

Labor's Failure to Organize the South

Introduction

One of the great organizing arguments dating back more than 50 years ago, when organized labor was still on the move, was whether or not the setbacks and final abandonment by the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO) of its Operation Dixie in 1953 was inevitable, because the South can't be organized, or circumstantial, the result of bad timing, the lack of coordination, or.... The question is certainly relevant still, but more pressing for us here is the question of labor's collective inability since that date to create a different result for both the South and for its own future. The overarching concern looking both backward and forward is whether or not the continued inability to successfully address and master this Southern organizing problem is in fact the key to the puzzle of labor's overall national demise.

The growth of the population of the South has been tremendous in the last five decades, leading the rest of the country, and the South's political climate and lower wages has attracted industrialization from other regions of the country looking for cheaper labor markets, transportation costs, and favorable subsidization.

Union leadership has not been unconcerned or naïve about the risks of a giant, unorganized South, and there have been many serious and sophisticated efforts at building pockets of mass unionization. Lane Kirkland's AFL-CIO created and supported the seminal Houston Organizing Project (HOP) in the late 1970's to mid-1980's. John Sweeney's "outsider" campaign to win a convention floor election contest to take over the AFL-CIO in the mid-1990's also carried with it a call to organize the South and several important initiatives to do so, including the HOTROC campaign in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast Mariners' Campaign. Other major campaigns have focused on specific sectors. The UAW has been particularly active – and unsuccessful -- among the foreign automakers who have built plants in a huge corridor of jobs and investment running across Tennessee, Mississippi, and Alabama. The Service Employees have run a number of important campaigns among janitors, public employees, and health workers in various markets in the South, especially southern Florida, Houston, Atlanta, and New Orleans. Other unions have had moments in the South that are worth exploring, but "moments" have not created "movements" to organize the unorganized despite all of the rhetoric and expenditure.

In looking at the record and its implications, we hope to find the lessons offered from that history, but also understand where we are now and how an unorganized South may pull down the entire labor movement. Regardless of the history, the 21st century finds the South with membership density that is less than two-digits in every state of the South.

Data Sources: Current Population Survey (CPS) Outgoing Rotation Group (ORG) Earnings Files, 2006. Sample includes

State	Employment	Members	Covered	%Members	%Covered	%Total USA Employment
Alabama	1,930,249	170,113	193,988	8.8	10.0	1.51%
Arkansas	1,130,108	58,127	67,488	5.1	6.0	0.88%
Florida	7,675,747	396,958	497,350	5.2	6.5	5.99%
Georgia	3,973,751	175,802	229,688	4.4	5.8	3.10%
Kentucky	1,752,214	172,106	196,338	9.8	11.2	1.37%
Louisiana	1,676,436	107,008	121,163	6.4	7.2	1.31%
Mississippi	1,064,772	60,044	77,593	5.6	7.3	0.83%
North						
Carolina	3,809,761	125,627	155,114	3.3	4.1	2.97%
South						
Carolina	1,775,394	58,655	74,288	3.3	4.2	1.38%
Tennessee	2,549,584	152,962	174,002	6.0	6.8	1.99%
Texas	9,750,865	476,209	575,809	4.9	5.9	7.60%
Virginia	3,445,961	139,498	179,326	4.0	5.2	2.69%
Total South	40,534,842	2,093,109	2,542,147	5.2%	6.3%	31.61%

employed wage and salary workers, ages 16 and over. Variable definitions are: Employment=wage and salary employment, Members=employed workers who are union members, Covered=workers covered by a collective bargaining agreement, %Members=percent of employed workers who are union members, and %Covered=percent of employed workers who are covered by a collective bargaining agreement.ⁱ

The high water mark is now less than 10% (Kentucky at 9.8%), and the low-water level finds both of the Carolina's at only 3.3% union membership. In the past 30 years we have gone nationally from a situation where almost one of every three workers was a union member and in four southern states at that time (TN, KY, AL, and LA) almost one of every five workers was union to today: we have roughly one of every eight workers in a union and, in the South, one of about every 20 workers.

Given the lack of large scale or consistent current organizing efforts, there is no reason to believe that these figures will not continue to fall in the South (and nationally as well). The question is whether or not this was inevitable or can this situation still be changed?

Operation Dixie (1946-1953)

The leadership and organizing staff of the CIO had the right analysis when they launched Operation Dixie. In the aftermath of WWII they could see the impact of increasing industrialization in the South. Soldiers were returning, there had been a huge upsurge of African-Americans in the workforce, and the CIO had every reason to believe they could be successful. One of their affiliates, the Food, Tobacco, Agricultural and Allied Workers of America (FTA, CIO) had launched 62 organizing drives prior to Operation Dixie, winning 52 of them and gaining 12,500 workers largely in North Carolina of all places.

Historians have not been kind to Operation Dixie.ⁱⁱ The failure to organize the South has been attributed to everything from lack of clarity and confusion of the CIO's position on race, subterfuge and opposition from the AFL-CIO, utilization of non-Southern organizers and a strategy that assumed tactics could be easily transplanted from the prior CIO success to the more hostile environment of the South, to the advent of the Cold War, which included the expulsion of the left unions (seeing a drop in CIO membership from 5.2 million members during the war to 3.7 by 1950), passage of Taft-Hartley (1947) and its anti-labor provisions (which propelled the expulsions), as well as

the difficult relationships with the Dixiecrats as part of the “governing” Roosevelt coalition nationally.

All of this may be true to some degree, but from an organizer’s perspective, reading the organizer’s reports from that time, they seem not so different from reports one could read today. It was hard work. The managers at union headquarters didn’t get it. Money and resources were increasingly thin. Staff was insufficient. You don’t need to put these letters in a time capsule to get a sense of the late 1940’s and early 1950’s or to believe that the life of an organizer on the road in the hills and hollers of the South was as tough then as it is today, or has been throughout the last half-century.ⁱⁱⁱ

The hard thing to understand more than 50 years later is that Operation Dixie does not seem a disaster in pure organizing terms. Elections were being won more often than not. Workers were being organized. The work of the CIO was being mirrored, even in the South, by AFL organizers as well. The problem was more one of will, resources, and circumstance than a simple story of union’s being handed their asses on a platter by a bunch of yahoos in small, red dirt towns.

The problem was the way the unions perceived the obstacles. The primary target was the textile industry which at the time was based in the Carolinas where labor was the weakest. Missing was the blending of the community-union strengths which had been the CIO’s most successful models in auto and steel. The comparison between community hostility and recent memories of a genuine movement of workers in the North made the sloggish work of organizing in the South seem so much worse in comparison.

From an organizer’s perspective, it seems like simple persistence would have meant increased progress throughout the South. Lessons were being learned, strategies were being reshaped, and had the commitment continued over time, there is every reason to believe that labor would have prevailed more often than not.

