

ARCING TOWARD JUSTICE:

The Evolution of the Living Wage Movement

A publication sponsored by the Bridging the Economic Divide Initiative of Tides Foundation

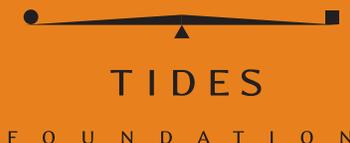


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SECTION 1: THE PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

The living wage movement turns 11 years old this year.

It is a movement that has grown and changed dramatically throughout the last decade. And it has expanded beyond that one titular strategy into many strategies—including city and state minimum wage initiatives, “accountable development” campaigns that attach economic justice standards to public developments and now strategies to challenge Wal-Mart, the world’s largest retailer and largest private employer in the United States.

This report will take a look at that history, at past and current battles, and try to explain what has worked, what has not and why. Finally, it will look at trends in the movement and possible funding directions for the next several years.

But first, we will begin with a brief history and a look at the present landscape of the economic justice movement.

SECTION 2: HOW WE GOT HERE: THE ROAD TO THE LIVING WAGE MOVEMENT

There has been an economic justice movement in this country at least since the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th Century. And the struggle to counterbalance the power of capital has taken many forms, most notably the labor movement and union organizing.

But unions have declined in power, although their leadership struggles to re-make them—a phenomenon that will be discussed elsewhere in this paper. Just over a decade ago, the living wage movement began, and has evolved beyond that one effective strategy to pursue a variety of approaches to raising wage and workplace standards. The living wage strategy was first launched in 1993, with the first ordinance passed in 1994. This strategy was then employed around the country in over 120 municipalities. In the ensuing years, activists branched out beyond the traditional living wage to include city and state minimum wages along with the other strategies to be explored in this report. Taken together, these policy measures and organizing campaigns can be considered the economic justice movement of the modern era.

The Face of the Low-Wage Workforce

It is useful to begin a discussion of economic justice strategies with a look at the low-wage workforce. Low-wage industries include retail, janitorial, home-care and child-care, security, hospitality—restaurants and hotels. As economist Robert Pollin points out, it is not inevitable that jobs in these sectors pay a poverty wage. Manufacturing jobs, now seen as the occupations that built the American middle class, were dangerous and low-paid endeavors until they were unionized.

If you were to pull a random employee from today’s low-wage workforce, odds are that she would be female and an immigrant from Latin America, Asia or the Caribbean. That profile is borne out by a grab bag of statistics.

- In 2000, 31.1% of women workers earned a poverty-level wage—or less.
- 58% of workers on temp agency payrolls are women.

- A 1999 analysis by the **Economic Policy Institute–EPI**— looks at the low-wage workforce nationally, and breaks the wage scales into several categories. The lowest scale is an average of \$5.69 an hour, \$11,380 annually for full-time work: Almost 60% of those making an average of \$5.69 an hour are female.

The **EPI** analysis defined the high-end of low-wage pay at an average of \$16.87 an hour—\$33,740 annually. Males make up 55% of those who work in the higher range, and women, 45%.

The racial breakdown of those making the lowest wage—an average of \$5.69 an hour: 60% white, 15% black and 19% latino. These somewhat reflect their proportions in the population. But of those making the higher average wage of \$16.87 an hour, 75.8% of those are white, 11.7% are black and 10.8% are latino. Still, while a greater proportion of workers of color are likely to make a poverty wage, these stats show that there are plenty of white people nationally among the low-paid worker ranks—think Wal-Mart in white-dominated rural areas.

These figures frame the why and inform the how of the living wage and broader economic justice movements.

1994: A Movement Begins

The first living wage ordinance was passed in Baltimore in 1994 after a \$1 billion-plus taxpayer renovation of the Baltimore Inner Harbor that resulted in little but low-wage, dead-end jobs. “There was a lot of anger about that,” says Jonathan Lange, the lead organizer for **Baltimoreans United In Leadership Development (BUILD)**. The issue particularly hit a nerve with African-American church leaders and congregations, which were tightly allied with BUILD; they all teamed up with the **American Federation of State, Municipal and Federal Employees** to push a living wage ordinance through the Baltimore city council.

Two appealing and enduring principles were central to the Baltimore ordinance: working people deserve a fair wage, and private development financed by public funding should meet job-quality and other standards. The Baltimore ordinance was modest in both the wage rate (beginning at \$6.10 an hour) and scope (covering a scant 1,300 workers initially). But it was a clever strategy that other activists around the country noticed. And since 1994, more than 120 living wage measures have passed.

In the meantime, however, the political and economic terrain has shifted substantially. And economic justice strategies now fall into three general categories:

- **Wage Campaigns:** Traditional living wage campaigns including their direct outgrowth, city and state minimum wage fights;
- **Accountable Development:** Campaigns that fight for Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) designed to leverage development funds for quality jobs and other economically just considerations. This category includes many of tactics used against Wal-Mart’s unfair business practices.
- **Immigrant Worker Organizing:** Immigrant workers centers have begun to team up with fair-wage advocates to enforce wage and hour laws and to broaden those laws.

Why Living Wage Campaigns

Living wage campaigns are the product of innumerable factors—political, social, and economic. Several stark factors however have played a key role in developing this social change strategy:

The Collapse of the Minimum Wage

The Growth of the Temporary Work Force

The Decline of Unions

Off Shoring

“Wal-Mart-ization”

The Collapse of the Minimum Wage

“The fundamental motivation behind the living wage movement,” economist Robert Pollin told *The Nation* in 2000, “is the collapse of the minimum wage.”

In 1994, when the first living wage ordinance was passed, the federal minimum wage was fixed at the abysmal hourly rate \$4.25. It hasn’t budged from \$5.15 an hour in more than eight years. This equals \$10,712 a year for full-time work. And The Economic Policy institute reports that inflation has eroded the effects of that 1996 raise.

Since 1968, the federal minimum wage has plunged some 40%, while American worker productivity has increased by around 80%, says Pollin, the leading living wage economist in the country and founder of the **Political Economy Research Institute at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst (PERI)**. If the minimum wage had kept pace with worker productivity rates, it would be fixed closer to \$14.50 an hour.

The strategies outlined in the *Funding Directions* section at the end this report all address this fundamental decline in wages.

