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When Uprisings Aren't Spontaneous:

The Wisconsin Uprising as a product of movements in struggle

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by

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ABSTRACT

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The Wisconsin Uprising not only was the early riser of the U.S. protest wave of 2011, it was highly militant and the largest and most broadly based of those mobilizations. Nonetheless, the full meaning of Wisconsin continues to be lost to scholars and activists alike. The Wisconsin Uprising provides a classic case for studying the process and consequences of movement building, and stands for the proposition that the conscious movement building activities of activists matter. I draw on interviews and archival research as well as my personal history as a protagonist in the popular movements of Wisconsin over 25 years. I show how key elements of the Wisconsin Uprising were constructed in the greater period of struggle that began in the early 1990s, arguing that the wave of 2011 was a product of purposive actions in the course of that struggle. In so doing, I introduce a theoretical framework for explaining the trajectories and outcomes of "movements in struggle" and takes lessons for future social movement action.

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I. Introduction

On May 1, 1995, one thousand "socialist dinosaurs" marched from Wisconsin's Capitol Square to the headquarters of Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce four blocks away. By the time the May Day Mobilization for a People's Budget had ended, the corporate lobby group's sign had burned to ashes and blackened stone. In the next day's *Wisconsin State Journal*, Republican state legislator Scott Jensen described the May Day state budget protest as the work of "socialist dinosaurs" who had reemerged, as if from Jurassic Park, in the streets of Madison.

Sixteen years later, on Valentine's Day, February 14th 2011, eleven hundred students and teachers from the University of Wisconsin and Madison Area Technical College entered Wisconsin's Capitol in protest of a proposed state budget and so-called "Budget Repair Bill." By the next evening, upwards of ten thousand people had joined the protest and begun occupying the Capitol Building. Within days the crowds on the Capitol Square swelled to 30,000, and then 50,000, and eventually 150,000, giving global visibility to the six-month period of mass sit-ins, political strikes, encampments, assemblies, recall elections, marches and rallies known today as the Wisconsin Uprising.

The Wisconsin Uprising shocked most outside observers. Its scale, tactical militancy, and radical working class politics were unexpected. The best that most journalists could do to explain Wisconsin was to point lamely to the emerging revolutions of the Arab Spring. Multiple subsequent commenters even described Wisconsin as inspired by Occupy Wall Street, a manipulation of chronology and

causality that would make any time traveler's head spin. But the Uprising didn't surprise those who first rose up. Many saw it coming, prepared the way for it, and built the kind of movement they believed they would need in an ongoing struggle against austerity and corporatization. The Wisconsin Uprising provides a classic case study for looking at the process and consequences of *movement building*, and stands for the proposition that the conscious movement building activities of activists and organizers matter.

With this study we first ask what it means that Wisconsin surprised most scholars of social movements, and what it means that the Uprising has still not been explained adequately. I then begin to explain the Uprising by placing Wisconsin's role in the 2011 protest wave within the context of a period of struggle that began in the early 1990s. We will see that between the May Day Mobilization for a People's Budget of 1995 and the 2011 Wisconsin Uprising against the Budget Repair Bill, movement intellectuals engaged in movement building, a self-conscious activist process of constructing the kind of movement they believed was required for the current period of struggle. We will see how this conscious movement building process produced the people, culture, continuity structures, and resources that made the Wisconsin Uprising much of what it was and wasn't. In so doing, I will introduce a theoretical framework for explaining the trajectories and outcomes of *movements in struggle.* And I will take a lesson from Wisconsin for future social movement action in this current period of struggle.

A. Wisconsin's relevance for social movement studies

For a time, in the months before Occupy Wall Street, the mass uprisings of the industrial Midwest held the world's attention. Millions of people tuned in regularly just to get the latest news from Wisconsin. Thousands travelled to Madison from New York, Washington D.C., Montreal and many other major cities to take inspiration and lessons home from the protests. Publishers contracted for a series of books geared toward popular audiences, including *It Started in Wisconsin* (Buhle and Buhle 2011), *Uprising: How Wisconsin Renewed the Politics of Protest, from Madison to Wall Street* (Nichols 2012), *Wisconsin Uprising: Labor Fights Back* (Yates 2012), *We Are Wisconsin* (Sagran 2011), *The Battle for Wisconsin* (Kersten 2011), and various commercial films soon followed. Yet very little academic scholarship has been produced about Wisconsin. Why?

One explanation might involve the bicoastal bias of those who view the Midwest as "flyover territory." Another might suggest that the global breadth of the protest wave of 2011 was so significant that Wisconsin simply got lost in the wider maelstrom. Yet Wisconsin was at least as militant, more clear in its demands, significantly larger, and more broadly based than Occupy Wall Street. And as the early riser of the 2011 protest wave in the United States, it was novel. Researchers should have been interested in learning the lessons of Wisconsin.

In 2012, in his outgoing remarks as chair of the American Sociological Association's Collective Behavior and Social Movements section, Jeff Goodwin pointed to the Wisconsin Uprising and asked those gathered, "where did capitalism

go?" by which he meant, 'where did capitalism go in social movement studies?' Goodwin continued:

> *"Too much of the recent scholarship…treats movements as if they were hermetically sealed off from broader historical processes and social forces… neglect[ing] the broader sweep of politics, but it is capitalism that is especially conspicuous for its absence in the recent literature…"* (Smirnova and Wooten 2012)

At that same meeting, Juhi Tyagi and Michael Schwartz reviewed recently published articles from the social movements journal *Mobilization*, finding only three that dealt significantly with the contextual "broader sweep" identified by Goodwin. The ongoing absence of capitalism may help to explain the relative absence of Wisconsin from the dominant social movements literature, and in turn brings gravity to what Richard Flacks has called *The Question of Relevance in Social Movement Studies* (Flacks 2005, Bevington and Dixon 2005, Buechler 2000, Goodwin and Jasper 1999). Class-based popular movements having been "parceled out" to labor studies and industrial relations, the field of social movement studies has proven unable to account for some of the most significant social movement activity of our time (Barker *et alia* 2014).

What would account for Wisconsin? A handful of social movement scholars have considered the protests as a case study in collective identity, framing, and mobilization, focusing on the escalation of moral obligation through the course of the first months of the Uprising (Kearney 2013), the role of place and culture in explaining higher mobilization in Wisconsin than in other Midwestern protest

states (Klainot 2013), the activation of a "state patriotism" (Anker-Møller 2012), the sedimentation of imagery in populist placemaking (Seifert 2013), the translation of women's leadership in the protests into the election of Tammy Baldwin to the U.S. Senate (Buhle 2013), the framing of the Uprising as a pro-democracy struggle (Goldberg 2011), and the role of Wisconsin as an early riser of the 2011 protest wave (Febres-Cordero 2012). Yet worthwhile as some of these forays are, they come to us in the form of graduate theses or of short discursive essays. Among the leaders in the field of social movement studies, only Jane Collins gives the Wisconsin Uprising significant treatment:

> "*Studying the Wisconsin protests through the lens of recent writing on primitive accumulation suggests the importance of recognizing that resistance to accumulation by dispossession is an ongoing aspect of labor's struggles. This recognition implies the need for unity between groups targeting labor rights and those concerned more broadly with securing resources for social reproduction.*" (Collins 2012, p18)

Collins' analysis provides a starting point for considering Wisconsin within the context of a global struggle sometimes described as originating in the 1970s, and becoming manifest in the 1990s (Robinson 2008 and 2014, Buechler 2000, Wallis 1991, Arrighi *et alia* 1989, Boggs 1986). Throughout the 1990s, the politics of austerity, structural adjustment, and corporatization not only generated significant resistance of the kind symbolized by 1999's Battle in Seattle against the World Trade Organization. They also spurred the recognition of the need to reinvent the labor movement, radical politics, and popular movements in general (Manski 2014 and

2015, Juris and Khasnabish 2013, Markoff 1999, Juravich and Bronfenbrenner 1998, Flacks 1996, Grossman and Adams 1993) and the construction of transnational social movement networks (Smith 2008, Welton and Wolf 2001, Buechler 2000, McAdam and Rucht 1993, Grunder Frank *et alia* 1990).

It would be difficult to explain the Wisconsin Uprising independent of this history, and it would be hard to do so using the existing social movement theory toolbox. Indeed, few social movement scholars have ever tried. Yet these difficulties may be remedied in two steps. First, we can understand that *protest waves* and *waves of contention* take place within what Rosa Luxemburg called *periods of struggle* (Luxemburg 2008). Second, we can bring together the existing literature on social movement *continuity, culture, resources, leadership and praxis* in constructing an understanding of the conscious, activist process of *movement building*.

B. Wisconsin as a Case Study

By examining social interactions in their real-world contexts we gain deeper understanding of real-world behavior and its meaning (Charmaz 2008, Yin 1994). In developing theory out of qualitative "research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation" (Creswell 2014), I bring a depth of understanding to analysis of the Wisconsin Uprising that is missing in most other accounts. Robert Yin suggests six sources of evidence for data collection in the case study protocol: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and

physical artifacts. Not all need be used in every case study, but my research makes use of most of these in triangulating for data validity.

My research is grounded in participant observation and conscious praxis in the course of my own personal experience as a labor, environmental, student, and pro-democracy activist in Wisconsin from 1986 through 2013 (Perlman 2011, Buhle and Buhle 2011). I conducted seven semi-structured interviews, seeking the understandings of activists from multiple social positions and different activist sectors were involved in both the Wisconsin Uprising and in the decades of organizing in Wisconsin prior. Given that most activists are public figures who are not well compensated for their labors, and based on my own experiences as an informant for scores of academic research project, I believe it unethical to for researchers to make use of the intellectual labors of activists without giving due credit. For this reason, and because my informants preferred their assessments to be made public, I have at their direction identified them by name. My semi-structured interviews were supplemented with coded analysis of documents, artifacts, and the records from the Wisconsin Labor History Society, Madison Infoshop, Democracy Teach-In Clearinghouse, Wisconsin Wave, Wisconsin Uprising Archive, and many news and editorial sources, as well as a review of the existing social scientific literature on the Wisconsin Uprising.