Why then the loss of focus and will to organize the South? I believe that the last straw for the campaign managers at union headquarters was the inability to believe that there was an endgame that would allow the work to be sustainable in the wake of the passage of Taft-Hartley and the fact that in short order within the lifespan of Operation Dixie, one state after another locked the door on the union shop and the prospects of an effective union dues structure at the end of the organizing rainbow. Tennessee, Virginia, North Carolina (where the textile drives were at their apex!), Arkansas, Texas and Georgia passed “right-to-work” statutes immediately with the passage of the Taft-Hartley Act in 1947. By the chronological end of Operation Dixie all of the Southern states except Louisiana had passed or implemented some effective version of “right-to-work” by statute or constitutional amendment. The writing was more than on the wall, it was in the law. It was going to be very difficult to “make organizing pay,” especially if it were going to be a long drawn out battle from city to city, county to county, and state to state across the South, all of which of course it was proving to be.

Priorities and problems were building elsewhere in the nation and the sense of crusade for the South had dissipated before 1953 when the project finally collapsed. The golden age of labor organizing in the United States had passed and reaction was setting as hard as concrete. By 1956 the AFL and CIO had already recognized the political and organizational climate shifted and merged to form one organization, the AFL-CIO, and effectively ceded the responsibility of organizing to the affiliates rather than directly coordinating and mediating organizing institutions. It would take a long while for that to change, and the South paid the price along with the rest of the nation's workers.

The AFL-CIO's Houston Organizing Project (1979-1984)

In fact twenty-five years passed before there was another concerted effort to create an organizing initiative with scale and substance in the South. Lane Kirkland stepped into the shoes of George Meany in 1979, and not long afterward – to his credit and perhaps as a surprise to many – there was a commitment of more than \$1,000,000 per year (real money then!) to create the Houston Organizing Project. The idea was to prove in the “new Detroit,” as some called Houston at the time, that labor could find a place and make its way in the Deep South.

Under Mr. Kirkland's direction, the federation also is involved in an organization drive called the Houston project, in which 40 unions are pooling money and organizers to launch what the federation hopes will be a major organizational drive in that city, where workers and management often resist unions and where unions represent a fraction of the work force. The federation believes there are more than 700,000 potential union members in the Houston area. – William Serrin, New York Times, 11-15-81

The results of HOP were less than stellar, though the “fraction” that Serrin denigrated in his article would look good to many cities in the South (and elsewhere) at this point, since they were up to 10% density^{iv} at the end of the HOP project.^v That is a good sight better (by almost double) what the density is in Southern cities today, 25 years later.

There were successes.^{vi} The increase in members of the Houston teachers union and the city workers units at the time were the bright lights of the project.^{vii} SEIU had a nursing home campaign with Beverly Enterprises, the largest such company in the country at the time, and election results from Houston to Marshall, Texas in the northern part of the state all padded the totals for a project desperate for results.

Nonetheless, the disappointments of the Houston Organizing Project were legion. In fairness part of the dysfunction of the project had to do with the very nature of the AFL-CIO, a federation composed of unions that were fundamentally independent and autonomous bodies with firm beliefs about their own entitlements. They did not see themselves as embarked on an organizing mission for the common good. Nowhere was this more obvious than around issues of jurisdiction. The CIO efforts of the 50's were radically centralized compared to the loose coordinated cooperative campaign run by the affiliates. This was a classic example of “neither fish nor fowl” organizing. The AFL-

CIO contributed general services, assigned and dispatched some staff and coordinators (like Comeaux), husbanded the money and pitched in some of their own, and then tried to herd the cats to organize their sectors.

Much of the “organizing” work implemented under the auspices of the AFL-CIO consisted of “cooperative” projects and a complex “clearing” process around organizing targets, that became as controversial and counterproductive as it may have meant to be constructive. Any union that was part of the “cooperative” campaign had the ability – and right – to “clear” future organizing targets on the eminently reasonable grounds that resources were scarce and that unnecessary competition between unions needed to be avoided. A union would indicate in these regular meetings, and during the heyday of the HOP they were occurring almost weekly, the organizing targets their international union was pursuing, but this system of self-certification in too many cases was employed to obstruct organizing by other unions (seen as competitors). Once declared, a union essentially froze a future target for a year and this process of “reservation” could be extended if there was any activity, lack of activity, or simply if no one cared one way or another. For many unions who understood protecting jurisdiction more clearly than they did organizing new workers, the process worked fine. Furthermore there were additional incentives. If your union had declared and reserved the target, and another union moved forward and organized that firm or group of workers, then the offended union could file charges against the organizing union and through the quasi-judicial system created to defend jurisdiction win the rights to workers the other union had organized. The practice impeded rather than stimulated more recruitment.^{viii}

Furthermore, the program never really tested its theory that Houston was developing a new industrial center replacing many of the jobs in this area of the country that had once driven unionized labor from the Midwest and East and big labor could follow the jobs. But the industrial unions did not fully subscribe to the program, unfortunately. The Steelworkers in the mid-late 1970’s, under Regional Director Eddie Ball (later Secretary-Treasurer of the entire union) had been the labor powerhouse in the Houston area with more than 20,000 members at its heyday. Their influence, numbers, and resources, along with their political and racial liberalism during that period made Houston one of shining progressive lights of the South. But the Steelworkers did not fit into the organizing plans and programs for the Houston Organizing Project, because unfortunately the advent of HOP drastically coincided with the massive hemorrhaging and downsizing in basic steel all of the country decimating the Steelworkers in Houston as well.

Campaign leadership was a problem, particularly given the chaotic structure (or anarchy?) of the project. Robert Comeaux, organizing director of HOP, was not an organizing director from any of the participating unions, nor was he a major organizing figure in Houston or the South at the time. He was straightforwardly a union representative with UFCW (United Food and Commercial Workers) based in San Antonio. He neither had particular specialized knowledge or information about Houston and its organizing problems or potential, nor on the other side did he have relationships with the top levels and leadership of the national unions sufficient to assure commitments

and investment. Nor did he even have particular experience running large organizing programs and staff. He had been on the national staff of the union and had run some campaigns largely in the west and Midwest. He was essentially dispatched over to the position as a compromise candidate on the assumption that he would not create problems for the partners or the federation.

By the time HOP took its last jump in the middle of complaints, recriminations, firings, and financial commitments exhausted and undelivered, the bottom line was that the project had never really gained traction with workers. The economy in Houston was no longer booming given setbacks in oil pricing leading to weakness in real estate and other local markets. There was no new social contract with labor waiting to be negotiated in the city. For some this proved that the AFL-CIO was inept at managing an organizing project, but in the larger context of plummeting membership that lesson was swept away in the pursuit of survival.

Sweeney Early Organizing Initiatives (1998-2001)

The next big push for the South came another twenty years later as part of John Sweeney's clarion call to organize after he won the first contested election in AFL-CIO history to become AFL-CIO president. Consistent with Sweeney's mission to jumpstart growth was a commitment, often expressed^{ix}, to organize the South. Interestingly much of that work ended up concentrated in the New Orleans area around three campaigns: Justice at Avondale, the Gulf Coast Mariners, and HOTROC, all roughly in the period running from 1998 through 2001.

There were common themes in these projects. They were all multi-union partnerships, which were the easiest program for the federation to support politically. With more than one union involved there was no question of preferential treatment or favoritism in spending and allocating resources. In other ways all of the campaigns were fundamentally different.

