



Breaking New Ground: Social Movement Theory and the Cincinnati Union Co-ops

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Abstract

This article provides a case study, based on original author research, about the start of the union co-op movement in Cincinnati a decade ago. The author views the formation of initial union co-ops through the lens of social movement theory. Doing so identifies mechanisms critical to the success of a local union co-op movement, including the following: emulation – where a group of people model their work on that of others; social appropriation – where a group of people involved in an organization with one purpose utilize the organization for a new purpose; diffusion of information – sharing knowledge to wide networks; brokerage – relying on known individuals and organizations to connect with other potential allies and supporters; and resources, such as amassing pooled cash, recruiting government support, and locating meeting space. Additionally, those involved in a successful union co-op movement must be adaptable, draw on a wide variety of experts, aggregate information, and engage in long-term planning. Leadership and a substantial commitment of time to the movement by the leaders was repeatedly recognized by the interviewees as crucial to success.

Keywords Worker-owned · Union · Cooperative · Social movement theory

Introduction

“At a glance, our efforts may seem small, but together we are strong. It takes social movements of all kinds, including the worker-owned co-op movement, to create an economy that works for all.”

The global Covid pandemic, the mass social movement against anti-Black racism, and renewed labor activism within the U.S. challenge us to find more humane, sustainable, and egalitarian ways of living and working. Those in the union co-op movement – which combines labor and co-op organizing – offer a vision for one type of more human, sustainable, and egalitarian work. The vision is not simply a dream – it

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is a reality modeled on the historical success of the Mondragon Corporation cooperatives that arose after the devastation of the Spanish Civil War. The movement draws on lessons learned in the U.S. by, among others, Black cooperativists, documented in Jessica Gordan Nembhart's groundbreaking book *Collective Courage*, by the Knights of Labor who during the 1880s, formed hundreds of co-ops as a means to empower workers, and by long-standing union co-ops like Cooperative Home Care Associates, the largest worker cooperative in the U.S.

This article provides a case study, drawn from interviews with those involved, about the start of the union co-op movement in Cincinnati a decade ago. The author views the formation of the initiative and initial union co-ops through the lens of social movement theory. Doing so identifies mechanisms significant to the success of a local union co-op movement. These mechanisms include the following: emulation – where a group of people model their work on that of others, such as the Mondragon cooperatives; social appropriation – where a group of people involved in an organization with one purpose utilize the organization for a new purpose, like building a union co-op initiative; diffusion of information – such as sharing knowledge of cooperative models, funding, and legislation to wide networks of labor and social justice activists; brokerage – relying on known individuals and organizations to connect those in the union co-op movement to other potential allies and supporters; and resources, such as amassing pooled cash or property, recruiting donations and government support, and locating meeting space and expert services. By identifying significant mechanisms, the case study may benefit two audiences. Local groups hoping to start their own local union co-op movement will find descriptions of strategies that are likely to work. Academics and practitioners studying worker-owned cooperatives can further analyze the case study through different lenses that may result in additional strategies that work to build a robust union cooperative economy.

This article begins by providing background. The second section explains union co-ops, their benefits, and barriers to starting union co-ops and reaping these benefits. Generally, worker-owned businesses, including union cooperatives, last longer than other businesses, retain workers longer than traditional businesses, build community wealth, and circulate income in the community. The third section provides background about social movement theory relying on the pivotal work by McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly – *Dynamics of Contention*. *Dynamics of Contention* has been cited over 8,000 times, and a widely acclaimed social movement theorist, Bill Gamson, recommended it to the author as the book that would best integrate the body of knowledge known as social movement theory. The fourth section provides the case study of the Cincinnati Union Co-op Initiative (CUCI) and the first two union co-ops resulting from the initiative, Our Harvest and Sustainergy. The fifth section summarizes lessons learned from the case study, and the final section concludes.

Background – Union Co-op Basics

This section explains what a worker-owned cooperative is, the benefits of worker-owned co-ops to the business and society, and the barriers in the U.S. to the formation of worker-owned co-ops. Next, the section explains what a union co-op is, how the labor movement can contribute to the formation of cooperative ecosystems, and why the labor movement and cooperative movement will both benefit from working together.

What is a worker-owned cooperative?

A cooperative is a business owned and managed by those who benefit from it. Several different classes of people can own a cooperative, and so one typology defines them by the class of owners involved (Lurie & Fitzsimmons, 2021, p. 5) Levinson & Eisenback, 2021, pp. 84–85). Cooperatives owned by consumers, those who buy the products or services of the business, are consumer cooperatives (Levinson & Eisenback, 2021, p. 85). Many people are familiar with a grocery cooperative in their community, which is a consumer cooperative where the grocery shoppers own the business (Levinson & Eisenback, 2021, p. 85). Others may be familiar with R.E.I. a well-known outdoor sport clothing and equipment retailer. R.E.I. is a large nationwide consumer cooperative, owned by its shoppers (Recreational Equipment, Inc. [REI], 2020). Another type of cooperative is a producer cooperative (Levinson & Eisenback, 2021, p. 84). An example of a producer cooperative that most people are familiar with is an agricultural cooperative. The farms, which produce the product, own the cooperative business that processes and/or distributes the farmers' product. The company Organic Valley, for instance, is a cooperative owned by the farmers who produce raw milk, eggs, and other assorted products (Organic Valley, n.d.).

A third type of cooperative is the worker-owned cooperative. A worker-owned cooperative is owned by the workers who run the business (Levinson & Eisenback, 2021, pp. 84–85). A well-known example of a worker-owned cooperative is Equal Exchange, a large fair-trade coffee and chocolate company (Equal Exchange, n.d.). Equal Exchange has over 130 worker owners and had revenue of \$74.4 million in 2018 (Levinson, 2021). In a traditional worker-owned cooperative each worker has one share and one vote (Levinson & Eisenback, 2021, p. 85). This governance structure ensures that every worker has an equal claim to the company and an equal say in company decision-making (Levinson & Eisenback, 2021, p. 85). Worker owners of small businesses may run them collectively, making all decisions as a group, while in larger businesses workers normally elect a board of directors to oversee management, who makes daily business decisions. (Levinson et al., 2019, p. 194; Levinson, 2021; Neighboring Food Co-ops, n.d.) In the latter instance, the owners elect the board and make certain major business decisions, such as whether to relocate or start a new branch, by vote of all the owners (Levinson et al., 2019, pp. 234–235). Some cooperatives have multiple classes of owners, such as both consumer owners and worker owners, and are known as multi-stakeholder cooperatives. (Levinson et al., 2019, p. 229). Some cooperatives also have an investor class, who may have a less than 50% ownership stake or a share which grants the investors a right to a monetary return but no vote on business matters. (Levinson et al., 2019, p. 255).

Unlike a traditional business, profits are not returned to shareholders based on the number of shares they own (Levinson & Eisenback, 2021, p. 85). Rather, surplus is returned to members in the form of patronage dividends (Frederick & John, 1993, p. 3; Levinson et al., 2019, p. 196). For a consumer co-op, for example, the amount of return a shopper owner receives is based on the amount of shopping they have done, whether in dollar amount or number of purchases (Levinson & Eisenback, 2020, pp. 195–196). For a worker-owned co-op, patronage dividends are typically based on the number of hours worked (Levinson et al., 2019, p. 263). Each worker will have an individual account within the company, which holds the amount of money they paid to purchase their one share and additional amounts that are returned as patronage dividends, on an annual basis (“Subchapter T,” 2012). The worker will also receive a portion of the patronage dividend as a cash or cash equivalent payment (Baskaran, 2015, p. 363; Benson, 2011, p. 36; Levinson et al., 2019, p. 264).

Many cooperatives, including worker-owned cooperatives, subscribe to certain cooperative principles, which are documented in the International Cooperative Alliance Cooperative Principles (International Cooperative Alliance [ICA], n.d.). Cooperative owners democratically control their business capital and finances (ICA, n.d., ¶ 3). Many cooperatives use open-book management where worker-owners have input into financial decisions (Wells, 2013). Cooperatives value education, such as financial literacy or dispute resolution training for the worker-owners or community education events (ICA, n.d., ¶ 5. Education, Training, and Information). Cooperatives ascribe to anti-discrimination principles and equality for white women, people of color, and other marginalized workers. (ICA, n.d., ¶ 1. Voluntary and Open Membership). Cooperatives give back to the community in a broad range of ways, such as sponsoring a little league team or providing cooking or language classes. (ICA, n.d., ¶ 7. Concern for Community).

What laws enable worker-owned cooperatives?

Many states have statutes that permit businesses to incorporate as a cooperative. In some states, like Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi, co-ops are limited to certain industries, such as agricultural and electrical cooperatives (Moriarty, 2019). In other states, such as Colorado, Iowa, Kentucky, Arkansas, and Utah, a general cooperative statute, like those modeled on the Limited Cooperative Association Act, provides a means for businesses in many different industries to organize as a cooperative (Levinson et al., 2019, p. 230). In some states, such as Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Michigan, and Nevada, businesses can incorporate under statutes specifically designed for organizing a worker-owned cooperative (Moriarty, 2019). Massachusetts has traditionally been held up as having a model statute (Ellerman and Pitegoff, 1982–83, p. 441). The Massachusetts statute incorporates the governance structure of the Mondragon cooperatives (Ellerman and Pitegoff, 1982–83, p. 441; Levinson, 2014, p. 360). The Mondragon Corporation, headquartered in the Basque region of Spain, is the largest ecosystem of worker-owned cooperatives in the world (Goodman, 2020; Jones, 1987). More recently, California and Illinois have each passed a statute enabling incorporating as a worker-owned cooperative (Hatcher, 2019, pp. 30, 35; Limited Worker Cooperative Association Act, 2020). In states that do not have a cooperative statute that enables organizing as a worker-owned cooperative, owners can organize under a different state's cooperative law or as an LLC, providing for cooperative governance in the bylaws or organizing documents (Levinson et al., 2019, p. 248). Even in states that do have statutes that enable organizing as a worker-owned cooperatives, some workers choose to organize as an LLC because they are multi-stakeholder, include an investor class, or prefer to be classified as owners rather than employees for tax and employment law purposes (Ji & Robinson, 2012, pp. 30–37; Levinson et al., 2019, p. 248; “Other tax,” 2020, ¶ “Why might a cooperative choose Subchapter K”).

The tax code incentivizes the creation of cooperatives, including worker-owned co-ops, through Subchapter T of the tax code (Haber, 2018, p. 267). Subchapter T provides that an entity structured as a co-op can avoid double-taxation (Haber, 2018, p. 288). A corporation is taxed twice. They are taxed on gains (their surplus of revenue beyond costs) at the entity level, and the owner also pays tax on any dividend received from the gains (Haber, 2018, p. 286–287). On the other hand, partnerships are pass through entities that are not subject to double taxation (Franklin, 2016, p. 581). All gains are taxed at the partner level, whether or not the partners actually receive any cash or the partnership retains the gains. An LLC can elect either corporate or partnership taxation (“Other tax,” 2020).

A co-op incorporated as a corporation, LCA, or LLC can elect Subchapter T taxation. This tax status enables only the owner and not the entity to be taxed on patronage dividends, including the portion of the patronage dividends retained in individual accounts and the patronage payments to owners so long as at least 20% of the patronage dividend is paid out in cash or its equivalent (“Subchapter T,” 2012). The owner pays tax on the full amount of the patronage dividend – the patronage payment received and that retained in their individual account. Subchapter T enables the entity to avoid taxation by distributing gains to its owners as patronage dividends (“Subchapter T,” 2012). Electing Subchapter T means the cooperative benefits as an entity by having a reserve account and not being double-taxed on patronage allocated to the owners, and the owners benefit by having a guaranteed cash or equivalent payment of 20% whenever patronage is allocated to them (Benson, 2011, pp. 33–36).

The labor and employment laws apply to cooperatives in the same manner they apply to other businesses (Levinson, 2018a, pp. 548–550). Cooperatives’ unique ownership and governance structure will sometimes raise issues about whether owners are classified as employees for the purpose of any particular statute (Levinson, 2018a, b, c, p. 531; Levinson & Eisenback, 2020, pp. 220–225, 2021, pp. 881–14).

What are the benefits to the business and society?

Worker-owned co-ops benefit the workers and their business and also their community (Levinson et al., 2019, pp. 228–229). First longevity of co-ops means that jobs for those in the community will exist for longer than job opportunities at a more traditional business (Pérotin, 2012). A well-established body of literature establishes that employee-owned businesses, predominately ESOPs in the U.S., tend to stay in business longer than comparable non-cooperative companies (Blasi et al., 2013; Kruse, 2002). A growing body of literature suggests the same is true of worker-owned cooperatives (Burdin, 2014, p. 202; Olsen, 2013; Pérotin, 2020, pp. 14–17).

Worker-owned co-ops also retain workers longer than traditional businesses (Chen & Chen, 2021). The longer a worker is employed, the longer the worker and their family are afforded some financial security. It is also less costly for a business because they less frequently pay for hiring and training costs for a new worker. One reason co-ops retain workers longer is that owners tend to cut their hours and salaries rather than let junior workers go during difficult financial times, which are bound to occur in our cyclical capitalist economy (Goodman, 2020). One way an ecosystem of co-operatives can protect against down-cycles is by guaranteeing job security via retraining and reemployment (Goodman, 2020). The Mondragon Corporation, where the motto is Humanity at Work, pays unemployed workers a significant percent of their salary and retrains them for re-employment at another cooperative (Goodman, 2020).

Because worker-owned co-ops are owned by those who work in them, they are more likely to be owned by those who live in the community in which the business is located (Levinson et al., 2019, p. 235). Many more traditional businesses are owned by shareholders or partners who live elsewhere. As local businesses, worker-owned co-ops circulate income in the community – the salary or wages of workers who live in the community are often spent in their community (Levinson et al., 2019, p. 235). In addition to circulating income, the worker-owned co-ops build community wealth (Levinson & Eisenback, 2020, p. 216). The workers who live in their community own a share of the business and build wealth through patronage (Levinson & Eisenback, 2021, p. 82). The

circulation of the income and wealth in the co-op's community creates economic opportunity and jobs for others (Levinson & Eisenback, 2020, p. 217).

Traditional businesses have recently acknowledged that decision-making should not be driven only by the bottom line of whether profit can be made regardless of unfortunate externalities (Business Roundtable, 2019). More companies are incorporated as benefit corporations or certified as b-corps with a socially responsible mission (Tu, 2016, p. 142). The governance structure of a co-op and their adherence to the cooperative principles means that many worker-owned co-ops are inherently more beneficial for their workers and their families, the community, and the environment (Levinson et al., 2019, p. 251–252). The relatively flat governance structure ensures that more people with diverse positions and socioeconomic status are involved in decision-making (Seidelman & Howells, 2016, pp. 35–37). Mondragon imposes a ratio of highest to lowest pay – so that the highest paid worker does not earn more than six times the lowest paid worker – fostering economic equality (Goodman, 2020). The educational mission means that owners learn transferable skills – for example, they may use financial skills and their wealth to purchase a home or dispute resolution skills to become more active in local politics (Levinson et al., 2019, p. 235). The workers will be less likely than out-of-town owners to make decisions that negatively impact the environment in which they live and work (Co+op, n.d.; Seidelman & Howells, 2016, p. 35; Worth, 2013).

In the U.S. baby boomers are nearing retirement, and what has been termed the silver tsunami approaches (Rose et al., 2021, p. 3). When baby boomers who own local businesses retire, the community will lose jobs if the businesses close. Unless the business owner has family to whom they will turn the business over or finds a buyer for the business, jobs will be lost when the business closes (Sherman, 2019). Even businesses that do not close but are purchased by venture capitalist or a non-local owner may cause job loss to the community because the new owner may cut jobs as a cost-saving strategy (Rose et al., 2021, p. 4). For many mid-sized communities, where local businesses supply the majority of jobs, saving as many of these jobs as possible is necessary to maintain community wealth (Curtis, 2021; Rose et al., 2021, p. 4; Oetken, 2017; Trott, n.d.). One solution is for the retiring owner to sell the business to its employees in a conversion to a worker-owned cooperative (Berner et al., 2015, p. 4).

Recently New York City has assisted local businesses that were negatively impacted by the pandemic. One strategy has been to assist these companies in learning about and considering converting to employee ownership, including to worker-owned co-ops, as a path to stay in business and retain jobs in the community. The Deputy Mayor's office worked with technical assistance providers to establish a hot line and web page where businesses can ask for assistance (Kahn, 2021). They screen the business to see if they are appropriate for conversion or could benefit from other assistance. The businesses appropriate for conversion are connected to partner technical assistance providers such as the ICA Group (ICA Group, n.d.), the Working World (The Working World, n.d.), the Democracy at Work Institute, and the Business Outreach Center Network. In their first month, the program had 76 requests for support, 47 by phone and 29 on the web (Kahn, 2021). 75% were business owners. 85% were not familiar with employee ownership. They referred 74% to a project partner for intake for technical assistance with a conversion and provided 14% other resources (Kahn, 2021). At the launch of New York City's initiative to support conversions to employee ownership, the Mayor and Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives emphasized that "enabling workers to buy their businesses is a proven model to address the wealth gap in this city" and the program works toward "closing the racial wealth gap" ("Mayor de Blasio Launches Employee

Ownership NYC,” 2020). Santa Clara has recently implemented a model similar to New York City (Haugh, 2021).