II. The Social Movement and Social Change Literature

A. Waves of contention within periods of struggle

Social movements are, by definition, inconstant. They tend to rise and fall. For this reason, when social movements swell, they are described in terms of waves or cycles. The concept of waves of contention, or protest waves, is generally useful in understanding the trajectories of social movement action, and there is a significant body of research that has been constructed around the emergence of protest waves, their resolution and subsidence, and the cultural, political, and social structural artifacts they produce. (Koopmans 2007, McAdam *et alia* 2003, Tarrow 1998, Meyer and Staggenborg 1996, Snow and Benford 1992).

Unclear, however, is the temporal duration of such waves. When speaking of a wave of contention, is our object to be found in the months or years of heightened visibility, or are such waves generally of greater duration, and inclusive of the many years of less intensive activity that precede the surfacing of a social movement? Were the years 1968-1973 the period of a protest wave, or is it more useful to think of that wave as having started earlier and ended later? Similarly, is it useful to speak of the "Protest Wave of 2011," as many scholars have, or will we later look back to 2009 as the first year of a protest wave that continued on past 2011?

A few have taken stabs at clarifying what defines the temporal limits of a wave or cycle of contention; Sidney Tarrow made a passing reference to a typology of "moments, cycles, ages of contention" (Tarrow 1993, p21). A dominant discourse

within social movement theory has described waves of contention as occurring in response to perceived threats and according to the relative structure of political opportunity available to activists at a particular time (McAdam *et alia* 2001). Analyses of opportunity and threats are presented as useful in predicting *when* contention will escalate (Tarrow 2011). Yet, as Taylor (1989) has noted, missing from such analyses are useful explanations of what meaningful activity occurs between waves of contention and of the role of activists in building social movements in periods of less visibility. Thus, missing in most accounts, is an effective means of predicting *what* activists will do in the course of contention.

> *"It is absurd to think of the mass strike as one act, one isolated action. The mass strike is rather the indication, the rallying idea, of a whole period of class struggle lasting for years, perhaps decades."* (Luxemburg 2008, p141)

Waves of contention – what Rosa Luxemburg a century ago described as *mass strikes* – are usually of shorter duration than the lifespans of the people who make them. Many activists live through multiple waves of contention, immersed all the while in "the great underground work of the revolution [which is] in reality being carried on without cessation, day by day and hour by hour, in the very heart of the empire." (Ibid, p133).

This underground work – which activists today call "movement building" – is not only uninterrupted, it is of duration, carried on not only hour-by-hour but also year-by-year and sometimes decade-by-decade. The work takes place within the context of a period defined by a long-lasting crisis in which, "the political forces

which are struggling to conserve and defend the existing structure itself," engage in an "incessant and persistent" struggle against movements from below (Gramsci 2000, p201). Antonio Gramsci called such periods *conjunctural*. For our purposes here I instead use Luxemburg's *periods of struggle*, situating waves of contention within periods of struggle.

The 2011 protest wave, of which the Wisconsin Uprising was a critical element, can only be properly understood in the context of a period of struggle that began in the early 1990s and continues today. Francis Fukuyama predicted in 1989 that the collapse of the Soviet Bloc would bring with it the end of social systemic change, and therefore, of history (Fukuyama 1989). Instead, the Soviet collapse at once ended a period of international struggle defined by superpower hegemony and at the same time initiated a new period of global struggle between corporate capital and people's movements (Robinson 2014, Buechler 2000, Wallis 1991, Núñez Soto and Gillooly 1989). From Washington, Wall Street, and Dallas, as well as London, Davos, and Doha, came a multipronged and multilevel push that included neoliberal trade policies like NAFTA and the Multilateral Agreement on Investments, domestic corporatization policies like the telecommunications and welfare reform acts of 1996, and everywhere, resource wars for oil and minerals (Manski 2015). The resistance to these policies took on greater coherence and militancy as the global struggle developed, producing massive movement upsurges in the protest waves symbolized by the Battle in Seattle of 1999, the global anti-war protests of 2003, and the Day Without an Immigrant of May Day, 2006.

Wisconsinites who were veterans of these struggles, as well as of localized conflicts over corporatization, austerity and democracy, introduced the protest wave of 2011 to the United States.

B. In Struggle: The movement building process

Ask most any veteran activist and they will react with surprise on hearing that the concept of *movement building* is not already a central part of the sociological literature on social movements. After all, movement building is nothing more than the critical work the movement intellectuals Richard Healey and Sandra Hinson were celebrating in, "point[ing] to promising trends – greater attention to political education, leadership development, coalition building, and infrastructure – that we see manifest in renewed efforts to become more strategic." (Healey and Hinson 2005, p57-58).

Activists engage in movement building all the time. Social movements are filled with institutions and practices devoted to the task, from movement half-way houses such as the Highlander Center to pedagogical campaigns such as teach-ins and micro practices such as skill-shares. In recent years, passing references to movement building have increasingly appeared in academic journals and graduate theses. And some scholars have called attention to the importance of movement building (Avendaño and Hiatt 2012, Kay 2011, Ryan and Gamson 2006). Yet to date, with one notable exception which we'll turn to later, the *practice* of movement building has not been brought in from the field to the academy as a *theoretical*

concept. Here again is an opportunity for academic scholarship to gain from the learning of lay practitioners (Bevington and Dixon 2005).

To be clear, many of what I identify as the *elements* of movement building have already been analyzed within the field of social movement studies. These include questions of movement organization, continuity, culture, resources, and leadership. What has generally been missing is the recognition that all of these together are produced, reproduced, and synthesized through the conscious action of activists in a movement building process oriented toward long-term strategic gains in the course of social struggle. Movement building is a material praxis.

Social movement scholars recognize that movements don't always disappear in times of less visible activity between waves of contention. *Movement continuity* is a common fact. Verta Taylor and Leila Rupp explored the role of *structures of abeyance* – institutions, organizations, networks, and communities – in retaining critical ideological and other cultural resources through relatively low periods of mobilization (Taylor 1989, Rupp and Taylor 1987). More recent research has identified the importance of informal *place-based movement scenes* as abeyance structures (Haunss and Leach 2007). And a wide variety of scholars have considered the role of *collective identity* in maintaining submerged networks of activists through periods of lesser activity (Melucci 1996), building collective consciousness and solidarity (Hunt and Benford 2007, Taylor and Whittier and 1992), and shaping the long-term strategic orientations of movement participants (Fominaya 2010, Polletta and Jasper 2001).

A closely related body of work is concerned with the importance of *movement culture* both as a product and a producer of social movements. Waves of contention often produce cultural currents which in turn can rebound to impact the very movements that helped produce them as well as other social movements (Earl 2007, Whittier 2007, Taylor and Whittier 1995). In particular, the *cultural frames* articulated and elaborated by social movement participants have been shown to produce wider cultural change (Snow *et alia* 2013). Significant attention has also been paid by social movement scholars to the construction and distribution of cultural bundles of tactics, symbols, and practices described as collective action *repertoires* or *toolkits* (Taylor 2009 and 1996, Swidley 1986, Tilly 1977) and *charismatic packages* (Lowenhaupt Tsing 2005) which become available for future use or which may *spillover* and *diffuse* across into other movements (Whittier 2007, Soule 2007).

A few researchers have looked beyond these mostly discrete set of cultural artifacts to examine the ways in which culture can become embedded in institutions as roadmaps, or *institutional schemas* for action (Polletta 2008). And still others have developed the analytical framework of *political cultures of opposition and resistance*. There, ideology and cultural idioms are understood to mediate between individual's subjective experiences and the objective structural and organizational forces they face (Foran 2014, Reed and Foran 2002, Taylor 2002, Morris and Braine 2001). Such political cultures have been found to be especially important in maintaining the kind of horizontalist, decentralized, and anti-authoritarian movements that have arisen since the 1990s (Leach 2013). Indeed, it is these very

kinds of movements and community-based uprisings that have most often been described as "spontaneous" or encouraging spontaneity in the social movement literature (Kucinskas 2015, Snow and Moss 2014).

Movement know-how is transmitted in symbols and other forms of material culture, yet the accumulation of knowledge and experience within individuals also is critical to movement success. *Movement leaders* play key roles in sustaining movements (Taylor 1994) and in creating opportunities for movement success (Morris and Staggenborg 2007). Gramsci recognized the importance of *organic intellectuals*, who, having arisen out of conditions of social struggle, provide movement leadership at the ground level (Gramsci 2000). More recent scholarship in this tradition calls them *movement intellectuals* or simply *activists* (Barker *et alia* 2014, Cox and Gunvald Nilsen 2014, Eyerman and Jamison 1991). And activist biographies reveal that once activated, individuals tend to remain engaged in social change work (McAdam 1989, Whalen and Flacks 1980). We find a most useful account of the generation of such grassroots leadership in returning to Luxemburg and *The Mass Strike*:

> "*The most precious, because lasting, thing in this rapid ebb and flow of the wave is its mental sediment: the intellectual, cultural growth of the proletariat, which proceeds by fits and starts, and which offers an inviolable guarantee of their further irresistible progress in the economic as in the political struggle.*"
> (Luxemburg 2008, p134, emphasis added)

Leaders aren't effective unless they are able to access and mobilize resources. For many years, the study of social movements was dominated by a *resource mobilization* model that emphasized the importance of the accumulation of material, organizational, moral, and human resources (Zald 1992, McCarthy and Zald 1977). The effective and innovative use of resources, or *resourcefulness*, has been recognized as a resource in its own right – a kind of *strategic capacity* of organizations identified by Marshall Ganz in his study of the United Farm Workers (Ganz 2000). Activists know the importance of organizations in developing leadership (Han 2014) and in building *resource capacity*. Since the 1990s the U.S. labor movement in particular has been engaged in significant internal debates over the need massively to expand its organizing program and its social base (Fletcher and Gapasin 2008, Moody 2007, Lichtenstein 2002, Bernard 2008, Bronfenbrenner 1999).

Beyond the ranks of organized labor, efforts to build popular movements in the United States have engaged in what Jeffrey Juris and six coauthors have called the construction of *movement building machines* (Juris *et alia* 2014). Their analysis of the U.S. Social Forum process of 2010 represents an important effort to conceptualize movement building within a social movement studies framework. They describe the Social Forum process as a machine producing new organizational resources: cross-sectoral alliances, organizational infrastructure, and links between local, regional, national, and global struggles.