Justice at Avondale is the easiest to describe. For many years the Avondale Shipyards were the largest shipbuilding facility in the country and one of the only ship fabrication sites that was non-union. Avondale was the largest single employer in the New Orleans area with more than 5,000 hourly workers. There had been many failed organizing efforts at the yards over the years by different unions and the employer was virulently anti-union. Many workers in the late 1960's remember vividly the shadow of the water tower over the yard and the last vote count (and union defeat) painted in huge relief on the tower. Every so often Avondale workers, battling the constant turnover and unsafe conditions, would show up at various union halls all over New Orleans begging for assistance in organizing. Finally, the Metal Trades Council, AFL-CIO, composed of a coalition of mostly trades based unions, responded and despite a contentious and litigious campaign finally prevailed after several years and was certified around the time of Sweeney's election. Support by the AFL-CIO consisted largely of assistance in running a contract campaign rather than a new organizing effort, but there is little doubt that this campaign was important in finally bring this work to harvest. The AFL-CIO was

able to contribute resources and staff with the right experience and continue to force the unions that were part of the Metal Trades Council to maintain their focus during this interminably lengthy struggle. A change in ownership to a less antagonistic employer and away from local ownership and management finally provided the breakpoint to settle the campaign successfully. Disappointingly, this contract victory was not converted into increased new organizing in other unorganized other Gulf Coast shipyards. The Operating Engineers organized one location on their own, but the Metal Trades Council did not continue as an effective organizing or coordinating formation, and the opportunity eventually faded away.

Simultaneously, a significant private sector organizing effort was assembled that targeted the largest employment sector in New Orleans: the 20,000 to 50,000^x worker strong hospitality industries. This campaign called HOTROC^{xi} (the New Orleans Hospitality, Hotels, and Restaurants Organizing Council, AFL-CIO) was initiated by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) under Local 100 in New Orleans and partnered with the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union (HERE) and the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE) through its New Orleans local. The AFL-CIO was a central partner providing both resources and staffing as well as utilizing the project as part of their training programs for lead organizers. This effort finally began in 1998 and ended in the wake of 9/11 in 2001, which eliminated tourist air travel and made the organizing strategy largely moot. The campaign strategy dictated by the partnership attempted to use both direct organizing and other tools to create leverage to organize the hotels primarily by creating “labor peace” or neutrality agreements^{xii} in areas where we had private-public partnerships. Extensive time and effort was spent integrating the local political realities with the project organizing work, so that Mayor Marc Morial and the majority of the New Orleans City Council became pivotal to the success of the campaign. HOTROC prevailed in a direct NLRB election with a unit of over 350 workers employed by ARAMARK at the New Orleans Convention Center; organized the largest and historic pro-labor march for workers rights with an estimated crowd in July 1998 of between 7,500 and 10,000 people that demonstrated the community support for a worker-centered set of municipal policies; and created the labor peace agreement with the Piazza d’Italia project that led to the wall-to-wall unionization of the Loew’s Hotel on Poydras Avenue. Other labor peace agreements in process involving both developers and City intervention included an airport hotel, a World Trade Center hotel conversion, as well as progress towards agreements and concessions based on zoning and other City concessions were swept away in the industry downturn in the aftermath of 9/11.

Other events at the time contributed to both the potential and the performance here. The victory on an electoral initiative initiated by ACORN (the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) and SEIU Local 100 to raise the minimum wage by one dollar in the City of New Orleans was phenomenally popular with the base. This electoral strength also helped create a majority coalition in the City Council in support of progressive community and labor programs and built an increasingly productive working relationship with Mayor Morial. Local 100 parlayed all of this into a long-sought prize by negotiating an election agreement allowing city workers to finally

vote on the question of unionization, then successfully winning elections and bargaining the contract to represent 1,500 municipal workers after decades of illusive and futile efforts.

Nonetheless despite all of these advances, the work did not continue meaningfully after 9/11 in the hospitality and hotels sector, because of problems which almost seem inherent to multi-union partnerships. The Hotel union had little appetite for the New Orleans hotel market as it turned out, being much more interested in Mississippi casinos, which their huge base in Las Vegas made lower hanging fruit. So, rather than retool and alter organizing strategies as the investment and expansion of the market changed both nationally and in New Orleans in the wake of the unsettling time of 9/11, the partners left the AFL-CIO holding the bag on the project and finally effectively shutting the operation down.

The Gulf Coast Mariners campaign was a joint project of the maritime unions seeking to organize the Gulf Coast sailors, who were the only part of their jurisdiction remaining unorganized in the US. The campaign was spearheaded by the Seafarers International Union (SIU) and managed largely by their organizing director, Jessica Smith with heavy staffing and research from the AFL-CIO. The campaign began with an important community organizing component designed to create a mariners association particularly in the southern Louisiana parishes of Lafourche, Terrebonne, and Plaquemines. Additional campaign elements sought to create leverage from Texas to Florida engaging the industry and owners. The companies responded in virulent fashion by organizing a deeply divisive grassroots anti-union campaign founded on the deeply connected families of managers and supervisors. The anti-union campaign was run like a political campaign with yard signs speckled everywhere, including public right-a-ways, saying “There is NO You in Union,” all of which was reminiscent of the anti-union efforts in the rural textile towns that confronted Operation Dixie. The companies organized before the political support had been built sufficiently to sustain the local mariner organizing and much of the energy of the campaign became directed at saving what they had, including a local state senator. ACORN, Project Vote, and the Mariners mounted a huge voter registration campaign that created a sufficient base from the previously disenfranchised (the Houma Nation added voter registration to their constitution based on their happiness with this outcome) for the senator’s re-election. But against this onslaught the worker organizing never gained sufficient ground and the without a longer term commitment there was no hope of success, so the effort petered out after several years.

Other Efforts

The story of other concentrated efforts to organize the South over the last generation is also episodic, rather than concentrated over time.

On the industrial side the real story is deindustrialization, rather than new organizing. Setbacks in oil, chemical, and paper manufacturing have all led to mergers of these unions (some largely based in the South) with the Steelworkers to survive. The

United Automobile Workers (UAW) has supported huge drives among “transplants” (domestic plants of foreign manufacturers) as the auto industry has grown in the corridor running between Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia. To date except for the bargained accretion at the Tennessee Saturn plants, the UAW has not been able to successfully organize any transplants.

Service sector organizing has generally trailed the phenomenal growth of these kinds of jobs throughout the South. Hotels are not organized in any significant number, though there has been recent work around Mississippi casinos which shows promise. Disney workers through various multi-union councils in the Orlando area have some spatial strength. The Service Employees, famed for their innovative efforts among janitors in the last twenty years have only made inroads among property service workers in very recent years in Houston on a citywide basis and Miami where a campaign seems to be building. Nursing home workers found their way with Retail Workers Distribution Workers (RWDSU) (now a part of the UFCW) in Alabama and health care workers have some increasing density with SEIU in South Florida, but in the main the story is episodic, rather than systematic.

Public sector success has also been hard to achieve. Teachers have probably had more success than most because they were able to sustain an organizing model for decades in both the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) that did not depend on collective bargaining for sustainability or local bargaining laws and procedures for success. The existence of a collective bargaining law in Florida has led to extensive certifications for many unions, including AFSCME, SEIU, Teamsters, and of course the teachers who have the largest merged union in the South with over 130,000 members in the state [there are another 250,000 workers under their agreements who are not members though], but the ability to create a sustainable membership model and a servicing model in a right-to-work environment has prevented the building of real power by workers in that state in many of these units.

