell administration's line that the strike was not about race. For Scott, the strike was one of the first tests of black political governance in Atlanta. The union or even the black striking workers played little role in the *Daily World's* understanding of the conflict. To the editors, the most important parties involved were the black leaders who supported the strike and those who supported the Massell administration. "We strongly suggest," Scott continued, "that all Negro local elected

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[749] Hugh Nations, "'Give a Little' On Talks Sen. Johnson Asks Union," *Atlanta Journal,* April 8, 1970, 1A, 18A.

[750] "Negro's Dilemna [sic] In U.S. Politics." *Atlanta Daily World,* April 17, 1970, 1.

[751] "Sound Leadership Needed," *Atlanta Daily World*, April 6, 1970, 4.

officials get together and form a consensus on this controversy and come forward with some sound recommendations."[752]

Per the *Daily World's* conception of this dispute, the losers of the strike were the "general public," by which they mostly meant middle-class black homeowners. This general public would suffer because of the loss of essential services and the threat of increased taxes that could result from a wage gain. Strangely, just as disconcerting for *Daily World* writer Thaddeus Stokes were the likely changes to garbage pickup that could result from the strike. One often discussed proposal to decrease sanitation man-hours and increase productivity was curbside pickup. This would require homeowners for the first time to bag their trash and take it to the curb. Curbside pickup was not introduced until 1974 when Maynard Jackson was mayor, but for editors of the *Daily World* this was a surprisingly urgent and controversial issue. Curbside pickup would "cause undue hardship" including "a sharp increase in street littering," an "unpleasant odor," an increase in rodents, and a "depressing sight to see." It would also increase the work of the homeowner and decrease services offered by the city without a decrease in taxes. Stokes, unironically, exhorted "that great 'silent majority' of Atlanta citizens to speak out against the curb-collecting method."[753]

The *Daily World* viewed itself as the voice of Atlanta's black middle class. Its concern with higher real estate taxes and curbside pickup were the concerns shared by this growing demographic. It is difficult to not see in Stokes's worse-case scenario of the

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[752] "Sound Leadership Needed," *Atlanta Daily World,* April 6, 1970, 4.

[753] Thaddeus T. Stokes, "Brass Tacks: …By Their Silence," *Atlanta Daily World,* April 28, 1970, 6.

hardships of curbside pickup a fear of losing one of the privileges of prosperity that helped Atlanta's black middle class to define itself in opposition to the city's non-home-owning black working class. As we saw in a previous chapter, one of the principle complaints of poor black Atlantans was the unsanitary conditions of their neighborhoods; unpaved, unlit roads strewn with litter. It was Stokes' fear that curbside pickup would bring back some of these unsanitary conditions and ruin the aesthetic appeal of a house and yard that middle-class black families worked hard to own. Stokes did not, and would not have, blamed the poorly paid sanitation workers directly for new curbside services. But it was the demands (better pay, less strenuous and filthy working conditions) and actions of these workers (two strikes in eighteen months, a general willingness to skip a day of work every once in a while) that pushed the city to consider this change. The ambitions and desires of Atlanta's black working class, in effect, threatened some of the ambitions and desires of the city's black middle class.[754]

Most black leaders who supported Massell tried to avoid directly attacking the striking workers and even the union. Instead these leaders, including insurance executive Jesse Hill, Community Relations Commission (CRC) director Reverend Sam Williams, and Martin Luther King Sr., attempted to stay behind the scenes and influence the strike during meetings.[755] From the beginning of the strike, King was open about his support for the mayor. On April 4, while attending a public ceremony on the second anniversary of

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[754] Thaddeus T. Stokes, "Brass Tacks: …By Their Silence," *Atlanta Daily World,* April 28, 1970, 6.

[755] Boyd Lewis, "5 Weeks Jobless Hurting Garbage Workers, Families," *Atlanta Voice,* April 19, 1970, 1.

his son's assassination, King tried to prevent striking workers from using the occasion to hold a rally. Despite the attempt by these men to stay behind the scenes, the union and its supporters understood that they were not interested in helping the strikers win their demands. At one City Hall meeting, AFSCME international official Joyce Brown and Martin Luther King Sr., got into an argument. Brown was upset that no city workers were invited to a meeting between leading black Atlantans and the mayor. She told the reverend that "the black leaders had no right to talk without the union members present." "We have begged you to come to every damn meeting we had," she continued, "and you haven't come." "This is not necessary" King said, responding to the criticism, "I gave blood for these people." [756]

Somewhat surprisingly, the editors of the black-owned *Atlanta Voice*, whose editorials and reporting placed them further to the left than the *Daily World,* took a stance towards the strike similar to the older newspaper. The *Voice* was more sympathetic to the striking workers — "the poor, who need the money" — than the *Daily World.* Nor was the *Voice* as supportive of Massell*,* though it did approve of his interracial populist rhetoric. But like the *Daily World,* the *Voice* viewed the strike as a needlessly harmful conflict. The strike was a power struggle between the leaders of the union and the city, it argued. There was a "lack of flexibility on the parts of the leaders of both the unions and the city."[757] The leaders on both sides "with their full bellies" should "drop this foolishness, and give

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[756] Alex Coffin, "Black Leaders Ask Strikers Reconsider," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 10, 1970, 22A.

[757] George Coleman, "We Are All at Fault in the Garbage Strike," *Atlanta Voice,* April 26, 1970, 2.

the poor man his just due, and get the garbage cleaned up before they go on with their factional fights…..Whatever they are."[758] The losers of the strike were "the citizens and the poor garbage strikers," who "will lose, for they are only seeking better wages, a small part of this war, or paying for services they are not getting."[759]

The stance of the editors of the *Voice* was shared by other leading black Atlantans, like A.M.E. Bishop E.L. Hickman. These men (and the spokesmen were all men) attempted a politically safe, diplomatic, middle position between the Massell administration and AFSCME. They emphasized that lines of communication should remain open and that both sides find a way to compromise to end the standoff. The Atlanta Baptist Ministers Union, an organization of influential black Baptist preachers led by J.H. Langston, passed a resolution emblematic of this middle ground approach. The Union acknowledged that the administration faced "a serious labor problem" and that the strike was a response to the "low income salary" of many city workers. But the city did not bear all the fault for the labor stoppage. It was up to both the city of Atlanta and the union to "work to bring about an agreeable solution…to bring peace, goodwill, and tranquility to our city."[760]

For those taking the middle position there were four parties involved in the strike: the city government (including both Massell and the board of alderman), the union, the

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[758] "Look to the Needs of the Poor Before Others," *Atlanta Voice,* April 19, 1970, 2.

[759] George Coleman, "The Poor are Heard But Who Will be the Winner?," *Atlanta Voice,* April 12, 1970, 2.

[760] "Baptist Minister Union Calls on Both Sides to End Strike of City Workers," *Atlanta Daily World,* April 7, 1970, 1.

striking workers, and the rest of Atlanta's residents. In their view, city politicians, workers, and ordinary Atlantans all had a legitimate stake in the dispute. They viewed the union, however, as an outsider. Even the editors of the *Daily World* were careful to not criticize the demands of the workers too much. They agreed the workers were still underpaid, but did not believe that a wage hike was as necessary in 1970 as it may have been in 1968. In other words, there was still some justification for their actions. For most observers and participants of the strike, even among those supporting the striking workers, AFSCME did not have the same legitimacy. It was treated and discussed as a third party without the same political or social standing. There was a perceived threat that the union was "seeking city control," which "has happened in some cities."[761]

Even supporters of the striking workers were skeptical of AFSCME's intentions during the strike. Marvin Arrington, a black lawyer and freshman alderman, announced that because "the city did not play fair" in their negotiations with AFSCME, he was "in support of the sanitation workers 100 per cent." Arrington, though, was not as enthusiastic about AFSCME. Along with Massell, he argued "the high echelon of the union is not suffering," and that only "the man on the bottom" felt the impact of the strike. He added that he had "a hang up about unions, too. They've been the most discriminatory organizations in the United States in the past 50 years."[762]

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[761] George Coleman, "The Poor are Heard But Who Will be the Winner?," *Atlanta Voice,* April 12, 1970, 2.

[762] Michael Wright, "Arrington Hits City on Strike," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 16, 1970, 15B.

A turning point of sorts for strike support occurred when Massell offered the city workers a weekly bonus in lieu of a strike, which the union quickly opposed. For those who were inclined to support Massell, the opposition to the bonus was baffling and only proved the obstinacy of the union. But for many others, including some influential black leaders, the bonus was undignified and condescending. In late March, the mayor proposed – and the aldermen passed – an ordinance that gave the lowest paid city employees a five-dollar weekly bonus provided they work forty hours a week. As city officials pointed out, this was larger than nearly any employee would get from a one-step raise.[763] For the editors of the *Constitution,* "it was clear, at this point that city officials have worked hard to find additional funds within the city's budget for the garbage workers."[764]

AFSCME and the workers quickly and adamantly rejected the proposition. Wurf found this offer "insulting" because it did not "provide for absenteeism because of illness or injury."[765] One worker rejected the opportunity for the "damn $5" because he did not

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[763] As the director of finance Charles Davis explained to the mayor: "It is interesting to note that $1.00 a day or $5.00 a week cash bonus exceeds what a one-step increase would be on all salary ranges below Range 44 and all 21 classes recommended [to receive the bonus] are less than Range 44." Memorandum, Charles L. Davis to Sam Massell, March 30, 1970, Box 106, Folder 1, Sam Massell Papers.

[764] For quote see "The Garbage Strike," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 10, 1970, 4A. The city actually did not need to find extra funds. The bonus plan for the rest of the year would cost $309,000, while the city's initial offer to raise the minimum wage to $2.13 and provide a $5,000 life insurance premium would have cost the city $453,120. Draft by Sam Massell, no date, Box 105, Folder 6; Memorandum, Charles L. Davis to Sam Massell, March 30, 1970; Memorandum, "Cost of Raising All Employees to a Minimum of $2.13 Per Hour," no date, Box 106, Folder 1, Sam Massell Papers.

[765] Alex Coffin, "Massell Warned by Wurf," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 3, 1970, 1.

want "charity, just one-step."[766] Even an alderman, Richard Freeman, who was not otherwise supportive of the strike, could not understand why if the city "could find the money for the $5 bonus, [it] could have found the money for a step pay increase for the same workers."[767]

For some in Atlanta, Massell's offer of a bonus revealed the hollowness of the argument that this strike was an economic issue rather than one of civil rights. The mainstream white press was particularly active in trying to dissuade people from the idea that the strike had anything to do with demands related to the civil rights movement. "Some supporters of the union have tried to make the current controversy appear to be a civil rights struggle," read an editorial in the *Constitution.* "It's not. It's never been." [768] Leroy Johnson and other black allies of Sam Massell also pushed this narrative. In a meeting with elite black Atlantans, who Johnson hoped would help convince the city workers to come back to work, the state senator pressed the men to agree that "the strike is an economic, not civil rights, struggle."[769] This framing was one that Massell, the alderman, and their allies believed they could win. After all, the strikers had just won pay raises in 1969 and January 1970, an immediate pay raise four months later was not necessary. As a civil rights struggle, however, there were more ways for the workers to

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[766] Alex Coffin, "Massell, Union Talks Again End in Dispute," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 2, 1970, 20A.

[767] Alex Coffin, "Massell, Union Talks Again End in Dispute," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 2, 1970, 20A.

[768] "The Garbage Strike," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 10, 1970, 4A.

[769] Alex Coffin, "Black Leaders Ask Strikers to Reconsider," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 9, 1970, 1A.

come out on top. The city simply could not control the narrative in the same way. Despite all of Massell's efforts to be the mayor for black Atlanta, he was still a white mayor, and it was not difficult to portray him as just another white mayor in the way of the black freedom struggle.

Despite the obvious strengths of a civil rights narrative – s trengths that AFSCME certainly learned in 1968 – union officials were careful to not over emphasize any racial aspects of the strike. A week into the strike, Morton Shapiro asserted that "civil rights leaders may be called in later to assist, but right now, the strike is not racial. This issue is not white. The issue is not black. The issue is green." A few months after the strike ended, Shapiro conceded to a researcher that "union officials made a conscious decision at the beginning of the confrontation to prevent the conflict from taking on the racial overtones that the strike in 1968 had taken on."[770] When asked by a reporter if he thought the strike was "primarily a racial struggle or an economic struggle," Tom Evans was careful to split the difference. "The initial confrontation," he explained, "came about because of an economic stance." It was obvious to Evans, however, that Massell's "bonus incentive plan was sort of racial," that after Massell's offer, "a lot of black leaders realized it was racial."[771] During the first two weeks of the strike many black leaders were hesitant to make any statements supporting either side of the strike, but after Massell's offer some leading black Atlantans spoke out.

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[770] Alex Coffin and Mike Wright, "No Accord in Sight in City Strike," *Atlanta Constitution,* March 24, 1970; Larry E. Moss, "City-waste collector confrontation: An Analysis of the Confrontation Strategy of the AFSCME During the Atlanta Sanitation Strike of the Spring of 1970," (MA Thesis, Atlanta University, 1971), 57.

[771] Gene Guerrero, Jr. "Sam in a Bag," *Great Speckled Bird,* April 13, 1970, 3.

One of the most vocal of these black leaders was Lyndon Wade, the executive director of the Atlanta Urban League (AUL). Like many black-led organizations, the AUL kept a neutral stance early in the strike. After Massell fired the striking workers, the AUL simply called for "lines of communication to be reopened" in order for a "prompt settlement."[772] But Wade condemned Massell's offer in stronger terms than most. He called the five-dollar bonus "the rankest form of benevolent paternalism" and a "far cry from the 'upgrading of human dignity' that was pledged by the new administration."[773] "It is time to take positive action," the former social worker continued, "and that means put some money into the pockets of the working poor." To accomplish that Wade called upon the "city's leadership, governmental and nongovernmental to answer that request."[774]

There were some black leaders who supported the strike from the beginning. Prominent among the early supporters were SCLC head Ralph Abernathy and Lonnie King, the president of the local branch of the NAACP and leader of the Atlanta student movement in 1960. In March 1970, King had just taken a leave of absence from his position with the NAACP to run in the Democratic primary for Georgia's 5th District congressional seat against Andrew Young. In his comments supporting the strike, King focused on the actions of Massell. "I find that he is employing tactics to settle a strike that

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[772] Memorandum, Board of Directors, Atlanta Urban League to Sam Massell and Morton Shapiro, March 19, 1970, Box 36, Folder 8, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

[773] Alex Coffin, "Massell, Union Talks Again End in Dispute," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 2, 1970, 20A.

[774] Lucile McAllister Scott, "Atlanta Urban League Says: City 'Bonus' Offer is 'Deplorable,'" *Atlanta Daily World,* April 3, 1970, 1.

should shock most of the liberals and blacks that supported him," King told the press. "I was duped," King later said about his previous support for the mayor. King's support stands out among black proponents of the strike for its explicit defense of the union. "The subtle issue here is, is there going to be a union? I believe that if Massell could find a way to give money and get rid of the union he would do it."[775] King also convinced the local NAACP executive committee to endorse the strike and donate funds to the strikers.[776]

Joining King in support of the striking workers was Ralph Abernathy. As he did during the 1968 Atlanta strike, the SCLC head emphasized the poverty-level wages of the workers in a March 25 statement to the press. "Many of these men," Abernathy explained, "who want to work, are not paid enough to provide their families with adequate food, clothing, shelter, medical care, and other basic needs." SCLC, he continued, "had a deep commitment to the rights of the working poor." He recognized that "the city is filthy now with uncollected garbage…but filth is not only measured in terms of garbage; it is also measured in terms of man's exploitation of his brother and the destruction of human dignity." Abernathy was "disturbed by the actions of [his] dear friend, Mayor Massell" and he "call[ed] upon the mayor…to do whatever is necessary to provide adequate incomes so that these workers may feed their hungry children."[777]

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[775] Hugh Merrill and Bill Montgomery, "City Strikers Vow Hard-Line Stance," *Atlanta Constitution,* March 29, 1970, 1A.

[776] "Possible Meeting Monday on Striking City Workers," *Atlanta Daily World,* March 29, 1970, 1.

[777] "Statement by Dr. Ralph David Abernathy," March 25, 1970, Box 75, Folder 13, SCLC Records Emory; Telefax, Ralph Abernathy to Sam Massell, no date, Box 106, Folder 1, Sam Massell Papers.