The Growth of the Temporary Workforce

It is not an exaggeration to characterize the traditional relationship between employers and workers over the last few decades as a modern ice age. The expectation of a virtual lifetime covenant between the workers and a company or industry has not only long dissolved, but the model has been utterly replaced by the culture of the “temporary” and “contract” worker. The growth of the “temporary work” industry has outpaced conventional national employment by five times since 1990. Additionally, this fundamental change in this nation’s workforce has significantly hindered traditional union organizing—which is traditionally based on one workplace, one industry.

The mechanisms that once shielded workers from the competition of an open labor market—namely unions, or at minimum a dominant business model that views a stable workforce as a plus—no longer offer broad protection. Even employees with steady jobs, those who aren’t temps and who go to work at the same place each day, are faced with the possibility of mergers and buy-outs that eliminate jobs and benefits over night.

Understanding the disintegration of the traditional employer/employee relationship that has accelerated over the last decade is essential to thinking about how to bridge the growing inequities and reverse the erosion of worker expectations and rights here in the United States.

Organizer efforts to respond to this fundamental shift are the basis of the Enforcement Campaigns strategy in the *Funding Directions* section.

The Decline of Unions

The downward spiral in wage and working standards over the last five decades can be tracked alongside the decline of U.S. unions. Union membership peaked at around 35% of the workforce in 1954, after a groundswell of organizing in 1930s, followed by another surge after the Second World War. But by 1947 corporate backlash had begun and has continued since. The *Taft-Hartley Act*, passed that year, enabled “right to work” laws that encourage “open shops”—allowing workers to opt out of union membership yet enjoy the higher wages and benefits guaranteed by the union. Studies now show that right-to-work states have significantly lower working standards and wages than states that without such legislation.

The union movement also adopted approaches that served to undermine it in the long run. Labor narrowed its focus to exclude broad social policies, such as an across-the-board wage standard and guaranteed health care. These efforts had been led by leftwing and Communist unions that were part of the labor movement in the ‘30s and ‘40s. The McCarthy era crushed those unions and mainstream unions failed to defend them. The labor movement that emerged no longer acted as a counterweight to corporate power. They did however manage to protect interests such as union manufacturing jobs—the steel, autoworking and textiles jobs that built the post-war middle class.

Those jobs continued to provide middle class wages throughout the 1970s. But the 1980s saw a precipitous rise in so-called “runaway shops.” Corporations that owned manufacturing plants begin to shut them down and move them overseas where labor was much cheaper and unions next to non-existent. The jobs that left were overwhelmingly union jobs.

Corporate maneuvers such as this, combined globalizing trends, have continued and union membership in the United States dropped to 21.1% during the 1990s. The U.S. now has one of the lowest levels of unionization among industrialized countries.

The jobs that built the American middle class did not inherently pay well, but did so only after unions fought to make them middle class jobs. Those jobs set the standard for employment categories and raised the bar overall. One of the premises that inform the strategies outlined in the *Funding Directions* section of this report—wage campaigns, economic development accountability, the broadening and enforcement of employment standards—is that the jobs that cannot be shipped out of this country, e.g. the hotel and tourism industry, grocery, retail, and other service industries, should pay a livable wage.

Globalization and Off-shoring

The increased rate of plant-closings during the 1980’s presaged the “free trade” framework, which came to prominence in the early 1990s. Deindustrialization of urban centers devastated inner cities and particularly displaced the African-American workers that made up a significant proportion of manufacturing workers.

The bellwether of this “free trade” movement and the current phase of globalization was the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the United States and Mexico. A key policy objective of the Clinton Administration and implemented on January 1, 1994, NAFTA was the model for trade policies aimed at making it relatively easy to move jobs and capital across borders. NAFTA also made it significantly more difficult to move labor—a central, little-discussed issue in immigration policy debates.

The border town of El Paso, Texas, provides a snap-shot of NAFTA's effect on the American labor market, with a loss of 30,000 jobs since the agreement went into effect. Jobs that had been unionized headed south, replaced by minimum wage and part-time work. By the mid-1990s the free trade framework was in place and the American workforce was down to an 8% unionization rate.

And in 2005, even more educated workers are seeing standards eroded. Professional jobs that required a higher education level and were previously considered untouchable are now leaving the country. Any jobs that can be digitized—financial, software, technical support—even the reading of x-rays—can be off-shored now to highly educated individuals who will work for less.

All these forces have enhanced the power of corporations and depressed job standards. The strategies outlined in this report have had some success in raising the standards for jobs left behind.

“Wal-Mart-ization”

Wal-Mart is the world's largest retailer. They are the largest employer in 25 states and can set the standard for wages and labor practices across large sections of the country and the world. It has become such a powerful economic force that the company now has its own verb. The “Wal-Mart-ization” of the economy refers to the proliferation of the Wal-Mart business model and its central tenet: the merciless squeezing of labor costs to eliminate retail competition.

In its stores, the company is penurious with wages and employs part-time workers to save money on benefits. Wal-Mart is the target of the largest class action lawsuit against an employer in recent history that alleges that men are routinely promoted over women. The company ruthlessly suppresses unions and simply closed a store in Canada where workers voted in favor of a union.

Wal-Mart claims that 90% of its employees enjoy health coverage and downplays an interesting statistic: 50% are covered by a family member's plan or Medicare. Those who buy into the company's coverage find the employee contributions and deductibles so high that the only real coverage is for catastrophic illness. Routine preventative care, like vaccinations, are not covered.

As the biggest retailer in the world, Wal-Mart is the 800-lb gorilla of the labor market. The company pits suppliers against each other for the lowest prices, which can easily translate into sweatshop conditions in the supplying factories as they compete to do business with a global giant.

Because of Wal-Mart's size, the economic ripple effects of wage suppression are substantial, and other companies are looking to the Wal-Mart model to fatten their bottom line. The overall effect is one of lowering wage and workplace standards. That is why this report undertakes a discussion of efforts to stop Wal-Mart's expansion into local communities in the Possible Funding Directions section. It looks at local strategies and their potential to counteract the standards-lowering aspects the Wal-Mart business model.

SECTION 3: LOOKING BACK: SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

This report discusses strategies beyond living wage campaigns even as they remain the foundation for the economic justice movement. **Tides Foundation's Bridging the Economic Divide** has been one of the biggest funders on the national landscape. We will take a moment here to assess the gains and look at the developments on the fair wage front.

Traditional Living Wage Campaigns

When we talk about 120-plus living wage laws having passed, it almost always refers to traditional living wage campaigns. They have secured ordinances distinguished by being linked directly to public funding. Some measures cover only employers with city contracts; others include both contractors and companies and developments receiving subsidies. Either or both ways, they require that businesses that receive public funding pay a living wage.