What are the barriers to formation in the U.S.?

Worker owned co-ops do not fail at higher rates than traditional businesses as some scholars initially hypothesized accounts for their relatively low prevalence in the U.S. (Olsen, 2013; Landín, 2018, p. 5). Instead, they must overcome significant barriers that other forms of business do not face when starting up.

One major impediment is the lack of knowledge about worker-owned cooperatives among entrepreneurs, business owners, union members, and those who assist them (Landín, 2018, p. 7). Business and law schools have traditionally not included cooperatives in their courses covering available business organizations. That is starting to change with programs like Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations Curriculum Library for Employee Ownership making materials readily available to professors, but the standard curriculum from which most teach still fails to include cooperatives (Lewis, 2018; Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations, n.d.). In 2021, the City University of New York launched a graduate-level certificate, “Workplace Democracy and Community Ownership” at its School of Labor and Urban Studies (CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies [CUNY], n.d.). Having identified this gap in higher education, the School realized that teaching cooperative business through a lens of labor and urban studies would be a significant contribution to the field (R. Lurie, personal communication, 2022). Small Business Development Centers and Start-up Weekends and courses do not traditionally include education about cooperatives (Fifty by Fifty, 2018). Even with the passage of the Main Street Employee Ownership Act, the education around cooperatives for small business development centers is only starting (Dubb, 2018; Kahn, 2019; Main Street Employee Ownership Act, 2018). Business owners and entrepreneurs, like others, learn best through storytelling, and the stories of successful worker co-ops have not yet been shared widely enough (Boris, 2017; Robbins, 2008).

Most scholars identify lack of funding as one of the primary impediments to starting a worker-owned cooperative or an ecosystem of cooperatives (Lurie & Fitzsimmons, 2021, p. 28; Rose et al., 2021). The Main Street Employee Ownership Act mandates education but does not provide financial support, such as funding needed to develop materials, train employees, hold conferences, and provide assistance to the community (Latour, 2019; Levinson et al., 2019). Banks and other traditional funders are often not familiar with the cooperative model and reluctant to make loans and investments in a worker-owned cooperative (Abello, 2021). Local government loan requirements sometimes have requirements that an individual have a credit record, make a personal guarantee, or provide collateral which does not work well when groups of workers are each contributing a small amount of funding to start a business, as happens with organizing many co-ops. (Abello, 2021; Camou, 2016; “METCO Board,” 2021). A number of funding sources are, however, available, in addition to some city specific funds like New York City’s program. These include Capital Impact Partners, LEAF, the National Cooperative Bank, Seed Commons, Shared Capital’s Cooperative Worker Ownership Loan Fund, Southern Reparations Loan Fund, the Working World, and Transform Finance (Abello, 2021; Capital Impact Partners, n.d.; Josephy, 2018; Local Enterprise Assistance Fund [LEAF], n.d.; National Cooperative Bank, n.d.; Patchwork Cooperative Loan Fund, n.d.; Seed Commons, n.d.; Shared Capital Collaborative, n.d.; Southern Reparations Loan Fund, n.d.; Transform Finance, n.d.; The Working

World, n.d.). Credit unions are structured as co-ops and so are more often willing to loan to other cooperatives (Dopico & Rogers, n.d.).

Many local and state governmental economic development units are still focused on luring large companies and traditional entrepreneurial start-ups. In places like New York City, Cincinnati, and Wisconsin where government support is available, we see growing cooperative ecosystems providing jobs with living wages for many (Abello 2021; Ifateyo, 2015; Landín, 2018, p. 11). Globally, tax preferences that go further than Subchapter T are available. For the Mondragon cooperatives for instance, the Spanish government taxes co-ops at a lower rate but requires them to contribute the 10% to their regional Basque government or community groups and projects (Garcia et al., 2020, p. 128; Abascal-Hildebrand, 2000, p. 278; Levinson, 2018a, b, c.). In the U.S. the federal government has not taken similar measures that encourage state governments to support co-ops (Landín, 2018, p. 19).

Another impediment to organizing cooperatives identified by those at Mondragon Corporation is the purported individualistic culture in the U.S. The American dream focuses on low socio-economic status people working hard to advance and earn enough money for a home and leisure time (Landín, 2018, p. 13). Witness these lyrics from the opening song of the most popular recent Broadway show, Linn Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*.

The ten-dollar founding father without a father
 Got a lot farther by working a lot harder
 By being a lot smarter
 By being a self-starter

Mondragon Corporation owns at least one subsidiary in the U.S., but they are not cooperatives, at least in part because the Spanish worker owners believe the U.S. lacks the corporatist culture prevalent in Spain that promotes success through cooperation (Schlachter, 2017, p. 130). Yet, many in the U.S. have successfully started and relied on co-ops, as documented by Jessica Gordan Nembhard (2014) in her groundbreaking work on the history of Black co-ops and by Joseph Blasi and his co-authors (2013) in their seminal work on the history of employee ownership in the U.S.

What is a union co-op?

A union co-op is often used to refer to a worker-owned co-op where the workers are organized and represented by a union (Lurie & Fitzsimmons, 2021, p. 7; Levinson, 2018a, b, c, p. 457). The largest union co-op in the U.S. is Cooperative Home Care Associates, employing thousands of workers in the Bronx (CHCA, n.d.). These home care workers are typically women of color. While they work in a traditionally low-wage industry, the owners of Cooperative Home Care Associates earn a living wage and have health and other benefits. Cooperative Home Care Associates was formed as a worker-owned co-op in 1985. At that time the employees were not unionized. They unionized in 2003, and their union, SEIU Local 1199, enabled them to engage politically, navigate health care systems, and provide financial security to their employees (1199 SEIU, 2021; Levinson, 2018a, b, c, p. 458).

Other examples of union cooperatives in the U.S. are New Era Windows and Snow River Cooperative. Worker owners at New Era Windows are represented by the United Electrical Workers Union (New Era Windows Cooperative, n.d.). The employees, with assistance from their union, bought the Republic Windows company when it was slated to close. Workers at Snow River Cooperative are represented by IUE-CWA (C. Amadon, Personal communication, 2021; UW Center, 2020). They converted from a traditional

company to a worker-owned cooperative in 2020 (Trott, [n.d.](#)). Other examples of union co-ops include Community Printers ([n.d.](#)), Worx Printing Co-op ([n.d.](#)), Working Systems ([n.d.](#)), Design Action Collective ([n.d.](#)), Red Sun Press ([n.d.](#)), and White Electric Coffee Co-op ([n.d.](#))

Lobster 207, while a producer rather than a worker cooperative, is also a relatively well-known union co-op where the owners are members of the International Association of Machinists (IAM). (Maine Lobstering Union – Local 207, [n.d.](#)). Previously the lobster workers worked as independent contractors for large distribution businesses and were unable to keep consistent hours or earn a living wage. By forming the co-op under their own ownership, they bring financial security to themselves and their families (Overton, [2017](#)).

This article focuses on the establishment of an ecosystem of union co-ops in Cincinnati. In Cincinnati, the Cincinnati Union Co-op Initiative (CUCI) was started by four individuals from various walks of life with the express intent of starting Mondragon-style cooperatives to create a just economy for all (Co-Op Cincy, [n.d.a](#)). The story begins in 2009 when the United Steelworkers Union and Mondragon Corporation entered into a historic agreement to cooperate in forming worker-owned co-ops in the U.S. (Co-Op Cincy, [n.d.a](#), [n.d.b](#)) Kristen Barker, a peace and nonviolence advocate, Phil Amadon, a retired union leader, Ellen Vera, a labor organizer for the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 75, and Flequer Vera, an immigrant and business student, studied the Mondragon Corporation for over a year (Levinson, [2018a](#), [b](#), [c](#), p. 465). They proposed their idea and had support from many people from the Cincinnati community. The first co-ops they incubated were Our Harvest, an urban farm and distribution hub, and Sustainergy, an eco-retrofitting company (Co-Op Cincy, [n.d.a](#), [n.d.b](#)). Today both co-ops remain in business employing around eighteen workers, who are unionized (Sustainergy, [n.d.](#); Our Harvest, [n.d.](#)).

How can the labor movement contribute to formation?

The labor movement can contribute to the formation of a cooperative ecosystem in their communities by providing financial and other support to their own members or other workers who want to start a cooperative business. The first way unions can support cooperatives is by educating themselves about cooperatives and about how starting a cooperative is an alternative approach to advocating for workers and, ultimately, increasing union membership (Schlachter, [2017](#), p. 13.). One example is the Cooperative Solutions Working Group organized by Rebecca Lurie, Professor at CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies, where union leaders, members, and others active in the labor and social justice movements met monthly for over a year with those from the cooperative movement for educational sessions (CUNY School of Labor and Urban Studies [CUNY], [2021](#)). Just as many attorneys, accountants, banks, entrepreneurs, and professors are not familiar with worker-owned cooperatives, many union leaders and members are also unfamiliar with worker-owned co-ops.

The labor movement can also commit time and resources to helping start a co-op or ecosystem of co-ops. (Schlachter, [2017](#), p. 13.) A union can provide an organizer to work full or part-time on a cooperative project (Lurie & Fitzsimmons, [2021](#), p. 13). Lobbyist for the labor movement can advocate for government support for cooperatives or a particular co-op. Unions can open their halls as meeting and work spaces for entrepreneurs doing the hard work to start a co-op and for educational events and conferences offered by those knowledgeable about union co-ops (Levinson, [2018a](#), [b](#), [c](#), p. 546; Lurie & Fitzsimmons [2021](#), p. 13). In our now more virtual world, unions can offer their virtual meeting spaces for use for

meetings and webinars. A union can provide a loan or even a grant to support its members, members of another union, or non-union workers who are forming a cooperative (Levinson, 2018a, b, c, p. 547).

Unions can also use their status as entities who use services to promote cooperatives (C. Amadon, Personal Communication, 2020). Scholars have written about anchoring institutions serving as the impetus for a more equitable economy (Goodman, 2014, pp. 1671–73; Huertas-Noble, 2016, p. 357; Maurrasse, 2016). The Cleveland Project and the Evergreen Cooperatives were developed as a way for anchor businesses, such as hospitals, to provide support for worker-owned co-ops (Democracy Collaborative, n.d.). One of the ways anchor institutions promote co-ops is to procure the products and services they routinely use from co-ops (Alperovitz et al., 2010). For instance, the hospitals in Cleveland contract with the Cleveland Laundry Co-op (Cleveland Clinic Newsroom, 2018). A local union does not typically employ as many people as a local hospital, but they can still serve an anchor function and use their buying power to push the economy toward more cooperativism and equality. When hiring businesses to water plants, keep up grounds, provide accounting services, cater events, perform an environmental compliance audit, or provide childcare, for instance, unions can provide a preference to union co-ops or even to non-union co-ops to demonstrate commitment to a worker-owned and managed economy.

Moreover, in their capacity of bargaining representatives, unions can negotiate for right of first refusal for their employees to buy the business should it go up for sale or propose to close (Lurie & Fitzsimmons, 2021, p. 14).

Why would the labor movement do so?

The labor movement should support the formation of union co-ops for philosophical and practical reasons. Both the labor movement and the worker cooperative movement aim to empower workers (Lurie & Fitzsimmons, 2021, p. 20, Dubb, 2013). They fight for workers to have voice in their workplaces and input into decisions that impact their daily life at work and their communities. Both movements aim to provide financial security for their members, co-ops through an ownership share in a business and unions through collective bargaining for higher wages and benefits.

Within the U.S. labor law system, private sector unions have the right to bargain over wages and other terms and conditions of work. Unions also bargain over the effects of certain managerial decisions, such as closing a business, to obtain severance pay or recall rights for affected employees. While unions do not have the right under the National Labor Relations Act to bargain over an employer's decision of whether to close, (*Fibreboard Paper Prods. Corp. v. NLRB*, 1964); *First National Maintenance v. NLRB*, 1981), unions have often engaged in other types of activity to support worker control over business decisions and protect working people. The Knights of Labor, a large union with thousands of members during the 1880s, formed hundreds of co-ops as a means to empower workers (Lurie & Fitzsimmons, 2021, p. 5; Hild, 1997, p. 287; Levinson et al., 2019, p. 235). Unions have long endorsed political candidates who will implement policies that support workers and have lobbied and engaged in civic action around worker-friendly legislation such as the eight-hour day established by the FLSA, abolishing child labor, or fighting for universal health care and local living-wage ordinances. (Bennett & Taylor, 2001, p. 265; Masters & Delaney, 2005; Stern, 2003).

Unionization rates in the U.S. continue to decline, with private sector unionization rates remaining below 7%, despite recent small increases in the unionization rate and increased

labor activism. (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS], 2021). While the public sector unionization rate remains at 34.8 percent, with the Supreme Court's *Janus* decision, which overruled decades of longstanding precedent that had supported unionization through required payment of dues by those represented, the public sector unionization rate may begin to decline (*Janus v. Am. Fed'n of State, Cty., & Mun. Emps., Council 31*, 2018; BLS, 2019). Scholars have written about various ways that unions might be able to increase membership, even working within the failed U.S. legal structure that deters unionization (Milkman, 2020). Members-only unions, providing services to members, offering representation in employment arbitration, shareholder activism, partnering with workers' centers, and online organizing have been proposed as offering potential for increased unionization (Schwab & Thomas, 1998, p. 1022; Hodges, 2014 p. 1683; Marvit & Shriever, 2015; Rosado Marzán, 2017, pp. 425–426; St. Antoine, 2020, p. 15).

Supporting worker-owned cooperatives offers another way to increase membership (U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives, 2017). When unions assist non-union members and help incubate a co-op, the workers are likely to view the unions favorably, and, especially if a neutrality clause is included in the co-op bylaws, they may vote to join a union. When a union helps laid off or otherwise out of work members establish a new cooperative business, those members will likely remain members and vote for representation. When a union helps members convert a company to a co-op they save their members' jobs and retain those members (McNamara, et al., 2021). Traditional organizing campaigns at large companies often involve a hostile employer who expends significant resources campaigning against unionization and are long, drawn-out, and emotionally draining experiences for union organizers and the workers seeking to unionize (McNamara, et al., 2021; Decision & Direction of Second Election, Amazon.com Services, LLC, Case 10-RC-269250 (Nov. 29, 2021)). Collective bargaining with traditional employers is also often an adversarial and long process. A union cooperative is not likely to campaign against unionization and will simply step back and let the worker-owners decide whether to unionize and whether and which already existent union to join or affiliate with. Likewise, union negotiators have described the bargaining process with a union co-op as more collaborative and efficient, transparently focused on what the co-op can afford, than that with many traditional companies; (R. Criscitiello, Personal Communication, 2021; Lurie & Fitzsimmons, 2021, pp. 16–17). Because organizing the worker owners takes less time, resources, and emotional toll, union co-ops provide a way to organize more members co-op by co-op and use less resources, making more resources available for the large campaigns where a win protects many more workers with unionization. Likewise, when less time and money is spent on collective bargaining at a worker-owned co-op, that frees up resources to expend on the large organizing campaigns, thereby increasing, or at least maintaining, unionization rates.

How does the cooperative movement benefit?

Beyond sharing the goal of worker empowerment, the cooperative movement concretely benefits from the labor movements resources and expertise when starting and running a union co-op (Levinson, 2018a, b, c, p. 454). In a worker-owned co-op that has a board and management, those workers on the board and in management will sometimes favor ownerships' interest rather than workers' interest (Schlachter, 2017, p. 14; Ellerman, 1988, p. 48; Levinson, 2018a, b, c, pp. 460–461). For example, management or the board may want to cut benefits to maintain a higher level of surplus both for use by the co-op and for dividends to the worker-owners. The union will represent the worker owners' interest as a

worker to retain strong benefits even if it means less surplus for expansion or investment or less cash payments at the end of the year (Levinson, 2018a, b, c, p. 461). Each worker-owner faces an internal decision about how to reconcile their interests as an owner and a worker, and having a board represent owners' interest and a union represent workers' interest increases the likelihood that each worker-owner thinks explicitly about what the best balance will be.