Abernathy limited his support of the strike to comments to the press until the end of March, but he was eager to get SCLC more involved. On March 26, the day the strikers rejected the agreement reached by Massell and some local leaders, Abernathy told the press the "SCLC cannot for much longer provide merely verbal support for the workers." Not everyone in SCLC was as willing to support the striking workers. Joseph Lowery, the chairman of the board of SCLC joined a group of nine black ministers who "pledged their willingness to do whatever was necessary to end the strike."[778] One anonymous SCLC official hoped to keep the organization out of the strike. The official expressed relief when he thought there was an agreement on March 25. "Whew. We were being pressured to get in, but we didn't want to with all we're already involved in."[779]

In March 1970 SCLC was not involved in any major projects, but the pressure of movement activity over the previous dozen years had taken a toll on the members. SCLC, a *Baltimore Afro American* article explained in January 1970, "like its leader [Ralph Abernathy] is tired, very tired." Andrew Young admitted that "[w]e're not really strong enough to take on any national issues like Birmingham or Selma." Instead the organization was spreading itself thin with smaller projects and campaigns across the country. It ran among other programs Jesse Jackson's Operation Breadbasket program in Chicago, new chapters in other northern cities, Dorothy Cotton's Citizen Education Program in South Carolina, voter registration campaigns in Alabama, and ad hoc

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[778] Michael Wright and Alex Coffin, "Agreement Reached in City Strike," *Atlanta Constitution,* March 25, 1970.

[779] Alex Coffin, "City May Edge Out of Garbage Business," *Atlanta Constitution,* March 30, 1970.

campaigns like a Memphis hospital strike in December 1969. [780] By March 1970, several veteran activists were ready to move on. That month James Bevel left SCLC and Andrew Young quit to run for congress.[781]

Nevertheless, throughout April, SCLC was the leading community organization to support the strike. SCLC joined a growing alliance of black activists in forming a group called the Coalition of Concerned Citizens. The coalition included members of the Atlanta branch of the NAACP, the Metropolitan Atlanta Summit Leadership Conference (MASLC), the Atlanta Ministerial Alliance, Tenants United for Fairness (TUFF), the Emmaus House, the National Welfare Rights Organization (NWRO), and the Concerned Clergy. Although it is not clear if it was part of the coalition, another of the early groups to support the striking workers was the National Domestic Workers Union, led by Dorothy Bolden. Leading the coalition were long- time SCLC associates John Middleton and E.H. Dorsey. Both Dorsey and Middleton were ministers and early members of Operation Breadbasket. In 1970, Middleton was also the president of Robert Morris College, and the second most influential member of the coalition after Abernathy. Outside of the more moderate NAACP and the Atlanta Ministerial Alliance, this was a coalition of experienced progressive and radical activists. They were not afraid to challenge the Massell administration or go against some of the most influential black Atlantans.

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[780] "SCLC, Battered, Fatigued by '60s, Plans Rejuvenation By '71," *Baltimore Afro American,* January 10, 1970, 18.

[781] "Rev. Bevel Quits Rights Organization," *Baltimore Afro-American,* March 7, 1970, 3; "Aide to Dr. King Joins House Race," *New York Times,* March 5, 1970, 27.

In some ways the messaging of the activists supporting the striking city workers could have been pulled directly from the 1968 strike. This was again a strike about the poverty-level wages of municipal workers. Abernathy explained to the press that he had "devoted [his] life to fighting for the poor" and "if the poor garbage workers aren't given a livable wage, we will have to mount a full-fledged demonstration."[782] These poverty wages – "part-time pay for full-time jobs" – were "far from enough…to provide a family with a decent home, food, medical care, heat, light, clothing, and education expenses." As another strike supporter proclaimed "this is a fight – a war – but only for milk."[783] And as in 1968, strike supporters criticized the spending choices of a wealthy city that continued to pay its own workers a pittance. In a flyer the Coalition for Concerned Citizens explained that "an affluent city like Atlanta…must not allow those that care for the city to continue living on a lonely island of poverty." "The city" the coalition continued, "has the resources to settle the strike but lacks the integrity."[784]

The coalition argued that "equally responsible" for "failing to meet the meager and just demands of those downtrodden ones" were "every member of the Chamber of Commerce, every businessman and businesswoman." Real power in Atlanta, the strike supporters implied, rested with the city's business elite. The argument continued that Massell, the people's candidate during the campaign, took his hard line stance against the union because he was acting under the influence of these elites. Therefore, the strikers

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[782] "Abernathy to Aid Garbage Strikers," *Atlanta Voice*, *April 5, 1970,* 1.

[783] "Strike!," *Great Speckled Bird*, April 2, 1970, 3.

[784] Position Paper, The Coalition of Concerned Citizens, The Atlanta Workers Strike, no date, Box 36, Folder 14. AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

and their allies had to put real pressure on Atlanta businesses if they hoped to win concessions from the city. As Hosea Williams told a marching crowd in front of Rich's department store: "We've let Dick Rich [the long-time head of the store] run this town too damn long."[785]

To put pressure on Atlanta's business elite, the coalition chose to boycott downtown stores and companies. "We are asking every person of good will (black and white rich and poor) not to spend a single dime in any business located in downtown Atlanta." The coalition specifically identified major banks, Sears, Rich's, and the pre-eminent symbol of Atlanta commerce, Coca Cola, as the targets of protest.

Despite pushing SCLC towards a more active role in the strike, Ralph Abernathy did not give much personal attention to the dispute. He attended one meeting with a group of black leaders and gave some statements, but he was often away from the city. The strike coincided with a press tour by Abernathy promoting the Sidney Lumet directed documentary *King: A Filmed Record… Montgomery to Memphis.* The SCLC leader was not even in Atlanta for the end of the strike; he was in Boston receiving an award.[786] Instead Hosea Williams and Joseph Boone led most of the demonstrations that April.

Williams and the striking workers began their picketing of downtown businesses on March 12, when 125 demonstrators marched through Rich's holding signs that read "Things go bad with Coca-Cola until city workers get a raise" and "Rich's starves

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[785] Ron Taylor, "Strikers Begin Boycott at Big Businesses," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 12, 1970, 2.

[786] Boyd Lewis, "Garbage Strike Aftermath: Rats Flourish in City," *Atlanta Voice,* May 3, 1970, 1.

garbage men." Marches downtown continued through the end of the strike. Regardless, outside of demonstrations, marches, and one flyer printed by the Coalition for Concerned Citizens there does not appear to have been a real effort at boycott. There was no concerted effort at persuading Atlantans to avoid the stores, other than strikers exhorting them to do so as they marched. It should be no surprise then that the demonstrations and call for a boycott were not effective. There is no sign that the Chamber of Commerce or any other business leader's support for Massell's decreased during the boycott. Nor did the campaign seem to convince many shoppers to avoid downtown.[787]

In fact, the union and the supporting coalition struggled to get citizen participation throughout the strike. Marches and pickets, before and after the involvement of SCLC, were largely made up of striking workers. The Coalition for Concerned Citizens did hold a fundraiser but there was little active participation.[788] This was not the mass movement of the Memphis strike. Perhaps, one explanation for the weakness of the demonstrations was that SCLC leadership made no real effort at organizing Atlanta's citizens to protest. Williams, especially, just expected people to come to the demonstrations based on his own self-belief in his charismatic personality. A day before the strike ended, Abernathy admitted while "our picket lines and marches of the last few weeks have been sincere and noble…it is evident that our present level of action has not moved the city."[789]

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[787] "Ron Taylor, "Strikers Begin Boycott at Big Businesses," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 12, 1970, 2A; Alex Coffin, "5 Jailed, 27 Seized in Strike," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 15, 1970.

[788] See attachments to Letter, Julia D. King to Katharine Howard, June 12, 1970, Box 36, Folder 8, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

The End of the Strike and its Aftermath

The striking city workers did receive additional help when Vice Mayor Maynard Jackson publicly split with Massell's approach to the strike and argued that the city could and should settle with the union. Jackson was the first African American to hold the position of vice mayor, a seat that was essentially the president of the board of aldermen. He had no executive powers and on the board he could vote in committee but not in the regular body except as a tie breaker.[790] Jackson, since the beginning of the strike, had suggested that the city and union should agree to some sort of third-party referee, preferably an arbitrator or at least a mediator. Massell rejected this suggestion. Jackson also argued that the city should be able to raise wages for the fiscal year after March 31, a rule city officials insisted they could not break. The vice-mayor, while avoiding any specific legal claims, thought that "men reasonably disagree on the interpretation" of the law's language.[791] Jackson was all but siding with AFSCME, whose lawyer, the famous civil rights and labor lawyer Joseph Rauh, argued that the charter did not prevent a wage increase after the end of March.[792]

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[789] "Statement by Dr. Ralph Abernathy," April 21, 1970, Box 75, Folder 14, SCLC Records Emory.

[790] Maynard Jackson, Interviewed by Robert Wright, October 12, 1970, 635-15, Ralph J. Bunche Oral Histories Collection, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, accessed at *Archives Unbound* through the Washington, DC, Public Library.

[791] Transcript of Press Conference, Maynard Jackson, April 16, 1970, Box 105, Folder 5, Sam Massell Papers, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center (Hereafter Sam Massell Papers); Alex Coffin, "Strike Talks on Today' Jackson, Mayor Split, *Atlanta Constitution,* April 17, 1970, 1, 20.

[792] "Labor Lawyer Rauh Meets with Massell," *Atlanta Daily World,* April 17, 1970, 1.

In his announcement, Jackson was careful to not ally explicitly with the union, admitting "there are no winners in a labor dispute involving government employees." Jackson insisted that his concerns were about providing "essential services to [Atlanta's] people" and the low pay of city workers. "It is the obligation of the City in fact to anticipate, in a creative way, the needs of the people to serve the City." Because of this obligation to the needs of the community, Jackson laid the blame for the thirty-day strike on politicians —without mentioning Massell by name — who viewed the dispute "in terms winning or losing" and "in terms of good guys or bad guys."[793]

Jackson may have sincerely believed that the city needed to do more to end the strike. But it seemed obvious to the mayor and press that he had made the decision to split from the mayor because of politics. According to Jackson's biographer, Massell considered his vice-mayor a "publicity hound" who was "playing to the gallery."[794] Jackson, the grandson of John Wesley Dobbs, one of the most influential black Atlantans in the 1940s and 1950s, harbored real political ambition. An imposing presence at six foot two, 275 pounds, Jackson was a lawyer, whose first job in Atlanta was as an attorney for the National Labor Relations Board. To the surprise of nearly every Georgian (including his wife, who he did not consult with in advance), the thirty-year old Jackson ran for senator against Herman Talmadge in 1968. Even though Talmadge won easily, Jackson proved himself an energetic campaigner and got the attention of Atlanta's elite, black and white. Jackson even earned an endorsement from the *Atlanta Journal*, which thought that

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[793] Transcript of Press Conference, Maynard Jackson, April 16, 1970, Box 105, Folder 5, Sam Massell Papers.

[794] For quote see Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn,* 394.

"Jackson foretells of things to come" in the Democratic Party. The next year, to the frustration of Leroy Johnson, who did not think Jackson was acting appropriately deferential, the young lawyer ran for and won the position of vice-mayor.

Massell was mostly correct when he suggested that Jackson was simply playing politics when he came out against the mayor's handling of the strike. From the time he was inaugurated vice-mayor it was clear he planned to separate himself from the mayor. As Phyl Garland of *Ebony* put it, Jackson did not "hesitate to joust with Mayor Sam Massell."[795] In early April 1970, Charles Price of the *Atlanta Daily World* suggested that there was "a fundamental difference in the beliefs and style of Sam and Maynard."[796]

Siding with AFSCME just two months into his tenure was a canny decision for the young politician. It made Jackson a political ally of a union that had ambitions to be a political player in Atlanta's municipal politics. Local 1644 had just run an effective get out the vote campaign to help elect both Jackson and Massell, and it would be beneficial to have the union on his side when he ran against Massell in three years. And more importantly the support for the striking workers showed black Atlantans – working class voters not just the black elite – that unlike Massell, he was a serious politician interested in their well-being. Furthermore, this was a relatively safe political gambit for Jackson. With no real power the vice-mayor had the luxury of backing the striking workers. He

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[795] Phyl Garland, "Atlanta: Black Mecca of the South," *Ebony,* August 1971, 154.

[796] Charles Price, "Massell's Challenge," *Atlanta Daily World,* April 12, 1970, 4.

was not the one in charge of a budget, nor was he the one who had to answer to powerful business interests in the city.

By late April both sides were ready to settle the strike. After a few days of fine-tuning, an agreement was reached on April 22. It provided the lowest paid 2,314 city workers with a one-step (4.5 percent) raise, a promise by the city to study worker reclassifications which would possibly give raises to 550 additioanl employees, and all striking workers would be reinstated to their positions without pay for the time the workers were off.[797] The final settlement was all but a complete victory for Massell. Given his hostility to the union, perhaps he would have preferred for workers to end the strike with no raise given, but this was essentially the deal that Massell had offered, and the workers rejected, two weeks earlier when he agreed to convert his bonus plan to a one-step raise.[798] The agreement also cost the city $100,000 less than the original minimum offer he made on March 16. The lowest paid workers in fact were going to receive less than the offer to increase minimum wage to $2.13 per hour, their wages only increasing to $2.09.[799] The administration had already allocated these funds to pay for the possible bonus by March 31, so the city did not even have to reinterpret the March 31 deadline as Jackson suggested.[800]

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[797] To add further insult to the striking workers, the city only reclassified nine of the 550 employees into better paying positions. Michael Wright, "City Union Unhappy on Raises," *Atlanta Constitution,* June 4, 1970, 6B.

[798] Alex Coffin, "Black Leaders Ask Strikers Reconsider," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 10, 1970, 22A.

[799] "Atlanta Garbage Strike is Over," *Pittsburgh Courier,* May 2, 1970.

[800] Alex Coffin, "City Workers' Strike Ends After 36 Days," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 23, 1970, 1A, 19A.

The settlement calls into question the suggestion made, then and now, that Jackson's decision to break with the mayor helped end the strike. Since the settlement was essentially the same one made two weeks earlier it is unlikely that Massell acted in response to Jackson. He could have presented a more enticing package to AFSCME if he felt pressure to act. Massell also did not need to enact any of Jackson's recommendations. He did not turn to an arbitrator and he did not have to change the budget after the March 31 deadline. One journalist suggested that the "sum and substance" of Jackson's contributions to the strike was when he convinced Massell to allow a rally and march at City Hall, thereby "avert[ing] a serious confrontation."[801]

AFSCME, of course, attempted to sell the deal the deal as a victory. "This settlement did much more than win a sorely-needed pay increase. It proved to the city administration – the boss – that city workers must be deal with fairly and equitably." Many striking workers, however, understood that they did not win the strike, but the dispute had dragged on for more than a month and workers wanted to go back to work. "Something better happen soon," one striking worker complained a few days before the settlement. "They 'bout to throw me out of the house and they cut the gas off on me." Another explained that he still supported the strike, "but my kids ain't eating steak every night."[802] According to Bill Lucy the workers were "split" over the details of the agreement but they were in "overwhelming" support of returning to work. Despite this, a minority of

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[801] McCartin, "Fire the Hell out of Them," 70; Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca,* 58; "Alex Coffin, "No One Was a Winner in the Strike," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 27, 1970, 5C.

[802] Boyd Lewis, *The Atlanta Voice,* April 19, 1970, 1.

workers were angered by the agreement. There were reports of fist fights during the final meeting and workers leaving the church "grumbling that they hadn't gotten pay for the strike period." [803]

The workers dissatisfied with the settlement found their views expressed by Hosea Williams. After the settlement, Williams condemned Massell, "the Mayor's black advisors" – by which he meant Leroy Johnson, Joel Stokes, and Jesse Hill, among others – and AFSCME for the "selling out of Atlanta's city employees strike." "The striking city employees," Williams added, "feel that the activities of these so-called 'responsible Black leaders' are mainly responsible for a dishonorable settlement."[804] It is not known how many workers Williams represented with this complaint, but it was clear from the reaction to the settlement that not all of the strikers were happy. Buster Starr of the Metro Atlanta Summit Leadership Council (MASLC) echoed Williams's complaint when he argued the union "could have pushed hard" for a better outcome for the workers. "The union was working for its own benefit and not for the men."[805] Starr was effectively mimicking Massell's criticism of the union. Throughout the strike, Massell blamed the union and not the city employees for the strike. The workers, to the mayor, "had been made a tool of a small band of power-seeking union bosses."[806] Joseph Boone, who like

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[803] "Atlanta Garbage Strike is Over," *The Pittsburgh Courier,* May 2, 1970.

[804] "Charge Atlanta 'Sell-Out'," *Chicago Daily Defender,* April 30 1970, 8.

[805] Boyd Lewis, "Garbage Strike Aftermath: Rats Flourish in City," *Atlanta Voice,* May 3, 1970, 1.

