

Building Power in South Florida

by Sanjay Pinto and Barbara Byrd

Introduction

The Miami-Dade County metropolitan area is the eighth largest in the country. Historically, as elsewhere in the South, unions in the Miami area have faced steep challenges to growing their influence and membership base. But the area's significant untapped potential for building labor and progressive power and its importance on the national political map led the AFL-CIO to target Miami as one of five Southern cities for an initial round of investment in 2015 – part of a larger effort to revitalize the labor movement in the South. Given that Miami has the largest foreign-born population of any city in the country, unlocking the power of immigrant communities will be crucial to labor's efforts to help realize the area's progressive potential.¹ In light of the metro region's stark racial inequalities and an overall gap between rich and poor that leads the nation in one recent ranking, labor's ability to help unite the area's diverse population around a narrative of shared prosperity will another key to its success.² And, with evidence that there is political will among Miamians to address the acute impact of the climate crisis in the region, the ability of unions to partner in the creation of green jobs and a more sustainable future will be also be an important factor in labor's relevance during the years to come.³ This report explores recent developments involving the South Florida AFL-CIO and draws lessons for labor and community leaders looking to expand progressive activism in South Florida and beyond.⁴

Miami's Progressive Potential

After the Second World War, the Congress of Industrial Organizations attempted to unionize the American South, with the aim of building a progressive multiracial coalition that would help to transform the region and the country. So-called "Operation Dixie" largely failed amid Jim Crow laws, racial division and terror, and the red-scare hysteria of the Cold War. Instead, "right to work" laws began to gain momentum, touted in part as a means of ensuring that white workers would not have to become members of the same bargaining units as their black counterparts.⁵ Many unions in the South (and in other parts of the country) also continued to reinforce racial divisions rather than challenging them.⁶ Since then, given the hostile political environment, anti-union culture, and challenges posed by right to work, national unions have made limited investments in the South. With low union density and growing corporate

¹ See <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2015/09/americas-leading-immigrant-cities/406438/> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_States_cities_by_foreign-born_population

² See <http://www.miamiherald.com/opinion/op-ed/article84026387.html> and <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article106325122.html>

³ <http://climatecommunication.yale.edu/visualizations-data/ycom-us-2016/?est=personal&type=value&geo=county>

⁴ Research for this report included several interviews with labor leaders and community partners. We spoke to leaders from a range of affiliates, public and private sector, building trades and teachers. We would like to thank all of the leaders and activists for taking time out of their busy schedules to share their time, ideas and enthusiasm.

⁵ <http://www.labornotes.org/blogs/2017/08/racist-who-pioneered-right-work-laws>

⁶ <https://press.princeton.edu/titles/10119.html>

investment, the South has often been at the leading edge of rising corporate influence in the US economy, society, and politics.

Florida was an early adopter of right to work in the 1940s and remains a right to work state today.⁷ At 2.8% as of 2017, private sector union density in the Miami metropolitan area is substantially lower than the national average of 6.5%, and the rate of de-unionization over the past three decades has been more rapid in the Miami region than it has been nationally.⁸ In contrast, the Miami area's public sector union density (32.5%) is only slightly lower than the national rate of 37.9%.⁹ Unlike its other Southern neighbors, public sector workers in Florida still have a right to unionize and bargain collectively, but Republican leaders in the state have been attempting to push through legislation that would strip these rights for public sector unions whose membership enrollment dips below 50% (which would affect most of the large public unions).¹⁰ The most recent law to pass was HB 7055, which denies collective bargaining rights to education unions that cannot reach 50% membership. The Florida Education Association has filed a lawsuit challenging the law¹¹, but ironically FEA also reports that membership has actually increased since the law passed¹². The recent legislative efforts by Republicans are a clear attempt to decimate this bulwark of union power throughout the state.

Despite this challenging terrain, the Miami area is an important and promising laboratory for labor movement revitalization. The eighth most populous metro region in the country and third most populous in the Southern region (after Houston and Dallas), the area encompassing Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and Port St. Lucie had some 6.7 million people as of 2016, with a rate of population growth that substantially exceeds the national trend. Some 2.7 million of these people reside in Miami-Dade County, where most of the South Florida AFL-CIO's membership is based. In 2012, nearly 64.3% of Miami-Dade residents were Latino, 17.1% were black, and only 16.1% were non-Hispanic white.¹³ A reliably Democratic stronghold, Miami-Dade turned out in record numbers to vote for the Democratic Presidential ticket in 2016, and demographic shifts together with other factors including heightened concern about climate change are likely to deepen this left-leaning tendency in the years to come, with potentially important implications for Florida's political map and that of the nation.¹⁴

Miami is also an important hub in the global economy – the airport and the port are the city's two biggest employers – and is quite dynamic economically. A 2015 comparison of how US cities have fared since the financial crisis of 2008-2009 found that Miami ranked second among large cities in “socio-economic growth,” defined by a combination of factors related to the “socio-demographic landscape” and “jobs and economic environment.” Miami ranked first on the list in overall population growth, growth in the

⁷ <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1743-4580.2006.00096.x/full>

⁸ See figures reported in <http://www.unionstats.com/>. Between 1986 and 2017, private sector declined 76% in Miami (from 11.5% to 2.8%) as opposed to 57% in the US as a whole (from 15.2% to 6.5%).

