

Taking the High Road in Milwaukee

The Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership

Annette Bernhardt, Laura Dresser, and Joel Rogers

Wisconsin has been home to a series of interrelated partnerships between labor and employers that have built institutions to support high-road business practice around quality, worker training, innovation, and cooperation. The Center on Wisconsin Strategy has been pivotal in these experiments. In this article, three members of the COWS staff use this experience to draw the general lesson for how organized labor can use sectoral development strategies to steer employers toward a more positive future.

HOW can organized labor get beyond simple adversarialism without selling out? How can it push employers to adopt and maintain high-road competitive strategies in face of low-road competition, and without

ANNETTE BERNHARDT, LAURA DRESSER, and JOEL ROGERS all work at the Center on Wisconsin Strategy (COWS), a research and policy center based at the University of Wisconsin that was instrumental in the creation of the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnership (WRTP) and still provides it with technical assistance and staffing. Bernhardt is a senior research associate at COWS; Dresser is the research director; Rogers is the director and also a professor of law, political science, and sociology at the university. The authors thank Eric Parker, another COWS senior research associate and also executive director of the WRTP, and Phil Neuenfeldt, secretary-treasurer of the Wisconsin AFL-CIO and co-chair of the WRTP, for countless discussions on the subject of this article.

much active public policy support? What exactly does labor have that employers especially need to pursue the high road, and what can it offer them without being suckered? More generally, how can labor be a leader in making the local and regional economic development policy that helps shape employer choice on competitive strategy work better for workers and the community? How can labor make that leadership part of and useful to its realization of broader political and organizing ambitions?

Like many local labor movements, Wisconsin labor has been struggling with these questions for years. And for years now, we at the Center on Wisconsin Strategy (COWS) have been working with Wisconsin's labor on a series of projects—among them the Wisconsin Regional Training Partnerships (WRTP) and Milwaukee Jobs Initiative (MJII), both centered in the Milwaukee metro area; and more recently the Jobs With a Future (JWF) project in the Madison metro area, an environment quite different from Milwaukee's—that attempt to answer them.

In different ways, all these projects are aimed simultaneously at upgrading the skills, wages, and career advancement opportunities for workers near the bottom of the labor market; building industry competitiveness through modernization, better workforce development practices, and other means; and increasing worker voice and power in firm and industry decision-making. And all these projects are framed by a certain broader view of what labor needs to do to advance in today's economy—beginning with a clear definition of its role in the economy. In order to find the popular support and political cachet for its own advancement, labor has always needed to do big things for the broader society. This necessity has commonly meant solving problems that capital cannot solve on its own.

In the past, labor's signal contribution was to ensure "effective demand"—raising wage floors enough to promise investors markets for expanded production. These opportunities in turn

increased the productivity of that output, which lowered the real cost of consumption goods, which could then be ever more widely purchased by better-paid workers in an unending upward spiral of living standards. But for a host of reasons, the conditions under which labor made that contribution have been undermined since the early 1970s. In proximate result, wages have stagnated or declined for most of the working population, inequality has soared, and even in that handful of industrial sectors that provided the foundation of postwar private-sector union power, that power has been drastically diminished. More immediately still, perhaps, labor has no clear function, beyond obstruction, in a fully marketized economy subject to increased competitive pressures.

This is the familiar starting point for the strategy considered here: to make labor again “part of the solution” to problems of industrial order. This time, however, we must focus as much on the supply side and framing conditions of that order (that is, the organization of production itself and the rules by which it is socially constrained) as on the demand side and the operation of internal labor markets. More specifically, labor must harness its residual strength and unique position in the economy to support a form of production—the “high road”—that is socially superior to present business practices. Such a high road would provide advantages to labor more or less immediately, but also further the interest of the broader society and even a significant share of capital itself.¹ Specifically, labor helps to organize employers willing to take the high road to the point where they embark on it together to realize the efficiencies that come of their collective organization. In return for labor leadership, employers share some of that gain with labor—a sort of productivity bargaining, or rent-sharing, on a grand scale. This strategy also anticipates high-road employers’ allying with labor against the most salient threat to them both: low-road firms and the public policies that support them. This arrangement, then, becomes the *shared* political program of a new

“social partnership”² between labor and capital: to close off the low road, to help build the high road, and to enable workers and firms now stuck on the first to be able to travel the second.

