

## Evangelical Faith at Work: Resistance as Obedience<sup>1</sup>

Ken Estey

Brooklyn College, City University of New York

### ABSTRACT

Protestant Christian evangelical practice and theology provides resources for resistance to labor exploitation. Black evangelical union members in Moncure, North Carolina demonstrate through a nine month strike against their plywood plant how resistance to unfair labor practices are also expressions of evangelical adherence to the authority of the Bible and faithful commitment to the church. Their labor ethic includes union membership and church membership to challenge overwork and attacks on labor unions.

### INTRODUCTION

Higher health care costs, longer work days, weekend work, fewer holidays, weakened seniority protections, a doubling of mandatory overtime from ten to twenty hours. Such was the last and best offer for contract renewal from the Atlas Holdings negotiating team to Woodworkers Local Lodge 369 of Moncure Plywood in the spring of 2008. Atlas Holdings LLC, a firm from Greenwich, Connecticut, purchased Moncure Plywood from the Weyerhaeuser Company in 2004 and they were determined to secure a handsome return on investment by saving money on labor and production in this latest contract round. Despite the uncertainty of going on strike, the union members knew one thing for sure based on these contract demands: this private equity holding company intended to eliminate union representation.

Months before the economies of the United States and Europe nearly toppled headlong into a depression rivaling the one in the 1930s, Local 369 of Moncure Plywood took a dive into the unknown on July 19, 2008. For the first time in the forty year history of the local, they voted to go on strike. An angry hive of workers flew out of the plant and lit on a thin stretch of gravel between Corinth Road and the railroad tracks in front of the factory. Set between trains and trucks, the workers began a three shift, seven day picket pacing back and forth, holding firm through the seasons until April of 2009. Out of approximately

sixty work stoppages in the prior quarter century in North Carolina, this was the fifth longest.<sup>2</sup>

This small woodworkers local attracted national attention, emerging from anonymity inside a gigantic machinist and aerospace union. The odds were long in this right-to-work state that also featured the nation's lowest union membership rate, then a daunting 3.5%.<sup>3</sup> Before the strike, 160 or around 80% of its two hundred workers belonged to the union. For North Carolina as a whole in 2008, the unionization rate within workplaces that include a union was approximately 70%. Thus, Moncure Plywood was slightly ahead of the state average. But when the picket line formed, the union dropped to 120 members as forty workers elected to cross the picket line and thus leave the union. A knowledgeable workforce remained behind to train the flood of replacement workers pining for work. In unreciprocated solidarity, Local 369 went on strike for everyone, including almost half the workforce that continued work inside the plant.

As a former evangelical, this strike intrigued me. My father worked in a factory and when he became born-again, he would go to his truck at lunchtime to read the Bible and pray. For him, work was a result of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden. Problems in the workplace had their source in individual sinfulness. The plant in which he toiled did not have a union. When work became difficult because of management or even his co-workers, he turned inward to ponder issues arising there. For two summers between college years, I joined my father to labor at the same factory. Those experiences prompted my interest in the relationship between faith and work. Thus, when I heard about a strike that involved a woodworkers local with an evangelical leadership and evangelical rank and file membership, I was eager to investigate this conflict. They handled their workplace problems in a different way because they had a union and chose to use its protections. Now, as a faculty member at Brooklyn College, I teach in a political science department though my degree is in theology. My professional responsibilities include teaching across two disciplines – politics and religion. I also belong to the Professional Staff Congress (AFT Local 2334) at the City University of New York. While my doctoral studies focused on the relationship of theological ethics and labor history, interviewing these workers in North Carolina was a new experience. Their strike and the financial crises that they faced were very tangible and pressing. The strike fund provided only \$150 per week for each worker along with assistance, on occasion, to meet other kinds of financial exigencies. As a result of talking to the workers, I discovered how evangelical theology and commitment to Biblical teaching supported their labor activism in ways that I had not imagined possible as a young person in a white, working class setting in rural New Hampshire. The question that has emerged for me in this labor story has been this: Can one be an evangelical but also be committed to a reciprocating nexus of practice and belief that supports laboring people? The theology of many of the union members that I interviewed at Moncure Plywood is classically evangelical. But the expression of their theological commitments in the context of this collective struggle over their livelihoods is especially creative and invigorating. They did not merely apply their theology to the crisis at hand. Their dedication to their respective churches, not to mention the years—often decades—spent in various phases of plywood manufacturing, set the context for creative Biblical and theological responses that crystallized on the factory floor and on the picket line from the summer of 2008 to the spring of 2009 and afterwards. Their theology would be recognizable to an evangelical anywhere in the abstract. But their framework for discussing the Bible, their beliefs, and their faith practices were distinctive. It was infused with the experience of producing plywood with

friends, family members and fellow church members. This was a tight knit group of workers who, on the basis of multiple accounts, actually enjoyed coming to work because of the camaraderie experienced there. Most of the workers at Moncure Plywood, at that time, were African American. Their theology was also shaped by the experience of working in a white-owned plant as well as being managed by a newly hired white management team brought in from Texas sometime in 2007 or 2008.

### ***METHODOLOGICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT EVANGELICAL DEFINITION AND IDENTITY***

Evangelicalism has been notoriously difficult to define – even among evangelicals! The association of evangelicalism with the Republican Party and, generally, national polling that separates white evangelicals from everyone else exacerbates confusion about definition and categorization. One Gallup report noted that “[T]here is no universally agreed-upon definition of exactly who is and who is not an ‘evangelical,’ but the label typically refers to individuals who are highly religious and identify with a non-Catholic Christian (Protestant) faith.”<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere in Gallup, a section on religion features a question with this built-in definition: “Would you describe yourself as a ‘born-again’ or evangelical Christian?”<sup>5</sup> This definition leans toward a religious experience rather than a set of beliefs or doctrines. In 2016, this poll showed that 41% of adults responded as born-again or evangelical Christian.

The Pew Research Center for Religion & Public Life conducted their second U.S. Religious Landscape survey in 2014. In a report based on the survey entitled “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” they also align “born-again” with evangelical. In an appendix on the classification of Protestant denominations, the report divides Protestantism into three major traditions – evangelical, mainline and historically black Protestantism.<sup>6</sup> Survey respondents were categorized according to the “specific denomination with which they identify.” For instance, all members of the Southern Baptist Convention are deemed to be evangelical, all American Baptist USA members are classified as mainline Protestant, and all those who belong to the National Baptist Convention are placed in the historically black Protestant tradition. If respondents were unclear about their precise denominational affiliation, then they “were placed into one of the three Protestant traditions based on their race and/or their response to a question that asked if they would describe themselves as a ‘born-again or evangelical Christian.’”<sup>7</sup> According to this method, the report places 25.4% of U.S. adults within evangelical denominations. Evangelical denominations, according to the report, share religious beliefs such as the importance of personally accepting Jesus Christ as the only way to be saved. They also emphasize the practice of bringing other people to the faith. Another aspect of an evangelical denomination has to do with “origins” which, according to the report, includes “separatist movements against established religious institutions.”<sup>8</sup> The matter of origins is very important because the struggles between the so-called “fundamentalists” and “modernists” in the early part of the twentieth century did lead to enduring denominational fissures. It also led to questioning among some fundamentalists themselves of whether a middle ground might exist between the warring factions in Protestantism, fighting as they did over questions about the significance of the scientific method and questions about the faith in light of Biblical criticism and evolution. The founding of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in 1942 provided an institutional home for believers, denominations, and organizations

who did not wish to completely withdraw from other believers or from the world at large as many other fundamentalists still wished to do. The label “evangelical” found an organizational home, so to speak, in the NAE and it has functioned ever since to situate the presence of evangelicals in American life. Still, the emergence of evangelicalism (organized as a national body) occurred as a result of highly publicized theological battles conducted in large part by white theologians and pastors.

Earlier in November 2015, drawing upon this history of debate around defining evangelicalism, the NAE and LifeWay Research concluded in a joint study that evangelicals are to be defined by what they believe. As Leith Anderson, the NAE president, noted in a press release accompanying the release of the report: “Evangelicals are people of faith and should be defined by their beliefs, not by their politics or race.”<sup>9</sup> The joint study lists four statements with which people must strongly agree in order to be categorized as evangelical.

