The Limits of Cooperation: Social Conflict and the Collapse of the Democratic Party-Organized Labor Alliance

Isaac Effner
Isaac.Effner@Colorado.EDU

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The Limits of Cooperation: Social Conflict and the Collapse of the Democratic Party-Organized Labor Alliance

Isaac Effner

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Thesis Advisor
Michaele Ferguson, Political Science

Committee Members
Edward Scott Adler, Political Science
Mark Pittenger, History
Abstract

The historic Democratic Party-organized labor alliance, created during the New Deal and strengthened during the postwar era, has become increasingly strained. Scholars of various disciplines have identified causal mechanisms for this decay, focusing on the role that the Party, neoliberal ideology and labor unions have played in facilitating this decline. Rather than select the most salient explanation or promote an alternative causal mechanism, I argue that these factors are all the result of an inevitable social conflict underlying the alliance. By synthesizing the different causal mechanisms, I illustrate how these factors reinforce each other and develop an understanding of the antagonistic social constructs precipitating this conflict. As opposed to the result of economic shifts or policy changes, I argue that the collapse of the alliance was caused by the disparity between labor’s working class goals and the bourgeois expectations of Democratic Party. I conclude by arguing that continued cooperation within the party system constitutes an existential crisis for unions, and that the labor movement must seek a political strategy without the Democratic Party in order to prevent the subversion of its ideological and social foundations.
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Foreword:

An alternative title: Dispatches from the Atrocity Exhibition.

I began preliminary research for this thesis in the summer of 2016, amidst the political turmoil of the surprising rise of outsider candidate Donald Trump and the relentless controversy and infighting in the Democratic primary. At the time, I entitled the confusion and horror of this political atmosphere the “atrocity exhibition” as it seemed to encapsulate the horrors of the rising tide of racism, misogyny and reactionary hysteria in American society. It conjured images of the disjointed psychoanalytical nightmare of J. G. Ballard’s classic novel and the hypnotic rumble of Joy Division’s despairing drone.

On a visit to my parent’s house I found a copy of a Teamster’s newsletter, courtesy of my Stepfather: a member of the Teamsters union at the Fort Collins Anheuser-Busch plant. Amongst the local news and pleas for donations, there was an article whose title “It’s Trump time, no more platitudes”1 seemed to encompass the conflict that this thesis addresses. The writer of the article, Secretary-Treasurer of Local 455 Steve Vairma, encouraged his audience to reject the platitudes of Trump’s pro-working class rhetoric, but “give the new president a fair opportunity to deliver on his promises to uplift the working class.”2 That this article can be considered a radical proclamation illustrates the decline of the political strategy of American labor unions.

Labor inhabits a particular pitiful sideshow of this American atrocity exhibition, demoralized to the point of idly waiting for a political savior to salvage working class America from the privations of capital. The radical and vigorous labor movement of the past has evaporated, leaving behind an overly-bureaucratic, politically directionless disarray of unions.

2 Ibid, 1.
What Vairma fails to comprehend is that the uncritical acceptance of political cooperation is the most dangerous platitude infecting labor. Trump will not right the wrongs of the Democratic Party, but will establish a new ideological framework through which the relentless persecution of labor is executed. The crisis confronting labor is its confinement under the yoke of the political system controlled by interests antagonistic to the working class. The purpose of this thesis is reject the blind acceptance of the political system implicit in Vairma’s plea, and dismantle the confines that have imprisoned the political imagination of labor. Labor cannot afford to languish under the regime of patience and politics, and must either rise above it or consign itself to the dustbin of history.
Section I: Introduction

The political alliance between the Democratic Party and organized labor, established in 1935, has collapsed due to the precariousness of its foundation and its fundamental unsustainability. Despite the longevity of this compromise, from the outset the conflictual relationship between labor and the political party generated considerable strain barely contained by the confines of the alliance and poorly concealed. At the core of this disintegrating alliance lie antagonistic conceptions of socio-political realities, pitting the establishmentarian expectations of the Party against the social goals of labor. This social conflict defines the subject of the following thesis: how the political relationship between the Democratic Party and organized labor has been defined by this conflict, and how these tensions have been manifested in various ways in American politics.

The purpose of this thesis will be to utilize this framework to analyze the decaying state of the alliance between organized labor and the party, the characteristics that defined the paradigmatic heyday of the postwar alliance, and the causal mechanisms that precipitated this decline. Not only have these changes dramatically altered the political significance of organized labor within the Democratic Party, these seismic shifts have troubling ramifications for the entirety of the working class within the contemporary political system. Understanding how the Party-Labor alliance has shifted, and how the conflicts leading to this shift have been formed and expressed, is vital for defining what the role of labor is and ought to be in the political sphere.

Despite a glut of historical literature on trade unionism from the Leftist European traditions of Marxism and syndicalism, the investigations of labor and political parties within American politics are far from comprehensive. However, a considerable amount of scholarship investigates the creation and decline of this alliance, albeit from more narrow approaches based on specific disciplines, rather than purely ideological frameworks. These approaches, while extremely varied in conclusions and
methodology, all identify a similar relationship between organized labor and the Democratic Party, and conclude on its temporariness and decline. This literature can be roughly separated by their focuses as either party-oriented, ideology-oriented or labor-oriented explanations.

The literature that focuses on Party-oriented explanations analyzes the role of the Democratic Party in creating and undermining the alliance. Much of this is based in historical examinations of the interplay between the Democratic leadership and the organized labor movement. Historical studies that examine Democratic policies towards organized labor such as the works of Jefferson Cowie\(^3\) and Mike Davis\(^4\) examining the New Deal era, and W. Carl Biven’s\(^5\) examination of the Carter administration document how the Democratic Party has historically interacted with labor radicals and bureaucrats. This body of literature plots the trajectory of the Democratic Party’s past with organized labor, presenting the policies that contributed to the decline of the alliance, as well as the purposes behind these policies. Other scholars focusing on the role of the Democratic Party analyze the changes in electoral demographics and ideological foundations that have influenced the alliance fundamentally. Rather than focus on the historical context of Party policies, Thomas Frank in his seminal *What’s the Matter With Kansas?*, analyzes the cultural shifts underlying the changing relationship between the Democratic Party and working class America.\(^6\)

Second, there is a body of literature that focuses on the ideological causes of the decline of the Party-Labor alliance. Examinations of the crumbling alliance originating from a more ideological and economic framework utilize discourses on neoliberalism, as “an ideology; a mode of governance . . . and

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a policy package,” beginning in the early postwar years. Leftist economists such as Gerard Dumenil and Dominique Levy\(^7\) investigate how the shifting trends in the global economy as well as domestic policies adopted by both Democrats and Republicans have disadvantaged the working class, and how this neoliberal order derives from a compromise between the capitalist and business classes under the auspices of government. Addressing the ideological dimensions of neoliberalism, writers such as Pierre Bourdieu\(^9\) and Jodi Dean\(^10\) examine how the adoption of the market-logic of neoliberalism by the political elite has undermined the social fabric of leftist movements and organized labor.

The last pertinent body of literature focuses on both the literal actions of unions, and more theoretical understandings of labor. Beyond a considerable body of writing produced by union members, bureaucrats and ideologues, scholarship focusing on the role of the organized labor in the decaying alliance tends to take the form of prescriptive analysis for union policies. Writers such as Stanley Aronowitz\(^11\) and Raymond Hogler\(^12\) accept as a fait accompli that the alliance between the Democratic Party and organized labor has been severely strained through the last quarter of the century. While these writers express radically different visions of what a new labor movement should look like, they converge on identifying the most contentious policy issues that have caused the current political climate. To theorists sympathetic to organized labor, the decline originates in the failure of the Democratic Party to protect the rights of union members, and the industries that employ them.

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The various factors that these three groups of writers have identified as responsible for the decline of the Party-Labor alliance are, I argue, inextricably linked: these factors reinforce each other and compound one another’s effects. The disparate causal mechanisms identified by the aforementioned theorists explain specific vehicles precipitating the decline of the alliance, however these fail to present a composite image of the socio-political world defining these trends. In order to facilitate a more comprehensive conception of these trends, I will synthesize these various arguments in order to conceptualize the political, social, and economic universe that defines the relationship between labor and the party, in periods of both cooperation and conflict. Rather than causal mechanisms, the synthesis of these three bodies of literature leads me to the conclusion that the shifts in the relationship between the Party and labor are driven by an inherent conflict between the nature of political parties and organized labor, derived from their disparate ideological foundations as competitive social structures. This only becomes apparent we examine the roles of the party, ideology and labor holistically.

I develop my account of the structural conflict between Party and Labor by analyzing each factor, showing how the conflict between Party and labor cannot be properly understood without accounting for the different social structures of parties and labor. Analyzing the ways through which this conflict has been manifested, I consider how the Labor-Party alliance decayed due to underlying socio-political tensions, rather than because of policy differences or economic changes. There is no set of policies that could have prevented the decline of the Party-Labor alliance, or mended its deeply fractured state. Rather, the conflict between party and labor structure guaranteed that this political alliance would only ever be temporary, and that lasting government-labor cooperation would be impossible. I conclude by applying this framework to the contemporary political context, considering the failure of the Democratic Party to retain support of organized labor and the false promises of the Trump administration in strengthening the economic power and political preeminence of the working class. In
this thesis, I aim to separate organized labor from the confines of Party-centric discourses, and advance it into the socio-political realm of a post-alliance order.
Section II: The Democratic Party’s Synthetic Compromise

“If an emergent Republican ‘majority’ is displacing the old New Deal coalition as the fulcrum of the American electoral system, it is only because forty years of marriage between labour and the Democrats have produced a politically dispirited and alienated working class.” –Mike Davis

Observing the expanse of America’s postwar period, one would be hard-pressed to pinpoint the precise moment the Democratic Party reneged on the promises of the Party-Labor alliance and abandoned the negotiating table. Both emerged from the wreckage of the Great Depression empowered by the victories of the Second World War, and united by a mutually beneficial alliance that would drastically alter the role of labor in American politics. Half a century later the rise of free trade Democrats at the core of the Clinton administration and the inability of unionists to defeat NAFTA exposed the considerable degree to which the alliance had crumbled. Taken *prima facie*, the interplay between the Party and labor in the 20th century illustrates a decay from the high-water mark of New Deal compromise to the current nadir precipitated by conflict over economic issues. However, examining the alliance more closely reveals the ceaseless tension, ideological rivalries and open hostilities that formed the foundation of the postwar compromise and resulted in the contemporary Democratic Party’s indifference to the concerns of labor.

The following chapter focuses on the Democratic Party’s role in the creation of the Party-Labor compromise and its position as the historical agent sowing the seeds of its destruction. Rather than a reorientation of the Party’s Gilded Era promotion of monied interests, the alliance reflects an uncharacteristically bold experiment in welding together an opportunistic elitist structure to the semi-proletarian networks of labor to form an electorally viable political machine at a time of considerable upheaval. The “divorce” of this political marriage reflects the conclusion of an experiment that has

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increasingly become an albatross dangling from the centrist neck of the Party. The technocratic core of the Party has lost interest in maintaining the tokenism generally allotted to securing unenthusiastic labor support, content to let it limp beside it or, preferably, fade into obscurity.

Much of the scholarship focusing on the Democratic Party’s role in the alliance adopts a historical approach, emphasizing the political context surrounding its development, and on the individuals and institutions that defined it. However, this approach tends to overemphasize the influence of the actions of Democratic presidents and union leaders, rather than studying the inherent social conflict that generates tensions regardless of the political context. To foster an understanding of this conflict, I adopt a more holistic approach to the historic development of the alliance and its collapse. This chapter considers the larger political narrative of the alliance, rather than focusing on separate historical moments. While this chapter can be broadly divided into three sections (the creation of the alliance, the postwar period, and the decline of the alliance in the late 20th century), they all reflect an identical political struggle.

**Disunity and Disharmony in the American Labor Movement**

In order to understand the tensions engrained in the Party-Labor alliance, it is necessary to emphasize the open hostility that characterized the Party’s pre-New Deal labor policies. The Democratic Party at the turn of the century viewed organized labor as a nuisance, and thus appealing to a “union vote” fell outside of sensible electoral strategy. Especially problematic was the lack of a particular political entity of a unionized worker or a labor vote, as the extant labor movement was divided roughly into two fairly antagonistic camps, both considerably heterogeneous. The most established unions consisted of skilled craft laborers, rallying around the flag of the American Federation of Labor and its dedicated moderate Samuel Gompers. The AFL exuded a conservatism and nativism, born out of a
“white, male, [and] native-born”\textsuperscript{14} identity antagonistic to the immigrant laborers of the industrial sector.