Questions of labor’s best strategy are often discussed and debated in terms as abstract as those just offered. The Wisconsin experiments, however, offer some real experience by which our application of the strategy outlined above can be assessed, which is what we aim to do in this article.

For the sake of brevity, we concentrate on the experience of the WRTP and, within that, on the first of the industry-sector partnerships under its direction—the one in manufacturing. This is the oldest of the projects noted above and the most advanced in realizing the different parts of the strategy just suggested. But we note immediately that other partnerships within the WRTP itself, and other projects—some relying on parts of the WRTP’s own capacity, others modeled on it in other industrial sectors or other regional labor markets—suggest the wider utility and replicability of the broad strategy.

Economic Context and the Problem of Supplying High-Road Inputs

Like many other Midwest cities, Milwaukee was devastated by the “rustbelt recession” of the early 1980s, and even more by the massive flight of manufacturing firms over the subsequent decade out of Milwaukee Metro³ to lower-cost “greenfield” sites. Milwaukee lost fully a third of its traditional industrial base during the period, a loss that sharply accelerated union decline statewide and growing poverty in Milwaukee itself. Metro deindustrialization is expressed in Figure 1. Note that manufacturing employment in Wisconsin did not in fact decline over the period. It simply moved from Milwaukee and surrounding counties to more rural ones. Figure 2 shows some

of the effects on Milwaukee, whose heavily African-American central-city population was devastated by the industrial flight.⁴

In the early 1990s, as Milwaukee manufacturing firms began emerging from their prolonged slump, those firms discovered two things: (1) to remain competitive in high-end markets, they needed to upgrade the skills of their existing workforce, and (2) they needed to do so on a scale and scope beyond existing apprenticeship programs, which most of them had abandoned anyway during the slump's heyday of skilled-labor surplus. This situation made employers at least open to a constructive discussion about training problems with a labor movement that itself realized that, to preserve membership and get on the high road, it needed to be much more involved in driving the firm restructuring, modernization, and human capital formation.

What became clear in this discussion, eventually formally facilitated by COWS, was the need for a joint labor-management structure of cooperation—or “partnership”⁵—covering multiple firms and ideally extending to enough of them to influence behaviors throughout the manufacturing sector. This need for a multifirm approach, rather than exclusive reliance on firm-specific collective bargaining or negotiation, followed from the fact that the sorts of supports needed for the high road were often a species of “public good” prone to “free-rider” problems.

Training itself is a classic instance of such a problem. Under otherwise unregulated and competitive market conditions, employers as a *group*—particularly high-roading employers—may benefit from the existence of a trained workforce, rich in generally applicable skills. But no *individual* employer has any incentive to provide the training needed to produce that workforce, since it lacks any assurance that its trainee may not one day become—through that individual's movement to a different employer—another firm's asset, without offsetting compensation. The result, widely achieved in fact in the United

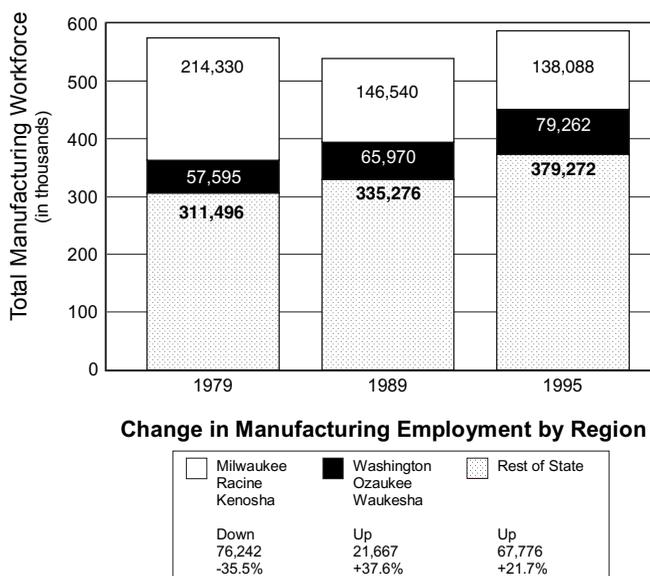


Figure 1. Metro-Deindustrialization in Wisconsin, 1979–95

States, is that employers barely train frontline workers. But since a trained workforce, particularly in manufacturing, is essential to achieving reasonable wages, this situation is bad for individual workers and the society as a whole. Lacking an appropriately trained workforce, employers pursue low-road strategies that do not rely on one. But this result makes the high road less available even to those firms that wish to pursue it, since they now face conditions under which low-roading competitors are more or less settled in their ways, and the available workforce is insufficiently skilled to permit them to start on something better. (See Figure 3.)