A unionized work force with formalized processes for dispute resolution will increase fairness on the shop floor, meaning in the day-to-day decisions about how work is done, who performs which tasks, and how co-workers treat each other (Hoffmann, 2005). When informal decision-making processes are used, they tend to replicate power toward those with seniority and can be influenced by gender and race bias. Using formal processes will not eliminate gender and race bias. Formal processes can reduce bias and enable less-senior people of color or white women to have a way to raise their grievances without fear of retaliation by fellow worker owners who are technically equal but actually have more power because of informal networks and support.

In addition to dispute resolution expertise that unions can bring to worker-owners, unions have industry expertise and lobbying expertise (Schlachter, 2017, p. 13; Levinson, 2018a, b, c, p. 547). If a worker-owned co-op is in an industry like health care that relies on government funding or contracts, a union's expertise and lobbying can help the cooperative obtain contracts and maintain funding to provide employees a living wage and benefits (Lurie & Fitzsimmons, 2021). More generally, unions can aid in lobbying for laws and policies that encourage a cooperative economy and more economic equality (Wilson, 2021).

Finally, the labor movement brings resources to combine with those of the cooperative movement. Unions have organizers, buildings, and training programs (Schlachter, 2017, p. 13; Lurie & Fitzsimmons, 2021; McNamara, et al., 2021). One significant resource that unions often provide is benefits, such as health, vision, and dental care, pensions, and life, unemployment, and disability insurance (International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans, McNamara, et al., 2021). A smaller co-op, which may not be able to afford a high-quality benefit plan, may be able to partner with their union to provide that plan because the benefit plan combines several businesses in the same industry or sector into a multi-employer plan (International Foundation for Multiemployer Plans, n.d.).

Background – Social Movement Theory Basics

This section explains what social movement theory is and the model used by the authors of *Dynamics of Contention* to explain the conditions under which social movements form. It then focuses on explaining the mechanisms involved and how the mechanisms can aid the understanding of a cooperative movement, such as the union co-op movement in Cincinnati.

What is social movement theory?

Social movement theory is a sociological theory describing the conditions that explain social movements, collective action to promote change (Levinson, 2014, p. 337; McAdam et al, 2001, p. 16). Social movement theorists often study and explain broad-based movements like the Civil Rights movement in U.S. in the 1960s, the Tiananmen square crisis in 1989, dismantling apartheid in South Africa, or the #metoo movement in the 2010s

(McAdam et al., 2001, p. 75). Other times social movement theory is helpful to understand smaller movements, such as why workers at a particular plant organize a union or go on strike (Levinson, 2014, p. 337).

In the book *Dynamics of Contention*, the authors synthesize the body of literature on social movement theory to explain the agreed upon model (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 17). Social or economic change impacts the opportunity of potential actors. Change also impacts mobilizing structures that promote communication, coordination, and commitment, or, in other words, solidarity. Finally, change impacts the framing or shared definitions of those in the movement. Those three factors also affect each other (McAdam et al., 2001, pp. 16–18). The authors are sociologists who are experts in social movement theory. They outline the different emphases of different social movement theorists. They explain that most social movement theorists agree about the different conditions that explain social movements, although they may study and emphasize different aspects of social movements (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 16). The authors come out of the structuralist sub-group (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 22). Structuralists explain behavior by focusing on collective organizations (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 21). Others, such as Bill Gamson, focus on the individual and group psychology. (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 21) A third group of scholars starting with Mancur Olson and solidified by John McCarthy and Mayer Zald focuses on the rational actions of individuals or groups (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 15).

What is the explanation of the conditions under which social movements form?

The authors of *Dynamics of Contention* propose a dynamic model that explains not only social movements but also other types of political contention by integrating research from other bodies of literature, including those focused on revolutions, strikes, interest group politics, nationalism, and democratization (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 6). The authors explore many forms of contention to uncover the dynamics of contention and to identify mechanisms that recur in different contentious politics (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 4). Their focus is on social movements and political contention that involve a national government actor. In this regard, the theory is not a perfect fit to explain local social movements to establish a worker-owned co-op or cooperative economy. The authors recognize, however, that with modification their theory can explain local movements (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 8). The author's theory of contention is sufficiently encompassing of social movement theory that it should have some utility to explain the success of a movement such as the start of CUCI and the incubation of Our Harvest and Sustainability.

The authors posit that environmental mechanisms, such as availability or lack of resources impact people's capacity to engage in collective action (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 25). Other environmental mechanisms include shifts or growth in population and urbanization (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 26). Cognitive mechanisms, such as solidarity, can commit people to take collective action even though it causes an individual serious loss (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 26). Individuals signaling to others through words, gestures, and demeanor can increase or decrease the likelihood of collective action (McAdam et al., 2001, pp. 26–27). Finally, relational mechanisms, such as a broker, who brings groups together through increased interaction, can incentivize collective action (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 26).

Mechanisms interact to form processes, “frequently recurring causal chains, sequences, and combinations.” Examples of processes are “actor constitution, polarization, and scale shift” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 27). Mobilization is a process, as is political identity

formation (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 28). An episode of contention, such as a particular social movement, involves two or more processes (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 28). The mechanisms and processes in turn affect mobilization (and demobilization) of groups toward action, actors who engage in collective action, and the trajectory of any collective action (McAdam et al., 2001, pp. 35–36).

The authors begin by examining what mobilizes people into movements, how collective groups and identities are formed, and what trajectory of collective action results (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 38). To understand why people act collectively at a certain time, such as why in Montgomery in 1955 Black residents collectively engaged in a bus boycott, social movement theory examines key components of a movement. They consider 1) social change processes, 2) the political opportunities and constraints on an individual or group to engage in successful collective action, 3) the forms of organization, formal and informal, with most agreeing organizational strength correlates with the ability to gain access and win concessions, 4) framing of specific grievances as collective problems that form collective identity, and 5) the means by which the collective action is engaged (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 41).

McAdam and co-authors recognize that coopting existing organizations is a mechanism that permits resource-poor groups to overcome organizational deficits and engage in collective action (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 44). Movement leaders have a role in framing, but so do many others such as movement opponents, the government, and the media (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 44). Some of the insights from the book, translated into less academic and potentially more easily understood language, can be helpful in explaining when people successfully mobilize and continue to engage in collective action, such as starting a union co-op. To engage in collective action, certain prerequisites must happen. 1) “social construction of politically relevant categories, such as indigenous peoples or feminists”; 2) social interactions that are innovative although confined by previously known types of action; and 3) action arising out of pre-existing ties from other political or collective action or routine social life (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 58).

What mechanisms are involved in successful social movements?

The authors identify the following mechanisms at play in processes of contention. 1) competition for power; 2) diffusion of information, when information flows across ideological divides and different sectors resulting in similar ways of collective action, like sit-ins or freedom marches; 3) repression, an effort to suppress collective action or rights claiming; and 4) radicalization. Repression can result in different predictable effects: A) stifle resistance or B) cause well-organized actors to shift tactics; C) if selective, isolate more militant groups; or D) if generalized, compel moderates to join extremists. Radicalization “expands collective action frames to more extreme agendas” and causes more conflict. The authors of *Dynamics of Contention* propose that a dynamic interactive approach is needed to understand large social movements (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 73). In particular, governments and challengers are continuously interacting, and both define “threats and opportunities,” mobilize “resources,” and undertake “collective action” in response to the other’s actions (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 74). They use comparisons between two movements or episodes of contention to unearth similar mechanisms and processes that drive change (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 82).

One mechanism they identify is that of a broker, a person or organization which creates connections and facilitates coordination (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 85). They also use the

comparisons to identify “distinctive configurations of mechanisms that set episodes apart and account for major differences among them” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 86). In addition to brokerage, they identify these mechanisms: threat/opportunity; social appropriation; category formation; object shift; and certification (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 86). Additionally, the flanking effect is a mechanism in which “forceful action at the extremes of a political continuum” make middle ground actors ally more closely (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 86).

They examine three causal mechanisms, attribution of threat and opportunity, social appropriation, and brokerage more closely through comparing the Mau Mau Revolt in Kenya in the 1950s to the Philippine Yellow Revolution in the 1980s. They ascertain how these mechanisms contribute to mobilization (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 91–92). They identify two change processes at work in the social movement that led to the Mau Mau Revolt. One is the trend toward decolonization after World War II and the other a land shortage crisis, resulting from white in migration, that disrupted the Kikuyu economy and peoples’ way of life (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 94–95). The social movement or revolution results not from the changes but from the way parties to the conflict interpret and respond to those processes (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 95). First the authors examine the mechanism of collective attribution of threat or opportunity. Basically people either invent or bring forward a prediction of what the outcome of a leader’s predicted actions or inactions will be, and then that prediction becomes widely shared and collectively held. Normally different advocates compete to have their proposed prediction collectively adopted (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 95). In this situation, white settlers saw decolonization as a threat while Kenyan nationalists viewed it as an opportunity for independence (McAdam et al., 2001, pp. 96–97). At the same time, a grassroots campaign initiated by a group who had been dispossessed of their land responded to the land crisis (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 98). This campaign developed into a whole segment of society that engaged in oaths – first to resist resettlement – but with time to engage in violence against white settlers, colonists, and older conservative Kenyans aligned with them.

Social appropriation is the mechanism by which particular people “appropriate existing social space and collective identities” to further their collective prediction and responsive action (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 102). In Kenya, those dispossessed of their land used established “dynastic and generational lines of authority” to spread the new oath and mobilize their revolt. Once those in the urban area of Nairobi became involved, trade unions were an important social structure that was appropriated (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 106). Brokerage is the method where a person or some social site links two previously unconnected social sites or people (McAdam et al., 2001, pp. 102, 142). Three brokers were involved in spreading the new oath and land resistance campaign (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 103). One was a long-existing political association; a second was the militant people who had been dispossessed of their land; and the third was “itinerant traders” who traveled back and forth between certain locations (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 104). In Nairobi, brokers included the original ten trade unionists who agreed to be oathed if certain conditions were met and the taxi drivers who connected people without strong ties to each other and connected urban and rural areas. The Mau Mau Revolt had no “centralized direction” or “formal organization” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 107).

As to the Philippines’ Yellow Revolution, the movement started when a rival of Ferdinand Marcos was assassinated. While the authors do not explicitly name the broad change processes at work, they imply the imposition of military rule and the world recession in the early 1980s were two broad processes that led to continued and broadened opposition to Marcos (McAdam et al., 2001, pp. 110–11). In discussing the mechanism of collective attribution of threat or opportunity, the authors note that the return from exile of Marcos’

rival to the Philippines resulted because the rival viewed Marcos' ill health as an opportunity to transition power to the opposition (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 112). They discuss how uncertainty about what will happen next is critical to mobilization (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 112). The middle class viewed the rival's assassination as "a profound threat to the tattered remnants of Philippine stability," and the leftist opposition seized the moment as an opportunity to oust Marcos (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 114).

The authors address together the methods of social appropriation and brokerage involved in the Yellow Revolution. They first note that established oppositional organizations, with farmers, labor, or students as members, grew in number of members. They then explain that, even more significantly, the middle and upper middle classes mobilized because the Catholic Church, conservative newspapers, and national business associations made direct appeals to them. They formed loose umbrella organizations which drew in greater numbers of people (McAdam et al., 2001, pp. 116–17).

They conclude that while the same three mechanisms are involved in Mau Mau and the Yellow Revolution, social appropriation, brokerage, and collective attribution of threats and opportunities, the mobilization and its outcomes result in different patterns. "They differ because the sequence, combination, interaction, and context of these mechanisms' activation profoundly influence their joint consequences" (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 120). They theorize that where more established organizations pre-exist a social movement less violence will be involved than where less centralized brokerage mobilizes people (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 121). They also differ because other mechanisms were involved such as certification and decertification. Certification is when external authorities validate certain actors and their actions, while decertification is the withdrawal of validation (McAdam et al., 2001, pp. 121, 145). Leading Kenyan activists were tried and imprisoned, decertifying those involved in the Mau Mau Revolt. In contrast, a Catholic Cardinal certified the anti-Marcos movement by endorsing it. The U.S. media decertified Marcos' legitimacy.

The authors next move on to write about how one person or group has multiple identities which change over time (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 126). They ask three questions about social movements? 1) "Actors: Who makes claims, and why do they do so?" 2) "Identities: Who do they and others say they are, and why do they say so?" 3) "Actions: What forms do their claim making take and why?" The mechanisms the authors explain form and transform actors, identities, and actions (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 127). Actors who make claims on governments are normally networks of people with shared "histories, cultures, and collective connections with other actors" rather than individuals (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 132). All identities have a potential or actual political side – each categorical pair such as husband-wife and Muslim-Hindu "has its own historically accumulated forms of deliberation and struggle" (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 134). Political identities involve relations to governments (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 134).

In addition to brokerage, and certification, which were previously discussed, the authors explore the operation of two additional identity-related mechanisms, category formation and object shift (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 127). Category formation means groups of people distinguish themselves from others by asserting or creating shared boundaries. Category formation can happen by invention, a formal drawing of a boundary and mandating relations across the boundary (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 143). Or it can happen through borrowing where categories already existing elsewhere are adopted in a local setting (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 143). Finally, category formation can occur by means of encounter because two previously separate groups of people start competing for resources and generate a boundary. (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 143) Yet another mechanism is object shift (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 144). Object shift is when claimants, brokers, or the targets of the

claims adjust upon whom they are making claims or who is defending against the claims (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 144). One of the few workplace examples the authors provide is in explaining object shift (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 145).

To be sure, long-run object shift intersects with a number of other formative processes. As relations between workers and managers change and as governments intervene more or less actively in management-worker disputes, all three parties undergo internal transformations, only some of which result directly from their interaction with each other; the government becomes a more prominent object of claims by workers and management, but that change occurs in interdependence with many others (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 145).

The authors identify four mechanisms that intersect in South Asia's Hindu-Muslim conflicts, brokerage, certification, category formation, and object shift (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 148). They specifically discuss an example where Hindus aim to build a temple on the site of a Muslim mosque, at Ayodhya (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 150). The agitation toward this goal over several decades involved 1) brokerage by "organizations and regional leaders," 2) category formation through both emphasizing the Hindu/Muslim categories and transforming them to greater importance, and 3) object shift from focusing on local enemies (lower castes or Muslims) to the national government (demanding the temple). The movement unsuccessfully tried to "establish certification for the stylized performance of recapturing presumably ancient Hindu religious sites from Muslim occupation" (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 150).

They discuss these four same mechanisms at work in the collapse of apartheid in South Africa in the 1980s and 1990s. They assert that brokerage was critical because organizations formed new coalitions around black liberation, including an alliance between resistance groups and black-based unions (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 151). Large coalitions, such as of the United Democratic Front, representing 575 organizations, and the Congress of South African Trade Unions are a prominent example of brokerage (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 152). Object shift included actors "alternating their claim making among international actors, national authorities, and local targets, with corresponding shifts among repertoires, rhetoric, and categories." Yet category formation was less significant because categories had taken shape already during apartheid (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 155). One key shift in categories did occur – the male/female category. Women entered paid labor with their own distinctive interests (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 155). Certification by government powers and foreign countries of the African National Congress resulted in a negotiated compromise (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 153). The authors conclude that although the same four mechanisms worked in the Asian and South African movements, the results were dramatically different – Hindu/Muslim conflict was elevated and continued in Asia, whereas in South Africa apartheid ended (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 157).

These previously discussed case studies addressed the four mechanisms role in "transforming actors, actions, and identities." The authors explain that a different combination of mechanisms operate in relation to some workplace issues.

Brokerage, category formation, object shift, and certification need not occur together. Brokerage, for example, commonly plays a crucial part in strikes that bring several groups of aggrieved workers into coordinated action against the same set of employers. In such cases, categories often already exist, no shift in object takes place, and certification of the unions and workers involved as valid actors follows straightforward bureaucratic routines (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 150).

The authors then turn to exploring the role of mechanisms in “mobilization, demobilization, and trajectories of contention” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 159). They pose this question: “Why did the trajectory of conflict in Spain” against Franco’s reign resemble a peaceful protest cycle while conflict in the U.S. between abolitionists and slavery supporters resulted in a violent civil war? The authors look at three mechanisms in addition to brokerage at work in these situations. Identity shift, where the boundary between two political actors, groups of people, shifts. Radicalization defined as “increasing contradiction between the prevailing claims, programs, self-descriptions, and descriptions of others across such a boundary, and its opposite.” And finally, convergence where “increasing contradictions” or radical extremes of a group, “at one or both extremes of a political continuum drive less extreme political actors into closer alliances” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 162).

As an aside, whether the conflicts in Spain have yet been successfully resolved is for some an open issue. Many harms caused by Franco’s regime have not been explicitly acknowledged and arguably no actual reconciliation has taken place (Zahira Araguete-Toribio, 2017). The authors of *Dynamics of Contention* do acknowledge, when discussing refinement of their theories and future research questions, that their model provides no method to determine when a social movement begins or ends (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 309).