Social movement scholars aren't the only ones who know that movement continuity, culture, leadership, and resource mobilization are critical elements in the building of social movements. For activists engaged in struggle, these elements often are not just the building blocks of movements, but the elements of life itself, determining whether or not essential needs are met and modulating the degree of risk and exposure to personal harm the activist experiences. Struggles, after all, involve more than one participant; social movements from below engaged with *social movements from above* (Cox and Gunvald Nilsen 2014). Thus, as Colin Barker tells us:

> "'*Class struggle' is inherently a process involving (at least) two sides. One side involves multifarious forms of resistance to exploitation and oppression; the other includes the equally varied means by which ruling groups work to maintain their positions and to contain such resistance.*" (Barker 2014: 43).

Struggle occurs in geographic locations, upon conditions, and within a set of social relations particular to the actors involved, or what Gramsci termed *terrains of struggle* (Gramsci 2000). In the course of struggle, activists teach themselves and others lessons about how to build lasting, effective, well-resourced movements for the road ahead, and it matters to activists whether those lessons prove correct (Pleyers 2013, Wainwright 1994). If they are correct, activist efforts escalate over time from particularized local conflicts to generalized campaigns to large scale and potentially revolutionary *social movement projects* (Cox and Gunvald Nilsen). This reflexive building process is essential to the larger social change process that Ron

Eyerman and Andrew Jamison named *cognitive praxis* (1991) and Richard Flacks called *making history* (1988). If, as Colin Barker has put it, social "movements are mediated expressions of class struggle" (2014), activists *and their antagonists* are the prime mediators.

I stress this last point because I know it will somehow be missed by some. The building of social movements is never unilateral and it does not occur in a vacuum. Most activists engage in movement building conscious of their immediate antagonists and other actors, as well as with some sense of the need for, as Wisconsin family farm activist John Peck put it, "strategies and analysis that carry through beyond your immediate crisis or battle or target that you are focused on, and that is more broad based" (2016). Just as struggle is both interactive (between movement actors and others) and intra-active (among movement actors), so too is the process of movement building. Thus, even processes that might seem purely internal to particular movements, such as trainings, skill shares, caucuses, or conferences are undertaken in knowledge of struggle. And "sporadic outbreaks and skirmishes" that might seem external to the process of movement building are in actuality "giving the people a lesson" (Lenin 1903) through which "all the elements necessary for a coming battle unite and develop" (Marx 1847).

I define the movement building process as *the purposive production of social movement elements for use in future struggle*. The process is *purposive* in that it involves the conscious and often praxis-driven action of movement participants toward a future goal. The process produces social movement *elements* to the extent that it

builds continuity structures, culture, leaders and resource capacity. And the process occurs within the context and consciousness of present and future social *struggle*.

III. Findings and Analysis

A. Wisconsin in Struggle

> *"Revolutions must be prepared for gradually, outrages must be resisted, and outrageous laws must be resisted and refused obedience to, before a revolution can be prepared for, long before it can be matured."*
> ~ The Racine Advocate, 1851, a newspaper of Wisconsin's abolitionist movement

Beginning with statehood in 1848, Wisconsin provided a heartland for radical, socialist, and progressive politics. The state resisted slavery to the point that prior to election of Lincoln to the presidency, the legislature began secession proceedings and Governor Randall ordered a review of state militia units to insure loyalty to Wisconsin in the case of war with the federal government (Manski 2006). Fifty years later, the Socialist and Progressive parties dominated municipal and state politics for most of a generation. In the 1960s and 1970s, Madison in particular was a global center of the New Left. Major national organizations and unions like the National Organization for Women, United States Student Association, Sierra Club, AFSCME, and National Education Association were formed and led by Wisconsinites. In the 1980s, Wisconsin became a hub of Latin American solidarity organizations, the U.S. Out of Apartheid movement, and anti-nuclear organizing. By the early 1990s, Wisconsin was home to an internationally-oriented, dense

network of progressive non-profit organizations, universities, labor unions, and politically engaged worker, service, and housing cooperatives. All of this made Wisconsin what Ralph Nader once called "The Progressive Heritage State," a place where, as my research reinforced, every school child is raised on stories of the La Follette insurgencies, sewer socialism, farm and labor strikes, and Wisconsin's clean government and clean environment traditions.

It also made Wisconsin a national target of the political right long before the surname "Koch" came to prominence. The election of Tommy Thompson as governor in 1986 initiated a period of political struggle that heightened and expanded into economic and social struggle on a series of fronts by the mid-1990s and which involved a concerted effort by national rightwing groups like the Alliance Defense Fund, National Association of Scholars, and the Bradley Foundation, among others, to restructure Wisconsin's political economy and to contest the cultural hegemony of Wisconsin progressivism.

Here I do not intend to present a chronology or a history of these struggles. Certainly a history is needed, both of the 1990s-2010s period and also of the Wisconsin Uprising itself (with few exceptions the written and video works published in 2011-2012 were either preliminary at best or one-dimensional and factually flawed at worst). Instead, here I analyze the iterative movement building process leading up to the Wisconsin Uprising, recognizing that activists in the Wisconsin struggle produced and reproduced key elements of a movement that shook the world in early 2011.

I begin by identifying four important terrains of struggle: First, the state's biennual budget battles; second, sectoral and institutional conflicts over corporatization and corporate power; third, the participation of Wisconsinites in regional, national, and global conflicts against corporations and the state; fourth, conflicts over the fate of social movement organizations and institutions in Wisconsin.

In presenting each terrain of struggle, I identify important *conflicts* that took place in Wisconsin over this period. These conflicts were often of significant duration and involved thousands and tens of thousands of people, yet they each were only particular fronts in larger waves of contention and in the overall period of struggle. One might think of these conflicts as similar to what are sometimes called *episodes of contention* (McAdam *et alia* 2003), yet I don't find the term 'episodes' particularly intuitive for events and processes of this scale. The overall framework I am using here might be represented simply as:

periods of struggle > waves of contention > conflicts

I don't attempt to provide a complete history of the Wisconsin left, and some critical conflicts in which I and many of those I interviewed were involved (for instance, anti-war activism and the marriage equality movement) are not dealt with here. I focus on those terrains and conflicts that most directly prefigured the Wisconsin Uprising of 2011.

Finally, I identify certain elements essential to movement continuity and cultural, leadership, and resource development that were produced by activists in

these struggles and which proved important in the manifestation of the Wisconsin Uprising. Some might think of these elements as similar to what social movement scholars sometimes call *spillover* (Whittier 2007, Soule 2007). Yet most of these elements did not simply happen to spill from one conflict to another. They were consciously constructed and carried forward in individuals, artifacts, and organizations. Many of the activists involved in these conflicts were fully conscious of the reality that they were engaged in a longer and broader struggle and that the choices they made and strategies they pursued in the course of that struggle would produce the social movements of the future.

1. ***Terrain of Struggle:*** **State Budgets.** The State of Wisconsin runs its budgets on a two year cycle. This means that every two years, in the beginning of January, the governor makes a speech about state priorities and proposes a draft of the next state budget. Over the course of the next five months, interest groups mobilize their members to influence legislators over particular budget priorities. Into the early 1990s, there were a number of major budget protests organized by labor unions, student associations, and others. Yet, these were usually single-constituency mobilizations and not even sectoral in scope; the teachers mobilized teachers, students mobilized students, health care advocates mobilized physicians and nurses, and so on. In 1993, Gov. Thompson was successful in using the budget process to impose school district revenue caps and limits on teacher pay increases.

In 1995, the pattern of single-constituency budget protests changed. The May Day Mobilization for a People's Budget was organized in response to a proposed budget by Gov. Thompson which was a harbinger in many respects Gov. Walker's Act 10 Budget Repair Bill of 2011. The 1995 Thompson budget hit many social sectors with fiscal cuts at once, gutted environmental oversight, exposed state employees to greater risk, attempted to eviscerate the office of Secretary of State Doug La Follette, and more. In response, a joint effort by the Madison branch of the Industrial Workers of the World and the Wisconsin Greens, with critical support from Madison Teachers Inc (MTI), was successful in building a labor, student, community and environmental coalition of 105 organizations, including major statewide formations such as the Wisconsin AFL-CIO, John Muir Chapter of the Sierra Club, Wisconsin NOW, and United Council of UW Students.

Weeks of protest leading up to May 1st culminated in a mass rally at the Capitol, an all-day "People's Budget Hearing" in which an alternative budget was drawn up, and the fateful march on Wisconsin Manufacturer's and Commerce (WMC), the state affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the National Association of Manufacturers. A giant puppet representing Gov. Thompson as an octopus strangling various institutions of Wisconsin's progressive tradition was set on fire. And the WMC's sign, on which the puppet was leaning, exploded into flames and burned to ashes. Republicans were apoplectic. Democrats were apologetic. And activists – after ensuring that the fire had been put out – headed to the nearest beer hall and prepared for another round.

"This was very important because, growing out of that May Day budget protest and for all the years since, has been the Earth Day to May Day Coalition," a process involving mainstream unions, environmental groups, and community organizations in building personal, cultural and organizational ties across the green and blue spectrums (Stockwell 2016). It also inaugurated a regular practice of coalition work around each state budget cycle, including mass protests during the tenure of Governor Jim Doyle, a Democrat, against his proposed anti-labor austerity budget of 2005.

Each of these budget conflicts formed "building blocks coming up to 2011," as MTI teachers union official John Matthews described them (2016). In these budget conflicts activists developed a movement repertoire that included *cultural elements* such as the practice of targeting the state chamber of commerce as a common "class enemy," statewide coalition work around state budget processes, the strengthening of ties between environmental and labor organizations in particular, the identification of mainstream social movement organizations with the radical heritage of May Day and the May Day sing-along tradition. Furthermore, the creation of the standing coalition around Earth Day and May Day fostered *movement continuity* and as well the emerging movement's *resource capacity* through strengthened social network ties among key movement leaders. "In Madison, the good news about us by 2011 was that all of those very close, inclusive relationships were there," according to union staffer Ed Sadlowski, Jr. (2016).