- The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe.
- It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.
- Jesus Christ’s death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin.
- Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God’s free gift of eternal salvation.<sup>10</sup>

These four statements nearly match David Bebbington’s oft-cited four-fold formulation that summarizes the doctrinal and behavioral characteristics of an evangelical outlook. The four points consist of conversionism (born-again experience), activism (missionary and social reform work), Biblicism (the Bible as ultimate authority) and crucicentrism (emphasis on Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the cross to redeem humanity).<sup>11</sup>

The ready connection between “white” and “evangelical” is a result of a long history and it is certainly related to the toleration and even encouragement within Christianity of white supremacy and racial apartheid. Black evangelicals have long been aware of the ways that economic, political and social power has been unequally meted out. Forming their own churches as central to their own communities, it was not as if they somehow also formed theologies wholly alien to orthodox Christianity. If the NAE/LifeWay Research report emphasizing evangelical belief is any guide, black evangelicals are numerous. And one attempt to shift public perceptions on evangelicals occurred a month before the 2016 presidential election. Change.org published “A Declaration by American Evangelicals Concerning Donald Trump” by Evangelical Leaders which argued that a “significant mistake in American politics is the media’s continued identification of ‘evangelical’ with mostly white, politically conservative, older men. We are not those evangelicals. ... We are Americans of African and European descent, Latino/a, Asian American, and Native American. We are women and men, as well as younger and older evangelical Christians. We come from a wide range of denominations, churches, and political orientations.”<sup>12</sup>

## ***RESISTANCE AS OBEDIENCE: THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL JUSTIFICATIONS FOR THE***

## **STRIKE**

The interviews to follow demonstrate the ways that evangelical perspectives on the Bible and theology may also encompass practices of resistance as examples of obedience. These practices include but go beyond those found in various “faith at work” movements by including faith in God and solidaristic faith in each other. Both are essential to the decision to fight back against a multinational corporation. Resistance becomes a form of obedience and is enveloped in other practices familiar to evangelicals and non-evangelicals alike, such as a devotional life shaped by prayer, singing, and Bible study. Nonetheless, even in a workplace that was obviously hostile to their interests, many of the Moncure Plywood workers discussed the tension they felt while resisting. They were caught between the imperative to obey authority as a hallmark of the Christian life and the need to deal with their bosses’ disobedience to Christ’s commands to obey the law and treat people with dignity and respect. The six union members featured below include three members from the leadership of Local 369 and three other long-time workers also from Local 369. They belong to six different churches, including two Baptist churches and four churches from various Pentecostal and Holiness traditions. Two churches are in Moncure and the other four are located ten to thirty miles from the plant. While an extended discussion of the similarities and differences between these churches and their denominations is beyond the scope of this article, the members found common ground through working together and a place of unity through the struggle on the picket line. Overall, the interviewees point toward a distinctive way to be evangelical because they are union members. They also show a different way to be a union member because they are evangelicals. They carve out a niche in both places as they are held accountable by their communities while also sorting out their commitments in light of the corporation’s attempt to crush the union and take away their jobs. The workers’ accounts include reflections on work at Moncure Plywood before the strike, recollections from the strike itself, and a review of work conditions in the plant once the strike was over.

## **END OF STRIKE, BEGINNING OF NEW STRUGGLE**

The strike ended on March 30, 2009 when the members voted for the contract, but as the workers’ stories will demonstrate below, the battle shifted to inside the plywood plant. The union initially considered the end of the strike a victory because the new contract limited mandatory overtime to ten hours, secured the threatened seniority rights, and held employee insurance costs down. But as long-time worker Charles Raines told a reporter from the Charlotte News & Observer: “Maybe it’s not the victory people hoped for, but it’s a victory.”<sup>13</sup> Only twenty-five of the 110 striking workers gained back their jobs per the agreement between the union and the company. The other eighty-five workers had to wait or continue with their temporary or part-time jobs they took while on strike. Or they could apply for unemployment compensation since they became instantly “laid off” once the contract was approved.

The union’s main concern, after the strike, encompassed the new problem of getting everyone back in the plant and working at their pre-strike jobs—a reminder that a strike is always just half the story. The

post-strike strategy in any labor dispute is as important as the strike itself. The most immediate issue was a disagreement in the interpretation of the newly signed contract renewal. Only twenty-five workers were allowed back into the plant after the contract was signed as the company alleged that financial difficulties prevented immediate recall of all the workers who went on strike. Over the next few months, according to seniority, the company slowly called in the other workers three to five employees at a time. Once past the gate, they were ordered to take job posts they never had before or ones they performed long ago when they had less seniority. Meanwhile, replacement workers continued to work in the plant.

***LEWIS CAMERON: FAITHFUL STAND AGAINST CONCESSIONARY DEMANDS – ON STRIKE!***

“We had to make a stand and that stand was the strike!” Lewis Cameron, the president of Local 369, emphasized this point when I asked about the meaning of his words quoted in a February 2009 Labor Notes interview. He said “we are standing on the word of God that we can see this through, and we are gratefully receiving support from all over the state.”<sup>14</sup> Cameron’s declaration called to mind a hymn sung regularly in evangelical churches:

Standing on the promises of Christ my King,  
Through eternal ages let His praises ring,  
Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing,  
Standing on the promises of God.

Standing, standing,  
Standing on the promises of God my Savior;  
Standing, standing,  
I’m standing on the promises of God.<sup>15</sup>

This standard of evangelical Protestant hymnology is a paean to classical evangelical doctrine that believers can rely on God’s promise that Christ’s death on the cross leads to salvation, come what may. But on the strike line, standing on God’s word was also about prevailing in the struggle to beat back Atlas Holdings and its concessionary demands. Control over the pace and quality of one’s work was the central shop floor challenge. Biblical and Christian teaching informed the struggle for many members of Local 369 at Moncure Plywood to secure self-determination.

Over the din of the breakfast crowd at Brass Kettle Family Restaurant in nearby Sanford two months after the strike, Lewis Cameron agreed to recount the story of Local 369.<sup>16</sup> His wire rimmed glasses, moustache, and measured words had a professorial air that suggested analyst, not agitator. Employed at Moncure Plywood for thirty six years, Cameron became the face for a public struggle for workers who had punched their timecards in anonymity for decades. Building seniority year by year, he became a shop

steward in 1978, worked his way up to chief shop steward, then vice president, and finally president of the local in 1985. The leadership of Local 369 has been a vindication for him as he did not attend college just after high school as planned. According to Cameron, he asked God why he was in this plywood job, one that seemed not to have any future in it. God answered that he had the job to watch over the people in the plant. “It wasn’t my intention to be the union president, and it wasn’t my intention to be a leader, but that was what He ordained me to do, so that’s what I have to do, it’s not because I want to, it’s because that’s what I do...”<sup>17</sup> One can be ordained a pastor or a union local president. If called, one answers.

The dirt, dust and demands of plywood manufacture can be washed off. But true renewal for many at Moncure arrives on Sunday with the solace of song and spirit-filled worship rather than the pounding press of plywood production the other five or six days. The company had other priorities—rather than a maximum fifty hour work week, they wanted a contract provision to keep workers in the plant for up to sixty hours when necessary. This would mean packing sixty hours into six days, in whatever combination, to preserve one’s ability to have Sundays off—not to mention issues around coordinating schedules and simply holding up, physically, under the stress. But when a machine breaks down and workers are sent home early, production goals must be met by expanding the hours of the following workday(s) or pushing work further and further into the weekend. No matter what, realistically, a sixty hour work week would inevitably involve punching the time clock on a Sunday. Cameron said that such a demand was taking God’s people and controlling them for the company’s benefit without giving anything back. Furthermore, the company would be acting against God’s will because even God rested after six days of work. To demand anything more from his creation would be inhumane. Furthermore, as Cameron noted, keeping the Sabbath holy is impossible if you are working every Sunday. A member of Covenant Christian Church in Southern Pines since 1976, regular church attendance is central to his life. It is also a family matter – his brother is the bishop in the church and a cousin is the pastor. The conflict over mandatory twenty hours overtime and thus inevitably work on Sunday was the major motivation to go on strike. But the workers at Moncure Plywood had to balance this onerous work schedule with another important doctrine. Evangelicals have a vigorous sense of God’s authority in their own lives, personally and collectively. To challenge one’s boss or the management structure is daunting given Paul’s argument in Romans 13:1 that there is “no authority except that which God has established” (NIV). The decision to go on strike is a challenge to this authority.

Surrounded by ministers at work and at home, and guided by his own faith, for Cameron, God’s presence extends without interruption from church to the workplace. Jesus created the first union, as Cameron describes it, when he sent his disciples two-by-two to get the word of God out, a demonstration of the strength of numbers in the work of evangelism. Local 369 also has the mission of getting the word of God to others by taking care of God’s people who couldn’t take care of themselves, speaking up for them when they couldn’t speak and standing for them when they couldn’t stand. Union leaders can find Biblical resources for thinking about their particular task in the Old Testament. Moses, in the book of Genesis, exhibited leadership insofar as he took the God-ordained job of freeing the people of Israel from slavery—the ultimate labor problem. Moses had the calling to free his people and Cameron had a particular call in his own union. “I’m not equating myself with Moses but it is virtually the same thing. He had to

free those people from slave drivers—these slave owners, the Egyptians, even though he was unable to go to the Promised Land.”<sup>18</sup>

Cameron believed that God would not leave or forsake the workers on the picket line – especially with all the support Local 369 gained from local churches, preachers and church folk. Since it was God’s will that they have work at Moncure Plywood over those decades, God wouldn’t just change his mind and let people fall down during the strike. As God provided for people on the line and made sure they had at least some of the things they needed, then it had to be God’s will that they were on the picket line. As Cameron emphasized, “We just have to stand on that and that stand was the strike!”<sup>19</sup>

### ***WILLIAM HARRINGTON: WORK AS STEWARDSHIP AND SORROW***

Rev. William Harrington has been the pastor at Lambert Chapel Baptist Church in Siler City, thirty miles from Moncure Plywood, since 1981. One of the thirteen original founding churches of the Deep River Missionary Baptist Association in 1916, the association has its roots in an emphasis on the missionary work of saving souls for Christ.<sup>20</sup> On Sunday mornings, after a full week at the plant, he begins his “day off “ at five a.m. to get ready for church, sometimes returning home at nine in the evening—morning, day, and night attending to church services and all the tasks typical for a minister of this congregation of a hundred regular attendees. Sundays are followed by the midweek Wednesday service. Regular deliberations with the deacons and with the trustees are customary and the midnight phone call announcing a parishioner’s death or a family emergency must be taken. “I am just available for whatever they need me.”<sup>21</sup>

Holding on with two full-time jobs, Harrington knows what work is. At the plant, where he has been laboring since 1973, he tends the Curtain Coater. Spreading glue and spreading the gospel, Harrington is stretched thin holding it all together. In the midst of his plywood work and his ministry, he was also a trustee for Local 369, supervising the local’s finances and property.

During the strike, he worked closely with the strike finance committee to distribute funds to members and tended to various financial problems among the membership. He bought kerosene for the heaters and hauled wood for the barrel fires. He is a woodworker to the core—working with wood even on the line,

Harrington is a graduate of nearby Shaw University Divinity School in Raleigh. He ponders questions posed to him like a philosopher. The thoughtful and pause-filled character of his speech converts into an effortless cascade of words telling the whole of salvation history in one sermon.<sup>22</sup> In his characteristically selfless manner, he never discussed the strike in his sermons over that nine month period on the line but preached about the proper treatment of one’s neighbor and the development of personal character. He argues that work is a form of stewardship and that one’s conduct on the job must be characterized by honesty. But, in all cases, one does what is necessary for survival by taking lessons from ants and their example of hard work. On Accountability Day, everyone will give an account of one’s deeds. But in the meantime work happens only by the sweat of one’s brow, the result of sin.<sup>23</sup>

Now, Adam’s job was to tend the garden but he had no sorrow with it. So we work now, but



our work has sorrow mixed with it. We enjoy a lot of it, but it is not 100% joyful. There are moments when we wish we never saw [work]. There are moments when we procrastinate. We know we need to be doing something, so we say: I'm just not up to it. So when [Adam] sinned, he brought the curse with it...<sup>24</sup>

As for workers who labor without sweating, white collar workers, or owners of corporations, Harrington says that they also experience the curse connected with work. Greed is a drive associated with lacking self-fulfillment and satisfaction. Harrington paraphrased Augustine by noting that no one is satisfied until one turns to God—without God, one is empty and seeks to fill what only God can fulfill. Harrington finds a useful illustration in the story in I Kings 21 about the idol-worshipping king of Israel and his wife. King Ahab wanted Naboth's vineyard, located next to his palace, as a vegetable garden. Naboth did not want to sell or exchange his vineyard with Ahab because it was ancestral land. Jezebel, Ahab's wife, devised an elaborate plan to have Naboth murdered, so she could seize the property and hand it over to her husband.

You see if you look at our time now, that's what's happening, the concept of the big fish trying to eat up all the little fish, I believe [we're] in the crisis we are in now because of greed. It's not the people who have got millions of dollars that run the economy, it's people like me, you, the others who go out to the store and buy something that keeps the store open. The rich man don't need to buy that. Even if he did, it's like probably, what I've [been] told, 10% who own all the wealth, the rest of the 90 got to spend what little [is] left...<sup>25</sup>

Harrington also sees a parallel between his union and the Israelites of old who endured four hundred years of slavery to the Egyptian Pharaohs. The members of Local 369, too, are an oppressed people who only want to feed their families and have time to be with them—especially on Sunday, a day of emotional liberation from the weekly struggle for survival. But at Moncure Plywood, there is a Pharaoh “who wants it all, he wants to treat laborers like they're slaves...”<sup>26</sup> Similar to the Israelites who left Egypt, the members of Local 369 who left the plant for the picket line faced new challenges. How does one hold the picket line, prevent defections and keep up morale? Harrington recalled the story in Exodus, when, a month and a half after the Israelites fled Egypt, they were in the desert and lamented, erroneously, that in Egypt “we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted” (Exodus 16:3, NIV). As the months dragged out in front of Moncure Plywood, self-questioning arose with a strike that seemed to be lasting forever. Similar to the Israelites, Harrington argued that the union members also needed to be prayerful: “...[I]t goes back to people calling on the name of the Lord, at some point in time, if he is God, he's going to answer prayer.”<sup>27</sup>

### ***DEBRA SCHOR: WORKING FOR THE LORD AS WORK ETHIC***

As the secretary-treasurer for Local 369, Debra Schor's job took on new urgency during the strike.<sup>28</sup> Working with Harrington and others on the strike finance committee, she wrote the weekly checks for

strike pay and other checks as needed to support individual strikers with various financial emergencies. Her calm character was a perfect match for the task of issuing checks for an ever more anxious membership that had to make do on the modest \$150 a week that the local could afford. Demure, not eager to speak but offering a smile almost of relief when answering a difficult question, she relishes a good book and has been a lifetime member of Liberty Chapel in Moncure. She began her work at the plywood plant in August 1978 and just before the strike, she drove the fork-lift truck. Perhaps the skill she acquired in steering the back wheels left to go right, and right to go left helped her figure out how to survive in a mixed-up post-strike environment in which management remained eager to reduce the union membership.<sup>29</sup>

Schor did not return to her pre-strike position—neither to the forklift nor even to the older position as a stockroom attendant. After an extended wrangle with management, she ended up on the patch line with sanding duty—a purgatory of sorts for plywood neither flawed enough to be scrapped nor good enough to be shipped. Management claimed that her old stockroom attendant position was eliminated even as she could look over and see a replacement worker busy at work counting inventory. The post-strike management strategy to change the job positions and shifts of returning workers ensnared Schor as well. She used to work during the first shift. Afterwards, they placed her on night shift and gave her a press utility job that assists the press operator on cleaning, routine maintenance, and replacement at break time. Unfortunately, Schor is afraid of heights. The press utility and press operator positions require tasks that can only be accomplished from a catwalk twenty feet off the shop floor. Just the thought of it gave her an upset stomach and images of a panic attack.

After a number of failed attempts to persuade the managers to change their minds on this assignment, they suggested she join union colleagues who took a severance package instead of taking a different shift or a new position. Schor refused. Management insisted. Alvin Meyer, vice president of the local and shop steward, stepped in and spun a worst case scenario for management to ponder. As Schor recalled his words: “So, you want her to get back up there on the press? And the next time she gets up there, what if she actually does have one of those panic attacks? ... What if she just falls off, you know, lean over the rail and fall off? ... She is going to get hurt or she is going to get killed, and ... that’s not going to be a good story if something happens to Debra, her family is going to get into it and ... it’s not going to be good.”<sup>30</sup> Management considered that outcome, relented, and sent her back to the patch line.

Despite her travails on the shop floor, Schor emphasized that Biblical teaching requires a superior work ethic characterized by obedience to one’s employer as a way to be faithful to God. One may not care for the supervisor or manager—she notes they may even be mean and hateful—but she still maintained that you are to give your 100% best and not respond in kind. The main problem, according to Schor, is that if you start acting like them, you let the devil win. You then need to ask God to forgive you for acting in that mean and hateful way. After all, the ideal in one’s job is to be working for the Lord and to do what God wants by doing what the supervisor wants, like it or not. You should be at work on time, not be lazy, and just do your job. Her reference to the phrase “working for the Lord” is significant as it comes from Paul’s letter to the Colossians where he specifically instructs slaves on their role in a Christian household. The main passage is Colossians 3:22-24: “Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything... Whatever you

do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters... It is the Lord Christ you are serving.” (NIV). Schor’s reference to Colossians, obviously, is not to defend slavery. Rather, the focus of one’s labor has to be on God who transcends human institutions and all their limitations. In Schor’s understanding, respect for workplace authority and obedience to one’s boss bespeaks respect for and obedience to God who is ultimately behind all earthly powers.

Schor values a solid work ethic, but one with reasonable limits. Atlas Holdings demanded contract language that would exceed her understanding of those limits and make it impossible to conduct a good Christian life. This contradiction pushed Schor and others into active resistance to the company through the strike. The whole dispute with the company revolved, most generally, around the matter of dignity. The “Bible teaches that you shouldn’t let people make a fool of you and that God gives us common sense to make the right decisions.”<sup>31</sup> Similar to others, she wanted fair treatment.

Yeah, it’s not like we’re trying to fight against the company, we just want the company to treat us right... You know, a lot of us don’t mind working, we work overtime if the company wants us to work overtime, we want the company to prosper and make money... but not get ridiculous, sixty hours or more a week, we told them, when are we going to have time to go to church and spend any time with the family? Our lives will be wore out...<sup>32</sup>

The union feared they would soon be burdened with seven-day weeks under conditions that were already demanding at five or six days. The oldest workers with the most union experience, greatest seniority, and highest pay would feel this pressure the most. Schor was not among the very oldest workers, but had worked at Moncure Plywood for just over three decades. She was fully supportive of rigorous production schedules and she had a high standard for her own work. But Atlas Holdings pushed Schor and others like her well beyond what they could endure physically and what they could handle emotionally. When she argues that “our lives will be wore out,” I believe that she meant worn out in every aspect of one’s life – including the spiritual dimension. Such a work schedule would isolate Schor and her co-workers from their faith communities. The corporation demanded from them everything they had to give.

### ***SHIRLEY FRENCH: PICKET LINE AS GOD’S TESTING GROUND***

Shirley French started work at Moncure Plywood in 1976 and quit just a month before our interview at her home.<sup>33</sup> Before the strike, she worked as a dry feeder, loading green or wet wood into the drying machine to eliminate moisture so it wouldn’t warp or come apart after being glued and pressed. When she returned to work, management placed her in that area but this time as a utility person with the additional requirement to tend the dry feeder when needed. These two jobs and the increased pressure for production took its toll. She injured her back right away. With what she described as sword-like pain, she wrestled with wet, moldy and sticky wood, finding it difficult to separate quickly and load efficiently so the dryer could run at full capacity. Onerous work even without a back injury, the frustration of this job and the physical toll drove her into the waiting arms of the modest severance package that the company offered to anyone who would take it—especially the long-term union activists. My comment that she was

a veteran in the plant prompted her observation that “We all stuck in there together.”<sup>34</sup> But French’s injury undid three decades of work in nine days—symbolic of big changes happening for nearly everyone in the company. French’s decision to leave was easy on her ailing back but not on the family’s bottom line. Before the strike, French’s income evened out fluctuations in her husband’s earnings. Vacation pay covered the first days and weeks of the strike for some workers. But the day of reckoning was fast approaching for everyone, especially for those without a savings account. She recalls how “I prayed and prayed and I did not see where I could get this money, anything, I felt this stuff pressing down on me and I cried out to God, one night...he lifted that burden off of me... Everyone on strike was facing some form of this problem.”<sup>35</sup>

A member of a church in the Holiness tradition, “holy” for her means that “we believe the entire Bible...we believe every word, every doctrine.”<sup>36</sup> She recalled how in 1986, “God was knocking on my heart and I heard him say it is time to be saved...”<sup>37</sup> About a year or two later, she recounts that after a vacation with her sister in Buffalo she returned home and “fell on my knees and I asked God to save me and so I was put into the church I go to now.”<sup>38</sup> Soon after, she started going to Christ Church of the Deliverance in nearby Sanford. She remembers the second Sunday she attended, the service got “real hot and fiery in there and I didn’t know what God was like but something lifted me up, the next thing I know I was just praising God ...”<sup>39</sup> Approximately two years later, she kept having dreams about “a good feeling that would come upon me and what I would hear was how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things...”<sup>40</sup> Not knowing what was going on after three nights of these dreams, she went to a spiritual overseer at her church who said that God was calling her to preach. Now she is known to all as Evangelist French.

The cadence and content of her casual speech reveals a deep relationship with the Bible; quotes and paraphrases from the Bible structure her sentences. For her, labor is part of the divine order that God has set up for human sustenance: “He said you don’t work, you don’t eat.”<sup>41</sup> Here French refers to Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians, in which he urged them to note his example as a self-sustaining missionary who did not rely on them for food and support: “We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat’” (2 Thessalonians 3:9-10, NIV). Other members of Local 369 also pointed to this verse when I asked them about the Bible and work. For French, a strong Biblical basis for a commitment to hard work also includes a Biblically informed notion of solidarity that supports a favorable perspective on unions. Both positions can be held simultaneously. In a paraphrase and recombination of verses from two different books in the New Testament, she argued that “[T]ogether we stand, divided we fall, that can go for any union, any group, a line for people who stand for something. The Bible says together we stand, divided we fall, you got to stand together, if you stand together in unity, of one accord, whatever you are standing for and believe in God for, that’s what you get...”<sup>42</sup> (Matthew 12:25, Philippians 2:2).

French’s belief in the Biblical foundation for a vigorous work ethic as well as union solidarity bespeaks her overall perspective that God is present everywhere, even on the picket line. She recounted times when people who did not belong to the union would visit and pray with the members out in front of the plant. She felt that this was “a good thing, some people need it, some people needed their faith built

up, some people needed to be encouraged because no doubt, at one point, people were at the place where [they were] about to give up, you know, and you have to encourage those people to stand to the end.”<sup>43</sup> Her point here weaves in the answer Jesus gave to his disciples who asked about the “end of the age.” Jesus described all the tribulations to come but also reassured them that “the one who stands firm to the end will be saved” (Matthew 24:13, NIV). Perhaps, French was thinking about the tribulations the union members were going through at that time. She further noted that “God always has a way to make sure the appropriate thing happens at the appropriate time, and my thing is that the whole time we were out there on strike, I believe God was trying to get us to reach out to him...”<sup>44</sup> For her, the picket line was not only about trying to change a company’s position on the union contract but also a place where individuals could be changed spiritually. Union members could turn to God on the picket line and in the midst of all the economic hardships resulting from the strike.<sup>45</sup>

### ***SALLY JOHNSON: CHRIST-LIKE SOLIDARTY ON THE PICKET LINE***

Sally Johnson started work at Moncure Plywood in 1978.<sup>46</sup> Before she went out on strike, she was a wood-grader, a final step after the plywood panels have been pressed, cut to size, and sanded. True Apostolic Church has been her church home since 2005. Baptized there, her church is still led by its founding apostle who was moved by the Lord to go to Sanford to lead revival services where many were saved and received healing.<sup>47</sup> The emphasis on the Holy Spirit is a characteristic of the Pentecostal tradition in evangelicalism. Healing ministries are ministries of the Spirit who works miracles with bodies broken by sin and disease.<sup>48</sup> For Johnson, all of life belongs to Jesus—from waking up every morning to every breath throughout the day. She seems to take energy from every breath too; her direct and assertive manner informs her presence and commands attention in one-on-one conversation and in meetings of the local. Similar to the discussions with Debra Schor and Shirley French, my conversation with Johnson focused on conditions at the plant after the strike. The company severance package to entice long-time workers to leave was only part of the story. Union members who returned and tried to stay, like Johnson, were soon to face a new emphasis on rule enforcement. Matters of little or no consequence before the strike now became part of one’s work file. Verbal warnings followed by one or two write-ups would occur for conversations with co-workers, infractions around break times (accusations that workers left their post early or returned late), and for workers who couldn’t honor that request to stay an extra four or eight hours because of family commitments. The write-ups blazed the paper trail that would lead to dismissal—the third write-up would result in being fired. Given that the union had already been weakened by dozens who “severed out” by taking the severance package, the union quickly lost the ability to regularly file and follow up on grievances and/or go to arbitration. Also, according to Cameron, the company wouldn’t give union stewards and officials time away from work to have meetings to discuss these issues. Not allowing union members to file and work through those grievances was, in turn, a more comprehensive violation of the contract. When work practices, however unfair or contractually prohibited are allowed to continue, they set a precedent that becomes very difficult to challenge later on. The result is that workers can be fired for violating “rules” around work practices that were never formally agreed to through contract

negotiations (and/or subsequent labor/management meetings) and should never have been allowed in the first place. As more than one union member reported, we won the battle (the strike) on the outside but we are losing the war on the inside. Through all of these events, before and after the strike, Johnson had to contend with the misuse of managerial power even as she affirmed her theological understanding of God's grace and power. As for her own work, she said that "if it wasn't for the grace of God, I wouldn't be there at all. I look at it through Christ's eyes, not man, or my eyes – through Christ's eyes, that's how I get through day by day."<sup>49</sup> When I asked what she sees through Christ's eyes, she replied:

I see some of the things that aren't right, but I can't change them, I can only pray, that's the only thing I can do, I can pray that God change things... The kind of things they are doing to people, you know, they are doing so wrong, so wrong with people in there, and they think they have all the power in their hand, but they do not, there's so much stuff going on in there, it's pathetic. To me, it's a power thing, to me, it's a power thing. It's all about the power.<sup>50</sup>

When Johnson returned to the plant, a replacement worker was busy doing her old job, so she had to settle for another position. The management plan to induce returning union members to take the severance package thinned out the union membership and moved it closer to their goal of union decertification. The prospect of Moncure Plywood becoming a non-union plant was on many minds. The union was facing its own extinction.

In addition to the management counterattacks against the union, there was also the day-to-day prospect of working with former union members who stayed in the plant during the strike. Johnson opted for prayer as it helped her deal with those whom she felt gave into their fears, crossed the picket line at the beginning of the strike, and became unable to look out for their fellow union members. Prayer for Johnson was not a substitute for action but its accompaniment. She also served her union with in-plant organizing once the strike was over.

In Johnson's view, being Christ-like must also include having solidarity with each other. "[I]f you're Christ-like, you don't turn from your brothers and sisters... [Y]ou don't turn from your brothers and sisters, but they did, when we went on strike."<sup>51</sup> Being "Christ-like" for many evangelicals is summarized by the ubiquitous phrase "What would Jesus do?" In short, Johnson would argue that Jesus doesn't cross picket lines. She posed her point in these terms: "[T]he friends you left in there—whenever you going on strike—they're not your friends no more. They are your enemies, so you only got to pray for them... they are not there to look out for you, and that's wrong..."<sup>52</sup> Johnson likely had words from the Sermon on the Mount in mind in which Jesus taught his disciples "But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you (Matthew 5:44, NIV)." Johnson emphasized, though, that even if union members did break the picket line, they should have at least helped people on the line with money or food. Not many helped, even refusing to talk to picketers in front of the plant. If you are "in Christ," Johnson argues, "it don't matter what be going on inside that job, you would stop and help your brother and sister when you come out."<sup>53</sup> The phrase "in Christ" appears often in the New Testament, but Johnson might be incorporating Paul's teaching in 2 Corinthians 5:17 that those who are "in Christ" are a "new creation." To be in

Christ means one is Christ's ambassador which includes the ministry of reconciliation and bringing others to be "in Christ" as well.

For Johnson, prayer was important for building up one's faith. But her prayer life was not only the personal practice of piety. She blended her spiritual practice with a sharp willingness to call workers to public account in their failure to exhibit Christ-like character. Her public advocacy also included rebutting those who argued that the union didn't do anything for its members. She tried to tell others about the ways that the union assisted its membership over the course of the strike, even while acknowledging that during the strike, if "you had no faith to hold on to God, you would have lost it... that's where faith comes in... you had to hold on to Jesus, you had to... because you couldn't make it on no \$150, not paying no mortgage, not paying no healthcare, not buying no groceries..."<sup>54</sup> Prayer sustained her as she kept her union sisters and brothers in Local 369 at the forefront of her activist work.

### ***CHARLES RAINES: PICKET LINE AS CHURCH***

During the strike itself, many union members held on through creative combinations of personal faith and its public manifestations. At selected times throughout the strike, the entire picket line became a place of worship and praise. In the moments that this occurred in front of Moncure Plywood, union members and outside supporters transformed the picket line into a place to express their deepest Christian commitments.

Charles Raines discussed his theology of the strike from two perspectives – as a member of Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church since 1981 and as one who has worked on nearly every phase of plywood production since his first day on the job in June 1968.<sup>55</sup> Compact and youthful, his energy suggested he could work another four decades at Moncure Plywood. Before the strike, he was the lead person for the wood stock in his shift, ensuring that it was dry and of proper size for the next steps in production. A lead person has to know everything in the department and also works with one's senses in an unconventional manner. "Seeing with your ears" is one example—to hear the way a machine is running well or not running properly.<sup>56</sup> Creative coordination of his senses served him well during the strike, as after the interview he eagerly displayed his artwork featuring images of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Barack Obama stored on the backseat of his car, a mobile art emporium. Moncure workers had to be resourceful to adequately supplement the meager \$150 issued every week from the strike support fund.

Raines's pride in his work at Moncure Plywood entails a theology of work that maintains one has to "earn his living by the sweat of his brow, you don't work, you don't eat"—a deft combination of verses from the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament, and an echo of William Harrington and Shirley French's observations above.<sup>57</sup> Raines argues that "in the Garden of Eden, they didn't have to want for anything, after they sinned, then you have to work, that what sin is... Adam and Eve pretty much have to work for a living, tilling all the soil..."<sup>58</sup> Unions also work – cooperating to make the workplace more bearable. The union, in Raines's view, made Moncure Plywood a totally different place to work. In other plywood factories, workers were "hopped up and mad" but at Moncure, management used to cooperate with the workers. But he no longer wants his son to work there because "now they got this attitude that I'm in charge

and you are going to do what I say.”<sup>59</sup> But Raines does not draw the additional conclusion that resistance is futile or an additional expression of human sinfulness. The picket line—the most widely recognized expression of workers’ agency and power—can be equated with the Church itself. “We’ve already heard of the phrase where there is unity there is strength, where two or three are gathered in my name, He will be in the midst, if God is in the midst of something, you gotta be strong...”<sup>60</sup> This is a paraphrase of Matthew 18:20: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (KJV). Many evangelicals associate this verse with the minimum precondition for forming a church, a small collection of believers who gather in the name of Jesus to invoke his presence. God was in the midst of Local 369, according to Raines: “I know that he had our backs, because when people come together like at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came in like a mighty rustling wind, everyone was of one accord, they received the Holy Spirit, tongues, so when people get together, believers, and pray about a thing, God is in it, because he can’t go back on his word.”<sup>61</sup> Here Raines uses a story from the second chapter in the book of Acts to reinforce his point derived from Matthew that God was in the midst of their resistance, blessing and supporting that work.

Power through the picket line comes in many forms. Moncure Plywood workers turned theirs into a place of spirited solidarity, praise, prayer, and union songs. Raines recalled one particular Friday evening when the wife of Local 369’s vice president and her twin sister arrived on the line with donations for the striking workers. After the rain subsided, the siblings led a church service right on the picket line. Raines concluded the union had power that night summing up for many local members that labor solidarity and spiritual community are as one.<sup>62</sup>

### ***CLASS AND RACE AT MONCURE PLYWOOD***

The Moncure Plywood workers profiled above, and many other members of Local 369, participated in faith practices that embodied their beliefs about labor justice. Those faith practices—prayer, singing, worship—were forms of class struggle insofar as they challenged a work regime viewed as unjust in nearly every aspect. If class is not defined by income or status but rather described through the dynamic relationship of power between workers and management/capital, the rank and file of Local 369 emerged as a class to struggle against the grab for power by Atlas Holdings and its management team. Their picket line displayed a welcome irony. A key motivation for the strike centered on the mandatory overtime that would have precluded church attendance. But the picket line itself became a location for the spiritual rejuvenation they were trying to protect. The union members, through church attendance, worship, prayer, and Bible study, enlivened the old labor adage “eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, eight hours for what we will” For many members of Local 369 “what we will” included Sunday mornings and early afternoon hours, Wednesday prayer and Bible study, and all the other activities at their respective churches throughout the week.

As Michael Zweig notes in *The Working Class Majority*, class is “about the power some people have over the lives of others, and the powerlessness most people experience as a result.”<sup>63</sup> He expands on this insight by arguing “(c)lass is first and foremost a product of power asserted in the production process.



This means power over what goes on at work: who will do which tasks at what pace for what pay, and the power to decide what to produce, how to produce it, and where to sell it.”<sup>64</sup> At Moncure Plywood, the members of Local 369 were working class but they were not completely powerless. They had a union. Though far from being in charge of the factory, the leadership and the membership of Local 369 still had a contract that provided for seniority, limitations on overtime work, collectively negotiated pay scales, and an array of benefits. The contract included a grievance process to not only make it enforceable but to also address workplace issues and problems as they occurred. In addition, if the parties could not reach an agreement through the grievance process, outside arbitration through the provisions of the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) and the decisions of the local National Labor Relations Board could be sought. In short, workplace relationships are not a matter of private negotiation between an individual and the boss. The NLRA, for all its limitations, pushes the workplace, even jobs created by a private corporation, into the public realm and thus subject to laws, limitations, and letters from elected officials.<sup>65</sup> Given the rarity of prolonged strike actions, it is easy to forget that a strike is, in fact, a legal activity. The purpose of the NLRA is to encourage collective bargaining and to protect workers’ freedom of association, self-organization and the ability to choose their own representatives to negotiate the terms and conditions of their employment and provide for mutual aid and protection.<sup>66</sup> Some measure of self-determination on the shop floor (power over the conditions of day-to-day work) thus becomes possible. To defeat the extension of mandatory worktime from ten to twenty hours, for example, is exactly the point of a union. Not merely a bumper sticker (Unions: The Folks that Brought You the Weekend), unions were forged on the anvil of ten and eight hour work day campaigns.<sup>67</sup> Moncure Plywood workers were staring down the loaded barrel of ten hour work shifts over six days – or eight to ten hour shifts over seven. To lose the power to get some rest is the slow march to an early death or, along the way, accidents and injuries. What kind of life could the members of Local 369 possibly have with ten hour workdays? As Lewis Cameron noted, “If you’re working every day, then what good is having a union?”<sup>68</sup> Rank and file, dues-paying members would naturally be asking the same question with this angle: What am I paying dues for? Melvin Montford, Local 369’s longtime business representative and leader of the Raleigh chapter of the A. Philip Randolph Institute summed up the proposed work regime in his widely cited quip: “Even the slaves got off on Sundays.”<sup>69</sup>

While the emphasis so far has been on the category of class to analyze the conditions faced by the workers of Local 369 at Moncure Plywood, class cannot stand alone. In my interviews, the word “class” was encompassed in our discussions about power on the job but the dimension of race and the word “race” emerged explicitly and with greatest force. The intersection of class and race was apparent in the very first interview that I conducted with Lewis Cameron just over two months after the initial group of union members reentered the plant after the strike. Discussing the issues that prompted the strike, he recalled the management team brought in by Atlas Holdings and the work conditions at the time of the contract negotiations in early 2008.

Yes, the negotiating committee brought [the contract] to the people, and [the members said] we can’t work under those conditions. They refused to do it; these guys they brought

in from Texas—and everyone knows that Texas was the last state to know that slavery was over, two years later, they call it Juneteenth—these guys are very anti-union, and racial. We had a real fight on our hands and we were willing to stay there and fight the fight. There were times when we wanted to give up but people that were behind us kept us going, the church people, the women's group from the Chapel Hill, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, they were behind us. They're still behind us.<sup>70</sup>

Cameron's reference to "these guys" meant the management team brought in from Texas, all white men. The reference to Juneteenth—June 19th—a day to celebrate and honor the ending of slavery in the United States is significant. For Cameron, the fact that Texas did not know or did not choose to publicize President Lincoln's 1863 Emancipation Proclamation until 1865 is not just a historical detail. Cameron's apparently ironic remark, just a week before Juneteenth, trenchantly suggested that this management team didn't get the word that slavery was over either, much like their Texan forebears. Emotions were very raw upon re-entry into the plant. The length of the strike, the isolation of the picket line on Corinth Road, the heightened and subsequently dashed hopes for a contract settlement by Christmas, the interminable winter months that followed—all of this contributed to the pall hanging over the strikers. But one incident stood out and it occurred nearly two months into the strike on Friday, September 12, 2008. On that day, members of the picket line at Gate B noticed a noose hung high up over one of the two grapples for a log lift sitting on company property. It remained there for three days.

Gate B is the entrance for logging trucks to drive onto the property so the logs can be weighed and checked into the plant at the gate house near the road. In addition to the main plant entrance, this was one of two locations for the picket line. Inaccessible to the striking workers without trespassing, the yellow log lift sat back of the gate house to the right about 175-200 feet from the road. The noose, fashioned from a red tube or hose, was plainly visible to the workers who were assigned to picket nearby. Questions about its placement, the perpetrator and its menacing presence for three days roiled the union and its many supporters. Press from as far away as Los Angeles and Detroit reported on it.<sup>71</sup> As the Moncure Solidarity Committee wrote in their flyer:

The noose was allowed to be displayed for more than 3 days. Except for a burning cross and a white hood, there are few symbols of racism more inflammatory or feared than a hangman's noose. Many of the striking workers have relatives or know of stories of friends or ancestors who were either lynched or threatened by the prospect of a lynch mob.<sup>72</sup>

Lester Strunk, one of the members of Local 369, when I asked him about key points in the strike remarked: "Well, one of the things that stuck out for me... coming into the line to do our picket duty, lo and behold... they had a noose hanging up there when we came in. That was one of the things that stuck out for me. ..."<sup>73</sup> Jeff Matuszak, the sales and marketing manager at Moncure Plywood, said the company's investigation showed that the "supposed noose" was actually a hose that an employee had picked up from the ground and then placed out the way to remove a tripping hazard. He also said that if racial motivations were revealed, appropriate disciplinary actions would occur.<sup>74</sup>

The following Monday, September 15, action replaced debate about what was sitting on that log lift and how it got there. A videographer captured the events that day and the audio recorded his plea to the crew at Gate B checking in the logging trucks:

Before you all go inside, can I just ask you about this thing over here that's hanging? It looks like a red noose. It looks like the kind of things that black people have been hung with, you know, lynched. Killed. Even if that's not what it is, shouldn't you take it down?! You don't want a noose hanging right there, do you? It doesn't look very good.<sup>75</sup>

Not long after this plea, a truck pulled up to Gate B to exit the plant. Met there by activists from the Moncure Solidarity Committee—two older women holding umbrellas to protect themselves from the sun—the truck driver agreed to their request and walked back onto the factory grounds. Once at the log lift, he reached up and pulled down on the hose, raising the noose up and nearly over the grapple. For a second, the knot caught on the grapple and as it was about ten feet over his head, he had to swing it off rather than to continue to pull it outright. Contrary to the company spokesman's assertion, this hose was hardly "placed" but had to be tossed fifteen feet up and over the grapple of the log lift to achieve its malicious effect. For a few minutes that day, two activists and one truck driver formed an impromptu coalition to do what the striking workers could not without facing fines and/or arrest.

As Lester Strunk later recounted the story, a "group of ladies" were visiting that day and they "were raising so much sand about the noose..." the truck driver acted to get "the ladies to stop hassling him..."<sup>76</sup> Perhaps, that Monday afternoon, the white truck driver was also making common cause with the activists and the picket line he otherwise had to break when he drove into the plant earlier that day. Whatever the case, a weekend's worth of looking at the noose made its mark. The union's subsequent filing against the plant with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission did not produce any results.

The furor over the noose and its removal highlighted the welcome forces that were starting to coalesce around the strike effort. Those "ladies" were white women from the Moncure Solidarity Committee organized in Chapel Hill, twenty five miles to the north. Drawn from various groups including Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Chapel Hill, the Committee also worked with activists from the local NAACP. The involvement of the Black Workers for Justice (BWJ) in Raleigh was particularly significant. With other community activists and organizations, BWJ had already convened a People's Assembly in Raleigh on August 9, 2008 that, among other projects, highlighted Local 369. This People's Assembly voted to join the picket line later that month to mark the 45th anniversary of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech at the March on Washington in 1963. The assembly viewed solidarity with the Moncure strikers as a way to continue the legacy of King's solidarity with Memphis sanitation workers in their struggle against racism and unfair labor conditions.<sup>77</sup> Black Workers for Justice, in turn, is a coalition partner of Historic Thousands on Jones St (HKonJ) movement convened by Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II. The 14-point People's Agenda of the movement highlights a number of policy recommendations that are specific to African American communities in North Carolina. With respect to the labor movement, the agenda calls for repealing the state law that prohibits public employee collective bargaining. It also calls for strengthening laws to regulate workplace safety which is a very important matter for all workers,

especially in a factory.<sup>78</sup>

### ***THE END OF LOCAL 369 - WINNING ON THE OUTSIDE, LOSING ON THE INSIDE***

The struggle at Moncure Plywood was a fight for workers' rights shaped by the faith commitments of its participants. The workers grew in their class awareness not only through the power differential between the union and the corporation but also through their actions of resistance to regain power over their workplaces and their lives. The workers' faith and their church communities were central to this struggle as it informed them about the conditions of a just workplace (especially appropriate limits on work) and, as well, provided resources for faithful resistance, or resistance as obedience. The class standing of the members of Local 369 was already conditioned by the long legacy of slavery, dispossession, and the racial apartheid of Jim Crow. The ideology of racism/white supremacy that arose to justify these practices also legitimizes practices of capital that requires the lowest possible cost for labor, goods, and services—no matter how this occurs.<sup>79</sup> In the production chain, commodities gained at a rock bottom cost yield greater profits later on. Driving down labor costs is always paramount. The strike was a result of demands from Atlas Holdings to dismantle the union, assert complete control over the labor process, and reduce labor costs to the lowest possible minimum. The conduct of Atlas Holdings, a distant multinational holding company based in Greenwich, Connecticut, was not unusual. The length of the strike and its confused aftermath was also business as usual, a manifestation of white supremacy and racism.

The incomplete resolution of this strike had its roots in the company's demand that any resumption of negotiation on the contract not include the very union leadership that called for the strike nine months earlier. Even Local 369's long term business representative, Melvin Montford, was not allowed to participate at the negotiating table. Instead, contract negotiation was taken over by two other business representatives from the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAMAW). Local 369 was not only absent for the formulation of the contract language but also, most significantly, for the subsequent discussions that would inform its intended meaning and application. The fate of Local 369 was now in the hands of the gigantic IAMAW for which this small woodworkers local in rural North Carolina had never been a priority. Throughout the strike, Local 369 had to agitate to gain attention from their own international of 700,000 workers and retirees that includes Boeing workers and laborers from other better known corporations. Only after a good deal of pressure from Local 369 and its community supporters, did then IAMAW president, Tom Buffenbarger, visit the picket line in February 2009 to offer a modest support check, six months after the strike began. The fight for Local 369 was never only against Moncure Plywood and Atlas Holdings but also against an international, that by all accounts, had neglected them and sold them out. Workers suspected collusion between the IAMAW and the company, including payoffs and other forms of corruption. As Harrington summarized the matter: "In my opinion, the union got into bed with the company."<sup>80</sup>

By late June 2009, three months after the strike ended, Local 369 was desperate. Many members had already taken the severance package. Those who refused the severance package subsequently faced mul-

multiple write-ups and disciplinary measures. The leadership of Local 369 wrote a blunt letter to Buffenbarger in late June to emphasize the crisis facing the union:

We may have survived the battle, but we fear this racist and anti-union company may win the war if we don't fight differently. We think they are trying to push out enough workers so they can decertify the union. Members are angry and feel betrayed. ... Many members ask why we were not part of the negotiations, nor our Business Agent, so we could have had some good trained eyes watching the company and helping our union negotiators. Members feel that the company did not want us in the negotiations just like they did not like us working in the plant and challenging their power – because we are Black. But after a few days of negotiations, we voted for the contract which we never had time to study, 8 and ½ months was taking its toll on members and their families, so we were hoping for a decent contract.<sup>81</sup>

Despite the plea for help in the letter, assistance did not arrive. In the next three years, member after member left on severance, was fired, or simply quit. The union filed grievances but lacked the means to see them through to resolution. The grievance committee was not allowed to meet. Union stewards, though in the plant, were not allowed to talk with union members. The whole replacement worker issue was also featured in this letter.

Replacement workers are still in the plant, holding our former jobs. ... But after the first 25 of us went back to our original jobs, we understood from the union negotiators that we would go back a few at a time and replacement workers would go to the end of the seniority list. Now we are told there is a difference of opinion about what the contract actually says. Again, our leadership was not at the negotiations.<sup>82</sup>

The work of the union ground to a halt even as plywood production pressed on. Fears that the union would be decertified arose shortly after the workers returned to the plant in April 2009. These fears were realized in the next round of negotiations in the spring of 2012. While the company was supposedly negotiating in good faith with what was left of Local 369 and its leadership, it was also circulating a petition asking whether workers wanted to maintain membership in the union. On June 20, 2012, of the 114 eligible voters, 96 participated in the election. 41 voted for the union and 55 voted against the union. Of all places, the decertification election was held in the breakroom—an embodiment of the balance the union was seeking to achieve for its members throughout its four-decade existence.<sup>83</sup>

## **CONCLUSION**

The goal here has been to examine a labor gospel by and for evangelicals who labor and believe that God wants everyone to have a full and economically secure life.<sup>84</sup> Workers are well within their rights to ensure the workplace is just and serves their interests too.<sup>85</sup> The evangelical union members at Mon-

cure understood the demands of their faith at church, on the job and, as events turned out, on the picket line as well. The sale of their plant to Atlas Holdings was not their decision but they had to live with the consequences. Despite their lack of power over the sale, they tried to shape its outcome, especially when they grasped that their very existence as a union and as a family of workers would end. Nonetheless, they were unable to preserve their jobs, their union was decertified, and people who had worked together for decades were scattered.

The success or failure of a social justice struggle has the highest stakes: people's lives, health, and livelihood. Winning can be a life or death matter to secure or expand access to fundamental goods. Partial wins or partial losses, at best, create opportunities to assess the future and to evaluate whether to mount additional efforts. But an outright loss can be devastating. Members of Local 369 lost their jobs and eventually their union. I do not have a tally of the lost homes, sold or repossessed cars, liquidated college and retirement accounts, forfeited life plans, and the accumulated stress and long-term negative health effects due to the struggle. Some workers were near retirement and elected that option, even if they might have worked a few more years had the company not been sold or had the strike not been necessary. Others found new types of work. Lewis Cameron, worked for a while as a locksmith and as a postal service driver, but found his passion working with children. Charles Raines exercised his creativity through painting. Shirley French experienced tremendous liberation simply through leaving her job.

In one of my last interviews with members of Local 369, I turned to William Harrington to make sense of the events at Moncure Plywood. Even Harrington, a trustee of Local 369, left the plant after thirty nine years in May 2012. When I caught up to him in December 2012, three years after my first interview with him, I asked how he considered the whole experience from a biblical, spiritual perspective.<sup>86</sup> He pointed me to Gideon the prophet (Judges 6) whom God sent to save the Israelites from the Midianites who were oppressing them and stealing their crops. God's intervention was the only hope for the Israelites. I asked him if there might be a "Gideon" at Moncure Plywood now. He said that a Gideon is not present. Local 369's decertification, for Harrington, is part of the overall pattern of weakened unions and the increased power of corporations. God uses what people are confronted with to bring about change—"that's the hope for those in there now."<sup>87</sup> I interpret Harrington's comments to mean that even in the most dire of times, though a "Gideon" is not present, God is always present and always working. That is, for the plywood workers left behind, even without a union and while facing a very belligerent management regime, they may still look to God in the midst of their trials for the transformation that is always possible through God's power even when no hope seems reasonable or possible.

As for Local 369 itself, he said that it was like a pillar to lay one's head upon. Many times, people could have been fired but the union was a pillar, it had strength, and people kept their jobs. Harrington was referring to the story of Jacob's journey in Genesis 28 from Beersheba to Haran. Along the way, Jacob rested for the night and used a stone as a pillow. In the morning, he set up the stone as a pillar to mark the presence of God, revealed in a dream of a stairway to heaven where God renewed promises made to the descendants of Abraham. But the problem for Harrington is that the pillar became a stumbling block (an image in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament). Rather than a sign of strength and God's presence, the union became the place where people trip and are prevented from reaching their goal. In

the face of Local 369's decertification, he called it a "time of mystery," a time when people are awaiting a Gideon and a time when even Harrington asked himself "Lord, how long?" (echoes of the lamentations in the Psalms and elsewhere) and "When will the change come?"<sup>88</sup> For lack of an answer, he noted that those who "wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength" (Isaiah 40:31) and that "we wait with the expectation that our need will be addressed" (likely a paraphrase from Romans 8:19).<sup>89</sup>

Given the generations-long decline in the labor movement in the United States,<sup>90</sup> the likelihood of new initiatives in the current presidential administration to undermine workplace safety,<sup>91</sup> and the renewed threat of a Supreme Court decision that could gravely weaken public sector unions, to adopt a stance of "waiting" seems foolhardy when organizing is more essential than ever.<sup>92</sup> Harrington's advice should be taken in context. Rather than escapist, his comments reflect the sober assessment that his local expended every effort only to find all avenues for success foreclosed.

Only after reviewing the strike in and of itself could Harrington muster some positive thoughts about their efforts and imagine resources for the labor movement in the future. He noted that a picket line "can bring unity for a people."<sup>93</sup> As he emphasized, paraphrasing Psalm 133:1, "how good and how pleasant when the brothers dwell together in unity."<sup>94</sup> Despite the fracture of labor and management at Moncure Plywood and the division within the union (those who crossed the picket line and remained in the plant to work), the picket line was not a place of contention but one of unity where prosperity could be realized. But the usual meaning of prosperity was not on his mind. According to Harrington, "[p]rosperity on the picket line meant that everyone's needs were met. Everybody was equal."<sup>95</sup> Given Harrington's role as union trustee and thus his collaboration with the treasurer (Debra Schor) during the strike, he was very familiar with each check written, each emergency request tended to. He was well-positioned to know that prosperity could not be conventionally measured by strike pay of \$150 per week. Prosperity is not defined by an accumulation of money or goods but shaped by others on the picket line and the quality of the relationships developed there. "Everybody's needs were revealed: if you had a need, I knew about it, if I had a need, you knew about it, we could deal with meeting each other's needs based on resources."<sup>96</sup> Harrington's labor ethic is based on mutual accountability that depends, at its core, on a view of people who "dwell together" (again, Psalm 133), not on deracinated individuals. Given the experience of unity and the unique sense of prosperity that emerged from their struggle, Harrington described yet one more insight: "We also recognized leadership. We knew everybody could lead on the line, someone had to take the lead and someone else had to follow..."<sup>97</sup> A union and particularly a picket line, for Harrington, was not only about recognizing and meeting needs, but also a place to practice the idea that leading and following are reciprocal activities, two phases of a larger undertaking that makes a picket line strong and enduring.

Local 369 reached the age of forty-four years when it met its match in Atlas Holdings. Before its demise, the labor evangelicals in that local showed remarkable resilience and persistence in their resistance to management and the corporation. To persist as they did was not only due to the union's work. It was also due to their collective sense of God's omnipresence, their attention to prayer and their joy in praising God through song. The nimble adaptations of ancient Biblical texts to their present-day experiences were especially vital to long-term survival in this struggle. All of these practices mattered deeply because they were manifestations of resistance, through obedience, against grave injustice.

NOTES

---

1. The generous support (in alphabetical order) of the Brooklyn College New Faculty Fund, The Leonard and Claire Tow Faculty Travel Fellowship, and the PSC-CUNY Research Foundation were essential to this project.

2. “Work Stoppage Data: Work Stoppages Ended 2005-2014, Work Stoppages Ended 1984-2004,” Federal Mediation & Conciliation Service, accessed January 10, 2017, <https://www.fmcs.gov/resources/documents-and-data/>.

3. A right-to-work state allows workers in a given state to gain the benefits of a union contract without having to join the union or pay dues to the union. In non-right-to-work states, workers may still opt out of joining a union but still must pay dues or agency fees to support the union and its organizing work. Kentucky’s decision in January 2017 to become a right-to-work state pushed the number to twenty seven with more states expected to join this list.

For unionization rates in North Carolina and across the nation in 2008: “Union Members in 2008, Table 5. Union affiliation of employed wage and salary workers by state,” News, U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, January 28, 2009. accessed September 22, 2016, [https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/union2\\_01282009.pdf](https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/union2_01282009.pdf).

4. Frank Newport, “Trump Not Yet Generating Evangelical Republican Zeal,” Gallup, June 27, 2016, accessed January 12, 2017, [http://www.gallup.com/poll/193166/trump-not-yet-generating-evangelical-republican-zeal.aspx?g\\_source=evangelical&g\\_medium=search&g\\_campaign=tiles](http://www.gallup.com/poll/193166/trump-not-yet-generating-evangelical-republican-zeal.aspx?g_source=evangelical&g_medium=search&g_campaign=tiles).

5. “Religion,” Gallup, accessed January 12, 2017, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx>.

6. “America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015: 100, accessed January 12, 2017, <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>.

7. *Ibid.*, 100.

8. *Ibid.*, 22.

9. “NAE, LifeWay Research Publish Evangelical Beliefs Research Definition,” National Association of Evangelicals Press Release, November 19, 2015, accessed November 14, 2016, <http://nae.net/evangelical-beliefs-research-definition/>.

10. *Ibid.*

11. See “What is an Evangelical?,” National Association of Evangelicals, accessed February 1, 2017, <http://www.nae.net/what-is-an-evangelical> in which Bebbington is cited. Also see David W. Bebbington and his discussion of these four characteristics in the context of doctrinal formulations by the newly formed Evangelical Alliance in London (1846) in *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 22-23.

12. “A Declaration by American Evangelicals Concerning Donald Trump,” Evangelical Leaders, accessed January 12, 2017, <https://www.change.org/p/donald-trump-a-declaration-by-american-evangelicals-concerning-donald-trump>.



Also Laurie Goodstein, "Group Questions Donald Trump's Lock on Evangelical Voters," *New York Times*, October 7, 2016, accessed January 11, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/10/08/us/politics/evangelical-voters-trump.html>.

13. Kristin Collins, "Strike ends amid economic uncertainty," *Charlotte News and Observer*, April 2, 2009. The article is no longer on the newspaper website but it is accessible through <http://chatham-county-nc.com/bulletinboard/index.php?topic=12225.0> and also <https://groups.google.com/forum/#!msg/gangbox/gtdsmjsOfRw/AhiFk1TzOe0J>, both accessed April 14, 2017.

14. Pete Vargas, "Plywood Strikers Steadfast, Weary," *Labor Notes*, February 2009, 4.

15. "Standing on the Promises," Text and music by R. Kelso Carter (1849-1926), *The United Methodist Hymnal*, number 374, accessed January 11, 2017, <http://www.hymnsite.com/lyrics/umh374.sht>.

16. Lewis Cameron, president, Woodworkers Local Lodge W369, in discussion with the author, 11 June 2009.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

20. Mansel Philip McCleave, *The Story of the Deep River Missionary Baptist Association of North Carolina: from 1916-1961* (1962), accessed September 22, 2016, <http://archive.org/details/storyofdeepriver00mccl>.

21. Rev. William Harrington, Sanford, North Carolina, in discussion with the author, 18 June 2009.

22. Sunday Service, Lambert Chapel Baptist Church, Siler City, N.C., 28 June 2009.

23. Harrington, 2009. I did not ask him about the meaning of Accountability Day but assumed that he meant Judgment Day. For instance, I John 4:16-17: "And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus" (NIV).

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Debra Schor is a pseudonym.