Poultry and catfish workers were targeted in the 90’s by three different unions (UFCW, LIUNA, and RWDSU) at different times in the rural south. The textile workers in the 80’s and early 90’s were very active in manufacturing locations all over the South through the ILGWU, ACTWU, and other unions that became UNITE but there is little evidence that the work survived in many areas. The Mineworkers led some heroic struggles and strikes, but entered the 21st century a shadow of their former glory, having never cracked a new organizing methodology in the southern underground.

The giant shipyards at Pascagoula spurred some organizing success in the Gulf Coast areas between Mobile, Alabama and Gulfport, Mississippi. The areas around Birmingham, where steel held sway back to the great drives of the 30’s, created pockets of strength. The failure to pass right-to-work legislation in Kentucky supported more density in that state over a most of the 20th century. Yet mainly in looking at the organizing successes in the South over the period since Operation Dixie, we are fortunate to see little islands of organization in the vast unorganized sea of workers.

Slipping and Sliding: The New Orleans Exception

The story for labor in the last half-century has not been a pretty tale. Looking at fourteen of the largest metropolitan areas in the South during this period gives a pretty clear picture of labor as the living dead.

In 1986 there were three areas (Birmingham, Memphis, and New Orleans) with more than 10% union membership density. Looking at workers covered by collective bargaining and/or represented by unions added another seven areas (Atlanta, Dallas/Fort Worth, Little Rock, Miami, Richmond, San Antonio, and Tampa/St. Pete). Just below the 10% coverage mark were Houston at 9.9% and Jackson with 9.6%. Houston as the largest city in the South is especially interesting because these figures were gathered almost right after the Houston Organizing Project closed its doors.^{xiii}

Almost twenty years later the South significantly outpaced the decline that has been the story of the national devastation of labor. The last available figures indicate that the highest union membership density in 2004, importantly and perhaps not surprisingly, is in New Orleans with 8.5%, leading all of the other cities by almost two (2) full percentage points of density at that point. Again, the only city with over 10% coverage was also New Orleans with 10.2% of workers covered by unions. The next largest city for coverage in 2004 was the Tampa/St. Petersburg area with 9% coverage. Other cities, including Birmingham and Memphis, leaders of twenty years prior, had dropped by more than half of their membership and even more precipitously in areas of their coverage. New Orleans had fallen during the period without a doubt, but only by around 20% in both membership and coverage.^{xiv} Clearly the organizing initiatives had achieved dramatic results in offsetting the dominant trends in the South.^{xv}

Why it All Matters

The original strategists in the CIO could not have been more clairvoyant. The South matters, and in fact it is central. The entire country increasingly tilts towards the beating sun. In 1950 in the midst of Operation Dixie the South had 26.21 per cent of the population. By 2002, the percentage had risen to almost one-third at 31.63%.^{xvi}

Looking at the statistical measures of union members in the southern states gives a sobering look at why the failure to organize the South looms menacingly over the region and the country. Evaluating the relationship between total employment and union membership and density across these states reveals nothing in recent decades other than precipitous declines.^{xvii}

In the few decades between the mid-80's and the end of 2006, differentials between the South and the rest of the country went from being lower to being abysmal. Density across the South in 1983 (during the time of the Houston Organizing Project) was just shy of 15% while on a national level union density was 20.1% which was certainly a shortfall by almost one-third, but not crushingly significant.^{xviii}

At the end of 2006 the spread between the South and the nation was more critical. The national union density number was 12.5% of total employment. The South in 23 years had now fallen to a little more than half of the national density at 6.3. The South had fallen to half of the density of the national average. Job growth in these 23 years had increased by over 37% in the South which exacerbated the falloff in density since the organizing growth did not keep up. Ironically, the numbers seem to indicate that this was something other than a total free fall. The number of “free riders” – workers covered by unions who were not members, seems to have actually been reduced both absolutely and in percentage terms in the several decades of this period, seeming to indicate that unions were doing something right, perhaps getting more participation from the membership who were responding to increased emphasis on organizing, the opposition, and the organizing culture. It also may indicate other factors like more fully evolved racial integration of the workplace throughout the South, the increasing number of women workers in the workforce, the increasing Latinization of the Southern workforce, all of which at different levels may have positively impacted membership to unit size ratios. Nonetheless, the impact of deunionization throughout the country accelerated even more rapidly in the South where the implosion of union membership in the last twenty year period to the level fell to the level where in some states the statistics were almost insignificant and one could almost say finding union members in many areas would be rarer than hen’s teeth. Shifting and shaking even the finest breakout of the latest numbers gives us a better look, but no real comfort.^{xix}

The only bright spots are the density in the public sector in some states. Private manufacturing is significant in Louisiana, but marginal most other places (outside of Kentucky which is often the non right-to-work outlier). The private sector density today in the South is a wasteland. Once again Louisiana is about the highest at 5%, but 1 out of 20 workers hardly qualifies as a real force in the private sector.

Over the last 70 years organized labor has led important initiatives to organize the South and achieved some success. At each point lessons have been learned and in some cases important success achieved, but equally apparent the institutional will has then waned because of either internal confusion or external rationale, and the initiatives have then wilted not to be revived, sometimes for many decades.

The original analysis that propelled Operation Dixie, which argued that labor could not survive by allowing a vast unorganized pool of workers in the South, is truer today even than it was, but unfortunately the capacity to change these conditions is also dramatically lessened. The legal environment under the National Labor Relations Act has deteriorated to the point that the AFL-CIO has publicly declared that changes in the labor law are its top priority.^{xx} The lack of resources that confronted the CIO and forced their pullback in 1953 has become even greater now as organizing and new member acquisition costs have steadily risen for most unions to more than \$1,000 per member. Unions are generally weaker now than they have been for almost 100 years, so the

notions that they could resource the money, manpower, and material along with the necessary will and wherewithal to tackle a mass organizing problem that numbers in the millions and millions of unorganized workers is clearly unlikely using contemporary organizing methodology.

The South's problems are classically *colonial*. The CIO, the partners within HOP, and the AFL-CIO repeatedly pulled the plug on important organizing efforts in the South *because they could*. This was not home. It was not at their front porch in Washington or New York or Chicago or even really in their backyard. It was to them alien soil, miles away, out of sight and out of mind, a long car, bus, train, or now plane trip away, and therefore easy to avoid, and ignore. These were workers in situations that were invisible to institutional labor in a way that it would have been impossible to imagine in another context. Now, the South is perhaps harder to ignore when cities like Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio are all in the top ten largest cities in the country and the labor giants of the past in New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia are increasingly unable to carry all of the weight of the remnants of labor power. Harder intellectually perhaps, but usually not harder for labor leadership in fiercely political institutions that have to balance the line of representing existing members (outside of the South in the main^{xxi}) and their fights for survival against the fact that labor's strength is falling. Organizational reality dictates you are either growing or you are dying, and labor has been dying a long time now.