These campaigns have built the movement. And the fight to pass these ordinances can take two forms:

Legislative—Passing an ordinance through a city or county governing body; or

Electoral—Winning a ballot measure.

Traditional Living Wage Campaigns: Pros and Cons

Traditional living wage campaigns have enjoyed tremendous success in part because they attach conditions to jobs created by public funds, which is highly a palatable argument to most voters and legislators. Since they cover relatively few workers, they are usually seen as less of a threat than more ambitious efforts and are thus less likely to draw heavy fire from the opposition. Traditional living wage has functioned well as a ground-floor strategy to build coalitions that pursue other economic justice measures. And in southern cities, where right-to-work policies translate to little labor clout to help living wage measures along, they may be the most viable strategy.

The downside, though, is the low number of workers it covers, sometimes a few hundred or even less. In Los Angeles, for example, a city of 3.7 million people, the living wage law covers roughly 7,000 workers, all at businesses that receive city funds. Employees stocking shelves at Target or flipping burgers for Jack generally do not benefit from living wage pay hikes.

City Minimum Wage

In some cities, activists have given the entire low-wage workforce a raise—and these are a watershed victories for the movement. Seven cities in the US have passed a minimum wage set above the federal standard:

Washington DC—pegged the city minimum wage a dollar above the federal minimum in 1994, shortly after Baltimore passed the first traditional living wage.

New Orleans—with a low-wage tourism-based economy, a grassroots effort passed a minimum wage in 2002 designed to cover 50,000 workers. It was over-turned by state-level legislation that outlawed local jurisdiction over wages. This will be discussed further in the section on the challenges the movement faces.

San Francisco—the city minimum wage, passed by ballot measure in 2003 covers some 50,000 low-wage employees

Santa Fe—pushed through the city council in 2003, the city minimum wage adds to the paycheck of more than 30,000 employees.

Madison, Wisconsin—the city council passed a measure in 2004 that covers approximately 17,200 workers.

Milwaukee and LaCrosse, WI—raised their minimum wage standard above the state’s standard in 2005.

City Minimum Wage: Pros and Cons

Some see city minimum wage efforts as a clever end-run around the federal stalemate. The win in San Francisco, for example, could be a jumping off point for higher wages in the Bay Area. Adjacent cities can pass similar measures and set a higher regional wage floor.

It is important to note that there was a well-developed organizing infrastructure in the cities where a raise covering all minimum wage workers went through. Three of them had already passed a traditional living wage.

The potential downside presented by a city minimum wage strategy is a reflection of its strength—the larger numbers of workers covered. It makes for a big political target that draws much heavier opposition than the traditional living wage. The New Orleans measure ran into heavy seas even before it went before voters. The hotel and restaurant industry immediately mounted a court challenge against the legitimacy of the signature-gathering method used to get it on the ballot.

Both the traditional living wage and the city minimum wage strategies face potentially fatal attacks in hostile state legislatures which can pass laws to pre-empt local wage measures. It happened in Louisiana. And opponents threatened it in New Mexico, but could not muster support in the legislature.

State Minimum Wage

Wage activists, of course, want raises for as big a group of workers as possible. And those who feel they can generate the necessary political might—often built on organizations developed in municipal living wage fights—press for change at the state level.

Once again, the arenas of struggle in state minimum wage fights are either legislative, or, in those states with an initiative system, electoral.

STATE MINIMUM WAGE: ON THE LEGISLATIVE FRONT

Maryland and New Jersey are the latest states whose legislatures passed a minimum wage law that raises their wages above the federal standard. New York passed one in December 2004. The **Working Families Party (WFP)** in New York pushed a bill through both houses of the legislature that would raise the minimum wage there to \$7.10 an hour—then overcame a veto by Governor George Pataki. **WFP** and allies pressured the legislature to overturn it with “a classic campaign—knocking on doors, accountability sessions, and press conferences,” says WFP’s Edina Berrios. Other state battles include:

Illinois—ACORN built enough of a base so that Governor Rod Blagojevich took a leading role in pushing through a minimum wage raise.

Vermont— activists won a living wage in Burlington and carried the momentum to the state house.

Massachusetts—ACORN, in coalition with state-level labor organizations, raised the minimum wage in Massachusetts in 1999. That alliance and the pressure from the higher-than-minimum wage rates in adjacent states, set the stage for a good chance at winning another raise in the legislature in 2005.

California— has an initiative process, but the last state wage-hike was a result of a coalition effort to move it through the legislature. That's often the best way to do it in California, where ballot initiative fights are waged on the airwaves, with expensive campaign spots that give well-heeled opponents an advantage.

STATE MINIMUM WAGE: ON THE BALLOT INITIATIVE FRONT

Florida— ACORN led the fight for a November, 2004 ballot initiative, registered more than 200,000 voters and got some 5 million votes in favor of the initiative. They won by an incredible 71% despite the \$4.3 million marshaled by the opposition, led by the National Restaurant Association. A legislative strategy was out of the question: the Florida state legislature was sufficiently antagonistic to have passed legislation to pre-empt any local wage legislation. **ACORN** was also interested in boosting progressive voter turn-out in a battleground state.

Nevada—the culinary workers union in Las Vegas, where the downward pressure on wages is fierce, was the leading force to get a minimum wage on the '04 ballot. They teamed up with a community coalition, Progressive Leadership Alliance for Nevada, which also did voter registration and mobilized voters. The measure passed overwhelmingly. Surprisingly, the opposition failed to mobilize.

State Minimum Wage: Pros and Cons

State minimum wage measures have a lot of plusses. They obviously would cover the greatest number of workers with one measure and they bump up wages in the entire state, creating a significant ripple effect for low-wage workers who make more than the minimum. Just as city minimum wage laws raise the wage floor regionally, state wage laws can do the same if adjacent states pass them.

The potential downside: It takes a great deal of organizing to pass state minimum wage laws. Both legislative efforts and ballot measures require lots of coalition building and tending, plus rank-and-file mobilization. State ballot measures can be extremely expensive, especially in a state like California where the initiative process is all about air-time purchase.