Gompers, a youthful idealist turned subdued pragmatist, utilized the craft union contempt of class politics to pursue narrow economic goals through an agenda of neutrality and anti-statist voluntarism. Combining a laissez-faire view of the government’s role in the economy and a reliance on the volunteering efforts of craft union workers, the AFL increased the welfare of a narrow and elitist sector of American labor.\textsuperscript{15} Rather than agitate for worker’s rights and workplace protections at a federal level, voluntarism produced “a system of protection just for the aristocracy of labor.”\textsuperscript{16}

Voluntarism’s restrained approach to achieving worker advancement was accompanied by an equally moderate devotion to political neutrality. The 1894 AFL convention’s “Political Programme” stated that “party politics whether democratic, republican, socialistic, prohibition, or any other should have no place in the convention of the A.F. of L.”\textsuperscript{17} Neutrality became a pillar of the AFL, making it entirely unavailable (and unwanted) for incorporation within the Democratic electoral coalition. Craft union workers as a whole generally shunned progressivism and voted for conservative and racist politicians, though never basing their political activities on a union identity.

The antithesis to Gompers’ demure leadership and aversion to overt political agitation lay in the neglected mines, factories and urban wastelands of industrial America. If the AFL represented the professional crust of the labor movement, the industrial unions pursued the goals of the proletarian

\textsuperscript{15} Voluntarism, Samuel Gompers and the early AFL are often supported as paradigmatic of “good unionism” within the Right to Work movement. The National Right to Work Committee has released pamphlets outlining the proper practices for unions based on a “devotion to individual freedom” rather than “rely almost solely on compulsion, coercion, threats, violence and intimidation.” “The Voluntarism of Samuel Gompers,” National Right To Work Committee, accessed March 27, 2017, https://nrtwc.org/pdfs/Gompers.pdf.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Ibid}, 57.
heart of the industrial era, radicalized by the deprivations of the workplace and fueled by a passionate desire for political action. The same year that the AFL released a Political Programme declaring the virtue of neutrality, the radical industrial based American Railway Union launched the watershed Pullman Strike in response to unfair wage cuts. Despite the ring-leader’s initial reluctance to call a strike, the Democratic President Cleveland’s heavy handed reaction\textsuperscript{18} led Eugene Debs to call a general strike for the city of Chicago. The characteristic refusal to participate by the craft unions, at the behest of Gompers, led to the failure of the general strike, the crushing of the Pullman strike and the arrest of Debs. Despite the failure of the American Railway Union, the strike laid the foundation for political strategies of industrial unions and spurred the creation of an industrial counterpart to the AFL: the Industrial Workers of the World.\textsuperscript{19}

The IWW, which organized much of what would form the Congress of Industrial Organizations or CIO, focused on inclusivity and radicalism in order to pursue the interests of industrial workers. The IWW became the refuge of marginalized and despised members of the workforce: Jewish and Catholic immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe,\textsuperscript{20} black workers migrating from the South,\textsuperscript{21} and a host of anarchists and leftist outsiders. The inclusion of racial minorities and women scandalized the conservatives in the AFL and the political establishment, leading the IWW to attempt to achieve its political aspirations outside of the confines of the existing party structure.

\textsuperscript{18} The president dispatched 12,000 troops to break the strike, a severe reaction by even the standards of the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century. \textit{Ibid}, 58.
\textsuperscript{19} Formed in 1905 by Eugene Debs and other radicals expressly stating “the superiority of industrial unionism over craft unionism in the struggle against the monopolistic, highly integrated organization of employers.” Philip Foner, “The IWW and the Black Worker,” \textit{The Journal of Negro History} 55, no. 1 (1970), 45.
The IWW and its allies formed the Socialist Party as a political wing aimed at “challeng[ing] the rise of corporate power through the ballot box.”22 Debs ran as the socialist candidate for every election between 1900 and 1920 (the final time while imprisoned for sedition)23 as an alternative to traditional party politics for the legions of disillusioned industrial workers and leftists. The socialist political strategy was diametrically opposed the neutrality of the AFL, but to the Democratic Party both were equally electorally useless. To the Party, unions were either irrelevant to elections, or worse represented an electoral threat by a dangerously radical mob.

Along with the hostility of the judicial branch, the presidency aided in the federal offensive that plagued the labor movement. The aforementioned Pullman Strike was crushed ruthlessly by a Democratic presidency, a trend well established among his fellow Democratic presidential peers. Woodrow Wilson, despite his reformist rhetoric and 14 points idealism, supported a repressive patriotism at the outbreak of American involvement in the First World War. Anarchists and leftists including socialist leader Eugene Debs were punished for their political beliefs and had their First Amendment liberties curtailed by the Espionage and Sedition Acts.24 Union members were not voters to be attracted, but untrustworthy dissidents to be marginalized and restrained.

For the Democratic Party in the early 20th century, union votes were neither particularly useful nor desirable. The party maintained a solid coalition of business interests and Southerners while supporting an economic and political program antagonistic to organized labor. For the union member collusion with the government was reprehensible and impractical. The political strategies organized by both the conservative craft unionists and more radical industrial unionists developed in part due to the

23 Ibid, 59.
24 Ibid, 76.
open hostility of the government. Expressing support for the Democratic Party was outside the logical universe of political behavior for union members.

Waging Peace

Despite the Democratic Party’s historic animosity towards organized labor, the drastic changes of the interwar period made an alliance an increasingly profitable proposition. The economic and political dislocation of the Great Depression granted an unprecedented importance to organized labor in the eyes of the Democratic Party. The business bedrock of the Democratic Party had fractured, due to the Wall Street crash and the depthless contempt titans of industry had for the recently inaugurated President Franklin Roosevelt. The upheaval had also provided the idealists in the President’s Brain Trust an opportunity to pursue their loftiest economic reforms, contingent on the cooperation of the unionized working class. Accordingly, “for the first and only time in American political history, the federal government actively supported—even promoted—the right of working people to organize into unions.”

The collapse of the Wilsonian political universe ushered in a new era of organized labor and Party interactions. The AFL neutrality stance had long been abandoned and the IWW had been crippled by the Red Scare and internal ideological disagreements leading to a schism. To the Democratic Party, or more accurately the small cadre of New Deal architects advising FDR, unionized America represented an immense untapped reserve of electoral support and were key to the realization of the New Deal’s alphabet soup programs.

25 An animosity shared by the President, who in 1933 derided the speculators and financial experts in messianic fashion: “The money changers have fled from their high seats in the temple of our civilization . . . We may now restore that temple to the ancient truths.” Ibid, X.

26 Ibid, 112.
The New Deal ideologues within FDR’s administration were tasked with forging a peace with the unions the Democratic Party had previously repressed. The treaty between the warring parties was enacted in 1935, undertaken by Senator Robert Wagner’s tireless efforts to create the National Labor Relations Act. The “Wagner Act” legitimized the right of unions to bargain collectively (thus legitimizing organized labor itself), leading to a “massive organizing drive in basic industry,”27 undertaken by the de facto leader of the industrial union movement John L. Lewis. The drastic unionization effort realized Wagner’s plan to form an electoral base within the ranks of organized labor. Despite Roosevelt “never develop[ing] much sympathy for unions . . . he readily accepted them as allies of convenience.”28 By Roosevelt’s second campaign millions of union and working class voters had been brought into the fold of the nascent New Deal coalition. His victory in 1937 declared the self-perpetuating alliance between the reoriented Party’s desperate need for electoral support in the wake of the loss of the East Coast capitalists, and the union leadership’s new found recognition and influence within the government.

The end of the *Lochner* era of federal repression of labor and the Wagner Act treaty ended open hostility, yet the deep ideological rifts immediately began bearing the weight of this convenient alliance. The exclusion of racial minorities and women from New Deal reforms, necessary to secure the support of the Southern Democrats, violated the core principle of inclusivity of industrial unionism—those of the IWW and the remnants of radicalism dormant in Lewis’ CIO. Despite the CIO’s defiant declaration “that the new unions would not discriminate on account of race, gender, or creed,”29 organized labor was subsumed within the Caucasian and masculine world of Washington politics, an identity diametrically opposed to the leftism of the radical labor movement. The Democratic Party moved to curtail the radicalism and militancy of unions that could potentially interfere with the economic aspirations of the

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New Deal’s drive towards progress; Roosevelt’s nonchalance towards the deaths of ten protestors in the 1937 “Little Steel” strike reflected the Party’s low tolerance of irritating incidents.

Organized labor constituted a minor piece within the Roosevelt administration’s roadmap for creating its vision of American society: part Brain Trust idealism, part FDR megalomania. The Party’s willingness to advance the goals of organized labor had evaporated by the outset of World War Two, when the brief historical window allotted to organized labor slammed shut leaving the stupefied labor bureaucracies to support the Party out of as much shock as loyalty. Where Samuel Gompers famously declared that the ultimate desire of labor was “more,” the Party answered with a deafening “enough.”

**Historical Roots of Party Domination and Discipline**

Despite the desperation of the Roosevelt administration’s desire to halt mass strikes and working class agitation (necessary to enact New Deal economic legislation) the Party proved excellent in containing and controlling labor. Despite the watershed Wagner Act, the actual interactions between the party and the various unions constituting the labor vote reveal a far more cynical and expedient mode of operations. The Democratic Party lacked any particular ideological similarities with organized labor and shifted support between conservative craft unions in the AFL and the CIO’s more radical industrial unions in order to extract as much political capital as possible. Convenience formed the foundation of the party’s dealings with labor, and defined the political alliance through the 20th century.

An examination of the political machinations of the Roosevelt administration illustrates the interplay between political goals and the level of support the Party allotted to worker’s organizations. The administration used the NRA (National Recovery Administration) selectively to maintain the working class electorate as well as support from key industrial business (such as GE, US Steel and the oil
industry). Thus, the party granted preferential treatment to industrial interests (home to the more radical CIO) by granting them a certain “margin of appreciation” in enacting the Wagner Act, while providing support and relief to the AFL (which remained intensely hostile to industrial unionism) dominated industries on the east coast. This “political juggling act” allowed the Party to play both sides until the incessant agitation, strikes and sit downs of the CIO, inspired by IWW tactics and aided by the Communist Party, led to the defection of industrial business from the New Deal coalition. The administration, having lost a major bulwark of support in an election year, attempted to attract the potential four million voters of the CIO by reorienting the NRA away from craft unionism and tacitly supporting industrial unions. In return, “the CIO created Labor’s Nonpartisan League (LNPL) to mobilize support for Roosevelt and help make up the deficit in campaign financing left by the defection of Democratic bankers and businessman.” The CIO served the Roosevelt administration well, providing campaign mobilization and votes for his 1936 and 1940 campaigns, until the rearmament drive at the outbreak of WWII led the administration to renew its ties with the industrial business that had defected in the mid-30s. While the administration feared a strike wave would be inevitable if it openly abandoned and repressed the CIO, it did manage to impose a “wartime no-strike pledge and the regressive wage ceilings of the so called ‘Little Steel Formula,’” on the CIO, reflecting a zero tolerance policy for unions interfering with the war effort. The CIO bureaucracy, now dependent on federal support for legitimacy and barely subduing the powder keg of rank and file proletarian radicalism, submitted to “permanent harmonization of the interests of capital and labor through an integration of collective bargaining and scientific management.”

31 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
The interaction between the party and the AFL and CIO in the latter half of the 1930s revealed the manner in which the party would rely on unions for votes and campaign mobilization, while simultaneously imposing a corporatist discipline on worker radicalism. The relationship became integral to the political behavior of the CIO, and later AFL-CIO, transforming industrial unions from the heart of American radicalism to a submissive electoral machine, in the words of CIO PAC leader Jack Kroll “bargaining with [the Party] ‘much as it would with an employer.’”\(^35\) This alliance would work as long as these unions were necessary for electoral victory and the Party maintained at least token support for labor’s goals, a precarious and doomed relationship. The position of labor in America had evolved rapidly over the course of a few decades, gaining influence and legitimacy while losing its independence through its incorporation within the narrow confines of the Democratic Party.

**In Camelot: Unions in Washington**

The end of the Second World War ushered in a renewed period of Party-labor cooperation, expanding the influence of unions within the political sphere while simultaneously narrowing labor into an interest group within the electoral base. The legitimization of labor and the decrease in cross-union tension fostered by the AFL-CIO unification, led to the creation of a political machine capable of delivering millions of votes, and more importantly providing an unrivaled source of propaganda distribution and mobilization. While the true electoral importance of AFL-CIO votes decreased,\(^36\) labor “perform[ed] a multitude of unglamorous tasks which most middle-class suburbanite Democrats or ADA (Americans for Democratic Action)-type Liberals [would] not perform,”\(^37\) while mobilizing marginalized racial communities the Democratic Party historically ignored.\(^38\) The AFL-CIOs Committee on Political

\(^{35}\) *Ibid.*


Education (COPEs) formed a significant part of the Party’s campaign apparatus, while the support unions showed for Democratic candidates amounted to a “liberal sanction” allowing Democrats “to rally support from other self-designated liberal groups. . . [that] usually [would] not back a candidate whose acceptability to organized labor [was] highly questionable.”

In reciprocation, the Democratic Party pursued an industrial policy supportive of the manufacturing sectors of the Great Lakes states and a Keynesian economic policy prioritizing full employment over inflation. Unions received an unprecedented level of federal support, most dramatically evident in President Kennedy’s Executive Order 10988 which recognized the right of federal employees to organize and bargain collectively. Underlying the New Deal compromise was the unchallenged superiority of the American economy in the postwar period, granting labor unions economic strength and relevancy.