29. Debra Schor, Moncure, North Carolina, in discussion with the author, 20 June 2009.

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. Shirley French is a pseudonym.

34. Shirley French, Moncure, North Carolina, in discussion with the author, 23 June 2009.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid. The contemporary Holiness church tradition (or traditions) draws on a complex history dating back to the nineteenth-century Holiness movement. According to Amos Yong and Estrela Y. Alexander (*Afro-Pentecostalism: Black Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in History and Culture*, New York: New York University Press, 2011), this movement was a precursor to twentieth-century Pentecostalism and it was characterized by the application of John Wesley's concept of entire sanctification to matters of personal spirituality, piety and church life (2). They also used camp-meeting style revivalism and the language of Holy Spirit "fire" baptism (7). Estrela Y. Alexander (*Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011) emphasizes the African American contribution to the holiness movement and thus Pentecostalism. Randall Stephens (*The Fire Spread: Holiness and Pentecostalism in the American South*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) proposes that "holiness people were less bound by prevailing social codes" and that the assumption of leadership roles by women "proved to be one of the most distinguishing marks of both the holiness movement and, later, pentecostalism in the South" (9). Also see Vincent Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1971, 1997).

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

45. Ibid .

46. Sally Johnson is a pseudonym.

47. True Apostolic Church, <http://www.trueapostolicdeliverance.org/index.html>, accessed November 19, 2013. The website is no longer accessible.

48. Grant Wacker, in *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2003), argues that "radical evangelicals" (both holiness and Pentecostal believers) espoused a four-fold gospel

including personal salvation (conversion) followed by Holy Ghost baptism or the post-conversion experience of entire sanctification which, for many adherents, entails the “lifelong process of moral cleansing” (2). Divine healing and the Lord’s soon return are the other two aspects of this four-fold gospel (1-3). Divine healing does not come from the “outside” – Wacker notes how pentecostals believed that “God’s Spirit literally took up residence inside their physical bodies [which] authorized tongues, healings, visions, resurrections, and other miraculous phenomena that had largely disappeared from American Protestant culture, especially mainline groups” (15).

49. Sally Johnson, Sanford, North Carolina, in discussion with the author, 23 June 2009.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Charles Raines, Sanford, North Carolina, in discussion with the author, 24 June 2009.

56. Ibid.

57. Ibid.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Michael Zweig, *The Working Class Majority: America’s Best Kept Secret*, 2nd ed., (Ithaca: ILR Press, 2000, 2012), 8.

64. Ibid., 10.

65. In a show of support for the workers at Moncure Plywood, seven of the eight Democrats (G.K. Butterfield, Bob Etheridge, Larry Kissell, Brad Miller, David Price, Heath Shuler, and Melvin Watt) from the North Carolina U.S. House delegation (111th Congress) signed onto a letter to Timothy Fazio, Managing Partner of Atlas Holdings LCC. “We urge your management team to return to the bargaining table and find a way to return these hard-working Americans to their jobs at the Moncure Plywood plant where they have dedicated so many years of service.” “Letter to Timothy Fazio,” Congress of the United States, February 13, 2009. Letter in author’s possession.

66. “National Labor Relations Act,” National Labor Relations Board, accessed February 9, 2017, <https://www.nlr.gov/resources/national-labor-relations-act>.

67. For a depiction of the sacrifice born by workers who struggled for an eight hour day, see James Green, *Death in the Haymarket: A Story of Chicago, the First Labor Movement and the Bombing that Divided Gilded Age America* (New York, Anchor Books: 2007).
68. Richard Fausset, "Strikers at plywood plant put hopes on Obama," *Los Angeles Times*, February 6, 2009, accessed January 26, 2017, <http://articles.latimes.com/2009/feb/06/nation/na-north-carolina-strike6>.
69. Raleigh People's Assembly, "Justice for Moncure Plywood Workers: Community Support Needed to Win Justice," *Justice Speaks: Black Workers for Justice*, September/October 2008, 5. Also, <http://blackworkersforjustice.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Justice-Speaks-10-2008-final.pdf>, accessed January 27, 2017.
70. Cameron, 2009.
71. Ibid. Also, Pete Vargas, "Plywood Workers Steadfast, Weary," *Labor Notes*, February 2009, 4.
72. Flyer, Moncure Solidarity Committee. Flyer in author's possession.
73. Lester Strunk is a pseudonym. Lester Strunk, Sanford, North Carolina, in discussion with the author, 21 June 2009.
74. Chris Saunders, "Workers Still on Strike at Chatham Company," *Daily Tar Heel*, September 17, 2008, accessed June 25, 2009, <http://www.dailytarheel.com/news/state-national/workers-still-on-strike-at-chatham-company>. The web page is now inaccessible. Article in author's possession.
75. "The Noose at Moncure Plywood," Loren Hart, September 15, 2008, accessed January 27, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RE4Hv-CLQDE>.
76. Strunk, 2009.
77. Raleigh People's Assembly, "North Carolina People's Assembly puts forth plan of action!," *Justice Speaks: Black Workers for Justice*, September/October 2008, 1-2. Also, <http://blackworkersforjustice.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Justice-Speaks-10-2008-final.pdf>, accessed January 27, 2017.
78. "People's Agenda," Forward Together Moral Movement / HKonJ People's Assembly Coalition, accessed January 31, 2017. <https://hkonj.com/about/peoplesagenda/>.
79. This formulation of the relationship of the ideology of racism to the practice of slavery relies upon Craig Steven Wilder's discussion in *A Covenant with Color: Race and Social Power in Brooklyn* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 3: "Racism was not produced by slavery; it was produced during slavery. Race arose in defense of the perverse maldistribution of social power through which people of African descent were enslaved as the application of that power came into question."
80. Rev. William Harrington, Sanford, North Carolina, in discussion with the author, December 15, 2012.
81. "Petition for Fair Representation," Letter from IAM Local W369 to R. Thomas Buffenbarger, President IAM, late June 2009. Letter in author's possession.

82. Ibid.

83. “Cases & Decisions: Moncure Plywood LLC,” National Labor Relations Board, accessed February 2, 2017, <https://www.nlr.gov/case/10-RD-080922>.

84. My notion of a “labor gospel” is a variation on Ken Fones-Wolf’s label “trade union gospel. See *Trade Union Gospel: Christianity and Labor in Industrial Philadelphia, 1865-1915* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

85. Several members of Local 369 pointed to Luke 10:7 when asked about the relationship between one’s work and the Bible and the teachings of the church: “And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: *for the labourer is worthy of his hire*. Go not from house to house” (KJV). Author’s emphasis added.

86. Harrington, 2012. Though Harrington’s official role in Local 369 was union trustee, over time, I grew to think of him primarily as the union’s biblical theologian. He never failed to connect his experiences to biblical texts and then employ those connections to interpret what he was seeing and hearing. In a way, he was fulfilling his role as a trustee as a union trustee must always think in the broadest ways about protecting the union and building its capacity..

87. Ibid.

88. Ibid.

89. Ibid.

90. 10.7% of employees belonged to unions in 2016 compared to 20.1% in 1983. Economic News Release: Union Members Summary, Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor, January 26, 2017, accessed February 7, 2017, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm>.

91. For an alarming account of proposals to roll-back workplace safety measures, see Elizabeth Grossman, “Republicans Are Racing to Make Workplaces More Dangerous and Unhealthy,” *Working in These Times*, March 15, 2017, accessed April 12, 2017, [http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/19974/republicans\\_are\\_racing\\_to\\_make\\_workplaces\\_more\\_dangerous\\_and\\_unhealthy](http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/19974/republicans_are_racing_to_make_workplaces_more_dangerous_and_unhealthy). Of particular note is the February 22 letter from the Business Roundtable to Gary Cohn, Director of the National Economic Council of the White House that spells out their goal to undo key regulations in three major areas: energy & environment, health care, and workforce issues (overtime, fair pay, and Equal Employment and Opportunity Commission requirements for pay data to prevent discrimination). See <https://businessroundtable.org/sites/default/files/Regulations%20of%20Concern%20Letter%20and%20List%20170222.pdf>.

92. *Janus v. AFSCME* (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees) is a renewed attempt to show that the First Amendment’s free speech guarantee is violated when public employees who choose not to join the union in their workplace have to affirmatively opt-out of paying that portion of union dues – or agency fee or “fair share service fee” for a non-union member – not directly related to contract negotiation and administration. Rather, public employees should be allowed to opt-in to pay that portion of those fees in order to protect their freedom of speech by not “forcing” them to pay for political activity by their union. The key question is what is considered political or non-political in the administration and function of a union. Opponents of public sector unions question whether there is anything that a union does that is not inherently political. An earlier attempt to achieve this goal, *Friedrichs*

v. California Teachers Association, reached the U.S. Supreme Court but the decision on March 29, 2016 tied at 4-4 as Justice Antonin Scalia died six weeks earlier on February 13. Scalia's vote very likely would have contributed to overturning the precedent set in the Supreme Court's 1977 *Abood v. Detroit Board of Education* decision (allowing the collection of mandatory agency fees from public sector employees). Public sector union members comprise 49% of all union members in the United States (<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm>). The recent confirmation and swearing-in of Justice Neil Gorsuch restored the Court to nine members. If the Supreme Court were to accept an appeal of *Janus v. AFSCME* from the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals, given the perceived judicial leanings of Gorsuch, the precedent set in the *Abood* decision is likely to be overturned.

93. Harrington, 2012.

94. *Ibid.*

95. *Ibid.*

96. *Ibid.*

97. *Ibid.*