[806] "Mayor Massell Statement," *Atlanta Daily World,* March 27, 1970, 4.

Abernathy was not in the city when the strike ended, agreed that the "strikers lost when they were supposed to benefit."[807]

The complaints of leading community supporters of the strike revealed an important difference between the union and civil rights activists that prevented a more effective partnership. Starr was critical that the raise the workers received was "less than was offered by the city at the start." Most likely he was referring to Massell's five-dollar bonus that the workers soundly rejected. Where for an activist like Starr, settling for more money may have made more sense, for the union it was crucial that it not concede to only a bonus. This strike was seeking more than just about improved wages; this was about improving the position of city workers as dignified workers, and that included not having to jump through hoops to receive a fair wage.[808]

In an interview three months after the strike, Morton Shapiro attempted to sell the results of the strike not as "an economic victory but a political one." Shapiro explained that "the workers got the city to stick by its agreement to a one-step pay raise and to recognize the AFSCME as the legitimate representatives of the workers."[809] Shapiro was wrong. If anything the strike did more to delegitimize the union in the eyes of the mayor and the aldermen. After the strike was over, Massell sought a way to punish the union. On July 31, he signed an ordinance passed by the board of aldermen that rescinded the right to dues checkoffs, a privilege that AFSCME had secured in Atlanta since 1959. Without

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[807] Boyd Lewis, "Garbage Strike Aftermath: Rats Flourish in City," *Atlanta Voice,* May 3, 1970, 1.

[808] Boyd Lewis, "Garbage Strike Aftermath: Rats Flourish in City," *Atlanta Voice,* May 3, 1970, 1.

[809] Moss, "City-waste Collector Confrontation," 55.

the right to a legally-binding contract, however, it was a privilege the city could end at any time. Massell was a leading proponent of the ordinance and lobbied alderman before the vote. One of the opposing aldermen, who remained anonymous, called the ordinance "government by vindictiveness."[810] Without the dues check-off automatically deducting union fees, Local 1644 lost its most important source of revenue.

Massell was particularly angry because he felt Wurf was disrespectful even after the strike ended. At a press conference two days after the settlement, the union president charged that Massell was "a boy trying to do a man's job" and that the diminutive mayor was "not big enough for the job."[811] These attacks clearly nettled the mayor, who in response wrote to Claude Holt, president of Local 1644, condemning Wurf's attacks and threatening to end the city's relationship with the union. The mayor wondered why the union would continue to attack him if "they have any intention of developing any meaningful relationship for their members with this administration." He called for a "public apology" on "behalf of the city employees" if it was "the wish of this union to represent them in any meaningful relationship with Atlanta's government."[812] AFSCME leaders did not apologize.

Rescinding dues checkoff was an intentional act to debilitate AFSCME in Atlanta. Years later, Massell admitted in an interview that he "was satisfied beyond any doubt,

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[810] Alex Coffin, "Ending Checkoff Was a Backward Step," *Atlanta Constitution,* August 10, 1970.

[811] "Wurf Charges Mayor Turned on Backers," *Atlanta Journal,* April 24, 1970, 24-A.

[812] Letter, Sam Massell to Claude Holt, April 24, 1970, Box 105, Folder 5, Sam Massell Papers.

that AFSCME did not have capable leadership to protect its own members and for that reason I had no special interest in them at all." Because of his lack of faith in competency of the union, Massell claimed he made no "special effort to…try and dissolve their membership other than the check-off."[813] The ordinance was, in the words of one journalist, a "determined drive to kill off the union."[814]

Massell was not successful in killing off Local 1644, but the removal of the checkoff system seriously hindered the work of Local 1644's largest and most influential division. AFSCME viewed the ordinance as an existential threat. Because of a long-standing policy, AFSCME refused the "'carpetbagging' technique of hand collections," and instead it chose to subsidize Local 1644.[815]

The combination of a lack of funds, increasing disinterest from the rank and file, and poor local leadership meant that the union struggled to do more than its most basic duties. Given the union's dysfunction, officials representing the public works department chose to focus almost wholly on representing workers in the grievance process. In part due to the backlash caused by the March 1970 strike, the largest and most powerful department in Local 1644 was now only providing the same services offered by the much smaller and less influential departments at Grady Memorial Hospital and the public schools.

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[813] Yancy, "The Spectre of Public Unionism,", 162.

[814] Alex Coffin, "Ending Checkoff Was a Backward Step," *Atlanta Constitution,* August 10, 1970.

[815] Report, "For Background Purposes," by AFSCME/Atlanta, Box 30, Folder 35, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

Wurf and the international did not give up on their vision of an influential public sector union in Atlanta. In order to rejuvenate Local 1644, AFSCME in May 1973 placed the local under trusteeship. The international hired Leamon Hood, a black Georgia native, as trustee. In a letter to Local 1644, Hood listed several reasons for the takeover: a "lack of leadership; increasing instability… dissipation of the local's assets; growing factionalism within its ranks; and most importantly, diminishing participation by the membership in the democratic process of Local 1644."[816]

By the end of 1973, Local 1644 had another problem: a drive by the Laborers International Union of North America (LIU) to organize Atlanta's sanitation workers. Beginning in the 1970s, LIU, like the Teamsters, the SEIU, and other traditionally private sector unions recognized that public employees were a ripe target for organizing. By 1974 the LIU had already organized sanitation workers in Birmingham and Jacksonville. Now focusing on Atlanta, LIU hired Joyce Brown and Fred Williams, experienced organizers whom AFSCME had dismissed when the international put 1644 under trusteeship. In the early months of Hood's tenure as trustee, the raid by LIU became the biggest threat to AFSCME. Not only did the Laborer's organizing campaign threaten to take members from Local 1644's most important department, the mere existence of a rival union weakened the union's position vis-a-vis the city. When Hood and 1644 attempted to reopen negotiations with the Massell administration in late 1973, the city expected AFSCME to prove that it represented at least a majority of the workers.[817]

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[816]Quoted in Yancy, "The Spectre of Public Unionism," 206; For more on Leamon Hood see McCartin, "Managing Discontent," 271-300.

[817] Yancy, "The Spectre of Public Unionism," 208.

Local 1644's main strategy to turn its fortunes around and to counter the threat of the LIU was to help elect Maynard Jackson mayor in the November 1973 elections. Jackson had proven himself a supporter of Local 1644 during the strike and later with his consistent support of dues checkoff. As the local had learned during the 1968 and 1970 strikes and the backlash they engendered, having the right mayor meant all the difference for the public employee union. So as in 1970, when AFSCME played an important role in the election of Massell, it worked in 1973 to defeat Massell and elect Jackson.

In placing its hope in another liberal mayor, AFSCME showed it had learned little from the 1970 strike. Massell, the liberal mayor and public supporter of labor unions, fired the striking workers and held firm to his commitment not to give workers any more than he had offered the union before the strike. After more than a month of striking, the union finally agreed to a settlement that was much smaller than the one initially demanded. The split in ranks within the black civic elite also should have also given Local 1644 pause about the kind of community support that the union could expect under a Jackson administration. Several black civic leaders, including Martin Luther King Sr. publicly sided with Massell. For these men, black political influence, as gained under the Massell administration, was more important than the demands of the strikers, especially since they had just received a wage increase two months earlier. Even black supporters of the strike expressed serious reservations about AFSCME. Black city workers deserved raises, but the union was not seen as the proper organization to support the workers since it was concerned as it was with its own success rather than the success of working-class black Atlantans. Moreover, the 1970 strike should have shown AFSCME how relatively ineffective the community support it received was. SCLC and allies were unable to build

a mass movement of Atlantans to support the strikers. The marches that activists held downtown and the rallies at City Hall were not effective at forcing Massell to make concessions. Entering the dispute, Local 1644 believed it should have been a relatively easy victory. AFSCME was bargaining with a brand new liberal mayor, the economy was strong, Atlanta's budget was in good shape, and the strikers had the support of SCLC. In the end, these conditions meant little. Public sector union strength was simply too weak in Atlanta to gain any concessions without the support of powerful politicians. The 1970 strike should have shown Local 1644 that the conditions to win a public sector strike in Atlanta were virtually absent long before Maynard Jackson fired the workers in March 1977.

Chapter 6: "It Was a Blow to the Coalition": The 1977 AFSCME Strike and the Response of Atlanta's Black Communities

In March 1977, Maynard Jackson, now the first black mayor of a major southern city, fired over 900 striking city employees. Jackson called the mass firing "the most painful task" of his entire career, but repeatedly claimed that the city could not afford the wages the workers demanded. Jackson took the strike personally and believed that AFSCME was trying to take advantage of him. "Maybe the union thought that because I'm liberal, because I'm black, I would respond to any demand no matter how outlandish**,**" he explained.[818] Jackson effectively ended the strike after two weeks when he fired the workers and hired replacements. In taking the hardline stance against Local 1644, Jackson received overwhelming support from Atlanta's black politicians, ministers, and civic leaders. Martin Luther King Sr., not alone in this opinion, told the press that "If you do everything you can and don't get satisfaction then fire the hell out of them."[819]

Observers then and now have viewed Jackson's decision to fire the striking workers and the support the mayor received from leading black Atlantans as a key event to understand the development of black urban politics in the post-segregation era, the contours of black economic inequality, and the limits of a civil rights-labor coalition. For some Jackson's actions during the strike exemplify how the first generation of black politicians, especially black mayors, shaped their policies around the demands of the

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[818] Tom Matthews and Vern E. Smith, "Atlanta: The Strikebreaker, *Newsweek,* April 25, 1977, 29-30.

[819] Jay Lawrence, "City Strikers Clash With Job Applicants," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 5, 1977, 2A.

white business class. Reuel Schiller argues that "politics was a double edged sword...white politicians courted African-American voters by furthering their interests. Black politicians, in turn had to gain the support of powerful interests within the white business community if they wished to stay in power." According to Schiller**,** "this fact put significant restraints on their ability to address fundamental issues of economic inequality."[820]

In response black community leaders often acted in lock-step with black mayors, either because black leadership and black-run civic organizations had been incorporated into black-led municipal administrations and/or out of a sense of racial solidarity with black leadership.[821] A year after the strike, Atlanta University political scientist Mack Jones, who publicly supported the striking city workers, wrote that "the response of black leaders to the mayor's handling of the sanitation workers' strike suggests that black leaders may be predisposed to support a black government on issues and under circumstances in which it would not support white-dominated governments."[822] Clarence Stone argued "Jackson was able to mobilize black clergy against striking municipal employees" because "black ministers, who are key links between black officeholders and the black public, have indicated that any impairment to an incumbent mayor is perceived

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[820] Reuel Schiller, "Mourning King: The Civil Rights Movement and the Fight for Economic Justice," *New Labor Forum* 27, no. 2 (2018), 16.

[821] For a popular explanation of cross-class intra-racial dynamics of shared African-America political group interests see Michael C. Dawson, *Behind the Mule: Race and Class in African-American Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[822] Mack Jones, "Black Empowerment in Atlanta," 115. See also Hobson, *The Legend of Black Mecca,* 87-88.

as a weakening of black solidarity and a threat to black political power."[823] And Adolph Reed wrote, with reference to the strike, that "Jackson's hegemonic control of the idea of black interest enabled him to subvert and co-opt the moral force of racial populism."[824] As a result, when black blue-collar city workers struck in Atlanta, the black mayor eager for the support of the white business elite in an election year took a hardline stance and fired the strikers. Black community leaders, identifying their interests with the interests of Jackson administration, vociferously supported the mayor's actions.

When commentators discuss the 1977 strike, the context within which Jackson and black community leaders acted, is given short shrift. We rarely get an insight into what shape the economy or the city's budget are in in March 1977. We do not get a sense of unemployment and inflation in Atlanta – the two metrics of that ubiquitous 1970s term stagflation. We do not get a good sense of which workers struck and why, or what Local 1644's actual relationship with the city was like. We also do not get a sense of why exactly black community leaders supported the mayor, what their justifications were. Instead what is usually told is a short morality tale of a black mayor acting on behalf of white business interests and supported by an African American middle class turning its back on the black working class.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the relationship between black community leaders and Local 1644 was never as strong as many commentators assume when they discuss the

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[823] Stone, *Regime Politics*, 166.

[824] Adolph Reed, *Stirrings in the Jug,* 5-6.

different reactions between the 1970 to 1977 strike.[825] There were no efforts to build a stronger alliance between black civic leaders and Local 1644 in the years between the two strikes either. Black civic leaders and civil rights activists were not predisposed to support Local 1644 and its strike. When the 1977 strike occurred – a walkout that had been building for more than a year – there were not many compelling reasons for black civic leaders and civil rights activists to support the strike.

The strike was supported by only a small portion of the Local 1644's membership and disavowed by most of the leadership. Initially, close to 1,000 workers walked off the job but this number quickly dwindled to around 400. Out of this 1,000, only about 150 had voted for the strike in a spontaneous vote, and when a second more formal vote was held six days later only 300 members voted in support of it. Then a day after the initial unplanned vote, AFSMCE international released an ad in the *New York Times* bashing the Jackson administration and suggesting that Atlanta too could experience the urban crises that Northern industrial cites faced. The strike, then, had no preparation, was voted on by only a quarter of the union (and an eighth of all city workers), and was supported by an international union openly attacking the city's first black mayor. This was hardly a scenario where black civic leaders and civil rights organizations inclined to support the policies of a liberal black mayor would choose to break with Jackson and support the strike. But when Jackson won the election in October 1973, few in Local 1644 could have predicted this outcome.

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[825] Two articles by Joseph McCartin are the best resources for understanding the 1977 strike. McCartin, however, overemphasizes the differences between the 1970 and 1977 strike. See McCartin, "Fire the Hell out of Them": 67-92 and McCartin, "Managing Discontent."

Jackson's Ascendency

By 1973 most observers thought that Atlanta would elect its first black mayor. Given the long tradition of organized black politics in Atlanta, the eagerness of well-positioned black politicians to run for office, the desire of black Atlantans to elect a black mayor, and the racial polarization of the city, it was not surprising that with African Americans making up forty-eight percent of the eligible voter population, the city was likely to elect a black mayor.[826] The election was even more probable because Massell's actions had made it less likely for many black voters to continue to support him. By 1972 the political calculation had changed for Massell. The mayor had won in 1969 because of the support of black Atlantans, and his policies and anti-racist rhetoric following the election reflected Massell's understanding of his winning coalition. Soon after the election, however, it was clear that most black Atlantans, including important early supporters of Massell, were ready to elect a black mayor in 1973. Massell began to cater his policies and rhetoric to more please Atlanta's white voters instead.

Massell doubled down on his wooing of the white electorate during the campaign. During the run-off election against Maynard Jackson, Massell hoped to incite the fears white Atlantans had of a black-led city. Particularly egregious was a two-page ad that his campaign ran in the *Atlanta Journal* six days before the election. Presented to the reader was a black and white picture of garbage-strewn city street. It was an image of urban decay, though not even of an Atlanta street, but one in Philadelphia. Running over the top

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[826] For voting statistics see Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn,* 400.

of the image were bold block letters that read "Atlanta's Too Young to Die." In the copy, Massell warned if the city elected Jackson "that many blacks and whites alike fear a new trend of flight from Atlanta. They fear an end to progress, an end to opportunity, an end to faith."[827] The mayor claimed the ad was not racist. Instead it was the divisive and even racist policies of Jackson and Hosea Williams, who was running for city council president, that would chase people from the city. During a television appearance two days after the ad the mayor charged that Maynard Jackson was a "racist" who "has made every decision as vice-mayor on a racial viewpoint."[828]

Massell's ad was immediately met with opprobrium. Benjamin Mays, then the chairman of the Atlanta Board of Education and former Massell supporter, called it a "demagogic plea" that sought to "spread fear and panic." The *Constitution,* which initially backed Leroy Johnson in the general election but then sided with Jackson during the run-off, was especially critical of Massell's ad. Editorials addressed the controversy and breathlessly condemned the racist ad. One editorial compared Massell to both to the segregationist Alabama governor George Wallace and the Georgian white-supremacist J.B. Stoner.[829] Another wrote that "Sam Massell acts as if he were running for a South African city which practices apartheid."[830]

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[827] See ad in *Atlanta Constitution,* October 11, 1973, before 12A; see also Pomerantz, *Where Peachtree Meets Sweet Auburn,* 412, 413.

[828] Tom Linthicum, "Massell Won't Drop 'Racist' Blasts," *Atlanta Constitution,* October 11, 1973, 2A.

[829] Hal Gulliver, "Sam's Issue: Niggers," *Atlanta Constitution,* October 11, 1973, 4A.

[830] Editorial, "Massell's Campaign," *Atlanta Constitution,* October 12, 1973, 4A.