2. ***Terrain of Struggle:*** **Sectoral corporatization.** After 20 years of deployment in the Global South, in the 1990s the Washington Consensus' program structural adjustment was brought north (Manski and Peck 2006). In 1994, Michael Joyce, president of the Milwaukee-based Bradley Foundation, called for the abolition of the idea most identified with the state of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Idea. In an article titled *The Legacy of the 'Wisconsin Idea' Hastening the Demise of an Exhausted Progressivism*, Joyce wrote that because "the public school [has] become virtually synonymous with progressive democracy," rightwing activists were "looking even now for promising states upon which to focus their initial efforts – states that have traditions of progressive, citizen-based politics; states where parents are refusing to turn over more funds to failures like the public-education establishment; states where parents are clamoring instead for the opportunity to select their own schools for their children. You may be sure that Wisconsin fits that bill nicely." (Joyce 1994, p.11-14). In actuality, the Wisconsin Idea – "the boundaries of the university are the boundaries of the state" – is specifically associated with the 26-campus University of Wisconsin System more so than with its K-12 public schools, but Joyce's broadside against both the universities and the schools of Wisconsin was if anything, an understatement of the Bradley Foundation's agenda.

Governor Thompson of Wisconsin proved a quite willing instrument for implementing a radical restructuring of Wisconsin's public education, corrections, and welfare systems, as well as of the state's regulatory approach to natural resources and business. Majority minority Milwaukee in particular was made the

primary national testing ground for all kinds of corporatization schemes, including Workfare, Bridefare, School to Work, education vouchers, charter schools, private prisons, and more. To the chagrin of many Wisconsinites, Thompson's corporatization program became known worldwide in policy circles as "The Wisconsin Model" (Reese 2011). Meanwhile, the Exxon Minerals corporation pursued plan to open the world's largest metallic sulfide mine at the headwaters of the Wolf River and immediately abutting the Mole Lake Sokaogon Anishinabe (Chippewa) reservation. Governor Thompson's top aide, James Klauser, was a former Exxon lobbyist.

A popular meme of radical movements in the 1990s was a modified image of a road sign that read, "Resistance May Be Expected." As the Thompson administration "just kept chipping away at the Wisconsin tradition," resistance mounted (Matthews 2016).

Wisconsin's anti-mining movement united rural and urban people, tribal communities and the rural white working class. Tribal activists blocked railroad tracks and fought mining at the DNR and in the courts. The AFL-CIO came out against metallic sulfide mining. Marches of thousands against the proposed mine took place in small towns and in larger cities. The Earth First! movement held its annual gathering in the North Woods, occupying the mine site and corporate offices. Municipalities across the state passed anti-mining resolutions and North Woods townships attempted to ban mining in their jurisdictions. 60,000 people signed a petition calling for the revocation of Exxon's certificate to do business in

Wisconsin. A popular slogan of the movement was "Wisconsin Forever! Exxon Never!" The resistance to mining in Wisconsin came to be called "The Wisconsin Contagion" in mining industry circles, and after a decade of intensive resistance, Exxon gave up and the state legislature adopted a moratorium on metallic sulfide mining by such a margin that Gov. Thompson felt compelled to sign it into law.

The multiracial rural-urban alliance in the conflict over extraction involved some of the same activists engaged in the many conflicts over the racialized corporatization of public services. Southeast Wisconsin's Welfare Warriors organization, made up primarily of white and Black activists, joined with Hmong, Latino and other community activists across the state in resisting Thompson's plans for Wisconsin's welfare programs; Thompson's W2 program became the model for President Clinton's 1996 welfare act. A Latino-led campaign based in Milwaukee called Education for the People joined with local teachers unions and student groups in opposing school vouchers, charter schools, and corporate advertising in public schools. Majority minority Milwaukee high school students stalled Republican plans to disband their school district in favor of a vouchers program by organizing white high school students in rural districts to support them, and then by heading to Madison where they occupied the Governor's Office. In Madison, an alliance of the Greens and MTI teachers union was successful in forcing the resignation of school superintendent Cheryl Wilhoyte (whose next job involved running the Edison Project's corporate takeover of the Philadelphia School System).

At the University of Wisconsin System, a concerted campaign was made to defend affirmative action from attack by the National Association of Scholars. In the course of these multiracial statewide campaigns, activists with the A Job is a Right Campaign revealed that the Bradley Foundation was the major source of funding behind the corporatization and racialization of welfare and education in Wisconsin as well as nationally. Among other things, the Bradley Foundation had financed the publication of Charles Murray's racist tract *The Bell Curve*, which claimed to prove that Blacks were genetically inferior to Whites and Asians. The Bradley Foundation now became the target of regular protests by an unusual coalition of activists from various labor unions and student groups, the Nation of Islam and Catholic nuns, welfare rights activists, Greens and socialists.

A third site of conflict throughout the 1990s and 2000s was the 26 campus University of Wisconsin System, where, as in many other parts of the country, funding cuts and tuition increases drove students, faculty, staff and community members into standing alliances such as the UW System-wide Alliance for Democracy, the Coalition for Social Responsible Investment, and the UW Federation of Labor, each of which campaigned for the democratization of the University itself. Out of these alliances emerged the national student anti-sweatshop movement, with the UW-Madison leading the way with mass anti-Reebok protests in 1995 and then weeklong mass anti-sweatshop sit-ins in early 1999 and 2000. Most of the initial leadership of United Students Against Sweatshops

(USAS) came from UW-Madison's Student Labor Action Coalition (SLAC) and UW Greens.

Wisconsin was the national headquarters for the anti-corporate campus group 180/Movement for Democracy and Education (180/MDE) as well as the National Teach-Ins on Corporations, Education, and Democracy, later renamed the Democracy Teach-Ins. "The purpose of the Teach-Ins has been to raise such questions as, 'Do we live in a democracy?" and if not, "How can we win democracy?" with as many people, particularly young people, as possible" (DTI 1996, 1997, 1998). The teach-in process also deliberately nationalized Wisconsin's revival of the May Day tradition, securing the formal endorsement in May Day activities by scores of major national progressive organizations. In 2001, 1500 students walked out of classes and occupied the State Capitol Building in a protest that secured the first tuition freeze in UW history. In 2003, as part of the global Books Not Bombs Student Strike initiated by 180/MDE, over 5000 college, high school, and middle school students occupied the Capitol Building. In 2005, 48 students from across the state organized a five-day hunger strike inside the Capitol Building against tuition hikes.

In the course of each of these and other sectoral conflicts, activists produced and reproduced critical *cultural elements* for movement building including statewide multiracial coalition building against a common corporate target (and often on the basis of working class solidarity), sophisticated direct action organizing, and demands for democratic structural reforms. These critical lessons reinforced what

many Wisconsinites knew from childhood, which was that "statewide organizing is right out of the progressive playbook; Fighting Bob La Follette took rural farmers and urban factory workers and aligned them, and we know and have to show that rural families have been left out in the cold and abandoned in same way that urban families have been," as Milwaukee labor organizer Jennifer Epps-Addison told me (2016).

Most of the standing alliances created out of these particular conflicts did not last through to 2011, and therefore could not in themselves provide for the building of *resource capacity* or the kind of structures for *movement continuity* that might have been helpful in the Uprising; one notable exception was the Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice. Yet many individual movement *leaders* from these struggles remained active in Wisconsin throughout the entire period, and their personal relationships, maintained in abeyance through submerged networks, were to prove important in the formation of Wisconsin Wave of 2011. As Milwaukee teacher and labor activist Sangita Nayak shared, in referencing a mid-1990s meeting with university administrators over recruitment and retention of students of color, "The same people at that table were the same people in all of those fights, so being an activist at that time you had to know that all these battles were going to come together in one grand fight."

3. ***Terrain of Struggle:*** **Corporate globalization.** Wisconsin is 900 miles from Washington D.C. and 1800 miles from Washington State, yet distance did not prevent Wisconsinites from playing pivotal roles in the 1990s-era wave of contention over the shape of globalization. U.S. Senator Feingold was a recognized leader the fight against NAFTA, the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and other trade deals, and in doing so he was in line with the many Wisconsin cities and towns that had passed resolutions calling for "Fair Trade, not Free Trade." The international human rights organizations Colombia Support Network, Free Burma Coalition, East Timor Action Network, and Students for a Free Tibet all made their homes in Madison, and local solidarity activism with popular movements in El Salvador, Nicaragua, Mexico, Haiti, and Nigeria was particularly strong. In 1999, hundreds Wisconsinites travelled to participate in the mass direct action protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle, and in the following years hundreds more headed to Washington D.C., Quebec City, Miami, and points around the globe for protests against the IMF, World Bank, WTO, and FTAA.

Closer to home, following on the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, some of the first social forum processes in North America were organized as the Midwest Social Forums hosted in Wisconsin from 2003 through 2006, ahead of the first U.S. Social Forum in 2007. Wisconsinites travelled in large groups to support the prolonged labor strikes in the so-called Labor Warzone of Central

Illinois, the newspaper strike in Detroit, Mohawk encampments in central Ontario, the Minnehaha Free State actions in Minnesota, and mass protests against corporate sponsorship of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1996.

In 2002, Wisconsin itself became home to a national mobilization against corporate influence in the U.S. Conference of Mayors when that organization met in Madison; the mayor declared martial law, sealed off much of the downtown against protests, and was punished by voters in the following election with a fourth place finish. In 2004, hundreds of Wisconsinites traveled to Ohio to assist with the oversight of the presidential recount in that state. In 2006, 25,000 marched in Madison and 70,000 in Milwaukee in the wave of immigrant workers rights mobilizations that swept the country.

Through each of these conflicts and mobilizations, Wisconsin activists expanded their social networks across national and regional borders, strengthening their sense of collective identity as a part of a global popular movement, thus opening up new network *resources* for receiving global solidarity, and orienting themselves *culturally* toward an idea that their local troubles and global social problems were one and the same:

> *"'An injury to one is an injury to all' was a slogan that the leadership took to heart. So when there was a struggle elsewhere, be that elsewhere in the United States or elsewhere internationally, they would open the doors and have people come in and talk about that. I think that what that did was it raised the consciousness of the local labor movement that labor struggles are not just what's happening in your shop, it's what's happening in all the shops around you, all the shops in the country, and in fact all the shops in the world."* (Stockwell).