A vicious cycle is at work. Feeble and falling membership in the South means that rank and file members and their leaders have little hope of successfully mounting the internal political pressure to internally force institutional change in redirecting scarce resources to mount a crusade to organize the South. A weakened, divided, and embattled labor movement, as we have currently, is little able to seize the vision and the momentum to launch the needed crusade to organize the South in real terms. Valid concerns about overall institutional survival make it difficult to point fingers and assign responsibility and accountability to current labor leadership over the collective loss of either their organizational patrimony or their inability to right the sinking ship, but nonetheless, the facts are inescapable.

Ironically, it seems clear from the facts that this is not the way it had to be, therefore a different strategy, methodology, and, frankly, commitment to organizing could have produced a much different history, and if finally adopted, might still create a different future.

Lessons and Steps Forward

To imagine the South moving in a more progressive direction, we also have to imagine the full social, economic, civic, and political participation of our citizens in the various dimensions of their life, including their work. It is impossible to imagine any of this without vibrant, robust and powerful community and workplace-based organizations that serve as vehicles for such participation and give voice and strength to people, their demands, and dreams. Unions or some similar worker-based associations must be part of

that future in order to imagine change in this region. Change here is essential, or else the South drags the nation down. To achieve any of this we finally have to learn some lessons and move forward.

- ***Stick to the Cities:*** The people, the jobs, and the political leverage (along with any imaginable resources) exists in the cities, not the countryside. That's where our success has been and where we can use whatever resources we still have in a concentrated and efficient manner. I learned this lesson early as an organizer when still in Arkansas in conversations with the great organizer, H.L. Mitchell from the early 1970's until his death some years later. Mitch was one of the founders and the chief organizer of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union in the eastern Arkansas delta country in the 1930's where STFU organized sharecroppers with some modest success and a world of opposition. Mitch spent much of his organizing career trying to organize workers in rural production settings particularly among agricultural workers and other rurally based production workers from fisherman to sugarcane workers. As he told me more than once, "Wade, it just don't pay."
- ***Ground First, Job Sectors Second:*** The lessons of organizing workers in the South that are often overlooked is the fact that space not sector trumps everything. Concentrating resources and organizing across many sectors (private and public) makes a difference and multiplies the impact more than any results isolated in any separate sectoral silo. The Sweeny AFL-CIO concentrated on metropolitan New Orleans through various broad based efforts and within the short span of several years managed to hold and maintain (and in some cases increase) density in New Orleans more than in any other major city in the South. The New Orleans Model has been overlooked and needs to be replicated in city after city.
- ***Leveraging Markets and Firms:*** The lesson the Service Employees learned in failing to organize janitors in Atlanta was that they needed to combine a market based strategy with an analysis of firms where they have relationships and leverage in the market, and this led to the eventual victory in organizing janitors in Houston.
- ***Leverage Remaining Strength to Organize the South:*** The secondary lesson here is part of the anti-colonial organizing reality: to organize the South, existing unions will *have* to be willing to *lend* some of what strength they have left through leverage in specific markets and with individual firms to create organizing rights and concessions in the South in order to even the playing field. Unwillingness to broker these relationships aggressively is an often established formula for failure. This has certainly been the story in the Service Employee success in Houston where they targeted the city *solely* based on the concentration of their existing contractors working non-union there, as well as the way they leveraged the HCA and Tenet hospital nationally to win organizing rights on hospitals in the South Florida market around Miami. The earlier Disney story which led to the "miracle of Orlando" is also a case in point.

- ***Marathon, not a Sprint:*** Organizing the South means a long term and permanent commitment to building organizational density in fixed locations over decades in order to achieve results. This is also a lesson from the New Orleans experience. The groundwork undergirding the various initiatives had been laid for years by constant organizing, building political relationships, and deepening community organizing and social movement strength around a variety of issues including jobs and income. SEIU Local 100 made its first recognition demand for a public sector city workers unit under Mayor Ernest “Dutch” Morial in 1985, so it took almost 20 years of constant pressure and organizing to finally create the “opportunity” to organize the 1500 municipal workers under Mayor Marc Morial, Dutch’s son. Organizing success has to be based on building long term settlements and not colonial outposts and trading stations. This is a challenge for institutional labor because these are political institutions with limited resources that are primarily focused on short term results, rather than long term projects,^{xxii} but, no success will be achieved without a long term commitment.
- ***Organization First and Foremost, the Rest Whenever:*** Organizing models being used by most unions are inadequate to organize anywhere, much less the hardscrabble South. In an era where the law is inaccessible, dilatory, and expensive, organizing methodology needs to escape the collective bargaining regime and concentrate on worker-driven rather than employer-dependent strategies for realizing organization first, and outcomes in terms of improved working and economic conditions down the line. The organizing rule has to be build power first among workers by any means necessary on our own terms and in a sustainable way, with dues paying members at whatever level and the issues of wages, hours, term and conditions of employment will fall into place later.^{xxiii} The success of public sector associations and unions in the South has been largely independent of collective bargaining laws or election and recognition procedures, and the same model is applicable in the private sector as well.^{xxiv}

Summary

The challenges faced just living in the South rest heavily on the shoulders of low and moderate income working families. Relief from our economic and social challenges will come from organizations which give voice and create power through participation in the workplaces and communities of this region. One hand holding up this part of the sky should be organized and institutional labor, but without a change of vision and methodology, without long term commitment, and without deeply rooted leaders and organizers able to take the stand and weather the storm, it is unlikely that labor’s Southern initiatives will be more than repeated disappointments in pursuit of an unrealized and delayed dream. In the meantime the South operates as a huge magnet pulling people and jobs from throughout the country into our cities and growing towns. With vanishing unionized participation and experience, a new and terrible social contract is being forged *de facto* in the South which depends not on justice and fair wages on the

job, but only on the ability of workers to flee when possible to other jobs or submit to the conditions and institutionalize the dominance of the workplace and the docility of the workforce. As this cancerous experience spreads, a national and multi-national set of employers have no reason to do anything other than make casual accommodation to the last vestiges of unionized strength and the Southern business model epitomized by Arkansas based Wal-Mart, the world's largest company, will become the American model.

It is a shame though since actual organizing has proven, time and time again, that success is possible, even perhaps inevitable with consistent and continuous work, despite being neither easy nor quick. However, if we are to ever live in a more equitable and progressive America, we cannot achieve that without radically changing course in the South and leading the way on the ground in workplaces throughout our cities creating a new paradigm as fundamental and necessary to our lifeblood as spitting and grits.

ⁱ This data is abstracted from excellent and more comprehensive research published by Barry T. Hirsch and David A. Macpherson in 2007.

ⁱⁱ The best sources on Operation Dixie and the arguments presented here are Barbara S. Griffith, *The Crises of American Labor: Operation Dixie and the Defeat of the CIO* (Temple University Press, 1988), Michael Goldfield, *The Color of Politics: Race and the of American Politics* (New Press, 1997), Robin D.G. Kelley, *Building Bridges: The Challenge of Organized Labor in Communities of Color* (NYU Press, 1999), Michael Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights: Organizing Memphis Workers* (University of Illinois, 1993), and Robert Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-20th Century South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

ⁱⁱⁱ Reading the campaign reports is depressing because so many of the messages and tactics of management in these anti-union drives are almost identical to what an organizer faces in a campaign today 40-50 years later. Technology may be modernizing the world, but a lot of the headbutting of labor and management is totally "old school," as if neither party learned anything over the years.

