Working-Class Power and Spirituality

Reflections on SeaTac's Minimum Wage Campaign

BY JONATHAN ROSENBLUM

GOD OF MERCY, God of Justice, God who transforms our hearts," intoned Rev. John Helmiere, convening Alaska Airlines' annual shareholder meeting with a prayer. The 200 shareholders bowed in silence, not yet aware that the twelve minister-shareholders before them had assembled to commit an act of corporate apostasy.

The prayer veered sharply: "God, we ask that you give our leaders the wisdom to do right by their workers, do right by their community. . . save us from the snares of selfishness." Corporate executives sat stunned, not quite comprehending how the annual showcase of their company's record profits had just been hijacked.

And that was just the start. For the next ninety minutes, airport workers led chants demanding recognition of their union. Community activists interrupted the proceedings to lead a debate about poverty wages at the main airports used by Alaska Airlines. A church leader led a rousing spiritual song: "Solid as a rock, rooted as a tree, we are here, standing strong, for airport workers!" And ministers peppered Alaska's CEO with challenges to change course and respect workers' rights.

What Alaska Airlines executives experienced that afternoon in May 2013 was an emerging coalition of airport workers, faith leaders, and community leaders who had come together to challenge the prevalence of low-wage jobs in and around SeaTac Airport outside Seattle, Washington. Baggage handlers, cabin cleaners, wheelchair attendants, parking lot workers, and rental car workers joined spiritual leaders and community activists to occupy the Alaska Airlines shareholders meeting and claim the space for a spirited, and spiritual, call for justice.

Over the next six months, this remarkable coalition launched the small community of SeaTac into the national spotlight by passing a bold voter initiative to raise airport wages to at least $15 per hour. Naturally, however, business didn't give up. A coalition led by Alaska Airlines went to court to block the new wage level. A lower-level state court barred enforcement of the wage inside the airport but ordered it be applied at

Ministers, imams, airport workers, and community allies march to demand a $15 per hour minimum wage at SeaTac Airport near Seattle, Washington, on April 28, 2012.

JONATHAN ROSENBLUM has been a labor and community organizer for more than thirty years. He lives in Seattle and is a member of Kadima Reconstructionist (Jewish) Community. He can be reached at jonathanr4212@gmail.com.

Jonathan Rosenblum

covered businesses outside airport boundaries. Both sides appealed this split-decision to the Washington State Supreme Court. (At press time for *Tikkun*, a High Court decision was still pending.) But even while waiting for the court, workers were beginning to reap benefits from their fight: Alaska Airlines and the Port of Seattle, facing widespread pressure, agreed to worker pay increases of up to $2.50 per hour—more modest than the initiative, but significant nonetheless and a recognition of the workers' growing power.

The immediate story of SeaTac's ballot campaign has thus come to a temporary resting place, but its ripple effects continue to spread. Since the 2013 SeaTac wage initiative, $15 minimum wage struggles, many inspired by the SeaTac campaign, have taken root in cities across the United States. In focusing so much on $15, however, many of these minimum wage campaigns are failing to make the most of the deep-seated passions that fueled the Occupy protests and that have the power to attack not just the symptoms of injustice (low wages and income inequality) but also its root cause: power inequality.

Fighting for More than a Minimum Wage

Under the surface of current minimum wage efforts is a vital struggle over whether the fight is about lessening income inequality to create a "fair economy"—an issues fight—or about building real power for workers and realigning societal priorities—a values fight. "Most of us who are in this particular struggle need to be pushed a little beyond that fifteen-an-hour wage," said Rev. Dick Gillett, an Episcopal priest and social activist. "It's easy to leave the discussion right there . . . but the issue is more about the dignity of people. Giving people a sense of control—of power over their own lives—that's a moral issue."

I was centrally involved in the SeaTac struggle from its inception in 2011 until last summer, serving as director of the coalition effort that brought together unions, community groups, and faith groups. SeaTac was about more than $15. By looking deeper at this campaign, I hope that leaders and supporters of other minimum wage struggles will be emboldened to fight not just for raises, but for social transformation.