The power of organized labor during the postwar period and its enthusiastic cooperation with the Democratic Party led to a dependence on federal politics as the chief political arena among the top tier of union bureaucracies. The industrial agitators that formed the ranks of the early 20th century unions were replaced by corporatist bureaucrats eager to express the professionalism and respectability of the reunited AFL-CIO. To bureaucrats like AFL-CIO President George Meany, presidential influence and political participation became an end in itself, allowing the existence of an alliance to replace the delivery of actual policies supporting organized labor.

Inclusion, or collusion as the radicals of the past would have condemned it, proved to be intoxicating to the business minded bureaucracy, who readily pursued a path of moderation. This led to

the stifling of grass-roots radicalism by the AFL-CIO bureaucracy, the exclusion of militant black unions during operation Dixie and the whole-hearted participation in the anti-communist excesses of the McCarthy era.41 The union bureaucracies succeeded in eradicating the dogged leftism and racial inclusionary ideology of the IWW within industrial unionism, while the COPEs expanded the Democratic electorate into minority communities in a far less threatening manner, inadvertently signing their own death warrant. The Democratic Party granted the George Meanys and John L. Lewis’s of organized labor a seat at the negotiating table as long as union support remained in step with Democratic economic and political policies and unions were performing vital electoral services. These electoral services had become increasingly irrelevant as the end of the Dixiecrat alliance led to a radical shift in the Democratic base towards the bi-costal, racial inclusivity strategies evident in the contemporary Party. The Democratic Party continued to support pro-labor economic policies such as a macroeconomic focus on full employment, however this was predicated on the participation of the organized labor and on America’s unchallenged position as the industrial superpower. The collapse of the postwar economic system and the rising economic power of Germany and Japan would abruptly end these policies.

Undeniably, the Democratic Party benefited immensely from the support of organized labor in the postwar decades, in return granting legitimacy to union bureaucrats fearful of returning to the dark days of strike busting and repression. The Democratic Party’s support for organized labor resulted in terrific returns, inter-union conflict defeated the old guard radicals which thwarted Wilsonian suppression, while the organizational capacity integral to union formation facilitated the creation of the post-Southern Strategy electoral base. The Democratic Party succeeded in creating a political machine out of the formerly robust and heterogeneous working class movement of the pre-Great Depression era. As changes in global economics and domestic politics made supporting organized labor decidedly

unfashionable, the Party simply concluded its pro-union policies while reaping the benefits of labor’s bureaucratic inertia. Labor’s lack of radicalism and the dedicated support of its bureaucracy to the Party led to its inability to prevent shifts towards policies detrimental to working class interests.

**A Reluctant Keynesian**

By 1976, the United States lacked the unrivaled economic strength that the postwar compromise was predicated on, and the political stability that had defined earlier Democratic presidencies. The Bretton Woods monetary system had imploded, the American economy had been rocked by the OPEC shocks, and the federal budget was overextended by the combined cost of Great Society programs and the Vietnam War. Compounding the tensions within the Democratic Party and organized labor alliance, the nomination and victory of Southern Democrat Jimmy Carter deeply worried union bureaucrats.

Despite the increasingly acrimonious relationship between labor and Carter, and his unsettling support of business, deregulation and his southern origins, Carter was in the words of his Chair of the Council of Economic Advisers Charles Schultze, “a reluctant Keynesian.” The Carter administration pursued full employment policies reminiscent of the Kennedy administration, a stimulus package in line with Keynesian orthodoxy, and pursued an early inflation strategy of voluntary price and wage controls that allotted considerable power to unions.

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42 The relationship between organized labor and the Southern states had always been especially negative, and the failure of the Operation Dixie unionization drive led to a deep distrust of Southern politicians.


45 Carter’s 1977 stimulus was one of the largest points of contention in his early presidency, criticized as insufficient and too pro-business by liberal Democrats, Kennedy administration economists and the AFL-CIO, then suffering under 7% unemployment. Despite its numerous detractors and its mutilation in congress, as an attempt to stimulate the economy the plan was inherently Keynesian. *Ibid*, 70-1.
The Democratic Party under the Carter administration maintained the labor status quo of the postwar era, despite the deep ambivalence of the president. The conflict between the administration and organized labor did not originate in the Democratic Party’s attempts to further discipline and limit union activity, but the immense disparity between labor “aspiration[s] to return to the unfinished agenda of the Kennedy and Johnson years,” and the unstable economy and dollar value which Carter inherited. While the Carter administration would alienate the left-wing of the Democratic Party and turn to monetarist strategies to combat the stagflation crisis, most evident in the selection of Paul Volker as Chairman of the Federal Reserve, Carter felt substantive non-Keynesian policies were necessitated by the growing pressure to resolve the recession and the failure of orthodox economic policy to lower inflation. The Party remained committed to the postwar alliance conceptually, but the economic disasters of the late 1970s severely limited the capacity of the president to maintain these policies.

The ostensibly anti-labor economic policies of the Carter administration reiterated the social conflict inherent in the alliance, but more immediately reflected the administration’s desperation to halt the economic crisis. Carter’s labor strategy was to maintain the status quo of the postwar period, not to openly marginalize organized labor from the Party. As such Carter policies reflect a truly postwar Democratic strategy, attempting to extract the possible electoral and economic advantages of union support in exchange for legitimacy and influence. The tensions between the Party and labor that existed during the New Deal period and throughout the postwar era continued, but the alliance remained intact under Carter.

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46 Ibid, 131.
47 The conflict with congressional liberals Tip O’Neill and Ted Kennedy proved to be disastrous due to the fierce primary competition between Carter and Kennedy in the 1980 election. Ibid, 2.
48 Ibid, 237.
While Carter and his economic policies angered and ostracized organized labor in the short term, the rejection of Keynesian governance resulting from the stagflation crisis proved to be far more disastrous. The victory of Ronald Reagan in the election of 1980 destabilized the Democratic Party and sparked a centrist backlash against the supposed excesses of the postwar Democrats. The following decade would lead to the rise of a new breed of Democrat, decrying the era of big government and federal spending, led by the smarmy governor of Arkansas, Bill Clinton.

The Death Rattle of the New Deal

The end of the Carter administration amounted to the conclusion of the postwar compromise between the Democratic Party and labor. The new guard of centrist Democrats constructed an electoral strategy and promoted policy initiatives antagonistic to organized labor. These Democrats deepened the socio-political rifts of the alliance by pursuing pro-business economic policies and maintaining the Reaganite rejection of Keynesian macroeconomics.

Bill Clinton and his Third Way ideology succeeded in damaging the political power of organized labor in a form the Reagan administration could only dream of; actively severing the ties of political influence established by the New Deal Democrats. A brief aside into Clinton’s history with organized labor within Arkansas presents a roadmap for how Democratic Party electoral strategies shifted post-Carter to the detriment of union interests.

At the outset of Bill Clinton’s political career in the early 1970s, labor donations and organization partially financed his campaign and propelled him to the forefront of Arkansas state politics. Despite union support, Clinton’s tenure as governor (1979-81, and 83-92) reflected the centrist triangulation

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49 The following examination of Clinton’s anti-labor practices while Governor of Arkansas was taken from the work of Michael Pierce, associate professor at the University of Arkansas, an expert on labor history in Arkansas. Michael, Pierce, “How Bill Clinton Remade the Democratic Party by Abandoning Unions: An Arkansas Story, The Labor and Working Class History Association, November 26, 2016.
integral to the post-New Deal Democratic strategy. “Work with liberals on social issues and gestures to the black community allowed [him] to retain the backing of much of the left . . . and [his] labor policies attracted the support . . . of business conservatives.” The success the triangulation strategy reaped allowed the governor to further distance himself from the influence of organized labor, dramatically evident in the 1992 election where the Clintons proudly defended their close ties to avowed union busters Tyson Foods and Walmart. The Arkansas gubernatorial arena provided a staging ground for the “New Democrats,” expressing the viability of a pro-business centrist party capable of challenging the revitalized Republican Party. The Clinton Democrats, despite their pretentions of novelty, signaled a return to the business friendly relations of the pre-New Deal party, an arrangement that would require the marginalization of organized labor the former governor had proved to be thoroughly adept at.

The inauguration of Bill Clinton signified the final nail in the coffin of the New Deal and postwar Democratic Party. To the Clintonite branch of the Democratic Party, now inhabiting the White House and dominating the Party infrastructure, the trappings of big government and “the politics of entitlement” were characteristic of liberal naiveté. The Third Way sought to disentangle the Party from its civil society obligations, while remaining nominally committed to progressivist causes, and reestablish the Democratic-business alliances which defined the pre-Roosevelt administrations. While labor unions had been routinely marginalized, manipulated and de-radicalized during the postwar years, under Clinton they inhabited a space outside of the centrist restoration. Despite the continued willingness of Democrats to accept political donations and co-opt organizational capacity to aid in campaigning, the

50 Ibid.
51 While working for the campaign of fellow Democrat centrist Senator David Pryor in 1978, Bill Clinton penned a series of ads arguing unions were “disastrous for the economy of Arkansas.” Ibid.
centrist core of the Democratic Party viewed unions as a hold-over of the excesses of Great Society overspending, and the alliance as “government intervention in the labor market.”53

Before moving on it is necessary to reexamine the term “marriage” often used to refer to the interactions between the Democratic Party and organized labor. Perhaps a more accurate description would be a political dalliance (though perhaps the needlessly romanticized terminology ought to be scraped entirely), where the Party briefly flirted with the most moderate segments of working class organization before returning to its soulmate of conservative business and white collar technocracy. The collapse of the New Deal did not give way to a new guard of forward-thinking Democrats, but reasserted the primacy of the elitist core of which had presided over the excesses of the Wilsonian suppression of leftism and the earlier mass strike breaking. The brief period of federal support of organized labor, as tumultuous and unbalanced as it had been, concluded ushering in a new era of political friction and increasing hostility.

The Fight against Fair Trade

While the Clinton administration promoted a host of policies which disadvantaged the working class (see Section III) the most blatant antagonism directed against the increasingly strained apparatus of political cooperation consisted of the Democratic Party’s newfound enthusiasm towards free trade. The scuttling of Keynesian logic, and its inward looking theories on full employment and domestic stimulation, was replaced by an outwardly looking economic ideology equating and necessitating global economic liberalization with domestic economic progress. According to the economic logic of Third Way Democrats, free trade amounted to “a force for social progress,”54 facilitating economic, political and social advancement in the developing world while pushing past the economic limits of New Deal

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54 Ibid, 234.
protectionism and government intervention. From a leftist perspective free trade amounted to neo-imperialism, while organized labor viewed free trade as a fundamental existential threat.

Before investigating the conflict surrounding the enactment of the Clinton Administration’s free trade magnum opus NAFTA, the political symbolism of free trade deserves comment on two points. First, the promise of universal economic benefits (or that the rising tide will lift all boats) derived from free trade violates the basic logic of political economy, predicated as it is on the study of winners and losers in the global economy. Regardless of the net benefits of liberalized trade to the economy as a whole, some segment of the economy must bite the bullet of free trade, and the costs of trade fall squarely on the union core of the manufacturing sector. Rather than motivated by “irrational fears driven by isolationist tendencies,” organized labor’s categorical rejection of free trade originated in the inevitability of job losses engendered by market liberalization.

Second, regardless of the supposed benefits that free trade delivers for the economy, the non-democratic nature of NAFTA’s enactment poses a question of the role of a state with regards to its citizenry. That organized labor was marginalized and ignored while the government created an economic policy that negatively impacts the economic livelihood of union workers challenges the preconceptions of democratic legitimacy. The state imposed an economic policy benefiting the corporate classes, expressing the capitalist values of the Clintonite Democrats and the elitist anti-working class policies of centrist; a cross of gold for the 21st century.

NAFTA

The enactment of NAFTA corresponded with an attempt by the Democratic Party to alienate organized labor from the power centers of government and abrogate the influence it had formerly

55 Ibid, 232.
exerted. The political alliance unraveled as the Third Way Democrats relentlessly pursued a policy
objective virtually unanimously opposed by organized labor. The following is not an investigation into
the economic consequences of NAFTA with regards to organized labor, especially as any attempts to
prove its effects remain contested, but to demonstrate the growing policy disparity and hostility
between the former allies as a result of the political conflict over NAFTA.

While the corporatist leadership of the AFL-CIO had previously supported free trade
agreements, the fear of maquiladora factories utilizing cheap Mexican labor represented a direct
challenge to union employment. The North American Free Trade Agreement, initiated by negotiations
between Bush, President Salinas of Mexico and Prime Minister Mulroney of Canada, became the most
publicized and substantial issue of Clinton’s first term. However, the initial conflict centered on whether
congress would grant fast track authority to Bush late in his term in order to expedite NAFTA
negotiations, which the AFL-CIO feared would grant insurmountable power to the presidency.