4. ***Terrain of Struggle:*** **Wisconsin's progressive movement.** As addressed in our discussion of the sectoral struggles against corporatization, the progressive movement in Wisconsin came under a concerted national attack beginning in the early 1990s. Some of this national attention was focused on the political economy that formed the underlying social base for progressive politics in Wisconsin, and some of it was direct, targeting popular movement organizations and institutions themselves. At the same time, activists in Wisconsin engaged in both novel and conventional movement building activities which resulted in the growth of resource mobilization capacity in particular areas.

Overt anti-union activity was relatively limited in Wisconsin compared to other Midwestern states in this period. Defensive strikes and lockouts such as the one in 2003-2004 at Tyson Foods' Jefferson, Wisconsin plant were not unheard of, and there were periodic union-busting trial balloons by both private and public employers. At the same time, there were some advances in expanding union representation in some sectors. University of Wisconsin faculty, for instance, finally won a long fight for collective bargaining rights in 2010. The real blow to union capacity in Wisconsin was structural. As neoliberal austerity and global trade policies "hit town after town where militant trade unionism was practiced, it became clear to us that this wasn't just about seeking cheaper labor – that was a part of it – it was about eradicating any semblance of democracy in the economy" (Sadlowski 2016). In Wisconsin as across the country, unions did not replace lost manufacturing sector members with service, clerical, and agricultural workers. One

result was that Wisconsin's union representation declined from 19% to 14% of employed workers between 2000 and 2011 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Another was that the leadership of most state unions stayed monochromatic and got grayer over time. And a related development was that the state's largest unions adopted less militant postures:

> *"They just were not ready. AFSCME and WEAC tried to move away from a confrontational aspect of bargaining. They wanted to be known as a professional organization, as nice guys, and didn't want to be confrontational and therefore didn't maintain the ability to be confrontational when they needed to be. They wanted to be known as organizations that politicians could get along with. They didn't maintain what they needed to with the legislature or with political action so that they were a force."* (Matthews)

Even as much of Wisconsin labor lost members and militancy, other unions and labor organizations gained political consciousness. Many of these gains came out of the May Day process built around the biennial state budget conflicts and the many other anti-corporate conflicts that generated interactive forms of movement building. Yet intra-active movement building occurred as well as veteran labor activists developed new institutions, traditions, and practices in order to build working class consciousness and union power. Madison's WORT community radio station launched regular Labor Radio programming in 1991, and this in time grew from a short morning update to a regular weekly program and eventually, a nationally syndicated labor radio service called Workers Independent News (WIN). May Day celebrations were expanded beyond the annual rally and picnic to include an annual May Day Sing-Along, teach-ins, and special events like the Irish Labor

Sing-Along. Workers Memorial Day became a major annual event organized by central labor councils in various regions of Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Labor History Society brought labor education and the epic book, *Labor's Untold Story*, to the state's public schools. And the various local independent teachers unions and central labor councils made a point of building ongoing, horizontal relationships across the various different regions of the state. All of this was the work of a cohort of militant labor activists who came to the fore in the 1970s and 1980s, and many of whom remained in leadership of Wisconsin labor right through into 2011.

Like organized labor, student organizations in Wisconsin lost significant institutional muscle at the same time that they developed greater independence and militancy. The Arizona-based Alliance Defense Fund orchestrated a direct legal assault on the ability of student associations to use student fees for advocacy and organizing purposes. This litigation specifically targeted student groups such as Black Student Union, UW Greens, and Campus Women's Center at the UW-Madison, and resulted in the U.S. Supreme Court's *Board of Regents of the UW System v. Southworth* ruling, which while facially a victory had the practical effect of severely limiting student advocacy across the state. Student associations across the Wisconsin and the rest of the country responded to *Southworth* by adopting policies requiring "content neutrality" in the allocation of student fees, the practical effect of which has been to limit the institutional capacity of students to organize collectively and engage in express advocacy. Notably, the loss of institutional power did not translate to a decline in student militancy – if anything, the reverse was true. In the

late 1990s and early 2000s, students and campus workers repeatedly occupied Regents meetings and campus administration buildings, went on strike, engaged in prolonged hunger strikes, and in one case, suffered an early morning police raid that resulted in 54 arrests. Furthermore, students began to build new institutions outside of the official governance structure of the university, "setting up an infrastructure to shift power at the school for the long haul" (Epps-Addison 2016).

Family farm organizations were significantly weakened through this period by the corporate consolidation of agriculture in Wisconsin, with three family farms failing a day at the height of Wisconsin's farm crisis. However, in the process of their resistance to recombinant Bovine Growth Hormone (rBGH/BST) and milk exchange price fixing, radical groups like the Family Farmer Defenders imparted new leadership and militancy to the venerable Farmers Union and other farm and ag groups.

In the media sector, Wisconsin activists experienced significant but fleeting growth in independent media, with the creation of radio stations, new weekly alternative newspapers such as *The Wisconsinite*, and a robust IndyMedia operation. Nearly all of these collapsed by the end of the 2000s and many traditional newsmedia outlets fell prey to consolidation, including the venerable progressive newspaper of Fighting Bob La Follette and William T. Evjue, *The Capital Times*, which was compelled to move to a weekly newsprint format.

While labor unions, family farmers, students and independent media came out of this period somewhat weakened in organizational capacity, there were other

sectors where significant organizational and membership gains were made. New organizing by Hmong and Latino activists resulted in the formation of new community organizations and workers centers throughout the state. These institutional gains were particularly important given efforts by the Bradley Foundation to divide and conquer communities of color in Wisconsin through a racialized assault on public schools and social welfare programs. The cooperative and independent business sectors grew at a significant rate throughout the 1990s in particular, and by 2010, Wisconsin cooperatives such as Organic Valley and Union Cab of Madison were playing national leadership roles in advocacy groups like the Organic Consumers Association and the U.S. Federation of Worker Coops. A new type of social movement organization type emerged – *democracy movement organizations*. In the case of Wisconsin, these included the statewide Democracy Unlimited of Wisconsin Cooperative and the Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, as well as the national Liberty Tree Foundation for the Democratic Revolution and the Center for Media and Democracy. These new formations gained thousands of members in Wisconsin and engaged in significant popular education campaigns, teaching about corporate power, corporate harms, and the history of corporate personhood through publications, tabling at county fairs, and the collection of 180,000 signatures on petitions calling for the revocation of Exxon, Pepsico, and Monsanto's certificates of authority to do business in the state.

In the electoral arena, the shape of progressive politics changed substantially. Beginning in the late 1980s and becoming well established by early 2000s, a

significant array of activists joined efforts to build independent political parties in Wisconsin, beginning with the Labor Farm Party of the 1980s and the New Progressive Party of the 1990s, and continuing on via the Wisconsin Green Party from the 1980s through the current day. Greens and Progressives held leadership positions on city councils, school boards and county boards in Madison, Milwaukee, Stevens Point, Oshkosh, Racine, and Superior, as well as seats in many others part of the state. Meanwhile, the Democratic Party of Wisconsin entered period of ideological dissonance in which most of the party base and many of its elected officials (such as Russ Feingold, Tammy Baldwin, Gwen Moore and Mark Pocan) remained significantly to the left of the national, Clintonized Democratic Party, even while the state party organization weakened substantially and came to be dominated by a business-oriented leadership cohort that frequently was involved in conflict with communities of color and particularly the organized Black left of Milwaukee.

The overall trajectory of Wisconsin's progressive movement in the 1990s and 2000s produced organizations, unions, and networks that were generally less resourced by traditional measures of *mobilization capacity* but endowed with greater *strategic capacity* to do more with less and to do it more militantly and in cooperation with broader sectors of the population. Core pillars of the traditional progressive movement – labor unions, farm organizations, student associations, and Black community organizations – all came under direct and indirect attacks, and they suffered for it. And individuals experienced personal problems of

burnout, instability, and lack of time caused by austerity and structural adjustment; it became harder to be an activist. Activists recognized these issues and others, and attempted to redirect their movement building efforts accordingly, developing more horizontal, democratic, and diversified approaches to uniting disparate sectors of Wisconsin's working classes in common struggle against common targets.

B. The Wisconsin Wave

> "*The Wisconsin Uprising was not organized by a bunch of consultants based in D.C. - it came out of a history of organizing that was there bubbling under the surface that was ready to reemerge when push came to shove, and that's why this happened so well. People already had those experiences and those tools in the toolbox and could use them again when needed.*" (Peck 2016)

When Scott Walker defeated Tom Barrett in the gubernatorial election of November 2, 2010, Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce (WMC) won an important victory. But mass popular resistance to WMC's agenda could still be expected. The reasons for this should be clear. Since 1995, diverse activists had regularly targeted WMC and in the process, "unified due to a common enemy" (Peck). In times of operational unity, activists built personal relationships, new forms of social movement organization, and new networks across social sectors and across the state. Through these networks and in their practice of common struggle, activists developed a collective action repertoire which included regular occupations of the state capitol building, revival of the strike tradition, and notably, biennial alliances around the state budget.

Importantly, many Wisconsinites came to understand local troubles as part of global problems and made efforts to maintain relationships with activists and organizations on other continents. And alongside their transnational politics, Wisconsin activists consciously made use of the state's deeply rooted progressive identity, such that for many, "The Wisconsin Uprising came from a gut sense understanding of what Wisconsinites were: progressive, socialist folk who understood that everyone deserved to be treated well." (Nayak 2016)

In his time as Milwaukee County Executive, Walker had not treated everyone well. He had targeted the poor, labor unions, public schools, and social services, and demonstrated a ruthlessness then-uncommon in Wisconsin's political culture. The expectation among progressive activists was that Walker would prove a more aggressive proponent of austerity than previous governors Jim Doyle, Scott McCallum and Tommy Thompson. Even before taking office, Walker proved that expectation justified by thwarting nearly $1 billion in federal funding for the expansion of high speed rail to Wisconsin, something the Amtrak-loving Thompson would never have done.