To solve the training problem, one needs either (1) to keep employees at a single employer (as in the heyday of the Japanese “lifetime employment” system), thus providing the company’s owners with the assurance that they will realize a return on their training investment; or (2) simply to require all firms to train at some expenditure level, or to sacrifice to the state (where it can be used for that purpose) the difference between that level and what the company actually spends on training (a “play or pay”

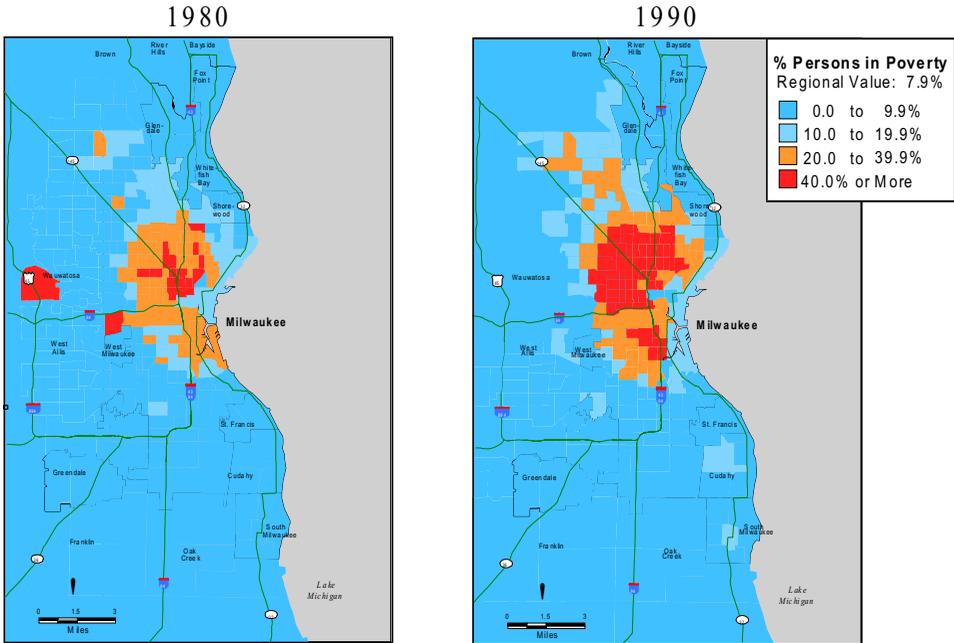


Figure 2. Milwaukee Poverty, 1980–90

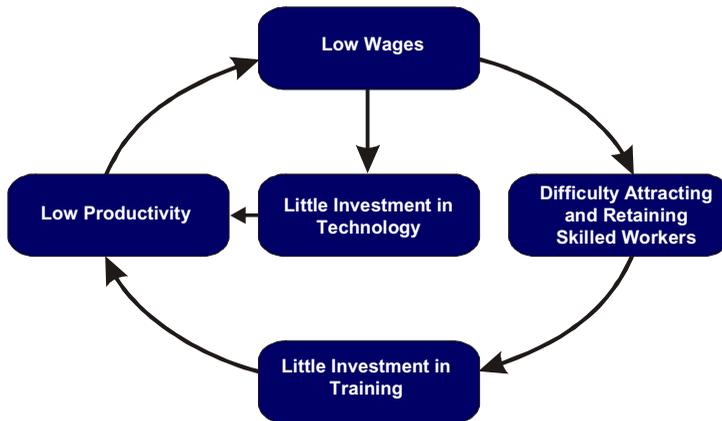


Figure 3. The Vicious Circle Confronting U.S. Manufacturing

This figure was originally produced by Dan Luria, of the Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center. See Luria and Rogers (1999).

training scheme of the sort mandated in France); or (3) (as in Germany) to get enough firms to jointly agree to train—ideally with common standards on content and expenditure effort—at which point the free-rider problem, while not precisely solved, is diminished in its effect. While not preventing interfirm “raiding” of trained employees, this approach ensures enough training going on, generally, so as not to fatally compromise any single firm’s position. If nothing else, the firm can simply cross-raid the trained worker of yet another firm.

