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THE PARADOX OF ORGANIZED LABOR: ECONOMIC DECLINE AND POLITICAL RESILIENCE

1. Continued Decline in Membership and Economic Power

- *New Voice* reform effort and predictions/claims of revival
- Clear failure by early 2000s of efforts at membership revival
- Split within AFL-CIO in 2005 and formation of *Change to Win* federation

2. Political Resilience and Enduring Alliance with Democratic Party

- Union members/households as percentage of electorate remains stable.
- Union campaign contributions remain sizable and growing.
- Labor retains capacity to place issues on legislative agenda of Congress
- Democratic congressional unity in favor of labor is *growing*.
- Presidential nominating process: union support still avidly sought within Democratic party.

3. Explanations

- Political mobilization is far easier than reversing deep-rooted economic change or achieving a major institutional transformation.
- Growth in public employee unionism produces both increased *need* and *capacity* for political action.
- Union resiliency in context of demobilization of other constituencies may generate unexpected influence.
- Increased Democratic party homogeneity reduces internal Democratic opposition to union initiatives, and allows Democrats to do more with less.

Reform efforts of the 1990s and 2000s:

New Voice Reform Program

Main Leader: John Sweeney, Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

- Increase federation-level support for organizing: research; training of organizers; coordination of organizing efforts; subsidies to union organizing drives.
- Encourage affiliated unions to devote more money and effort to new organizing.
- Intensify grassroots political mobilization of members and autonomous campaign activities.
- More “hardball” pressure on wavering politicians.
- Improve public visibility of union leaders and public relations efforts generally.
- Experiment with civil disobedience, mass demonstrations, and militant protests.
- Improve ties with “liberal left,” including women, minorities, students, academics, etc.
- Enhance role of “central labor councils” in political/organizing efforts at municipal level.
- Improve quality of internal democracy and participation within labor federation.
- *In short: intensification of effort within existing federation and national union structures.*

Change to Win Reform Program

Main Leader: Andrew Stern, Service Employees International Union (SEIU)

- Use labor federation to *force* mergers of unions to create “mega-unions” matching industrial sectors.
- *Require* affiliated unions to increase money and effort on union organizing.
- Slash federation bureaucracy, and shift resources to new organizing.
- More experimentation with new kinds of unions and bargaining arrangements.
- Redirect money from political contributions to organizing and grassroots mobilization.
- Experiment with new political alliances, both to left and right (even with Republicans).
- Centralize federation level decision-making in largest unions (“mega-unions”).
- *In short: a vastly more centralized federation focused primarily on new organizing.*

Affiliated Unions, Change to Win Federation (approximately 5.4 million members in total)

Service Employees International Union (building services, health care, public employees)

International Brotherhood of Teamsters (truck driving, transportation, etc.)

United Brotherhood of Carpenters (construction)

United Farm Workers

Laborer’s International Union of North America (construction workers)

UNITE-HERE (textiles, hotel, restaurant employees)

United Food and Commercial Workers Unions (grocery store employees)

Note: Mainly unions from service sector or building trades, usually of AFL pedigree; composed of general unions that contradict larger strategy; very little member interest in withdrawal decision; no discernible results thus far.

Claims and predictions about union revival:

Selected book titles suggesting union revival: *Rising from the Ashes?*; *Rekindling the Movement*; *From the Ashes of the Old*; *The Transformation of U.S. Unions*; *Not Your Father's Union Movement*; *A New Labor Movement for a New Century*; *The Next Upsurge*.

John Sweeney, AFL-CIO President, 2002: *"We have become more focused on organizing. Unions have traditionally focused on service and bargaining. They tried to preserve the benefits that they had achieved in the past – not focused enough on organizing. A culture of organizing has developed. This required the national unions to educate their members. We needed to sensitize labor union people to the importance of organizing and politics. Unions are doing this. We are increasing the use of volunteer organizers. We have increased organizer training at the Federation's Organizing Institute. Financial support has grown. There are more multi-union campaigns. We have developed strategies to use in assessing campaigns and in doing them."*

Margaret Levi, APSA President, in *Perspective on Politics*, 2003: *"The American labor movement is being revitalized. Unions, once bulwarks of white, male dominance, have had to make room for people of color, women, and new immigrants. They have expanded to accommodate not just the craft and industrial sectors, but also the service sector, high- and low-skilled, private and public. Long dormant, the debate about union democracy is surfacing again. The deadening effects of federal structures on local actions is giving rise to a revival of central labor councils and regional mobilization. Successful organizing drives and strikes are becoming more commonplace. The American labor movement is becoming an active partner in a range of social movement coalitions and reclaiming its role in mobilizing voters on behalf of candidates and public policies."*

"The AFL-CIO has stemmed the decline in union density, but it has not raised the percentage of workers in unions."