SECTION 4: THE BROADER VIEW

The wins described above are obviously accomplishments. But the big-picture accomplishments of the living wage movement can be summed up as follows:

- The concept of “living wage” has moved into the national vocabulary. Scores of grassroots level debates about the issue have introduced a term and idea that has resonated. It is language that expresses values, not policy, and the concept of a fair wage for work has been widely embraced.
- By a conservative estimate more than two years ago, some 250,000 workers got a raise from living wage or fair wage efforts. Economist Stephanie Luce of the University of Massachusetts Amherst made that calculation before the 100,000-plus workers added by the city ordinances and the millions added by state wage campaigns. It also disregards the “ripple” effect—when the bottom wages rise, others tend to do so as well.
- \$750 million was pumped into low income communities annually as a result of living wage legislation per 2002 calculations. Luce has not yet revised that number to account for the living wage wins since then, but says that it would be higher now.
- Local progressive infrastructures and alliances have been strengthened in the wake of living wage fights. From Denver to Memphis, Massachusetts to Atlanta, coalitions to win the living wage have remained intact to take on more economic justice issues. These campaigns have also beefed up membership numbers and local leadership ability in coalition organizations.

Building Infrastructure, Building Movement

As we all know, billions have been poured into developing conservative institutions over the past decade—from the Heritage Foundation think tank to the grassroots mobilizer Concerned Women for America. And the conservative perspective presently dominating the national debate is directly related to this effort.

But a significant aspect of the living wage movement has been the national infrastructure that has developed around this work, which may constitute some of the most progressive institutions now in existence.

ECONOMIC RESEARCH

Economic research has helped shape the debate in the media and beat back challenges from opponents like the National Restaurant Association, the deep-pocket opponent of living wage and minimum wage measures.

The **Political Economics Research Institute (PERI)** has conducted studies on the projected economic effects of living wage and provided testimony before city and state governments.

The Washington DC-based **Good Jobs First** is a kind of living wage movement cousin. They have issued dozens of pivotal studies and their research on how subsidies are doled out can provide ammunition in the calls for accountability.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Technical support has also made it possible for groups to plan winning campaigns without re-inventing the wheel.

The **ACORN Living Wage Resource Center** has offered on-the-ground technical support to campaigns nationally. It provides the benefit of the lessons learned from other campaigns, and provides big-picture policy argument as well as organizing strategy. It connects groups to the other resources—legal, technical, and academic—in the national infrastructure.

The **Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE)** provides advice and how-to's for efforts around the nation, and has figured out new models of subsidy accountability. LAANE grew out of the LA Coalition, that passed one of the first living wage laws in the country, and has since developed the Community Benefits Agreement model. (More on that in the section on possible funding strategies.)

LEGAL STRATEGIES

Legal strategies have also been central to the living wage movement's success. **The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University** has crafted and defended the pivotal legislation of the wage movement, such as the San Francisco and Santa Fe minimum wage ordinances. They have been the central mover in every legal fight to defend traditional living wage, and served as a kind of “in-house” counsel for the movement, working with activists to design legally bullet-proof legislation. They trouble-shoot procedural issues and campaign finance rules in ballot initiative efforts, defending legislation in court challenges, and organizing big-gun pro bono counsel.

Unlike most legal entities that caution against what activists cannot do in a legal sense, Brennan Center is key to pushing the limits of what's possible; activist allies approach with a general policy idea and Brennan Center works with them to find the policy proposals that are legally and politically feasible but that go as far as they can.

MEDIA STRATEGY

Media strategy has changed the frame of the national debate as well as helped win local battles.

The Spin Project has worked with campaigns all over the country. One of the key gains of the living wage movement is the shift in the national discussion away from the question of job creation and to the issue of the quality of jobs. “It's one of the few economic justice battles that's happening in this country where we control the frame,” observes Robert Bray, founding director of **The Spin Project** and editor of the Tides sponsored “Winning Wages: A Media Kit for Successful Living Wage Strategies” a how-to on integrating the media strategy with the organizing work.

Future Challenges

All of these elements create a clearly complex environment in which to continue this necessary work. Here are a few of the key challenges facing activists and funders in the near future:

STATE-LEVEL PRE-EMPTION:

The major threat to local living and minimum wage measures is state legislation that over-rides the local power to set wages. Paul Sonn, of the **Brennan Justice Center**, says there is unfortunately no constitutional challenge to these state-law pre-emptions.

New Orleans ACORN struggled for years to get the city minimum wage measure as far as the ballot. When they finally did, it passed overwhelmingly, and was then scuttled by fiat at the state level when the legislature outlawed local measures regulating wage standards. **ACORN** is undaunted but now must struggle to regain lost ground as they attempt to raise the state minimum wage.

Each legal challenge to living wage has hinged on state law on the matter. Even measures like the traditional living wage in Atlanta, Georgia, have been crushed by legislative action. Atlanta living wage proponents were sufficiently plucky to rebound and get a measure passed that affects the contract bidding process and allows advantage points to those bidders who promise a living wage and meet other conditions. But a state-level pre-emption in effect undid years of smart and careful work.

The Santa Fe living minimum wage ordinance in New Mexico survived because the legislature failed to muster the votes necessary to override the local wage increase. Activists must remain vigilant, however, as a change of legislators could tilt the balance against them.

In Wisconsin, the legislature did in fact pre-empt local wage increases—but a well-organized campaign pressured the governor to veto that bill.

Pre-emption is a palpable threat to the advancement of fair-wage efforts, and opponents such as the National Restaurant Association are doubtless aware of that. Protection of the local measures often hinges on a state legislature disinclined to attack them, as in New Mexico.

But it behooves wage activists to maintain the ability to mobilize people at the local level to put pressure on individual legislators or the governor—the only other option to protect hard-fought local wage wins. Opposition research to detect the level of chatter about pre-emption campaigns would be time well spent.

SECTION 5: POSSIBLE FUNDING DIRECTIONS

In the most general of terms, the living wage movement has morphed into a multi-strategy fair-wage movement. When considering future funding directions for the **Bridging the Economic Divide Initiative** at **Tides Foundation**, there are three broad categories to consider:

- **Living Wage Campaigns**, which includes “the next wave” or city and state minimum wage efforts;
- **Accountable Development Campaigns**, which includes Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) and anti-Wal-Martization campaigns;
- **Immigrant Worker Organizing/ Day Laborer Campaigns**, which dovetail with enforcement campaigns; that is, making sure that wage and labor standards laws are being enforced.

Funding Direction I: Living Wage and Minimum Wage Campaigns

TRADITIONAL LIVING WAGE CAMPAIGNS

Now that more than 120 municipalities have passed traditional living wage laws, there are fewer extant campaigns. For the past decade, one could look around the country and identify a dozen campaigns going forward at a given time; last year there were only four.