In the same election that produced Governor Walker, I was a Green Party candidate for election to the State Assembly on Madison's west side. Convinced that a major austerity fight was coming, I entered the race in order to confront a perceived threat from within the Democratic Party in the form of a former Sierra Club staffer-turned-coal industry lobbyist, Brett Hulsey. I worried that Hulsey would, on taking office, undermine the progressive leadership of the Democratic

caucus in the state legislature. My platform included constitutional guarantees of full funding of public services and public education, taxing the rich, and expanding worker and community cooperatives.

In a four-way race, I came in second with 31% of the vote, the highest percentage for any independent candidate in state-level elections in Wisconsin since 1944. More significantly, after three major unions broke with the Democrats to endorse me –the teachers (MTI), the firefighters (IAFF 311) and the teaching assistants (TAA AFT 3220)– prominent Democrats also shifted allegiance. The Mayor of Madison, the President of Shorewood Hills, the former Attorney General, the current Secretary of State, and the future Congressman from the 2nd Congressional District, among others, all crossed party lines. The day before the election, the outgoing incumbent endorsed me. For my candidacy, this was all too little too late, but for the coming uprising, it proved significant.

The day after that election, several teachers who were members of my campaign team came to me and asked me to make use of my lists, networks, and momentum to build a resistance to Scott Walker. As one of them put it, "we can't trust the Democrats to do this for us, and people will be looking for leadership."

One month after the election, the Liberty Tree Foundation convened a teleconference briefing on the global response to austerity. Sixty Wisconsin activists joined with fifty others from around the United States in phoning in to talk directly with activists from the anti-austerity movement UK Uncut, the International Student Movement (ISM), the student struggle in Chile, and the globally renowned

Filipino intellectual, Walden Bello. One immediate result of the teleconference was the drafting of a confidential proposal for a "Wisconsin Wave of Action" circulated among movement leaders from different social sectors, borrowing much of its framework from the anti-austerity struggles in Europe, including the French slogan "We won't pay for their crisis!," and the concept of a "wave of action" from the Anomalous Wave of Italy as well as the 2010 Global Wave of Action to Defend Public Education:

> "*The Wisconsin Wave is a popular wave of resistance against planned cuts to public services to be imposed at the bidding of WMC and other corporate lobbyists. Its purpose is to directly name and confront the corporate interests behind the anti-public sector agenda, weaken them politically, and as a result, shift the momentum from austerity and cuts, toward a demand for higher taxes on the rich, full funding for public services, and democratic reform of state government.*" (Wisconsin Wave 2010).

The goals of the proposed Wave included "building a popular movement," "reintroducing mass direct action to Wisconsin politics," and "destroying the ability of WMC to function politically" (Ibid). The plan was to escalate the protests until May 1st, when a hoped-for crowd of 50,000 would enter and occupy the State Capitol Building. Other events would take place along the way, including actions at the annual state lobby day of Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce on February 23, 2011.

A first protest was scheduled for Valentine's Day, February 14, 2011, by AFT locals 3220 and 223 as well as the Student Labor Action Coalition at the UW-Madison and the student senate at Madison Area Technical College. Its theme was

the lighthearted but heartfelt message from the university community to "Please don't break my heart, Governor Walker."

C. The Wisconsin Uprising

On Friday morning, February 11th, 2011, Scott Walker "dropped the bomb," as he himself put it, on Wisconsin's working class by introducing what he called the "Budget Repair Bill," also known as Act 10 – a comprehensive attack not only on public sector unions but also against state aid to the poor and disabled, the public university and college systems, libraries, parks, the progressive regulatory regime, microbreweries, cooperatives, renewable energy, and much more. While the preemptive timing of Walker's blitzkrieg was unexpected, the assault itself was not. Within hours, small groups of people were picketing the Governor's Mansion. On Monday, February 14th, students and campus workers stormed the Capitol, and the call for the Wisconsin Wave – signed by 100 union presidents, elected officials, and community, farm and student leaders – was made public:

> *"Today, Wisconsin's democratic tradition faces the greatest threat it has ever known. Governor Scott Walker, operating at the direction of Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce (WMC), is using the financial crisis caused by Wall Street speculators as an excuse to impose devastating cuts to public services. The WMC agenda is shameless. They intend to shift the tax burden even further away from major corporations and onto the rest of us. Their agenda is undemocratic. They would protect themselves from voters by lowering Wisconsin's voting rights guarantees to those of Alabama and Mississippi. Their agenda is heartless. It has no place in it for the needs of Wisconsin's youth, our poor, our disabled, or our unemployed at this time when their needs are greatest.*
>
> *The WMC-Walker agenda would destroy everything that once made Wisconsin great: a robust educational system; safe, high paying jobs; and a clean environment*

available for enjoyment by all people. But as in other grim times throughout our state's history, concerned Wisconsinites are rising up to defend our way of life. This diverse group of individuals, which includes everyone from college students to factory workers to small farmers and businesspeople, is uniting behind the common-sense principle that the wealthy few who caused the financial crisis are the ones who should pay for it. This rising Wisconsin Wave of protest insists that:

- *Our state government must guarantee a fully funded public sector including education, health care, human services, transportation, public safety, and vital regulatory agencies.*
- *Taxes on large corporations and wealthy individuals should be returned to reasonable levels in order to solve the state's fiscal crisis.*
- *The state must respect the rights of workers to organize unions and bargain collectively.*
- *Initial budget priorities must be established through public participation instead of closed door meetings between public officials and special interest lobbyists.*
- *Voting rights must be expanded, not limited, to insure that every Wisconsinite can take part in our democracy.*
- *Wisconsin deserves government of, by, and for the people, not the corporate elite; corporations have no constitutional rights and may not buy our elections or government.*

This Wisconsin Wave is a force independent of political parties and partisan elected officials. It is an awakening of Wisconsinites independent of –but not exclusive of– whatever other political, union, faith, or organizational affiliations we each might have. To the giant corporate interests that currently dominate our state, we say that we will not stand by and watch you destroy Wisconsin's democracy, Wisconsin's economy, Wisconsin's schools, and Wisconsin's communities. We will not pay for your crisis. We will organize. We will march. We will non-violently resist your policies and overcome your agenda. To our fellow Wisconsinites we say simply, "join us." Join the Wisconsin Wave of resistance against corporatization and austerity, and for democracy and shared prosperity for all."

~ from the Call for a Wisconsin Wave, 2/14/2011

The Wisconsin protest wave escalated very quickly, growing by tens of thousands in days. Three unions –MTI (teachers), IAFF 311 (firefighters), and TAA (teaching assistants)– mobilized nearly their entire memberships to join students

and community members at the Capitol. Madison area schools were closed as thousands of area high school students marched downtown to join the fray. The big three statewide public sector unions –AFSCME, SEIU, WEAC– mobilized their members, and private sector unions began to add their numbers. Thousands occupied the Capitol and quickly self-organized management of the building. Within weeks the rallies in Madison had grown to 50,000, then 70,000, and eventually, 150,000+ people – this in a city of 225,000 people. The protest wave had become something bigger: a popular uprising.

The South Central Federation of Labor in southern Wisconsin unanimously adopted a general strike resolution, and industrial action in the form of a political strike became a reality in the sectors of education, health, and transportation. State Senate Democrats fled the Capitol and the state in order to deny the legislature quorum. Across every rural and urban region of the state, activists organized mass protests in the thousands, public school students walked out of classes and occupied administration buildings, chamber of commerce offices faced pickets, corporate lobbyists were picketed at their homes, and workers walked off the job. "Madison was sort of a beating heart; things would circulate in and out," from all the small towns and cities into the Capitol Square and back out again (Peck).

Far from only a union movement, most sectors of Wisconsin's working classes were involved, with farmers, students, unemployed and working poor acting and organizing together in the same way that Luxemburg meant when she wrote that, "Not above, among the heads of the leading directing organizations and

in their federative alliance, but below, among the organized proletarian masses, lies the guarantee of the real unity of the labor movement." (Ibid p180). Cooperatives and local businesses self-organized to bring supplies and funding to the struggle, and began challenge WMC's claim to speak on behalf of business interests. The Wisconsin National Guard, local police, even employees of the FBI not only refused to clear the Capitol Square, they took part in the protests. Eventually, nearly 1 million Wisconsin voters signed a petition to recall Governor Walker; 900,000 signatures were certified by the state elections agency.

Thousands came to Wisconsin from around the world and then went back home. Mass solidarity actions took place across the United States and around the world, and aid came in from Cairo, the UK, Korea, and elsewhere. Similar mass uprisings began to take place in other states of the industrial Midwest, and plans were made for mass encampments at Freedom Plaza in Washington D.C. and Zucotti Park in New York City. The horizontalist practices of the 1990s and the slogan of Seattle – *This is What Democracy Looks Like!* – reappeared as if resurrected in the echoing rotunda of Wisconsin's Capitol, and from there was projected around the world, resonating to this day in Black Lives Matter and the Million Student March. And even at the height of the protests, organizing carried forward on parallel fronts, for instance, with the collection of 22,000 signatures to place a ballot measure before the voters of Madison calling for a constitutional amendment abolishing corporate constitutional rights and asserting popular sovereignty over

campaign finance, the first of over 600 and states communities in the United States to have so far adopted such a measure.

What you've read here is only a flashing reflection of the enormity and dynamism of the Wisconsin Uprising. And contrary to common misconceptions, the mass mobilizations that began in early 2011 lasted nearly two years, not just a few months. Yet I don't intend and never intended to present here a blow by blow account of the Wisconsin Uprising or of the longer term protest wave. Instead, I have attempted to establish a baseline understanding of the movement building process that led up to the Uprising, and to make clear that while the mass protests were precipitated by Governor Walker's actions, his actions were expected and planned for. The Uprising was not spontaneous. It was prefigured in the movement building and the social struggle of 20 years. And much of the way in which the Uprising carried forth could be expected given a serious analysis of the relation of the developing popular movement to the forces arrayed against it. So let's turn to what did and did not happen in the course of the Uprising, and in the rebounding of the mass wave it heralded, and ask how the movement building process shaped these events . . .

How did the Uprising escalate so quickly? Through activists mobilizing their personal networks and organizational members according to prepared plans and deeply embedded practices. "We had institutions that came out of our past work - coops, community radio, people who had medical, food not bombs skills, we had a

mini-temporary autonomous zone in the Capitol because of that - very quickly - people from outside were shocked." (Peck).