The leaders and lobbyists of organized labor reached out to congressional allies such as Speaker
Thomas Foley and former UAW member Esteban Torres. The lynchpin of organized labor’s
congressional strategy was House Majority Leader Richard Gephardt, the Democrat responsible for
opposing President Bush’s fast track authority bid in 1991. Despite his reputation as a pro-labor
Democrat, Gephardt’s former position as chair of the Clintonite Democratic Leadership Council and his

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58 Ibid, 102.
59 Ibid, 258.
60 Gephardt’s resistance to Bush consisted of a letter containing a list of vague emphases on environmentalism, fair
trade practices and worker’s rights which were later incorporated into his meek reservations against NAFTA under
Clinton. Ibid, 103.
61 A certainly underserved reputation as it rested solely on his failed attempt to enact the “Gephardt Amendment”
which would require retaliation against countries that “ran up big trade surpluses with the United States,” a policy
in line with union interests. Ibid, 106.
fear that opposing free trade would harm his presidential aspirations and relationship with Bush’s successor led him to side against the unions.

Bush, unable to negotiate such a major tri-party trade deal before his loss to Clinton in 1992, reaped little from the battle over fast track authority. President Clinton, having run a campaign with little labor presence, inherited and utilized fast track authority irrespective to the vociferous protests of organized labor. The creation of fast track authority ensured that an-anti labor trade agreement would be a fait accompli, as the deference congressional Democrats would grant to Clinton would overpower opposition among the Democratic leftists. NAFTA’s successful enactment in 1993 and subsequent implementation on January 1, 1994 signified the victory over and independence from the remnants of the postwar order. Clinton had successfully run a campaign while marginalizing the historical organizational support of labor, and enacted legislation that labor had ferociously opposed, exemplifying the viability of a post-organized labor influenced Democratic Party. Clinton’s successes, coupled with the defeat of Keynesian liberals during the Carter administration, resulted in “the Democratic Party’s headlong flight from labor.”

To the credit of the extant labor leadership, the pro-free trade Democrats inspired “a growing militancy against fast track and NAFTA.” The corporatist tendencies of Meany’s successive AFL-CIO president Lane Kirkland and his uninspired opposition to NAFTA resulted in growing pressure for his resignation and his eventual replacement in 1995 in favor of Secretary-Treasurer Thomas Donohue. However, the growing militancy of organized labor accomplished little as the Democratic Party had proven its independence from union influences during the previous battles over fast track and NAFTA.

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62 Ibid, 149.
63 Ibid, 144.
64 Ibid, 119.
The channels through which postwar union leaders had interacted with the Democratic Party had been gradually severed, a reality which became abundantly clear to organized labor over the next decades.

The triumph of Clintonite centrism in the battle over NAFTA corresponded to an expanding anti-labor regime within the party’s infrastructure. The party platforms of 1992 and 1996 contained only token references to labor rights and opposition to Right-to-Work legislation, while insisting that workplaces “must be revolutionized to make them more flexible” and productive." The Clinton Administration and NAFTA expressed the realities of the post-New Deal Democratic Party, wherein labor was regarded as a source of campaign contributions rather than as an interest group requiring policy concessions to be retained as part of an electoral coalition. The Democratic victory, in the words of Donohue’s successive AFL-CIO president John Sweeney, was Clinton’s ability to “give lip service to working families . . . and then vote for trade agreements that protect corporate interests but expressly sell out working families.”

**Cosmopolitan Backlash**

Bill Clinton’s rejection of the Keynesian Democratic order expressed the ideology and goals of an emerging strain of Democratic centrism hostile to the elements of civil society and organized labor that had infiltrated the party. Clintonite Democrats, the current ruling faction within the party, combine the

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66 Despite the platform’s ambiguity as to what constitutes a “flexible” workplace, the term is generally understood to be a signifier of insecurity and impermanence of work within modern leftism. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu referred to workplace flexibility as flexploitation, or in a less pithy manner, as “a mode of domination . . . based on the creation of a generalized and permanent state of insecurity aimed at forcing workers into submission.” The term flexibility within the platform thus encourages the abandonment of the rigid expectations of hours and wages held by union workers, and envisions a form of fluid work more competitive with workers internationally. Pierre Bourdieu, “Job Insecurity is Everywhere Now,” in *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market* trans. Richard Nice (New York: The New Press, 1998).


69 Despite the Hillary Clinton’s loss to President Trump in 2016, she successfully defended the challenge of Bernie Sanders in the primary campaign, as well as House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi’s victory over Tim Ryan.
Wilsonian era’s business-political alliance with the current electoral bases established during the postwar years as its normative structure. In order to reestablish the business friendly relations integral to the 21st century goals of the “Third Way,” the Party has undertaken a cosmopolitan backlash against the proletarian rabble attempting to hamstring its free trade aggrandizing, pro-corporate form of pseudo-progressivism.

The concept of backlash politics, as theorized by political analyst Thomas Frank’s investigation of middle-American hyper conservatism in *What’s the Matter with Kansas?*, refers to the explosive rejection of the Democratic Party and its liberal policies by the voters of the non-industrialized Midwest during the late postwar era. Whereas the conservative backlash that defines Kansas pits “the unpretentious millions of authentic Americans . . . [against] all-powerful liberals who run the country but are contemptuous of the tastes and beliefs of the people who inhabit it,” the cosmopolitan identity feels assailed by the retrograde forces of protectionist paranoia and white male conservatism.

The cosmopolitan backlash integral to the Third Way shuns radical leftism in favor of substantively non-committal liberalism in support of minority communities, feminism and LGBTQ rights. Conflicts within the cosmopolitan world view are post-ideological, conceptualizing civil rights as economic issues requiring evermore market freedoms and liberalizations to achieve equality. Thomas Frank’s conclusion that “the most important similarity between backlash and mainstream commercial culture is that both refuse to think about capitalism critically,” explains the relentless economization of social programs and the promotion of free trade under cosmopolitan ideology. The triangulation and

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pro-business stances exhibited in the Arkansas campaigns of Bill Clinton have evolved into an ideological alliance with capital and its beneficiaries, against its former allies of organized labor and radical civil movements.

As such, the economic desires of organized labor represent a direct threat to the cosmopolitan conception of progress; the very existence of unions represents a manipulation of labor markets. That unions categorically oppose free trade agreements reflects the backwardness of labor veering on ideological degeneracy. The degree to which free trade, perhaps the most obvious and observable signifier of cosmopolitanism, has remained present in the highest echelons of the Democratic Party alludes to the victory of corporate power over the Keynesian old guard. The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) integral to the international designs of the late Obama administration, and only reluctantly opposed by Hillary Clinton for fear of the Sanders campaign, expresses the continued corporatism of Democratic leadership. The brief interlude of organized labor and Democratic Party cooperation, as cynical and manipulative as the arrangement was, has ended and revitalized a corporatist core eager to minimize labor power. Certainly the electoral strategies of Clinton and Obama\textsuperscript{73} established a viable alternative to reliance on the organizational capacities of organized labor in the Rust Belt.

What significance does labor have in the corporatist view of cosmopolitanism? What motivates the political behavior of workers? The Third Way leadership of the Democratic Party rejects the existence of class conflict underlying worker solidarity, flattening the universe of political activity into the camps of cosmopolitan progressiveness and the retrograde forces of the anti-trade right. Actions of

\textsuperscript{73} Clinton’s triangulation and business connections proved an adequate replacement for union activity, while Obama’s targeting of urban areas with “a high concentration of advanced degrees” provided a roadmap for a cosmopolitan electoral base. Lily Geismer, “Atari Democrats,” \textit{Jacobin}, February 8, 2016. Incidentally, the throngs of youthful Obama supporters and volunteers is strikingly reminiscent of the “movement culture’ [which] is critical to mass protest” identified by Thomas Frank as integral to right-wing backlash movements, wherein wedge issue spectacle takes the place of political achievement. Thomas Frank, \textit{What’s the Matter with Kansas?}, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004), 93.
organized labor are either motivated by retaining the privileged position of white men in the economy, or to prevent international competition facilitated via free trade liberalism. The denunciation of NAFTA and TPP's lackluster labor protections is viewed as an excuse to fight market liberalism rather than an expression of international worker solidarity. The support of Bernie Sanders in several state primaries and the decent amount of union support for him was interpreted by the Cosmopolitans as evidence of the conservatism and racism of the working class; “somehow, someway, [a] vote for a Jewish socialist Brooklyn native was a vote for racism.” To the Cosmopolitan Democrats organized labor is an appendage of the decaying forces of the old economy, an obstacle to overcome in order to secure the victory of free trade progressivism.

To return to the question at the center of this thesis: Why did the political alliance of the Democratic Party and organized labor collapse and fail to deliver labor to the promised land of political power and inclusion? While the cosmopolitan forces of the Third Way performed the coup de grâce on the alliance, the fault lies with a deeply engrained corporatism within the Democratic Party antagonistic to labor’s economic policies and social constructions. The manipulation of organized labor during the postwar era, which turned a robust working class phenomena into a narrow interest group, embodies the same tensions which the Clinton administration deepened. The Cosmopolitans inherited an electoral strategy no longer reliant on labor and an altered set of economic circumstances, allowing them to

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74 Current president of the AFL-CIO Richard Trumka has alleged that the acceptance of the May 10th agreement on labor standards provided diplomatic cover for nations like Columbia that engage in “violence and the murder of trade unionists for exercising their rights.” The lack of strong labor protections constitute a major issue American unions have with free trade legislation. “AFL-CIO President Trumka on Trade,” C-SPAN, accessed March 12, 2017, https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4535031/afl-cio-president-trumka-trade.

75 Naturally the largest bureaucracies remained committed to the fatalistic death spiral of endorsing the mainstream Democrat candidate (e.g. the AFL-CIO and the Teamsters). However, smaller unions like the Communications Workers of America (CWA) and the United Electrical Workers (UE) endorsed Sanders, along with many individual union members. David Moberg, “Bernie Sanders and Unions’ Relationship Status: It’s Complicated,” In These Times, January 19, 2016. Accessed February 2, 2017. http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/18786/unions-bernie-sanders-hillary-clinton-labor.

pursue an anti-labor regime. Had the FDR administration not required an alliance with organized labor to enact the New Deal, the Democratic Party would never have reached out to labor. The alliance was predicated on the significance of labor to the Party, the antagonistic economic and social positions swept under the rug to maintain a wary compromise. Organized labor simply no longer maintains that significance. The Democratic Party of the 21st century has been freed from the irritating influences of organized labor and Keynesianism, and is now free to pursue the rabid capitalism of the Wilsonian era.

While the current arrangement is not necessarily permanent it is difficult to imagine an alternative. The current ruling faction of the Democratic Party has continued to ward off challengers while further distancing itself from the forces of organized labor and leftism. If some acolyte of Bernie Sanders managed to overthrow the yoke of cosmopolitanism, there is certainly no guarantee that unions would regain the political significance labor had in 1935 making the New Deal valuable to the Party. However, the reality of the Democratic Party’s cynicism in controlling labor and imposing ideological discipline on its radicals casts doubts on the utility of renewing the political alliance for labor, regardless of the nominal leadership. Rather the logical decision for the post-Democratic Party labor movement would be a renewal of independent minded political action outside of the rigid structure of the party politics. The Democratic Party has rejected the alliance, and labor can either reciprocate or follow meekly in the wake of the Cosmopolitan Democrat dismantling of the postwar compromise.
Section III: The Neoliberal Individualization of Society

“A whole set of presuppositions is being imposed as self-evident: it is taken for granted that maximum growth, and therefore productivity and competitiveness, are the ultimate and sole goal of human actions; or that economic forces cannot be resisted.” – Pierre Bourdieu

The collapse of union power and the abandonment of social democratic ideals creating the current political climate formed in part due to the rise of a political ideology throughout the power centers of Europe and America in the late 20th century. Corporate unionism and right wing Democratic policies did not form in a vacuum, but were influenced by a pervasive environment of market rationality and the fetishized worship of individualism, relating to the creation of the political-economic theories of neoliberalism. The politics, ideas and practices have effected organized labor in two key ways: through an observable shift in economic policies towards “liberalized” trade policies and labor markets, and the rise of neoliberal theories dismantling the social foundations underpinning working class solidarity.

While there is a considerable body of literature examining the rise of neoliberalism, organized labor tends to be overlooked, as many scholars focus on neoliberalism’s effects in a broader social context. I expand on this literature by examining how neoliberalism has restrained organized labor specifically, applying the conclusions of other scholars to the Labor-Party alliance. Following an examination of how neoliberalism spread to the forefront of Western governance, I will illustrate the different ways the economics, policies and market rationality of neoliberalism has influenced the Democratic Party and organized labor.