In particular, there are three aspects that made SeaTac powerful: First, it was framed as a community campaign to build worker power—a qualitatively different goal from raising the minimum wage. Second, we did not see our fight for a ballot initiative to raise the minimum wage as an alternative to traditional workplace organizing. The SeaTac struggle, funded and staffed largely by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), with significant support from the Teamsters Union, the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, and UNITE HERE (the hotel and restaurant workers union), required a laser focus on fundamental worker power building: identifying and developing workplace leaders who would speak in their own voices and lead. And third, the SeaTac campaign was a spiritual progressive struggle: it drew much of its strength from interreligious coalition-building, led by the community group Puget Sound Sage. Faith leaders consistently introduced a broader moral framing decrying the fundamental injustice of corporations holding disproportionate power over the conditions of our lives. So even though we were focused on raising the minimum wage, we did not forget that building worker power was essential to attacking the root problem that produced income inequality.

How It All Started

The number fifteen wasn't on anyone's mind when the SeaTac campaign began. Rather, the organizing began as a broad community effort to build power and voice for thousands of low-wage workers—largely immigrants and refugees—in and around SeaTac Airport.

In March 2013, two months before the twelve minister-shareholders protested at the Alaska Airlines' shareholders meeting, a delegation of eighty airport workers, faith leaders, and community allies went to the major airport contractors to announce that a majority of workers had signed union cards and had formed unions; they called for

negotiations. The delegation also went to the corporate headquarters of SeaTac-based Alaska Airlines, the airport's dominant carrier.

Not surprisingly, all of the employers refused union recognition. And at the prayer-led Alaska Airlines shareholders meeting that spring, the CEO turned aside calls for negotiating with the workers' representatives.

Two weeks later, airport workers and community leaders responded with a bold plan: Since the employers refused negotiations, the workers and their unions would ask voters in the City of SeaTac to impose a solution. They submitted enough signatures to put on the ballot SeaTac Proposition 1, an initiative that would ensure at least $15 per hour, full-time work, paid sick leave, and strong job protections for every airport worker.

The battle pitted workers, unions, community groups and faith organizations against Alaska Airlines, the Chamber of Commerce, the National Restaurant Association, and other big business interests. In the ensuing six months the community of SeaTac, population 25,000 with 12,000 registered voters, endured the sharp glare of national and international press attention.

Most reporting on SeaTac's $15 initiative campaign defaulted to the common frame of institutional battle: labor unions on one side, big corporations on the other. "SeaTac is now center stage in a national push for a $15 minimum wage," NBC News reported, noting "a costly initiative campaign in which the two sides combined to spend $1.8 million."

Worker Organizing in an Age of Private Contracting

The contest over the minimum wage at SeaTac was about much more than just paychecks—it was about whether workers can still wield collective power in industries ripped apart by anti-union legislation. To fully understand the stakes of our campaign, it's necessary to look back at the history of union-busting and deregulation that created the current working conditions at SeaTac.

To operate a large international airport, you need a lot more than the pilots, flight attendants, ticket agents, and security officers we see whenever we travel. You need thousands of people to fuel and service airplanes, clean cabins, escort passengers who require wheelchair assistance, mop floors, clean bathrooms, maintain equipment, operate the air traffic control system, and load baggage. There was a time when the vast majority of these airport jobs were good jobs. Rep. Adam Smith, the congressman representing SeaTac, recalls how his father supported their family by loading and unloading baggage. "My father was a member of a union—so he got decent wages and benefits at his blue-collar job," Smith said. "That enabled me to pursue my hopes and dreams."

But airport jobs began their precipitous decline after a Democratic-led Congress passed the 1978 Airline Deregulation Act, thereby freeing airlines to compete against one another and permitting companies to freely contract out work. In the succeeding decades, in an effort to maximize profits, airlines outdueled one another to see who could cut costs the most by busting unions, forcing worker concessions, and offloading work to minimum-wage, low-bid contract companies.

Alaska Airlines was slower than its competitors in the contracting-out game, but in 2005 they made up for lost time. The airline was in negotiations with its baggage handlers, members of the machinists union, for a new union contract. The company demanded deep concessions from the workers; union members were willing to make some accommodations but not as many as the executives demanded.

The fight for a minimum wage spread beyond SeaTac to Seattle as well. Here, Seattle City Council Member Kshama Sawant calls for $15 per hour at a rally on March 15, 2014.

It was still dark on Friday morning, May 13, 2005, when Alaska's baggage handlers began showing up for their day shifts only to be handed pink slips. Their jobs were gone—given to a low-bid contractor. Overnight, 472 jobs with union rights that paid at least $16 per hour with health care, paid vacation, paid sick leave, and retirement benefits became poverty-wage jobs without benefits or rights. Alaska executives boasted to the business media that the move saved the company $13 million in annual costs. Other airport businesses took heed and followed suit, if they hadn't already done so.

By 2011 the baggage handling jobs, along with other contracted-out work—about 4,000 jobs in and around Sea-Tac Airport, or one-quarter of the workforce—paid close to or at the state minimum wage. Leading the way in contracting out was Alaska Airlines, with 1,000 contracted poverty-wage jobs. And the airline was even beginning to contract out entire flights—pilots and flight attendants included. Few had any benefits, or at least any benefits that workers could afford. Almost none had union protections.

As the contracting scheme tightened its grip, the jobs fell increasingly to recent immigrants and refugees. Their nationalities map the civil strife and natural disasters of our times. Somalia made up the largest single contingent of airport workers. Then Ethiopia and Eritrea. Bosnia. Iraq. Ukraine. The Philippines.

Wheelchair attendant Evelyn Olano offers a window into the working conditions at SeaTac: "I used to make minimum wage for thirty-two hours, but under the new manager I only work three days," she said. "So I have a second job at the airport, also minimum wage, for Olympic Security Incorporated. Neither job has to give us benefits."

The poverty conditions lock workers into a cycle of dependency and desperation. "I'm paid minimum wage by Bags," said wheelchair attendant Yusur Adan, referring to her employer, an Alaska Airlines contractor. "We have no paid vacation, no paid sick leave, and no holiday pay. . . . There is simply not enough money coming in to pay for even the basic necessities of my life."

A Grassroots Effort to Get Out the Vote

While the population of SeaTac is composed largely of immigrants and people of color, many residents were either not citizens or not registered to vote when the initiative was placed on the ballot. Fully 62 percent of the registered voters were white, and overall more conservative than the airport workers and their allies.

To pass the voter initiative for $15 per hour, a door-to-door persuasion effort was required. SEIU and other unions provided significant expertise and resources to bolster an already motivated base. Residents urged their neighbors to register to vote. Workers hosted coffee table discussions. Churches and mosques staged voter registration drives. High school students signed up newly eligible voters. All told, the campaign registered more than 900 new voters, mainly from immigrant communities. Their votes would prove decisive.

The leaders of Abubakr Islamic Center, the largest mosque in the area, helped distribute a Somali language video to congregants, encouraging a "yes" vote and giving instructions about the all-mail voting system in Washington State. Puget Sound Sage sponsored a shop-in at local businesses that had endorsed the initiative, underscoring the point that workers with larger paychecks would boost the local economy.

When airport workers took part in a citywide canvass, they found that while most of SeaTac's voters are working class, many didn't immediately understand or empathize with the plight of immigrant workers. Abdirahman Abdullahi, a Hertz rental car worker, said voters were surprised to learn that his minimum-wage job lacked sick leave. But after hearing his story, "they came to see the similarity between them and me," Abdullahi said.

Yemane Gebremicael (right) urges SeaTac residents to support local businesses that endorsed the ballot initiative aimed at raising the minimum wage and guaranteeing full-time work, paid sick leave, and strong job protections for every airport worker.

As November approached, the Alaska Airlines-led "no" campaign hit full throttle, with a door-to-door canvass, mailers, TV ads, and media events. Under the bright glare of the national spotlight, voters approved the measure by 77 votes out of nearly 6,000. The morning after the election airport workers high-fived each other and proudly wore stickers that read "$15—We Did It!" throughout the airport.

A Community Transformed

The SeaTac campaign transformed the community in lasting ways.

"For the first time, we were able to tell our people, the immigrants in SeaTac, that you have a voice and your voice can be heard," said Omar Mumin, a community activist and former airport worker.

Mohamed Sheikh Hassan, executive director of Seattle's Afrique Service Center, said the campaign had generated role models for many people who had never engaged in activism before, and particularly for the girls and women in his community. "Now you can see their energy and the momentum," he said. "We see the women standing up."

And Rev. Jan Bolerjack, whose Riverton Park United Methodist Church was a key supporter of the initiative, said, "People seem to look at each other now with more recognition and respect. . . . The campaign highlighted just how hard people work and how much people care for their families."

Interreligious Solidarity Builds Labor Solidarity

The campaign didn't enjoy a smooth start. When SEIU and Teamsters union organizers started reaching out to workers in 2011, it became clear that a trademark union organizing campaign focused largely on job issues would not be sufficient. The airport workers were a fragmented group composed of Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Catholics, evangelicals, and people from other heritages. They had come to Seattle through war, turmoil, refugee camps, and untold struggle only to land in a place that delivered poverty wages, irregular work hours, abusive managers, overcrowded apartments, underfunded public schools, food bank lines, and an overwhelming materialistic culture.

The workers wanted good jobs, but they also needed to defend their communities, traditions, and values. And as they began to meet with organizers in 2011, more than a few were skeptical that the U.S. labor movement would understand and be able to help solve their problems.

That skepticism was first tested early in the campaign on an issue that had nothing to do with money.

On the last Friday in September 2011, Somali shuttle drivers for Hertz took their customary break to pray, something they had done for years. Praying five times a day is obligatory—it's one of the five pillars of Islam. Ritual prayers last but a few minutes, hardly causing a blip in operations. Hertz management had always accommodated the workers, treating prayer breaks like smoke breaks: just take it and then come back to work. But on this day a manager told the workers to clock out.

Hertz shuttle driver Zainab Aweis recalls that the manager announced the new rule, saying, "If you guys pray, you go home." For Aweis it was an easy choice: she went to pray, because while money mattered, faith was fundamental. Along with thirty-three of her co-workers, Aweis was suspended.

Although the Hertz workers were members of the Teamsters union, it would have been understandable if union leaders took a pass on the fight. After all, they were operating in a post-9/11 environment, cognizant that the vast majority of their union members were not Muslim and were likely to be quite unsympathetic.

But the Teamsters didn't balk. Five days later, more than fifty protesters gathered around the Hertz counter at SeaTac. Muslims, Christians, and Jews joined union and community activists, praying while holding signs that read, "Respect me, respect my religion."

Faith Leaders' Role in the SeaTac Campaign

The aggressive stand taken by union members caught the attention of the East African community, and the organizing at the airport gained momentum. A few months after the Hertz fight erupted, twenty-five imams and other leaders of Seattle's Muslim community gathered to hear from airport workers and strategize with organizers. As we discussed the campaign, they referred back to the standoff at the Hertz counter as a moment when they saw the meaning of solidarity.

Community leader Mohamed Sheikh Hassan said that when both the union organizers and faith leaders started telling the airport workers, "We are here with you, fight with us," it made workers realize "that you can make a change, that you can stand up, that everything's possible collectively."

Two years later, during the fall 2013 campaign for the $15 initiative, I would often hear union leaders marvel about how active and enthusiastic the Muslim community was. Not everyone fully appreciated that the seeds of that alliance were planted in a trust-building exercise two years prior that had nothing to do with $15.

Throughout the campaign, faith and community leaders built close relationships with individual airport workers. "The airport workers are our neighbors, our friends," explained Yemane Gebremicael, head of the group African Diaspora of Washington. "At first, they were frightened—'We could lose our jobs,' they said. But when they saw us coming to the airport, marching with them, testifying in their support, they became more confident." Gebremicael and other community leaders also insisted that workers not be mere "props" held up by the campaign to establish legitimacy. "It is possible to overshadow communities when you are an expert or you are an activist, you overshadow them and you are speaking on their behalf and they're just sitting waiting for you to do things for them," he said. For the campaign to be successful, he added, workers had to be seen as "speaking for themselves."

Faith leaders also engaged in direct negotiations with Alaska Airlines. In late 2012, for example, Alaska Airlines CEO Brad Tilden agreed to meet with campaign leadership. Instead of union officers, the campaign sent four faith leaders and three workers to the meeting. "Faith leaders were very present there with the workers," said Rev. Paul Benz, a Lutheran minister and leader of a statewide interfaith group. "So right up front, Brad Tilden and his folks know this—there is a moral side to this picture."

Internal to the campaign, the active engagement of mosque and church leaders, social service agency leaders, and community leaders served to nudge forward, gently but persistently, the notion that the wage problem was inextricable from the other problems in the community, and the campaign needed to stay focused on a broader social mission. Good airport wages? Sure—but this had to be about lifting up the entire community.

Beyond Wages: Changing Lives

In SeaTac and in other social justice campaigns, we should measure our progress not just by tangible things like wage gains, but also by how lives are changed in the course of struggle—the ripple effects beyond the immediate campaign that spur further action for justice.