^{iv} Union density is calculated as the percentage of union members compared to the total number of non-agricultural workers in the economy of the specific jurisdiction (city, SMSA, state, or national).

^v See table on Union Membership, Coverage, Density and Employment by CMSA, MSA & PMSA, 1986.

^{vi} Robert Comeaux, the organizing director of HOP, has repeatedly expressed the lessons of the campaign in graphic detail, as have other participants. This section is based on conversations between Robert Comeaux and the author in 1992 and 1993 in San Antonio, as well as conversations with other organizers directly involved with HOP in Houston and elsewhere.

^{vii} The public employee unions, AFT and AFSCME, felt that they did the best with HOP because they could simply sign up members and as the campaign progressed, putting real numbers of new workers organized was at a premium and welcome from any quarter, as opposed to needing to follow a private sector legal regime that included election and certification procedures and perhaps collective bargaining.

^{viii} The cultural shift around jurisdiction that would come later to institutional labor was first manifest in these early fights and frustration in Houston, and they presage the arguments 25 years later around "sectoral" emphasis and commitments to organizing that became the driving rationalization splitting the AFL-CIO and culminating in the creation of the Change to Win Federation. The problems of "organizing" unions versus "servicing" unions, between the building trades and just about everyone else, and the confusions over the clarity of roles between the AFL-CIO and its member unions on the life and death struggles around organizing methodology and the life force mandate for organizational growth all came increasingly to the forefront in the problems that beset and crippled the Houston Organizing Project.

^{ix} All of us who were there heard Sweeney express just that commitment in his campaign speech in the AFL-CIO Convention held in New York. This was a personal passion of Ray Abernathy from Atlanta who ghosted many of Sweeney's speeches and rarely failed to make sure the pledge to organize the South was fully embedded in Sweeney's commitments.

^x There were more than 20,000 workers employed directly by hotels and more than 50,000 workers in the area employed by all hotels, restaurants, bars, and other hospitality venues according to Department of Labor statistics.

^{xi} Disclosure: I was Chief Organizer of the HOTROC campaign and served as Chief Organizer of SEIU Local 100 headquartered in New Orleans, as well as ACORN, whose national office was also in New Orleans. During part of this seminal period I was also Secretary-Treasurer of the Greater New Orleans AFL-CIO and President of the SEIU Southern Conference, so was in a position to know much of this information as a participant.

^{xii} The cornerstone of such agreements were usually a "card check" of union supporters which would trigger a independently conducted certification process with the employer maintaining neutrality and neither expressing opposition or support for the unionization effort, but instead allowing employees to freely choose without intimidation whether or not they wanted union representation or not.

^{xiii} Disappointingly, we cannot locate after an extensive search any reliable statistics on union density in Houston or other Southern cities prior to the initiation of the Houston Organizing Project.

^{xiv} Tragically, the end of 2005 saw the devastation of Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans dislocating everything and everybody, and leading to an unprecedented assault on organized labor. UTNO (United Teachers of New Orleans), the largest union at the storm with over 5000 members was totally decimated and now has hardly 200 members two years later. Other public sector numbers also were hammered with layoffs and permanent displacements. Several of the construction trades were amalgamated with Baton Rouge unions (Sheet Metal and Laborers for example). New figures on density are likely to upend the victories won by earlier organizing efforts in the wake of acts of God and conspiracies of men.

^{xv} **Union Membership, Coverage, Density and Employment by CMSA, MSA, PMSA, 1986** (details in table note)

Metropolitan Area	'86 Obs	'86 Employment	'86 %Mem	'86 %Cov	'04 Obs	'04 Employment	'04 %Mem	'04 %Cov
Atlanta, GA MSA	1,083	1,273,401	8.3	10.4	1,452	2,130,164	5.6	6.9
Birmingham, AL MSA	392	356,165	11.3	14.2	644	502,564	5.1	5.9
Charleston, SC MSA	296	168,139	7.6	8.5	283	221,764	4.4	6.6
Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill, NC-SC MSA	1,395	528,648	7.9	8.8	792	731,362	3.3	4.1
Dallas-Fort Worth, TX	2,055	1,725,852	8.1	10.3	2,230	2,745,079	4.6	5.3
Houston-Galveston-Brazoria, TX	1,816	1,542,234	7.9	9.9	1,779	2,190,726	6.1	6.9
Jackson, MS MSA	356	147,083	7.7	9.6	313	207,602	5.2	5.2
Little Rock-North Little Rock, AR MSA	498	210,027	9.3	12.2	422	237,633	5.4	6.3
Memphis, TN-AR-MS MSA	429	391,167	12.1	17.2	407	469,238	6.3	6.8
Miami-Fort Lauderdale, FL	1,871	1,186,661	9.8	11.5	1,661	1,643,193	6.6	8.4
New Orleans, LA MSA	565	510,067	10.7	12.8	566	530,649	8.5	10.2
Richmond-Petersburg, VA MSA	367	324,582	8.5	10.4	422	427,461	3.6	4.8
San Antonio, TX MSA	786	497,867	8.3	10.2	547	674,258	6.0	7.6
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater, FL MSA	1,284	761,480	9.4	13.1	1,129	1,078,678	6.7	9.0

Data Sources: Current Population Survey (CPS) Outgoing Rotation Group (ORG) Earnings Files, 1986. Sample includes employed wages and salary workers, ages 16 and over. Variable definitions are: Obs=CPS sample size, Employment=wage and salary employment, Members=employed workers who are union members, Covered=workers covered by a collective bargaining agreement, %Mem=percent of employed workers who are union members, and %Cov=percent of employed workers who are covered by a collective bargaining agreement. Metropolitan areas shown in the 1995-2001 tables are based on 1993 Census definitions used in the CPS; those shown in the 1986-1994 tables are based on the 1984 Census definitions. CMSAs at the top of the table are identified by CPS size codes, while the MSAs and the PMSAs in the remainder of the table are identified by a mix of Census FIPS codes and size codes included in the CPS. For the five CMSAs during 1986-94, counts for the component PMSAs do not add to the CMSA total because the CPS failed to assign some households to PMSAs. This causes employment estimates in the component PMSAs to be

understated. CMSA employment counts are correct for these five urban areas during 1986-93, but are understated in 1994. The five CMSAs are: Boston, Hartford, Philadelphia, Providence, and St. Louis.
 © 2002 by Barry T. Hirsch and David A. Macpherson. The use of data requires citation.

xvi **No. HS-4. Resident Population by State: 1900 to 2002**

[In thousands. As of April 1, except as indicated]
 For information on methodology for intercensal estimates, see
<http://eire.census.gov/popest/topics/methodology/states.php>