The Rise of Neoliberal Economics

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The preoccupation of the radical and academic left with neoliberalism has been castigated as a glorified conspiracy theory; a laughable bogeyman through which leftists project their growing irrelevancy. While leftist writers have undoubtedly utilized dramatic rhetoric in denouncing neoliberalism, (with Henry Giroux referring to the ideology as “a unique set of conditions for both producing and legitimating the central tendencies of proto-fascism”78), the salience of the subject when discussing labor unions and socio-politics is undeniable. Neoliberal ideology and practices have succeeded in fostering a new world vision within the highest echelons of capital and government, profoundly influencing contemporary politics. However, these ideas and policies were considered fringe and extremist throughout the postwar period, contained in right-wing think tanks and select university economic departments. Both the origins and historical development of neoliberalism deserve discussion in order to understand the modes through which neoliberalism infiltrated government to become the dominant, normative ideology.

The essence of neoliberalism, as articulated by ideologues and intellectuals from Austria and Chicago, asserts the moral superiority of the competitive free market as a means to organize human relations above all other forms of social organization. The market is maintained as a moral paradigm, and neoliberalism promotes economic and social policies that unfetter the development of the market. Milton Friedman,79 the University of Chicago economist integral to the development of anti-Keynesian monetarism and American neoliberalism, outlined a wide array of policy prescriptions for American economics and society in his landmark text Capitalism and Freedom. These varied from the vehement rejection of industrial regulation,80 the adoption of a free floating exchange rate system81 (a development which occurred regardless of neoliberalism due to the collapse of the Bretton Woods

78 Henry Giroux, Against the Terror of Neoliberalism (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2008), 21.
79 While Friedman is far from the only neoliberal American economist relevant to this subject, his immense influence within both academic and political circles makes him especially salient.
81 Ibid, 64.
financial system), and the rejection of anti-discrimination legislation. \textsuperscript{82} The disparate recommendations Friedman offered in 	extit{Capitalism and Freedom} all promoted reducing the regulations of the economy and protecting individual rights over what he viewed to be the tyranny of collectivism and bureaucratic federalism. To Freidman, a society unbound by economic regulations or paternalistic interferences in individual behavior offered the pinnacle of human achievement.

\hspace{1cm} As reactionary as the neoliberal policies articulated within 	extit{Capitalism and Freedom} objectively are, Friedman’s writings maintain an incessant revolutionary tone: decrying the socialist establishment that denigrates free market competition. “Underlying most arguments against the free market is a lack of belief in freedom itself,”\textsuperscript{83} proclaims Friedman in his neoliberal Sermon on the Mount, simultaneously dismissing leftist arguments about freedom from the excesses of the market, and proclaiming neoliberalism as the inheritor of the liberal tradition of freedom. Despite the revolutionary rhetoric, neoliberalism is not an ideology of opposition triumphing over totalitarianism, instead benefiting the capitalist classes and entrenching the preexisting political system, the Democratic Party included. The dichotomy between the lofty rhetoric of 	extit{Capitalism and Freedom} and the conservative realities of its pseudo-utopian policies belies the raison d’etre and metanarrative of neoliberalism. Neoliberal interpretations rely on the assumption that economic essence (the moral superiority of the competitive market) precedes the existence of civil society. Economics and politics are subsequently viewed through a warped utilitarianism; actions which benefit the idealized competitive market net a positive gain, whereas actions benefiting civil society are deemed irrelevant, or dangerous to freedom. Capitalism is not deregulated in order to increase the share of wealth to the working classes or benefit a national economy, but to promote the expansion of the economy. The neoliberalism of 	extit{Capitalism and

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, 111.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid, 15.
Freedom claims to seek the expansion of the free market in order to realize the individual liberty of man, but its ultimate goal is to strengthen the economy as an end in itself.

Of note are the references to organized labor within Capitalism and Freedom, reflecting the neoliberal position towards unions from a theoretical standpoint. While neoliberal theories on labor would eventually become incorporated and executed within the existing expressions of conservatism, Freidman’s interpretation of labor unions in Capitalism and Freedom elucidates the primacy of market ideology as the lens neoliberal theorists utilize to examine political and economic activity. Despite the extensive social and political underpinnings of the worker’s movement, Friedman conceives of unions as labor monopolies—cartels holding the economy hostage and sabotaging the free market by cluttering the labor force with needless regulations. In fact, “unions have...not only harmed the public at large...they have also made the incomes of the working class more unequal by reducing the opportunities available to the most disadvantaged workers.”84 To neoliberals, a labor union operates as a trust for a particular segment of the labor market, distorting market forces and artificially raising the wages to the detriment of workers outside of the cartel, the consumers and producers, and the economy as a whole. Friedman, writing in the early 60s at a time when a quarter of the working force was unionized,85 saw an economy held captive by a host of robber barons, more deserving of an antitrust trial than a position of influence within the Democratic Party.

Consequently, Friedman rejected the notion that unions serve a purpose beyond wage manipulation, either in providing a political outlet for union members or fostering a broader working class solidarity. To Friedman, that “labor leaders have a ‘social responsibility’” beyond the narrow interests of their union members “show[ed] a fundamental misconception of the character and nature

84 Ibid, 124.
85 A statistic which Friedman provides himself without a source. Ibid, 123.
of a free economy.” The relationship between union leader and union member ought to be indistinguishable from that of corporate officials and shareholders, tasked with maximizing profits within the rules established by the free market. Labor unions were solely a market phenomenon, and an illegitimate one at that.

The purpose of neoliberalism, stated or otherwise, proved to be a hard sell amidst the postwar milieu of Keynesianism and the Party-Labor compromise: hence its relegation to think tanks and conservative economics departments. Given the preeminence of unionized workers within the economy, and the Party’s reliance on union mobilization and electoral power, *Capitalism and Freedom* changed little in the decade after its publication. The following proliferation and ascension of neoliberalism as the dominant ideology of the capitalist classes is thus an astonishing period of history. The result was the triumph of fringe theories over the economic logic forming the foundation of the postwar compromise, and a wave of economic reforms attempting to realize the privatized and individualized market envisioned in *Capitalism and Freedom*.

**Ideological Cadres and the Conservative Counter-Culture**

The defining moment of neoliberalism occurred at the first meeting of the Mont Pèlerin Society in 1947 of anti-Keynesian economists in Switzerland. Inspired by the possibilities of an international network of neoliberal economists, conservative journalists and wealthy corporate financiers, Austrian economist Friedrich Hayek (best known for his seminal polemic *Road to Serfdom*) published “The Intellectuals and Socialism.” Hayek promoted an “elite-driven and elite-directed strategy of opinion formation,” creating an infrastructure to distribute neoliberal reasoning and policy recommendations to political and economic elites globally. The mantle of neoliberal proliferation was adopted by an Anglo-

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86 Ibid, 133.
American network of think tanks, responsible for financing neoliberal writers (such as Hayek and Friedman), introducing these theories to business elites and conservative media outlets and lobbying politicians to promote “market based alternatives.” Neoliberalism found a home among the disaffected members of the capitalist classes and evolved into a subsection of a growing conservative counterculture, fusing fundamental neoliberal policies with the conformism of the growing suburban middle classes, the racist traditionalism of the former Dixiecrats and establishment Republican hardliners. Neoliberalism was swept in amidst a larger oscillation of conservatism, often compromising core beliefs in order to establish alliances with various popular movements. For instance, while Milton Friedman readily stated his abhorrence of the “prejudice and narrowness” of the Jim Crow South, in part due to his Jewish ancestry, the neoliberal international expressed great eagerness to support and be supported by the organizational capacity of the Southern political machine.

Herein lies the key aspect of neoliberal diffusion, the top-down and gradual spread of neoliberalism inherently leads to a “mission creep” as the vehicle of its normative shift. Neoliberal attempts to dismantle the American Great Society or the extensive British welfare system directly proved abortive, however the stagnation crisis allowed neoliberal monetary policies to be adopted by the federal governments in D.C. and London. Neoliberalism failed to crack the solidarity of the industrial union heartland during the postwar period, yet the radical individualism and free market dogmas formed a rhetorical foundation within the Jim Crow South: discrimination was cast as an issue of business owner rights rather than an issue of systemic racial bias. Neoliberalism crept through various sectors of society, adopted piecemeal by politicians across the political spectrum, either out of necessity

88 Ibid, 135.
89 A political movement referred to as fusionism: fusing the disparate strands of conservatives into a coherent force capable of defeating the New Deal coalition, the brainchild of National Review founder William F. Buckley (Ibid, 163).
as in Carter’s foray into monetarism,\(^9^1\) or complicity. Neoliberalism appears to be isotropic as it gradually flowed towards the centers of power globally from all directions, fueled by the vast stores of wealth and writing funneled through think-tanks and conservative media. Carter’s macroeconomic shift towards monetarism signified by the selection of Paul Volcker as Chairman of the Federal Reserve legitimized the rise of neoliberal ideology within the federal power structure. However, the coup de main against organized labor would occur during the administration of neoliberal poster child Ronald Reagan.

**Neoliberalism against Labor**

The decades following the ascendance of the neoliberal paradigm proved to be destructive to both the industrial sectors forming the core of the modern labor movement and the influence of unions within politics and society. While there were certainty specific anti-union actions undertaken in this period, I would like to primarily emphasize the uniquely neoliberal pattern through which these actions were undertaken. Anti-union activity, either through legislation or through strike-breaking targeting individual unions, certainly predates the rise of neoliberalism. However, the anti-union practices in the neoliberal age reflect the free market ideology expounded within *Capitalism and Freedom* and preached by the disciples of Mont Pèlerin. The repression Eugene Debs decried reflected blatant attempts of factory owners and the capitalist class at large to express their power over laborers, while the ownership class after the realization of normalized neoliberalism transmuted themselves into the protectors of economic liberty. The market place had become the focal point of a new wave of antiunion activity, union members no longer cast as a Bolshevik horde agitating for revolution, but a malignant trust distorting the labor markets.

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\(^9^1\) Monetarism, a theory supporting the use of controlling the supply of money in order to stabilize the economy (favoring the reduction of inflation over policies supporting the realization of full employment), constituted a cornerstone of Friedman’s economic policies.
The Ronald Reagan administration, despite its adherence to the social conservatism demanded by the religious right and abhorred by Milton Friedman and other ideologues, created the bedrock of the neoliberal order. Illustrative of this alliance is the extensive interaction between Reagan and Mont Pèlerin economists, which fundamentally influenced Reagan’s passionate contempt towards government as bureaucratic, inefficient, and corrupt. Reagan’s familiarity with neoliberalism has been extensively documented, ranging from his gushing endorsement of Hayek in a letter to Eamonn Butler92 to Freidman’s regular invitations to the White House93 to aid in policy decisions.94 Reagan would utilize his extensive involvement with neoliberal theory in the early days of his first term when launching an antiunion action reminiscent of the pre-New Deal era—the destruction of the PATCO strike.

The strike, the culmination of workplace grievances and wage disputes within the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization, launched in early August 1981 during the early days of Reagan’s presidency. Despite the legitimacy of the union’s claims,95 the administration refused to consider the striker’s claims and issued an ultimatum of 48 hours for workers to return or be terminated. The vast majority of the union members maintained the strike and Reagan “invoked the Taft-Hartley Act to dismiss 11,435 workers”96 Reagan maintained that the strike was both illegal under Taft-Hartley and constituted a peril to national security, and despite the inevitable impediment to air travel the mass firing led to, the replacement of unionized workers would improve the industry in the long run.

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93 Ibid, 264.
94 Milton Friedman was extensively involved in the Republican Study Committee’s critique of the Humphrey-Hawkins act of 1978 (an act which expressed federal support for the Keynesian concept of full employment) and naturally recommended the act to be replaced with tax cuts. Ibid, 264.
95 Fear that long hours and work related stress could lead to disaster led the Nixon administration to establish a panel to investigate working conditions in the 1971, alluding to the seriousness of the air traffic controller’s demands. Ibid, 266.
96 Ibid, 266.
Despite the legality of the Reagan Administration’s strike breaking actions, the mass firing constituted a deeply shocking watershed moment for unions under neoliberalism. Despite the anti-strike provisions within Taft-Hartley, previous administrations had refused to impose such draconian measures in imposing discipline on strikers. In fact, between 1962 and 1981 nearly 40 illegal strikes against the federal government occurred without the invocation of the provisions in Taft-Hartley.\textsuperscript{97} Reagan, far from moved by a sincere desire to uphold the law, aimed to attack the power of unions and the Keynesian order symbolically through the destruction of PATCO. George Schultz, Reagan’s Secretary of State, stated Reagan pursued a hardline in order to show “that he was serious about his radical reform agenda” and believed “larger political and ideological issues [were] at stake in the outcome of the strike.”\textsuperscript{98} The PATCO strike granted Reagan an opportunity to launch an offensive against the old order and enact the free market ideology central to the utopian vision of neoliberal economists.

The destruction of the PATCO strike opened the floodgates for a litany of anti-union activity in the private sector and deregulatory behavior from both the executive and legislative branches. Soon after the administration crushed the union, Phelps Dodge and International Paper responded to strikes with mass firings;\textsuperscript{99} striking was rapidly expunged from the tool kit of American unions as other employers redoubled the Reaganite vanguard into the breach of Keynesian society.