It was, essentially, this third approach that we attempted with the WRTP. With the strong support of labor, and the qualified support of at least a few business leaders, we sought to organize a group of manufacturing employers and their unions into a single group dedicated to solving collective action problems in their sector. This was the WRTP, which eventually started in 1992 with about a dozen large union shops covering less than 10,000 workers. In the decade since, the WRTP has grown to include more than 100 employers—predominantly but not exclusively unionized—covering some 65,000 workers, or about a third of the Milwaukee Metro industrial workforce.

Employer partners in the WRTP essentially agree on a common code of industrial conduct. While hardly formalized, that code’s content is that employers will (1) train frontline workers at much greater levels than in the past, with shared curricula among them and benchmarking of their varied efforts and practices; (2) dedicate themselves more generally to promoting high-road practices in their own and other firms, with specific attention to modernization and preparation of the future workforce; (3) permit workers a significantly greater say in firm governance, starting with administration of the enhanced human capital budget implied by the greater training commitment, but extending to new equipment purchase and the design and upgrading of production systems; (4) support workers seeking

to advance themselves within this newly high-roading order, with supports for training and pay rewards for skill advancement.

The aggregate results of the WRTP are impressive. Taken together, WRTP members have stabilized manufacturing employment in the Milwaukee metro area, and indeed contributed about 6,000 additional industrial jobs to it over the past five years. Among member firms, productivity is way up—exceeding productivity growth in nonmember firms. Once-stagnant wages are also up, and easily outpace wage growth outside the partnership. Individual firm commitment to training frontline workers is evident in direct training costs of some \$20 million annually—an increase of almost that magnitude from prior levels. Direct training reaches some 6,000 workers (one-quarter of whom are people of color) each year. Because entry-level job requirements among member firms are known and broadly shared, moreover, the WRTP has been able to offer employment opportunities to those traditionally neglected in Milwaukee metro’s labor market. Connections between the TRTP and the MJI have helped place more than 1,300 “disadvantaged” central city workers—including many former AFDC/TANF recipients—in jobs that more than doubled their previous year’s earnings (from an average of \$9,000 to \$23,000 annually), while providing health insurance and clear opportunities for further advancement. Upon examination, this MJI/WRTP work may prove the most cost-effective job-training and welfare-to-work program in the country—in large measure because it starts with employer demand and commitment to working with the program rather than with the individual served by it—with among the highest rates of participant job retention.

There are also more explicitly political results. In addition to myriad reforms in the process by which workforce development is administered in Milwaukee, there has been general success in shifting the establishment frontier of public policy debate—if

not yet all or even most actual policy—toward the promotion of high-road practices and the embrace of sectoral and jointly labor-management approaches to workforce development administration. In Milwaukee, all this has been explicitly embraced, for example, by the business association representing the 200 largest employers in that city.⁶ In Wisconsin more generally, it has been embraced by then Republican governor Tommy Thompson (now secretary of health and human services in the Bush administration) in his recommendations for reform of vocational and technical training in the state,⁷ and most recently by the state Department of Workforce Development in its plans for the reform of our “Wisconsin Works” (W2) program of welfare reform.⁸ Nationally, the Employment and Training Administration of the U.S. Department of Labor, acting on recommendations first made by COWS and offered by former labor secretary Robert Reich shortly after an inspection of the WRTP in Milwaukee, has also embraced the broad approach. Its program in Regional Skills Alliance (RSA) demonstration grants, now running about \$25 million annually, essentially seeks to replicate the experience in Milwaukee (and in other sites then featuring mature sectoral initiatives).