In the months following the ballot victory, SeaTac workers continued organizing. Parking lot workers won union representation elections in April 2014, and three months later Yusur Adan helped lead a successful union representation election for her 240 fellow SeaTac wheelchair attendants. They had to overcome four rounds of compulsory anti-union meetings held by her employer. In the run-up to the election, managers brought in from as far away as Florida trailed workers around the airport and warned them against talking to union activists. The union election was the largest private-sector worker win at SeaTac in a generation. Omar Mumin helped organize a strike last summer against Uber, the for-hire ride company. Uber fired him after the strike, but he's not slowing

down. And when I met up with Abdirahman Abdullahi one evening last September, he had been spending the day mobilizing people in mosques and neighborhoods to turn out for a meeting to fight the local housing authority's rent hike plan.

A year after the twelve minister-shareholders disrupted the Alaska Airlines meeting in Seattle, the airline announced it was moving its 2014 gathering 1,500 miles away, to Anchorage, Alaska. The SeaTac campaign decided to send a dozen workers and faith and community allies anyway. A week before the meeting, my phone lit up with the number of Alaska Airlines' corporate headquarters. It was Shannon Alberts, the company's corporate secretary. She said she had a message from the company leadership for us: they realized that they couldn't control everything we intended to do, but "this year we're not going to let you lead off the meeting with a prayer." There was a pause. "We really, really don't want you to do it. OK?" Her plea signaled the company leaders' recognition that subtly but surely, the ground is shifting under Alaska Airlines.

The "Fight for $15" Spreads Nationwide

Beyond SeaTac, the "fight for $15" took off nationally. Fast food workers escalated job actions in cities around the country. President Obama highlighted the need for a higher minimum wage—but promoted a meager vision of $10.10 per hour. Mayors and other local government leaders took up the call.

Living wage fights have developed nationwide in varying ways. In New York City, Chicago, Detroit, Little Rock, Las Vegas, and elsewhere, fast food workers are staging individual and group walkouts, and augmented by community supporters, marches and civil disobedience; many but not all are tying the $15 wage demand to recognition of the workers' union. San Francisco voted in November 2014 to raise the city's minimum wage to $15, and Oakland voters approved an increase to $12.25. Alaska, Arkansas, Nebraska and South Dakota—not your typical "blue" states—passed modest wage increases as well. And mayors and city councils in a range of cities, from Portland, Maine, to San Diego, California, have proposed wage hikes. In Chicago and Seattle, mayors diverted growing street heat into a political process that yielded agreements for sizeable, though incremental, wage gains. (The Seattle settlement includes a three-to-seven year phase-in and allowances for employers to count tips and health care benefits against wages during the phase-in period.)

These are indeed heady times for living wage advocates. Poll after poll show strong public support for raising worker pay. In the next few years, on the current trajectory, millions of low-wage workers will see bigger paychecks due to political action. Not bad. But economic concessions are one thing; power concessions, quite another.

What's less certain is whether in years to come, outside of a few discrete cities and regions, there will be a meaningful U.S. labor movement capable of allying with other social justice organizations to tackle the myriad challenges that capitalism poses to our society and planet. As the living wage movement has blossomed, the pushback against worker organizations has only increased. Three years ago Wisconsin governor Scott Walker won a high-profile battle to strip public workers of bargaining rights. Legislatures in Michigan and Indiana passed stiff anti-union laws. Last summer, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a ruling that further weakened public sector unions nationwide. In Washington state, the same legislators who applauded the bravery of the SeaTac community for leading the $15 fight against Alaska Airlines rushed into a special session to enact a record $8.7 billion tax benefit package for the Boeing Company. The legislature's vote effectively cornered aerospace machinists into giving up secure retirement plans in exchange for less-than-ironclad job guarantees.

Staying Focused on Power Inequality

With momentum currently favoring those who advocate hikes in the minimum wage, there's a strong temptation to cater to "opinion-leaders" by downplaying union formation

and instead framing the issue of income inequality as a way to stabilize and improve capitalism. Venture capitalist Nick Hanauer and SEIU leader David Rolf wrote in 2013 that living wage campaigns "will create a faster-growing and fairer economy that is built from the 'middle out,'" adding that "the alternative, a vast sea of poverty with tiny islands of wealth, will be bad for everyone eventually, even the rich." And former Labor Secretary Robert Reich wrote that a $15 minimum wage "would put money in the pockets of millions of low-wage workers who will spend it—thereby giving working families and the overall economy a boost, and creating jobs."

These men are directing their words at the country's elite, but is the hope of becoming better consumers really going to animate workers to build a movement? Rather than trying to persuade the 1 percent that the wealth and power they've accumulated is somehow not in their long-term interest, we should move our living wage struggles beyond the narrow frame of material gains and instead present the moral and spiritual character of these struggles.

In conversations with workers as the ballot campaign heated up, I heard time and again how their aspirations went far beyond Reich's compassionate brand of Keynesian economics. They want personal dignity, time with their loved ones, and opportunities to live and grow. They want relief from the unceasing, grinding stress of poverty.

"If SeaTac Proposition 1 passes, it would change my life so I could only have one job and spend more quality time with my family," said Sheryl Molina, a shuttle bus assistant. Bereket Elala, a baggage handler, added, "I will be able to spend more time on my education, and concentrate better on my studies. I can have days off to spend with my family."

The vast majority of workers harbor no illusions that they'll get what they need by portraying raising wages as also good for the 1 percent. To win better lives, they recognize that they will have to confront the bosses' power with their own organized power. They recognize that the root cause of their economic distress is the problem of power inequality.

"The corporations, they just want to get more profit, profit, profit," said Abdullahi, the Hertz rental car worker. "So we need to come together to organize and to be a part of the movement so we can fight back for our rights. We have to have power. We have to show our strength."

A Spiritual Progressive Approach to Income Inequality

Because unions are representative organizations with distinct members, its leaders understandably tend to look at issues in concrete, material terms: "What can we win at this bargaining table?" "What bills can we pass in this legislative session?"

While such concrete goals are crucial to building worker power, attempts to mobilize around them are rarely as stirring, inspirational, and effective as campaigns that move beyond a materialistic framework and connect material issues to the values of community, human dignity, freedom, and justice.

To be sure, wage-focused campaigns have merit in the broader movement. Wage improvements provide vital, tangible relief to low-income workers and families. By bringing into stark contrast the difference between the 1 percent and the rest of us, living wage fights can be a launch point for an important discussion about why we have such inequality. As we win living wage campaigns, they become important confidence-building milestones of the movement's growing success. And as people build confidence, they get involved.

But if campaigns don't articulate a vision beyond the $15 symbol, then political and business elite will misappropriate it as the ceiling. We have to frame our struggle as a fundamentally moral one—a struggle based on values that contest the assumptions of our capitalist culture. And our values have to put forward a vision of what we think a just society ought to look like. Within this larger set of demands resides the call for a living

wage. A sharp economic critique is vital, but a sustained movement must be built on a foundation of values. A spiritually grounded call for justice can be such a foundation.

When Rev. Helmiere and his colleagues crashed the Alaska Airlines shareholders meeting in 2013, they were connecting spiritual values to material demands in just this way, deftly shifting the terrain from dollars and cents to values and justice, challenging the company not with math problems contained in corporate balance sheets, but with moral questions of how executives ought to be treating their fellow human beings.

Looking back on his prayer, Rev. Helmiere noted that he wasn't seeking to advance ideology, but rather to deliver a genuine prayer that seeks to connect with the Divine. "Part of that prayer is indeed a plea for justice and a plea for social change," he said, "but the roots of it aren't an economic agenda or political agenda. I think it's more dangerous to people in that way because they can't just say, 'OK, that's a leftist thing or a greedy worker thing.'"

The U.S. labor movement today is in desperate need of creativity and vision. Labor organizations and leaders who are struggling for basic survival are ill-resourced and ill-equipped to imagine a broad, vibrant social justice movement. They are caught in constant issue fights, defensively responding to the needs of their members, an ever-diminishing fraction of the U.S. workforce. Others do have vibrant visions but feel unable to build meaningful, collective worker power within the constraints of the current economy. Income inequality is a relatively easier challenge to tackle compared to power inequality, so unions focus on the former at the expense of the latter.

The SeaTac campaign was powerful because, through the strong participation of faith and community groups, it fused workplace power-building with a broader values-based mission. If spiritual progressives build on this model in tackling power inequality nationwide, they could play a powerful role in saving the U.S. labor movement. ∎