Why were the Madison area's teaching assistants (TAA), teachers (MTI), and firefighter (IAFF 311) locals the labor movement's first responders? Because MTI and the TAA had long provided much of the militant, democratic base of mainstream labor in southern Wisconsin, and the teachers and firefighters local 311 had a deeply intertwined history of mutual aid, and because all three unions had signaled that they were prepared to act unilaterally and without permission from the Democratic Party in the previous election cycle.

Why were students, union families, farmers, and members of cooperative and environmental organizations the mainstays of the Uprising? Because those five constituencies shared a common culture of resistance, having regularly worked together for two decades in coalition around budget conflicts and in various anti-corporate and pro-democracy campaigns.

Why did so many individuals apparently unaffiliated with unions or with progressive organizations turn out? Because Wisconsinites' collective identification with Wisconsin as a heartland of progressive politics and open government provided a quasi-nationalist basis for popular mobilization.

Why did fourteen Democratic state senators choose to delay Act 10's enactment by fleeing the state? And why did Secretary of State La Follette delay Act 10 further by refusing to publish the legislation? Because a critical section of the state Democratic Party's elected officials were more aligned with popular movements than with state

party officials or the White House, both of which sought to end the occupation of the Capitol as soon as possible.

How was it that the rhetoric and tactics of the Wisconsin Uprising spilled over regionally, nationally, and globally? They didn't spill over. The Wisconsin Wave was produced by a movement in struggle both locally and globally. The Wave was initiated in direct communication with activists around the United States and across the world. As the Wave became an uprising, plans use Wisconsin to initiate a national "USA Wave" were shelved in favor of direct affiliation with the new U.S. Uncut anti-bank movement modeled on UK Uncut. People everywhere consciously worked to use Wisconsin to raise up the global anti-austerity, pro-democracy struggle within the rest of the United States.

These answers are all variations on a theme. Movement building shaped and made possible the protest wave that rose up in Wisconsin in 2011. And where the Wisconsin Uprising can be said to have been most successful, it was in its movement building effects beyond the frozen streets of Wisconsin:

> *"I don't think that the Uprising was a failure at all. Yes, maybe we didn't get an immediate response. But we did build a level of consciousness and activism in people who had not been active before and who remain active and conscious now. We did inspire Occupy Wall Street in many ways. We did offer an example to other states out of what Wisconsin was doing."* (Stockwell)

D. Framework: Movements in Struggle

The Wisconsin Wave was built by activists, and in turn, produced activists and made history. But measured against the bold metrics publicized by the initiators of the protests, the Uprising was only a partial success. True, Wisconsin built a class-based popular movement and it returned the practice of mass direct action to the national stage. But the movement's most immediate goals were not met. WMC and other corporate lobbyists still write the bills that Wisconsin's legislature enacts. And over the past five years, that legislation has profoundly harmed working class Wisconsinites.

There were a few policy wins: attempts to break the UW-Madison off from the rest of the University of Wisconsin system were stopped, and an insurgent defense of microbreweries was successful. But the attack on public sector collective bargaining is now law, and Wisconsin is a Right-to-Work state. Where union representation declined from 19% to 14% of Wisconsin workers from 2000 to 2010, today only 8% of Wisconsin workers are represented by unions (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics). Wisconsin's environmental, consumer and worker protection regulatory regimes have been gutted. Over 100 preemption laws have been enacted to prevent local governments from exceeding state standards. Well over a billion dollars in funding for public schools and colleges has been eliminated, and schools, libraries, and community centers have been shut down across the state. Hundreds of thousands of Wisconsinites have suffered severe cuts in food, health, family planning, and housing aid (WDC 2016).

How was it that some of the largest, most militant protests in American history failed to accomplish their most immediate goals? The facial answer is that the occupation ended, the protests deescalated, and the state government went ahead and implemented nearly all of its agenda. The deeper answer is that the preparations that were made in the years leading up to 2010 were sufficient to build the kind of explosive popular movement that inspired the world, but insufficient to defeat a state government under the control of committed ideologues. The Republican legislature, after all, is the product of the most gerrymandered legislative districts in the United States (Jackman 2015). The GOP handily lost the popular vote in both 2012 and 2014, yet retained a 20% majority in both legislative chambers. The militant majority movement from below that built the Wisconsin Uprising came into a conflict with a militant minority movement from above, and lost.

I have posited that movement building occurs in the course of struggle – that it is an interactive and intra-active process undertaken on particular terrains of struggle in the light and under the shadow of other actors (*see* Figure 1*, below*). Activists engaged in struggle produce identifiable social movement elements that in turn make possible and shape the conflicts of the future. The timing and the outcomes of those conflicts are, like movement building, codetermined by the extant conditions of particular terrains of struggle and the actions of other actors, including especially movements from above. Theoretically, an activist with perfect information about the terrains on which they were operating and about the culture,

continuity structures, leadership and resource capacity of other actors in struggle could make decisions that result in total movement success. In practice, activists never have perfect information, they never are capable of considering all the angles, and they operate with many motivations and understandings that are not instrumentally tied to movement success. Yet most social movement activists "try to get it right" by developing strategies for success, and in their strategic praxis they engage in movement building.

Figure 1: A model of movements in struggle

Relation of conflicts and waves to periods of struggle:

Periods of Struggle > Waves of Contention > Conflicts

The movement building process:

Activists in Struggle → Interactional + Intra-actional Movement Building → Elements of Social Movements → Condition of Movement at Time "x"

Production of conflicts and waves of contention:

Condition of Movement at the Time "x" + Condition of Movements from Above + Condition of Terrain of Struggle → Conflicts/Waves of Contention

E. What Might Have Been Done?

What might have been done that would have resulted in the defeat of Act 10 and the WMC's agenda? My research suggests three related factors undermined the success of the Wisconsin Wave: de-escalation, overly solidaristic politics, and ineffectively-answered racism.

Escalation made the Wisconsin Wave what it was; *de-escalation* ended it. There were other possible ends to the protest wave. It could have been smashed, with mass arrests and police violence; it wasn't. It could have resulted in the defeat of Walker and WMC; it didn't. The Wisconsin Uprising of early 2011, as well as the Wisconsin Wave of 2010-2012, ended instead through de-escalation.

Hundreds of thousands rallied behind demands for full funding for public services; AFSCME leader Marty Beil unilaterally offered health care, pension, and other concessions to Walker. As AFSCME's Ed Sadlowski, Jr. put it, "The state leadership were giving away all of our leverage and offering up concessions instead of making demands." Beil's announcement of concessions was met with spontaneous booing by the masses gathered at the Capitol, but the damage was done. Meanwhile, national union leadership pressured local union leaders to drop the general strike resolution, and they did. With no obvious way left to escalate from the seizure of the Capitol, the stage was set for an end to the occupation. Jennifer Epps-Addison relates that:

> *"I think we could all could agree that there was a really large disconnect between the activists on the ground who made the world stop around this and the gatekeepers who were negotiating away our position even at a time when we were in*

a position of power. While the people who were occupying were calling for a general strike they were giving away all of our leverage."

De-escalation took place within the Democratic Party as well. The State Senate Democrats who had fled Wisconsin were unable to maintain their solidarity as a number of them began to get cold feet. They returned to Madison and were welcomed as heroes. With quorum restored, Act 10 was adopted.

A grassroots movement for the recall of Scott Walker and other Republican officials collected one million signatures. In turn, the national and state Democratic Parties did everything in their power to insure that no candidate associated with the Uprising emerged to challenge Walker. Prominent progressives like State Senator Erpenbach, State Assembly Minority Leader Barca, and former U.S. Senator Russ Feingold were pressured by national Democrats not to run. Even Dane County Executive Kathy Falk, hardly a stalwart of the progressive wing of the Democratic Party, was attacked by party officials for pledging that she would overturn Act 10 if elected. Instead, Walker again faced the man he had defeated in the previous election, Tom Barrett. Barrett distanced himself from organized labor and reiterated his support for ending school board control of the Milwaukee schools. "The realm of politics was reduced once again to the ballot box," (Peck) and, "the people relied on to do the legwork for campaigns were treated badly – candidates were forced on them – and so the mass movement was not engaged as it should have been." (Epps-Addison). Barrett, and the movement, lost.

The answer to why de-escalation occurred depends on who is asked the question. As Norman Stockwell observes, “In any kind of real people's movement, you will always have people coming together, many of whom may not have worked together and may have to learn how to talk to each other and may or may not have respect for each other.” Those who pushed for de-escalation at the time said that the movement did not have the resources to mobilize a general strike, to maintain the occupation of the Capitol, or to defeat Scott Walker with a progressive gubernatorial candidate. Nearly all of those who initiated the Wisconsin Wave and played leading roles in expanding the Uprising disagreed, saying in various ways that the moderate forces, “didn't have a grasp of what they had in their hands at the time." (Sadlowski). How this disagreement was resolved proved pivotal to the outcome of the protests.

Early on in the Uprising, the leaders of the big statewide unions that favored de-escalation formed what they called “The Labor Table,” and began meeting regularly at the Concourse Hotel a block from the Capitol. Those participating in these meetings included some “who couldn't even stand being in the same room together before then,” but “the locals who were the power behind any kind of demonstration were excluded.” (Matthews). The three unions –MTI, IAFF 311, and the TAA– which had led the occupation of the Capitol were excluded. So too were the other local unions and student, environmental, and community organizations that were part of the initial Wisconsin Wave call to action, as well as newer popular organizations such as the Kill the Bill Coalition, Wisconsin Resists!, and

Autonomous Solidarity Organization, formed in the course of the Uprising. Without exception, those who met at the Concourse Hotel favored de-escalation and "no arrests!" as opposed to "fill the jails!" (Sadlowski). There was also a *national* business unionism versus *local* militant unionism dynamic that emerged, familiar to many who had taken part in the labor wars of the Upper Great Lakes of the 1990s.

Why did de-escalation win out? After all, the militants had initiated both the Wisconsin Wave and the Wisconsin Uprising, they had the great majority of active protest participants on their side, and they had longstanding experience working together through budget mobilizations, strikes, and various anti-corporate campaigns. The section in favor of escalation should have been well situated to provide overall leadership.