Turning back to the mechanisms, the authors suggest that the unpopular issue of slavery, which was being held in delicate balance by the Constitution and agreements struck between representatives from the North and South, “was insistently forwarded by” the abolitionists who were “a small and active minority” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 165). This small group “offered a language of sin and damnation to characterize an institution that most [white European] Americans regarded as a form of property” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 166). They also produced antislavery politicians in both of the political parties of the time, Whigs and Democrats (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 166). The applicable structural change, demographic and economic, that provided the foundation for political change was immigrants driving down wages in urban areas so that many northerners moved West (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 167). The abolitionists joined with those who wished to settle the West – the Free Soil party (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 167). Southerners’ identity also transitioned to take on a moral component defending their way of life and asserting inferiority of Black people (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 168). President Lincoln, who was “at best tepid antislavery,” brought together a coalition of Northerners and Westerners, nativists, Free Soilers, Whigs, and northern Democrats (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 170). In this situation, the groups converged toward the extremes (radicalization), with Southerners promoting secession and abolitionists advocating confrontation (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 171).

The structural changes underlying the Spanish movement were migration from rural to urban areas and an increase in income per capita (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 176). A strong system of Communist-led worker committees engaged in strikes and combined economic and political demands during Franco’s rule (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 177). Opposition movements were present in the Basque region and in Catalan (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 178). Students were organizing as were neighborhood groups (McAdam et al., 2001, pp. 178–79). As to identity shift, those living in Spain had switched their collective identity that viewed Europe as foreign to a collective identity that viewed themselves as part of Europe (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 181). Those living in Spain also incorporated autonomist identities – granting regional autonomy became part of a shared identity (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 182). Brokerage was a significant part of the Spanish post-Franco transition because the elites brokered agreements on behalf of the larger groups they represented

(McAdam et al., 2001, p. 183). The church brokered between conservative groups and others, easing “the hostility of the conservative right to the new democratic regime” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 184). Importantly, there was brokerage between the two main opposition parties which made it possible for them to present a united opposition (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 184). The authors address convergence and radicalization together again – these concepts seem to go hand and hand. “In Spain radicalization on the extremes brought moderate regime and opposition groups together” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 184). The opposition remembered the civil war and worked hard to “find sources of agreement with moderate sectors of the regime” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 184). Religion and anticlericalism no longer strictly matched conservative versus opposition left (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 185). Extreme right-wing groups protested the loosening of restrictions by the Franco regime (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 185). Extremist violence in the Basque region rose (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 185). Because of this, the opposition groups and unions defined themselves as peaceful and collaborated with the regime (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 185).

The authors recognize that of the methods brokerage “explains significant features of all six episodes,” that is of the case studies of the Mau Mau Revolt, the Philippine Yellow Revolution, South Asia’s Hindu-Muslim conflicts, the collapse of apartheid in South Africa, the conflict in Spain against Franco’s reign, and the pre-civil war period in the U.S. (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 188). Generally the mechanisms and processes they discuss can be pictured as arrows that connect social change, mobilizing structures, framing processes, political opportunities, repertoires, and movement emergence” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 189).

In the third and last part of the book, the authors examine revolutions, nationalism, and democratization to illustrate that the way that the mechanism work together differently in each situation differentiates successful and unsuccessful movements (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 193). In a movement to establish a cooperative economy or worker-owned co-op, none of these three types of social movements is involved, so the mechanisms may operate in some different pattern or not at all. For revolutions, the authors identify the mechanisms of infringement of elite interests, suddenly imposed grievances, and decertification. Infringement of elite interests refers to a ruling dictator excluding elite business interests who were previously part of the bargain (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 200). This mechanism will not operate in the formation of CUCI, so will not be discussed further. Suddenly imposed grievances are “singular events that dramatize and heighten the political salience of particular issues” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 202).

For nationalism, the authors identify the mechanism of “opportunity spirals, identity shift, competition, and brokerage” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 228). Opportunity spirals mean that one actor’s change in response to their interpretation of an environmental change alters another’s environment triggering change by those impacted by that second change (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 243). Competition simply means different political leaders and groups are competing for power (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 245). In exploring contentious democratization, the authors discuss “coalition formation across classes, central cooptation of intermediaries, dissolution of patron-client networks, and brokerage (McAdam et al., 2001, pp. 264, 272). These mechanisms are at play in two processes, “insulation of public politics from material inequality and integration of trust networks into public politics” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 272). Crossclass coalition formation is the “creation of coordinated action across a major class boundary” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 276). Central cooptation of intermediaries is the “integration of previously autonomous brokers and leaders of subordinate categories into governing coalitions” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 276). Dissolution of patron-client networks is the “breaking of asymmetrical and personalistic chains of

relationship connecting power holders with subordinates” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 276). These last two mechanisms of central cooptation of intermediaries, which focuses on governing state actors, and dissolution of patron-client networks, which focuses on the breakdown of set relationships of subordination do not apply to the social movement to start CUCI, so will not be further discussed. The authors provide a list of mechanisms involved in democratization in the final chapter of the book (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 275).

In describing different types of movements, the authors focus on the most significant mechanisms. Brokerage is a key repeating mechanism. Additionally, while law plays a role in the social movements discussed by the authors, because they mention trials and other legal means of conflict resolution, such as grievance procedures and appeals to government, the authors do not explicitly address the role of laws in social movements. Rather, they discuss certification and decertification much more broadly. In so doing, law is one of many procedures for certification. Procedures for certification or decertification include, “laws, registers, surveillance, police practice, subsidies, organizations of public space, and repressive policies” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 147).

The book concludes by examining three processes which the previously discussed mechanisms, and others, form. Actor constitution is when previously unorganized or apolitical individuals and groups become organized groups (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 315). The other two processes are polarization and scale shift (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 315). Polarization means “widening of political and social space between claimants in a contentious episode and the gravitation of previously uncommitted or moderate actors toward one, the other, or both extremes” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 322). Scale shift is “a change in the number and level of coordinated contentious actions leading to broader contention involving a wider range of actors and bridging their claims and identities” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 331). The authors describe how, in addition to brokerage, scale shift involves diffusion, attribution of similarity, and emulation (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 331). Diffusion is when information is transferred along “established lines of interaction” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 331). Attribution of similarity is “the mutual identification of actors in different sites as being sufficiently similar to justify common action” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 334). Emulation is simply when one group models its collective actions on those of another group (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 335).

They conclude by specifying that their dynamic model of mechanisms and processes has been formed by considering only “national episodes of *transgressive contention* located squarely within the *institutional realm* of politics” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 340). They claim that these mechanisms will be greater in scope than their limited cases suggest (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 340). The authors anticipate their model is transferable to local situations and to situations that do not involve state actors (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 342).

How is social movement theory helpful in identifying the necessary conditions to successfully start an ecosystem of co-ops?

Ultimately, McAdam and his co-authors’ primary point is that common mechanisms operate across broad categories of social change. They focus on identifying these mechanisms. We can study group efforts to establish worker-owned co-ops to illuminate whether they also involve these mechanisms and to identify different mechanisms that may operate in instances of social and economic change which do not involve political contention. To gain the most utility in examining what circumstances started the movement toward a union co-op initiative in Cincinnati and rendered the movement

successful in establishing several cooperatives, I provide an alphabetical compilation of the potentially applicable mechanisms highlighted in the authors' model.

Mechanisms at Work in Social Movements

Attribution of Similarity Attribution of similarity is “the mutual identification of actors in different sites as being sufficiently similar to justify common action” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 334).

Attribution of Threats & Opportunities This mechanism involves people inventing or forwarding a prediction of what the outcome of a leader's predicted actions or inactions will be. The prediction becomes widely shared and collectively held. Normally different advocates compete to have their proposed prediction collectively adopted.

Brokerage Brokerage is the method where a person or social site links two previously unconnected social sites or people (McAdam et al., 2001, pp. 102, 142).

Category Formation Category formation is a mechanism where people distinguish themselves from others by asserting or creating shared boundaries.

Certification and Decertification Certification is when external authorities validate certain actors and their actions, while decertification is the withdrawal of validation.

Competition Competition simply means different political leaders and groups are competing for power (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 245).

Convergence Convergence is a mechanism that operates in conjunction with radicalization. Radical extremes of a group or groups drive less extreme group members into closer alliance.

Crossclass Coalition Crossclass coalition formation is the “creation of coordinated action across a major class boundary” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 276).

Diffusion Diffusion is when information is transferred along “established lines of interaction” (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 331). Information flows across ideological divides and different sectors resulting in similar ways of collective action, like sit-ins or freedom marches.

Emulation Emulation is simply when one group models its collective actions on those of another group (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 335).

Identity Shift Identity shift is a mechanism where the boundary between two groups of people shifts.

Object Shift Object shift is when claimants, brokers, or the targets of the claims adjust upon whom they are making claims or who is defending against the claims (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 144).

Opportunity Spirals Opportunity spirals mean that one actor's change in response to their interpretation of an environmental change alters another's environment triggering change by those impacted by that second change (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 243).

Radicalization Radicalization is a mechanism where groups on different sides of an identity boundary polarize to the extremes.

Resources An environmental mechanism, availability or lack of resources impacts peoples' capacity to engage in collective action.

Social Appropriation Social appropriation is the mechanism by which particular people "appropriate existing social space and collective identities" to further their collective prediction and responsive action (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 102).

Suddenly Imposed Grievances Suddenly imposed grievances are "singular events that dramatize and heighten the political salience of particular issues" (McAdam et al., 2001, p. 202).

Qualitative Case Study and Analysis

Today, Co-op Cincy, formerly known as the Cincinnati Union Co-op Initiative (CUCI), and its initial two co-ops, Our Harvest & Sustainergy, are sustainable small entities that have existed for a decade. This Section provides a qualitative case study, conducted by the author, of the social movement mechanisms leading to CUCI, Our Harvest, and Sustainergy. The data collection process is described before turning to descriptions of how each entity came into being. The beginning of each entity is analyzed to determine which social movement mechanisms identified in the *Dynamics of Contention* model were involved and what other factors were significant to successfully launching this cooperative social movement. The Section concludes by providing lessons to be drawn for those interested in using the mechanism of emulation to start a similar union cooperative movement in their own locality or region.

Data Collection Process

The data relied on was collected through semi-structured interviews with twelve individuals involved in starting CUCI or Our Harvest. The author started by interviewing three of the four initial founders, Kristen Barker, Ellen Vera (then Dienger), and Flequer Vera. The author used a snowball method, asking each interviewee who else to interview. These interviews took place in person and by phone during 2013, 2014, & 2015, as outlined below. One interview, that of Eileen Frechette, was conducted in partnership with Lauren Hansen Schlachter who has previously reported about her independent research (Schlachter, 2017). The information provided in the interviews was triangulated against the other interviews, original documents, such as the CUCI web page, meeting handouts, certificates of incorporation, by-laws, contemporaneous news articles, and annual reports, and two other case studies of CUCI (Schlachter, 2017; Lurie & Fitzsimmons, 2021).

- Kristen Barker 8/2/13
- Flequer Vera 9/3/13
- Ellen Vera 9/3/13
- Gary Hines 10/7/13
- Kristin Gangwer 4/4/14
- Stephen Dienger 4/10/14
- Eric Britton 6/2/14
- Phil Amadon 7/22/14
- Zeke Coleman 8/6/14
- Cynthia Pinchback-Hines 2/7/15
- Union Representative 2/17/15
- Eileen Frechette 3/13/15

Cincinnati Union Co-op Initiative

CUCI describes itself as “a non-profit that develops integrated networks of worker-owned businesses that sustain families. We give working people, especially those in distressed and underserved communities, genuine control over their economic lives.” (Cincinnati Union Cooperative Initiative, 2016). CUCI is based on the 10 Mondragon Cooperative Principles which are similar to those discussed above in Section II.A but focused on worker-owned cooperatives.

10 Mondragon Cooperative Principles	
Open Admission	Coops will not discriminate in hiring
Democratic Organization	One worker, one vote
Sovereignty of Labor	Workers run the cooperative
Participation in Management	Development of adequate systems for participation, transparency, consultation, and negotiation
Instrumental & Subordinate Nature of Capital	Providing and creating jobs is prioritized over increasing the marginal return on investments.
Wage Solidarity	Highest paid workers earn no more than 5-7 times more than lowest paid workers.
Inter-Cooperation	Working cooperatively with other co-ops is valued and essential.
Universality	Solidarity with all those who work for economic democracy
Social Transformation	Support and invest in social change
Education	To promote establishment of these principles

(Cincinnati Union Cooperative Initiative [CUCI], 2015).) The principles are as follows: 1) Open Admission: Co-ops will not discriminate in hiring; 2) Democratic Organization: Each worker has one vote; 3) Sovereignty of Labor: Workers run the cooperative; 4) Participation in Management: Co-ops develop adequate systems for participation, transparency, consultation, and negotiation; 5) Instrumental & Subordinate Nature of Capital: Providing and creating jobs is prioritized over increasing the marginal return on investments; 6) Wage Solidarity: The highest paid workers earn no more than five to seven times more than the lowest paid workers; 7) Inter-Cooperation: Working cooperatively with other co-ops is

valued and essential; 8) Universality: Co-op workers demonstrate solidarity with all those who work for economic democracy; 9) Social Transformation: Co-ops support and invest in social change; and 10) Education: Co-ops promote the establishment of these principles (Cincinnati Union Cooperative Initiative, 2015).

Diffusion of information was the initial impetus for CUCI. Phil, who at that time was a 32-year railway mechanic, brought the October 2009 Mondragon Corporation and United Steelworkers Agreement to the attention of Kristen and Ellen (K. Barker, personal communication, August 2, 2013, p. 1; E. Vera, personal communication, September 3, 2013, p. 2; P. Amadon, personal communication, July 22, 2014, p. 2; Lurie & Fitzsimmons, 2021, p. 53; Co-Op Cincy, n.d.a, n.d.b). When Phil learned of the agreement he recognized an opportunity, which he concisely summed up: “And when I found out in 2009 that [the United Steelworkers] and Mondragon had reached an agreement, I knew immediately it could be a really significant game changer for the labor movement in the United States” (P. Amadon, July 22, 2014, p. 2). Phil was aware of Mondragon because of diffusion of information. Around two decades earlier a friend and leader in the building trades had traveled to Mondragon and shared his experience with Phil (P. Amadon, July 22, 2014, p. 2). At this time in late 2009, Kristen was working at the Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center (IJPC), and Ellen was a union organizer for United UFCW Local 75 (Co-Op Cincy, n.d.a). They also reached out to Flequer Vera about the Steelworkers Mondragon agreement. Flequer is an immigrant from Lima, Peru who worked in the non-profit sector on immigrant rights and social justice issues (F. Vera, personal communication, September 3, 2013, p. 2). The importance of brokerage was also apparent from the start. Phil served as a broker when he brought the agreement between the Steelworkers and Mondragon to Kristen’s, Ellen’s and Flequer’s attention (P. Amadon, July 22, 2014, p. 2). The Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center (IJPC), where Kristen worked, had sent delegations to Mondragon in the 1980s and 1990s and at that time had concluded it would be difficult to replicate the worker co-operative ecosystem in Cincinnati (Co-Op Cincy, n.d.a, n.d.b). They had reasoned that the U.S. has less of a cooperative culture than the Basque culture. Kristen explained: “[W]hen we think, for example about the American dream, we think more of the picket fence and the house, like more on an individual level than on a society, like our communities, kind of level.” The Steelworkers’ interest in worker-owned cooperatives brought the abundant solidarity from the labor movement to the table and provided powerful organizations willing to put resources into starting a cooperative movement (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 1.). The intersection of the labor movement with the worker cooperative movement reflected in the agreement demonstrates the mechanism of crossclass coalition.

Phil, Kristen, Ellen, and Flequer studied the Steelworkers Mondragon model for approximately a year during 2010 to see if they could bring the model to Cincinnati (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 1; E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 2, P. Amadon, July 22, 2013, p. 2, F. Vera, September 3, 2013, pp. at 3, 4, Lurie & Fitzsimmons, 2021, p. 40). They studied IJPC’s old books, including *Making Mondragon* (Whyte & Whyte, 1991), and videotapes about Mondragon, and they learned about other cooperatives in the U.S., such as those formed from the Evergreen Project and by the Ohio Employee Ownership Center (OEOC) (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, pp. 1–2; E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 2; P. Amadon, July 22, 2013, p. 5). Because Kristen worked at IJPC, they were able to access old materials about Mondragon to study the possibility of bringing worker co-ops to Cincinnati and were able to connect with other interested people and groups involved in peace and non-violence work (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, pp. 1–2). The role of IJPC reflects the importance of the mechanism of social appropriation.