State	1900 June 1	1910 Apr 15	1920 Jan 1	1930 Apr 1	1940 Apr 1	1950 Apr 1	1960 Apr 1	1970 Apr 1	1980 Apr 1	1990 Apr 1	2002 July 1
United States	75,995	91,972	105,711	122,775	131,669	150,697	179,323	203,212	226,546	248,710	288,369
Alabama	1,829	2,138	2,348	2,646	2,833	3,062	3,267	3,444	3,894	4,041	4,487
Arkansas	1,312	1,574	1,752	1,854	1,949	1,910	1,786	1,923	2,286	2,351	2,710
Florida	529	753	968	1,468	1,897	2,771	4,952	6,789	9,746	12,938	16,713
Georgia	2,216	2,609	2,896	2,909	3,124	3,445	3,943	4,590	5,463	6,478	8,560
Kentucky	2,147	2,290	2,417	2,615	2,846	2,945	3,038	3,219	3,661	3,685	4,093
Louisiana	1,382	1,656	1,799	2,102	2,364	2,684	3,257	3,641	4,206	4,220	4,483
Mississippi	1,551	1,797	1,791	2,010	2,184	2,179	2,178	2,217	2,521	2,573	2,872
North Carolina	1,894	2,206	2,559	3,170	3,572	4,062	4,556	5,082	5,882	6,629	8,320
South Carolina	1,340	1,515	1,684	1,739	1,900	2,117	2,383	2,591	3,122	3,487	4,107
Tennessee	2,021	2,185	2,338	2,617	2,916	3,292	3,567	3,924	4,591	4,877	5,797
Texas	3,049	3,897	4,663	5,825	6,415	7,711	9,580	11,197	14,229	16,987	21,780
Virginia	1,854	2,062	2,309	2,422	2,678	3,319	3,967	4,648	5,347	6,187	7,294
Total Southern Population	21,123	24,683	27,524	31,376	34,676	39,495	46,473	53,264	64,947	74,452	91,215
Percent of population in the South	27.80 %	26.84 %	26.04 %	25.56 %	26.34 %	26.21 %	25.92 %	26.21 %	28.67 %	29.94 %	31.63 %

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, census years, *Demographic Trends in the 20th Century, Census 2000 Special Reports, Series CENSR-4*. See also
<http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/censr-4.pdf> (released 17 December 2002);
 "Table ST-2002EST-01 - State Population Estimates: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2002";
 published 20 December 2002;
<http://eire.census.gov/popest/data/states/tables/ST-2002EST-01.php>.
<http://eire.census.gov/popest/data/states.php>

xvii **Union Membership, Coverage, Density and Employment by State, 1983** (details in table note)

State Code	State	Sector	Obs	Employment	Members	Covered	%Mem	%Cov	%Overall Employment
63	Alabama	Total	2,567	1,352,750	228,177	268,173	16.9	19.8	1.53%
71	Arkansas	Total	1,967	748,345	82,221	103,180	11.0	13.8	0.85%
59	Florida	Total	5,443	3,851,182	393,749	532,852	10.2	13.8	4.36%
58	Georgia	Total	3,526	2,251,024	267,041	345,076	11.9	15.3	2.55%
61	Kentucky	Total	2,237	1,249,436	223,715	259,807	17.9	20.8	1.42%
72	Louisiana	Total	2,264	1,480,074	204,208	267,775	13.8	18.1	1.68%
64	Mississippi	Total	2,112	799,794	79,351	99,685	9.9	12.5	0.91%
56	North Carolina	Total	3,400	2,338,878	178,656	238,116	7.6	10.2	2.65%
57	South Carolina	Total	1,977	1,175,193	69,566	100,585	5.9	8.6	1.33%
62	Tennessee	Total	2,406	1,668,152	252,358	300,948	15.1	18.0	1.89%
74	Texas	Total	8,752	6,010,470	583,715	712,818	9.7	11.9	6.81%
54	Virginia	Total	3,628	2,291,003	268,307	346,087	11.7	15.1	2.59%

Total South				25216301	2831064	3575102	11.23%	14.18%	28.56%
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Data Sources: Current Population Survey (CPS) Outgoing Rotation Group (ORG) Earnings Files, 1983. Sample includes employed wage and salary workers, ages 16 and over. Variable definitions are: State Code=Census state code used in CPS, Obs=CPS sample size, Employment=wage and salary employment, Members=employed workers who are union members, Covered=workers covered by a collective bargaining agreement, %Mem=percent of employed workers who are union members, and %Cov=percent of employed workers who are covered by a collective bargaining agreement. © 2002 by Barry T. Hirsch and David A. Macpherson. The use of data requires citation.

xviii **Union Membership, Coverage, Density and Employment by State, 2006** (details in table note)

State Code	State	Sector	Obs	Employment	Members	Covered	%Mem	%Cov	%Total Employment
63	Alabama	Total	1,903	1,930,249	170,113	193,988	8.8	10.0	1.51%
71	Arkansas	Total	1,741	1,130,108	58,127	67,488	5.1	6.0	0.88%
59	Florida	Total	7,303	7,675,747	396,958	497,350	5.2	6.5	5.99%
58	Georgia	Total	3,802	3,973,751	175,802	229,688	4.4	5.8	3.10%
61	Kentucky	Total	2,479	1,752,214	172,106	196,338	9.8	11.2	1.37%
72	Louisiana	Total	1,541	1,676,436	107,008	121,163	6.4	7.2	1.31%
64	Mississippi	Total	1,428	1,064,772	60,044	77,593	5.6	7.3	0.83%
56	North Carolina	Total	3,530	3,809,761	125,627	155,114	3.3	4.1	2.97%
57	South Carolina	Total	2,232	1,775,394	58,655	74,288	3.3	4.2	1.38%
62	Tennessee	Total	2,392	2,549,584	152,962	174,002	6.0	6.8	1.99%
74	Texas	Total	8,785	9,750,865	476,209	575,809	4.9	5.9	7.60%
54	Virginia	Total	4,010	3,445,961	139,498	179,326	4.0	5.2	2.69%
Total South				40,534,842	2,093,109	2,542,147	5.2%	6.3%	31.61%

Data Sources: Current Population Survey (CPS) Outgoing Rotation Group (ORG) Earnings Files, 2006. Sample includes employed wage and salary workers, ages 16 and over. Variable definitions are: State Code=Census state code used in CPS, Obs=CPS sample size, Employment=wage and salary employment, Members=employed workers who are union members, Covered=workers covered by a collective bargaining agreement, %Mem=percent of employed workers who are union members, and %Cov=percent of employed workers who are covered by a collective bargaining agreement. © 2007 by Barry T. Hirsch and David A. Macpherson. The use of data requires citation.

xix **Union Membership, Coverage, Density and Employment by State, 2006** (details in table note)