Taylor Dark, unknown academic in Japan, in *Labor History*, 1999: *"...there is no reason to think that Sweeney will find the going any easier than his predecessors. Thus, although it is too early to determine whether Sweeney will succeed or fail, one thing is certain: the limits on his power, and the constraints on the federation itself, remain profound. However much he may try, Sweeney's efforts to turn the AFL-CIO into an agent of labor renewal may have only a marginal effect on the total amount of union organizing activity."*

One suspects that a truly effective strategy for increasing union density would require the construction of entirely new incentive systems in the national unions to replace those that now reward the servicing of the existing membership over new organizing. The elaboration of such new incentive systems, however, is beyond the capacity of Sweeney and his allies in their capacity as federation officials. Therefore, *it is entirely possible that the current federation president will find himself in a situation not unlike that of his predecessors: drawn towards political action – with its promise of beneficent and immediate results – over the far more difficult and elusive achievements of new organizing. In this manner, Sweeney may soon gain a new appreciation for the institutional limits that Meany, Kirkland, and Donahue had all confronted before him."*

VITAL SIGNS OF THE U.S. LABOR MOVEMENT: BEFORE AND AFTER 1995

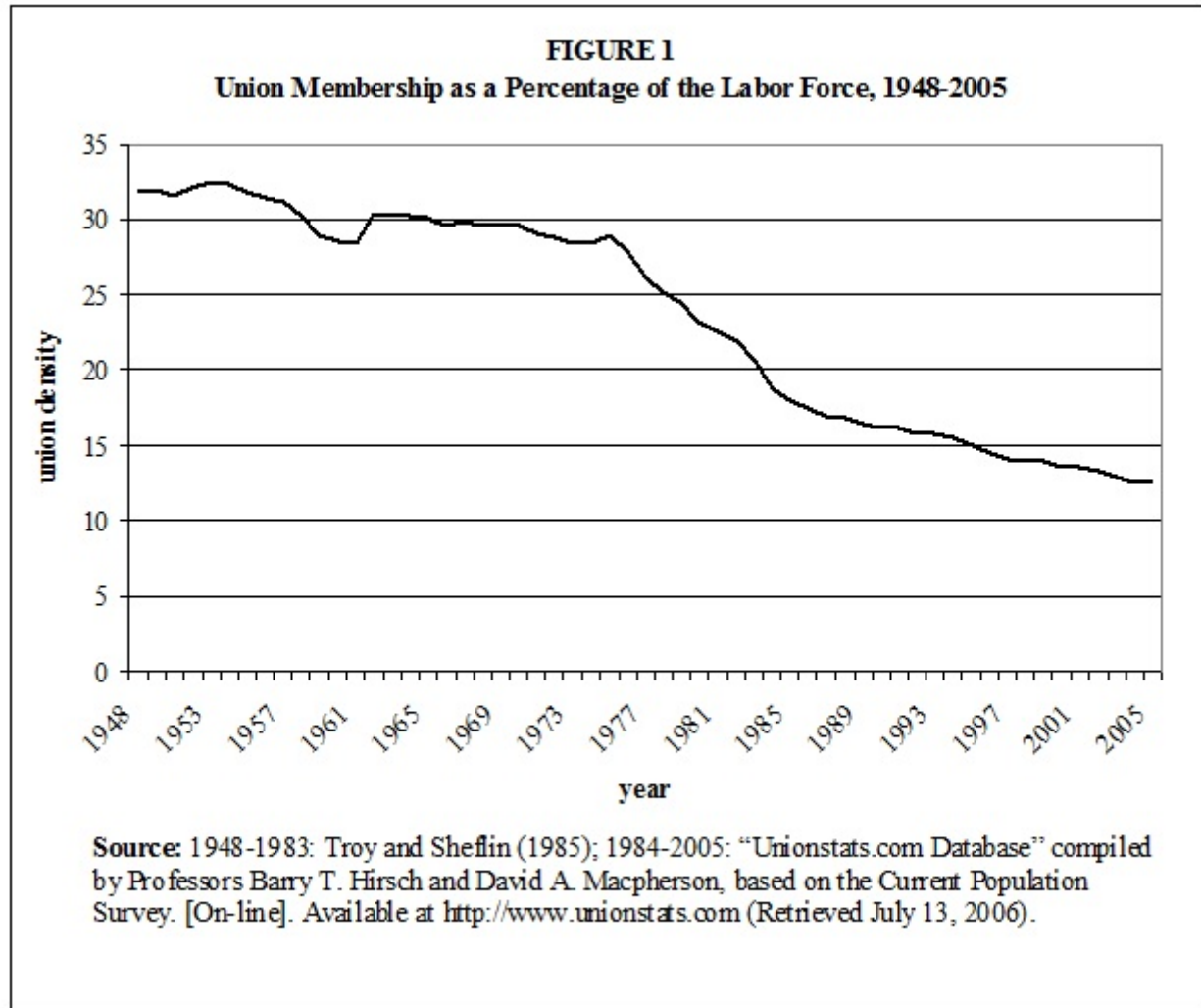


Table 1: Union Membership, 1985-2006

Year	Total (in thousands)	Percent of Employed Workers (Density)
1985	16,996.1	18.0
1986	16,975.2	17.5
1987	16,913.1	17.0
1988	17,001.7	16.8
1989	16,960.5	16.4
1990	16,739.8	16.1
1991	16,568.4	16.1
1992	16,390.3	15.8
1993	16,598.1	15.8
1994	16,740.3	15.5
1995	16,359.6	14.9 (Sweeney elected AFL-CIO President)
1996	16,269.4	14.5
1997	16,109.9	14.1
1998	16,211.4	13.9
1999	16,476.7	13.9
2000	16,258.2	13.5
2001	16,288.8	13.4
2002	15,978.7	13.2
2003	15,776.0	12.9
2004	15,471.6	12.5
2005	15,685.4	12.5 (Withdrawal of CTW unions)
2006	15,359.1	12.0

1985-1995: Membership loss of 636,500; -3.74% Density decline: -17%

1996-2006: Membership loss of 920,300; -5.65% Density decline: -17%

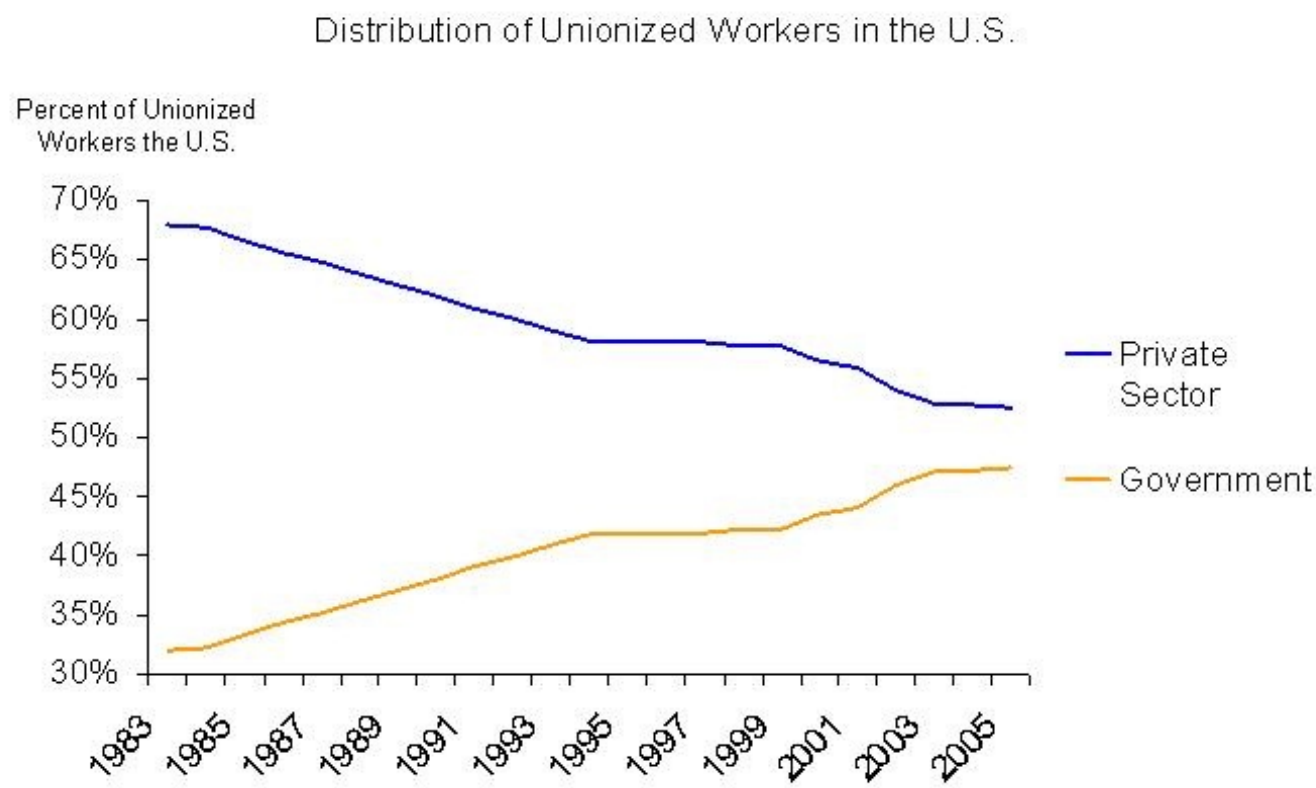
Source: “Unionstats.com Database” compiled by Professors Barry T. Hirsch and David A. Macpherson based on U.S. government figures. Available at: <http://www.unionstats.com>, accessed on March 30, 2007.