Traditional living wage campaigns, many funded by the **Tides BED Initiative**, have built a strong and successful movement. Traditional measures can be easier to win than a wider city-wide minimum wage because the arguments are appealing: public funding should not create poverty wages, and tax-payers end up subsidizing twice when they pick up the tab for health care. The traditional living wage also tends to attract much less attention from such ardent opponents of the minimum wage as the National Restaurant Association.

Traditional living wage campaigns also have the potential to organize a base and develop leaders—it’s a clear-cut goal that resonates with the potential base. In the cities where minimum wage has recently passed—San Francisco, Santa Fe and Madison—a traditional living wage campaign had set the stage for these bigger efforts. And the significant organizing work had already been started.

So even though it may appear that traditional living wage strategy is on the wane, there are two circumstances when it makes particularly good solid sense and deserves support:

- **Southern States:** In the conservative south a traditional living wage effort is the most winnable ground-floor economic justice issue;
- **Building Blocks:** Living Wage campaigns can be a highly effective first step in a longer-term power building strategy to change the political structure, like the city council in a municipality.

Southern States...

There is certainly an argument that the South, with its increasing numbers of low-wage immigrant workers, should be an economic justice organizing priority and that traditional living wage would be the way to do it.

There are still very few living wage laws there. Activists in Memphis and Knoxville, Tennessee have been struggling for over a year to pass the measures in those cities; Atlanta passed one only to have it attacked and dismantled by state legislation; and New Orleans passed a minimum wage hike only to have the legislature outlaw it. Neither are there living wage laws in Mississippi, Alabama or the Carolinas.

Because of the difficulty of the political territory, traditional living wage campaigns can be the best economic justice strategy to pursue in order to build and strengthen organization.

That's the case in Memphis and Knoxville, and certainly in Atlanta, where the coalition did a bit of an end-run around a legislative pre-emption that negated local wage measures. The Atlanta activists passed a contracting policy that gave preference to bidders who pledged to pay a living wage.

Campaigns are presently underway to pass traditional living wage measures in Little Rock and Pine Bluff, Arkansas; ordinances would establish a toe-hold for economic justice measures there.

Building Blocks...

Traditional living wage campaigns can be seen as part of a larger long-term power-building strategy in the South, but can function that way elsewhere, as well. Several cities that have achieved a city minimum wage launched it from the infrastructure established by the traditional living wage fight. **The Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy** is the front and center example of starting with living wage and blossoming into an economic justice powerhouse, but it is also useful to look at Santa Fe, NM, where activists had pushed through a traditional living wage and were negotiating with the city to conduct a study of its effects when they launched the city minimum initiative that was eventually passed by the council.

San Francisco is another city that had passed a traditional living wage ordinance before undertaking the more ambitious city minimum.

More recently, in Syracuse, New York, the **Working Families Party** pursued a traditional living wage law, but were unable to get it through city council after a member who had pledged to vote for the ordinance reneged. The next election cycle they successfully ran a candidate against the uncooperative council member and are poised to win a traditional living wage law there this month.

PUEBLO, a grassroots organization in Santa Barbara, California, tried to pass a living wage ordinance in 2000; they got a wage raise for some 200 workers but not an ordinance. Since then, **PUEBLO** has been doing classic house-meeting campaign-style organizing on a variety of issues—blocking a bus fare hike, for instance—and has developed a precinct organization that can influence city elections. They have formed a new living wage coalition with organizations whose endorsement is valuable to the three swing votes in an upcoming council race, and have just launched a new, power-building living wage campaign.

A campaign for a traditional living wage now plays a similar role in Phoenix, Arizona. Activists pushing for an ordinance there thought they had an ally on the city council who would sponsor the measure, but who then wavered. And the rest of the council votes for a living wage ordinance looked even shakier. And when Wal-Mart came to town, the council completely rolled over despite a chamber packed with opponents. Now the living wage campaign is organizing to mobilize in key council districts to make living wage an issue in upcoming elections; they also expect to be part of the state ballot initiative effort geared for 2006.

CITY MINIMUM WAGE CAMPAIGNS

City minimum wage campaigns are a significant new direction for the living wage movement; activists call them “the next wave.” Their appeal is that they cover a far greater number of workers than the traditional ordinances.

Santa Fe, San Francisco, Madison are three cities that have passed city minimums recently without having them undermined or overturned. There are presently three more city minimum wage strategies on the burner: **ACORN** is presently contemplating city minimum-wage ballot measures in Northern California in 2006 in Emeryville and Oakland. Because of the proximity of those two cities to San Francisco, which passed a city minimum wage in 2003, the overall effect would be to raise the wage floor regionally

And activists in Albuquerque, NM, organized by **ACORN** and assisted by the Brennan Center, are using the momentum and the favorable reports about the results of the Santa Fe minimum wage to work toward winning a ballot initiative in October, 2005.

Proposals to raise wages for a whole city draw much opposition fire, so they require more resources than a traditional living wage campaign. When **ACORN** attempted a city minimum wage in Denver in 1996, the National Restaurant Association kicked in \$50,000 to produce and air a TV commercial to oppose it. They shipped the same spot to Houston to defeat **ACORN**'s minimum wage campaign there.

But city minimum wage campaigns are certainly seen as a “next step” in advancing the living wage movement with their coverage of more workers, and the potential to raise the wage floor regionally. It's hard to imagine forward-movement on a comprehensive economic justice strategy that remains fixed on the traditional living wage.

When contemplating funding city minimum wage campaigns here a few issues to consider:

- It takes more money to win a city minimum wage than a traditional living wage. So the size of the grants may need to be larger. A victory in these campaigns, particularly by an organization with potential to build and expand, certainly provides a high-yield return on the higher investment.
- These campaigns need to be built to last. Activists should have an organizing strategy that engages the base and maintains political pressure while the measure is inevitably taken to court.
- It is wise to assess the state legislature's inclination to pre-empt local ordinances and the leading organizations' capacity to combat that. This also applies to traditional living wage, but, as noted, those are less likely to be attacked.
- A minimum wage win is a significant victory in and of itself, but it is all the better if it can bump up progressive turnout in tight local elections with other progressive issues on the ballot. That should be a consideration when contemplating funding, along with the degree to which coalitions and broader agendas can be leveraged.

STATE MINIMUM WAGE CAMPAIGNS

State minimum wage campaigns represent another important new front in the fight for economic justice in the United States. They raise the standard of living for potentially millions of workers as the federal government refuses to budge. And their strategic electoral importance has excited much interest since November, 2004.

The two state ballot measure victories in Florida and Nevada were among the few bright spots on an excruciating November, 2004, election day.