State Code	State	Sector	Obs	Employment	Members	Covered	%Mem	%Cov
63	Alabama	Total	1,903	1,930,249	170,113	193,988	8.8	10.0
63	Alabama	Private	1,572	1,598,093	74,085	84,733	4.6	5.3
63	Alabama	Public	331	332,156	96,028	109,255	28.9	32.9
63	Alabama	Priv. Construction	127	137,685	4,225	6,118	3.1	4.4
63	Alabama	Priv. Manufacturing	331	333,373	29,133	30,921	8.7	9.3
71	Arkansas	Total	1,741	1,130,108	58,127	67,488	5.1	6.0
71	Arkansas	Private	1,414	922,486	36,735	37,926	4.0	4.1
71	Arkansas	Public	327	207,621	21,392	29,561	10.3	14.2
71	Arkansas	Priv. Construction	95	63,769	575	963	0.9	1.5
71	Arkansas	Priv. Manufacturing	312	205,573	17,527	17,527	8.5	8.5
59	Florida	Total	7,303	7,675,747	396,958	497,350	5.2	6.5
59	Florida	Private	6,276	6,601,617	154,150	195,509	2.3	3.0
59	Florida	Public	1,027	1,074,130	242,807	301,841	22.6	28.1
59	Florida	Priv. Construction	656	693,484	21,783	24,044	3.1	3.5
59	Florida	Priv. Manufacturing	466	488,743	11,818	16,903	2.4	3.5
58	Georgia	Total	3,802	3,973,751	175,802	229,688	4.4	5.8
58	Georgia	Private	3,171	3,325,181	113,806	141,743	3.4	4.3
58	Georgia	Public	631	648,570	61,996	87,945	9.6	13.6
58	Georgia	Priv. Construction	268	286,866	11,965	11,965	4.2	4.2
58	Georgia	Priv. Manufacturing	482	496,978	32,266	40,746	6.5	8.2
61	Kentucky	Total	2,479	1,752,214	172,106	196,338	9.8	11.2
61	Kentucky	Private	2,042	1,446,092	122,219	133,924	8.5	9.3
61	Kentucky	Public	437	306,122	49,887	62,414	16.3	20.4

61	Kentucky	Priv. Construction	136	99,534	10,560	11,810	10.6	11.9
61	Kentucky	Priv. Manufacturing	368	262,427	40,188	42,683	15.3	16.3
72	Louisiana	Total	1,541	1,676,436	107,008	121,163	6.4	7.2
72	Louisiana	Private	1,283	1,409,658	65,575	74,068	4.7	5.3
72	Louisiana	Public	258	266,778	41,432	47,095	15.5	17.7
72	Louisiana	Priv. Construction	123	140,306	10,388	11,364	7.4	8.1
72	Louisiana	Priv. Manufacturing	148	167,572	31,003	33,472	18.5	20.0
64	Mississippi	Total	1,428	1,064,772	60,044	77,593	5.6	7.3
64	Mississippi	Private	1,144	857,930	34,890	42,852	4.1	5.0
64	Mississippi	Public	284	206,841	25,155	34,741	12.2	16.8
64	Mississippi	Priv. Construction	77	59,431	1,875	1,875	3.2	3.2
64	Mississippi	Priv. Manufacturing	268	202,730	17,014	22,788	8.4	11.2
56	North Carolina	Total	3,530	3,809,761	125,627	155,114	3.3	4.1
56	North Carolina	Private	2,938	3,180,923	57,781	71,513	1.8	2.2
56	North Carolina	Public	592	628,837	67,846	83,601	10.8	13.3
56	North Carolina	Priv. Construction	281	310,313	2,855	2,855	0.9	0.9
56	North Carolina	Priv. Manufacturing	539	574,428	17,761	22,936	3.1	4.0
57	South Carolina	Total	2,232	1,775,394	58,655	74,288	3.3	4.2
57	South Carolina	Private	1,816	1,449,420	31,842	33,216	2.2	2.3
57	South Carolina	Public	416	325,975	26,813	41,072	8.2	12.6
57	South Carolina	Priv. Construction	159	134,372	3,662	3,662	2.7	2.7
57	South Carolina	Priv. Manufacturing	384	303,059	8,540	9,226	2.8	3.0
62	Tennessee	Total	2,392	2,549,584	152,962	174,002	6.0	6.8
62	Tennessee	Private	2,024	2,156,099	67,418	76,198	3.1	3.5
62	Tennessee	Public	368	393,485	85,545	97,804	21.7	24.9
62	Tennessee	Priv. Construction	180	189,906	2,942	2,942	1.5	1.5
62	Tennessee	Priv. Manufacturing	379	396,452	32,618	35,271	8.2	8.9
74	Texas	Total	8,785	9,750,865	476,209	575,809	4.9	5.9
74	Texas	Private	7,320	8,166,978	230,574	264,971	2.8	3.2
74	Texas	Public	1,465	1,583,887	245,634	310,838	15.5	19.6
74	Texas	Priv. Construction	683	778,026	14,710	15,756	1.9	2.0
74	Texas	Priv. Manufacturing	915	1,031,799	61,010	66,946	5.9	6.5
54	Virginia	Total	4,010	3,445,961	139,498	179,326	4.0	5.2
54	Virginia	Private	3,253	2,807,697	85,990	104,226	3.1	3.7
54	Virginia	Public	757	638,265	53,508	75,100	8.4	11.8
54	Virginia	Priv. Construction	336	287,725	5,152	12,806	1.8	4.5
54	Virginia	Priv. Manufacturing	319	272,775	21,270	26,797	7.8	9.8

Data Sources: Current Population Survey (CPS) Outgoing Rotation Group (ORG) Earnings Files, 2006. Sample includes employed wage and salary workers, ages 16 and over. Variable definitions are: State Code=Census state code used in CPS, Obs=CPS sample size, Employment=wage and salary employment, Members=employed workers who are union members, Covered=workers covered by a collective bargaining agreement, %Mem=percent of employed workers who are union members, and %Cov=percent of employed workers who are covered by a collective bargaining agreement. © 2007 by Barry T. Hirsch and David A. Macpherson. The use of data requires citation.

^{xx} The AFL-CIO has publicly declared that changes in the labor law are its top priority having narrowly failed to move the legislation out of Congress in 2007, so if their hopes of a Democratic President and Democratic majority in Congress are realized in 2008, one would assume this would continue to be a central priority.

^{xxi} The Service Employees, arguably one of the most progressive unions in the country and certainly the largest and fastest growing union in the United States over the last 20-25 years is a good example of this political contradiction. I became the first Executive Board member elected from the South in 1996, when Andrew Stern became International President. The Southern Conference was also chartered at the same time where previously the country was divided between East, West, and Midwest running from north to south. Eight years later when I left the board to organize the multi-union Wal-Mart campaign in Florida and elsewhere, all of the conferences were gone, there were some more board members from the South, so this wider geographical reality had become institutionalized, but the membership percentage from Southern locals compared to what is now almost 1.5 million members in the union was miniscule for all practical purposes, and the voice within the overall union was similarly soft. The notion that a major US union would be led by a labor leader from the South is about as likely as an international union being led by

someone from Canada. But in fact that happens, so I guess it has become even more unlikely to imagine the tail wagging the dog to lead such a movement in the South again.

^{xxii} This is ironic particularly for the Service Employees whose most extensive growth has been among home healthcare workers, which they only realized in California and Illinois after similar commitments of 15 and 20 years duration based on constant organizing and adaptable strategies combining worker power and political leverage.

^{xxiii} See Rathke on “Majority Unionism” in *Social Policy (6/12/02)* available via www.chieforganizer.org.

^{xxiv} Successful experiment of the Wal-Mart Workers Association in Florida is indicative of this membership based, non-collective bargaining methodology. Also see, Rathke, “A Wal-Mart Workers Association: An Organizing Plan” in Nelson Lichtenstein’s edited volume, *Wal-Mart: The Face of Twenty-First-Century Capitalism* (New Press, 2006).