Table 2: Union Density, Private Sector and Public Sector, 1985-2006

Year	Private Sector		Public Sector	
	Total (in thousands)	Percent	Total (in thousands)	Percent
1985	11,253.0	14.3	5,743.1	35.7
1986	11,084.7	13.8	5,890.5	35.9
1987	10,857.3	13.2	6,055.7	35.9
1988	10,702.4	12.7	6,299.2	36.6
1989	10,536.2	12.3	6,424.2	36.7
1990	10,254.8	11.9	6,485.0	36.5
1991	9,936.5	12.9	6,632.0	36.9
1992	9,737.2	11.4	6,653.1	36.6
1993	9,580.3	11.1	7,017.8	37.7
1994	9,649.4	10.8	7,091.0	38.7
1995	9,432.1	10.3	6,927.4	37.7 (Sweeney elected)
1996	9,415.0	10.0	6,854.4	37.6
1997	9,363.3	9.7	6,746.7	37.2
1998	9,306.1	9.5	6,905.3	37.5
1999	9,418.6	9.4	7,058.1	37.3
2000	9,147.7	9.0	7,110.5	37.5
2001	9,141.3	9.0	7,147.5	37.4
2002	8,651.5	8.6	7,327.2	37.8
2003	8,451.8	8.2	7,324.1	37.2
2004	8,204.5	7.9	7,267.1	36.4
2005	8,255.0	7.8	7,430.4	36.5
2006	7,981.3	7.4	7,377.8	36.2
1985-1995: -1,820,900; -16% Density: -28% +1,184,300; +21% Density: +5.6%				
1996-2006: -1,433,700; -15% Density: -26% +523,400; +8% Density: -3.7%				

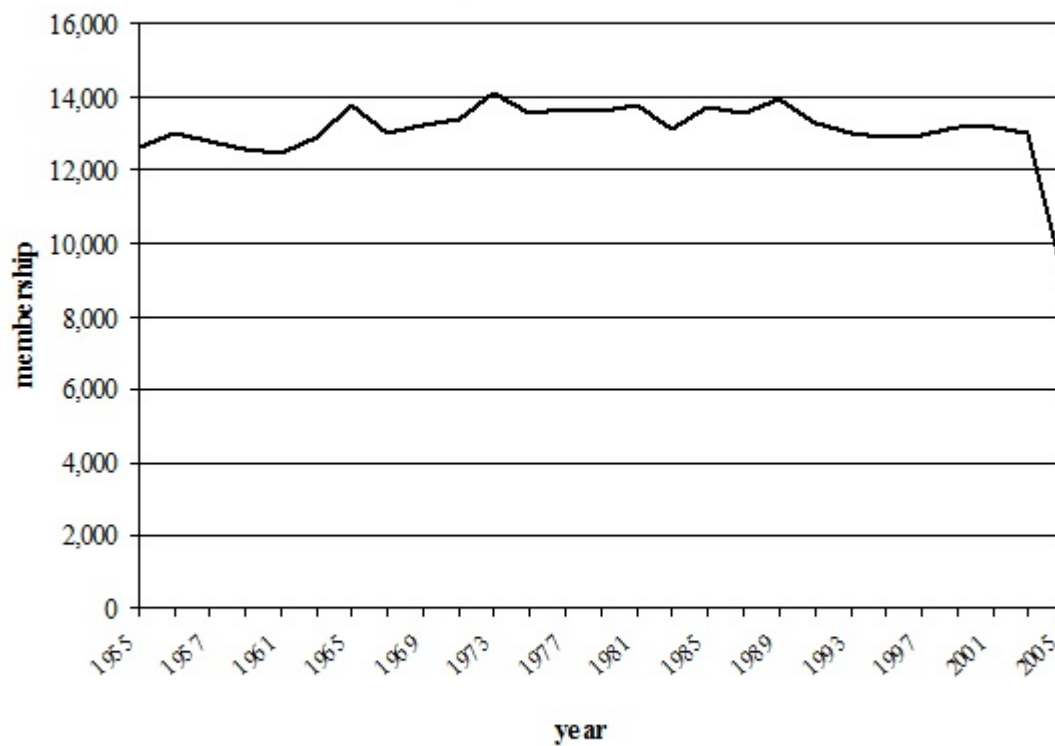
Source: “Unionstats.com Database” compiled by Professors Barry T. Hirsch and David A. Macpherson based on U.S. government figures. Available at: <http://www.unionstats.com>, accessed on March 31, 2007.

Figure 2: Percentage of Unionized Workers in Public Sector and Private Sector



Source: U.S. Department of Labor

FIGURE 2
Membership in AFL-CIO Affiliated Unions, 1955-2005
(in thousands of members)



Source: AFL-CIO Executive Council Report, 2005; AFL-CIO website: <http://www.aflcio.org>.
Note: Downturn in 2005 reflects withdrawal of Change to Win unions.