The minimum wage campaigns not only won raises, but built organizing infrastructure and activists skill. Work continues in both states; in Florida, where the legislature is attempting to roll back the will of the voters, and in Nevada, where voters by law have to approve the measure a second time.

Minimum Wage Campaigns in Twenty-Two States; Ballot Measures in Four of Them

The momentum toward raising the state minimum wage is clear: campaigns to do so are moving forward in twenty two states, in eighteen states through legislative fights four by ballot measure.

ACORN, with legal guidance from the Brennan Center and support from the **Economic Policy Institute**, is laying the groundwork in Arizona, Ohio, and Michigan for state minimum wage ballot initiatives in 2006. The states gearing up for minimum wage ballot measures will all have other key elections going on at the same time.

There are clearly reasons to support state level minimum wage ballot measures, both for the number of workers they cover and the possible political opportunities they afford. Legislative fights can build political opportunity in other ways—through coalition work, making the issue a litmus test for legislators and candidates, for example.

Funding Direction II: Accountable Economic Development

ANTI WAL-MART CAMPAIGNS

Living wage/minimum wage measures respond directly to the problem of low wages by raising the floor, and the organizing that wins the fights has put into place local organizations to continue the fight.

But the direct wage measures do not address another force in the economic landscape—Wal-Martization, the business model that suppresses wages and organizing and pressures suppliers to cut costs through work speed-ups and wage suppression. Wal-Mart has developed and championed it, but employers such as Home Depot (500,000 workers), Lowe's and Kmart/Sears have based their business model on Wal-Mart's as well. Wal-Mart is an 800-pound gorilla in the US economy and exerts influence on labor markets around the world as well, refusing to deal with all but the most tight-fisted suppliers with the lowest labor standards.

The most direct attack on Wal-Martization has been to take on Wal-Mart. That's been a complicated and difficult campaign, but one that has begun to evolve some interesting and potentially winning strategies.

Banning Big Box

Many municipalities have sought an outright ban of the big box giant, with mixed results. Santa Rosa, California, as well as several small towns outside of Phoenix, Arizona and Montgomery County, near Washington DC, have banned the big box through ordinances.

But when the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance banning big box development, Wal-Mart swiftly turned it around and put a referendum on the ballot. It asked: do you, voter, agree with the Board of Supervisor's ordinance? Wal-Mart strategists knew that it is infinitely more difficult to get voters to say yes rather than no. The ordinance was voted down, and Wal-Mart won.

In Alameda County, Wal-Mart evidently thought it more strategic to mount a legal fight rather than one at the ballot box; they challenged on procedural issues. The Board of Supervisors scrapped the banning ordinance and re-instated it after following the correct procedures. Wal-Mart lost there.

The growing consensus is that outright banning is not a fruitful approach.

Strategies Other Than Banning:

1. Making Wal-Mart Accountable—Setting Job Standards

Many of those on the front lines have found it savvy to pursue strategies based on accountability rather than out-right banning. Wal-Mart seizes upon the argument that a ban limits consumer choice. Strategies that ask for accountability offer more choice—they have the potential to give communities more control over local development.

In Chicago, in 2003, **ACORN** waged a vigorous multi-faceted campaign to pass an ordinance, designed by the **Brennan Center**, that welcomed Wal-Mart— or any other Big Box, like Target or Home Depot, also low-wage employers. But there were conditions: employers must pay at least \$10 an hour and provide \$3.00 an hour worth of benefits. The other requirement would be local hiring and a policy that allows employees to discuss working conditions—a big problem with anti-union Wal-Mart.

ACORN took that tack in part because their low-income base would tend to welcome a Wal-Mart. Most folks also understand that the low pay and few-to-no benefits are not a viable option to remedy the poverty in their neighborhoods. **ACORN** managed to thwart the development of a Wal-Mart on Chicago's south side but anticipate that the company will take another run at it.

The proposed Chicago ordinance has not yet passed. It would be unprecedented in its ability to raise wage and workplace standards at Wal-Mart, but has yet to be tested.

The strategy's strengths:

- **Unifying Strategy:** This method can link many communities—including immigrant and African-American communities—in a common fight. Immigrants are often “hyper-employed,” working a couple of low-wage exploitative jobs, while African-Americans often experience being shut out of the job market altogether. Setting jobs standards is a common goal that benefits all.
- **Setting Standards:** These efforts could force Wal-Mart or other big box employers to meet wage and other workplace standards in order to locate where they have targeted a customer base;

- **No “Stay Out” Rhetoric:** These campaigns do not say “stay out” —which can backfire in several directions—but, rather, “please meet our standards.” The issue then shifts from limiting consumer choice or anti-job creation as Wal-Mart frames it when there is a ban. Rather, it expands community control.
- **Base Building:** The community control aspect makes it a good base-building strategy as activists can be educated and mobilized every step of the way.

The strategy’s weakness:

- **Tough to Pass:** These measures can be tough to generate votes around. The vagaries of Chicago’s city council politics aside, there is nothing in the Wal-Mart business model that would suggest that the company would not vigorously resist such standards.

2. Require an Impact Study

Another approach is the one undertaken in Los Angeles. The Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy worked with pro-labor City Council members to craft an alternative to an outright ban. In 2004, the council eschewed a ban and instead passed an ordinance that requires big-box developers to pay for a study, conducted by consultants from a list screened by city officials, that investigates and explains the potential economic, environmental and social impacts of a proposed development. The ordinance only applies in designated redevelopment zones.

City officials will be able to review the economic impacts information and decide case-by-case whether to grant Wal-Mart the necessary permits. The study is intended to provide a clear-eyed view of the development in a given area and information upon which to devise a sound plan. It takes a holistic look at development impacts, not only job issues, but whether it undermines small businesses, causes more traffic. It also allows for community participation in the development debate, something that has not really happened before in Los Angeles.

The strategy’s strengths:

- **Direct Appeal and Participation:** This strategy speaks to a low-income base of support in the most basic of terms: jobs and services. It speaks directly to the needs of a given community and allows that community to participate;
- **Build Unity:** Like the Chicago strategy to establish standards, it has potential to unite the immigrant and African-American communities, two distinct groups that experience economic conditions differently;
- **Building a Base:** This method is also ideal for building and maintaining a base. Each study released lays out the issues for the local neighborhood. A campaign could start as soon as a proposal gets into the works, and the community involved at every step, including responding to the response of city officials;
- **Ease of Campaign:** This method is an easier sell than a ban, and difficult, if not impossible, to challenge in court;
- **Coalition Opportunities:** The host of issues the studies encompass, from jobs to traffic, presents potential to bring together broad coalitions of economic justice, environmental, small business and preservationist activists.