The WRTP in More Detail

How is all of this accomplished and organized? At the core of the WRTP, which is governed by a self-selecting board composed of equal numbers of industry and labor representatives, are a series of working groups in which employers and unions jointly pursue the high road—identifying common problems and best practices, developing pilot projects and implementing them. These working groups, whose governance characteristically mimics that of the WRTP as a whole, focus on solving the major problems facing any industry today:

First is the challenge to *remain competitive and productive*. Here the partnership provides technical assistance to its firms in plant modernization and the adoption of new workplace practices. Examples of assistance are staff helping firms to identify and introduce new technologies into their production practices (funded by the National Institute of Standards and Technology), or working with managers in assessing their use of temp workers and identifying alternative staffing practices.

Second is the need to *train incumbent workers*. Here the partnership helps firms and their unions build strong systems for computer-based, classroom, and on-the-job training. Firms and unions learn from each other the best ways to build programs and to get workers to use them. The partnership has developed customized training programs so that workers can use new technologies, give feedback on their implementation, and, in the long term, move up the job ladder.

Third is the need to *find and train new workers*. Here the partnership runs a number of programs, including the one noted above—the MJI, linking inner-city residents to area jobs. Crucial here again has been the shared design and acceptance of a common “essential manufacturing skills” curriculum, as well as a workplace mentoring program for the new recruits. The renewal of manufacturing and the retirement of a highly age-compressed workforce have presented an enormous opportunity to provide family-supporting jobs for central city residents. And the need to do so has been given added political saliency by the manifest success of Wisconsin’s version of welfare reform in purging caseloads, and its general failure to get former welfare recipients into better-than-poverty-wage jobs.

In addressing these needs, the WRTP plays the role of honest broker, an essential intermediary, for the local workforce development and employment system. It brings together the different actors in that system, with everyone contributing what they

do best. So, for example, employers and unions have the job openings and best understand skill requirements; community organizations are good at recruiting workers and offering support services; and technical colleges have the training expertise. Rather than each group trying to do everything on its own (and inevitably failing), the goal is to have a well-coordinated and efficient system of recruiting, training, and placing workers. The logic is simple: Train workers for specific jobs that already exist. But this level of coordination doesn't happen on its own. It requires an organization, such as the WRTP, with strong ties in all the respective communities.

What distinguishes the WRTP from similar attempts at labor market coordination, however, is the central role that unions play. From the outset, unions have been key in determining the shape and activities of the partnership, and not only because they protect the interests of workers. They are also the best source of worker voice—"high road" initiatives can only succeed with sustained input from the worker side. Over and over again, employers trying to change their production and service delivery systems have quickly learned that knowledge from the floor is critical to the process—about what should be improved, whether the new technologies and machines are working, safety issues, and what training should actually look like. Similarly, the participation of older workers in bringing new workers into the fold—through mentoring and on-the-job training—has turned out to be one of the hallmarks of the partnership.

New Directions

Looking to the future, the WRTP has several new items on its plate. Most important is replication in other sectors. With an RSA grant of its own from the U.S. Department of Labor, WRTP is creating new partnerships in construction, data networking,

health care, hospitality, and transportation. While the specific needs of each industry differ, the basic steps are the same. First, steering committees of business and labor leaders have been formed in each sector, with an emphasis on coalition building and recruiting firms and unions. The next stage is that the committees develop strategic plans to meet the staffing and training needs of their industry, drawing on research and firm surveys. Pilot recruiting and training programs are then put in place and evaluated. Throughout, the fledgling partnerships are benefiting enormously from the groundwork already laid by the mature manufacturing partnership (such as ties to community colleges, public agencies, and community groups, and knowledge of public-funding streams).

A good example is the hospitality partnership, one of the most advanced new partnerships to date. Last year, an industry needs analysis identified two main obstacles to optimal workplace performance: the difficulty in finding qualified workers, and insufficient skills of current workers. The hotel partnership has therefore focused on setting up recruitment networks and training sessions for the positions that are hardest to fill: entry-level and intermediate-level jobs in the rooms and food and beverage divisions. Since most new entrants to the industry do not have the employment history and customer service skills to enter these jobs directly, a week-long “essential skills” class has been developed. Incumbent workers, on the other hand, can now take a class teaching the “fundamentals of supervision” by way of preparing to bid for jobs higher up the career ladder. On-site English as a Second Language (ESL) classes (for the largely immigrant workforce) and a workplace mentoring program are also being developed. Finally, the hotel partnership is working with the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) union on expanding its “floater” program. This program currently allows banquet servers to sign up on a list to work at member properties’ banquets during the

slow season. The goal is to develop a similar program for housekeepers, which would ensure that employees maintain adequate working hours and that employers can fill their irregular labor needs efficiently.

Not surprisingly, as the WRTP moves into this new sector and others, it has had to ramp up on a number of fronts. Most important is the need for a larger and better system of recruiting new workers. The WRTP has therefore embarked on building a community network of nonprofit and public agencies. These community organizations, most of them located in the inner city, are educated by the partnership about career opportunities and skill requirements at its member firms, and they receive an electronic newsletter about employment and training opportunities on a regular basis. They then recruit and screen candidates for the job openings and support them throughout the hiring process. The workers are hired immediately if they already qualify, or conditionally on completing the training program. While this type of coordination occurred informally in the past on an as-needed basis, the community network now formalizes the process and makes it more reliable, ensuring a steady stream of new workers for the various partnerships.

Along similar lines, the WRTP has also developed a new initiative to prepare the next generation of workers for the skilled trades and other technical fields in the Milwaukee metro area. Both employers and unions recognize that the skills shortage has become the single greatest barrier to the growth of family-supporting jobs—and the problem is that many young people overlook the industrial sector in selecting their careers. The plan, parts of which are already being implemented, consists of three strategies: marketing careers in the skilled trades and other technical fields to students; providing technical assistance to schools for reviving or upgrading their vocational programs; and offering paid work experience to qualified students. The latter is es-

pecially important, since apprenticeships or internships can often turn into permanent jobs after graduation.

These and other new initiatives are made possible by the fact that the WRTP has built itself into one of the smartest and most connected actors in the local labor market. It is also one of the biggest, when measured by employer and union membership, and here we should note that size brings with it a considerable amount of political leverage. For example, several years ago, the WRTP conducted a needs assessment of area employers and found the skills shortage to be the number one problem. The partnership then sponsored a forum for managers and labor leaders to discuss the results with state and local officials, and called for a task force to come up with effective responses to the skills shortage. The governor appointed WRTP's co-presidents to lead the Task Force on the Future of Technical Education and Training. Much of the final report from this task force was implemented in the state budget, including a \$20 million training fund for low-income workers to achieve upward mobility, a \$13 million scholarship fund for youth to attend local technical colleges, a \$7 million expansion of school-to-work programs for disadvantaged students, and other policy initiatives.

What's the Payoff?

While the particular benefits the WRTP offers to different partners in local economic development may already be evident, it may also help, in more general terms, to sketch its contribution to employers, labor, and the broader community.

The Employer View

The logic behind the WRTP is to marshal as many resources as possible to push participating companies toward a high-perfor-

mance, “mutual gains” model, in which both the firms’ profits and workers’ wages and careers are sustained. The logic is simple, at least in theory: Deal with problems by providing collective solutions that single firms can’t afford or devise on their own, with the price tag of good wages and benefits, job security, and career ladders for workers.⁹

For example, single firms (especially smaller ones) have a very difficult time knowing exactly how to modernize and implement new technologies, never mind having the resources to retrain workers. Shared resources on the first front, and joint training pools on the second, can make the difference between choosing the high road and creating quality jobs or sticking with the low road and even moving out of Milwaukee to nonunion sites. The training of incoming workers fulfills a similar function. Wisconsin manufacturing was hit with tight labor markets and an aging workforce well before the rest of the country, and finding young workers who could operate the new machinery became increasingly difficult. The WRTP ensures a sustained flow of skilled incoming workers by partnering with technical colleges and public agencies to provide customized training. A major employer in the region reports that this “managing of supply” allowed him to stay in Milwaukee and actually expand his plant.

Finally, it is also important to recognize that a low-wage business strategy brings its own set of costs—shirking, absenteeism, and lack of commitment and worker buy-in. These are incentive problems that the traditional internal labor market was good at solving and that the partnership model can also address. For example, worker-management teams charged with modernizing the workplace yield many of the benefits of employee involvement (Levine and Tyson 1990). The WRTP has also successfully worked with several firms to convert temporary jobs back to permanent jobs by documenting in concrete terms the loss of revenue from the contingent strategy.