The Reagan Administration and its neoliberal agents were granted a rare opportunity to enact Friedmanite socio-economic policies, as the unraveling Keynesian order left organized labor, grassroots civil rights movements and Democrat left-wingers on the retreat. The primary purpose of the neoliberal


reclamation would be the wrenching of political and economic power from the popular classes and the thorough dismantling of New Deal and Great Society policies.

The Reagan administration continued to launch an offensive against organized labor, a focus signified by the selection of notorious union buster John Van de Water as chairman of the National Labor Relations Board.\textsuperscript{100} The Kennedy-Johnson era welfare reforms received similar treatment under the Reagan regime. The most egregious example of the Reagan administration’s destruction of postwar institutions occurred at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)—ironically a frequent target of Reagan’s rhetoric against the inefficiency of federal bureaucracy. Under the management of Reagan’s lackey HUD secretary Samuel Pierce and his impressively underqualified executive assistant Deborah Gore Dean\textsuperscript{101} the Department was bilked out of an estimated $2 billion by various connected construction companies and lobbyists.\textsuperscript{102} Reagan’s free market policies led to the slashing of welfare program budgets, the relegation of HUD to the hands of incompetent or deeply corrupt subordinates, emblematic of the “influence peddling and cronyism that infected the Reagan administration at almost every level.”\textsuperscript{103} Large swathes of the Keynesian safety net had their budgets slashed to irrelevancy or fell prey to the rapacious eye of opportunistic corporations. The breakneck pace of deregulation led to rampant corruption adversely affecting the most vulnerable and ignored victims of American capitalism—the urban poor.

However, the lion’s share of Reaganite “reforms” focused on the free market deregulations integral to neoliberal economics. The administration launched a wave of deregulations most noticeably,\textsuperscript{100} Van de Water previously presided as the president of the consulting firm John R. Van de Water Associates, which had advised corporations how to combat union activity since the 1940s. William Kleinknecht, \textit{The Man Who Sold the World: Ronald Reagan and the Betrayal of Main Street America} (New York: Nation Books, 2009), 63.\textsuperscript{101} Two of the 138 members of the Reagan administration “convicted, indicted, or investigated for criminal activity,” often for corruption or financial misconduct. \textit{Ibid}, 193.\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Ibid}, 192.\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Ibid}, 192.
and disastrously, in the financial sector. The Savings-and-Loans sector (also referred to as “thrifts”) became one of the earliest targets of Reagan’s radical neoliberal deregulations. The previously regionalized mortgage loan services rapidly deregulated, courtesy of legislation pushed through by the Oval Office,\(^{104}\) deconstructing safeguards built into the loan infrastructure (lifting regional restrictions, allowing S&Ls to diversify from traditional mortgage loans to high risk investment and mortgages with complicated financial instruments, and allowing single stockholder thrifts where historically 400 local businessman or other notables were required to act as stockholders.) The inevitable result of these deregulations was the infiltration of S&Ls by shady businessmen and unscrupulous investors also could “virtually loan funds to themselves, with no money down.”\(^{105}\) The S&L deregulations would provide a foundation for the wave of mortgage lending malfeasance in the 2000s, leading in part to the 2008 financial meltdown.

The Reagan administration’s free market zeal collided with the crown-jewel of the financial reforms of the New Deal era: the Glass-Steagall Act. The act aimed at preventing the rampant speculation and banking malfeasance which led to the collapse of the Great Depression. The act enforced a separation between commercial and investment banking, and complimented the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) to insure small deposits to restore faith in banking institutions, and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) which sought to regulate the stock market. The Glass-Steagall Act was naturally considered to be illiberal paternalism by Freidman and his acolytes, and was subsequently gutted by the administration. The Federal Reserve Board, acting under the direction of the Oval Office and with intense lobbying from banking institutions, reinterpreted Section 20 of the act (which allowed commercial banks to invest as long as the activity yielded less than 5% of gross

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\(^{105}\) *Ibid*, 118.
In 1986 the Federal Reserve Board allowed banking holding companies to use commercial banking funds in higher risk investments including commercial paper, municipal revenue bonds and mortgage backed securities. While Glass-Steagall remained nominally intact, the restrictions on banking institutions had been lifted just enough for a wave of risky banking activity to make the act irrelevant. The deregulatory actions undertaken by the Reagan Administration realized the free market dreams of neoliberal ideologues at the cost of destabilizing the economic structure established by the New Deal-Keynesian political structure.

The neoliberal reforms undertaken by the Reagan Administration succeeded in both slashing the New Deal and Great Society policies as well as fundamentally shifting political discourse into the realm of free market ideology. The Democratic Party accepted the Friedmanite obsession with the free market and pivoted against the social-democratic configuration which had seen the rise of union power and the creation of the welfare infrastructure. The Party submitted to the economic ideology “as if that battle was fought and lost, so [they] must accept Reagan’s version of . . . economic history.” The social ideology that formed the foundation of the half a century of Democratic Party policies was replaced by a new emphasis on economic technocracy. “The result was a conflation of technical policy analysis with ideological assertion,” replacing Keynesian governance with a dogmatic reliance on the market as the principle source of political truth. The adoption of this logic would lead to the ostracism of organized labor from the Democratic Party during the administration of Bill Clinton.

The neoliberal economics, anti-welfare policies, and union-busting of the Reagan administration forced labor onto the offensive. However, neoliberal logic seeped past the Republican Party into the fabric of American politics, shifting the political center into the neoliberal right. As English sociologist

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106 Ibid, 120.
107 Ibid, 73.
Colin Crouch has observed, “this fundamental political shift was more profound than anything that could be produced by alterations between nominally social democratic and neoliberal conservative parties in government as the result of election.”\(^{109}\) The rise of neoliberal logic formed the basis through which the Clinton centrist branch reclaimed the Democratic Party in the name of capital, undertaken through the promotion of market logic and individualism.

**The Democratic Party and the Rise of Market Place Politics**

The Clinton Administration extended the free market ideology of the Reagan Administration, establishing neoliberalism as the sole paradigm of both parties. The NAFTA debacle, pitting the union bureaucracy against their former allies in Congress and the Democratic Party, has previously been discussed. However, “market-based alternatives,” the administration’s favored buzzword for neoliberal deregulations, extended across broad swathes of policy decisions. The mantra of Clinton Democrats became dogmatic support of the Third-Way ideology purging “the politics of entitlement”\(^{110}\) and the “corrosive culture of dependency,”\(^{111}\) from the Democratic Party.

The administration continued the legacy of the Reagan administration\(^ {112}\) through its domestic and foreign policy. The most obvious connection to Reaganite policies would of course be the Oval Office’s enthusiastic and unwavering support of the Gramm-Leach Biley Act, the final nail in Glass-Steagall’s coffin.\(^ {113}\) However, the Democrats plunged further into the heart of the Great Society’s welfare security net than the Reagan administration had dreamed of. The HUD scandal operated on the

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\(^{111}\) *Ibid*, 207.

\(^{112}\) The Clinton administration viewed in self as the supreme executor of the vision of neoliberal economics, Clinton himself castigated Reagan’s economic policy as “masked in anti-Government rhetoric, [and] basically traditional Keynesian economics,” *Ibid*, 186.

institutional level of the welfare state, while Clinton’s notorious Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (popularly known as Work for Welfare) aimed to redefine welfare at the individual level. The act, heavily influenced by Milton Freidman’s policy recommendations for the deconstruction of the welfare state,\textsuperscript{114} aimed to replace traditional unemployment insurance and welfare protections with a new form of subsidized employment. Individuals under the neoliberal regime are not entitled to a safety net but are expected to save themselves from the privations of unfettered capitalism.

The administration pursued relentless neoliberalism, privatizing the economy, obsessing over the deficit and purging organized labor from the Democrat Party—in the parlance of the administration “limit[ing] government intervention in the labor market.”\textsuperscript{115} The Washington Consensus attempted to impose the administrations Spartan view on socio-economic policies within the developing world. The Clinton administration assumed the mantle of Reagan’s neoliberal doctrine, succeeding not only in institutionalizing neoliberal policies globally, but also reorienting the Democratic Party toward an anti-Keynesian centrisim. Neoliberalism was no longer the frantic cry of the personae non gratae of the intellectual world, but the ideological foundation of both parties.

The End of History and the Last President

Neoliberal ideology defined and reoriented American politics fundamentally and irreversibly in the last quarter of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and onwards. The market became the center of the moral universe, the altar on which Reagan and Clinton succeeded in sacrificing the New Deal and the Great Society. Organized labor was relegated to the far reaches of political life, identified as an agent of economic

\textsuperscript{114} In 1979 Friedman wrote in \textit{Free to Choose: A Personal Statement} of the need for a smooth transition of “an orderly transfer of people from welfare rolls to payrolls,” Jack Godwin, \textit{Clintonomics: How Bill Clinton Reengineered the Reagan Revolution} (New York: AMACOM, 2009), 206.
\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Ibid}, 157.
corruption to be purged where possible and categorically condemned. The regime of centrist politics and economic liberalization, recognized no position for an inconvenient working class organization subverting sacrosanct middle class values and perverting the free market.

At the heart of neoliberal ideology lies an obsessive focus on the morality of individualism, at odds with the social structure of organized labor. This concept formed the foundation of the third wave offensive on organized labor and the welfare state. Whereas the policies and economics of neoliberalism marginalized unions from the Democratic Party, neoliberal individualism undermined the social ideology of organized labor. Neoliberalism legitimized a ferocious anti-working class agenda in the name of individual freedom and empowered the Democratic Party to defect from the Party-Labor alliance.

**The Triumph of Neoliberalism**

The rise of the neoliberal regime drastically limited the influence of organized labor in politics, and coupled with the decline of US industrial power, saw the movement on the defensive and undermined the Party-Labor alliance. However, the history of organized labor is inseparable from Sisyphean opposition, ideological repression, and political and economic violence. Yet the movement remained strong, incessantly agitating for wages and workplace protection despite the best efforts of capital to shatter worker solidarity during the height of early 20th century repression. The neoliberal era thus represents a turning point within labor history, an immense political trauma sowing the seeds of despair and paralyzing the movement.

The ascendance of neoliberalism has been manifested as an economic force, an array of individualizing policies and an ideological threat which has led to dire consequences for labor. The monetarist rejection of full employment stimulation, reinforced by the capitalist-business
compromise,¹¹⁶ has marginalized labor’s economic objectives out of the realm of acceptable macroeconomic policies. This shift was coupled by the rise of privatization and marketization of public polices, and the Democratic Party’s offensive against welfare and New Deal legislation. These policies succeeded in “reducing collective labour rights that might interfere with the markets,” ¹¹⁷ and the rejection of governmental responsibility in providing for the economically disadvantaged. The rise of neoliberal economics have expunged labor concerns from the Democratic Party, upending the postwar order which had promoted and protected union interests.

However, anti-labor polices alone do not account for the decline of the Party-Labor alliance, as neoliberalism’s most devastating effects pertain to the ideological rejection of Leftist civil society and economics. The rise of market logic and the neoliberal emphasis on individualization of civil society constitutes a mode of domination through which the interests of capital are imposed on organized labor. The failure of organized labor, along with other elements of civil society, to oppose the destabilizing ideology of deconstructive individualization and protect the Keynesian order “is the fundamental political trauma affecting the contemporary left.”¹¹⁸ This leftist political trauma has paralyzed organized labor’s ability to combat the deleterious effects of neoliberalism, forcing it into a defensive position against the destructive forces of market logic. Compounding on this trauma, the neoliberal dismantling of civil society, the antithesis to the expansion which occurred during the New Deal, further limits the avenues through which organized labor is able to form and expand. The acceptance of neoliberal logic within the highest echelons of the Democratic Party has thus formed an ideological and economic rift within the alliance, separating the Party and labor into rival camps with antagonistic visions of the politico-economic world.

Section IV: The Prisoner of Politics

“The Republican and Democrat parties, or, to be more exact, the Republican-Democratic party, represent the capitalist class in the class struggle. They are the political wings of the capitalist system and such differences as arise between them relate to spoils and not principles. With either of those parties in power one thing is always certain and that is the capitalist class is in the saddle and the working class under the saddle.” –Eugene v. Debs

Debs’s fiery denunciation of the machinations of political parties and their capitalist backers captured the spirit of radical organized labor in the early years of the 20th century. Villainous capital trampled the rights of the working class, the government violently repressed organized labor, together crushing strikes and imprisoning organizers. In the environment of severe oppression at the hands of the apparatus of the state, labor readily accepted the revolutionary fatalism of Marxism, adopting the vernacular of communism: capital, exploitation and wage-slavery. Yet, the worker’s struggle against the parties of property never materialized, and organized labor was incorporated into the very political system that Debs had condemned. The disparity between the revolutionary expectations of radical union workers and the contemporary relationship between party and labor has produced a crisis for the worker’s movement.

This chapter will focus of the nature of the fraught Party-labor alliance from a labor perspective, the counterpart of the Democratic Party examination of Section II. While the following analysis will be historicized, it will predominantly adhere to an ideological framework of the Marxist tradition. Returning to the political understanding of the ideological vanguard of unionism illuminates political realities ignored and rejected under the regime of corporatist unionism and bourgeoisie politics. This chapter will

identify the tensions inherent in this political alliance, and how these tensions have severely limited the political potential of organized labor while straining this power configuration to the point of collapse.