⁹ <http://www.unionstats.com/>

¹⁰ <http://www.miaminewtimes.com/news/florida-gop-union-busting-bill-filed-for-2018-9885698>

¹¹ <https://www.orlandoweekly.com/Blogs/archives/2018/07/02/florida-teachers-union-sues-state-over-union-busting-education-law>

¹² <http://www.sun-sentinel.com/news/education/fl-reg-schools-union-membership-20180713-story.html>

¹³ <http://www.miamidade.gov/business/economic-demographic-profiles.asp>

¹⁴ See <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/politics-government/election/article112999808.html> and <http://www.tampabay.com/florida-politics/buzz/2017/11/22/why-democrats-feel-miami-dade-is-moving-their-way/>

working-age population, and the increase in full-time jobs.¹⁵ Recent gains are not being shared equally, however. Miami is a site of tremendous inequality – a place where more than half of all jobs are low-wage positions in the service sector that pay an average of \$32,000 per year, and, according to recent measure, the US metropolitan region with biggest gap between rich and poor.¹⁶ As we discuss below, such disparities could become an important basis for collective action in the years ahead.

Miami-Dade County has an active network of community organizations – including the Miami Workers Center, the Florida Immigrant Coalition (FLIC), South Florida Interfaith Worker Justice, We Count, Catalyst and others – that are responding to inequalities of various kinds. Many have mobilized against aspects of President Trump’s agenda since the election, including his unremitting attacks on immigrants. One element of the Miami scene that caught the attention of the AFL-CIO was the early attempts by labor and community groups to move a progressive policy agenda in the city and region. A county living wage ordinance was passed in the late 1990s, and, in the years that followed, groups of labor and community leaders worked on issues such as wage theft, leveraging publicly subsidized development, and protecting immigrants.¹⁷ Even though the coalitions that emerged to focus on these issues were sometimes fleeting, and the work itself episodic, lacking a long-term strategic focus, there was excitement about the possibilities. That sense of opportunity remains.

This confluence of factors led to Miami to be identified as one of five cities for the initial round of a new national AFL-CIO labor council revitalization effort led by Executive Vice President Tefere Gebre. Two years ago, the national AFL-CIO chose five cities for the initial round of a new labor council revitalization effort.¹⁸ None of these cities, which have been targeted for significant investment by the AFL-CIO, are in states known as areas of traditional strength. They were chosen because they are sites of opportunity – for building labor-community coalitions, strengthening political successes, moving progressive policy agendas, and, of course, organizing.

In what follows, we aim to provide a sense of some factors that make the Miami area ripe for a flowering of labor organizing and progressive action. The rest of this background section discusses some key factors – demographics, inequality, and climate change – that shape the conditions of possibility for building the power of organized labor and the broader progressive movement in the Miami region. The next section discusses recent policy, organizing, political, and coalition-building work by the South Florida AFL-CIO, and the final section considers some potential ways of expanding on this work in the years ahead.

¹⁵<http://www.miaminewtimes.com/news/miami-had-the-second-most-socioeconomic-growth-since-2008-of-any-big-us-city-7939631>

¹⁶ See <http://www.miamiherald.com/opinion/op-ed/article84026387.html> and <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article106325122.html>

¹⁷ Nissen and Russo

¹⁸ <http://prospect.org/article/labor-goes-south-0>

Demographics

Miami is nicknamed the “Gateway of the Americas.”¹⁹ The Miami metro area ranks first in foreign-born population share nationally, and the city of Miami ranks second in foreign-born population share (56.4%) among among cities with more than 200,000 people, behind only the neighboring city of Hialeah (74.4%), which is also sits within Miami-Dade county.²⁰ The Miami metro region’s immigrant population is largely drawn from Latin America, though it also has sizable communities from Haiti, Jamaica, and other parts of the Anglo- and Francophone Caribbean. In line with its overall population ranking, the metro area has the sixth largest black population in the country.²¹ It also has the third largest Jewish population, trailing only the New York City and Los Angeles metro regions.²² This diverse mix of Miamians generally leans Democratic, though gerrymandering by the Republican-controlled state legislature means that South Florida’s delegation in Tallahassee leans Republican.²³

The Miami area is distinctive in its heavy presence of Cubans, who numbered nearly one million in the Miami metro region as of 2010 and accounted for over a third (34.1%) of the city of Miami’s population.²⁴ Miami’s Cuban population is significantly more conservative than most other segments of the Latino population in Florida and nationwide, and their support for Trump in the 2016 Presidential election has been cited as a key factor in his winning the state.²⁵ However, with declining turnout among Cuban voters and a growing inflow of immigrants from Puerto Rico and other parts of Latin America in recent years, the Cuban share of Miami’s and Florida’s Latino voter bloc is gradually ebbing.²⁶ The political orientation of the Cuban American community is also migrating leftward over time, driven in large measure by the more liberal leanings of younger, US-born Cubans.²⁷ It bears mentioning, too, that Cuban Republican politicians in Miami are often relatively liberal on economic issues -- a tendency that can be explained in part by their large working class constituencies.²⁸