My analysis of the dynamics between the two groups led me in an unexpected direction. I conclude that at the time of the Uprising, the militants were *too solidaristic*. Despite a history of internal struggle between different sections of the labor movement and between rank-and-filers and officers, "people said 'let bygones be bygones, we need to rally around this and move forward.'" (Peck). With no exceptions that I can identify, those who took part in more militant actions displayed a level of solidarity with more conservative elements that is unusual in the history of the American left. And it must be acknowledged that this full spectrum solidarity, from anarchists and Trotskyists to conservative Democrats and a few old-time Republicans, provided many advantages in the course of the Uprising. For instance, when Senate Democrats were trying to escape arrest so that

they could flee the state, cadre activists of the International Socialists, Socialist Alternative, and Solidarity mobilized to protect them. And when the Capitol occupation moved outside to form *Walkerville* –a tent city on the Capitol Square that directly inspired a similar encampment in Albany, NY, and in turn, Occupy Wall Street– the Concourse Hotel unions, led by AFSCME, provided material support. Yet one outcome of Wisconsin's solidaristic politics was that there was no effective means to counter de-escalation pressure from above and no way to compel the Democratic Party to run a movement-aligned candidate who could prevail in the recall election. The fetishization of solidarity had its consequences.

Issues of solidarity also form the third factor my analysis finds to have been consequential in the Wisconsin Uprising. In this case, the problem was the failure to build sufficient solidarity in the face of the *racist divide-and-conquer* strategy of the organized right:

> "*Looking at the history of Wisconsin and having grown up there my whole life, I was very clear that what many politicians do is to seed fear and distrust of people of color, of Black folks, of immigrants, of Milwaukee as a place … They use that in order to maintain their power, in order to get folks who should be naturally aligned through core value and core public policy desires to fight with each other and stay separated. It's like Scott Walker said during the Uprising, 'the strategy here is divide and conquer,' and that's been the strategy going all the way back to slavery when it was made illegal for indentured servants and slaves to till the same fields.*" (Epps-Addison)

Epps-Addison articulates the understanding shared by many Wisconsin activists I've spoken and worked with, often people who identity as multiracial or who come from multiracial families, or who for other reasons occupy transliminal

social positions. This shared analysis informed the conscious efforts of activists in the 1990s and 2000s to build on a multiracial and a statewide basis in respond to corporatization and austerity pushes from above that had the effect of "lowering the floor so much that people who don't have much would otherwise be turned against each other," as Sangita Nayak put it.

But the people who were involved in those conscious anti-racist, rural-urban, and statewide efforts were not the same people included at the Labor Table at the Concourse Hotel. There resulted a "distinct missing presence of people of color who were engaged in that fight and welcomed into that fight" (Epps-Addison) and organizations such as Freedom, Inc, based in Madison's Hmong community, found it necessary to repeatedly make clear that the attack on public sector unions was only one part of a march larger attack on poor and working class Wisconsinites, disproportionately people of color. The first mass rally that included large numbers of people of color (as well as farmers, students, and women) on stage was the 50,000 strong March 5th "We Are Wisconsin!" rally organized through the Wisconsin Wave (not to be confused with the We Are Wisconsin organization created by the Democratic Party of Wisconsin a week later as a moderating alternative to the Wave). But "the big money fightback," funded through the big statewide and national union organizations, "was not messaging or targeted to communities of color." (Epps-Addison).

It's not clear that the failure of major actors to affirmatively build on a multiracial basis had an immediate negative impact on the effectiveness of the mass

protests at the Capitol and around the state. In the critical Wisconsin Supreme Court election of April 5, 2011, however, the long-term failure to effectively support organizing in majority minority Milwaukee became plain. In a contest decided by the "discovery" of a net 7500 votes for Walker by conservative Waukesha County Clerk one day after the election, an increase of voter turnout in the City of Milwaukee of just 3% of eligible voters would have changed history. The election was between incumbent David Prosser, a Walker ally, and JoAnne Kloppenburg, a progressive lawyer whom the WMC attacked in its mailings as having "strong ties to Wisconsin's extreme left, including endorsement by the former national co-chairman of the radical Green Party, Ben Manski." Kloppenburg would have been a very different jurist than Prosser (who had recently made headlines for assaulting another justice), but more important in that election was that the balance of the Supreme Court was in play, and the court was to prove the final arbiter on Act 10, Right to Work, voting rights questions, and much else in the years to follow.

Why had the major organizations and funders "not done the work" previous to 2011? Epps-Addison exp0lains it this way: "Because [before 2011] the Dems were in power, involved in an unholy alliance with WMC – think about [Gov.] Jim Doyle, he's a reason we got preemption of the municipal minimum wage … when [neoliberal Democrat] James Norquist is your mayor, there isn't an interest in Black voter turnout in Milwaukee." The racialized corporatization politics of the 1990s and 2000s had been opposed by some Democrats, but embraced by others,

including Walker's two-time Democratic opponent, Tom Barrett, who as mayor had repeatedly attempted to end local school board oversight of the Milwaukee schools.

IV. Conclusions

'Tis the final battle,
Let each stand in their place.
The international working class,
Shall be the human race.
~ The Internationale, as sung in Madison, Wisconsin since the 1970s

There may be more people who know all the words to multiple versions of the revolutionary anthem *The Internationale* in Madison, Wisconsin than in any other city in the United States. It is sung on May Day, and sung on Labor Day, and sung in protest at the Solidarity Sing-along that still takes place nearly every day to this day at Wisconsin's Capitol. But the experience of the Wisconsin Uprising raises the question of whether, in fact, those who took part in it understood that the current period of struggle might indeed be "the final battle," as the anthem declares.

For many in Wisconsin, "the Uprising was about how we treat our own people" (Nayak) and returning to the pre-Reagan working class *Happy Days* symbolized by Milwaukeean Henry Winkler. But a return to those days was not in the offing because, beginning with the global crash of capitalism in 2008, the struggle that had begun in the 1990s had entered a heightened phase. Few if any

activists fully understood that. As Sarah Manski, my wife and a veteran of Wisconsin's labor movements since her teenage years in 1990s Janesville, relates:

> *"We didn't think we were going to lose, because we did the same things we'd done in the past when we didn't lose. We were dealing with a state that didn't care about legitimacy; in that kind of situation, you lose when you base your tactics on a battle for legitimacy."* (Manski 2016).

The collective action repertoire developed in the 1990s had worked until that point, but the movement from above, operating through Walker and the Republican legislature, had developed a counter-repertoire grounded in a policy of total war. As John Peck put it, "You might organize a little rally, and that's nice in your little town, but when you have actors like Walker and WMC you might as well be roadkill; the only way to respond is expressions of power."

Movement building matters. In the case of Wisconsin, movement building produced a historic uprising and inspired others. But there are times when struggles go from conflicts to waves and then in which, to win, they must become more than waves. For Wisconsinites to prevail, they needed a movement that could escalate beyond industrial strikes, mass occupations, enormous rallies, statewide mobilization, the shutdown of state government, support from the police, and one million people signing recall petitions. They needed a revolutionary movement.

The Wisconsin Wave had been prepared with an expectation that 50,000 people could be mobilized to occupy the Capitol by May Day, and that that would make the difference. Instead, the occupation began on February 15th and swelled to 150,000 within weeks.

After the general strike movement was undermined and quorum restored to the State Senate, Wave organizers began convening popular assemblies in different parts of the state in an attempt to build a stronger and more cohesive base of independent, popular power. They also began conversations with mayors and other elected officials in various Wisconsin cities about setting up a confederation of municipalities as a provisional alternative to the Walker government. But the Wave and the other independent popular organizations were built on the 1990s horizontalist model, and did not possess the internal discipline to mobilize the resources of affiliated organizations and networks.

> *"In my lifetime we had never, at least not in Wisconsin, seen the kind of passionate gut check 'fight for your life' organizing that emerged out of the Uprising. The Uprising complete changed people's imaginations of what was possible."* (Epps-Addison)

It is true that Wisconsin opened the doors to what was possible. It also gave a hard lesson as to what may be necessary in the years to come.

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Appendix: Script for Semi-Structured Interviews

Wisconsin Protocol.1.1 – Democratic Turn

In this study we are interested in learning from your history of organizing in Wisconsin in the 20 years leading up to the Wisconsin Uprising of 2011. We want to know how choices that activists made in those earlier years impacted the way in which the Wisconsin Uprising took place.

We have a lot of ground to cover, so if you are able to give more focused responses, that would be helpful. This said, if you feel the need to expand on some of your answers, that's fine. This interview should take about an hour.

I. ORIGINS AND EXPERIENCES

1. Tell me a little about how you came to be involved in working for social change.

2. Go back to the years 1990-1995 . . . and thinking about the broader movement . . . how do you remember thinking - at that time - about what the shape of things to come was. Did you have a sense of what the "coming struggle" was going to be about? If so, what was that sense?

3. Thinking to the entire period of the 1990s and 2000s, please share what you learned from some of the most significant struggles that you were involved with in that time period. What were the lessons learned?

II. MOVEMENT BUILDING

4. Activists often talk about "movement building." What do you think it means to "build the movement?"

5. Can you give me some examples of movement building activity that took place in Wisconsin in the 1990s and 2000s?

6. Let's follow up.

How do you believe that the lessons, skills, and ideas that were learned in the struggles of the 1990s and 2000s were passed on to new people who joined the movement in Wisconsin later on? Were any important lessons lost, and if so, why?

How did you and others develop new leadership in the movement over the 1990s and 2000s? How did you fail to develop new leadership?

Thinking of movement veterans - how did you and others in Wisconsin stay in contact with each other over these many years? What caused people to lose contact?

What was done to build resources - money, lists, organization, etc - in the 1990s and 2000s? What limited access to resources over these years?

III. WISCONSIN UPRISING

7. Where did you operate during the Wisconsin Uprising, and what did you see your role as being in the Uprising?

8. How do you think the previous 20 years of movement building shaped what happened in the uprising, for better and for worse?

9. What wasn't done in terms of movement building that should have been done?