White flight, which Massell warned would be the outcome of a Jackson victory, was a genuine concern. The white population of Atlanta decreased by 60,000 in the 1960s. And the exodus of whites out of Atlanta and into the surrounding suburbs only intensified as schools began to desegregate in the late 1960s and as black politicians came into power. In the 1970s, over 100,000 whites moved out of the city, causing the population to decline for the first time. Along with their bodies went their income, wealth, jobs, and other sources of capital that white families accrued during decades of Jim Crow inequality. These economic resources in the form of income, payroll, sales, and especially property taxes, which decreased as the property values of new black landowners decreased, became lost revenue for the city.[831] In a phenomenon experienced throughout the country, white families refused to share with black families the privileges they had accumulated through Jim Crow. [832]

Even though roughly 10,000 whites were moving out of Atlanta a year, the city continued to grow through the sixties into the mid-seventies. As white families moved out, black families moved in. In the 1960s, the black population increased by 70,000. By the 1970 census, Atlanta was a majority black city.[833] This was the result of migration of

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[831] For a contemporary discussion of changes in income and revenue in Atlanta due to white flight see Research Atlanta, "Which Way Atlanta," 1973; Research Atlanta, "Metro Incomes Rise," 1972; Research Atlanta, "The Urban Fiscal Crisis in Atlanta," 1979.

[832] For more on white flight in Atlanta see Kruse, *White Flight;* Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority.* For the effects of white flight and urban renewal on downtown Atlanta see Irene Valerie Holliman, "From 'Crackertown' to the 'ATL'," For more on white flight and urban crises see Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto,* Sugrue*, The Origins of the Urban Crisis,* Robert O. Self, *American Babylon.*

[833] Stone, *Regime Politics, 75*.

poor black families from rural areas to the city, and the beginnings of the return of young middle-class black professionals from the North.[834] This demographic change provided black Atlantans the opportunity to build the city into what *Ebony* called in 1971 "the black mecca." And it provided black politicians with the opportunity to collect enough votes to win the position of mayor and half the seats in the newly formed city council. According to *Ebony*, for many Atlanta was becoming "the place where black dreams are most likely to come true."[835] But just as Atlanta was turning into a city led by black politicians concerned with advancing the opportunities of its black citizens, the capital flight that accompanied white flight put real restraints on dreams that this new black mecca hoped to achieve.

Jackson became the first black mayor of a major Southern city on January 9, 1974. Much like Sam Massell's speech four years earlier, Jackson's inaugural address offered an inclusive and populist message. His inauguration was "the people's inauguration" and his administration would be "the people's administration," that would "afford even the poorest and most destitute person an alternative to agony." Jackson envisioned that Atlanta could become a model city not only for a new post- civil rights South, but a model for urban progress for cities across the country. "We can create the new models," he told the crowd, "based on a new political vision shared in and worked toward by all Atlantans."[836]

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[834] For a discussion on this return migration see Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca,* 60-61.

[835] Phyl Garland, "Atlanta: Black Mecca of the South," *Ebony,* August 1971, 152-157.

Early in his tenure, one of Jackson's priorities was the integration of the government and the Atlanta economy. According to a 1972 city employment report by the CRC, "Atlanta had made significant progress in minority employment" under the Sam Massell administration. Even with the improvements in the city's hiring and promotion practices, the report acknowledged that the gap between white and black workers in city employment persisted. "The profile of employment remains essentially the same … with blacks holding the lower paying less prestigious jobs and whites the higher paying more responsible positions." There were still only 18 black managers out of 133, 205 professionals out of 1,070, 265 clerical workers out of 1,055, and 248 police officers out of 1,277.[837]

The Jackson administration made a meaningful effort to end these disparities. It used the affirmative action office, that Massell created but did not fill, to hire and promote black workers to all levels of the city administration. In addition, the Jackson administration's personnel department reformed hiring practices, adding a residency requirement. These efforts substantially increased the number of black workers in professional, managerial, and supervisor positions. Between 1973 and 1978, the number of black workers in professional positions increased from 19.2 to 42.2 percent and the number of black workers in managerial positions increased from 13.5 to 32.6 percent.[838]

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[836] "Atlanta has the Opportunity to Lead the Way to a New Kind of Life, Says Mayor Jackson," *Atlanta Daily World,* January 10, 1974, 8.

[837] Report, "City of Atlanta Minority Hiring and Employment, Update '72," Community Relations Commission, Box 40, Folder 2, Andrew Young Papers, Auburn Avenue Research Library, Atlanta, Georgia.

[838] Bayor, *Race and the Shaping of Twentieth Century Atlanta,* Kindle edition location 1657; Stone, *Regime Politics,* 87; see also Emma Darnell, Interviewed by Jackie Shearer,

Jackson also sought to use the financial power of the city government to change hiring practices in the private sector and to channel more money to black-owned businesses. He instituted a series of guidelines to increase the involvement of African Americans in contract bids. The most well-known was the "joint ventures" guidelines. This rule allowed contractors to create limited joint ventures with minority-owned businesses "in order to receive special consideration in the competitive bidding process."[839] Jackson also threatened to pull city bank deposits from banks that did not hire black employees.[840] The newly formed city council backed Jackson in his efforts to further integrate the economy.[841] The city council, whose eighteen seats were evenly divided between black and white council members, passed an ordinance that required firms bidding for contracts to demonstrate "'affirmative action' programs for hiring minorities if the city is not satisfied with current staffing."[842]

Jackson was assertive in his demands for improving black economic and employment opportunities in the city. He also sought to rearrange how politics worked in the city. Early in his tenure Jackson was not as obsequious to white business leaders as previous

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October 27, 1988, "Eyes on the Prize II Interviews," Washington University Digital Gateway.

[839] Reed, "A Critique of Neo-Progressivism," in *Stirring in the Jug*, 210.

[840] Stone, *Regime Politics,* 87.

[841] The Georgia General Assembly adopted a new city charter for Atlanta in 1973. One of the most important changes was that the board of alderman, where seats were elected at large, changed to a city council where twelve out of eighteen seats were elected from single-member districts. Hobson, *The Legend of Black Mecca,* 69.

[842] Jim Gray, "Color Bind: City Minority Policy Delays Airport Study," *Atlanta Constitution,* February 20, 1976, 9A; Reed, "A Critique of Neoprogressivism," 210; Darnell Interviewed by Jackie Shearer.

mayors. Jackson's style frustrated business leaders who were used to a certain level of influence within the power structure. John Portman, the powerful architect and developer, complained that there was now a "lack of trust" between City Hall and the business community.[843] Another anonymous white business leader complained that "In the old days, you could pick up the phone and dial the Mayor at his office…Well, that's all gone now."[844] A blunt criticism of Jackson's management of the city came from Harold Brockey, the chairman of Rich's Department Store and president of Central Atlanta Progress (CAP), a group of Atlanta's business leaders. In a letter, Brockey explained that CAP members had concerns about "the increasing exodus of business from the City." While there was not yet evidence of a real exodus, he listed several reasons for the concern including: "fear of crime… racial problems… the quality of the school system…labor force supply and employment problems" and the "capacity of public sector to respond to downtown needs." Brockey warned Jackson that among the business community there existed a "perceived attitude of the Mayor as anti-white."[845] Former mayor Ivan Allen suggested that it was both white and black racism that was hurting the city. He was remarkably blunt when he told a group of executives that "some of us have gotten too concerned with wanting the city government to fail because it's black." But he

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[843] "Atlanta: A Decade of Prosperity and Goodwill Has Faded," *Atlanta Constitution,* March 23, 1975, 1A.

[844] B. Drummond Ayers Jr., "Amid Signs of Racial Division, Atlanta's Black Mayor Begins Second Year Under Fire," *New York Times,* February 26, 1975, 18.

[845] Harold Brockey to Maynard Jackson and Wyche Fowler, September 16, 1974, Box 8, Folder 1, Central Atlanta Progress Records, MSS 591, Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center; Mack Jones, "Black Political Empowerment," 112.

equivocated and argued that "We've got to rise above petty racism and it's not only black racism, it's white."[846]

In addition to pressure from the white business community, Jackson took office at the exact moment that America's golden era of economic growth ended. There were signs of an over-extended economy by the late 1960s – inflation began to increase and there was a mild recession in 1969 – but for most Americans the real sign of a troubled economy was the OPEC oil embargo of 1973 and 1974.[847] By 1975 the United States was in a deep recession. Particularly troubling to economists and politicians was the nature of this recession. Inflation and unemployment increased at the same time, contradicting the economic belief that as one rose the other decreased. This effect became known as stagflation. Nationally unemployment rose to 8.5 percent while inflation rose to nearly 12

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[846] Colleen Teasley, "Racism Killing City, Ivan Allen tells Forum," *Atlanta Constitution,* September 26, 1974, 1A. For more on Jackson's relationship with Atlanta's white business elite see Stone, *Urban Regime,* 87-92; Hobson, *The Legend of the Black Mecca,* 69-84; For a national study on white opposition to black politicians see George Derek Musgrove, *Rumor, Repression, and Racial Politics: How Harassment of Black Elected Officials Shaped Post-Civil Rights America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012). For more on the experience of the first generation of black mayors post-1965 see the essays in David R. Colburn and Jeffrey S. Adler, eds., *African-American Mayors: Race, Politics, and the American City* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

[847] For more on the oil embargo see Meg Jacobs, *Panic at the Pump: The Energy Crisis and the Transformation of American Politics in the 1970s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2017).

percent.[848] In Atlanta, the unemployment increased to 12.5 percent in 1975 from a low of 1.9 percent in 1971; black unemployment rose to 15.3 percent.[849]

Capital flight, a poor economy, and the federal government's retreat from favorable urban policies combined with the increasing social and economic demands of city dwellers and municipal employees and new riskier financial technologies used to pay for city operations led to urban fiscal crises throughout the country. Few cities were hit harder by the urban fiscal crisis than New York City which nearly declared bankruptcy.[850] While Atlanta did not suffer a financial crisis, the city's budget was under strain and the city had to pull back on spending.[851]

Local 1644's Push for Better Pay

This was the context within which AFSCME hoped to resurrect Local 1644. In early 1974 there were good reasons for the local to be confident of its future prospects. The

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[848] "Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey," Bureau of Labor Statistics accessed at https://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutputServlet; "CPI-All Urban Consumers (Current Series)," Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed at https://data.bls.gov/pdq/SurveyOutputServlet.

[849] "Statement of Hon. Maynard Jackson, Mayor, City of Atlanta," Job and Prices in Atlanta, Hearing Before the Joint Economic Committee, 94th Congress, 1st Session, December 8, 1975, 5.

[850] For an overview of the New York City fiscal crisis see Fein, *Fear City;* For a study on the city's public sector unions during the crises see Spear, "A Crisis in Urban Liberalism"; For a look at the dynamics that created fiscal crises in the 1970s see James O'Connor, *The Fiscal Crisis of the State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1973).

[851] For an in-depth look at Atlanta's finances in the 1970s see Steven R. Gretenstein, Ned O'Hearn, Barbara S. Wyne, "The Urban Fiscal Crisis in Atlanta," Research Atlanta, Inc., 1979.

economy had not yet bottomed out, the city still had money to spend. Union leaders believed that they had support among some city politicians. Their most important ally in the city council was James Howard, a long-time AFSCME representative in Atlanta, who won his seat in November 1973. Howard had a rocky relationship with the international, which had fired him just months before, but he remained a loyal advocate of the local public sector workers. AFSCME was also confident in their relationship with Jackson. In part this was because, as in 1969, AFSCME worked hard to help elect the mayor. Along with Local 1644 campaigning for Jackson, AFSCME international also donated $100,000 to the candidate, a significant portion of Jackson's campaign chest.[852]

Jackson's actions as vice-mayor and his positions as a candidate led AFSCME to believe that the mayor would be a friend. In addition to his break with Sam Massell during the 1970 strike, Jackson opposed the mayor's decision to end the dues checkoff.[853] While vice-mayor, Jackson had also suggested legislation to improve the personnel system for firefighters. The vice-mayor proposed the creation of a mediation board that could issue non-binding findings. Jackson's primary goal was to find "a peaceful way to settle disputes in the fire department, and people would not have to be engaged in work stoppages or slowdowns or strikes."[854] And early in his campaign, Jackson called for a return of the dues check-off and for a rationalization of personnel policies. "Atlanta is its

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[852] For AFSCME's donation see McCartin, "Managing Discontent," 285.

[853] Alex Coffin, "City Workers 'Union Orders Strike Vote," *Atlanta Constitution,* August 18, 1970, 1, 13A.

[854] WSB-TV newsclip. "Jackson Talks About New Public Labor Policy," August 12, 1971, accessed at Digital Library of Georgia, accessed at http://dlg.galileo.usg.edu/news/do:wsbn63714.

people, its workers, if you will, who make it all stick together, who provide its essential services: fire, sanitation, courts, hospitals, schools, etc.," he told a crowd of labor leaders at a banquet, "and it is time we let them into full participating citizenship on the job -- simply put, we need to develop a system by which they can bring the city's entire employer-employee relationship into the 20th century of human, collective labor relations. We must reinstate the check-off."[855]

When Jackson came into office, the major concerns of Local 1644 were an end to the dispute with the LIU, the renewal of a check-off policy, a more formal procedure to negotiate contracts, and an improvement in workers' wages and benefits. Early in Jackson's tenure, there were signs that the new administration would be open to working with AFSCME to meet these requests. In March 1974, the council approved Jackson's proposal for a pay raise for the 6,466 lowest paid public employees, increased health benefits, and a change to on-the-street garbage pick-up that would reduce sanitation workers' work load.[856] Then later in the year the city council passed an ordinance that allowed for dues checkoff by the city for any union that signed up at least 50 percent of its bargaining unit. While this ordinance did not give Local 1644 exclusive bargaining rights, it effectively ended the threat of LIU because AFSCME quickly signed up a

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[855] Speech, Labor Awards Banquet, April 7, 1974, Box 1, Folder 23, Maynard Jackson Mayoral Administrative records, 1968-1994, Archives Research Center, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center, Atlanta, Georgia, (Hereafter Maynard Jackson Records).

[856] Hank Ezell, "Garbage, Pay Hike Package Approved," *Atlanta Journal,* March 19, 1974 in Herbert Guthman "Scrapbook of news clippings related to Atlanta's urban development issues in 1974," *Ivan Allen, Jr. Digital Collection*, Georgia Tech University, accessed at https://ivanallen.iac.gatech.edu/omeka/items/show/420 (Hereafter Herbert Guthman Scrapbook).

majority of eligible city employees. The ordinance, though, came with an important caveat: the dues check-off privilege was dependent on unions restraining their workers from nearly any job action including demonstrations, pickets, slowdowns, work stoppages, and formal strikes. Violation of these restrictions could result in at least a ninety-day suspension of the dues check-off. Jackson supported and signed the ordinance.[857]

There were, however, early signs that the Jackson administration would not be that different from the Massell administration. For one, Jackson was adamant that city workers did not have the right to strike. Shortly after his inauguration he told the reporter of a popular alternative newspaper that he "does not, and has never, supported the right of municipal workers to strike."[858] AFSCME could not have really expected a mayor to support illegal job actions.

More disconcerting for Local 1644 was the administration's refusal to develop a formalized labor relations system. As even the city's own labor consultants advised the Jackson administration, developing a system beyond its ad hoc approach – which the

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[857] Yancy, "The Spectre of Public Unionism," 221-228.

[858] Jon Jacobs, "Maynard Something New?" *Great Speckled Bird*, January 7, 1974, 3. Government officials held different views on the right of public sector organizing and public sector collective bargaining but there were few officials who supported the right of public sector workers to strike. New York state, for example, passed the Taylor law in 1967, that provided a right to public sector union membership, and a mediation process, but attached stiff penalties to public sector strikes. In 1971 only Vermont, Hawaii, and Pennsylvania allowed some form of public sector employee strike. A 1970 Pennsylvania public employees' law sanctioned the right to strike unless it "endangered the 'welfare health, and safety of the general public." Freeman, *Working-Class New York*, 211; Harry H. Wellington and Ralph K. Winter, Jr., *The Unions and the Cities: Studies in Unionism in Government,* (Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 1971), 170; Shelton, "Against the Public," 55.

administration referred to as "meet and confer" – would reduce the chance of labor conflicts and personnel decisions that were only made in times of crisis. Jackson's administration, however, continued the ad hoc approach of his predecessors despite his publicized support for a more formalized labor relations apparatus. Jackson, after all, was the only representative at the Georgia Municipal Association's annual convention in 1976 to vote in favor of collective bargaining rights for public employees.[859] And when he oversaw the restructuring of the administrative departments in 1974, Jackson implemented a new Bureau of Labor Relations that was intended to ease the communication between employees, Local 1644, and the city.[860] The Jackson administration, however, avoided entering into negotiations with AFSCME over wages, civil service reforms, and a "memorandum of understanding." AFSCME area director Leamon Hood called the city's labor relations system "unstable, irratic [sic] and contradictory … a glaring example of the duplicity… of this administration."[861] Jackson understood the mechanisms that could be used to help create relatively peaceful labor relations, but he chose not to use them.

While Jackson could have sought ways to more thoroughly formalize labor relations, it was likely that this alone would not have prevented increasing hostility between the two sides. Long-time city administrator Dan Sweat argued that an essential element in

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[859] "A Position Paper by Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson on Labor Relations in Atlanta," May 25, 1977, Box 143, Folder 5, AFSCME, Office of the President: Jerry Wurf Records, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University (Hereafter Jerry Wurf Collection).

[860] Yancy, "The Spectre of Public Unionism," 247-249.

[861] Yancy, "The Spectre of Public Unionism", 240.

maintaining good relations with city workers was to make an attempt to improve the workplace and pay adequate wages and benefits.[862] As the expectations of city workers increased, it became more difficult for the city to meet these demands, especially as the city struggled to balance spending and revenue beginning around 1975.

Atlanta did not have the urban fiscal crises that New York City, or to a lesser extent Philadelphia, Baltimore and Detroit, faced.[863] Its relative fiscal security was evident in its ability to continue city employment levels remarkably well compared to other cities in this era. During labor negotiations, city officials bragged that they had zero layoffs whereas Philadelphia had 750, Detroit 1,575, and New York 20,000.[864] Unlike these cities, Atlanta had not turned to debt financing as municipal social service and payroll spending expanded in the 1960s. The state put strong limitations on the city budget and debt financing. Atlanta was "not allowed to allocate revenues unless they are collected," that is the city could not go into debt to pay for the general operations – a large portion of which was spent on personnel. While this protected the city against some of the fiscal crises of the era, the constraint on spending did leave the city in a vulnerable position,

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[862] Speech, "Maintaining Essential Services During a Municipal Strike," July 28, 1970, Box 10, Folder 6, Dan E Sweat Jr. Papers, P20002-06M, Georgia State University Special Collections, Georgia State University Library, Georgia State University, Atlanta, Georgia.

[863] See Fein, *Fear City*; Jane Berger, "'There is Tragedy on Both Sides of the Layoffs': Privatization and the Urban Crisis in Baltimore," *International Labor and Working Class History* 71 (Spring 2007): 36.

[864] Memorandum, Patricia Watson to Sam Hider, July 16, 1976, Series B, Box 114, Folder 10, Maynard Jackson Records.

largely because of the flight of capital out of the city and the resulting difficulty the city had in collecting revenue.[865]

As with spending, revenue collecting in Atlanta was also constrained by state law. The state prohibited the city from collecting many sources of revenue, leaving Atlanta heavily dependent on property taxes. To increase spending then the city needed revenue from property tax to continue to rise. From the mid- 1970s the city had no such luck. In 1975, during the recession, the city collected "a dangerously low" percentage of available property taxes. The property tax base of the city declined from 1976 to 1977. Thus, the city found itself in a difficult situation, constrained in its ability to raise wages and increase benefits for all of its employees.[866] The dilemma Jackson faced is clear from a discussion he had with a reporter about his "joint venture" policies in 1975, and his larger goal of improving black Atlantans position in the economy. "I'm a liberal down to my toes …I'm going to form a coalition of liberals," he explained. He added a caveat, "while maintaining a conservative fiscal posture, but advancing liberal concepts." Given the budgetary constraints of the city, Local 1644's demands for higher wages threatened Jackson's plan of "advancing liberal concepts" while also "maintaining a conservative fiscal posture."[867]

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[865] Steven R. Gretenstein, Ned O'Hearn, Barbara S. Wyne, "The Urban Fiscal Crisis in Atlanta," Research Atlanta, Inc., 1979, ii. Accessed from Georgia State University Digital Library.

[866] Steven R. Gretenstein, Ned O'Hearn, Barbara S. Wyne, "The Urban Fiscal Crisis in Atlanta," Research Atlanta, Inc., 1979, iii.

[867] Phil Garner, "Joint-Venturing: A Piece of the Pie, *The Atlanta Constitution,* September 28, 1975, 28.

While Jackson opposed any spending that would put the city in a deficit, he fought for increased revenue but faced opposition from the city council. In late 1974, as the city began to plan for a reduction of revenue in 1975, Jackson told the press that Atlanta had not run a "deficit…since 1937 and I guarantee you that we are not going to start now."[868] For members of the city council, the best way to prevent deficit was to avoid increasing and if possible reduce spending on personnel. Council member Herbert Guthman, a white conservative businessman from Atlanta's tony Buckhead neighborhood and frequent opponent of Mayor Jackson's spending proposals, recommended that the city make no new hires, give no new raises, remove unfulfilled positions in the budget, and if necessary terminate non-emergency positions.[869] Jackson, however, did not want to take as drastic an approach in preventing a deficit. In order to fill an expected budget deficit, Jackson recommended a property tax increase. The city council rejected Jackson's tax hike and instead passed a much smaller tax increase. Jackson denounced the council's tax as a "major triumph for the business community" and a defeat "for the masses of people." For Jackson, providing city services was essential to making Atlanta "a first class city" and to do this Atlanta needed "first class taxes."[870] In order to balance the budget with lower tax-revenues, the city council also agreed to five unpaid furlough days for city employees in 1975, which amounted to an average of a two percent pay cut for each

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[868] Hank Ezell, "No Deficit in 1975, Jackson Promises," *Atlanta Journal,* October 3, 1974, Herbert Guthman Scrapbook.

[869] Hank Ezell, "No Deficit in 1975, Jackson Promises." *Atlanta Journal,* October 3, 1974, Herbert Guthman Scrapbook.

[870] Hank Ezell, "Tax is Essential in Jackson's View," *Atlanta Journal,* December 11, 1974, Herbert Guthman Scrapbook.

worker.[871] During negotiations with AFSCME, Jackson had to keep in mind these revenue-raising restraints imposed by the city council.

While the city continued to frustrate public employees with half-measures and insincere efforts, the union responded with demonstrations and the threat of strikes. In many ways Local 1644 was just following the national trend of increasing militancy of public employees. Inflation and municipal spending cuts worked together to drive the workers' discontent. Inflation ate into workers' paychecks, which amplified workers' anger over reductions in spending and inaction by elected city officials.[872] In early March unionized workers at Grady Memorial Hospital held a rally to protest threatened cutbacks to hospital services due to budget shortfalls.[873] In October of the same year, AFSCME's public school employees joined with Atlanta's public school teachers, represented by the National Education Association, in a one-day strike.[874] Then in February 1976 Local 1644 held, according to a local news station, "a stormy demonstration that prevented the

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[871] John Head, "Jackson Concedes Defeat in 3 Mil Tax Hike Drive," December 20, 1974, *Atlanta Journal,* Herbert Guthman Scrapbook.

[872] For more on public sector militancy and the backlash in the 1970s see McCartin, "A Wagner Act for Public Employees," 123-148; McCartin, "Fire the Hell out of Them": 67-92; McCartin, *Collision Course*; Jon Shelton, "Against the Public," 55-75; Jon Shelton, *Teacher Strik*e!; Joseph Hower, "'A Threshold Moment'"; Steve Golin, *The Newark Teacher Strikes: Hopes on the Line* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002); Paul Johnston, *Success While Others Fail.*

[873] J.D. Cade and Z. Zumbrunnen, "Grady Budget Crisis: What Goes First?" *The Great Speckled Bird,* February 12,1975, 1.

[874] B. Drummond Ayres, Jr. "Atlanta Teachers Strike; Return to Work Ordered," *New York Times,* October 15, 1975, 49; "Atlanta School Employes Back to Work Under a Court Order," *New York Times*, October 16, 1975, 42.

Atlanta city council from holding its regular meeting."[875] Two weeks later, Leamon Hood led organized Atlanta school workers in a demonstration that disrupted a board of education meeting.[876]

These increasingly assertive tactics struck a nerve with Atlanta's white press, which described union leaders as extremists willing to subvert properly elected officials. "On two occasions," wrote one columnist, "unruly gangs from municipal unions have transformed what were orderly meetings into commotion and turmoil in which no public business could be attended to." The writer was concerned that Jackson was going to "sit passively by" while "militant unions create chaos and anarchy." If Jackson failed to respond, the author suggested**,** "the power" Jackson had in leading the city would be "transferred to union officials."[877]

Jackson did not hold the *Journal's* view of Local 1644. But editorials like this one revealed one pole of the dispute over municipal wages and public sector union power, with Local 1644 at the other pole. Jackson throughout 1976 attempted to find a position between these two poles. However, in part because of his concern about fiscal responsibility, it was difficult for Jackson, when finally pressured to choose a side, to side with the union. In mid-March 1976, Jackson spelled out the middle ground he attempted to hold. He assured workers that he and the city council "were deeply concerned about

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[875] Television News Editorial, Paul Raymon, "A Useless Show," TV5 WAGA-TV, February 17, 1976, Series B, Box 114, Folder 9, Maynard Jackson Records.

[876] Television News Editorial, Paul Raymon, "Damaging Demonstrations," TV5 WAGA-TV, March 2, 1976, Series B, Box 114, Folder 9, Maynard Jackson Records.

[877] Editorial, "Who's In Charge," *Atlanta Journal,* March 3, 1976, 18.

and clearly recognize the economic plight of our employees." But "the City simply did not have the resources which would permit a pay increase…we cannot give what we do not have."[878] Of course, had Jackson wanted to raise taxes and had he convinced the city council to do so then the city would have had money to spend. Instead Jackson promised to not raise taxes, prioritizing fiscal responsibility and the desire of homeowners and their city council members who were against increases to their property taxes.

In March 1976, as the threat of an AFSCME strike loomed, Jackson agreed to increase wages. On March 23, Local 1644 and the mayor reached a tentative agreement that included an immediate ten-cent an hour raise for low-paid employees, an additional $500 raise for all city employees, an increased payment for health insurance for employee dependents, only a one-day furlough, and a promise of no layoffs. The next day the city council passed the agreement but made the $500 raise contingent on the mayor cutting three hundred vacant positions that had been earmarked in the budget in order to fund the pay increase. This placed all responsibility for meeting the agreement on the mayor. As it became clear that summer that Jackson could not easily fund the $500 raise, the union increasingly attacked Jackson who would not or could not follow through with the March agreement.[879]

Jackson did not seem concerned that AFSCME openly attacked him. Even if he was sympathetic to the workers' demands, he was not short on ego and refused to be intimidated by the union. If anything, he seemed to relish the confrontation and did little

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[878] Statement by Maynard Jackson, March 11, 1976, Series B, Box 114, Folder 9, Maynard Jackson Records.

[879] "City Employes Union Mulls Walkout Action," *Atlanta Daily World,* July 9, 1976, 2.

to change the dynamic. In the margins of his notes during the March 1976 negotiations, Jackson bragged that "[the union] tried to trick me and I caught 'em! Handled successfully by my using very light touch."[880] Undoubtedly this approach helped lead to the personal hostilities that developed in the year-plus negotiation, a dynamic that benefitted the popular mayor.

Early in the confrontation, Jackson turned to black community leaders for support. In March 1976 Reverend Joseph L. Roberts, the minister at Ebenezer Baptist Church, the church famously led by Martin Luther King Sr. and his son, wrote a letter to the editor of the *Constitution,* calling for communication between the union and the mayor to continue. Written at the request of Sam Hider, the head of the city's labor relations department, a former organizer for the United Mine Workers, and member of Ebenezer Baptist, Roberts argued that both the mayor and the union showed "good faith in their willingness to continue coming to the bargaining table."[881] Roberts hoped that the two parties could continue this good faith effort to "spare our city a crippling strike." The reverend reminded the workers that they needed to work "within the financial limitations and restraints of the city during these hard times." In effect, Roberts was mimicking Jackson's approach to the confrontation. Coming from the pastor of Martin Luther King Jr's former church, the message would gain a legitimacy that Jackson alone repeating the message could not attain.[882]

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[880] Handwritten Note of Meetings, March 24, 1976, Series B, Box 2, Folder 13, Maynard Jackson Records.

[881] For more on Samuel Hider see Yancy, "Spectre of Public Unionism," 249-250.

After Jackson made it clear to the union that he was unable to fully fund the $500 raise, the union turned to protests to force Jackson's hand. In July and December 1976 and January 1977, sanitation workers held one-day walkouts. Prior to the July walkout, Local 1644 members also participated in several days of work slowdowns, a tactic the union spun as a "safety program."[883] During this period, Jackson attempted to make concessions to appease the union, even if it was not the promised $500 increase. In July, after the union members' first walkout – which they called "City Employees Pride Day" – the local, joined by Jerry Wurf, and Jackson renewed negotiations with Congressman Andrew Young and Dr. Ralph Blackwell, a former SCLC activist and director of the Southern Rural Action, serving as mediators.[884] After this meeting Jackson agreed to try to use federal counter-cyclical funds to finance the wage increases. However, Jackson faced opposition to his plan from city council and the press.[885]

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[882]Letter to the Editor from Joseph L. Roberts to Hal Gulliver, Editor *Atlanta Constitution*, March 22, 1976, Box 114, Folder 10, Maynard Jackson Records. This letter did not appear in the edition of the *Atlanta Constitution* that the author consulted.

[883] For a timeline of strikes and walkouts see "Strike Position Paper of AFSCME Local 1644," April 15, 1977, Box 33, Folder 23, AFSCME Local 1644 records; "Tough Stance: City Tells Workers No Raise This Year," *Atlanta Constitution,* July 21, 1976, located in Box 114, Folder 11, Maynard Jackson Records; Memorandum, George J, Berry to Members of Atlanta City Council, February 7, 1977, Box 114, Folder 12, Maynard Jackson Records; Press Release, "City Goes Back on Promise." AFSCME #1644 General Strike Committee, July 12, 1976, Series B, Box 114, Folder 11, Maynard Jackson Records.

[884] "Statement by Leamon Hood, AFSCME Area Director for Community Bulletin – Response to Maynard Jackson," ca. April 1977, Box 33, Folder 22, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

[885] In 1973 Congress passed the Comprehensive Employment Training Act to distribute funds to state and local governments to hire and train unemployed workers. It was intended to be used as counter cyclical funding during the recession, similar to the Works Progress Administration during the New Deal. "President Signs Manpower Bill," *New*

Eventually that Fall, the council agreed to allow federal funds to be used for one-time bonuses. Employees first received $170 dollars and then the council added another $94 dollars in January 1977. The city also promised to pay $94 dollars again in April and June. These small bonuses did little to appease the workers or the union.[886] In February, workers showed their frustration over negotiations, and anger over working in inclement weather, by striking for five days.[887] After the strike, contract negotiations intensified, but, if anything, both sides seemed even less inclined to compromise. After talks broke down in late March, city workers voted to strike.

The Strike, the Ad Campaign, and Jackson's Response

While the walkout had been in the making for more than a year, the actual strike was relatively spontaneous. Local 1644 renewed negotiations with the city on March 10. In this new round of negotiations, the union asked for liability insurance for workers involved in vehicle accidents, increased hospital benefits, and a fifty cent an hour raise for its members. This was a bold request amounting to close to a $1000 dollar or on average a 15 percent raise for employees who made on average $7,000 to $7,500 a year. The previous year the city was unwilling to meet the full $500 demand, yet some workers

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York Times, December 29, 1973, 1. For more on debate over CETA funds in Atlanta see Telegram, Elliott Levitas to Maynard Jackson, August 2, 1976, Series B, Box 114, Folder 11, Maynard Jackson Records; Jim Gray, "Jackson Pay Hike Plan Called Irresponsible," *Atlanta Constitution,* August 6, 1976, in Herbert Guthman Scrapbook.

[886] Memorandum, Tom Jennings to Don Wasserman, February 17, 1977, Box 143, Folder 6, Jerry Wurf Collection.

[887] Flyer, "AFSCME Local 1644 Special Bulletin," February 22, 1977, Box 7, Folder 10, AFSCME Local 1644 Records; "Strike Position Paper of AFSCME Local 1644," April 15, 1977, Box 33, Folder 23, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

and local leaders in Local 1644, apparently eager for a confrontation with the mayor, demanded twice that amount. As one union member told city leaders**,** "you can't buy us for the same price you bought us for last year." The negotiations, not surprisingly, went nowhere. The union even claimed that the city refused to negotiate and walked out of a meeting, a charge that city negotiators denied. On March 28, about one hundred and fifty union members attempted to meet with Jackson at his office in city hall but were denied access. After a confrontation with police, the union members, in the lobby of City Hall, voted to strike. All but four of the union members present voted to walk off the job.[888]

It is not clear how a group of one hundred and fifty members in an impromptu meeting at City Hall could vote for a strike for a union that claimed to represent 1,300 members. The existing records contain no references to discussions about the legitimacy of the strike among local or international representatives. Despite the increased hostilities between AFSCME and City Hall, it was a surprise to AFSCME leaders, local and international, that the workers voted to strike. On two other occasions in the previous few months, once in December and again during the five-day wildcat strike in February, union members had voted against a strike.[889] At these meetings Leamon Hood recommended against going out on strike, but according to Joseph McCartin members pushing for a strike thought "the international" wanted "to avoid a strike and thus preserve the dues checkoff." As dues checkoffs were integral to the success of union

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[888] Jay Lawrence, "City Union Vows to Halt Services," *Atlanta Constitution,* March 29, 1977, 1A.

[889] Jay Lawrence, "City Union Vows to Halt Services," *Atlanta Constitution,* March 29, 1977, 1A.

activists, this certainly would have been a valid reason, but one that militant workers saw only as cynical self-preservation.[890]

Most union officials were caught off guard by the strike vote. AFSCME officials in Washington were not expecting the workers to vote for a strike. As Harlan Joye, a longtime Local 1644 official remembered, "there was no preparation, there was no setup for it… It was people in the heat of passion that said, 'We're gonna do this. Screw 'em.'"[891] Leamon Hood explained to Joseph McCartin that he allowed "the strike vote to go forward without objection that afternoon" because he "was confident that the union had enough community support to win a battle with the mayor." This, of course, was a massive overestimation of AFSCME's standing in the community. Mike Dowling, a public relations expert for AFSCME international, suggested to Sam Hider that Hood and other local leaders had "lost control of the local committee" that voted for the strike. Dowling also disavowed that the international had any influence on the strike, "the situation" he told Hider, "was in the hands of the local reps."[892] For a small group of workers, the relationship between the organized workers and the city had simply deteriorated beyond repair by March 1977.

For more than a year, the union had pushed Jackson and the city council to raise wages while the city pushed back, conceded to some demands, and then pushed back

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[890] McCartin, "Managing Discontent," 287.

[891] Harlon Joye, Interviewed by Philip Laporte, May 9, 2006. Southern Labor Archives, Special Collections & Archives, Georgia State University Library, Atlanta, GA., 36-37.

[892] Memorandum, Sam Hider to Maynard Jackson, April 12, 1977, Box 108, Folder 3, Maynard Jackson Records.

again. As this conflict continued, some workers had grown increasingly restive over work conditions and salary. Inflation played a large role in the workers' discontent. By early 1977, inflation was up to 12 percent, returning to levels it had been at during the oil crisis of 1974. Economists attributed most of the increase to rise in consumer prices.[893] As prices shot up, the value of workers income was deteriorating quickly. Workers had not gotten a real raise since 1974, instead receiving occasional bonuses that did not keep up with cost of living.[894] The raises the lowest-paid city workers received in the two years leading up to the strike did not even keep up with other public sector workers in the region.[895] Union leaders and strikers, frequently emphasized the damage inflation was doing to their pay checks. "Even the few gains over the last 30 months represent less than a 3% increase in wages while the cost of living has gone up 21%," Leamon Hood described in a statement justifying the strike.[896] And at rallies striking workers carried signs that read "One Step Won't Help," and "The Cost of Living is 18% the City Offers 4%."[897] For an impulsive minority of workers, desperate for a raise to keep up with

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[893] LeRoy Pope, "Inflation Soars," *Atlanta Constitution,* March 20, 1977

[894] Jay Lawrence, "City Union Vows to Halt Services," *Atlanta Constitution,* March 29, 1977, 1A; "An Open Letter to Organized Labor from Atlanta AFSCME Local 1644," April 6, 1977, Box 33, Folder 22, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

[895] Statement by Maynard Jackson, March 10, 1976, Box 108, Folder 2, Maynard Jackson Records.

[896] "Statement by Leamon Hood, AFSCME Area Director, for Community Bulletin," no date, Box 33, Folder 22, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

[897] See photograph on cover of Zieger, *For Jobs and Freedom,* hardback edition. Photograph taken by Cecil Layne; private collection of Leamon Hood.

inflation, Jackson's unwillingness to meet with the workers that day was the final indignity.

As Harlon Joye explained, the spontaneous vote "was not the way to start a strike; not if you have any idea of winning." There was no "preparation, coordination" that was "so essential in prevailing in a job action."[898] Because there was no preparation to strike, it was not clear to union officials how many workers would join in the strike. As it turned out, the strike had surprisingly little support from the traditionally militant sanitation workers. Even the sanitation workers who participated in the February wildcat strike opposed the strike vote in March. Only about 45 percent of sanitation workers, the largest segment of city workers, joined the strike, while the aviation department had 65 percent, the waterworks department had 85 percent, and the sewer department had 95 percent of its workers go out on strike.[899] The union certainly had well-organized departments ready to strike, they just were not that strategically placed to cause the sort of aggravation on the general public that sanitation workers could. A unified strike by sanitation workers would have brought together a larger, louder, and possibly more persuasive group of striking workers. A unified sanitation department out on strike would also have stopped garbage collection and created a highly visible and odorous nuisance for the city.

Despite the lack of preparation and the private opposition from international leaders, the strike continued. On April 2, six days into the strike, and, as we will see, a day after

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[898] Harlon Joye, Interviewed by Laporte, 37.

[899] Report to Bob Killingsworth and John Reuther, "Strike Being Conducted by Members of Local 1544 in Atlanta, Georgia, March 28, 1977, Box 143, Folder 6, Jerry Wurf Collection.

the mayor fired the workers, three hundred workers in a more formal meeting voted to continue the strike. At this meeting, Leamon Hood did not try to talk the workers out of continuing the strike, instead "he played heavily on Maynard Jackson's actions in 1970."[900]

Jackson responded to the strike in almost the same exact manner as Sam Massell, though with more tact and community support. On March 31, after three days of negotiations, Jackson fired more than 900 strikers out of a blue-collar workforce of 2,700.[901] Like Massell, Jackson held a firm line and refused to meet with any more mediators, despite that very suggestion from Local 1644. Also like Massell, Jackson insisted that March 31 was the deadline for city to be able to add any additional changes to the budget. For the union, strikers, and strike supporters these last two positions were particularly galling. Jackson, after all, had made great hay in 1970 over the fact that Massell was acting irresponsibly by not accepting arbitration and by refusing to bend with regards to the budget deadline. Jackson's decision effectively ended the strike. Two weeks after Jackson fired the workers, trash pick-up returned to 79 percent normal services. The city was able to return to this level of service with returning workers – more than 400 fired workers returned to their job in the first two weeks – and hiring over two

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[900] Tom Baxter, "Strikers to Stay Out," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 3, 1977, 1A.

[901] The press at first reported 1,001 fired workers. However, by the end of the strike the press and the administration rounded down to closer to 900 fired workers. For 1,001 see John Turner, "To Talk Again, City, Union Say," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 10, 1977, 6A. For 900 see Lyn Martin, "Protesters Dump Trash," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 13, 1977, 1A, 10A; Jay Lawrence, "Only 18 Jobs Are Left in City Garbage Dept.," *Atlanta Consitution,* April 15, 1977, 16A.

hundred replacement workers. The city had all but won, but a hardcore group of around two hundred workers remained on strike until the beginning of May.[902]

The prospects of a victory for the strikers was damaged considerably when, a day after the strike vote, the first advertisement of an AFSCME international publicity campaign against Jackson ran in local and national newspapers. The first ad compared Jackson's management to the city's underperforming National Football League team, the Atlanta Falcons. "The Falcons Aren't the Only Losing Team in Atlanta. Try City Hall," the ad read in bold letters. Atlanta, the ad warned, was going through the same urban crises that cities like Newark, New York, Baltimore, and Detroit with "higher taxes, poorer services, boarded up schools, dirtier streets" were experiencing. AFSCME's ad blamed poor services and high taxes for "an annual exodus of 6,300 taxpaying citizens." The ad also targeted the poor administrative abilities of the Jackson regime, "Atlanta home owners' taxes soar, while $18 million in taxes, most of it owned by business go uncollected." The ad finished by asking "Will Atlanta join New York and the other troubled cities in the Northeast? It could. Unless Atlanta can put together a winning team at the top."[903]

Throughout the month-long strike Jackson and the press hammered down on the connections between the strike and the ad. Even more than the strike itself, this ad got

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[902] See Memorandum, Frederick T. Artis to Chester J Funnye', April 11, 1977 and Memorandum, Artis to Funnye', April 13, 1977, Box 114, Folder 15, Maynard Jackson Records.

[903] AFSCME advertisement, no date, Box 33, Folder 22, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

under the mayor's skin. Jackson charged that the union, in the ads, was "attacking and belittling the city of Atlanta, its citizens, and my administration."[904] For Jackson, it was all the evidence he needed that the strike was a coordinated campaign by the international to attack the city and undermine the mayor. Bill Shipp in the *Constitution* called the ad-campaign "baffling" and an "enigmatic campaign without point."[905] One Atlantan wrote the mayor that he believed the ad-campaign "was a disservice to all the citizens of Atlanta…the union has selfishly hurt the Atlanta image."[906]

Most significantly, the ad campaign attacking the city's first black mayor gave civil rights organizations, religious leaders, and other black civic elites further reason to back Jackson in the dispute. In announcing its opposition to the strike and its support of Jackson, the local branch of the NAACP focused on AFSCME's ad campaign. "The present crisis has been unfortunately and wrongly personalized by the unwarranted attacks on Maynard Jackson and the City of Atlanta by AFSCME in the local and national press."[907] SCLC, late in the strike, condemned the ad campaign as an "affront to our citizens" that could "only bring harm to the entire city including, of course, the workers they purport to favor."[908] AFSCME even recognized that a group of black

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[904] "A Position Paper by Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson On Labor Relations in Atlanta," no date, Box 143, Folder 4, Jerry Wurf Collection.

[905] Bill Shipp, "The Anti-Jackson Ad Campaign," *Atlanta Constitution,* March 29, 1977, 4A.

[906] Letter, Andrew Lees to Mayor and City Council, April 1, 1977, Box 114, Folder 14, Maynard Jackson Records.

[907] Memorandum, Special Meeting of Atlanta Branch of NAACP, April 4, 1977, Box 114, Folder 13, Maynard Jackson Records.

ministers called the Ministry Alliance, which the union believed was supportive of the strike, was "critical of [the] public relations ad campaign which is critical of Mayor Jackson."[909] Former city administrator Dan Sweat believed that the ad campaign was the crucial factor in guaranteeing Jackson maintained wide swaths of community support. "That's what tilted it over." It "really incensed a lot of rank-and-file people who would have been sympathetic."[910]

Yet, contrary to Jackson and the press's claim, the international did not know the local would go on strike when it scheduled the release of the ad for the following day. In fact, the ad campaign, in part, was a ploy by Wurf and the international to get Jackson and the city to renew negotiations. Wurf did not explain why he thought that an ad campaign attacking Jackson would convince the mayor to be more receptive to negotiations, especially since Wurf was transparent about the second reason for running the ad: it was part of AFSCME international's campaign to replace Jackson with a more labor-friendly mayor that fall, except no such candidate existed.[911] But it is clear Wurf never intended for a strike to occur alongside his ad campaign. In part to save face and distance the international from the defeat, AFSCME spokesman Don McClure admitted that "Jerry

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[908] Jay Lawrence, "Ads, Daddy King Cited in Strike Failure," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 29, 1977, 21A.

[909] Memorandum, John Reuther to Bob Clinesmith, March 30, 1977, Box 143, Folder 6, Wurf Collection.

[910] Jay Lawrence, "Ads, Daddy King Cited in Strike Failure," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 29, 1977, 21A.

[911] Ken Bode, "Crying Wurf: Atlanta Calls AFSCME's Bluff," *The New Republic,* July 2, 1977, 15.

Wurf hated the strike because he knew it couldn't be won. He didn't want a strike at the same time as this ad campaign."[912]

This message of the ad, too, suggests that AFSCME did not intend for it to be used during the strike. The ad described the city as struggling financially with an inept mayor. There certainly is nothing in the ad's message that would appear to help a group of striking workers seeking to convince a mayor to increase wages. If the city was near the financial crisis that New York had just experienced, then it would not have had the money to pay the workers. If anything, the ad supported Jackson's message that the city simply did not have the funds.

Thanks in part to the ad campaign, Jackson made the strike about the unbridled ambition of the international union instead of the workers themselves. Jackson publicly agreed that "the employes on strike need a pay increase. The employes deserve a pay increase. But," he added, "we don't have it."[913] AFSCME, he insisted, ignored this argument, and instead was intent on beating the mayor at all costs. The mayor attacked "irresponsible actions of AFSCME leaders who purport to represent the employers' best interests." "AFSCME," he charged, "has put city employees in the position of being in danger of losing everything."[914] Jackson believed AFSCME was specifically targeting him because it viewed him as an easy target in a strategically important location. "It was

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[912] Jay Lawrence, "Ads, Daddy King Cited in Strike Failure," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 29, 1977, 21A.

[913] Jay Lawrence, "Union Rejects Rehiring Bid," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 4, 1977, 1A.

[914] "Statement by Mayor Maynard Jackson," March 30, 1977, Box 114, Folder 12, Maynard Jackson Records.

and is AFSCME's intent to cripple major southeastern urban cities by making calculated, outrageous demands of mayors, especially southern, Afro-American mayors with a long-standing liberal reputation."[915]

Black and white civic leaders came out swiftly and strongly against the strike. An ad hoc group formed that included black civic and religious leaders Martin Luther King Sr., Lyndon Wade of the Urban League, Howard Creecy, vice-president of the Atlanta Baptist Ministers Union and former member of Operation Breadbasket. White business and civic leaders Dan Sweat, the president of Central Atlanta Progress, Franklin O'Neal of the Atlanta League, and Thomas Mammal of the chamber of commerce. And neighborhood association leaders, Joe Drolet of the Citywide League of Neighborhoods, and Rebecca English of the Citywide Advisory Council on Public Housing. This was a group that included representatives of the white business elite, some of the most respected black civic leaders, and representatives of the newly influential interracial neighborhood movement.

Together they released a statement supporting Jackson and denouncing the "union which purports to represent some city workers, while using these same city workers in a cynical power play aimed at taking over city government in Atlanta." The group followed the same line as the Jackson administration in targeting the union while showing sympathy "with the plight of the workers of our city." The group depicted the union as an outsider organization that was attempting to interfere with a mayor who "has been

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[915] "Draft of Position Statement Concerning Recent and Continuing Actions by the America Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) International Union," Maynard Jackson, May 17, 1917, Box 114, Folder 16, Maynard Jackson Records.

attempting to meet the needs of the people of Atlanta."[916] Martin Luther King Sr., gave the most emphatic statement against the union and the strike. "If any group comes to try to destroy our town, we are against it, with all the power we have." "If you do everything you can and don't get satisfaction," King added, "then fire the hell out of them."[917]

The black press responded to the strike the same way as leading black organizations and civic leaders. Both the *Inquirer and* the *Voice* were sympathetic to the workers; "laborers are people too. They need to be paid a decent wage."[918] But both newspapers supported Maynard Jackson. Their major concern was how the strike and any possible raises would affect the larger Atlanta public. "The strike is against the people of Atlanta." "The public," an *Inquirer* editorial wrote, "which has made room in its beleaguered, bills-paying activities, finds itself once again making sacrifices."[919] For J. Lowell Ward, publisher of the *Voice,* "[t]ax payers must pay for garbage collection. They must pay for it whether they are employed or not…It is the taxpayers who suffer when the public sector decides to strike."[920] As we've seen, the *Voice* also sided with the "little man in the middle" in 1970. But by 1977, it was no longer the little man stuck between two equally

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[916] Press Release, Joint Statement by M.L. King Sr. et al., no date, Box 33, Folder 22, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

[917] Jay Lawrence, "City Strikers Clash with Job Applicants," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 5, 1977, 2A.

[918] J. Lowell Ware, "Somethings the Mayor and AFSCME Should Know," *Atlanta Voice,* April 9, 1977, 1.

[919] Editorial, "Striking the City," *Atlanta Inquirer,* April 9, 1977, 2.

