

Labor and the Environmental Movement: The Quest for Common Ground

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Chapter 1
Introduction

Sandy Fonda is the chair of the Rainbow Alliance for a Clean Environment. Bill Towne is a District Manager for UNITE, the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees. They both live and work in Fulton County, New York. Fulton County is a rural area of upstate New York about an hour from Albany. Historically the economy of the region was based on the garment industry. Gloversville, one of several small towns to dot the countryside was the site of several tanneries that produced leather and leather products (including gloves, the town's namesake). Several tanneries still operate in the town, the pollution from which led to many years of conflict between Sandy Fonda and Bill Towne.

Problems began in the early 1980s when, according to Bill Towne, "the world finally found Fulton County." Environmental problems caused by the tanning industry had been largely ignored for years. But by the 1980s a group of activists that had been working on nuclear issues turned their attention to local environmental problems. Led by Fonda, this small community environmental group engaged in grassroots actions targeting specific tanneries for their environmental violations. The Rainbow members also pressured the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to more closely monitor the tanning industry in the area and to investigate the regulatory violations, which were numerous.

The first major conflict involving both Sandy Fonda and Bill Towne arose when the county was required to close and cap local landfills, which were contaminated with toxic waste from the tanning industry. The costs associated with this project were estimated to be in the tens of millions of dollars. The tanneries were to be required to pay for the capping and the construction of a new landfill, a cost they claimed they could not afford. Employers appealed to their workers for support in fighting the new requirements citing the threat of job loss if the tanneries were forced to bear this cost. According to UNITE's Towne the message from the industry was clear, "What was driven home to the union members was, 'They are going to shut us down! We are going to go bankrupt! We are going to close!'" These threats effectively turned the union against the Rainbow Alliance and the environmental measures they advocated. There were public confrontations between union members and environmentalists and between Bill Towne and Sandy Fonda personally. Again Bill Towne,

"It was truly white heat in those years. We were going to battle... It took a number of

years for that to settle. At the time, I'll speak for the union and the industry, we were dealing on a day-to-day basis and were not thinking long term at all. A lot of the members wanted things cleaned up, but we didn't want what we figured would be tremendous job loss."

While the landfill issue was being disputed, environmental regulators also determined that the tanneries were emitting too much effluent into the local river. This required that the tanneries install additional pretreatment equipment at the plants and that a new city waste treatment facility be built in order to bring discharge levels into compliance with the Clean Water Act. At this point UNITE entered into a formal alliance with the Tanners' Association and the local Chamber of Commerce in order to combat the new requirements that they believed would threaten jobs. Towne acknowledges that at the time he was skeptical of the more extreme claims being made by employers, but that "my primary concern was to ... save as many union members' jobs as possible." The Rainbow was the lead environmental advocate pressuring regulators to act, and again, they served as the target of industry and union attack.

The main point of contention was the level of water quality that needed to be achieved in the river into which most waste was eventually dumped. The industry and the union took the position that, with the aid of some federal waste treatment grants, the applications for which were already in progress, they would be able to achieve what was designated as a "Class D" level of water quality in the relevant stream. They claimed that reaching the higher "Class C" level, which was being advocated by the environmentalists, would require excessive costs and result in financial ruin for the local tanning industry. Internally union and business leaders agreed that they could achieve the Class C requirements at a later point in time, but that plans to meet the weaker standard were already in motion, thus they should resist reclassification for the time being. The Rainbow insisted that the reclassification and the treatment upgrades should be done simultaneously. This again led to heated conflict between the Rainbow and the union, including nearly violent confrontations between the chief adversaries. According to Sandy Fonda,

"The Chamber of Commerce and the local union and some business folks contributed money to do a study proving that it would be financially disastrous for us to go ahead with this proposed reclassifying of the stream from a Class D to a Class C. And so we went to the press conference where they were releasing this. We got there and we were

told that it was a private press conference. We were kicked out and Bill Towne, the union leader, slammed the door in my face. I was livid.”

This classic “jobs versus the environment” dispute continued through the 1980s polarizing the progressive community in Fulton County. However, several events took place that would soon alter the inter-movement dynamics.

At the time of the Fulton County conflicts, elsewhere in New York unionists and environmentalists had established some cooperative ties. These relations grew out of the Love Canal disaster in Niagra Falls, New York, in 1978 during which over 200 families were forced to evacuate their homes due to toxic contamination of the land on which the homes were built. Local unions had lent support to the homeowners among whom were several union members, thus establishing labor-environmental ties in the area. A major workplace environmental health incident in central New York brought unions and environmentalists in contact in that region and together these ties gave rise to a statewide network of unions and environmental organizations. Both Sandy Fonda of the Rainbow and Bill Towne of UNITE had ties to people affiliated with the Network. Activists from this coalition began to encourage these two progressive leaders to try to resolve their differences. According to Fonda

“We were involved with Citizens Environmental Coalition and the Labor-Environment Network, and they kept saying ‘Bill Towne comes to Albany to meetings on social justice issues, and he’s really good and you should try to mend your fences.’ And they were saying to him ‘Sandy is really progressive, and if the two heads of these organizations can get together, maybe the two organizations can start working together.’ And we were saying ‘No Way! No Way!’”

Under pressure from their colleagues, in 1989 both Fonda and Towne agreed to attend a workshop at a conference sponsored by the Labor-Environmental Network in which they were asked to simply talk about the issues that they confronted in Gloversville. Fonda reported that “we fielded some pretty tough questions, me from the labor unions and Bill from the environmentalists.” This interaction caused both of them to begin to rethink their positions. The conference workshop was the first civil interaction between these movement leaders and the

simple sharing of concerns in this forum allowed for greater understanding of one another's position in the dispute.

This meeting was followed by a chance encounter that would prove decisive in further altering the views of both actors. A year after the Network conference Fonda and Towne were each independently appointed to the Board of Trustees of the Fulton-Montgomery Community College. According to Fonda their duties as Trustees,

“...forced us into a room together to work on something. We got talking a little bit, and we were both seeing the political sides of the college. Then we talked a little bit about political sides of the union-environmental thing...We had some communication going.”

Issues at the college united Towne and Fonda against other board members and against the county government, which they charged was not adequately funding the school. In Towne's assessment, “It became really obvious to both of us that we could work together.” These interactions allowed for crucial trust building between the two activists as well as a greater appreciation for one another's views on the issues that divided them. The evolution of Towne's thinking is evidenced by quotes in two news reports. In 1990 he was quoted in the local newspaper, the Daily Gazette, regarding the conflict with environmentalists, “It's a matter of priorities...The Rainbow Alliance is environment first, jobs second, and the union is jobs first and environment second” (Hammond 1990). Slightly over a year later he was quoted in another source regarding his relationship with Fonda of the Rainbow, “It's always been, ‘Is it jobs or the environment first?’...we've matured enough to where we recognize that it's both” (Goudreau 1991).

This transformation was manifest in increasingly cooperative relations between the union and the environmental community. During some disputes between the Rainbow and Colonial Tanning regarding poor air quality in 1991, Towne arranged a group meeting with Fonda and the tannery owner during which a compromise was reached. But over time Towne abandoned his role as mediator and was pushed further into an alliance with the environmentalists. The Rainbow and UNITE worked closely together against the North American Free Trade Agreement, successfully pressuring local lawmakers to oppose the measure in Congress. This experience strengthened their bond and, by this point, they considered themselves to be friends and allies.

A couple of years later the tannery effluent issue resurfaced. The industry essentially won this dispute back in the 1980s with the aid of organized labor. At that time the stream retained its level D classification as the industry and union had sought, and the new equipment successfully brought the tanneries into environmental compliance with this level of water purity. But by the mid-1990s the Department of Environmental Conservation proposed raising the stream to the C level, the goal long sought by the environmental community. As might be expected, the tanneries objected and again cited the job loss threat to win union support for their position. However, this time the union sided with the Rainbow. Towne recalled the agreement the union and the tanneries had made ten years earlier about their future plans to accept the C classification.

“All these guys, the Chamber, the tanners, are saying ‘we can’t do it!’ They were making the same argument. But at a public hearing in Johnstown...I read out loud what was said at the Chamber breakfasts 10 years ago. I told them ‘This is what we did. Don’t make this argument now. We said we’d do it and there’s no reason not to.’ These cats never change their story. The industry, to a company, were all there claiming that they couldn’t afford to do it... For over fifteen years, they made those arguments about the Rainbow [being responsible for job loss]. Nobody listens to them anymore. The tanners will mouth them. There was a big brouhaha at the last hearing, but...nobody was listening to them anymore, certainly not our members, nor were the regulators. They, the industry, really went out of that last hearing humbled.”

Fonda and Towne now work closely together. Workers in the plants report environmental violations to the union and Towne passes the information on to the Rainbow. The Rainbow, in turn, aids the union with their environmental expertise to address problems at the plants. Knowing that UNITE and the Rainbow are working together, employers have asked Towne to use his influence to convince the environmentalists to drop lawsuits filed against them for environmental violations. Towne refuses these requests and instead directs them to clean up their practices. Regarding the new political alliance structure Towne says,

“We’re seeing all this stuff come down. That information [regarding violations] comes in, it goes up to her [Fonda], she brings stuff in to us. We’ve got [the tannery owners] wired. They really can’t move now, and they know it, because their worst fears have

come true.”

Except for the tannery owners whose “worst fears have come true,” the Fulton County story has a happy ending. Although jobs in the industry are still threatened by low wage competition and labor saving technology, employment is more secure for those currently employed due to the investment that has been put into the tanneries as a result of environmental requirements. The natural environment is now better protected and the entire community, including the workers and their families, is enjoying those benefits. It is not difficult to imagine a far less desirable outcome, one in which labor-environmental conflict resulted in further environmental degradation, a compliant workforce fearful of job loss and a fractured progressive community incapable of advancing any positive change. This has been the outcome in countless other communities around the nation where the threat of job loss has led unions to side with employers against environmental measures. This conflict also plays out at the state and national levels where measures supported by the environmental community are in many cases opposed by union leaders. These so called “jobs versus the environment” disputes have fractured progressive forces preventing the implementation of policies that are sensitive to both the environment and the needs of workers. A just and sustainable economy is the goal of unions and environmentalists, yet still these divisions are common. The question that presents itself is why this is the case. Why did Bill Towne and Sandy Fonda consider each other to be enemies? And more importantly, how is this kind of division overcome?

This book is an attempt to answer those questions. Labor unions and environmental movement organizations are among the most powerful social movement sectors in the United States. When they are capable of acting together they can advance policies that protect both working people and the natural environment. Yet divisions between these two actors can yield environmental devastation and attacks on the interests of workers and their unions. The creation of a just and sustainable economy depends on the ability of these two social movement sectors to come together to advance this common goal.

Although the focus here is on alliances between labor unions and environmental organizations, this can inform us about cooperation between social movement organizations in general. A deeper understanding of this type of cooperation is important because a single organization is rarely capable of advancing any significant political goal by itself. Even when

movement groups with similar interests work together, their effectiveness is limited. In the contemporary American context the ability to enlist a range of allies in political struggles is often a crucial determinant of success, thus coalition formation has become an essential strategy for social movement organizations (Hula 1999, Steedly and Foley 1990, Thomas and Hrebennar 1994, Yandle 1983).

It is possible to identify some natural allies in political struggle, groups whose interests commonly converge. Most inter-group cooperation can be found within movement sectors. Environmental organizations commonly work with other environmental organizations and labor unions routinely act in concert with other unions. Similar organizations do experience some limited competition for resources and members, and on occasion major fissures erupt over these or other issues. But when it comes to advancing common political goals, cooperation is widespread within movement sectors. This type of convergence becomes less likely when we examine relations between different kinds of organizations. Some conflicts can easily be anticipated, as with for example, a gay rights organization and a conservative Christian group. Some alliances may also appear likely, as when an anti-nuclear organization joins with a peace group. But with other types of organizations, where there are some overlapping and some conflicting interests, predicting inter-movement ties becomes more difficult. In this book, the goal is to identify when cooperation is possible among these types of organizations.

Labor unions and environmental organizations represent an excellent example of this type of complicated relationship. As the case of the Rainbow-UNITE alliance in Fulton County demonstrates, on occasion unions and environmentalists have utilized coalition strategies to further common aims. But this case also indicates that unions and environmentalists can find themselves on opposite sides of major struggles over economic and environmental policy. Conflict between labor unions and environmentalists has received a great deal of attention from academics and the media. However, the cooperation between these movements and when and how this cooperation arises has generated less interest.

An examination of recent history reveals mixed relations between environmentalists and labor unions. In some instances we see very close cooperation between unions and environmentalists. The so called alliance of "Teamsters and Turtles" whose protests disrupted the meetings of the World Trade Organization in Seattle in 1999 is the most well known instance of labor-environmental cooperation in recent years (Greenhouse 1999, Moberg 2000). This

coming together of a wide variety of unions and environmental advocates against the expansion of unrestricted trade was viewed by many as a surprising and unprecedented example of inter-movement cooperation among workers and environmentalists. But there are many lesser known examples of concerted efforts on the part of these two social movement sectors dating back several decades. For example, unions demonstrated early support for clean air and water legislation. (Dewey 1998). In the 1980s national labor and environmental leaders facilitated the creation of state based labor-environmental networks designed to challenge the anti-regulatory policies of the Reagan Administration (Obach 1999). The WTO protests were actually preceded by other cooperative efforts to oppose the North American Free Trade Agreement and “fast track” trade authority for President Clinton. In other cases joint efforts have been carried out in order to strengthen health and safety protections in the workplace and in the community, to promote recycling and to mitigate the environmental damage caused by development (Gordon 1998, Gottlieb 1993, Obach 1999). Although the WTO protests were the first to capture national media attention, labor-environmental cooperation is in no way a new phenomenon.

Yet, there are reasons why political analysts and the mainstream media expressed so much surprise over the labor-environmental cooperation in Seattle. In many cases these inter-movement ties are tenuous. Just a few years after Seattle, sharp divisions emerged between environmentalists and the Teamsters over a Bush Administration proposal to drill for oil in the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR). The United Auto Workers also had a falling out with environmentalists over efforts to increase the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards, part of the move to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This followed previous disputes over the Kyoto Protocol, an international treaty designed to combat global warming. Despite examples of intermittent collaboration, there has also been a great deal of conflict between environmental and union interests over the decades (Audley 1995, Buchanan and Scoppettuolo 1997, Dreiling 1997, Dunk 1994, Foster 1993, Judge 1995, Larsen 1995, Logan and Nelkin 1980, Ramos 1995).

But workers are not typically the lead opponents of environmental measures. Although UNITE played a major role in the conflict in Fulton County, it was the tanning industry that led the campaign against the environmental proposals. Environmental movement organizations are most commonly pitted against private industry executives who wish to avoid the costs and constraints of environmental regulation (Arrandale 1994, Ringquist 1995, Ruben 1992, Sanchez

1996). It is when industry seeks allies in opposition to environmental measures that workers are drawn into the fray. Employers seek to enlist workers to rally against environmental measures using the threat that profit loss may result in layoffs or a complete shut down. Knowing that a threat to corporate profits will not move the public, a more sympathetic victim is necessary to win public support, and workers are the obvious group to serve this purpose. Industry opponents of environmental measures will typically fade into the background and carry on low profile lobbying while workers are presented as the public face of environmental opposition. Often seen as issues of “jobs versus the environment,” it is these conflicts that have captured the most attention and helped to shape the perception that environmental protection is antithetical to economic expansion, job preservation and the interests of workers generally (Cooper 1992, Goodstein 1999, Gray 1995, Kazis and Grossman 1991).

In virtually every instance of labor-environmental conflict a job threat can be found. The UAW feared that unionized American auto makers would lose market share and eliminate jobs if higher fuel economy standards were imposed on the sport utility vehicles they manufactured. In the case of ANWR, the Teamsters saw the prospect of job creation with the introduction of oil drilling in the Alaskan Refuge. In the well known case of labor-environmental conflict from the 1980s and 90s, timber industry workers in the Pacific Northwest feared job loss if measures were imposed to save a threatened species of owl. Other conflicts have erupted over issues such as nuclear energy, bottle bills, development restrictions and toxic use reduction (Buchanan and Scoppettuolo 1997, Judge 1995, Larsen 1995, Logan and Nelkin 1980, Smith 1980). In all of these cases, workers and their union representatives perceived a threat to jobs posed by environmental measures.

Although each issue has unique elements that may unite or divide segments of the labor and environmental communities, to better understand patterns in these relationships it is first useful to examine how these two movements are situated in the larger political economy of the United States. It is the structure of the capitalist system that generates the contradictory drives towards private material gain and the protection of the public from the negative externalities that such economic activity often entails. This economic system facilitates not only the pursuit of profit by private firms, but most individual workers are compelled to seek personal security through private employment. In this way the interests of workers become tied to their employer, at least in terms of preserving the enterprise that provides profit for one and wages for the other.

The tannery owners in Fulton County and the workers at those plants both have an interest in maintaining those businesses. This is true despite the adversarial relationship that may exist regarding the distribution of resources within the firm or the control of the labor process.

In the pursuit of private gain and security through the operation of the enterprise, problems may “spillover” on to the public. As firms seek to increase profits by externalizing costs, the public is made to bear the brunt of their actions. Pollution serves as the classic example of such “negative externalities.” The tannery owner may save money and increase profits by dumping toxic waste into the river, but those living downstream and the public in general pay the price. Groups organized around protecting the public interest, such as environmental advocates, may then find themselves in conflict with the private interests that are threatened by measures that will interfere with their activity. Herein lies the root of labor-environmental conflict: an economic system in which private control over material resources and the pursuit of individual gain generate costs for outside parties and the public at large.

It is the structure of the capitalist economy that creates the conditions for conflict between private economic interests and the protection of public goods such as the environment, but it is the structure of American democracy that determines how such tensions are translated into political disputes. Following independence, the nation’s founders were wary of centralized power and created a system they thought would prevent factions from gaining undue control. These mechanisms, designed to prevent the centralization of power, have the effect of generating multiple competing interest organizations (Wilson 1993). Yet, with some notable exceptions, certain elite factions managed to maintain relatively tight control over policy and law making for much of the nation’s history despite these mechanisms. This was the case until political and economic conditions in the 1960s spurred broad popular mobilization which gave rise to a proliferation of movement organizations representing a wide cross section of the population (Berry 1984, Salisbury 1990, Schlozman and Tierney 1986, Walker 1983).

Government policies and other institutional mechanisms shaped the types of organizations that would emerge out of this mobilization. The creation of policy and the associated bureaucratic structures would influence how interest organizations would operate and would even shape the way in which interests were defined. The creation of public agencies designed specifically to address environmental issues fostered the formation of movement organizations that took environmental matters as their central concern. Previously, worker

mobilization had given rise to government policies and bureaucratic structures that channeled union interests towards specific workplace issues. The fact that Bill Towne and UNITE prioritized jobs over the environment is in part a reflection of the workers' preference ordering, but it is also a function of the legal and organizational structure of the labor movement in the United States which facilitates a focus on wages, hours and working conditions over more general concerns such as environmental protection.

The organizational form of the emergent movements and the development of government mechanisms designed to address specific issues would, in turn, have important implications for how these organizations would relate to one another. And this now crowded political space *necessitated* these inter-organizational relationships. These inter-movement ties would prove to be crucial, because in light of the more fragmented political landscape, combined with the declining significance of political parties, these relatively narrow interests must work together in order to achieve their goals. It is these developments that caused coalition formation to become a mainstay of politics in the United States (Hula 1999, Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier 1994, Keller 1982, Loomis 1986, Moe 1980, Sabatier 1988). Thus it is the market economy that sets the stage for conflict between private interests, such as capitalists and those they employ, and public interest organizations, such as environmental groups. And it is the legal and political structure of American democracy that facilitates the form that organized advocates will take. It is within this political-economic context that we can begin to analyze labor-environmental relations and why cooperation between these two sectors is so important, yet sometimes elusive.

The need for coalition formation is greatest for groups that are disadvantaged in terms of resources and political influence. The pooling of resources and political support in order to more efficiently advance one's goals is the central advantage of coalition formation as a strategy (Chertkoff 1970, Gamson 1961, Kelley and Arrowood 1960, Kelley 1970, Lieserson 1970, VonNeumann and Morgenstern 1947). Organized labor and environmental organizations, while being among the most powerful popularly based movements in the country, are, in terms of resources, at a disadvantage relative to corporate interests which often act as their political adversaries.

But labor's allegiance within this triad is difficult to discern. Unions can be seen as situated in between environmentalists and their employers when environmental issues arise. They share a common interest with employers in maintaining the enterprise and the jobs that it

provides to their members, thus they are susceptible to any perceived threat to employment. But their employer is also the adversary they were created to combat. Bill Towne worked with the tannery owners against the environmental measures, but the union and the owners were bitter enemies on many other issues. Conflict around workplace issues has the potential to expand into other realms pushing workers into alliance with anyone who shares the same adversary.

In addition to this traditional adversarialism between workers and owners, workplace safety issues and community environmental concerns make environmentalists natural allies in the effort to restrain employer abuses. The hazardous substances that the Rainbow Alliance wanted to restrict are the very ones that the tannery workers were exposed to on a daily basis. The community that the Rainbow was seeking to protect is also the community in which workers and their families live. As demonstrated by the Fulton County case, unions have entered into environmental policy disputes on different sides. They become the target of appeals from both employers and environmentalists, and given the importance of coalition support as a determinant of movement success, their leanings can determine the policy outcome (Steedly and Foley 1990). When unions do enter into such disputes on behalf of the environmental cause, they can often provide the crucial backing necessary for environmental policies to pass over the objection of industry opponents. Although it is less common, on some occasions environmentalists also offer crucial support to workers in disputes with their employers (Gordon 1998, Rose 2000). The failure of these groups to align, however, often yields policy outcomes that benefit industry at the expense of workers and/or the natural environment.

Thus, when and under what circumstances unions and environmental advocates are able to align is an important question for understanding the outcome of many policy disputes. The particular repercussions of a given measure can determine whether different unions will side with their employers or join in coalition with the environmental community. But beyond the question of specific short term instances of interest alignment, a more important question is the overall quality of the relations that exist between these two movement sectors. These more general relationships can have a broader effect on how organizations will behave when specific issues arise. Cooperative ties, once established, can shape the way all future issues are addressed. Thus, beyond any specific issue, the general quality of the inter-movement relations that are established can have implications for the overall direction of political and social change.

When unions and environmentalists have positive relations with one another and form an ongoing alliance, they present a formidable political force potentially capable of redirecting economic and environmental policy in fundamental ways. The significance of these ties can be seen in the political strategies used by political parties at the national level. Environmentalists and unions both represent important elements of the Democratic Party base and in many cases Democratic officials struggle to avoid alienating one or the other when a policy has contradictory implications for workers and the environment. Republican strategists often take advantage of these potential divisions. They attempt to peel away some of this support by fostering dissension between these crucial segments using particularly divisive issues (Kahn 2001). Thus the cohesiveness of these two movement sectors can be crucially important beyond any single issue. Their interest alignments around particular issues and the quality of their ongoing relations are the central concerns of this study.

The broad political and economic structures create the context in which organizations, such as unions and environmental SMOs, form and seek to advance their objectives. However, we must also focus on how organizations behave within that context in order to fully understand when inter-movement alliances will emerge. When examining political alliance formation most scholars focus on the intersection or dissension of the interests of the actors involved (Gamson 1961, Riker 1962). Using the conventional approach, organizations are viewed as rational systems oriented towards the achievement of specific goals, and they select allies when doing so will enable them to achieve their objectives (Scott 1992, Simon 1976). Based upon this view one may argue that unionists will oppose environmental policies when such measures present a threat to jobs or the general economic well being of workers and they will support environmental policies when they advance these core interests. While such a hypothesis offers a good framework to begin our analysis, it readily becomes clear that the question of when the interests of workers are threatened is a very complex one, and that different organizations are likely to have different interpretations regarding these questions. Thus we must more closely examine the question of interests in addition to an array of organizational issues that emerge when considering the actual process of inter-movement relationship development.

In doing so we must first recognize that the American labor movement is very diverse and complex in its structure. In addition to parallel union and union federation organizational hierarchies, at times individual unions cover workers with very different jobs at different

employment sites or even within the same site depending on how the bargaining unit was defined by the state governing body. This is important because different employment sectors are affected in different ways by particular environmental policies. For any given policy some workers may see their interests threatened, while others identify a potential benefit and still others may not be affected at all. Certain employment sectors are more obviously threatened by environmental measures. Workers in extractive industries, for example, may clash with environmentalists seeking wilderness protection. On the other hand some are in a position to benefit from certain environmental policies. For example public employees who work for a regulatory agency may see an employment benefit to greater environmental protection. Thus, we must first dissect how distinct employment sectors are affected by different environmental policies before we can make predictions about likely alliances.

But in addition to the discrete interests held by different sectors of the labor movement, we must also examine how those interests are specified by individual unions. Although legal and organizational structures foster common tendencies within similarly situated groups, there is still great diversity in terms of how unions behave politically. Some unions are inclined to oppose any perceived threat to the employment interests of their particular members, while others take a broader approach to interests in which the overall well being of the working class is factored into their strategic analysis. Some emphasize economic issues while others give more weight to issues such as the health and safety of their members, their own concern with the protection of the natural environment, their common cause with environmentalists in fighting employers and regulating industry, and mutual support for certain political candidates.

Similar variation can be found among the organizations that make up the environmental movement, a movement that pursues diverse goals and is more decentralized and organizationally complex than that of labor. Some seek to promote policies exclusively designed to protect the natural environment, yet others are primarily concerned about the threats to human health and safety posed by environmental degradation. Although both types would be considered “environmental” organizations, the contrast in the goals they seek to advance will make some more likely to ally with organized labor. While it is still possible to begin with a rational systems framework in which organizations methodically pursue specified goals, these varying orientations among groups within the environmental movement must be taken into

consideration when conducting a conventional coalition analysis based upon the interests of the actors involved.

Examining the core interests that underlie the relevant movements, however diverse and complex their interests are, is an important first step in understanding when labor-environmental alliances will form. Analysis of the way in which the policies advocated by one group affect the members of the other is an important issue. However, while much coalition behavior can be understood in these terms, this one dimensional interest approach fails to address the complexities involved in interest formation and political strategizing. As suggested above, unions represent worker interests in a broad array of areas, pushing them in several directions simultaneously. The interests that the unions act upon or prioritize are in no way given, allowing for a great deal of complexity even if immediate member interests were the sole determinant of union action. But an analysis of inter-movement relations based upon a pure interest assessment is further complicated by the fact that the goals of environmental organizations are difficult to classify in terms of interests.

Some theorists argue that organizations from these distinct movements have a fundamentally different underlying logic (Larana, Johnston and Gusfield 1994, Melucci 1980, Offe 1987). These “New Social Movement” theorists argue that the movements that have developed since the 1960s, such as the environmental or anti-nuclear movements, are “values” centered as opposed to being based on the achievement of private interests. Labor unions, some argue, can be easily understood within an interest framework. They are designed to protect and advance the interests of their members, particularly as they relate to wages, hours and working conditions. New Social Movement theorists argue that this type of interest based organization was the dominant form prior to the 1960s. However, since the 1960s we have seen the rise of social movement organizations that are not focused on the particular interests of their members, but rather, they are oriented towards achieving public goods or towards advancing values that have no immediate personal benefit to the membership. For example, while a negotiated wage increase is clearly in the interest of union members, the preservation of an endangered species may have no direct impact on an individual member of an environmental group that supports such a cause. Since personal interest is not the primary goal, New Social Movement theorists focus on the values component of mobilization. Individuals join or contribute to such groups, not because they hope to gain personally from the work of the organization, but they do so as an

expression of their values. In this context, the rational strategic pursuit of organizational goals is complicated by the expressive value element of environmental activism. Understanding the alignment of interests among two types of organizations is difficult if one type is not based on the pursuit of interests at all.

Some have criticized the New Social Movement theorists for drawing contrasts too sharply between the interest based “old social movements” and the values orientation of the new (Larana, Johnston and Gusfield 1994). Both can be seen as operating on the basis of some combination of values and interests. Furthermore, once the policy positions of labor and environmental organizations are identified, whether they are based on values or interests, it is still possible to analyze the extent to which the respective goals align or diverge. But, beyond the question regarding the foundation of their goals, some important differences do exist in terms of the structure and orientation of these two movement sectors. For example, resource mobilization theory suggests that attaining funds is a crucial determinant of organizational survival and success (McCarthy and Zald 1977). In looking at the differences between “new” and “old” social movements, one must take into consideration how such voluntary, values oriented organizations, like environmental groups, attract and maintain support, and identify how this may place restrictions on the political strategies they adopt, including their capacity to forge inter-movement alliances. Environmental leaders, like Sandy Fonda, must constantly consider how the position of the organization will be received by the members. Would cooperation with the union be seen as a betrayal of the environmental cause? Would a job saving compromise cause membership to drop off, thus threatening the very survival of the organization?

Labor unions, whose members are automatically affiliated with the union through their workplace, do not face the same constraints in terms of mobilizing resources. Yet, unions face different obligations in terms of achieving private material gains for their members. Bill Towne had to consider the interests of his members when devising a political strategy. But for him the immediate threat was not dissatisfied workers quitting the union, but rather, the union collapsing due to the loss of jobs. Again, these constraints will shape the political strategies available to union leaders and either induce or inhibit coalition formation with environmental SMOs. Thus, the political action and strategies adopted by these “new” and “old” movement organizations are shaped and constrained in very different ways, further complicating the question of when they will be brought into alignment.

There is yet a third level of analysis that must be considered when attempting to specify coalition practices. In addition to the macro political and economic conditions that provide a framework within which movement organizations operate and the organizational characteristics which shape their behavior, in order for coalitions to form, actual *individuals* have to interact in a concerted manner to establish relations with one another. Bill Towne and Sandy Fonda would probably not have created their alliance had they not been brought together by their personal ties with people involved in the New York State Labor-Environmental Network. Even their chance appointment as trustees at the community college was crucial for facilitating the interpersonal bonds that are decisive for the maintenance of organizational ties. Thus, a full understanding of inter-movement relations must also consider this interpersonal level of analysis.

When considering the establishment of interpersonal ties some theorists have noted that labor and environmental movement participants face particular difficulties in this regard due to the cultural differences that divide them (Eder 1993, Rose 2000). Middle class professionals dominate the environmental movement and they are embedded in a different cultural milieu than blue collar workers. Their views on political action, the nature of work, organizational functioning, the basis of knowledge and the role of nature differ in some important ways, complicating efforts by individuals from these movement sectors to achieve the common understandings necessary for them to work together. This is further complicated by the racial and ethnic differences between a predominantly white environmental movement and an increasingly minority dominated labor movement.

Many factors shape the extent to which labor unions and environmental organizations are likely to engage in cooperation or conflict. Broad political and economic structures create the context in which movement organizations form and the goals to which they are oriented. Organizational level variables also come into play when we examine movement groups that are organized on the basis of very different principles with distinct intra-movement ties and organizational maintenance needs. Lastly we must not ignore micro-level considerations such as the inter-personal ties between particular individuals within these movements. Each of these factors is examined in detail in the chapters that follow. While barriers to labor-environmental cooperation exist at every level, in many instances unions and environmentalists transcend those barriers and find that they are able to work together to create a more just and sustainable society. The goal here is to identify exactly how such cooperation is brought into being.

In order to uncover the conditions that facilitate or inhibit inter-movement cooperation between unions and environmentalists and the process by which such ties are created, I examine several cases of labor-environmental interaction. Interviews with dozens of labor and environmental leaders and activists were used to piece together how these inter-movement relationships develop. Cases drawn from states around the US provide examples of successful labor-environmental cooperation and of heated conflict. The chapters are organized not around single instances of inter-movement ties, but around the common issues and themes that emerged across cases. What is of importance is not the detail associated with any particular instance of labor-environmental conflict or cooperation, but rather the common challenges that emerge in all such cases. The themes explored address each of those introduced above, from the macro-structural conditions that give rise to social movement organizations oriented around a limited set of political objectives down to the micro level interactions of individuals rooted in distinct movement sectors. Below I provide a chapter by chapter preview of the issues analyzed in each section.

Most coalition theory begins with assumptions regarding the way in which organizations act on the interests they are designed to advance. Thus, it is important to first consider how different segments of the population are affected by environmental policies. Who benefits and who, if anyone, loses as a result of environmental protection? Is the “jobs versus the environment” tradeoff a myth or a frightening reality for workers? If there is an economic downside to environmental policy, who pays the price? Can this question be answered in class terms, with the largely middle class environmental movement well insulated from the economic repercussions of environmental policy, forcing economic costs on a vulnerable working class? Or is this issue more complicated whereby only certain employment sectors ever experience the economic downside of environmental policy? What about interests that go beyond economics, like health or political power? Are these win-win issues for workers and environmentalists? In Chapter 2 all of these questions are explored. Using the results of economic analyses, the interest configuration of environmentalists, workers and their employers is examined. This provides a rough outline of which groups are likely to come into conflict and which stand to benefit from common policies.

While an examination of interests provides a natural starting place for an analysis of inter-organizational alignment, what is more important is how those interests are actually acted

upon in the political sphere. In Chapter 3 I provide a historical overview of labor-environmental relations. Relations began on a positive note at the start of the contemporary environmental movement in the early 1970s, but soon economic concerns generated skepticism within a labor movement facing recession, job loss and rapidly declining membership. Over the next three decades we can see the emergence of “jobs versus the environment” struggles punctuated by concerted efforts to build labor-environmental unity. The 1970s and 80s included their share of conflict around such issues as nuclear power and forest preservation. But there were also major success stories such as the cooperative effort to gain access to information regarding the use of toxic substances in the name of worker and community health and safety. During the 1990s free trade emerged as a unifying issue among unions and some segments of the environmental movement. Yet, despite substantial cooperation and the high profile unity seen in the streets of Seattle, issues related to global warming and others continue to drive a wedge between environmentalists and important segments of the labor movement. The waves of cooperation and conflict and the variable relationships that developed between different unions and environmental organizations demonstrate the complexity of these interactions. Economic and political interests certainly play a role in generating conflict or cooperation depending on the strategic advantages to be had under different societal conditions. But as with the interest analysis offered in Chapter 2, it is clear that the quality of labor-environmental ties cannot be reduced to a simple interest configuration. Because an interest assessment alone cannot reveal the type of labor-environmental relations that will emerge, more in depth analysis of the *process* of inter-movement relationship development is needed. The subsequent chapters are all dedicated to examining the important elements of that process.

The case studies used for this research are drawn from five states: Maine, New Jersey, New York, Washington and Wisconsin. States were used as the initial focus of the analysis because they provide a sound basis for comparison. Each state has its own set of environmental organizations and a centrally coordinated state labor federation. State environmental and economic policies then serve as the basis for labor-environmental cooperation or conflict. Chapter 4 provides information on the relevant economic and political conditions in each of these states. In addition I identify the main labor and environmental actors in the states and provide an overview of the general quality of labor-environmental relations.

In Chapter 5 I examine the organizational constraints that limit the ability of unions and environmental groups to engage in coalition activity. I first ground the analysis in the context of American politics to demonstrate the way in which the US political structure tends to give rise to numerous, narrowly focused movement organizations. I then argue that this crowded political field and the limited set of issues addressed by each organization creates an organizational dilemma when considering coalition formation as a strategy. Organizational maintenance needs require that an SMO remain able to distinguish itself from others. Yet this distinctiveness reduces issue overlap with other organizations and inhibits the potential for coalition work, a dilemma that I refer to as the “coalition contradiction”. This condition afflicts SMOs in different ways depending on their “organizational range” (the number of issues that a group seeks to address) and the type of goals they strive to achieve. The need of unions to advance the material interests of their members creates some barriers to inter-movement cooperation, however it is voluntary “new social movement” organizations, like environmental groups, that face a more acute strategic dilemma. In this chapter I analyze the relationship between the structural conditions that give rise to different types of movement organizations and the way in which distinct organizational characteristics limit coalition participation.

The structural conditions described in Chapter 5 shape the propensity for movement organizations to engage in inter-movement coalitions, but those conditions are not a determining force. Organizations are capable of self transformation. Both external conditions and internal processes can alter organizations in ways that change their coalition propensities. In Chapter 6 I analyze these changes in terms of “organizational learning.” Changes that occurred within some of the labor and environmental organizations examined here reveal two types of organizational learning: experiential learning and learning through interaction with others. Experiential learning occurs when organizations face crises or fail to achieve organizational goals and, through a process of trial and error, develop new strategies and, on occasion, incorporate new goals as a result of their experience. This organizational range expansion then widens the field of prospective coalition partners. The second type of learning typically results from ongoing contact with other movement organizations in a context of mutual effort. This interaction builds trust and facilitates the homogenization of goals among organizational leaders, thus allowing for still more cooperation in a broader range of issue areas. Organizational learning and range

expansion can allow for more coalition participation, but the cases indicate that organizational learning is only durable if certain conditions are met.

In Chapter 7 the process of cross movement interaction is explored in greater depth. In particular, attention is focused on the role of “coalition brokers.” Brokers are the actors who bring movement organizations together in an effort to foster cooperation. They typically occupy a position that bridges the divide between the distinct groups allowing them to communicate with both sides and to frame issues in ways that resonate with both constituencies. In addition to the role played by these individuals, certain organizations are also commonly involved in the broker role, including citizens’ groups and occupational health advocates. In this chapter I document the way in which coalition brokers utilize bridge issues to bring unions and environmentalists together.

Chapter 8 addresses the question of the cultural divide between the typically middle class participants in the environmental movement and the working class members of the labor movement. Although the constituents of both types of organizations are less distinct in terms of class than they once were, some theorists argue that differences in class culture inhibit cooperation between these two movement sectors. In this chapter the extent of those cultural differences is gauged. I argue that while some cultural differences exist between some unionists and environmental advocates, cultural distinctions pose only a minor barrier to inter-movement cooperation. The cultural gap identified by others is better understood as a manifestation of organizational differences rooted in legal and structural pressures as opposed to class culture.

Taken together, each chapter represents one piece in a larger puzzle. The central issue is to understand when and under what circumstances we can expect cooperation between organized labor and the environmental movement. But the conclusions reached also have more general application. Macro political and economic structures can be seen as the foundation of the social movement politics that characterize American democracy. A core interest analysis allows us to weigh the effect of those factors taken by many to be the beginning and the end of political coalition study. But this examination goes beyond that to consider the impact of organizational and micro-level variables as well. On the organizational level, environmental SMOs and labor unions enable us to better understand the strategic constraints placed upon voluntary purposive organizations relative to those primarily organized around private material interest. In addition to the structural forces that shape political outcomes at the macro and the meso-organizational

levels, the micro level interactions must also be factored into the analysis. This is where we consider the basic mechanics of organizational contact and the influence it has on key actors allowing individual bonds to grow into movement alliances. In the concluding chapter I assemble the pieces to suggest an overall framework for coalition study. While not a completed picture, it provides a basic outline for understanding not only labor-environmental relations, but also for inter-movement alliances in general.

A note on terminology

This book examines the relationships between labor unions and environmental organizations. The full range of relationships will be considered from intense conflict to close cooperation. When labor-environmental relations are at their best, it may involve a “coalition” among various unions and environmental groups. Scholars have used the term “coalition” in many different ways. The most basic definition is perhaps that offered by William Gamson: “A *coalition* is the joint use of resources by two or more social units” (1961, 374). While the term coalition always implies the coalescing effort of more than one actor towards a particular goal, the level of coordination can vary dramatically. Political scientists often refer to “electoral coalitions” when analyzing the broad array of interests and organizations that support a given candidate or party. However, this does not necessarily imply any coordinated action or formal recognition of one another on the part of the actors involved (Axelrod 1986). Indeed, there may, in fact, be a large degree of disagreement and conflict among the actors involved in such a “coalition”. For example, a Democratic presidential coalition may include environmentalists, labor unions and high tech corporations, despite their divergent views on a wide range of issues and a total lack of strategic coordination among them. However, “coalition” may also be used to refer to coordinated action among organizations. This can take the form of one time short term, issue specific coalitions that may involve nothing more than adding an organization’s name to a list of supporters. Or it can involve highly coordinated efforts among groups that form stable, long standing alliances that work together on a number of issues. This can even include the creation of a separate office and staff and the dedication of other resources to overseeing coalition activity. For my purposes I use coalition to refer to actual coordination among labor and environmental organizations, not the electoral type of coalition which only implies common

support for a candidate or issue. The full range of coalition activity will be considered from those that involve limited effort on a single issue to ongoing partnerships. I use the term coalition frequently, but given the range of relationships that it can imply a more thorough description will be provided as needed for any coalitions referenced in this book.