They identified the agreement between the Steelworkers and Mondragon as a new opportunity to bring an exciting cooperative model to Cincinnati, demonstrating the mechanism of attribution of opportunity. Kristen explained: “Also, having such powerful organizations connected and willing to put their resources to making this happen felt like an incredibly new and exciting possibility” (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 1). To the extent the Great Recession was an impetus for the agreement, the agreement spiraled into a new opportunity for those in Cincinnati to start a cooperative ecosystem (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 1). Ellen too saw the threat to unionization and a transition to building union cooperatives as a major opportunity. She explained:

I think of me just kind of getting sick of doing all the defensive work and fighting so hard for so little. And I think I had like a 13% success rate in my organizing campaigns and not for lack of trying – just because it’s so difficult. So I think from that, wanting something that’s proactive, something where I have control. I mean, it’s still crazy hard, and we all know that start-ups fail all the time, but . . . me realizing that I can have more control over this, and if I work really hard I can build. And there’s still going to be market forces and different issues that are going on that are going to make it difficult to pay people the way we want to. But, like I said, the conversations different, when we are negotiating it’s about how can we pay everybody the most we can, not how can we pay them the least we can . . .”

(E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 24). Flequer, too, saw an opportunity. He attended business school and views cooperatives as “an opportunity for minorities to have access to a share of the pie, to create their own jobs” (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 3). After studying the union co-op model, Phil, Kristen, Ellen, and Flequer then diffused the information they had learned to others by holding events and engaging others in Cincinnati in the initiative (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 2; F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 6). Diffusion of information and networks to other organizations and experts were critical not only in starting CUCI but in continuing its work (C. Pinchback-Hines, personal communication, February 2, 2015, p. 14).

Identity shift and category formation are visible in the descriptions of how their work led them to identify as a group of people trying to build a cooperative economy, rather than as only members of a peace movement or union community. Kristen knew Phil, Ellen, and Flequer through her peace and nonviolence work at IJPC (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 5). They initially identified as involved with peace and nonviolence work and transitioned to be involved in building a cooperative economy. Kristen described the transition in this way:

[F]or the last 12 years I’ve worked at the Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center and the way I’ve conceived of my work is about building a community. So, to me, that’s a place where resources are shared equitably, where conflicts are resolved peacefully and constructively, where everyone is valued. . . . I fully came to believe over that time that . . . I can do all the training I want . . . people can be as effective at conflict resolution as they can, but then, you know if they don’t have a job, if so many people in their neighborhoods don’t have a job, and our neighborhoods are not stabilized and thriving with people being able to sustain their whole families through a job that has benefits, and through one job, not three jobs . . . that we’re never going to reduce these levels of violence that concern me and the community. We’re never going to shift or transform or create this beloved community that is very dear to me and what I want to be part of creating. So, it’s [building a union worker-co-op economy based on Mondragon’s model] just the next step of what I was doing. It seemed

like another way of creating the beloved community that might help meet my goals more . . .

(K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 10).

Cynthia described the social appropriation, identity shift, and category formation from the perspective of a participant in IJPC workshops. She started attending workshops about community relations and met Kristen, who then invited her to sessions exploring the idea of CUCI. Cynthia was teaching prisoners and saw the co-ops as a unique opportunity in the face of a bad economy to “help other people secure some type of gainful employment as opposed to just having to come out and get on unemployment and wait and wait and wait for – you know, try and try and try to no avail in some cases” (C. Pinchback-Hines, February 17, 2015, p. 1). Ellen described the transition from traditional organizing work in this way.

I was just seeing how much effort and everything I had to put in to try and help people better their workplaces and just how difficult it was and how people would get crushed over and over again trying to form a union and trying to have a little bit better pay and working conditions. And so, I think, out of that I think he [Phil] realized that this was something we are kind of kindred spirit on wanting there to be a better system and a better way to actually effectively create change in our community and especially in its working conditions. And so, when he approached me about studying this new model through Mondragon, and this agreement had happened, I was all in. (E. Vera, September 2, 2013, p. 2; P. Amadon, July 22, 2014, p. 2).

Ellen’s work as an organizer at UFCW Local 75, like Kristen’s at IJPC, illustrated social appropriation. After fighting for “small gains for workers” which was so difficult and resulted in employers firing workers, she thought the labor movement needed a new model that offers more worker control and possibilities (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 11). While overall the UFCW today remains focused on traditional union organizing campaigns, the union has been appropriated to do work starting cooperatives and continues this work. Dennis Olson’s talk about worker owned co-ops at a June 2021 conference held by Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations explained the Internationals’ continued support for union co-ops (D. Olson, personal communication, 2021). At least one other UFCW Local, Local 227, has supported a union co-op initiative in another city, Louisville. Phil recognized the UFCW as a union that did pioneering work “in terms of releasing organizing time to do this. It’s a good investment. It’s a safe, legal way to invest in the co-op movement. And it’s also a way to build the co-ops by doing some of the things that labor knows how to do best” (P. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 24).

Emulation was also a mechanism heavily involved in starting CUCI because CUCI based its initiative on Mondragon. As explained by one of the early CUCI brochures, “The Mondragon business model is the foundation for our effort to create competitive enterprises, foster social and economic justice, and empower worker dignity by creating jobs in businesses accountable to both their workers and the communities where they operate” (CUCI, 2013). Eileen Frechette, one of the initial three Our Harvest Board members, also mentioned that the Cincinnati Central Credit Union was based on the Mondragon principles, was a very different kind of credit union from other credit unions, and was a model for Our Harvest as well (E. Frechette, personal communication, March 13, 2015). She had long been a member of the credit union. (E. Frechette, March 13, 2015, p. 4).

The organizing of the study group’s initial event, which was held in February of 2011, also illustrates the mechanisms of brokerage, category formation, and social appropriation.

The four founders made a list of people they knew whom they believed might be interested in learning about using the Mondragon model to create jobs. They used their social networks and the organizations to which they belonged to circulate the invitation widely (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 9). The invitations for the initial event in February of 2011 were extended through the IJPC network, and IJPC promoted the event on their web page (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 16). Attribution of opportunity was at work because the Great Recession meant that learning about communities creating jobs was “a really hot topic on people’s minds” (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 9). As stated by CUCI’s later 2014 Annual Report: “Here in Cincinnati, like many other parts of this country, the need to create jobs is paramount. Families and neighborhoods across our region are struggling with high rates of long-term unemployment.” The February 2011 event brought together around 80 people to hear from Carl Davidson¹ (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, pp. 2,9; K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 12; C. Pinchback-Hines, February 7, 2015, p. 3; Lurie & Fitzsimmons, 2021, p. 53; Schlachter, 2017, p. 9; Co-Op Cincy, n.d.a, n.d.b) Phil knew and invited Carl Davidson, who is an expert on Mondragon, to speak. (E. Vera, September 13, 2013, p. 8, P. Amadon, July 22, 2014, p. 3) Those at the event learned about Mondragon and what that model could look like in Cincinnati. Around 20 of the attendees became more involved and started attending regular meetings, and several attended the April 2011 conference at OEOC. (Schlachter, 2017, p. 9; Lurie & Fitzsimmons, 2021; 53; Co-Op Cincy, n.d.a, n.d.b).

Attending the April 2011 OEOC conference was pivotal in terms of the mechanism of brokerage. It enabled CUCI to connect with a wide range of people and organizations, some of which they had previously studied, but were now able to actually meet. They spent four hours with Jim Anderson, the CEO at that time of the Evergreen Cooperative Laundry, a start-up cooperative in Cleveland. He answered questions they had provided to him about starting a worker cooperative economy (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 12; C. Pinchback-Hines, February 7, 2015, p. 3; E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 2). Ellen and her sister met Michael Peck, the North American Delegate to Mondragon (Schlachter, 2017, p. 9), with whom CUCI would ultimately work closely (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 2). Those from CUCI also met their future outside counsel, Eric Britton, at the conference (E. Britton, personal communication, June 2, 2014, p. 1). The mechanism of emulation is apparent once again, in using the Evergreen Cooperative Laundry as another model in addition to Mondragon. (CUCI, 2012).

After the April 2011 OEOC conference, CUCI developed proposals to present to Michael and Mondragon USA for three co-ops (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 2). The proposals brought three unions into the category of cooperativists, illustrating crossclass coalition and category formation. One proposal focused on the Steelworkers, and ultimately the proposed cooperative business was not formed. The second focused on the UFCW and proposed a food hub, which would ultimately become Our Harvest (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 2; E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 2). The third focused on the building trades unions, and ultimately became Sustainergy, an energy retrofit cooperative (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 3). For each proposed business, they had a working group (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 8). Ellen was the initial CEO of Our Harvest, and she and Phil played a large role in that project. Flequer was focused on Sustainergy and eventually became its CEO, and Kristen’s role in Sustainergy included political work to get a law enabled in Cincinnati that would help significantly increase the market for retrofitting (K. Barker, August

¹ Interviewee estimates of the number in attendance at the initial event ranged from 60–150, and previous case studies put the number at over 80, 80–90, and around 90.

2, 2013, p. 8). Michael came to Cincinnati in September 2011 to be briefed about the three proposals with the group needing to pay only the cost of his flight (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, pp. 2, 20).

Brokerage to bring the groups together, diffusion of information, and category formation continued. After the September 2011 meeting Michael visited each month, and all of the partnering organizations from around the state of Ohio would meet with each other and with him (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 20). The mechanism of category formation was described by Phil as critically important. He explained how based on the knowledge of history and of the wisdom of many workers before them, who had both successfully and unsuccessfully established cooperatives and formed unions, what the two defining characteristics of their work in Cincinnati would be. The first characteristic was the Mondragon principles, and the second was working as a non-craft union that represents many “workers in many industries as one united group” (P. Amadon, July 22, 2014, p. 9). He acknowledged that some people thought the founders were being inflexible, but that rather than abandon these principles they sought to help others understand them (P. Amadon, July 22, 2014, p. 9).

CUCI was incorporated in November of 2011 (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 20; K. Barker, personal communication, November 24, 2013; Certificate of Incorporation of Cincinnati Union Cooperative Initiative, Nov. 22, 2011). The incorporation of CUCI as a non-profit under state law was a form of certification. Their board initially had 14 people, including Kristen, Phil, Ellen, Flequer, and Gary Hines, the president of the local NAACP and a UFCW supporter. (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 14; G. Hines, personal communication, October 7, 2013, p. 1; Lurie & Fitzsimmons, 2021, p. 55, Co-Op Cincy, [n.d.a](#), [n.d.b](#)). Incorporation and forming the Board solidified a category of people who defined themselves as part of the union cooperative economy. Gary described first learning about CUCI around October of 2011 (G. Hines, October 7, 2013, p. 3) and being invited to join the Board (G. Hines, October 7, 2013, p. 3). He joined the Board as a broker because he could connect people from the NAACP and from his church and returning citizens, people returning to society from prison, to CUCI (G. Hines, October 7, 2013, p. 3). He learned about the Evergreen Co-ops in Cleveland, in an example of emulation, where many of the workers in those co-ops are returned citizens (G. Hines, October 7, 2013, p. 4). The Board of CUCI met monthly for regularly scheduled meetings, and more often if dealing with an issue such as receiving 501(c)(3) status or having someone from another organization come to educate the Board (G. Hines, October 7, 2013, p. 6). UFCW Local 75 and the Steelworkers provided space for monthly Board meetings (C. Pinchback-Hines, February 7, 2014, p. 9). The Board operated on a consensus basis as described by Gary: “Not that there’s not good discussion, but I think we’re able to work through most things, so nobody leaves mad, nobody leaves upset, nobody feels left out, you know? So it’s probably one of the better functioning boards that I’ve been on” (G. Hines, October 7, 2013, p. 5).

Another example of brokerage, in the form of social networks, and of opportunity spiral, is CUCI’s fundraising to support the three working groups. Phil mentioned the lack of capital as the number one challenge for the union co-op movement and CUCI (P. Amadon, July 22, 2014, pp. 20, 24). Despite the challenges, by April 2012, they ultimately raised \$22,000 from individuals by reaching out to communities of people who supported CUCI’s work. (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p.11.) CUCI reached out to those who had attended their February 2011 event, and CUCI Board members reached out to their communities. To raise the money, they had many conversations with individuals about their vision and the three projects. (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 14). They kicked off fundraising with an

event in December of 2011, where they raised around \$2,500 dollars of the total \$22,000 (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 15).

CUCI faced other challenges in addition to lack of capital. Cynthia Hines, a leader in Cincinnati's Black community, noted the idea of worker-owned co-ops did not catch on in the Black community during CUCI's initial years. She poignantly explained what daily life is like for those, including children, whose loved ones are incarcerated: they do not have time to think about voting or co-ops because "they don't have time to be thinking about anything" (C. Pinchback-Hines, February 7, 2015, p. 15). She believed it would simply take longer for the idea of a cooperative economy to penetrate into Cincinnati's Black community (C. Pinchback-Hines, February 7, 2015, p. 15). Cynthia's insight describes barriers, created by environmental, social, and economic circumstances, to the operation of the mechanisms of crossclass coalition and identity shift. Today, in 2021 and 2022, more people from Cincinnati's Black community are becoming involved with Co-op Cincy through the recruitment of five entrepreneurs of color and the Power in Numbers: Black-Led Co-op Business Bootcamp (Co-Op Cincy, n.d.a, n.d.b; Co-op Cincy, personal communication, December 28, 2021).

Also in December of 2011, some CUCI Board members went to Pittsburgh to meet with the Steelworkers and those involved with formulating the union co-op template (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 20; Witherell, et al., 2012). In February 2012 attorneys and others from the December meeting came to Cincinnati to continue working on the union co-op template with CUCI. UFCW attorneys and CUCI's attorney, Eric Britton, also attended the meeting. (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 36). The Steelworkers, Mondragon, and the OEOC announced the union co-op model template on March 26, 2012. (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 20; Witherell et al., 2012). Notably the role of experts, like attorneys, was significant to the development of CUCI but is not explored in depth by the authors in *Dynamics of Contention's* model of social movement theory.

In relation to experts more generally, not specifically connected to attorneys knowledgeable about union co-ops, Phil mentioned the tension created from the need to rely on experts for a successful cooperative when experts may not have a deep understanding of movement principles. He stated:

I think one of the other things that we've had a hard time with is that sometimes in order to run an organization or a cooperative business, you need expertise. But the expertise does not always come with agreement with the principles. And it is easy to say, "Yes, I agree with the principles," but it's a lot harder to live it out when the going gets rough. And when the going gets rough, people have a tendency to fall back to the last most comfortable position they were in. So if you have a person with a lot of expertise but not deep knowledge about the model and then a crisis hits, that person is going to be very influential and possibly shaky in terms of their commitment to the concepts and principles in the movement.

(P. Amadon, July 22, 2014, p. 20).

The mechanism of object shift is exemplified by CUCI's change in focus after the December 2011 meeting as they prepared for a March 2012 meeting about bringing a Mondragon company, Danobat Group Rail, to Cincinnati² (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 7; Schlacter, 2017, p. 10). (This project was the result of the first working group's efforts).

² While Kristen estimated that this meeting took place in February or March (Barker at 7), it has been previously reported as taking place in March (Schlacter at 10).

While initially CUCI had focused on bringing Michael to Cincinnati and making proposals to him, they shifted to have local government officials available at this 2012 meeting. Brokerage and social networks were critically important. Kristen described how to organize the initial meeting with Danobat Group Rail, she connected through a mutual friend from her college years at Xavier University, to someone on the City's Economic Development Team who was then able to connect her with the City Manager and Mayor's office, as well as the Chamber of Commerce and Cincinnati State Technical & Community College's Workforce Development Center (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 8). As a result, during the visit in March 2012, someone from the Economic Development Team attended, and the City Manager and the Mayor met with the Mondragon representatives (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 7; F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 8). A broader coalition of organizations was also in attendance alongside CUCI, including the NAACP, Cincinnati State, the Chamber of Commerce, the Steelworkers, and the Ohio Employee Ownership Center (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 7). After the March 2012 meeting, the Mayor went to Spain to visit Danobat Group Rail and the Mondragon Corporation in February 2013 (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 7). The involvement of the city officials illustrates certification, but also adds resources, which while heavily explored by other social movement theorists is not explored in depth by the authors in *Dynamics of Contention* (McCarthy & Wolfson, 1992, pp. 287–88).

In July 2013, Kristen switched from working for the IJPC to working for Mondragon International North America, the organization run by Michael Peck who was the North American Delegate for Mondragon (1999–2019) which, at the time, was majority owned by Mondragon International Cooperative (55%) and MAPA Group (45%) (K. Barker & M. Peck, personal communication, 2022; K. Barker, August, 2, 2013, p. 41; Schlachter, 2017, p. 12). This move solidified the category and certification of those in Cincinnati as part of a movement officially tied to the Mondragon cooperatives. By August 2013, those involved in CUCI had also appeared in local media to spread awareness of CUCI and its initiatives (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 39). The mechanism of certification was again illustrated when the IRS finally approved CUCI's non-profit status in November of 2013 (K. Barker, November 24, 2013). Initially, the IRS was offering 501(c)(4) rather than (c)(3) status. Kristen spent time in August of 2013 educating an IRS representative about CUCI and its role in educating the community about worker-owned co-ops and supporting co-ops and worker-owners (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 32).

Over time, several CUCI initiatives did not end up forming co-ops, such as the initiative to bring a Danobat Group Rail equipment cooperative to Cincinnati, an initiative to start a cooperative related to a family cookie business, and an initiative to open a cooperative grocery in an area affected by food apartheid (K. Barker, August 2, 2013; E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 2). But the opportunities from working on these initiatives developed ties and knowledge that assisted in supporting other cooperatives. Opportunities that did not ultimately work out led to different opportunities to support the co-ops that did. Those in the union co-op movement expect that some ideas will result in flourishing co-ops while others will not result in getting a co-op started – that is part and parcel of building a cooperative economy.

While recognized by other social movement theorists, the authors of *Dynamics of Contention* do not explicitly mention that any successful movement requires a huge devotion of time and energy on the part of leaders (McCarthy & Wolfson, 1996, pp. 1071–72). Kristen, Phil, Ellen, and Flequer devoted a huge investment of their own time into initiating CUCI and keeping it going during its early years after incorporation. Gary Hines emphasized that trust in Phil, Ellen, and Kristen was a primary motivator for him to join the Board and

continuing to work for CUCI (G. Hines, October 7, 2013, p. 22). “So relationships are very important to me. And I trusted these folks. I believed in what they were doing. And that’s why I continue to be on the board” (G. Hines, October 7, 2013, p. 22). Indeed, without Kristen, Phil, Ellen, and Flequer’s dedication, the union co-op movement in the U.S. would not be what it is today.

Our Harvest

Our Harvest, a farm and distribution hub, was the first worker-owned co-op CUCI incubated. Our Harvest has now been operating for a decade, has 11 workers, and three worker owners (Our Harvest, n.d.). The story of how CUCI started Our Harvest is intertwined with the above story of how Kristen, Ellen, Phil, and Flequer started CUCI.

The mechanism of social appropriation was illustrated by UFCW Local 75’s role in supporting Our Harvest as a start-up business. Ellen connected CUCI and the working group that would eventually become Our Harvest, which they called the “Food Hub Organizing Committee,” to the UFCW Local 75. Working as an organizer for UFCW 75, Ellen was permitted to spend official time on the project (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 14). While initially Ellen found explaining her vision to the union leadership challenging, ultimately she was permitted to work on the union co-op initiative in addition to traditional organizing campaigns (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 21). A representative and leader presented the idea to the Local’s rank and file and to the executive board, and they approved Ellen’s involvement (Union Representative, personal communication, February 7, 2015, p. 1). The Union Representative believed that if UFCW Local 75 became familiar with the co-op model, they would be able to save small shops from going out of business as had happened recently with Kellers IGA, a union-grocery store that had been located right next to University of Cincinnati (Union Representative, February 17, 2015, p. 1). The mechanisms of opportunity and identity shift appear involved as the union recognizes that co-ops can be not only start-ups but conversions and as the union shifts identity from losing unionized shops due to closure to starting their own businesses as cooperative leaders (Union Representative, February 17, 2015, p. 5). The Union Representative described the process: “The whole idea of worker-owned, worker-run co-ops was very new to me, so it was – I think other than just casual conversation of hearing unions involved in co-ops or helping participate in co-ops, there wasn’t really a true understanding, in this region anyway, until we took the initiative to a whole new level essentially in trying to create worker-owned union cooperatives that can help workers in this area” (Union Representative, February 17, 2015, p. 2). Once the leadership bought into the vision, others from the UFCW actively assisted with envisioning the type of project the CUCI working group would select (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 4; K. Gangwer, personal communication, April 4, 2014, p. 2.). A representative from the International, a researcher for the Food Processing and Packing Division, and a UFCW labor attorney attended many of the initial planning meetings (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 15). The attorney for Local 75 also assisted with labor law questions (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 17).

After the OEOC conference in April 2011, Ellen and others involved in the working group explored a food hub because, in another example of the mechanism of emulation, they had learned about one in Youngstown (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 3). They were trying to decide whether to start with grass fed beef or vegetables. The working group connected with the Ohio Cooperative Development Center at Ohio State University and learned that it would be less expensive to start a vegetable plant than a meat processing

plant (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 4). The working group met throughout the summer of 2011, did research, and figured out that they needed a feasibility study and a business plan (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 4). They believed at that time that they would need to raise to raise \$80,000 for the study and plan, although the cost ultimately was much lower, around \$40,000 (K. Barker, personal communication, 2022; E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 4). The UFCW Local 75 donated \$10,000 for the feasibility study and the business plan (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 21; G. Hines, October 7, 2013, p. 2; Co-Op Cincy, [n.d.a](#), [n.d.b](#)). In addition to the funding from the UFCW Local 75, the work group raised money to pay for the complete feasibility study and business plan from two foundations, the Hale Foundation and the Dominican Sisters (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 19). Working closely with Ohio State University Ohio Cooperative Development Center, the working group learned of the research the Center had done determining that a next generation of farmers was lacking (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 4).

In September of 2011 the working group met with Michael Peck. UFCW, the Ohio Cooperative Development Center, the Center for Community Change, and the OEOC all attended the September 2011 meeting regarding this second proposal, which would eventually become Our Harvest (Peaslee Neighborhood Center, [n.d.](#)). Individuals who were farmers, including Stephen Dienger who would become Our Harvest's farm manager, attended the meeting as well (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 15). In terms of brokerage, these meetings connected many previously unconnected groups. And they did so in an organized fashion because it would be somewhat difficult to connect groups and work toward a new social category if everyone was just there all at once and mingling. Instead, the working groups convened people interested in a certain business proposal, and then CUCI linked them together into a larger group committed to a union cooperative economy. Further exploring different types of brokers and organization of brokerage would be an interesting way to build on the work of the authors of *Dynamics of Contention*.

At the September 2011 meeting, the working group explained what a food hub is and how the U.S. Department of Agriculture had identified lack of food hubs as contributing to food apartheid. The Ohio Cooperative Development Center helped because they had studied the lack of succession planning for certain farms, leading to a lack of farmers, and were working on building a program to train farmers (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 18; E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 5). At that time, CUCI was exploring partnering with the Ohio Cooperative Development Center to create an incubation farm (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 18; E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 5). Brokerage and social appropriation are again evidenced as CUCI connected the Ohio Cooperative Development Center with Michael and Mondragon, and as its program was then used to support the cooperative farm. After the September 2011 meeting, the Ohio Cooperative Development Center visited Cincinnati to meet with Ellen about the project often (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 20).

Brokerage was critical for locating the land on which the initial farm opened in College Hill. Eileen Frechette, one of the women who was in the organizing group, and was later a member of the Board once Our Harvest incorporated, lived in an area called Wooden Shoe Hollow. Wooden Shoe Hollow is nearby to the College Hill farm and previously was the location of the greenhouses that supplied vegetables to Cincinnati. Eileen knew the owner of the College Hill farm, Bahr Farm, and knew that he was becoming too old to maintain his farm but wanted to preserve it as farmland (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 7). So around January or February of 2012, CUCI entered discussions with the owner and was able to lease the incubator farm in College Hill (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 7).

During this time, others were drafting the initial bylaws for Our Harvest and the mechanism of emulation was involved. Phil heard Michael Elsas, the CEO of Cooperative Home

Care Associates (CHCA), speak in Philadelphia around July 2012 (P. Amadon, July 22, 2014, p. 11). Kristen and Phil then met with him at headquarters in the Bronx and spoke in detail about the foundation of CHCA. Thus, CHCA was instrumental in Phil's thinking about how to draft the bylaws (P. Amadon, July 22, 2014, p. 11). Our Harvest's outside counsel Eric Britton drafted the articles of incorporation and helped with the bylaws before incorporation (P. Amadon, July 22, 2014, p. 11).

The OCDC collaborated with Our Harvest to quickly write up a small business plan before April of 2012 (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 5). Accessing capital was a major challenge in starting Our Harvest (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 22; K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 26; P. Amadon, July 22, 2014, p. 20; C. Pinchback-Hines, February 7, 2015, p. 12; E. Frechette, March 13, 2015, p. 4; S. Dienger, personal communication, April 10, p. 6). The local credit union Cincinnati Central Credit Union allowed them to sign \$5,000 notes if a person in the community co-signed (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 26; E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 19; E. Frechette, March 13, 2014, p. 4). Over twenty people were willing to co-sign on the loans. (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 26; E. Vera, September 2, 2013, p. 19). Our Harvest was ultimately able to pay the notes off with 12.4 percent interest so that the interest rate was lowered to nine percent (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 27). Also some individuals made smaller loans to Our Harvest and provided Our Harvest five years to pay them off at a low interest rate of one to four percent (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 27).

Our Harvest was incorporated on February 23, 2012 (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 21; E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 10; Articles of Incorporation of Our Harvest, Feb. 23, 2012) and received its certificate of incorporation on March 8, 2012. (Certificate of Incorporation of Our Harvest, March 8, 2012). Our Harvest began operating around April 6, 2012 (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 21; Lurie & Fitzsimmons, 2021, p. 40; S. Dienger, April 10, 2014, p. 3). while the full feasibility study and business plan were still underway. (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 5). They began with the incubator farm and not the full-scale vision for a food hub. The need to train farmers and to start the Ohio Cooperative Development Center's apprenticeship program made starting the farm first necessary (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 21). At that time only Ellen, Phil, and Eileen Frechette were on the Our Harvest Board (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 11). They planned to have an election among workers to broaden the board in April 2013 (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 11). They started with around four workers in addition to the three-person board³ (C. Pinchback-Hines, February 7, 2015, p. 8; K. Gangwer, April 4, 2014, p. 4, Welch et al., 2012).

One of the initial workers, Stephen Dienger, who started in April 2012, described how a family member (Ellen Vera) was involved in CUCI so he had known about the effort. Yet, he was not very involved because he had a market garden business. When the family member approached him to find out if he would be interested in being one of the first employees, he was initially hesitant. But ultimately "I was excited about it. Just the idea of the worker owner cooperative and... farming with people," and he committed. (S. Dienger, April 10, 2014, p. 1). The importance of preexisting networks in recruiting workers again illustrates the significance of the diffusion mechanism. Eileen similarly explained why she joined the Board of Our Harvest in March of 2012 (E. Frechette, March 13, 2015, p. 7). She had attended a few of the CUCI meetings in the past and had been persistently recruited by Phil to join the Board for several years prior to agreeing to join. (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 2). Diffusion of information was also evident in the story of another worker, Zeke Coleman, who joined Our Harvest for the 2013 summer season.

³ Interviewee's recollection of how many workers started Our Harvest ranged from three to six, and a 2012 documentary sources indicates there were six employees, including two part-time employees.

He explained how he was connected to UFCW Local 75 and knew Ellen. Ellen kept sending him information about the potential to work to start a cooperative farm. He initially was not interested in working with the cooperative, but once he looked into and got to know the people involved, he decided to stay and work there. (Z. Coleman, personal communication, August 6, 2014, p. 1).

Once the initial team of workers at Our Harvest was hired, one of the CUCI Board members, Cynthia, did initial training with them because they were not familiar with the backdrop and Mondragon principles. They had to go to work right away, so CUCI provided them an initial training session in the Mondragon principles. (C. Pinchback-Hines, February 7, 2015, p. 8). At a later point, CUCI hired someone to provide ongoing training for workers at each incubated cooperative. (C. Pinchback-Hines, February 7, 2015, p. 8).

While starting the farm, CUCI secured financing to start the feasibility study, including a grower survey. (E. Frechette, March 13, 2015, p. 3; E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 3). Ohio Cooperative Development Center surveyed growers within a 50-mile radius of Cincinnati to explore interest in a food hub. (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 5). Through the survey they discovered the majority of farmers were 57–60 years old and did not have a succession plan. They earned less than \$50,000 off their farm which meant someone had to have another job to have healthcare and benefits, and the farm was “more of like a hobby.” (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 5). CUCI also did a buyer survey, as part of the feasibility study, to assess demand for local produce. (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 5; G. Hines, October 7, 2013, p. 2). They used the information from the surveys to put together the business plan that would aggregate the distribution center with the incubator farm. (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 5). The results of the surveys displayed a threat of impending lack of farmers and an opportunity to create jobs to address demand for local produce. (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 5; S. Dienger, April 10, 2014, p. 4). The surveys demonstrate that in addition to the mechanisms identified by the authors of *Dynamics of Contention*, aggregating information and planning are critical to establish a successful co-op movement. In fact, Ellen emphasized the importance of long-term planning and “figuring out what’s the big next steps that we need to do [and] working towards that and accomplishing it.” (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 18).

Not only did Our Harvest begin in a smaller way than the vision of a food hub and farm, it also began before decisions had been made about governance. Kristen used a phrase Mondragon has adapted from a famous Spanish poem to describe Our Harvest’s initial operation. “We make the road while we walk it” (Machado, n.d.). They had not decided how long the probationary period for a worker would be before becoming an owner or what the cost of the one share would be. They had not yet developed training materials for worker owners. (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 29). Ellen described how they could have benefited from being able to hire more skilled labor and from having two farm managers instead of one, given the workload. (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 22). Many of the employees were new to business, which necessitated diffusion of information about running a business and managing effectively. (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, pp. 23–24). Ultimately, they hired OEOC to help with financial literacy. (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 23).

After incorporation and starting the farm, and during 2012, Our Harvest recognized UFCW Local 75 as the union representative of their non-management workers through a card check election (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 16; Welch et al., 2012).⁴ The workers joined UFCW Local 75 through a card check process in April or May of 2012 and started

⁴ One interviewee and previous case studies (Schlachter at 11), including one by the author (Levinson, 2018a, b, c), report the workers joined the union in 2014, while another estimated it was 2013, but further study of the interviews of Ellen and a 2012 slide deck indicate it is more likely the workers voted to join the union in April or May of 2012 and voted to ratify the collective bargaining agreement in 2014.

negotiating the CBA in October of 2013 (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 16). The process was slow because the workers were focused on other things during the growing season (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 16).

Brokerage continued to be an important mechanism in developing Our Harvest and the union-cooperative movement in Cincinnati. One of Our Harvest's future workers, Kristin Gangwer, attended a Green Umbrella meeting in September of 2012, which is a local food coalition meeting, and connected with Kristen and Ellen. Kristin started volunteering with Our Harvest in October 2012 (K. Gangwer, April 4, 2014, p. 1). She then interviewed for a position and started working in December of 2012 (K. Gangwer, April 4, 2014, p. 2).

The Our Harvest Board also continued to work on redrafting the bylaws in Spring 2013 (E. Frechette, March 13, 2015, p. 15). All of the workers and Board members met approximately eight to ten times to discuss a section of the bylaws (E. Frechette, March 13, 2015, p. 15; K. Gangwer, April 4, 2014, p. 15). About 75–80% of workers would be there for each meeting (E. Frechette, March 13, 2015, p. 15). Our Harvest also created additional jobs bringing the total number to ten in 2013 (K. Barker, November 24, 2013). Also in 2013, Our Harvest began to lease a separate piece of land in Wooden Shoe Hollow and farm that in addition to the Bahr Farm in College Hill (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 7; Rose, 2014, p. 5). But as of September 2013, they still did not have enough land, and one deal had fallen through because Our Harvest could not afford the asking price for the land. (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 22). As one initial employee noted, “not having farmland was one of the big challenges” (S. Dienger, April 10, 2014, p. 6). The importance of resources, such as land, to social movements while playing a pivotal role in the Mau Mau Revolt are not otherwise explored in depth by the authors of *Dynamics of Contention* and present a useful topic of future exploration.

In around April 2013, all the partners involved with Our Harvest again met, and focused on obtaining the financing for the full project of the hub, containing the farm and distribution center (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 6). They first looked to secure funding for the incubator farm (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 6). Around August 2, 2013, Our Harvest obtained a joint loan from two cooperative banks, Farm Credit Mid America and CoBank for \$450,000, plus a \$100,000 line of credit (Rose, 2014, p. 6). While monetary resources are not emphasized by the authors of *Dynamics of Contention*, loans function as a means of certification, and resources are critical to starting and sustaining any social movement or business, including a worker-owned cooperative. The employees at Our Harvest had to be flexible and adjust their planning when they did not have the financing, for instance, to purchase a tractor or hire another employee (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 22). One Board member noted “It was continually the money raising issues” (E. Frechette, March 13, 2015, p. 3).

Cincinnati State was an early anchor institute for Our Harvest and served to certify the cooperative (Welch et al., 2012). Our Harvest sold food to their restaurant and also had a workplace CSA there (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 30; E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 20). In August of 2013, Cincinnati State launched a Sustainable Agriculture Management Program (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 30; Curnutte, 2013, p. 2). The College Hill farm served as the practicum site for the certificate program (Cincinnati Union Cooperative Initiative, 2015; Whitman, 2014, p. 2). The mechanism of an anchor institution might be an example of partial social appropriation or attribution of similarity or might warrant further study as a separate type of mechanism involved in social movements. More generally individual commitments to buy CSA were more reliable than institutions' promises to buy a certain amount of produce (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 22; P. Amadon, July 22, 2014, p. 20; E. Frechette, March 13, 2015, p. 4). The dichotomy between institutional

and individual customers emphasizes the importance of the brokerage mechanism as well as object shift, from focusing on institutional customers to focusing on individual customers. Also, however, the switch from institutional customers to individual ones emphasizes the importance of how nimble or able to change institutions are as an important aspect of whether a social movement, like one to establish worker-owned co-ops, can succeed.

In summer of 2013 the CUCI Board had a meeting to bring in stakeholders interested in Our Harvest's work. The President of Cincinnati State attended. Several people from banks attended as did other entrepreneurs (G. Hines, October 7, 2013, p. 23). The lunch was primarily sourced from Our Harvest, and the tangible product was effective at motivating people (G. Hines, October 7, 2013, p. 23). UFCW Local 75 continued to broker important connections, like connecting Our Harvest to a union butcher when they added grass fed beef, in addition to vegetables, around August of 2013. As of September 2013, Our Harvest and UFCW Local 75 were working on locating union shops that would sell Our Harvest's produce (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 14). In September 2013, there were four employees on track to become worker owners in April 2014. While they considered a share price as high as \$10,000, ultimately it would be \$3,000 (K. Barker, Personal Communication, 2022; E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 13). The Board of Our Harvest was trying to find loan opportunities, or, if not, would consider payment in installments because they would not want poverty to exclude workers from becoming owners (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 13). They planned for the Board to have one CUCI representative and worker owners (E. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 13).

As of April 2014, there were five workers on track to become worker owners (S. Dienger, April 10, 2014, p. 12). By 2014, Our Harvest had two work sites, and more customers than the 2013 season (Z. Coleman, August 6, 2014, p. 4). Zeke described the cooperative worker environment in this way:

We all work together really good, so that's always a positive, helping each other out You know it's not like the other jobs I had in the past where . . . there's always somebody ramming you, pushing you, pushing you, but you're already doing what you can to make it work. There's nobody screaming at you and talking at you wild crazy. That doesn't seem to exist here, which is awesome. Because I mean, that not only makes . . . you feel better about your job, but you feel better about coming to work as well.

(Z. Coleman, August 6, 2014, p. 9). One Board member reported that Our Harvest had a 60 member CSA in 2012, in 2013 they grew to 200 or 250 members, and by 2014 they had 350 to 400 members of the CSA. (E. Frechette, March 13, 2015, p. 3; A. Kang Bartlett, personal communication, November 22, 2015; CUCI, 2014).

UFCW Local 75 assisted with the workers having a good collective bargaining agreement and an opportunity to select dental, vision, and short-term disability programs through the union. (K. Barker, Personal Communication, 2022). The contract was finalized in spring of 2014 (P. Amadon, July 22, 2014, p. 15) and was ratified in May 2014 (Z. Coleman, August 6, 2014, p. 10; Union Representative, February 17, 2015, p. 3). A UFCW Local 75 representative, not employed at Our Harvest, represented the workers and negotiated with two of the Board members of Our Harvest (Z. Coleman, August 6, 2014, p. 11; E. Frechette, March 13, 2015, p. 12). CUCI provided legal assistance from in-house counsel Casey Amadon (P. Amadon, July 22, 2014, p. 16), and the labor lawyers for UFCW Local 75 were also instrumental in finalizing the CBA (P. Amadon, July

22, 2014, p. 12). The emulation of Mondragon was again apparent during negotiations. The Union Representative described using the Mondragon model and principles as a starting point for the CBA (Union Representative, February 17, 2015, p. 4). A worker said this, “But a place like this I don’t really think a union is necessary because they’re already treating everybody fairly. But you know, it’s good to have one just in case something might happen. So I’m glad we do have one” (Z. Coleman, August 6, 2014, p. 10). Our Harvest holds weekly meetings with all workers and use an open book management method (Z. Coleman, August 6, 2014, p. 14).

In September 2014, Our Harvest had 12 full-time workers (Whitman, 2014). Despite continuing to grow, some workers did take a voluntary pay cut in 2014 (E. Frechette, March 13, 2015, p. 9; Schlachter, 2017). Those who did identified as part of the union worker co-op movement and had the privilege to make a sacrifice that others could not. (E. Frechette, March 13, 2015 p. 9.) All cuts still resulted in pay within the hourly wage structure in the CBA (E. Frechette, March 13, 2015, p. 11). By March of 2015, Our Harvest had two worker-owners (E. Frechette, March 13, 2015, p. 21). Their 2015 annual report reported a diverse work force of 18, including 11 full-time year-round employees. They were farming four acres on Bahr Farm in College Hill and 15 acres on White Oak farm in Morrow, Ohio. In addition to the CSA, they had 21 customers, including Whole Foods, Green Bean Delivery, and Cincinnati State.

Diffusion of information along established networks continued to play a critical role in helping workers identify as part of a cooperative economy even after the cooperative was formed. By 2015, CUCI was delivering weekly on-the-job educational sessions to workers at Our Harvest. “Sessions serve to demystify financial statements, tap into people’s collective intelligence about how to problem solve and build the business, develop communication skills, and integrate co-op values.” By 2016, Our Harvest “employed 15 people and served as a practicum site for 20 students” (CUCI, 2016).

Once again the role of leaders, like Kristen, Phil, and Ellen, and the huge time commitments they made to start Our Harvest should be added to the mechanisms necessary for a successful social movement. One Board member noted that the other two worked 60 hours a week (E. Frechette, March 13, 2015, p. 16). One of the initial employees noted the importance of leadership in getting Our Harvest started. When asked about what contributed to the success of starting Our Harvest, he responded: “I think the biggest thing was that the dedication that... the original founders... Ellen and Phil, Kristen Barker, [and] Ellen’s husband Flequer... had the vision and they spent a lot of time... after work hours working on it and formulating the plans and meeting and developing a strategic plan in order to get this started. You know, I think that having that clear direction was probably the biggest thing...” (S. Dienger, April 10, 2014, pp. 5–6). As summed up by Eric Britton:

Would you be able to do this with just any group of workers? . . . my reaction to that is the reason Our Harvest happened is because of the skill set that Kristen and Phil and Ellen brought to the tableOne of the keys for why these deals have gotten done, and they aren’t happening other places, is because Phil has the vision and Ellen has the organizing skills. . . . So one of the keys towards getting a worker co-op on this kind of model up and off the ground, if it isn’t buying an existing business, is having somebody who really knows how to organize things. And who’s able to devote like a ton of time.

(E. Britton, June 2, 2014, p. 23).

Sustainability

Today in 2022, Sustainability is an insulation and energy efficiency co-op that focuses on residential clients. They provide a free home energy assessment and work with their clients to install energy efficiency upgrades. They also offer solar energy installation. There are seven workers, at least three of whom are owners. (Sustainability, n.d.).

Before the September 2011 meeting with CUCI, Michael Peck emailed CUCI with the idea for the third proposal, which ultimately became Sustainability (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 19; F. Vera, September 3, 2013, pp. 5, 17). Michael notified them about Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) laws (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 19; F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 17). A national act providing for PACE had been adopted in Ohio and, if adopted at the municipal level in Cincinnati, would create the ability for industrial businesses to retrofit in an economically feasible manner (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 19). PACE applies to non-residential buildings, most of which, and particularly those built before 1980, have substantial energy inefficiency. If the owner makes retrofits, they “can likely save at least 30 percent” on their utility bill. An energy audit identifies how to make those cost saving retrofits (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 22). PACE enables a property owner to finance the retrofitting through the property tax assessment over the life of the improvement, up to 30 years (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 22; F. Vera, September 3, 2013, pp. 16, 17). The barrier of having to pay up front for retrofitting is thereby reduced (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 22; F. Vera, September 3, 2013, pp. 15, 17). PACE also acts similarly to enable switching to solar and geothermal energy (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 24).

The mechanism of diffusion operated when CUCI then alerted the local building trades unions about PACE. The Sustainability working group held a large event in conjunction with Michael’s September 11 visit. Those present represented the Green Umbrella, the Laborers Union, the building trades unions, and city government (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 19). Green Umbrella is a regional sustainability alliance of hundreds of Cincinnati organizations (Green Umbrella, n.d.). During this time, CUCI and the Sustainability working group researched PACE and “talked to various people about advocating for PACE in Cincinnati” (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 22; F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 17). The mechanism of crossclass coalition operated to connect CUCI, focused on building a cooperative economy, to different organizations focused on energy efficiency, not all of which were familiar with the cooperative economy. The working group reached out to Green Umbrella and the Greater Cincinnati Area Energy Alliance (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, pp. 17–18; Sustainability, n.d.). They spoke with the attorneys at the firm of Bricker & Eckler, who were involved in Toledo adopting PACE (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 22). The Greater Cincinnati Area Energy Alliance was a non-profit focused on energy efficiency. They provided energy efficiency assessments to both residential and commercial properties and then partnered with contractors who implemented requested changes to the properties (Office of Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy, n.d.).

In June of 2012, CUCI convened another large meeting related to Sustainability. CUCI was serving as a broker for Sustainability. For this meeting, they included Go Sustainable Energy, which is a group of engineers who do energy audits and verification (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 21; Go Sustainable Energy, n.d.). As with CUCI and Our Harvest, the role of expertise in organizing Sustainability is important though not explicitly discussed as a mechanism by the authors of *Dynamics of Contention*. Category formation is a way to view the addition of experts as they view themselves in alignment with those in the union

co-op movement. Identity shift may also be involved as CUCI begins to identify their work as including experts like lawyers and engineers in addition to those in the peace and non-violence movement and organizations supportive of that work.

By July 2012, CUCI was advocating for Cincinnati to adopt PACE. They spoke with city government officials and worked with Green Umbrella (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, pp. 16–17). CUCI was active in Green Umbrella's Food Action Team, because of Our Harvest, and by September 2012 had become involved in their Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation Teams (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 23). The role of brokerage by Green Umbrella is apparent. After the information about PACE was diffused from CUCI to Green Umbrella, Green Umbrella started spearheading an initiative to have Cincinnati pass PACE (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 23). The mechanism of attribution of similarity is manifested in the way Green Umbrella and CUCI came together around advocating for PACE. Green Umbrella included the Greater Cincinnati Area Energy Alliance, the Building Trades unions, non-union shops, and the Port Authority in the work (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 24; F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 17). They met regularly with Cincinnati council members, and the Office of Environmental Quality requested a report (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 24). Category formation operated to bring together CUCI and others interested in different aspects of environmental sustainability to lobby for PACE.

One place the allied actors identified opportunity and threat differently was that CUCI was committed to PACE including responsible bidder requirements, meaning that companies who benefit from the legislation must pay workers a prevailing wage (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 24; F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 17). Many of the solar contractors who were part of the Green Umbrella coalition viewed responsible bidder requirements as a threat because they pay their workers lower wages (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 24). The mechanism of competition operated between CUCI and the solar contractors as they vied for different particular provisions in the PACE ordinance. Explaining the mechanisms, such as competition, that operate within groups and coalitions to solve internal disagreements raised by somewhat different visions is an area the authors of *Dynamics of Contention* did not extensively explore. How people and groups work through those differences likely impacts the trajectory, and success or failure, of any particular social movement.

In September of 2012, Flequer began work in one of his classes at University of Cincinnati with assistance from two other students and a professor on developing a business plan for Sustainergy. By December 2012, Sustainergy had a solid business plan (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 5). Ultimately around April 8, 2013, the Cincinnati City Council unanimously passed the PACE initiative (K. Barker, August 2, 2013, p. 24; F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 17). This certified Green Umbrella and the work which CUCI began and was involved in. Sustainergy was incorporated August 20, 2013 (Certificate of Incorporation of Sustainergy, 2013). As with CUCI and Our Harvest, incorporation can be conceived as a type of certification by the state government, validating the cooperative business form.

By September 2013, Sustainergy was nearing its launch as an energy efficiency cooperative. They aspired to help commercial, industrial, and institutional buildings reduce their energy expenses and CO2 emissions. They would do this by offering an energy analysis, which was not common in the industry. The energy analysis and assessment would be performed by Go Sustainable Energy (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 10). Then Sustainergy would do the actual physical work to implement the retrofits. Sustainergy would assist clients with lighting, controls, sensors, heating and cooling systems, air drafts, and building envelope (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 11). Once the commercial, industrial, and institutional work was up and running, Sustainergy planned to explore expanding to residential properties (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 13).

Sustainergy started sales and had a couple of customers lined up by September 2013 (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 12). The sales process was implemented in the following way. They put together a list of 100 building owners of buildings built before 1980, those buildings with the highest potential for savings from energy retrofitting. They then mailed or emailed letters and called to follow up after six days. They believed they would obtain ten meetings from contacting the 100 owners. They then scheduled a meeting to ascertain the reasons the building owner might be interested in retrofitting and met a second time to offer a solution. They expected between the second and additional meetings to make one or two sales (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 14). This model was based on that of an entrepreneur friend of Flequer who started a similar business eight years before, exhibiting the mechanism of emulation (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 14). The sales process also exhibits mechanisms similar to diffusion and brokerage, but different from diffusion because the information was not disseminated through previously existing connections and different than brokerage in that Sustainergy and Flequer were attempting to connect with people they did not previously know. Perhaps the lack of previously existing connections accounts for the inability to ultimately obtain a high number of these clients, leading to the ultimate switch at a later time to focusing on residential properties. In addition to using this sales model, Sustainergy planned to obtain repeat customers from Go Sustainable Energy and interested potential clients through CUCI's networks.

As with Our Harvest, lack of financing presented an obstacle to starting Sustainergy. Flequer explained that “according to the Department of Energy, the two main obstacles for business or building to retrofit or take advantage of the potential of the retrofits is lack of financing. People don't want to spend the money because it's expensive, and they don't know that the actual savings are going to materialize. The second is lack of skilled labor” (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 12). By September 2013, Sustainergy had started marketing and seeking financing for workers to pay what they hoped might be a \$10,000 share of the co-op, although initial shares ultimately ended up being \$4,000 (K. Barker, Personal Communication, 2022; F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 15). Flequer was exploring whether a credit union might loan directly to the workers or whether they might loan to Sustainergy at a lower interest rate, and Sustainergy would then make the payments for the worker (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 15). As to skilled labor, the building trade unions provided resources because they provide their members healthcare and benefits and perform the hiring, including drug testing, of the workers (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 12). Sustainergy worked with IBEW Local 212, Pipefitters Local 392, and Laborers Local 265 (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 13; LiUNA! Local 265, n.d.). In September of 2013, Sustainergy was planning to hire a Mechanical Service Equipment person who was a member of Pipefitters Local 392 (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 20). They were also seeking to hire a union electrician at the highest scale and a HVAC person, but it was difficult to find someone who believed in the co-op values (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 12).

Sustainergy would launch in November 2013 with three initial jobs (K. Barker, November 24, 2013; Schlachter, 2017, p. 11; F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 12). Our Harvest was one of the initial clients (K. Barker, Personal Communication, 2022). Another initial client was a company that CUCI located, the owner of which was interested in supporting Sustainergy (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 14). This is a clear example of brokerage with CUCI connecting Sustainergy and the business owner. Sustainergy's third customer was an ESOP company, the representative of which Flequer met by attending Camp Washington business meetings. Camp Washington is the largest industrial community in the Cincinnati area. The company did not care about the cooperative movement, even though it was an

ESOP, but was strictly interested in the retrofit and energy savings Sustainergy could offer (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 16).

Flequer suggested that anyone starting a cooperative should connect early on with SCORE for business mentorship and with the SBA for networking with those who know how to create a business (F. Vera, September 3, 2013, p. 31; Score Association, n.d.). In other words, the mechanisms of brokerage and diffusion of information are critical to successfully launching a co-op. In June 2015, Sustainergy pivoted from commercial clients to residential clients (Sustainergy, n.d.; Schlachter, 2017, p. 11). Sustainergy partnered with Empower Cincinnati, a local energy initiative to provide energy efficiency audits and energy saving installations for residential properties (CUCI, 2015). By 2016, Sustainergy had “saved over 100 homeowners, on average, \$600 to \$700 per household in utility savings” (CUCI, 2016).

Lessons Drawn

Many of the conditions previously identified as historically operating to bring about a movement to establish a cooperative are apparent in the story of CUCI, Our Harvest, and Sustainergy (Levinson, 2014). The Great Recession was an instance of regulatory breakdown, or at least an economic condition, that served as a primary impetus for CUCI (Levinson, 2014, p. 354). While the social movement literature suggests other circumstances can serve as an impetus for a social movement, economic impetus appears particularly important for a union co-op movement. This case study of CUCI, Our Harvest, and Sustainergy discloses that the mechanisms of brokerage, diffusion, emulation, resources, and social appropriation are critical to a successful union cooperative movement. Others hoping to learn from the experiences of CUCI, Our Harvest, and Sustainergy might focus on the operation of these mechanisms.

Social appropriation of organizations such as the IPJC and UFCW Local 75 were critical. Those working to establish a successful local union co-op movement should identify interested founders who work for organizations, such as local unions and non-profits, that will support the work to open a co-op or co-ops. Cooperating with union leaders on initiatives that support working people and educating them about union worker-owned cooperatives can be crucial to securing union support when the time is ripe to start a particular co-op. While this case study focuses on two start-up cooperatives, converting an existing company to a co-op is a prime example of appropriation. Legislating a right of first refusal for employees to buy their company if it goes on the market or negotiating this right into a collective bargaining agreement promise a sophisticated legal mechanism for insuring social appropriation (Rieger, 2016, p. 26; Gowan, 2019, pp. 36–39; Weaver, 2020, p. 34; Lurie & Fitzsimmons, 2021, p. 14).

Brokerage and diffusion of information are also key components to starting and continuing a union co-op movement. Brokers connect previously unconnected organizations and movements with each other, such as OEOC connecting CUCI with the Cooperative Home Care Associates and Evergreen Cooperative Laundry representatives (CUCI, 2012), and the Green Umbrella connecting CUCI and Sustainergy to non-union companies with an interest in passing the PACE legislation. Pre-existing networks in the peace and non-violence movement and the union movement were critical in diffusing information and garnering support for CUCI. Those working to establish a union cooperative economy should have a broad network of people and organizations, beyond the one or two that are

appropriated, to which they can diffuse information and rely on for connections to other potential partner organizations.

The availability of resources beyond those garnered from appropriation is important. (Levinson, 2014, p. 356). When multiple individuals applied to the Cincinnati Credit Union for small loans for Our Harvest they aggregated individual resources. Those looking to build a union cooperative economy can similarly begin by pooling their own resources. Added value, using Our Harvest's expected profit to secure a loan from Farm Credit Mid America (Farm Credit, n.d.) and CoBank (CoBank, n.d.), was critical to obtain financing. Patronage played a role as reflected by the donations to the initial fundraising campaign that raised \$22,000 dollars for Our Harvest. Those involved in CUCI and the two cooperatives identified a lack of financial resources as a barrier to a thriving cooperative economy. Seeking resources from unions can help overcome this barrier. Unions have physical meeting space that they may be happy to share, such as the Steelworkers and UFCW Local 75 permitting CUCI to hold board meetings at their offices. Unions may be willing to pay an organizer to work on a union co-op projects, as UFCW Local 75 did with Ellen. Unions may donate in-kind services large or small, such as assistance of a union attorney or communications professional or give-always for an event, like pens or hand sanitizer. Unions may make a loan, like UFCW Local 75 did. Unions can be a source of employees, especially if the cooperative is looking for workers from the building trades. The building trades unions can aid with hiring and cover the administrative costs of paperwork and drug testing, as happened for Sustainergy. Unions can be a source of clients or customers. Unions were able to connect Our Harvest to union shops that would sell their products.

Beyond private sources of resources, like individuals and unions, governmental support and resources can be critical to a movement's success (McCarthy & Wolfson, 1992, pp. 287–88). Legal or regulatory changes could be made at the local, state, and federal levels to provide set-asides or incentives in the procurement and bidding processes for purchasing from local union cooperatives. In construction, for example, federal and state set-aside programs require awarding certain contracts to small businesses or minority-owned businesses or to women-owned small businesses (Kentucky Procurement Code, 1998; U.S. Small Business Administration, (n.d.a)). Set-aside programs and preferences for local bidders, services, and contractors could be expanded to prefer local union co-ops or employee-owned businesses (Levinson, 2014, p. 40).

Local, state, and federal government agencies could also make grants available to encourage a union cooperative economy. Grants and technical assistance could be provided to cover the expenses of feasibility studies, marketing studies, and business plans. Grants could also be provided to fund visits by union co-op organizers and city officials to union co-ops in the U.S. in other regions, or even to Mondragon or other thriving cooperative groups, such as in Italy. The Mayor of Cincinnati traveling to Mondragon is a good example of this type of public funding. Local government agencies can provide resources similar to those unions provide, such as meeting space, virtual or physical, loans, training for organizers and employees, and expertise such as from those knowledgeable about lean start-up methods or governmental bidding processes. Several Cincinnati governmental agencies, such as the Economic Development Team, City Manager, and the Mayor's office, supported CUCI's initiatives.

One relatively easy reform that can be made at the local and federal level is permitting small business loans to be made without a personal or entity guarantee from an owner with a 20% or more share in the business (Capital for Cooperative Act of 2021). In any worker-owned co-op with six or more owners, no owner holds a 20% share, since each holds one equal share, making the criteria impossible to meet. The Capital for Cooperatives Act,

introduced in the Senate during the 2021–2022 session, would direct the U.S. Small Business Association to devise criteria for loans to cooperatives that do not require a personal or entity guarantee (Capital for Cooperatives Act of 2021, p. 5.). Small Business Development Centers loans could be a significant resource for those starting union co-ops. Local governments such as cities and counties could also permit limited personal guarantees from a group of cooperative owners who together own more than 50% of the cooperative (LouisvilleKy.gov, 2021). Similar to what the Cincinnati Credit Union did for CUCI by allowing multiple individuals to offer collateral for the loans to CUCI, governmental loan agencies could then permit individuals to pool resources.

In addition to directly providing resources, government can also incentivize availability of more private resources. Patronage can be encouraged through charitable tax incentives. CUCI is a good example of how within the current legal framework an organization that seeks to educate the public about union worker-owned cooperatives and assist in creating a thriving cooperative economy falls squarely within the non-profit definition. CUCI is able to pool donations collectively from individuals who receive a charitable tax deduction. Pushing the tax boundary further, through IRS interpretation, to permit a cooperative with a charitable purpose to receive 501(c)(3) status would enable direct tax-deductible donations to the co-op. For instance, a worker-owned cooperative grocery designed to address food apartheid arguably qualifies as having a primarily charitable purpose (Levinson & Eisenback, 2020). Additionally, tax laws could be changed to enable people to make a charitable donation directly to a cooperative because patronage is not equivalent to individual shareholder profit or other types of personal inurement. Doing so would enable more direct funding to cooperatives. Alternatively, tax law could be changed to enable deduction of in-kind gifts of service, in addition to gifts of property and cash, for those who contribute to a non-profit like CUCI that promotes a union cooperative economy (Ellentuck, 2009). From a scholarly perspective, a more in-depth review of how resources operate in social movements and how those lessons could be used by those advocating toward a cooperative economy is warranted.

In addition to the mechanisms of social appropriation, brokerage, diffusion, and resources, emulation is critically important to establishing union cooperatives. Mondragon, Evergreen Cooperative Laundry, the Cincinnati Credit Union, and Cooperative Home Care Associates were critical models for CUCI. OEOC played a crucial role in connecting CUCI with representatives of these model cooperatives, many of whom they met at the OEOC conference. State laws funding employee ownership centers, which provide training, technical assistance, and programming would enable those interested in building union co-ops to more easily identify and emulate other cooperatives. The ability of a new employee ownership center to connect people to other regional cooperative movements could provide the foundation for a more robust union co-op movement in states where such centers do not yet exist. A federal employee ownership program could also assist the mechanism of emulation. The 2022 Reconciliation Bill reported to the Senate Education and Labor Committee contained a provision that would provide fifty million dollars “to establish an Employee Ownership and Participation Initiative that will provide grants, education and outreach, technical assistance, and training to promote employee ownership and employee participation in business decisionmaking” (Amendments to the Build Back Better Act, 2021, p. 40). Even without state or federal funding, privately funded centers at institutions of higher education, like OEOC’s affiliation with Kent State University or the NJ/ NY Center for Employee Ownership’s affiliation with Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations, or independent centers, such as the Indiana Center for Employee Ownership or the Rocky Mountain Employee Ownership Center, could play a similar role in

fostering emulation. The Employee Ownership Expansion Network can help groups interested in starting a center in their state.

The mechanisms of attribution of threats and opportunities, category formation, certification and decertification, and identity shift also played a substantial role in the success of CUCI, Our Harvest, and Sustainergy. Those hoping to learn from these examples can also learn from attention to these mechanisms. A social movement, including building a local union cooperative economy, sometimes comes from recognizing a threat or opportunity. The Great Recession meant that a lack of family sustaining jobs was readily identified as a threat in Cincinnati, while the 2009 Mondragon and Steelworkers Agreement presented a significant opportunity. Future cooperative movements are likely to arise from similar circumstances that create a vacuum that a co-op can fill or create the opportunity to bring alliances with and resources from organizations that were not previously connected to the locality.

Identity shift is also often crucial to start and build momentum of a local union cooperative movement or a movement to start a union co-op. A significant number of community members from other movements, such as the union movement and the peace and non-violence movement in Cincinnati, need to start to identify themselves as part of a union cooperative movement. Additionally, a broad range of people, beyond organizers, such as lawyers, engineers, and other experts need to identify themselves as part of the movement as well. Union cooperative founders will be more likely to succeed if there are a relatively large number of people who view themselves as sharing a common identity as part of the initiative.

As mentioned above in the discussion of resources, government support is crucial, and is also a method of certification. The passage of the PACE legislation, for instance, rendered legitimacy to Sustainergy's business plan. Sustainergy also provides an example of the significance of tax structures. Permitting industrial clients to use a property tax assessment to finance the retrofitting over 30 years, rather than up front, created customers for Sustainergy. State and local governments could provide more direct tax deductions to co-ops themselves, as does the central Spanish government, or to those who use the services of co-ops. For example, Spain permits a 10% tax reduction to co-ops, such as Mondragon's, if they contribute 10% to local causes (Dubb, 2013; Levinson, 2018a, b, c).

Because Ohio has a cooperative law, incorporating Our Harvest was a relatively simple process for their attorney to assist them with while the drafting of the bylaws was somewhat more complicated. States that do not yet have laws that make it simpler to incorporate a worker owned co-op can pass legislation similar to the Massachusetts Employee Cooperative Corporation Act or the Illinois Limited Worker Cooperative Association Act to reduce the cost to workers of forming a union co-op. Even in states where there are laws specifically governing worker-owned co-ops, making the process of drafting articles of incorporation and by-laws simpler for the involved lay people to perform, with less or no assistance of an attorney, could increase the likelihood of success for a local union cooperative movement. For instance, some attorneys are using customized document assembly software to draft ready-to-file articles of incorporation for new worker owned co-ops (Tuttle, 2021). By lowering the cost of legal help, use of such software can help more quickly certify a co-op via official incorporation. If such software were to become available to non-lawyers to use for both articles of incorporation and by-laws, it would greatly enhance the ability of new co-ops to receive the certification of incorporation more quickly.

Other mechanisms involved in starting CUCI, Our Harvest, and Sustainergy included attribution of similarity, competition, crossclass coalition, object shift, and opportunity spirals. The author was not able to identify the mechanisms of convergence and radicalization or

suddenly imposed grievances at play in the success of the union co-op movement in Cincinnati. Key components of their success in Cincinnati that are not extensively explored by the authors of *Dynamics of Contention* but were identified by those involved in Cincinnati's union co-op movement include expertise, adaptability, leadership, aggregation of information, long-term planning, and commitment of time.

The story of Cincinnati demonstrates that to establish a successful cooperative involves legal expertise, business expertise, financial expertise, governance expertise, expertise in human relations and conflict resolution, and expertise in the particular industry and business. Fundraising, holding events, starting a business, and keeping one in business involve the aggregation of information, such as customer discovery or market surveys, and long-term planning, from the details of food to serve at an event to the potential pivots the business can make if a certain source of income does not bear fruit. Those interested in building a local cooperative economy can increase their likelihood of success by identifying a broad range of people and organizations with helpful expertise and asking them to join the movement. Finding experts who have lived experience with working in solidarity with others, particularly other workers, can be particularly beneficial. Having someone on the leadership team, like Ellen and Kristen, with strong coordination and long-term planning skills could be critical to success.

Likewise, the organizations and the people involved should anticipate that flexibility will be required, and organizations will need to be adaptable. Just as innovation and adaptability are critical for any successful business, they are critical for cooperatives. At the organizational level, CUCI took on a range of three initial projects, given the likelihood that not all three would succeed, and then used the connections, information, and skills learned on an unsuccessful project to further successful ones. At the co-op level, Sustainergy's shifted away from industrial customers to residential customers. The Mondragon Corporation prioritizes innovation as a key to the success of its cooperative businesses. The cooperative bank, Laboral Kutxa, has a foundation, Gaztempresa, that provides technical assistance to hundreds of people each year who are starting small businesses. Many Mondragon co-ops have their own research and development department, and all profitable co-ops provide a percent of gross profits to the Mondragon Investment Fund. The Fund provides guarantees for loans to start new business ventures within the co-ops. Additionally, Mondragon Corporation has a joint public–private partnership with the Basque government, Saiolan, to support co-ops that are diversifying and bringing new products to market.

Leadership and commitment of time, while not explicitly addressed by *Dynamics of Contention*, have been addressed by other social movement theorists (Levinson, 2014; Ganz, 2004; Leondar-Wright & Gamson, 2010; Gamson, 1992). They were two of the most important keys to the success of CUCI and the two cooperatives, which is consistent with other movements to establish co-ops (Levinson, 2014, p. 355). The importance of leadership could be disheartening to some who advocate for a union cooperative economy because they perceive a lack of leaders. Yet, for those local residents who are willing to step up and devote their time to leading a union co-op initiative, like Phil, Kristen, Ellen, and Flequer were, the focus on leadership and devotion of time should, the author hopes, serve as a source of inspiration.

Conclusion

This article has presented a case study, based on original author research, of how a social movement in Cincinnati built CUCI, Our Harvest, and Sustainergy. The author interviewed twelve people involved in the Cincinnati union co-op

movement, and triangulated findings against contemporaneous documents and two other case studies. The case study is presented through the lens of social movement theory, as modeled in *Dynamics of Contention*. Several mechanisms identified by the model were critical – social appropriation, emulation, brokerage, diffusion of information, and availability of resources – or significant – attribution of threats and opportunities, category formation, certification and decertification, and identity shift – to the success of the movement. Those hoping to establish a successful local union co-op movement can draw on the case study for potentially helpful tips, such as working with local unions and approaching them for support of union cooperatives, identifying a wide range of social networks through which to disseminate information and seek support, aggregating individual resources in furtherance of locating further resources, and reaching out to government agencies and employee ownership centers for connections to other successful cooperative movements to emulate.

The interviewees identified some important components of their success that are not captured by the social movement theory at the detailed level that might be most helpful to other union co-op movement members looking to replicate CUCI's success. Leadership and a substantial commitment of time to the movement by the leaders was repeatedly recognized by the interviewees as crucial to CUCI's success. As the well-known Margaret Mead quotation states: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." The people and entities involved in a successful union co-op movement must be adaptable, draw on a wide variety of experts, aggregate information, and engage in long-term planning. This article discusses these topics, which might be fruitfully studied by other scholars interested in mechanisms resulting in successful union co-ops.

One potentially helpful future contribution to the literature would be for a scholar or scholars to examine how social movement mechanisms or other key features in Cincinnati's movement compare to those mechanisms or features involved in establishing other union co-ops, such as New Era Windows, Snow River Cooperative, White Electric Coffee Co-op, and Cooperative Home Care Associates. In particular scholars might examine some of the following interesting questions raised by this case study: 1) whether there is a typology of brokers involved in union co-op social movements, how these brokers are organized, and how they operate; 2) the role of availability of different types of resources, beyond loans and grants, such as real property, expertise, and government support; 3) whether anchor institutions play a role in union co-op movements, and, if so, what role; and 4) how the people and organizations involved in a union co-op movement work through differences and competition and how doing so impacts the trajectory and success or failure of any particular local movement. Additionally, in-depth case studies of union co-ops can add a qualitatively rich perspective to support the quantitative findings that employee-owned businesses last longer than conventional businesses, have less employee overturn, and build community wealth (Ji, 2018; Schlachter, 2017; Berry and Schneider, 2011).

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