[920] "J. Lowell Ware, "AFSCME's Attempt to Defeat the Mayor," *Atlanta Voice,* April 23, 1977, 1.

at fault parties; instead it was the workers and their union making unfair demands on city politicians who insisted the money did not exist, and who received the benefit of the doubt from the *Voice* and *Inquirer.* In the editorials the union was depicted as a "special interest group," and the strikers were rebuked for following "leaders whose paychecks are still coming while one thousand and one have theirs cut off."[921] "The mayor is bound to us politically and morally. When his duties to the people are weighed against the priorities of any special interest group, his decisions, however painful, must be in the best interest of all the people."[922] As a black mayor, he had the legitimacy to make decisions that were accepted as best for the general black population that Sam Massell never had.

Most conspicuously, SCLC refused to support the strikers and late in the dispute came out against the union. In 1968 and to a lesser extent 1970, SCLC members provided a crucial conduit between city workers and AFSCME and Atlanta's black activists and religious communities. Yet in 1977, the organization and its leaders were all but absent. As we have seen, SCLC did not have the funding or influence it had during the 1960s. It was a more dysfunctional organization searching for ways to stay relevant in the post-civil rights era.[923] Support from SCLC would not have altered the outcome of this strike. But the absence of their leaders and the unwillingness of the organization to support the

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[921] Editorial, "Striking the City," *Atlanta Inquirer,* April 9, 1977, 2.

[922] Ware, "Somethings the Mayor and AFSCME Should Know," *Atlanta Voice,* April 9, 1977, 1.

[923] See for example, Bernard E. Garnett, "SCLC's New Leadership Trio Has Big Rebuilding Chore," *Atlanta Daily World,* August 27, 1977, 1.

strikers shows how the organizational composition and possibilities of a labor-civil rights coalition had changed by 1977.

Ralph Abernathy played no role in the strike. In February 1977, Abernathy had stepped down as SCLC president – a position he held, except for a short period in 1973, since King's assassination – in order to run for the congressional seat that Andrew Young vacated. Abernathy failed to reach the run-off, running behind both Wyche Fowler, the eventual winner, and civil rights activist John Lewis. During the month-long strike, Abernathy campaigned for Lewis ahead of the April 15 run-off and focused on his pastoral responsibilities at West Hunter Baptist Church. Otherwise, he kept a low-profile.[924]

Hosea Williams, like Abernathy, stayed clear of the strike. Williams was now a state senator, elected in 1974, but remained, as ever, a proponent of protests and civil disturbances. He was also still an influential member in SCLC, despite his sometimes antagonistic relationship with other leaders of the organization. In fact, in August 1977 SCLC created the role of executive director and appointed Williams, who had allegedly threatened to leave the organization unless he was given a leadership position.[925] As Williams entered politics, however, his role as the voice and figurehead for worker protests decreased. The Metro Atlanta/DeKalb SCLC still existed in some inconsequential form, and the Poor People's Union continued to represent workers at the

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[924] "Rev. Abernathy Goes After Young's Seat," *Atlanta Daily World,* January 15, 1977, 3; Yvonee Shinhoster, "Political, Church, Civic Leaders for Lewis Urge Hefty Vote Tuesday," *Atlanta Daily World,* April 3, 1977, 1; Bernard E. Garnett, "Special Report: Why Lewis Was Defeated," *Atlanta Daily World,* April 16, 1977, 2.

[925] "New SCLC Leadership," *Atlanta Daily World,* August 27, 1977, 4.

Martin Luther King Sr., Nursing Home.[926] Yet as Williams promised in his 1973 campaign for city council president, he moved much of his politics from the street to the bargaining table. This did not mean that he was finished protesting. He was arrested and fined in 1976 for blocking the entrance of a federal court house to protest the lack of black contractors hired to build a new federal office building in Atlanta.[927] Also in 1976, Williams and the Metro SCLC participated in a picket and boycott at an A&P grocery store after workers complained about "racial discrimination, unfair labor practices, bad working conditions, and poor customer service practices."[928]

Despite his continued role as irritant to Atlanta's leadership and his occasional support for workplace protests, Williams was nowhere to be found during the strike. We can glean a possible insight into Williams's thinking about the strike from the Poor People Union's newspaper, *The People's Crusader*. Though not written by Williams, an editorial authored by Melba Johnson, followed the same reasoning used by Williams in his denunciation of the strike settlement in 1970. The striking city workers' demands were just, but the strikers were caught between two parties uninterested in solving the workers' problems. "The workers are being used by the union and are being denied a fair wage by the city." Johnson was particularly suspicious of the union because of its ad campaign. It appeared to her that the union was less interested in helping the workers

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[926] For the PPU's work with nursing homes see Subseries B, Box 2, Folder 7, Hosea Williams Collection.

[927] "Rep Hosea Williams, 3 Others Fined $300," *Atlanta Daily World,* April 21, 1977, 1.

[928] "SCLC Launches Citywide Boycott," *The People's Crusader,* May 7, 1976, 1, Hosea Williams Collection; "Talks on Picketing at A&P Store Held, *Atlanta Daily World,* May 6, 1976, 1.

than in picking the fight with the popular African American mayor. [929] Johnson's sympathetic stance for the workers caught in the middle was almost identical to the argument that Williams made after the conclusion of the 1970 Local 1644 strike.

Replacing Abernathy as head of SCLC was Reverend Joseph Lowery, the long-time chairman of the organization's board of directors who-was also the reverend at Central United Methodist, a former member of the Community Relations Committee (CRC), and board member of Atlanta's public transportation system, MARTA.[930] Lowery was always more strategically and politically conservative than Abernathy. In public, Lowery attempted to steer SCLC into a middle ground between the striking workers and Jackson. "Our deep concerns," Lowery wrote Jackson on behalf of SCLC board of directors, "rests with the workers whose jobs have been terminated and the impact of the strike has upon the city's administration and the community."[931] Lowery offered to create a task force that would meet with both the city and union to find an amicable solution.[932] He sent a similar telegram to Leamon Hood, but neither Hood nor Jackson took Lowery up on his offer. In a private meeting with the striking workers of Local 1644, Lowery took a less neutral

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[929] Melba Johnson, "Union and City Hall Wrong But City Employees Right," *People's Crusader,* April 29, 1977, 1, 2 in Hosea Williams Collection.

[930] See "Rev. Havlick Gets CRC Seat of Lowery," *Atlanta Daily World,* August 19, 1975, 3; "Citizens Urged to Cooperate in Reaffirming Faith in Atlanta," *Atlanta Daily World,* September 15, 1974, 1; "Rev. Lowery Acting Head of SCLC," *Atlanta Daily World*, March 4, 1977, 2.

[931] Mailgram, J.E. Lowery to Leamon Hood, April 13, 1977, Box 33, Folder 22, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

[932] Mailgram from J.E. Lowery and John Nettle to Maynard Jackson, April 14, 1977, Series B, Box 114, Folder 15, Maynard Jackson Records.

position. The SCLC president surprised Leamon Hood when he attacked the union as an "outside agitator" in front of strike leaders.[933]

Despite the response from SCLC members, the union received some support from the community. The best-known strike supporters were civil rights activists James Farmer and John Lewis. Neither man, however, was involved to the extent SCLC and other activists were in 1968 and 1970. Farmer, a co-founder of the Congress of Racial Equality, was the director of the Coalition of American Public Employees, a public sector labor union lobby and political action group comprising among others AFSCME, National Education Association, and the International Association of Fire Fighters. Farmer headlined a few rallies during the strike, and Local 1644 did its best to highlight his support of the union.[934] John Lewis also expressed support for the striking workers. But his support came belatedly, only after Lewis lost the mid-April run-off to Wyche Fowler for Andrew Young's vacated congressional seat.[935]

While not the most newsworthy, the supporter who had the most influence during the strike was probably council member James Howard. He was not alone among city council members to come out in support of the strike, although he was the most adamant

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[933] This anecdote is found in McCartin, "Managing Discontent," 288-289.

[934] Memorandum, Field Activities Center to Jerry Wurf, April 12, 1977, Box 143, Folder 6, Jerry Wurf Collection; Flyer, "We Shall Overcome!," Box 33, Folder 22, AFSCME Local 1644 Records; Tom Matthews and Vern E. Smith, "Atlanta: The Strikebreaker, *Newsweek,* April 25, 1977, 29-30.

[935] "Memorandum, Field Activities Center to Jerry Wurf, April 7, 1977, Box 143, Folder 6, Jerry Wurf Collection; Flyer, Bill O'Kain, "Lessons of the Atlanta Strike Defeat," Reprinted from *The Militant,* June 3, 1977, Box 7, Folder 3, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

supporter. Arthur Langford, at one point, also supported the strike but also was careful to show sympathy for the position Mayor Jackson was in.[936] Howard, the former AFSCME organizer, on the other hand joined his old union in attacking the mayor during the union's five-day strike in February. "I am inclined to believe that the Mayor thinks he is running a slave camp," Howard told the strikers. "Please do not allow him or the administration to intimidate you with threatening remarks. They are totally unnecessary and his entire actions are a complete farce."[937] During the April strike, Howard repeatedly sought, unsuccessfully, to find money in the budget to provide a pay increase.[938]

Other Atlanta-based civic and civil rights leaders who came out in support of the Local 1644 were those activists who were still outside the sphere of influence in the city, and many of them were women. The best known local leader who supported the strike was Ethel Mae Matthews of the Atlanta branch of the National Welfare Rights Organization. She was joined by leaders of public housing tenant organizations: Mandy Griggs of the Herndon Homes, Marian Green of the Techwood Homes, and Eva Davis of East Lake Meadows.[939] These activists were joined by the head of Atlanta's ACLU, Reverend Ralph Jackson, a Memphis-based preacher who had participated in the

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[936] Press Release, Arthur Langford, April 11, 1977, Box 114, Folder 5, Maynard Jackson Records.

[937] Letter, James Howard to Employees of the Sanitation Department, February 9, 1977, Series B, Box 114, Folder 12, Maynard Jackson Records.

[938] Lyn Martin, "General Funds for City Pay?", *Atlanta Constitution,* April 5, 1977, 2A.

[939] Flyer, "Support Strike Rally," April 19, 1977, Box 33, Folder 22, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

Memphis sanitation strike, and Atlanta University political scientist Mack Jones.[940] The supporters of the strikers were academics and leaders of grassroots, more radical organizations. Ethel Mae Matthews was a constant presence in protests throughout the 1970s, but she and her allies simply had little influence in the Jackson administration.[941] AFSCME leadership showed little interest in the support these activist women provided – AFSCME seemed most interested in the influence James Foreman brought to the protest – and did not work to cultivate a strong relationship with the NWRO or tenant organizations.

Organized labor provided the strikers with some support, John White, the long-time president of the Atlanta Labor Council, strongly condemned Jackson's actions during the strike. White and the ALC's support of the strike was joined at the national level by a telegram of support from AFL-CIO president George Meany.[942] And the national Coalition for Black Trade Unionists (CBTU), an organization formed in 1973 to provide an institution for black trade unionists frustrated with the direction of AFL-CIO under Meany, denounced "the Mayor for his actions for his actions and gall of using black workers as political pawns in his efforts to please a middle class black constituency and satisfy the white establishment."[943] CBTU representatives Charlie Hayes, a Chicago-

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[940] Flyer, "Strike Report AFSCME Local 1644," April 19, 1977, Box 33, Folder 23, AFSCME Local 1644 Records.

[941] For more on Ethel Mae Matthews see Brown-Nagin, *Courage to Dissent,* 357-430; Winston Grady-Willis, *Challenging Apartheid,* 136-142.

[942] Telegram, George Meany to John Wright, no date, Box 143, Folder 5, Jerry Wurf Collection.

based member of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butchers Union, and Cleveland Robinson, the New York City union leader who once had a short-lived partnership with Hosea Williams's Poor People's Union, participated in at least one rally for the strikers.[944]

AFCSME and the striking workers did not receive support from all worker organizations. The National Alliance of Postal and Federal Employees (NAPFE), a black-led national union of postal workers, came out strongly in support of Jackson against the striking workers. At a April luncheon for the mayor, NAPFE president Robert L. White, supported by the presidents of two Atlanta area locals, argued that Jackson was "executing the duties of his office in the best interest of his constituency."[945]

AFSCME officials believed that the community leaders' opposition to the strike had a deleterious effect on union solidarity. After the meeting where Joseph Lowery launched an attack against AFSCME's leadership, one of the prominent sanitation workers in attendance decided to return to work. Martin Luther King Sr.'s support of the mayor, according to one international representative, "caused a great deal of confusion among the employees."[946] "That Daddy King [Martin Luther King Sr.] thing really hurt us bad," concluded a local AFSCME official. "The average middle-class guy reading his

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[943] Press Release "CBTU Speaks Out on Atlanta," April 14, 1977, Box 33, Folder 22, AFSCME Local 1644 Records, Southern Labor Archives.

[944] For more on the CBTU see Cowie, *Stayin' Alive,* 57-59.

[945] "Postal Union Lauds Action by Jackson," *Atlanta Daily World,* April 26, 1977, 1.

[946] Letter, John Reuther to Bob Klingensmith, April 5, 1977, Box 143, Folder 6, Jerry Wurf Collection.

newspaper in north Atlanta must have thought, "Well, if he's against them, then they must be bad."[947]

Without the support of more influential allies in the city, Local 1644 alone was not strong enough to counter Jackson's efforts to break the strike. By the second week of the strike, Leamon Hood reported that "workers appear to be going back to work in droves."[948] At the same time, the city hired more than 200 replacement workers and claimed it had a waiting list of 1,000 more applicants. About 400 of the original 1,000 strikers remained on strike, a number that would soon winnow down to around 200 "hardcore" strikers as the rest returned to work.[949] The hardcore strikers mainly consisted of black employees of the water bureau where "only 56 of 275" had returned to work. The water bureau employee's militancy stood in stark contrast to employees of the sanitation department where "183 of 260 dismissed employes [had] returned."[950] The strike was broken.

On Tuesday, April 26, the union held a meeting with 250 remaining strikers, advising the workers to call off the strike. Disregarding the labor leaders' advice, the workers voted to continue the strike. AFSCME, however, was no longer interested in investing

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[947] Lawrence, "Ads, Daddy King, Cited in Strike Failure, *Atlanta Constitution,* April 29, 1977, 21A.

[948] Report, Field Activities Department to Jerry Wurf, April 8, 1977, Box 143, Folder 6, Jerry Wurf Collection.

[949] Memorandum by Don McClure, April 13, 1977, Box 143, Folder 6, Jerry Wurf Collection.

[950] Jay Lawrence, "Only 18 Jobs are Left in City Garbage Dept.," *Atlanta Constitution,* April 15, 1977, 16A.

money or manpower towards the lost cause. The day after the meeting, the international announced that it was pulling all support from the strike, and by the end of the week the remaining strikers agreed to return to work.[951] By late May, AFSCME reached an agreement with the city to hire back the last hundred or so striking workers still unemployed and to drop any charges resulting from pickets against most striking workers, in exchange for AFSCME agreeing to end its protests at Jackson public events, including those outside Atlanta, and to a moratorium on anti-Jackson ads.[952]

Even with more community support it is difficult to see how Local 1644 could have won the strike in 1977. It was a poorly planned strike with weak support among most of the rank and file against a mayor willing to dig his heals in and initiated at a time when high unemployment afforded easy worker replacement. Stronger community support may have given Jackson pause in firing the workers, but it is difficult to see where that support would have come from. Coalitions are difficult to build and maintain; they require hard work, compromise, and if not shared interests at least a convergence of interests. By the 1977 strike in Atlanta, the ingredients for a workable AFSCME-civil rights alliance were almost impossible to come by. For most black community leaders, there was no incentive in joining a coalition and breaking with the city's first black mayor to support striking workers. Unions did not play a significant role in most of their visions

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[951] Ann Woolner, "Strikers Lose Backing," *The Atlanta Journal,* April 27, 1977, 1; John Turner, "Strikers See Red, But Wave White Flag," *The Atlanta Journal,* April 29, 1977, 2A.

[952] See John Reuther to Jerry Wurf, "Re: Atlanta Local 1644 Developments," May 26, 1977; Leamon Hood to Bob Klingensmith, May 23, 1977, Box 143, Folder 5, Jerry Wurf Collection.

of how to best improve society and public sector unions played little role in their understanding of the local city governance. Unions, even the most racially progressive, were not a key aspect of their black freedom movement. Unions were outsiders, third parties, sometimes helpful, sometimes a nuisance, and sometimes antagonists. The economy, demographics, political culture, recent history, and electoral politics were all crucial factors into the failure of the 1977 Atlanta city worker strikes. But how key figures, including leading black civil rights activists, ministers, and politicians, viewed labor unions, and public sector unions specifically, helped determine the outcome.