Thus the promise of the sectoral partnership model is that it can actually change the nature of jobs being created. But it is quite difficult to pull off. It requires a critical mass of employers and preferably unions in a given sector, as well as any number of public partners, such as community colleges, private industry councils, and community-based organizations. Coordinating among all the different players and identifying the interests and potential contributions of each is an enormous and constant challenge. There may also be inherent limits to the stick-and-carrot approach. One manufacturer happily uses WRTP's services in designing a mentoring program for its new Latino workforce, but has so far resolutely stuck with its ten-year-long relationship with a temp agency for recruitment.

To Unions

The union and workforce perspective on the WRTP is a bit different, but no less important. Unions are involved because these projects provide real results for them. Unions that participate in these projects see old jobs improving and new jobs being generated. The very stability of their own firms rests on these initiatives to train, attract, and retain workers. Union members also see new pathways for skill development and career advancement as the projects extend within the firm. As they contribute positively to improving shop floor skills, unions also gain power to set the terms of compensation within the firm. These joint projects provide leverage in bargaining by allowing unions to be a proactive partner on skill-upgrading issues that challenge the firm. It is critical, of course, that this leverage be exercised; a key balance throughout these projects is managing to keep engaged on issues of joint interest without selling out in negotiations. The WRTP not only helps union leaders and members work on issues of joint interest with management, it also provides linkages with

other local leaders who have been through similar processes.

The union contribution to these projects increases union leverage, and the union contribution is substantial. Without labor union leadership at the partnership level *and* within participating firms, it is almost impossible to get inside firms and initiate broad, effective worker-training projects. Such projects require an economic incentive or source of pressure that makes firms willing to invest in upgrading the skills of workers. Some union firms have an incentive because high, contractually negotiated wages generate a need for equivalently high productivity. Other firms and unions find worker training an issue on which they can start discussions of interest to both parties. In these ways, unions can increase firm commitment to worker training. Equally important, effective training also requires good information from shop floor workers. They have the most intimate knowledge of the content of work, wasted steps, and process problems. Unions provide independent workforce representation and so can contribute to making workforce training and modernization efforts more effective.

Unions are thus partners on development of these projects and recipients of the services that such projects create. They gain power through their increased knowledge, and they gain in strength as members themselves come to appreciate the union's role in remaking a work site.

To the Community

Finally, there are evident payoffs to the "community"—both as that term is used to denote the general population in an area, and in its more common "coded" reference to populations of color, the poor, and others traditionally excluded from the full benefits of economic citizenship.

As a general matter, the WRTP increases investment, income,

and employment in the community, all of which obviously increase its welfare and living standard. It also improves job quality for those fortunate enough to be employed at member firms, with spillover effects on nonmembers.

At least as important, however, the WRTP does all this in a way that specifically favors a fairer distribution of economic opportunity—for both incumbent and prospective workers—through its negotiated supports for worker training and advancement, career mentoring programs, and support for workplace diversity. And in so doing, it offers a bridge between labor and those portions of the community traditionally excluded from the benefits of organization.

The importance of this last point cannot be overstated. At the core of any labor-community alliance that matters is a clear exchange of benefits, as well as the shared solidarities that may come of fighting for social justice. The “community” wants jobs, ideally good ones, and opportunities for advancement currently denied to it. Labor wants political support for defending wage and other standards for which it has fought and which are now under unrelenting attack. Labor, having access to good jobs, can help the community concretely in meeting its need. The community, having votes, can help labor concretely in getting what it wants.

Replication

The Milwaukee experience suggests that strategies linking workforce and economic development can be successful at a local level, in ways that answer many of the questions posed at the outset. But is the Milwaukee experience somehow unique?

Decisively, we think not. All regions face a choice between encouraging low- and high-road competitive strategies. And in all of them there are clusters of firms that could be moving toward the high road if pushed, and assisted, by unions or public policy

in solving the collective action problems that deny them public-goods-type high-road inputs. While circumstances vary, of course, that is our essential point on the replication question: “It can happen here”—meaning in any metro area.

Recently, national labor has come to be persuaded of this fact. And the Working for America Institute (WAI), labor’s nonprofit arm for workforce development, has taken significant steps toward providing the technical assistance needed to support labor and community leaders who wish to replicate WRTP-type “high-road regional partnerships” elsewhere.¹⁰

For activists, the basic opening moves in that replication are straightforward enough. From our experience, we would recommend that you:

- Do an industrial structure, demographic, and “power” map of your local labor market, identifying key sectors, workforce composition shifts, wage and income trends, and the available base, institutional or other, for advocacy.
- Target the sectors with the most immediate promise of success in taking the high road, or the most obvious demand for some of its ingredients, or the strongest union base—or, not infrequently, all three.
- Examine those sectors’ problems in more detail, reviewing results with employers and worker representatives, as well as state officials, to get consensus on the description of existing problems. The range of strategies for solving shared sectoral problems will follow more or less straightforwardly from their description, but getting otherwise-divided actors to agree on that description is essential to acting on problems together.

From there, the harder work begins—hammering out specific agreements, finding the financing for specific program initia-

tives, training and then managing the staff for whom typically (and this is true on the labor and community sides of things no less than the management one) this sort of work is new. But as a French wag once remarked of the legend that St. Dennis walked several miles holding his severed head in his hand, “The distance doesn’t impress; it’s the first step that seems difficult.” And the very good news we can report here is that that first step, in fact, is relatively easy to take.

Notes

1. For early statements of this strategy, coincident with the formation of the WRTP, see Rogers (1992, 1993).

2. The somewhat jesting reference, of course, is to age-old European acceptance of the “social partnership” between labor and capital as essential to ensuring an industrial order delivering some semblance of social equality. Such global acceptance of labor’s role has never been achieved in the United States.

3. Throughout, we will define Milwaukee Metro as comprising Milwaukee, Racine, Kenosha, Washington, Ozaukee, and Waukesha counties.

4. It may always be important to notice that the 1980s metro deindustrialization in America’s Midwest was a disaster not only for unions, but also for the predominantly black workers who had relied on unionized manufacturing jobs as their ticket to the middle class.

5. It bears emphasizing that the partnership does not presume any particular harmony in the interests of labor and capital, much less harmony throughout all of those interests. The partnership is about the willingness to seek and exploit areas of mutual gain, even as conflict elsewhere in the relationship is recognized.

6. See the report of the Greater Milwaukee Committee (2000). The report was authored by COWS but formally accepted and approved by the GMC leadership.

7. See the report of the Governor’s Taskforce on Technical Education (1999). Significantly, the taskforce was co-chaired by the co-chairs of the WRTP.

8. See Milwaukee Jobs Initiative (2001).

9. See Parker and Rogers (2001) for a fuller discussion of the incentive structure.

10. For some of the details, and all sorts of useful training materials, visit WAI’s web site: www.workingforamerica.org.

References

- Governor’s Taskforce on Technical Education. 1999. *Technical Education and Training: The Future of Wisconsin’s Workforce*. Madison: Office of the Governor.
- Greater Milwaukee Committee (GMC). 2000. *Toward a Regional Workforce Development Strategy*. Milwaukee: GMC.

- Levine, David, and Laura D'Andrea Tyson. 1990. "Participation, Productivity, and the Firm's Environment." In *Paying for Productivity: A Look at the Evidence*, ed. Alan S. Blinder, 183–243. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.
- Luria, Daniel L., and Joel Rogers. 1999. *Metro Futures: Economic Solutions for Cities and Their Suburbs*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Milwaukee Jobs Initiative (MJI). 2001. *Time for W3: Welfare Reform Lessons from the Milwaukee Jobs Initiative*. Milwaukee: MJI.
- Parker, E., and Joel Rogers. 2001. "Building the High Road in Metro Areas: Sectoral Training and Employment Projects." In *Rekindling the Movement: Labor's Quest for Relevance in the 21st Century*, ed. Lowell Turner, Harry C. Katz, and Richard W. Hurd, 256–272. Ithaca: Cornell University/ILR Press.
- Rogers, Joel. 1992. "What Needs to Be Done for Labor to Flourish." *Economic Notes* 60 (July–August): 11.
- . 1993. "Reforming U.S. Labor Relations." *Chicago Kent Law Review* 69: 97–127.

To order reprints, call 1-800-352-2210; outside the United States, call 717-632-3535.