**Class Struggle in Industrial America**

Given the internationalist perspective of Marxism, its application to pre-New Deal America was relatively straightforward. The economic advancement of the industrial era was founded on the rapid growth of industrial America, employing a kaleidoscope of workers of various nationalities and ethnicities. The vast amounts of wealth accrued by the factory owners and bankers corresponded to the privation and desperation of the proletarian workers laboring in the nightmarish conditions of unregulated factories, slaughterhouses and mines. From the ranks of the exploited working class rose the radical labor leaders who would partake in the most dangerous strikes, sit-ins, and clashes with the police, National Guard, and company goons. The class cleavage in the United States centered on the growing contingent of radical industrial workers and the intransigent elite of the bourgeoisie.

According to Marxist theory, the class struggle should have played out in a fairly predictable manner. As organized labor competed with itself, pitting the industrial proletariat against the conservative craft laborers, and “compels legislative recognition of particular interests of the workers, by taking advantage of the divisions among the bourgeoisie itself.” The industrial bourgeoisie, conflicting with the decaying segments of the elite class, utilizes the power of the proletariat, in effect “drag[ing] it into the political area.” The newly politicized proletarian class eventually overthrows the outnumbered bourgeoisie by seizing power in a class revolution, reenacting the political struggles of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy before it on a far grander scale. After seizing the modes of production

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121 *Ibid*, 481.
the proletariat comes to achieve the post-capitalist utopia, “where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes.”

The increasing militancy and political presence of labor organization appeared to conform to the basic outline of Marxist historical materialism, as organized labor increasingly gained political power while the old forms of bourgeois capital faded into obscurity. Later political developments—the incorporation of organized labor into the political machine of the Democratic Party at the exclusion of the Southern elements of the bourgeoisie—roughly adhered to the Marxist predictions of the formation of a proletarian political entity. However, rather than provide a springboard for a revolution against bourgeois government, labor’s collusion with the state limited its political potential and restructured unions into just one of many interest groups that constituted the Democratic Party electoral base.

This examination of Marxist political expectations is not meant to eulogize the possibility of a proletarian dictatorship, but to emphasize the extra-bourgeois political dimensions that labor imagined during the pre-New Deal alliance period. Political inclusion, which would increasingly replace expectations of pro-labor policies of the Democratic Party, limited the capacity of organized labor to operate outside of the confines of bourgeoisie political structures. Political parties increasingly control and direct the political activity of organized labor in ways that foster dependence of the support of the party, and in doing so vacate the ability to advance past a liberal political system. This curse of legitimacy, wherein labor loses political power by cooperating with bourgeois parties, has been an historic criticism of trade unionism by the far left. Vladimir Lenin denounced unions as a tool of

capitalism as they lead to the “ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie,” as they inhabit a political space within the capitalist framework.

The Democratic Party-organized labor alliance was inherently conflictual as it consisted of two entities with fundamentally opposed conceptions of the purposes of power and of society. The collaboration between a party inheriting the elitist history of liberal government, and a worker’s organization founded in an environment of radicalism opposing the existing political system. The relationship between the party and labor declined due to this inherent conflict outlined by Marxist ideology. As labor was recognized by the 1935 Wagner Act it entered a period of arrested development, incapable of advancing to a further stage of political development.

**Right-to-Work: A Case Study**

In order to illustrate how organized labor’s power has been significantly curtailed through the Party-Labor alliance, and the manner in which this conflict has further fractured the relationship, I will critically examine Right-to-Work. Right-to-Work laws represent one of the greatest challenges to modern labor unions, endangering the ability of labor unions to form a closed shop, or shops “which required union membership as a condition of employment.” Derived from a loophole in the 1935 Wagner Act, state governments were able to circumvent national law. The most notable of these state anti-labor laws was the 1943 Colorado-Labor Peace Act which used the war effort to legitimize a direct attack on closed-shop organization and collective bargaining. The Peace Act instituted a super-majority voting standard in order to form a closed shop, as well as promoting “paycheck protection”

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125 The language of Section 8(3) of the act legalized the right to negotiate for a closed shop, also stating “no statute of the United States” could prohibit contract clauses requiring union members, [and] it followed that those clauses would be legal throughout the country.” *Ibid*, 10. While Robert Wagner intended this to apply to state laws, the act allowed states to create proto-Right-to-Work laws.
criminalizing the automatic deduction of union dues from a paycheck.\textsuperscript{126} The Peace Act, which the decidedly non-radical AFL denounced as a “compilation of the most reactionary, arbitrary and unconstitutional provisions ever to enacted by any state,”\textsuperscript{127} provided a framework for the federal Labor Relations Act of 1947 (Taft-Hartley).

The Taft-Hartley Act legitimized the Wagner Act loophole duplicity enacted in Colorado, and laughably appropriated constitutional rhetoric by creating a “bill of rights both for American workingmen and for their employees,”\textsuperscript{128} launching an anti-labor offensive. While initially Right-to-Work laws were limited to states with low union density and long histories of anti-union legislation, the laws gradually diffused leading to the total of 26 Right-to-Work states as of this writing. Right-to-Work now symbolizes the most overt anti-labor offensive by the forces of pro-capital politics.

However, Right-to-Work laws are hardly the first or the most aggressive anti-labor offensive in union history. As previously mentioned, the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century was defined by aggressive strike-breaking actions undertaken at the behest of the presidency; police violence was used to prevent organization and terrorize workers and political repression was commonplace during the pseudo-progressive Wilsonian era. Furthermore unionism was criminalized by the judicial branch during the \textit{Lochner} era,\textsuperscript{129} and frequent court injunctions justified the use of using state militias to prevent union organization.

\textsuperscript{126} The law stated due deduction was illegal “unless the employer has been presented with an individual order therefor, signed by the employee personally, and terminable at any time by the employee giving at least thirty days’ written notice of such termination.” The law attempted to provide protection for union free-riders and expand the ability of employers to continually target workers with anti-union propaganda. \textit{Ibid}, 107.
\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Ibid}, 108.
\textsuperscript{128}\textit{Ibid}, 109.
\textsuperscript{129}Named after the Supreme Court Case \textit{Lochner v. New York} (1905) which ruled that a New York state law regulating hours for “bakeshop” employees violated the Fourteenth Amendment as “unreasonable, unnecessary, and arbitrary interference with the right and liberty of the individual to contract.” The \textit{Lochner} ruling formed the basis of anti-labor rulings from 1905 to the mid-1930s. Jefferson Cowie, \textit{The Great Exception: The New Deal & The Limits of American Politics} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 69.
Despite the ferocious anti-union activity of both states and federal government, unions increasingly grew in size and militancy.

The disparity between labor’s triumphs over the union busting of the early 20th century, and its inability to defeat Right-to-Work legislation reflects the limitations in political power engendered by the alliance with the Democratic Party. The inability of contemporary organized labor to defeat the Right-to-Work movement emphasizes the severe limitations in political power imposed on it by its alliance with and incorporation by the bourgeoisie Democratic Party. To emphasize the impossibility of organized labor to defeat Right-to-Work union busting while under the yoke of the Democratic Party, I turn next to consider the shortcomings of contemporary strategies that fail to take into account the class differences of labor and the Party, or to reject federal politics entirely.

**Proposed Anti-Right-to-Work Strategies:**

**The Fantasy of Cooperation**

The most accepted form of oppositional strategy to Right-to-Work legislation among union bureaucracies and non-radical theorists stresses the importance of operating within the established political alliance. Hence the continued support of politicians like Hillary Clinton by the major union federations, which seek to use political influence within the party system to form an anti-Right-to-Work offensive. Under the cooperationist ideology, Right-to-Work is a Republican strategy used to defend its business interests, and through the correct configuration of Democratic allies and union support, the Taft-Hartley Act can be repealed.

For example, Raymond Hogler advance a cooperationist argument in his recent book on the Right-to-Work movement, *The End of American Labor Unions*. Admitting that the Taft-Hartley Act is unlikely to be repealed at the federal level through increased support and higher donations to
congressional Democrats, he proposes a two-step program for an organized labor movement working within the institutional constraints of the party system. Hogler’s first step consists of launching anti-Right-to-Work propaganda to “dismantl[e] its intellectual pedigree and [make] clear the malignant purposes of those laws.” Hogler asserts that Right-to-Work is founded on dubious economic logic and a “moral proposition about the supremacy of the individual in American life,” both serving a conservative conception of organized labor as an anti-free market criminal conspiracy. By launching a counter Right-to-Work propaganda campaign, he believes that labor could form a “compelling cultural narrative” to combat the Republican use of personal freedom rhetoric to justify anti-union behavior.

Assuming this propaganda campaign were successful in undermining the pro-capital logic of the Republican Party, Hogler argues that the expanded pro-labor forces in the Democratic Party and society abroad would be capable of launching “a platform of political change carried out simultaneously in Right-to-Work states and on the federal level, to repeal Section 14(b) [of Taft-Hartley].” In this scenario, organized labor ought to launch an ideological campaign to convince the Democratic Party to in turn launch an effective political campaign at both the state and federal levels, securing the repeal of Right-to-Work.

Analyzing Hogler’s argument through the previously established framework illustrates the impossibility of achieving political change within the Democratic Party. The propaganda campaign outlined in “Step One” assumes that a pro-labor campaign could convince the Democratic Party to

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131 Ibid, 152.
132 Ibid, 154.
133 Ibid, 165.
134 Ibid, 152.
support the interests of the working class against the interests of capital (i.e. the interests of the bourgeois political establishment), without a corresponding renewal in political utility similar to the postwar arrangement. This propaganda would only serve to reinforce the beliefs of workers already in unions and perhaps convince non-unionized workers to organize, but would not persuade members of the Democratic Party of the morality of the worker’s movement.

To quote the esteemed political commentator Gore Vidal, “they don’t have to conspire, because they think alike. The president of General Motors and the President of Chase Manhattan Bank really are not going to disagree much on anything.” The same can be said of the passionate defenders of Right-to-Work at Boeing and the powerful members of the Democratic Party who would be capable of launching a repeal of 14(b). The cooperation based solution proposed by Hogler is a fantasy, as it assumes that a cultural narrative of organized labor could influence the bourgeoisie political establishment to undertake the class struggle on its behalf. Hogler proposes a sort of Marxist dialectical materialism in reverse, wherein the class that is not the ruling material class has the potential to become the “ruling intellectual force.”

The shortcomings of Hogler’s prescriptive recommendations for defeating the Right-to-Work laws reiterate the tensions inherent in the Party-Labor alliance and reveal difficulty for labor in achieving its political goals within the party framework. The decreasing utility of organized labor examined in the previous chapter compounds the inherent conflict derived from attempts to foster cooperation between entities with opposing conceptions of an ideal political state. The defeat of Right-to-Work legislation is exclusively salient to organized labor, and attempts to achieve political successes through cooperation

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with the Democratic Party will fail simply due to the fact that the party is uninterested in pursuing the goals of a working class organization.

The Dead-End of Social Activism

A second form of oppositional strategy to Right-to-Work legislation rejects the possibility of achieving political objectives through party politics altogether. The false promises of cooperation illustrate the impossibility of organized labor achieving its political goals through the intercession of the Democratic Party. However, neither does the avoidance of the political sphere in favor of further labor organizing and radical social activism. The radical neo-Narodniks, constituting the membership of the more fiercely independent unions and the typing-left, envision a political program whereby an expansive and robust grassroots labor movement would be capable of achieving the political successes undelivered by the Democratic Party. A proponent of this form of socially-focused labor movement is Stanley Aronowitz, whose *The Death and Life of American Labor* outlines a potential post-Democratic Party alliance labor movement.

Of note is Aronowitz’s deep cynicism toward the possible returns from cooperating with the Democratic Party. Castigating the fatalistic loyalty union bureaucracies maintain for the Party as a remnant of New Deal politics, liberals “sanctify[...them as saviors of the people and a shield against the right.”\(^{137}\) Rather than support a propaganda campaign similar to Hogler, Aronowitz states that “instead of waiting for the Democratic Party to enact changes, unions could . . . unite, and launch a militant, long-range campaign like labor’s first fight for shorter hours at the turn of the twentieth century.”\(^{138}\) However, the nostalgia Aronowitz and fellow leftists express for the radicalism of the earlier industrial unionism attempts to overcorrect the collaborationism of postwar unionism by attempting to revert to


\(^{138}\) *Ibid*, 141.
an unattainable period of ideological purity. To borrow a turn of phrase from Milton Friedman, the longing for the halcyon period of the IWW and independent CIO is like a passenger “leaning over and giving the steering wheel a jerk that threatens to send the car off the road.”\footnote{Milton Friedman, \textit{Capitalism and Freedom} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), 79.}

Aronowitz’s leftist theory can be broadly organized into two steps, each requiring a drastic alteration of labor’s political activity. The first step urges a renewal of the radical social mobilization that defined the radical labor movements of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. In order to secure a radical labor movement, Aronowitz stresses the importance of the “struggle for union democracy,”\footnote{Stanley Aronowitz, \textit{The Death and Life of American Labor: Toward a New Workers’ Movement} (London: Verso, 2014), 169.} alliances with community groups\footnote{\textit{Ibid}, 168.} in order to facilitate an intersectional class struggle, and the extension of unions into the “everyday life . . . outside of the workplace.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid}, 129.} These polices, along with a litany of Port Huron style communitarian ideals, are posited as necessary to fostering a labor movement outside of the limitations of the established political system.

In order to capitalize on the renewed radical potential of organized labor amidst economic circumstances that have drastically limited the political capacity of industrial unionism, the second step of his plan requires an increase in the breadth of working class organization. Rejecting the “workerism” of unionism “ensconced in old proletarian dreams,”\footnote{\textit{Ibid}, 127.} Aronowitz envisions the organization of service industry workers as well as the unemployed. By evolving past the proletarian identity maintained by the extant labor movement, a radical non-Democrat political strategy utilizing the expanded networks of organized workers could be established.\footnote{Despite the admirable goal of increasing the number of unionized sectors, this proposition appears to be particularly dubious. By unionizing vastly different sectors of the economy with little non-ideological ties to the old industrial movement, it seems far more likely to form more insular and non-political craft unions similar to the early AFL model, rather than a syndicalist labor movement.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{139} Milton Friedman, \textit{Capitalism and Freedom} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962), 79.  
\textsuperscript{141} \textit{Ibid}, 168.  
\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Ibid}, 129.  
\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Ibid}, 127.  
\textsuperscript{144} Rather than ingratiating organized labor further into the}
framework of the existing political system, Aronowitz’s radical labor movement would bypass the Right-to-Work movement altogether by supporting a union movement undefined by the legal system that upholds these laws.

While Aronowitz’s vision of a new labor movement is actively conscious of the class differences of the labor movement and the party, it falls prey to same nostalgia for which he castigates the workerist ideologues. Undoubtedly the radical social movements and labor organizations that Aronowitz considers to be models for the post-Democratic Party political strategy is aware of the impossibility of cooperation, however bourgeoisie governance does not respond to radical social mobilization. As admirable as attempts to form “a truly global labor movement,”\textsuperscript{145} launch an educational campaign to promote grassroots organizations, and create an anti-bureaucratic cooperative commonwealth\textsuperscript{146} are, they do not apply political pressure to the existing order. While the radical industries which Aronowitz lionizes existed on the fringes of the political establishment, the Socialist Party attempted to wrest power from the pro-capital parties through the electoral policies, harassing rather than ignoring the Democratic Party. It was this relentless political activity that led to the impressive organizational capacity that attracted the party and led to the creation of an alliance.

The tendency to fetishize the struggles of earlier unionism and attempt to foster an internationalist labor movement fail to provide for a legitimate strategy of class conflict against the confines of capitalist order. If the defeat of the Taft-Hartley Act is not possible legislatively, neither is a viable offensive against the Right-to-Work movement possible through educational programs and unionizing the unemployed. Labor must remain within the same political universe as the Democratic Party in order to struggle against the forces of capital, and lead to the class conflict Marx viewed as integral to proletarian victory. The position taken by Aronowitz rejects the dirty work required for class

\textsuperscript{145} Ibid, 170.\textsuperscript{146} Ibid, 174.
struggle in favor of ideological purity, positing a strategy as unlikely to liberate the labor movement as the cooperationist naïveté of labor centrists.

**The Failure of Labor**

The Right-to-Work movement does not adequately explain how the Party-Labor alliance has collapsed, but operates as a case study through which the causal mechanism of this decline is expressed. Analyzing the prescriptive visions of the cooperationist centrists and more radical idealists expresses how the spectre of the Democratic Party haunts the political imagination of organized labor’s theorists. Trapped between the Scylla of pointless collaboration and the Charybdis of ideological detachment, the Right-to-Work issue has been defined solely in terms of the alliance with the Democratic Party. This case study does not explain the decay of the Party-Labor alliance, although the Right-to-Work issue constitutes the most contentious issue after free trade, but the failure of labor to overcome anti-closed shop legislation exemplifies the limitations inherent in this alliance.

Labor’s confinement within the bourgeois system, caused by both the enthusiastic collaboration of the union bureaucracy in purging radicalism and the discipline imposed by the Democratic Party itself, has rendered it incapable of achieving political goals outside of the alliance context. Unions have stagnated and languished under the bourgeois thumb of the Democratic Party and liberal capitalism, emblematic in their inability to overcome Right-to-Work either legislatively or through social militancy. This contemporary power configuration dominates labor and subverts its attempts to pursue policy objectives beyond the sphere of behavior deemed acceptable to the Democratic Party.

Recalling the conclusions of the previous chapters, much of the strain on the Party-Labor alliance derives from limitations imposed by either the Democratic Party or by the restrictive neoliberal milieu. The conclusion to be drawn from the failures of organized labor differs from these explanations, as it relates to the changing nature of labor itself. The collusion with the Democratic Party in exchange
for legitimacy has transformed the radical socio-political movement into a narrow interest group vying for representation within a bourgeoisie political system. The alliance has crumbled as labor has lost its raison d'etre as a working class political organization confronting the privations of capitalism and the hostility of the political elite; now it is a willing partner in the political system that represses it. The alliance formed due to the Democratic Party’s need to secure support for the New Deal and prevent destabilizing labor militancy, however the Democratic Party no longer needs to actively control union radicalism. Labor has been so fundamentally altered and subordinated by this alliance (expressed by the increasing desperation of its condition and the inability of theorists to envision an alternative political identity) that the realities which defined the Wagner Act have disintegrated. Unions have increasingly come to conform to the conservative and neoliberal interpretations of it as an economic interest group pursuing pro-worker regulations in the labor market, due to its destructive alliance with the Democratic Party.
Section V: Conclusion

In this paper I have examined the factors contributing to the collapse of the Democratic Party-organized labor alliance formed during the New Deal. Rather than identify a primary causal mechanism for this decline, I have examined how these developments are part of a greater socio-political conflict between labor and the Party. Analyzing the research from various theorists operating within disparate ideological frameworks, I have synthesized their conclusions to form a broader theory explaining the relationship as inherently conflictual and self-defeating. Rather than individual crises derived from the actions of the Democratic leadership, the ascendancy of neoliberalism or the failures of organized labor, I have constructed a theory wherein the developments over the previous century conform to the same phenomena of social conflict, both caused by and reinforcing the incongruities central to the alliance.

Whereas much of the scholarship focusing on the Party-Labor alliance contextualizes political actions and economic changes as contingent on their particular historical milieu, I argue that these changes reflect constant social tensions within an ideological framework. Thus the adoption of anti-labor trade policies by the Clinton administration and the rejection of Keynesian macroeconomics are not tied to the historical circumstances of their enactment, but the inevitable result of the Party no longer constrained by a strong labor movement. This paper interprets the collapsing alliance as an extension of the class conflict that defines union politics and reinforces the domination of the political system controlled by elites over the working class.

Furthermore, I have identified how this Democratic regime infiltrates the ideology of organized labor and limits the imaginative frontiers of the labor movement. Not only have the labor bureaucracies accepted the alliance as the sole legitimate form of political action, labor theorists like Holger and Aronowitz are incapable of formulating a political program not fundamentally defined by the presence of the Party. The victory of the Democratic Party over the forces of organized labor, the unachievable
goal of Wilsonian corporatism, has been an establishment of a Foucauldian “grid of governmentality.”  
147
The Democratic Party has succeeded in “conducting the conduct,” of organized labor by utilizing an “intrinsic tendency to expand, an endogenous imperialism constantly pushing it to spread its surface and increase in extent, depth, and subtlety.”  
148
Having dragged the proletariat into the political sphere, the Party seeks to again exorcise labor to the economic realm, a realm devastated by the policies the Democratic Party has created and enforced, reshaping labor in its own neoliberal image.

This attempt by the Democratic Party to dominate labor, I argue, is not only an inevitable result of clashing social constructions, but the cause of the disintegration of the Democratic Party-organized labor alliance. The “decline” of the alliance signifies the Party’s ability to openly pursue policy objectives counter to the interests of labor without fear of electoral repercussions or an economically crippling strike wave. The collapse of the Keynesian economic system did not unleash a new wave of Democratic conservatism, but shed the Party’s veneer of social compromise as opportunist elites unfettered by the relics of the New Deal accelerated the realization of the alliance’s inevitable end. The political system that created the Democratic Party (and which the Party ruthlessly upholds) is a political dimension of capital and of the classes which benefit from maintaining a political-economic system that disadvantages the working class. This is the reason the Party-Labor alliance was inherently unsustainable: it was always a temporary arrangement built on a precarious foundation marked by ideological rifts and social tensions.

The impossibility of a lasting political compromise between political parties and the worker’s movement remains central to American politics, and the chief obstacle to revitalizing the labor movement. The 2016 election illustrated the absurdity of continued labor support of the Democratic Party from an ideological, let alone a logical, standpoint. The support expressed by the bureaucracies of...

the largest union federations for Hillary Clinton proved to be electorally indecisive in the Rust Belt states, mere background static amidst the Democratic infighting pitching the Cosmopolitan establishment against the leftist challenge of the Sanders campaign. Furthermore, the Clinton contingent’s rhetoric of responsibility and discipline, directed towards Sanders and his supporters doubled as a declaration against the socio-economic policies necessary to promote labor. Despite Clinton’s begrudging rejection of the Obama administration’s free trade legacy of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Democratic establishment reiterated the neoliberal dogma of personal responsibility and political moderation, the tired refrain of bland technocracy and elitist cosmopolitan contempt for collectivism.

Furthermore, the conclusions of this thesis also apply to union collusion with the Trump administration and the futility of labor realigning with populist conservatism. The support that business unions have expressed for Trump’s infrastructure plans and executive orders on the Keystone XL and Dakota access pipelines,149 coupled with the publicized support top bureaucrats like Teamsters General President James P. Hoffa and AFL-CIO’s President Richard Trumka have given to his anti-free trade agenda,150 illustrates the short-sightedness of labor’s political machinations. The Trump administration has clearly expressed a deep contempt for the labor movement; the brief nomination of the repugnant CEO of the fast-food conglomerate CKE Restaurants Andrew Puzder for Secretary of Labor, whose misogyny, dismissiveness towards workplace discrimination and rejection of minimum wage increases151 alone shocked even the most unprincipled labor leaders. That the proposed Trump Budget would slash the Labor Department by 21% (which Judy Conti of the National Employment Law Project equated to an

151 ibid.
inevitable increase in “illness, injury and death on the job”\textsuperscript{152} further illustrates the hostility towards labor emanating from the current administration.

However, the true danger of an organized labor-Trump alliance reiterates the conclusion of this thesis. Whether or not Trump will deliver the infrastructure jobs and trade policies desired by labor is irrelevant; the formation of a new Party-Labor configuration offers new avenues for the domination and repression of the labor movement. By collaborating with political parties, Democratic or Republican, labor engages in a ritualistic self-debasement, granting the political establishment the opportunity to dominate labor. Political parties conceive of a different view of power antagonistic to that of labor, and union cooperation inevitably leads to the replacement of the social imagination of the working class with the politics of restraint of bourgeois parties. Behind the Trump administration’s empty simulacra of pro-working class populism and postmodern spectacles of alternative truth and post-factuality lies the austerity and restraints of bourgeois governance. The Republican Party offers no reprieve to the crises facing the labor movement, and the reoriented alliance proposed by the ideological scabs of the building unions and short-sighted bureaucrats merely offers a change in the agents of domination destroying the labor movement.

The conclusion of this project, that any lasting political collusion between labor and the Democratic Party is a structural impossibility, expresses the necessity of a post-alliance political strategy. The corporatist unionists of the postwar era allowed the Democratic Party to dominate unionized America due to their fallacious assumption that the Party would deliver them from the conflict and uncertainty that had defined the early labor movement. They failed to recognize that the very political establishment through which they expected political salvation, actively restricted and dominated the

labor movement. Content with political inclusion and Democratic legitimacy, the labor movement failed to heed the warning of the IWW radical Eugene v. Debs:

I do not want you to follow me or anyone else; if you are looking for a Moses to lead you out of this capitalist wilderness, you will stay right where you are. I would not lead you into the promised land if I could, because if I led you in, someone else would lead you out. You must use your heads as well as your hands, and get yourself out of your present condition; as it is now the capitalists use your heads and hands.\(^{153}\)

The labor movement must reject the promises of the political establishment, and confront the anti-labor establishment rather than hope for the intercession of political saviors. The collapse of the Party-Labor alliance presents an opportunity for the worker’s movement to reject self-defeating political collusion, and combine a radical grass-roots organizational campaign with political strategies directly challenging the political system at both the state and federal levels. Unions have nothing to lose but their subjugation at the hands of the Democratic Party; they have a world to win.

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References