The Strategies weaknesses:

- **Multiple Battles:** In contrast to a Chicago-style ordinance, which in effect settles the matter of standards, the case-by-case nature of the study-requirement ordinance means a potential skirmish around standards each time Wal-Mart wants in;
- **Untested:** It is also too soon to tell whether the ordinance has altered Wal-Mart's approach in Los Angeles, whether they'll go away or agree to better job conditions.
- **Un-replicated:** It is also too soon to tell if it can be replicated elsewhere. Los Angeles has a pro-labor majority on the council; would it be possible to pass such legislation where that is not the case? Or could the arguments of local control, plus an organized base, win over local governing bodies?
- **Coalition Splits:** Coalitions face the prospect of being split along the lines of interests—for example, if Wal-Mart did agree to decent job standards, might labor-allied groups be tempted to disregard the threat to small businesses in exchange for good jobs in an under-employed neighborhood?
- **Necessary Infrastructure:** Los Angeles also has **LAANE**, a muscular, eleven-year-old organization, to keep tabs on proposals and initiate organizing campaigns. It's hard to imagine this strategy working in an area that doesn't have that level of sophistication and infrastructure.

A smart campaign to blunt Wal-Mart's bad influence appears to be gathering momentum. The national labor movement is discussing launching an offensive; so far the **United Food and Commercial Workers** have waged the most vigorous opposition since their grocery workers take the most direct hit. In addition, the **Center for Community and Corporate Ethics**, incorporated late last year, is planning to think-tank Wal-Mart strategy from all angles, and have made Wal-Martization their first focus. Labor-linked grassroots efforts like **LAANE's** could be another key component.

COMMUNITY BENEFITS AGREEMENTS (CBAs)

The Community Benefits Agreement strategy represents another vital way forward for the living wage/economic justice movement. CBAs expand on the principles represented by living wage campaigns: the jobs that the public investment yields should be quality jobs. But the community benefits agreements go beyond the question of jobs to take in housing, child care, parks and other environmental issues, and thus provide potential for broad coalitions to shape local development.

The **Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy—LAANE**—has been a national leader in developing the CBA strategy. They have negotiated some remarkable deals. The first leveraged the proposed expansion of downtown LA's mammoth Staples Center. It was a coalition effort in which **LAANE** played a key role. The deal included a pledge that 70% of some 5,400 permanent jobs created would have to pay a living wage or be covered by a collective bargaining agreement. The developers also put up \$1 million to create or improve parks within a mile of the project, which includes some of the mostly densely populated neighborhoods west of the Mississippi. This was in addition to traffic and noise mitigation measures.

In December, **LAANE** pulled off a \$500 million community benefits package involving the communities adjacent to LA International Airport, leveraging \$8 billion in private investment in a modernization plan. The CBA covers everything from sound-proofing homes to air conditioning for schools and a sharp reduction of air pollution on the tarmac.

LAANE has also negotiated CBAs on 12 smaller development deals around the city. The CBA strategy has attracted a following of activists adopting it for San Diego, San Jose, Palm Springs, Ventura, Santa Barbara and Fresno in California, and several cities across the country, including Denver, Atlanta, Boston and Miami. **LAANE** has worked with activists in these cities on their efforts. And the Ford Foundation has taken an interest in CBA funding.

The strategy's strengths:

- **Grassroots Participation:** CBAs provide a key opportunity for grassroots participation in the economic development process that in most places is still dominated by backroom deals;
- **Community Resonance:** CBA campaigns resonate with local people in blighted neighborhoods that need jobs and amenities.
- **Quality of Life:** The campaigns can actually deliver essential quality-of-life improvements and actually result in true economic development instead of a public windfall for private companies;
- **Public Funds for Public Good:** CBA campaigns further the argument that public funds need to be invested judiciously and with a plan, not simply in response to developer pressure.
- **Progressive Coalitions:** Because they address development issues, CBA's provide an opportunity for progressive coalitions.

The strategy's weaknesses:

- **Political Battles:** The politics of CBA's can be fraught with problems. The LA International Airport deal that **LAANE** negotiated was controversial with many environmentalists who opposed airports expansion, although several environmental groups signed on because of measures to reduce pollution at LAX.

Many opposed the expansion because it would re-affirm LAX as the key regional airport instead of spreading the burden throughout the region. The airport plan will undoubtedly add to the gridlock traffic around the airport. **LAANE's** CBA certainly benefited poor communities adjacent to the airport that have suffered from noise and pollution for years. But their role arguably made the airport expansion possible when many think it should have been blocked. **LAANE** is a strong ally of the LA County Federation of Labor, which was very much behind the LAX plan. It's an illustration of how wide-eyed one must be about all the politics and outcomes involved.

- **Research Heavy:** Community Benefits Agreements can be tricky to negotiate and implement. They take lots of painstaking research to understand the development process. Politically, activists must understand who the decision-makers are and how they relate with one another.
- **Base Maintenance:** It's a challenge to develop and maintain a base during and arcane and a fitful development process. On small-scale deals, developers can fall out and new ones come in, sometimes negating previously concluded deals. Even on the larger-scale developments can stall—for months or even years, as the neighborhoods wait—the Staples expansion, which resulted in a wonderful deal, is moving forward very slowly. Worthwhile questions when considering funding: how do organizers educate the base and include them in strategic decisions? What are the plans to build leadership and maintain the base?

Funding Direction III: Immigrant Worker Organizing/Enforcement Campaigns

The face of the low-wage worker, as previously noted, is likely to bear features that are indigenous/Latin American, Asian or Afro-Caribbean; the face of low-wage labor is likely to be that of an immigrant. When European and Irish immigrants arrived in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they met with a rapacious Gilded Age economic environment, but there were also institutions moving into place, such as unions and the “settlement house” movement that offered some protection against market forces.

Today’s immigrants are plunged into an environment with no such protections. They are “unstuck” from the organized economy, many, like day laborers or domestic workers, move from job to job and employer to employer. Such workers aren’t touched by traditional living wage strategies and even fall outside minimum wage and other approaches explored here. But their situation is emblematic of the common condition of worker dislocation in the 21st century.

How do you organize workers that don’t show up to the same workplace all the time, whose employers change constantly? What goals make the most sense in that context? How do you build leadership, institutions?