Table 3: AFL-CIO Membership, 1955-2006

Year	Membership
1955	12,622
1957	13,020
1959	12,779
1961	12,553
1963	12,496
1965	12,919
1967	13,781
1969	13,005
1971	13,177
1973	13,407
1975	14,070
1977	13,542
1979	13,621
1981	13,602
1983	13,758
1985	13,109
1987	12,702
1989	13,556
1991	13,933
1993	13,299
1995	13,007 (Sweeney elected AFL-CIO President)
1997	12,905
1999	12,952
2001	13,226
2005	12,975 (Withdrawal of CTW unions)
2006	8,500*

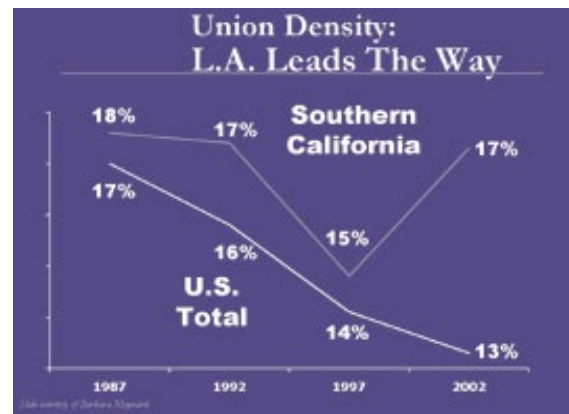
Sources: AFL-CIO Executive Council Report, 2005; AFL-CIO website: <http://www.aflcio.org>.

Note: No data available for 2003, due to move of AFL-CIO to a quadrennial reporting system.

*2006 figures are estimated, based on withdrawal of the Change to Win unions.

EXAGGERATED CLAIMS ABOUT UNION DENSITY IN LOS ANGELES AND LAS VEGAS

*Example of a bogus chart used to argue that
union revival is occurring in Los Angeles =>*



**Table 4: Union Density, Metropolitan Areas of Los Angeles/Long Beach
and Las Vegas, 1988-2004**

Year	Los Angeles Private	Los Angeles Public	Los Angeles Total	Las Vegas Private	Las Vegas Public	Las Vegas Total
1988	12.5	46.1	17.0	23.5	44.0	21.0
1989	13.4	47.6	18.1	20.8	47.1	23.5
1990	13.0	49.8	17.8	17.2	35.6	19.2
1991	12.5	49.4	17.5	18.0	40.6	21.4
1992	12.6	49.2	17.6	19.3	45.7	23.1
1993	11.7	50.3	17.4	18.0	45.4	21.1
1994	11.3	54.9	17.6	17.8	50.3	21.0
1995	9.1	53.3	14.5	18.2	54.2	21.7
(1995: Sweeney elected AFL-CIO President)						
1996	9.3	52.6	14.8	18.4	59.6	22.5
1997	9.5	45.9	14.3	18.3	45.2	21.3
1998	9.4	50.8	15.0	17.4	42.9	19.7
1999	9.7	51.8	15.3	19.4	49.2	22.7
2000	9.8	51.1	15.2	16.8	43.7	19.9
2001	9.0	50.7	15.1	16.4	42.8	19.0
2002	11.1	58.8	18.1	14.8	35.2	17.2
2003	9.5	56.3	15.6	14.0	33.1	15.9
2004	9.8	53.3	15.5	15.0	34.4	16.8
1988- 1995 change	-27%	+15.6%	-14.7%	-22.5%	+23%	+3.3%
1996- 2004 change	+5%	+1.3%	+4.7%	-18.4%	-42.4%	-25.3%

Source: “Unionstats.com Database” compiled by Professors Barry T. Hirsch and David A. Macpherson based on U.S. government figures. Available at: <http://www.unionstats.com>, accessed on March 31, 2007.

Table 5: Union Density, States of California and Nevada , 1985-2006

Year	California Private	California Public	California Total	Nevada Private	Nevada Public	Nevada Total
1985	15.8	44.2	20.4	19.5	32.8	21.6
1986	15.2	45.6	20.0	16.2	33.3	18.7
1987	14.5	45.2	19.4	14.5	34.5	18.3
1988	12.9	47.7	18.5	15.5	34.5	18.1
1989	13.3	57.8	18.9	14.9	40.0	18.2
1990	13.0	46.7	18.4	13.2	36.3	16.3
1991	12.5	47.0	18.3	14.2	39.6	18.3
1992	12.5	46.7	18.2	14.6	41.0	18.9
1993	11.6	48.3	18.0	14.3	37.1	17.7
1994	11.1	51.4	17.9	14.5	43.4	18.4
1995	11.0	51.3	17.7	16.5	41.4	20.2

1995: Sweeney elected AFL-CIO President

1996	10.4	50.3	16.5	15.8	51.2	20.4
1997	10.0	48.8	16.0	15.5	41.2	19.1
1998	9.8	50.0	16.1	14.1	37.1	17.0
1999	10.2	50.4	16.6	16.0	42.1	19.5
2000	9.7	50.3	16.0	13.8	39.6	17.1
2001	9.7	51.7	16.4	13.6	38.0	16.7
2002	10.2	55.8	17.8	12.2	33.9	15.2
2003	9.6	53.4	16.8	11.9	32.1	14.4
2004	9.4	52.9	16.5	10.0	31.7	12.5
2005	9.7	53.8	16.5	12.0	28.2	13.8
2006	9.0	52.6	15.7	12.5	32.9	14.8

1985- 1995 change	-30.9%	+16.1%	-13.2%	-15.4%	+26.2%	-6.5%
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1996- 2006 change	-13.5%	+4.6%	-6.6%	-20.9%	-35.7%	-27.5%
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Source: “Unionstats.com Database” compiled by Professors Barry T. Hirsch and David A. Macpherson based on U.S. government figures. Available at: <http://www.unionstats.com>, accessed on March 30, 2007.

Table 6: Work Stoppages Involving 1,000 or More Workers, 1982-2006

Year	Number of Stoppages	Workers Involved (thousands)	Days Idle (thousands)	Percent of Estimated Working Time	
1982	96	656	9,061	.04	
1983	81	909	17,461	.08	
1984	62	376	8,499	.04	
1985	54	324	7,079	.03	
1986	69	533	11,861	.05	
1987	46	174	4,481	.02	
1988	40	118	4,381	.02	
1989	51	452	16,996	.07	
1990	44	185	5,926	.02	
1991	40	392	4,584	.02	
1992	35	364	3,989	.01	
1993	35	182	3,981	.01	
1994	45	322	5,020	.02	
1995	31	192	5,771	.02	(Sweeney elected)
1996	37	273	4,889	.02	
1997	29	339	4,497	.01	
1998	34	387	5,116	.02	
1999	17	731	1,996	.01	
2000	39	394	20,419	.06	
2001	29	99	1,151	<.005	
2002	19	46	660	<.005	
2003	14	129	4,091	.01	
2004	17	171	3,344	.01	
2005	22	100	1,736	.01	
2006	20	70	2,688	.01	

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics. Web site: <http://www.bls.gov>. Accessed March 30, 2007.

Table 7: Union Households as Percentage of Voters in Congressional and Presidential Elections, 1992-2000, Based on CPS (Current Population Survey) and NES (National Election Study) Data

	CPS	NES	Average	Union Density	Difference between union density and average turnout
1990	21	19	20	16.1	+3.9
1992	20	18	19	15.8	+3.2
1994	NA	21	21	15.5	+5.5

(1995: Sweeney elected AFL-CIO President)

1996	20	21	20.5	14.5	+6.0
1998	19	21	20	13.9	+6.1
2000	19	17	18	13.5	+4.5

Averages

1990-1992	20.5	18.5	19.5	15.9	+3.5
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1998-2000	19	19.5	19	13.7	+5.3
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Source: Richard Freeman, “What do Unions do . . . to Voting?” *NBER Working Paper*, no. w9992, September 2003.

NA: No estimate is possible because between June and December 1994 sample redesigns by the Census led to a scrambling of the household identification number.

Note: *New York Times* exit poll in **2004** showed **24%** of electorate from union households.

Table 8: Percentage of Person Who Vote and Differences in Percentage Voting, by Union Status, 1990-2000

Year	All Persons in Union Household	All Persons in Nonunion Household	Union Difference
1990	50.7	48.1	+2.6
1992	69.4	65.5	+3.9
1994	NA	NA	NA

(1995: Sweeney elected AFL-CIO President)

1996	62.9	56.6	+6.3
1998	50.9	44.0	+6.9
2000	64.8	57.8	+7.0

Source: CPS Voter Supplement Files as recorded in Richard Freeman, “What do Unions do . . . to Voting?” *NBER Working Paper*, no. w9992, September 2003. NA: No estimate is possible because between June and December 1994 sample redesigns by the Census led to a scrambling of the household identification number.

Table 9: Democratic Percentage of Union Household Members and Non-Union Voters in Presidential Elections, 1972-2000

Year	Union	Non-union	Difference
1972	47	36	11
1976	59	50	9
1980	48	41	7
1984	53	40	13
1988	57	45	13
1992	55	43	12

(1995: Sweeney elected AFL-CIO President)

1996	59	49	10
2000	59	48	11
2004	59	48	11

Averages

1988 and 1992	56	44	12.5
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1996 and 2000	59	48.5	10.5
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Source: *New York Times* and *Voter News Service* exit polls.

Table 10: Percentage of Union and Nonunion Household Voters Who Tried to Influence the Vote of Others

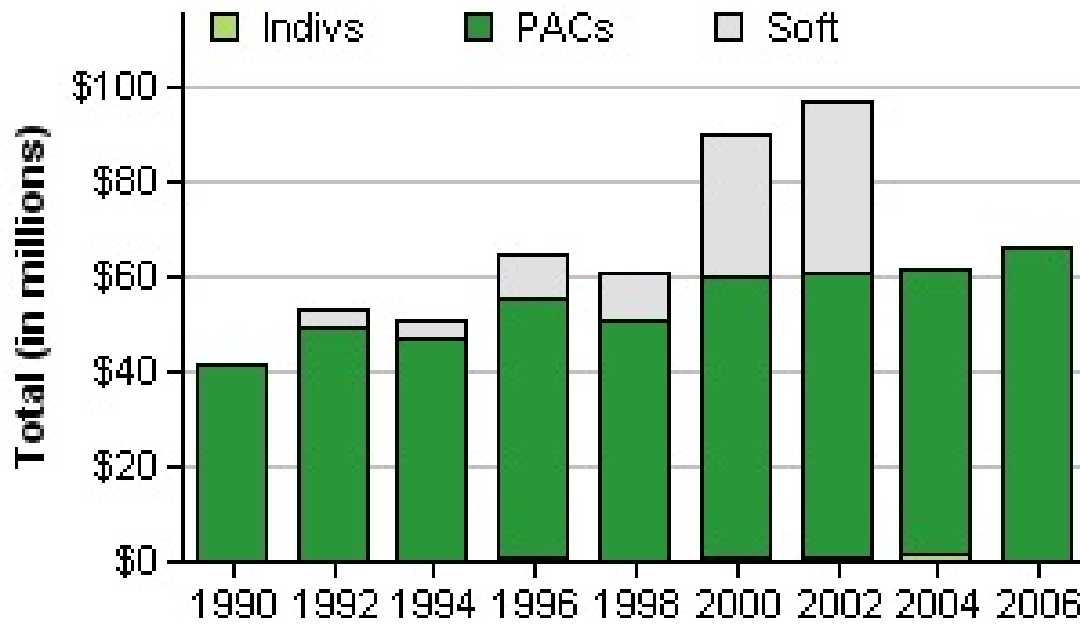
Year	Union Household	Nonunion Household	Difference
1988	31.3%	28.5%	+2.8
1990	15.9%	17.6%	-1.7
1992	39.9%	36.8%	+3.1
1994	23.4%	21.6%	+1.8

(Sweeney elected AFL-CIO leader)

1996	32.9%	26.3%	+6.6
1998	24.9%	18.1%	+6.8
2000	42.6%	32.7%	+9.9
2002	33.9%	26.7%	+7.2

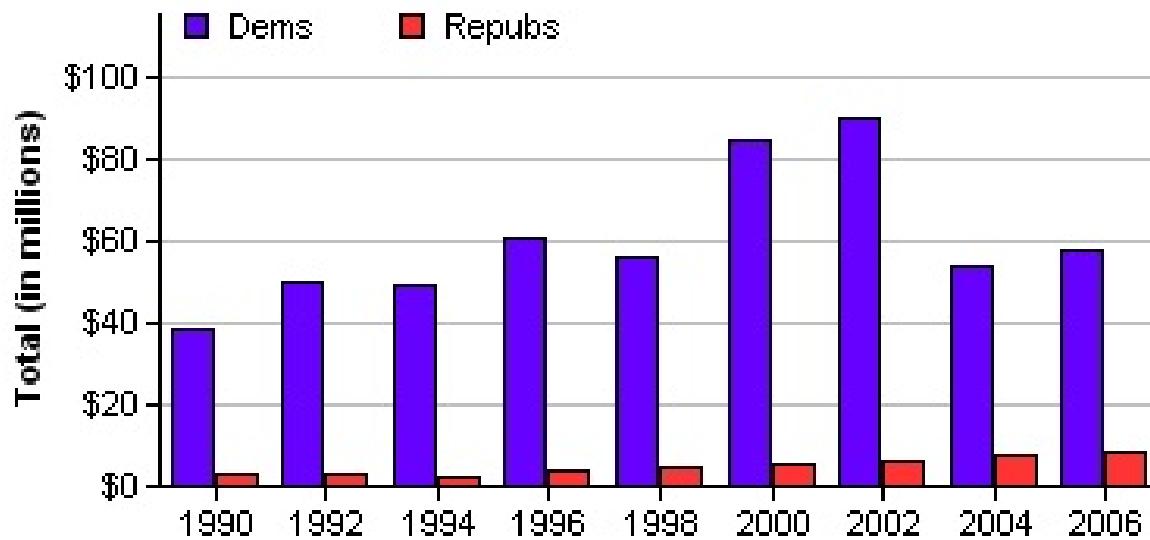
Source: American National Election Studies

Figure 3: Union Political Donations in National Elections



Source: Center for Responsive Politics
(www.opensecrets.org).

Figure 4: Distribution of Union Political Donations in National Elections



Source: Center for Responsive Politics (www.opensecrets.org).

Table 12: Distribution of Union Contributions and Expenditures in Competitive Races

	KIRKLAND (1988-1994)	SWEENEY (1996-2002)
HOUSE CHALLENGERS		
Competitive	66%	81%
Uncompetitive	34%	19%
Total \$ (in thousands)	\$20,098	\$29,471
SENATE CHALLENGERS		
Competitive	77%	83%
Uncompetitive	23%	17%
Total \$ (in thousands)	\$10,734	\$7,507

Source: Peter Francia, *The Future of Organized Labor in American Politics* (Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 38.


LEGISLATIVE AGENDA-SETTING

Note: Bill endorsed by *Democratic Leadership Council*.

Main Features of *Employee Free Choice Act*

- Requires National Labor Relations Board to accept the “card-check” method to certify a collective bargaining representative in a workplace.
- Majority of employees must sign a card (see below) for certification (no secret ballot).
- Requires parties who cannot agree upon a first contract within 90 days to submit to supervised mediation by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service.
- After 120 days without a contract, the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service will provide binding arbitration (valid for two years).
- *Requires* NLRB to seek a federal court injunction against an employer whenever there is reasonable cause to believe that employees have been discharged for union activity, or employers have interfered with employee rights during an organizing drive.
- Authorizes courts to grant temporary restraining orders or other appropriate injunctive relief.
- Increases fines on employers for illegal discharges of employees.
- Allows civil fines of up to \$20,000 per violation against employers violating employees’ rights during an organizing campaign.

Sample Union Authorization Card

 **AUTHORIZATION FOR REPRESENTATION**

I authorize a local union of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, to represent me in collective bargaining with my employer.

Name
(Please Print)

Address Phone

City State Zip


S.S. #

Employer

Department Shift: 1st ☐ 2nd ☐ 3rd ☐

Job Classification

Date Signature

FORM 1-11 

HISTORICAL COMPARISON OF VOTING ON LABOR LAW BILLS

Employee Free Choice Act, 2007 (failed)

House (March 1, 2007)

Democrats: **228 yes (99%), 2 no**
Republicans: 13 yes, 183 no
Total: 241 yes, 185 no

Senate (June 26, 2007 cloture vote)

Democrats: **48 yes (100%), 0 no**
Independents: 2 yes
Republicans: 1 yes, 48 no
Total: 51 yes, 48 no

Workplace Fairness Act (Striker Replacement Bill), 1993 (failed)

House

Democrats: **221 yes (87%), 33 no**
Independents: 1 yes
Republicans: 17 yes, 157 no
Total: 239 yes, 190 no

Senate (cloture vote)

Democrats: **50 yes (89%), 6 no**
Republicans: 3 yes, 40 no
Total: 53 yes, 46 no

Labor Law Reform Act, 1977-1978 (failed)

House

Democrats: **221 yes (79%), 59 no**
Republicans: 31 yes, 104 no
Total: 252 yes, 163 no

Senate (1978 cloture vote)

Democrats: **44 yes (72%), 17 no**
Republicans: 14 yes, 22 no
Total: 58 yes, 39 no

Repeal of Section 14(b) of Taft-Hartley Act, 1965-1966 (failed)

House

Democrats: **200 yes (70%), 86 no**
Republicans: 21 yes, 117 no
Total: 221 yes, 203 no

Senate (1966 cloture vote)

Democrats: **45 yes (67%), 22 no**
Republicans: 6 yes, 26 no
Total: 51 yes, 48 no

Repeal of Taft-Hartley Act, 1949 (failed)

House

Democrats: **193 yes (75%), 62 no**
Republicans: 18 yes, 147 no
Total: 211 yes, 209 no

Senate

Democrats: **29 yes (56%), 23 no**
Republicans: 12 yes, 30 no
Total: 43 yes, 53 no

Initial Passage of Taft-Hartley Act, 1947 (passed over labor opposition)

House

Democrats: **93 yes, 84 no (47%)**
Republicans: 215 yes, 22 no
Total: 308 yes, 96 no

Senate

Democrats: **21 yes, 21 no (50%)**
Republicans: 47 yes, 3no
Total: 68 yes, 24 no

Percentage of House Democrats for Labor

1947: 47%
1949: 75%
1965: 70%
1977: 79%
1993: 87%
2007: 99%

Note: 44 members of *Blue Dog Caucus* in 2007.

Percentage of Senate Democrats for Labor

1947: 50%
1949: 56%
1966: 67%
1978: 72%
1993: 89%
2007: 100%

Note: Percentages of Democrats *voting*, not entire caucus.

CONCLUSION: IS LABOR ON THE CUSP OF THE REALIZATION OF A DECADES-LONG STRATEGY OF POLITICAL REALIGNMENT?

Long-term political strategy of labor union leadership:

Andrew Biemiller, AFL-CIO's Director of Legislation, 1965: "The 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voting Rights bill will greatly increase the voting strength of Negroes in some of the previously uncontested, conservative districts in the South, bringing new forces into play in this long dormant area."

"We would have no objection to seeing a strong Republican party appear in the South. It might turn Southern Democrats into a more liberal group."

Walter Reuther, United Auto Workers President, 1960: "The American labor movement is essentially trying to work within the two-party structure, *but to bring about a basic realignment so that the two parties really stand for distinct points of view.*"