Organizing by unions and other progressive actors has often failed to penetrate large segments of the Miami region’s large and diverse immigrant population.²⁹ Even in industries with union representation, for example, membership enrollment rates are frequently lowest in immigrant communities.³⁰ However, recent years have seen some important union organizing victories involving a diverse spectrum of

¹⁹ <http://thecitadelmiami.com/why-miami-is-the-gateway-to-the-americas/>

²⁰ See <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2015/09/americas-leading-immigrant-cities/406438/> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_States_cities_by_foreign-born_population

²¹ <http://blackdemographics.com/cities-2/miami/>

²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_urban_areas_by_Jewish_population

²³ Nissen, Bruce & Monica Russo, “Strategies for Labor Revitalization: The Case of Miami,” in Lowell Turner and Daniel B. Cornfield, eds., *Labor in the New Urban Battlegrounds*, ILR Press, 2007.

²⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuban_Americans

²⁵ <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/politics-government/election/article113778053.html>

²⁶ See <http://www.tampabay.com/florida-politics/buzz/2017/11/22/why-democrats-feel-miami-dade-is-moving-their-way/> and <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/03/09/democratic-edge-in-hispanic-voter-registration-grows-in-florida/>

²⁷ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/06/24/after-decades-of-gop-support-cubans-shifting-toward-the-democratic-party/>

²⁸ Nissen and Russo

²⁹ Nissen and Russo

³⁰ Interview with Hernandez-Mats.

immigrant communities from Latin America and the Caribbean.³¹ The web of community organizations serving and organizing immigrant Miamians has also expanded considerably in the past decade, playing an active role in pushing back against Trump's recent attacks on immigrants. Further unlocking the power of immigrant communities is one key to tapping Miami's progressive potential.

Inequality

Miami is often associated with the glitz of South Beach. It should also be recognized as a leading avatar of our "new Gilded age."³² At a time when levels of income inequality in the US stand at an historic high, Bloomberg News recently ranked Miami first among big cities in its gap between rich (defined as the top 5% of earners) and poor (the bottom 20%).³³ Between 2014 and 2015, this gap increased by an incredible 16.8%.³⁴ The region also ranks second among the top 25 metro regions in the proportion of its residents living in poverty (15.4%) and has the second lowest median income household income (\$52,385) among this group.³⁵ And, in keeping with national patterns, there is evidence that certain communities are hit much harder by economic challenges. For example, in 2013, the median income of black non-Hispanic households (\$32,944) and Hispanic households (\$39,674) in Miami-Dade county lagged far behind that of non-Hispanic white households (\$64,976).³⁶

Inequality in Miami is closely connected to the region's economic structure. Deindustrialization has been one important driver of rising inequality in the US and other advanced democracies over recent decades.³⁷ In Miami, the sorts of industrial jobs that used to serve as a basis for carving out a decent living are now even more sparse than in most other places, and low-wage service jobs in areas such as retail and food service are more numerous. Indeed, a recent analysis showed that, of the ten most populous metro regions in the country, the Miami area has by far the largest share of census tracts in which members of this low-wage "service class" comprise a majority of residents.³⁸ Although the Miami region has recently added a sizable number of manufacturing jobs, the rate of growth -- both in percentage and absolute terms -- has been substantially higher in key segments of the low wage service economy.³⁹ This structural dynamic helps to give Miami's distribution of income its pronounced "hourglass" shape.

Given the impact of unions on pay rates and other aspects of economic inequality, Miami should be fertile ground for union organizing.⁴⁰ Although unionizing the kinds of low-wage service jobs that abound in

³¹ <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/university-miami-janitors-campaign-economic-justice-2005-2006>. Some of these have been led by SEIU 32BJ, a union not affiliated with the South Florida AFL-CIO, but UNITE HERE #355 has also won campaigns at the airport, casinos and hotels.

³² <https://press.princeton.edu/titles/10831.html>

³³ See <https://shadowproof.com/2016/07/04/us-reaches-historic-high-income-inequality/> and <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article106325122.html>. Bloomberg formulated its index of inequality using data from the American Community Survey.

³⁴ <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article106325122.html>

³⁵ https://www.bls.gov/regions/southeast/news-release/areaemployment_miami.htm

³⁶ <https://www.miamidade.gov/business/library/reports/2013-income-poverty.pdf>

³⁷ <https://www.amazon.com/Deindustrialization-America-Barry-Bluestone/dp/0465015913>

³⁸ <https://www.citylab.com/equity/2013/03/class-divided-cities-miami-edition/4678/>

³⁹ https://www.bls.gov/regions/southeast/news-release/areaemployment_miami.htm

⁴⁰ <https://www.amazon.com/What-Do-Unions-Richard-Freeman/dp/0465091326>

Miami was long assumed to be difficult, recent experience in Miami and other parts of the country has proved that it is not impossible. Of course, there are major obstacles to organizing in the service sector and other parts of the local economy. In Miami as elsewhere in the South, anti-unionism is deeply embedded. Employers frequently quash unionization drives through aggressive anti-union campaigns.⁴¹ Due in part to low union density, many workers are not familiar with the potential benefits that unions can bring. In Miami in particular, expanding organized labor's footprint is inextricably tied to the dual challenge of making inroads in the area's immigrant communities and confronting the racial divisions that "right to work" sought to reinforce.⁴² Crafting a narrative around shared prosperity that helps to unify the region's diverse working population is another important element in realizing Miami's progressive potential.

Climate Change

By now, most people in the US believe climate change is real, and a result of human activity. Fewer are concerned that climate change will affect them personally.⁴³ This probably helps to explain why the issue tends to rank relatively low when people prioritize the public policy issues they regard as most urgent.⁴⁴ In Miami, the environment is different. Hurricanes and other tropical storms have buffeted the region in recent years, and the link between climate change and the intensity of these weather patterns has been well-established by scientists.⁴⁵ Miami leads the nation in the risk of property damage from climate change, and rising sea waters could leave much of the Miami region underwater by this century's end.⁴⁶ In this context, it is not all that surprising that Miami is one of a small number of cities across the country in which a majority of people are worried that climate change will affect them personally, and that Miamians are more likely than others to favor policies aimed at curbing greenhouse gas emissions.⁴⁷ Of course, achieving meaningful progress in combating climate change would ultimately require a coordinated global effort. But, it is significant that local conditions in the Miami area have generated broad concern about the issue and a will to act.

Miami has already begun taking measures to respond to climate change. Miami Beach, a coastal city of around 90,000 within Miami-Dade that includes the famed South Beach area, is particularly vulnerable to the effects of global warming. Recently, the city has invested in modes of transport such as water taxis

⁴¹ Nissen and Russo

⁴² Not surprisingly given the region's overall demographic makeup, immigrant workers make up a large share of the overall workforce and a higher share of the low-wage service workforce than in any other metro region in the country. See <https://www.citylab.com/life/2017/02/where-a-day-without-immigrants-will-affect-cities-most/517008/>. The racist underpinnings of right to work are spelled out at <https://www.afscme.org/now/the-racist-roots-of-right-to-work>.

⁴³ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/03/21/climate/how-americans-think-about-climate-change-in-six-maps.html?mtrref=www.google.com&gwh=19AC243415C1ACDDAAF36ED0440FC68F&gwt=pay>

⁴⁴ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/09/23/most-americans-believe-in-climate-change-but-give-it-low-priority/>

⁴⁵ <https://www.ucsusa.org/global-warming/science-and-impacts/impacts/hurricanes-and-climate-change.html#.WjVunEqnFGM>

⁴⁶ See <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/environment/article29029159.html> and <http://www.businessinsider.com/miami-could-disappear-climate-change-2017-7>

⁴⁷ <http://climatecommunication.yale.edu/visualizations-data/ycom-us-2016/?est=personal&type=value&geo=county>

and trolleys that have a lower carbon footprint and created incentives for energy efficient construction.⁴⁸ In 2014, the mayor announced a \$500 million initiative called “Rising Above” that involves raising the level of local roads and installing a system for pumping water out of the city in the event of a flood.⁴⁹ Nearby on the mainland, voters in the city of Miami passed a \$400 million bond in November 2017 that includes funding to upgrade storm drains, flood pumps and seawalls -- the start of an estimated \$1 billion in projects to brace the city against rising seas -- as well as \$100 million for affordable housing and economic development.⁵⁰

There are important connections between climate change and the inequalities entrenched in the Miami region. For example, recent processes of residential displacement have involved so-called “climate gentrification.”⁵¹ Black Miamians were once redlined out of prime real estate in Miami Beach and other coastal areas, but climate change is now propelling gentrifiers into Little Haiti and other neighborhoods where black communities have settled, which have become more attractive due to their higher elevation.⁵² For unions with members in these communities, this has emerged a crucial quality of life issue to address. As we discuss below, the South Florida AFL-CIO has been increasing its engagement in climate change work, and there are opportunities for organized labor to play a role in ensuring that the “green jobs” of the 21st century are good jobs. With Miami facing existential questions about its future, climate change can potentially be a lever for reorienting the region’s developmental trajectory, helping to remake it as a place in which all residents can survive and thrive.

The South Florida AFL-CIO

Background

The South Florida AFL-CIO covers seven counties -- Charlotte, Collier, Miami-Dade, Glades, Hendry, Lee, and Monroe -- that altogether had 3.9 million people at the time 2010 Census, with Miami-Dade accounting for 68.1% of this number.⁵³ The area that the central labor council (CLC) covers is mixed politically. As noted above, a strong majority of Miami-Dade county’s population (65.1%) voted for the Democratic Presidential ticket in 2016. However, the six other counties listed above went red.⁵⁴ In addition to the South Florida AFL-CIO, there are two other CLCs that cover parts of the greater Miami metro region: the Broward County AFL-CIO and the Palm Beach/Treasure Coast AFL-CIO.⁵⁵ This case study focuses particular attention on the work of the South Florida AFL-CIO.

⁴⁸<https://www.citylab.com/equity/2017/06/the-fight-against-climate-change-four-cities-leading-the-way-in-the-trump-era/530385/>

⁴⁹<http://time.com/4932565/hurricane-irma-miami-beach/>

⁵⁰ <https://miami.curbed.com/2017/11/8/16624762/miami-voters-climate-change-bond>

⁵¹ Interview with Cynthia Hernandez

⁵² https://www.cjr.org/special_report/climate-change-florida-race-journalism.php

⁵³ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florida_AFL-CIO and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_counties_in_Florida

⁵⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/elections/results/florida>

⁵⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florida_AFL-CIO

As noted above, Miami has been particularly hard hit by trends of de-unionization in recent decades. The labor council's ability to build power in the region suffered a particularly harsh blow in the late 1980s, when Eastern Airlines went bankrupt in its attempt to defeat an organizing drive by the International Association of Machinists and the Transport Workers Union. The result of that defeat was the destruction of two of Miami's most powerful private sector unions.⁵⁶ Despite such setbacks, the CLC has maintained a presence in the local labor movement and cultivated connections with community groups, and it played an active role in the Miami living wage campaign in the late 1990s. In 2014, given the potential for growing the labor movement and deepening progressive politics in the Miami, the national AFL-CIO made an investment in South Florida as part its renewed strategy for building power in the South.

At a strategic planning meeting in convened in December 2014, nearly 50 leaders and staff from affiliated unions participated came together to discuss "big picture" goals and hash out a detailed work plan. Included among the goals were:

- Winning commitments from affiliates to mobilize members policy campaigns and other actions;
- Deepening partnerships and institutional connections with community organizations;
- Developing a media outreach plan and building a social media presence; and
- Developing a political and legislative program for 2016 and beyond.

Other goals were to increase the presence of the Young Workers Committee and explore the possibilities for joint organizing campaigns.⁵⁷

As of spring 2017, the South Florida AFL-CIO had around 100 affiliate locals from a range of different public and private sector unions. The total active membership in these locals was more than 55,000. United Teachers of Dade, an affiliate of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), was the largest union local by some distance, with nearly 12,000 members, and other AFT-affiliated locals accounted for nearly 6,700 additional members. Locals affiliated with the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) made up the second largest membership bloc, with over 5,800.

Other unions with reported local memberships totals exceeding 1,000 included the National Association of Letter Carriers (more than 1,900); International Association of Fire Fighters (nearly 2,700); International Brotherhood of Teamsters (more than 1,800); Transport Workers Union (nearly 1,700); International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Communication (nearly 1,500); Communication Workers of America (more than 1,400); UNITE HERE (more than 1,300); American Postal Workers Union (more than 1,100); and the Office and Professional Employees International Union (more than 1,100).⁵⁸

Since 2016, the South Florida AFL-CIO has secured several new affiliations including a new International Association of Fire Fighters local, the Communications Workers of America in Hialeah, the National Association of Letter Carriers, and the Transport Workers Union at American Airlines.⁵⁹ These

⁵⁶ Nissen & Russo

⁵⁷ *South Florida Strategic Planning Session: August 21, 2015: Executive Summary, Report and Recommendations*, prepared by the National AFL-CIO for the South Florida AFL-CIO.

⁵⁸ South Florida AFL-CIO membership spreadsheet, April 2017

⁵⁹ Interview with Richard Quincoces.

new affiliations bring added resources and energy into the CLC. As discussed below, a key question for the CLC and South Florida's unions going forward is how to organize and enroll more members, improving wages and other conditions for more people in the area and helping to expand the resources available for driving progressive change in the region.

The South Florida AFL-CIO has an executive board with four officers. The President of the CLC is a not a paid officer, but a representative from the Transport Workers Union. The Vice President, Treasurer and Recording Secretary positions are also on a volunteer basis.

The CLC has been able to staff up in recent years. In March 2015, with a grant from the national AFL-CIO, the council hired a community engagement coordinator who had been instrumental from her position at Florida International University in building the coalition that won a Responsible Wage Ordinance at the City of Miami the month before. The field staff for the council, who was hired in May, 2016, carried out much of the political and affiliation work. In July 2016, the labor council hired a Citizenship Program Coordinator who worked closely with FLIC and AFSCME on the citizenship clinics, some of which were conducted for AFSCME members. There has been some staff turnover since 2017, but it seems clear that the policy accomplishments described below were largely attributable to the increased capacity that the added staffing has enabled.

A snapshot of some recent CLC activities

- **Political action** -- As noted above, the South Florida area is historically a “blue” part of Florida, and increasingly so.⁶⁰ In the 2016, election the CLC managed a local get-out-the vote efforts with staff from different local unions. Locally, the political power structure is more conservative than one would expect given the political leanings of the electorate, and the CLC and area unions have had some success in turning some seats Democratic.

A special in 2017 to fill the Senate District 40 seat is one example. Democrat Annette Taddeo defeated the Republican and Independent candidates with 51% of the vote, flipping the seat from Republican to Democratic control. According to the council president, organized labor helped to “put her over the finish line” with a 1,300 vote margin.⁶¹ Although most of the mobilization came through among AFSCME and SEIU leaders and members, the CLC played in helping to coordinate the effort and pull in other unions.

- **Public policy** -- The South Florida AFL-CIO has been long been engaged in policy work in the region. In the late 1990s, it was part of a coalition of groups that successfully lobbied the Miami-Dade Board of County Commissioners to institute a living wage ordinance that applies to contractors in the Miami-Dade Aviation Department and to all other county contracts worth more

⁶⁰ In 2008, Barack Obama won Miami-Dade by 139,000 votes. Four years later, his margin was 208,000 votes. In 2016, Hillary Clinton defeated Donald Trump in Miami-Dade by a 290,000 votes.

⁶¹ Interview with Andy Madtes, November 27, 2017.

than \$100,000.⁶² Recently, the CLC has been involved in efforts to strengthen the ordinance. With healthcare costs rising rapidly, one key goal has been to reset its healthcare index.

The council also partnered with building trades affiliates and Florida International University (FIU) in convening a wage theft/misclassification committee, and the CLC president recently leveraged his position on the board of a public-private partnership planning committee to help convince Miami-Dade county commissioners not to divert public funding for the creation of private sector jobs.⁶³ In June 2016, with labor support, Miami-Dade County voted to increase its minimum wage to \$10.31/hour (\$2.26 above the state minimum), with \$1/hour raises each year for the next 3 years. Unfortunately, the increase was disallowed after it was ruled to violate the state's minimum wage preemption statute.

- **Immigrant outreach** -- In 2016, the South Florida AFL-CIO “received a grant from the New World Foundation and National AFL-CIO to implement a citizenship program.”⁶⁴ The aim was to promote outreach into immigrant communities and sign up new union members. Rather than creating a new program from scratch, the central labor council hired a staff person to manage a partnership with the Florida Immigrant Coalition (FLIC) on a citizenship clinic program it had been running since 2012.⁶⁵

At a single clinic in October 2016, those applying for citizenship included members of AFSCME, AFT, Teamsters, and UNITE HERE locals.⁶⁶ For AFSCME alone, the program brought in 60 new members over a period of several months. Although interest in the program remains, the grant supporting the program ran out in late 2017, and the labor council's involvement was on hold as of late 2017.⁶⁷

- **Climate change** -- With support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the South Florida AFL-CIO embarked on a project focusing on the “Impact of Climate Change on the Overall Health of South Florida” in 2017.⁶⁸ The aim of the project was to develop a shared agenda for addressing the effects of climate change among unions, environmental groups, and other progressive actors.

At an initial planning meeting in September 2017, labor representatives from the South Florida AFL-CIO, AFSCME, IUOE, SEIU, and UNITE HERE were joined by representatives from FIU and community and environmental groups including 350.org, Catalyst Miami, Miami Climate Alliance, New Florida Majority, and We Count!. Meeting participants expressed interest in working together on a range of issues including revenue losses and job impacts stemming from

⁶² <http://www.miamidade.gov/smallbusiness/living-wage-reports.asp>

⁶³ Hernandez, Cynthia. 2017. “Miami Dade Living Wage: Research Brief.”

⁶⁴ Hernandez, Cynthia. 2017. “South Florida AFL-CIO: 2017 Campaigns and Programs.”

⁶⁵ <https://floridaimmigrant.org/our-work/citizenship/become-a-citizen/>

⁶⁶ Hernandez, Cynthia. 2017. “South Florida AFL-CIO: 2017 Campaigns and Programs.”

⁶⁷ Interview with Andy Madtes, November 2017.

⁶⁸ The climate change project builds on earlier exploratory work the South Florida AFL-CIO

climate events, the health impacts of climate change on workers, climate gentrification, and a “just transition” for the Miami area.⁶⁹

Looking Ahead

Building on the work described above, there is potential for South Florida’s labor movement to grow in the years to come. Below, we draw on the interviews conducted in Miami to outline some ways in which the South Florida AFL-CIO and its affiliates might expand their work in the future.

- **Building organizational capacity** -- The CLC has staffed up in recent years. Still, concerns were also raised about staff capacity within the CLC, with some suggesting that per capita contributions from local affiliates should be increased to help support an increase in capacity.⁷⁰ The challenge of solidifying the current team is foremost right now, especially in light of recent turnover. It is perhaps time to take a step back, revisit the strategic plan from 4 years ago, and update it in light of these changes, recent accomplishments and continuing challenges. Addressing capacity issues within the CLC could yield dividends across the different areas of work discussed below.
- **Deepening political engagement** -- As discussed in the previous section, interviewees identified several areas in which the CLC had strengthened its political engagement in recent years, including candidate screenings, get-out-the-vote efforts, and serving as an information hub for affiliates. However, several leaders suggested that the CLC could further enhance its coordinating role by engaging with affiliates more strategically and much earlier on in the process of endorsing political candidates and pursuing policy and coalition-building work. With respect to political endorsements, some suggested that the process could be more inclusive and strategic, helping to ensure that organized labor speaks with a more unified political voice.⁷¹
- **Strengthening community connections** -- The CLC has a long history of working with community partners. As part of the living wage campaign in the late 1990s, the CLC played a key role in helping to coordinate the connections between unions and community groups.⁷² More recently, the CLC helped to manage the process for developing a community benefits agreement for the Miami World Center project.⁷³ The agreement itself fell short of community expectations

⁶⁹ Hernandez, Cynthia. Meeting notes from September 2017 climate change planning meeting. For more on the idea on the concept of a just transition, see

⁷⁰ The CLC President noted that, in late 2017, a decision was made not to hire a full-time executive director, at least for the time being.

⁷¹ The inability of the labor council to pull its affiliates together more consistently and aggressively in local races continues to be a challenge. Several leaders interviewed for this report expressed frustration with the tendency of affiliates to “do their own thing” in elections, and labor council staff expressed the on-going desire to build a stronger political program.

⁷² Interview with Jonathan Fried.

⁷³ Interview with Wendi Walsh.

in the terms that were negotiated.⁷⁴ But, according to some, it helped to solidify important relationships between unions and community groups.⁷⁵ Joint community-labor policy initiatives continue, including efforts to raise wages and enact other worker protections at the airport.

Several interviewees spoke about the pivotal role of the CLC staff person charged with managing community relationships in helping to strengthen these connections in different areas of work including community benefits agreements, climate change, and misclassification. Some suggested that, in the future, the CLC as a whole could do substantially more to reach out to community partners more deliberately and earlier on in the process of partnering on various projects and campaigns. Others spoke of the need to institutionalize these relationships, moving beyond personal to organizational connections.

- **Promoting multi-union organizing** -- A number of leaders of suggested that additional engagement around organizing new members and enforcing the living wage ordinance at Miami airport -- two issues that are closely related -- could be an area for the CLC and some of its affiliates to expand on existing work. Building on card check neutrality, UNITE HERE and the Service Employees International Union have had significant organizing successes in recent years, although, as of December 2017, there were no new organizing drives underway.

The “American Dream Miami” mega-mall was identified as another project with potential for new organizing and community benefits. If completed as planned, the facility would be 30% larger than the Mall of America in Minnesota, currently the nation’s largest.⁷⁶ The project’s developers have explicitly touted it as one that caters to high-income Miamians, creating an opening for arguing that it should at least supply decent jobs for workers.⁷⁷

Miami-Dade’s Strategic Miami Area Rapid Transit Plan (SMART) also provides a set of organizing opportunities that were identified by several of those we interviewed. With the tax increases needed to pursue the transit expansion being debated, local TWU members staged a public protest march in October 2017.⁷⁸ For the labor movement, there is potential for strategic engagement around the implications of these debates for construction and transport jobs and the ability of all Miamians to affordably commute to work.

⁷⁴ See <http://www.forworkingfamilies.org/sites/pwf/files/publications/Effective%20CBAs.pdf> and <https://riseup.fiu.edu/research-publications/equitable-urban-development/community-benefits-from-development/who-benefits-report-final50415.pdf>

⁷⁵ Interview with Jonathan Fried.

⁷⁶ The target completion date -- set for 2023 as of October 2017 -- has been pushed back several times: <https://www.constructiondive.com/news/american-dream-miami-construction-pushed-back-another-year/508414/>. Although critics have suggested that the idea of a mega-mall is outmoded at a time when brick and mortar retailers are shuttering their doors at a record pace, the project’s boosters have counters that complex’s broad range of offerings -- including an indoor ski slope, a skating rink, and a large concert and event space -- will draw in customers: <http://money.cnn.com/2017/06/01/news/miami-american-dream-mall/index.html>

⁷⁷ <http://www.americandream.com/miami/?open=1>

⁷⁸ <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article179223151.html>

- **Expanding outreach, particularly in immigrant communities** -- In Miami as elsewhere, there is a spectrum of views on immigration within the labor movement.⁷⁹ However, our interviews revealed convergence around the idea that outreach, organizing, and political education in immigrant communities is critically important as a means of expanding the reach of local unions. With Republicans in Tallahassee pushing decertification for public sector unions with membership enrollment below 50%, signing up new members has become a matter of urgency -- and a challenge that is linked to immigrant outreach since enrollment rates are often lowest in immigrant communities.⁸⁰

In this context, some interviewees suggested that the CLC could use its convening capacity for unions in both the public and private sector to share best practices in organizing and political education. A CWA representative who had revived the local chapter of the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement (LCLAA) noted that several CWA locals had high member enrollment in Latino communities and thought that organizers from these unions would be willing to share lessons.⁸¹ Over time, as in other cities such as Los Angeles, perhaps the assumption that immigrant workers are less likely to engage in union activity can be turned on its head.⁸²

- **Further developing a climate jobs agenda** -- Given the huge impact of climate change in Miami, its salience for the area's residents, and the commitment of local public resources to lower the area's carbon footprint and protect it from flooding, the CLC's strategic focus on climate change could yield opportunities to influence the shape of local development. As the CLC intervenes in local discussions on how to limit the damage done by climate change to property, jobs, local ecosystems, and human health, there may also opportunities for engaging affiliates in construction and other sectors in the development of an agenda aimed at creating unionized green jobs.

Advancing such as agenda demands significant organizational legwork, but the experience of some other cities and states suggests that it is possible for local unions to engage in this kind of

⁷⁹ Interestingly, Miami has been the site of some of the most important empirical work on labor market effects of immigration. During the Mariel boatlift in 1980, some 125,000 Cubans immigrated to the US, with many settling in Miami. The event created a "natural experiment" for studying the impact of immigration on wages and employment, and led to vigorous debate by those with differing interpretations of the data (see <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/001979399004300205> and <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0019793917692945>). A balanced reading of the evidence suggests that impact of the boatlift on wages and employment were quite minimal (see <https://www.cgdev.org/blog/what-mariel-boatlift-cuban-refugees-can-teach-us-about-economics-immigration>). As Milkman has argued, declining job quality standards tend to precede the influx of immigrant workers into low-wage sectors rather than the other way around: <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/15033>

⁸⁰ Interview with Hernandez-Mats. According to Hernandez-Mats, President of UTD, the union has substantially lower membership enrollment levels among immigrant teachers than those born in the US. Herself a child of immigrant parents from Honduras, she reported that the union was ramping up its efforts to address this challenge. In her view, the union decertification efforts clearly posed a threat to UTD, which had membership enrollment under 50% at the time she was interviewed. However, she also saw these developments as a good motivation to expand the union's membership in communities where density was low.

⁸¹ Interview with Manuel Hartman. <http://www.miamigov.com/crb/ManuelHartman.html>

⁸² <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/15033>

forward-looking and transformational process together. In New York, the Governor recently made a \$1.5 billion dollar commitment to a climate jobs agenda put forward by several unions.⁸³ In Florida, the political context is different, but the urgency of the climate crisis may create openings for unions to help develop the kinds of jobs that are needed for a just transition.

- **Creating alignment around a vision of social equality and racial justice** -- Around the time of Miami’s living wage campaign, a parallel effort in Silicon Valley was bolstered by the publication of a landmark report that drew attention to growing inequality in the region and the organizations working to address it.⁸⁴ In Miami today, developing a sharp narrative that captures local inequalities and creates an alternative vision around shared prosperity could help to provide a mobilizing frame for unions and other progressive actors. Such a framework would attend to people’s struggles around housing, transport, and other basic needs -- issues that, according to several interviewees, Miami’s labor movement needs to do a better job of addressing.

Confronting “the new Jim Crow” is also crucial to dealing with inequality in the region, including racial wealth and income gaps and uneven barriers to political participation.⁸⁵ Shortly after a “ban the box” provision was included in the Miami World Center CBA, Miami-Dade became Florida’s first county to pass a ban the box ordinance.⁸⁶ In 2018, the CLC will support a ballot initiative to overturn felony disenfranchisement in Florida, which disproportionately affects black and brown communities and prevents hundreds of thousands of people from voting.⁸⁷ By expanding on such work and connecting it to struggles for climate, immigrant, and economic justice, the CLC can play its part in constituting South Florida as a center of progressive multiracial democracy.

With its high diversity and population growth, an economy that is expanding but generating extraordinary inequalities, and given the particular urgency of the climate crisis for its residents, Miami has a great deal of untapped progressive potential. Through added capacity and a more coordinated and strategic approach to cementing community relationships and building power on a sustainable basis, the CLC and the area’s labor movement can help to realize this potential, with important consequences for South Floridians and the future political direction of the nation.

⁸³<https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-announces-major-climate-and-jobs-initiative-partnership-worker-institute-cornell>. See also <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/worker-institute/nys-projects/reversing-inequality-combatting-climate-change>

⁸⁴ <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1743-4580.2004.00009.x/abstract>

⁸⁵ <http://newjimcrow.com/>

⁸⁶ <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/article38002746.html>

⁸⁷ Interview with Andy Madtes. For more on the “right to restoration” campaign, see: <https://floridarrrc.com/>