Conclusion

The period covered in this dissertation spans the end of one era of American political and economic history and the beginning of another. The years between 1945 and 1973 constituted the age of the "Great Compression" in the United States, a period when, as historian Judith Stein explains, "income and wealth were mildly redistributed, even as economic growth soared."[953] This was an era of shared prosperity; working and middle-class wages rose together, labor unions grew in strength, and the federal government expanded the social safety net. By the mid-1970s, economic growth ended, productivity declined, both unemployment and inflation increased, and wages stagnated. In response to the economic decline, policy makers, both Democrats and Republicans, enacted policies that sought to revitalize the economy by ending restraints on capital movement and businesses, including reducing trade barriers, deregulation of markets, lower taxes, and an assault on organized labor. These new policies created, in the words of Stein, the "Age of Inequality." Beginning in the 1970s the distribution of income and wealth between the rich and everyone else diverged sharply in the United States. In 1980 the bottom 50 percent of U.S. income earners held more than 20 percent of the national income share while the top 1 percent of earners held about 11 percent. By 2017 the top 1

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[953] Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade,* xi. For more on the political and economic changes of the past forty-plus years see Robert Brenner, *The Economics of Global Turbulence;* David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Greta Krippner, *Capitalizing on Crisis: The Political Origins of the Rise of Finance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

percent held 20 percent of all income while the bottom 50 percent held about 13 percent.[954]

Over the past decade Atlanta has become something of a poster child for the growing economic inequality. The city is consistently ranked by the Brookings Institute and other organizations as one of the American cities with the highest level of income inequality. Those in the top 5 percent of earners in the city made more than 18 times those in the bottom 20 percent of earners. Economist David Sjoquist argues that this ranking is misleading because Atlanta is a relatively small city that comprises only 10 percent of the metropolitan population.[955] The suburbs are where Atlanta's white and black middle class live.[956] Among metropolitan areas, Atlanta's inequality ranking is closer to middle of the pack since most of the middle-class residents and jobs are located in the suburbs. What remains in Atlanta are dramatic highs and lows: well-compensated jobs in the northern, majority-white sections of the city and low-paying service jobs in majority-black south Atlanta. Atlanta's economic inequality then is also a racial

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[954] Facundo Alvaredo, Lucas Chancel, Thomas Piketty, Emmanuel Saez, Gabriel Zucman, "World Inequality Report 2018, Executive Summary," World Inequality Lab, 8.

[955] Stephanie Stokes, "How Atlanta Became the Capital of Income Inequality," wabe.org, accessed at https://www.wabe.org/atlanta-income-inequality/

[956] As of 2010, 87 percent of metropolitan Atlanta's black middle class lived in the suburbs. This is a drastic change from 1970 when only 27 percent of the city's black population lived in the suburbs. As with the city, there is a stark racial division in residency patterns in the suburbs. "Eleven of the Atlanta region's twenty-eight counties accounted for nearly all (98 percent) of the metro area's increase in African American residents." Karen Pooley, "Segregation's New Geography: The Atlanta Metro Region, Race, and the Declining Prospects for Upward Mobility," *Southern Spaces,* April 15, 2015, accessed at https://southernspaces.org/2015/segregations-new-geography-atlanta-metro-region-race-and-declining-prospects-upward-mobility.

inequality. The median income for white Atlantans is $86,678 while for black Atlantans it is $49,524 and nearly 20 percent of black Atlantans make less than $15,000 a year.[957]

It was these same low-paying jobs staffed mostly by black men and women that the activists in this dissertation sought to improve. In the years after AFSCME's failed strike in 1977, economic justice for these low-paid workers continues to motivate (and elude) civil rights and labor activists in Atlanta and nationally. Often activists and workers invoke the legacy of civil rights activists aiding workplace struggles during the classical stage of the civil rights movement.

In 1992, exactly two years after the IOC awarded Atlanta the Olympic Games, the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games (ACOG) held a celebration for the arrival of the official flag of the Olympics from Barcelona, the previous host of the event. That same day 2,500 union members and community activists marched downtown to the flag to demand that union labor be used for the construction of Olympic stadiums and facilities and for hosting and servicing the Games.[958] Leading the march were Jesse Jackson, former SCLC member and head of Operation Breadbasket in Chicago until 1973, and Joseph Lowery, the president of the SCLC. As they marched the veteran civil

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[957] "Changing the Odds: Progress and Promise in Atlanta," The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2019. For more on low-wage jobs in the modern economy see Steven Greenhouse, *The Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the American Worker* (New York: Anchor Books, 2009). For more on the changing dimensions of African American employment patterns in the post-segregation era see Katz, Stern, and Fader, "The New African American Inequality": 75-108.

[958] Stewart Acuff estimated there were between 10,000 and 12,000 who attended the protest while the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* estimated 2,500 actually marched. See "Flag Arrives in Atlanta, Unions Rally for Olympic Jobs," *Associated Press,* September 18, 1992; Phyllis Perry, *The Atlanta Journal Constitution,* September 18, 1992, 3.

rights leaders walked behind a mule-drawn wagon, just like to the wagons used during the 1968 Poor People's Campaign. The Atlanta Labor Council (ALC), which organized the march, wanted to make a direct connection between its demands for unionized worker involvement in the Olympics and the civil rights movement of the 1960s. According to ALC president Stewart Acuff, a white labor organizer, the march "affirm[ed] in the most dramatic way the historic alliance between civil rights and organized labor."[959]

The march got ACOG's attention but it did not persuade the committee to act. Acuff and the ALC continued to work with community activists, local politicians, and religious leaders over the next four years to get ACOG to act on the coalition's demand for union workers and just pay. Eventually contractors agreed to hire union workers on several construction projects, venue hosts also agreed to hire unionized employees where possible, and all other employees during the Games were paid a prevailing wage. *Newsweek* called the Atlanta Olympic Games "the most heavily unionized ever."[960]

Twenty-one years after ALC's march, another labor protest supported by a well-known activist of the classical phase of the civil rights invoked the economic dimensions of that very movement. On August 29, 2013, a day after the fiftieth anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington, Congressman John Lewis, the former chairman of SNCC, spoke at a rally for Atlanta-based fast food workers who were participating in a Fight for

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[959] Stewart Acuff, "Organized Labor and the Olympics," *Southern Changes* 18, no. 2 (1996): 19-20.

[960] "It's Hip to Be Union," *Newsweek,* July 7, 1996, accessed at https://www.newsweek.com/its-hip-be-union-179470; Stewart Acuff, *Playing Bigger than You Are: A Life in Organizing* (Arlington, MA.: Windwalker Media, 2011), Kindle edition location 358.

$15 protest.[961] Outside of a McDonalds restaurant, Lewis recited to the crowd a greatest hits of the civil rights movements efforts at confronting economic inequality. "Fifty years ago…we marched for Jobs and Freedom. We're still marching for jobs," he told the crowd. "We must remember that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968, died in Memphis trying to help the sanitation workers. And that's what this is all about. Some people are getting richer…and others are getting poorer and poorer."[962] Like the Olympic Games campaign, Fight for $15 also achieved some small success. In 2017 ATL Raise Up, Atlanta's local Fight for $15 organization, worked with Atlanta Jobs with Justice, a labor-community group coordinating coalition, Local 1644, and the Atlanta Professional Firefighters to successfully lobby the Atlanta city council to raise the wages of all city workers to $15 dollars an hour by 2019. This campaign led to raises for about 1,000 city workers.[963]

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[961] For more on Fight for $15 see Annelise Orleck, *"We Are All Fast-Food Workers Now": The Global Uprising Against Poverty Wages* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 33-37; David Rolf, *The Fight for Fifteen: The Right Wage for a Working America* (New York: New Press, 2016). For a look at Fight for $15's attempt to build a coalition with the Black Lives Matter movement see Kira Lerner, "Why Black Lives Matter and Fight for 15 are Protesting Side-by-Side," *Think Progress,* April 14, 2016, accessed at https://thinkprogress.org/why-black-lives-matter-and-fight-for-15-are-protesting-side-by-side-b81f562ac36d/; Tim Rogers, "How the Fight for $15 is Uniting Latinos, Blacks and Whites in a Movement the Nation Should Pay Attention To," fusion.tv, November 11, 2015, accessed at https://fusion.tv/story/231101/how-the-fight-for-15-is-uniting-latinos-blacks-and-whites-in-a-movement-the-nation-should-pay-attention-to/.

[962] "John Lewis Speech at Fast Food Workers Protest in Atlanta," August 29, 2013, Creative Loafing Atlanta YouTube channel, accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BktW9P7btrk.

[963] Joel Mendelson, "Atlanta Fought for $15 and Won," jwj.org, June 26, 2017, accessed at https://www.jwj.org/atlanta-fought-for-15-and-won.

The memory of civil rights activists working to address economic injustices during the 1960s serves as a powerful symbol for workers and activists alike. How these civil rights activists approached questions of economic justice and how they participated in workplace protests is the central concern of my dissertation. It explores the contours of the relationship between civil rights activists and other black community leaders and protesting black workers and their unions. It also looks at how these relationships evolved throughout the classical stage of the movement and the post-segregation era. Black economic inequality was always a concern for activists and reformers, it shows, even if it was not always a priority. Black activists and reformers in Atlanta, often middle class, attempted to help the black working class by confronting racial segregation, discrimination, and other forms of exploitation at the workplace and by supporting efforts to organize unions and improve wages and working conditions.

Occasionally, like the 1964 Scripto strike and the 1968 sanitation wildcat strike, black leaders were able to help black workers win important victories. At other times, like the boycott campaigns by Operation Breadbasket, the victories were small but certainly important for the black workers hired or promoted to better jobs. Often, however, activist-led campaigns ended in defeat.

Black workers, community supporters, and labor unions faced immense obstacles in their struggles to improve Atlanta's workplaces. White employers, despite the city's reputation as "Too Busy to Hate," were often resistant to demands by activists to end racist hiring and promotion policies. Employers also fought tooth and nail against attempts by black workers to organize unions and demand improved wages and working condition. In addition, labor unions were often not the most enthusiastic partners when

civil rights activists and labor unions attempted to build coalitions. Union leaders, and civil rights activists too, could be territorial and were reluctant to share leadership and decision making responsibilities with other activists. Both civil rights activists and labor organizers could support the same campaign but keep the other party at a distance. Crucially, there were also significant weaknesses to the kind of support that civil rights activists and other middle-class reformers brought to workplace protests.

My dissertation shows that civil rights activists and black reformers were most likely to respond to conflicts involving black workers if the conflict fit into middle-class activists' understanding of the black freedom movement. These activists often considered the importance a workplace protest had on the larger black Atlanta community. As my project shows, black Atlantans understanding of the black freedom struggle was not unified or static; different activists at different times emphasized different issues. For example, the Scripto strike received support from civil rights activists, in part, because the union and workers made the strike about racial employment discrimination. And in 1972, members of the black press and black community members supported a protest by a handful of Holy Family Hospital workers because they saw the workers' protest as part of a larger fight for community control of the hospital.

For many of the activists and reformers workplace issues were rarely the priority. There were often more pressing issues or more popular civil rights campaigns to support. Workplace protests that activists participated in would on occasion be placed on the back burner, or ignored completely, as activists turned their attention to other civil rights campaigns. The Dobbs House strike, for example, captured the attention of the city's civil rights groups and leading reformers for a few months in the summer of 1963, but when

the movement ramped up a campaign against segregated downtown restaurants the Dobbs House strikers were left without community support.

At other times, economic dimensions of the movement came into direct conflict with other priorities of activists and reformers. By the late-1960s many middle-class activists and reformers viewed black electoral success as the most important element of the Atlanta black freedom struggle. This rise of black political power coincided with an era of militancy from Atlanta's black public sector workers. In 1968, most of Atlanta's black activists and reformers supported a wildcat strike by black sanitation workers. At that moment in time, poverty was a priority issue for many black activists and reformers and they supported the workers' demands for higher pay. However, the 1970 and 1977 strikes by black city workers show how leading black activists and reformers support for the striking workers waned when the city workers challenged a City Hall where black Atlantans held increasing power.

While Atlanta's middle-class black activists and reformers often viewed black workers' workplace disputes as part of the black freedom struggle, rarely did they consider labor unions to have an important role in movement. A few of the activists like C.T. Vivian, Carl Farris, and Martin Luther King Jr., to an extent, were interested in developing a strong relationship between unions and the civil rights movement. Tellingly, both Vivian and Farris had lived in Illinois and had developed prior relationships with unions. For the most part, the men in this study were Southerners who just did not have the same experience with unions that a Northern-raised activist would have. These men had very little knowledge of labor law or the history, customs, and conventions of the labor movement. Nor does it ever seem they were much interested in building this kind of

knowledge into their political toolkit. Labor unions were separate organizations that at times could help black workers at other times activists viewed unions as an obstacle. Many of these activists believed they knew what was best for workers and how best to win the demands of workers.

Instead of attempting to work closely with unions or attempting tried and true methods to organize workers, negotiate with employees, and lead successful strikes, these activists attempted to import the tactics and strategies that they had successfully used to dismantle segregation and discrimination in other sectors of society. More often than not, these strategies and tactics were not effective. The one exception may be the Scripto strike, where the charismatic leadership and national reputation of Martin Luther King Jr., did convince management to return to the negotiating table. King's decision to go behind the back of the International Chemical Workers Union representatives, however, further reveals the relative disinterest by civil rights activists to form genuine partnerships with labor unions. Other activists, particularly those associated with SCLC like Ralph Abernathy and Hosea Williams, tried to replicate King's centralized, charismatic leadership style during labor disputes and largely failed to incite the same level of devotion from crowds or effectively wield this leadership style to help workers win labor disputes. Activists, workers, and unions could not persuade enough community members to join demonstrations to create disruptive acts of civil disobedience. The marches, rallies, pickets, and boycotts often did not compel employers to concede.

The centralized charismatic leadership of civil rights activists adopted by many of these middle-class activists and reformers did not prioritize democratic discussion and decision making. This was a paternalistic and undemocratic leadership style in which

middle-class activists and reformers supported and led protests on the behalf of black workers. From Operation Breadbasket through the marches held by SCLC during Local 1644 strikes there was rarely input from the workers. Among activists, there was little interest in earning worker buy-in for demonstrations or in developing worker leaders. The combination of activists' tendency to move from one campaign to the next and their unwillingness or inability to develop worker leaders made it difficult to sustain effective campaigns for workers' rights. In less careful hands, this leadership style could turn autocratic, with leaders acting solely on their own whim regardless of the effectiveness of their decisions.

This dissertation has sought to add to the growing literature on economic dimensions of the classic civil rights movement and the post-segregation era. Throughout the work, I've cited a generation of scholars who have disputed the claim that the classical era of the movement was absent of black activists' efforts to fight economic justice as they fought for racial justice. In the 1960s and 1970s middle-class civil rights activists, ministers, and other black reformers in Atlanta looked to use methods that had worked during other protests against discrimination and segregation to aid black workers at their workplace. However, there were important weaknesses in their understanding of economic justice, their relationship with organized labor**,** and in the strategies and tactics they employed that limited the effectiveness of middle-class activists' support of black workers.

The title of this dissertation, "To Secure Improvements in Their Material and Social Conditions," comes from a memo Jack O'Dell, executive director of SCLC, wrote

in 1970 explaining the main goals of the organization.[964] The "their" he referred to were the "working poor," a catchall term SCLC used to refer to all working class folk. The quote speaks to the interest SCLC activists and others had in the late 1960s and early 1970s in aiding working class struggles. But the quote also reveals a divide between SCLC, and middle-class activists and reformers more broadly, and the working poor whose "material and social conditions" activists wanted to help secure. It was not their own material and social conditions that the middle-class activists and reformers sought to improve but that of groups with different socioeconomic backgrounds and different life experiences.

As this history of middle-class activism targeted at Atlanta's workplaces shows, the divide between activists and workers mattered a great deal. Black middle-class activists often thought of themselves as the representatives of the black community and built relationship with black workers with that assumption in mind. The middle-class activists were the voice and the decision makers of these workplace protests. Furthermore, these activists did not have many material ties to these conflicts. They were, after all, aiding the workplace struggles of others. This often resulted in haphazard and distracted support. Activists often seemed to come and go from a campaign when they pleased. The middle-class activists and reformers who sought to help black workers did so out of good intentions but often the campaigns they organized were less than effective. As workers and activists in the increasingly multiracial movements for economic justice in our Age of Inequality draw from the legacy of civil rights activists, it is important to

[964] Memorandum from Jack O'Dell, July 29, 1970, Box 200, Folder 33, SCLC Records Emory.

recognize both the importance of the previous generation's struggle for economic justice and the limitations of previous campaigns.

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