Organizers have attempted to address these conditions by two principle means: immigrant workers centers and day laborer organizing—which can include a local day laborer center or take place on the corners where the men congregate looking for work.

IMMIGRANT WORKERS CENTERS AND THE ENFORCEMENT OF STANDARDS

The workers centers have always played a critical role in enforcing wage and hour laws, according to Janice Fine, of Northeast Action, who has completed a study on workers centers and their role in organizing day laborers and other sectors of immigrant workers.

Immigrant worker centers are the often the most active entities pushing to enforce wage and labor standards, calling up employers to pressure them to comply with the law. Most government agencies are too overwhelmed and understaffed to go out and investigate working conditions or even follow up on complaints. It’s easy to see how this can contribute to the general erosion of labor standards that we see in the marketplace these days.

In an exciting new development, workers centers have begun to team up with fair-wage advocates to enforce wage and hour laws. **The Coalition of Immoklee Workers** in Florida, for example, is teaming up with **ACORN** and **Florida Legal Services** to enforce the the recently-passed state minimum wage law. The campaign brings to bear legal muscle, an education and outreach campaign around worker rights and grassroots mobilization. In Santa fe, the **Living Wage Coalition** has joined forces with immigrant advocates Somos Un Pueblo Unido to enforce the provisions of the law there.

The **Brennan Center** recently added to the mix and convened a conference of those advocates to discuss strategies to pass and enforce broader laws that affect the whole labor market and cover those workers, and for greater enforcement through the immigrant workers and day labor centers.

Strengths of the Workers Center Strategy

- The centers also function as possibly the only nexus point for workers and becomes the place to organize them. The traditional model of workplace union organizing is irrelevant to workers who switch workplace and industries.

- Workers Centers are significant for being one of the few entities that enforce wage and hour laws. The more recent development of workers center leadership linking up with wage advocates increases that influence and is a promising direction.
- The workers center model places a heavy emphasis on popular education and true leadership development. The workers themselves are educated and groomed as leaders, the people who will have a role in crafting a national response to low-wage employment issues;

Weaknesses of the Workers Center Strategy

- Not all centers see their role as organizing, but rather, providing services. This is especially true of those that rely heavily on government funding.
- Janice Fine observes in that they often don't see the need or have the resources to do a thorough power analysis of the industry they are taking on, which can lead to flawed strategy;
- There is frequently a lack of understanding of the political power structure locally.
- The leadership development that the model emphasizes is a very long-term process, which means that it's not a quick-victory, high-yield strategy.

DAY LABORER ORGANIZING

Day laborer organizing functions at both a national and local level. Pablo Alvarado has successfully launched the **National Day Laborer Organizing Network, NDLON**, which includes over 50 centers and organized “corners,” where the men congregate looking for work.

The “jornaleros,” as the day laborers call themselves, are hired by the day by different employers and are frequently underpaid or stiffed completely. Employers have little incentive to provide safety equipment or apply safety standards. Another local issue for the jornaleros are ordinances that limit their ability to seek work.

Local organizing takes on these issues. Day laborers in California have marched on the homes and businesses of those notorious for cheating workers to force them to pay up. They have joined up with other community groups and institutions such as the **Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF)** to challenge ordinances that limit their speech and assembly.

Day laborer organizing somewhat overlaps with worker center organizing in that sometimes the day laborers base their organizing at local centers.

In Los Angeles, Pablo Alvarado is working with the laborers on various corners to set a wage standard below which no one will accept work.

On a national level, **NDLON** is taking on immigration issues, a particular problem for day laborers. Adjusting one's immigration status is usually linked to employment and the yearned-for “green card” is authorization to work legally in the US. An unskilled worker who just shows up has no such attachment, and no path to legalizing his or her status. **NDLON** has worked with immigrants rights advocates to inject this perspective into the immigration debate.

Strengths of the Day Laborer Organizing Strategy:

- Like the workers centers, the day laborer organizing model emphasizes leadership development, which means potential for rank-and-file day laborers to be integrated into movement leadership;
- the organizing model's emphasis on the immigration status of day laborers opens the door to an honest strategic discussion of immigration policy in the context of massive global economic shifts;
- like the workers center model, day laborer organizing is in large part based on struggling to enforce labor standards in a world of employer-employee relations where official enforcement has continued to decline.

Weaknesses of the Day Laborer Organizing Strategy:

- It's an advantage for workers to have municipal support to establish centers where it is lawful for employers to pick up jornaleros, but the government support severely restricts organizing activity. Northeast Action's Janice Fine agrees, and points out that there are many routes to independence that both day laborer and workers centers fail to explore: charging for services, setting up side-businesses such as check-wiring money to families in immigrant workers' home countries, seek support for their service work from more mainstream foundations.
- Like the workers center strategy, day laborer organizing emphasizes leadership development, a long-term process that means that it's not a quick-victory, high-yield strategy. On the other hand, given the mobility of the day laborer base, development of stable leadership is essential.

The overall move toward linking wage and hour enforcement organizing with immigrant worker and workers center efforts is in a nascent stage and deserves monitoring and support as a strategy that truly gets at the low-wage issues of a mobile and exploited immigrant workforce.

Likewise, the approach of fighting for broader measures that cover such workers is also at the ground floor level and represents a key opportunity for smart, strategic funding.

CONCLUSION

The living wage movement that began a little over ten years ago coalesced over time into a successful movement that focused on a narrow, attainable strategy. It has more recently morphed to a bigger, broader more multi-faceted movement for economic justice.

The strategies discussed in this paper are derived from the experience of local activists around the country. That means they are battle-tested, or, like the Wal-Mart accountability strategies, are certainly soon to be so. These approaches and campaigns also knit together into a single, broader strategy to move the ball forward on economic justice in an end-run around political gridlock at the national level. They also take into account the dizzying shifts in the economy that have dislocated workers around the world.

As a viable, practical and successful on-going effort, the economic justice movement has a role to play in the broader progressive movement as well, especially in these times of political reaction. As the proposed state minimum wage campaigns show, there's potential to achieve ancillary wins that advance a more progressive agenda. The link-up between advocates of work standards enforcement and fair wage activists represents another opportunity. The economic justice movement has been savvy about linking up with other social change efforts and must continue to do so.

The movement has helped advance the concept in our national discourse that working people deserve a "living wage." It is another challenge altogether to go against the prevailing "greed-is-good" sentiment and introduce the concept that economic justice is as moral an imperative as racial and gender equality. In these times, that could be tough. But as Martin Luther King, Jr., said "the moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice."