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Executive Summary

Over the past few years, there has been growing attention to the violence of policing and obstacles to police accountability and community safety that does not rely on police. With this heightened attention, the role and influence of police unions/fraternal organizations/associations has entered the spotlight, sparking discussions and debate over how to challenge obstacles posed by police union power.¹ As calls grow to address police union power, so too does apprehension around targeting what many assume functions as a typical labor union. Some caution that critiques of police unions is a slippery slope that can only lead to negative consequences for all public sector unions, not just those for police unions.

Concerns about union busting are valid— after all, US history is full of examples of both violent and nonviolent squashing of organized labor—but in the context of working to end police violence, these concerns are often misplaced. Police have existed as a force against unions and unionizing efforts and for breaking strikes and intimidating workers. Police unions have also distanced themselves in relation to other unions, marking themselves as associations or fraternal orders, which in turn has led to unique privileges and rights afforded to police unions, opportunities not often available to other labor unions. Ultimately, police union power solidified

¹ A note on language: for the sake of consistency, the term “police unions” will be used throughout this memo. Some police accountability activists in the field have noted that police do not refer to themselves as unions and that the nature of their organized labor is not the same as traditional unions and therefore police organizations should not be labeled “unions.” Nonetheless, this memo will use the term “police unions” to refer to the body that represents police officers, primarily those with collective bargaining/contract power and political power and influence. Some examples of these police unions will include the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), the Police Benevolent Association (PBA), the International Brotherhood of Police (IBP), and the International Union of Police Associations (IUPA). In contrast, non-police unions will be referred to as labor unions/traditional labor unions, which will include public and private sector unions and their federations, such as the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), and also the United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America International Union (UAW) and the Writers Guild of America, East (WGAE), both of whom are affiliated with the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). Correctional officers’ unions and additional information on firefighters and emergency response workers’ unions are outside the scope of this memo and will not be examined.

through contracts and skilled political lobbying has morphed police unions into a shape unlike traditional labor unions.

Organized labor remains an influential sector in the US and is arguably a sector growing in popularity and numbers. For this reason, advocates and organizers working to challenge police union power and change police union contracts must involve organized labor in their endeavors. In recent years, there has been reluctance by various labor union and labor federation leaders to stand against or expel police affiliates and who instead call for allying and working *with* police unions and police affiliates to reform policing. At the same time, there is a growing momentum among labor union chapters and individual members to embrace calls to divest from policing and to break traditional labor unions' ties to police and police unions. Police brutality is an issue that affects everyone in the US, especially people of color, and labor union members are no exception to this phenomenon.

This memo ends with several recommendations. Those who work with members of organized labor to advance campaigns to challenge police union power should focus on public education. There is a need to directly address the concerns and misunderstandings that exist around this topic, highlighting historic patterns of contention and conflict between police, police unions, and organized labor and how that relates to today's context. For those in academia, there is a need for research into relationships between traditional organized labor and police unions. Some study findings and much of lived experience by those in impacted communities indicate that the culture of police and police unions—often referred to as Blue Lives Matter culture and its “blue solidarity”—has created a seemingly impenetrable wall that indicate efforts to build allyship will likely be futile. As the obstacles posed by police unions through Blue Lives Matter culture may be insurmountable, the field of police reform, police accountability, and invest-

divest advocacy would benefit from research into strategies that support their goals without spending time and energy on building relationships that may never be fruitful.

Context and Opportunity: Why This Memo Right Now?

In 2020, the Defund the Police movement rose as a response to the continued police abuse and killing of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), at the same time the impact of racial disparities in policing across healthcare and public health initiatives was brought to the foreground of mainstream attention during the coronavirus pandemic.² Public demands in 2020 varied from calls for police reform, accountability, and transparency, to defunding and abolishing the police. These calls have come not only from those rallying in the streets, but from members of the organized labor movement, which include police unions as affiliated members. Calls to examine the obstacles posed by police unions have been met with fierce opposition by both traditional labor unions and police unions.³ Critics of challenging police unions within the organized labor movement also have concerns about the collateral damage to their own unions. Many ask: If we challenge the police unions and target their sources of power through collective bargaining and contracts, isn't that just union busting? To begin to challenge the unequal balance

² Throughout 2020, the COVID19 Policing Project tracked creation and enforcement of public health orders throughout the United States, as well as police enforcement of orders (or lack thereof). Results have shown that policing in this context has disproportionately impacted communities of color. The 2020 report, UNMASKED, also discusses the disparate effects of the coronavirus on marginalized populations (e.g., low-income communities, people of color, students, sex workers, unhoused people, and more); Pascal Emmer, et al, "Unmasked: Impacts of Pandemic Policing," (Community Resource Hub, 2020). The COVID 19 Policing Project was formed to track COVID-19 related public health orders and enforcement, document pandemic policing, and strategize toward a just recovery. A collaboration of 24 organizations and individuals and hosted by the Community Resource Hub for Safety and Accountability, the project published two reports and several updates (<https://communityresourcehub.org/covid19-policing/>).

³ When it comes to confronting police misconduct and changing the environment of police accountability, journalists note these efforts "are likely to require dismantling deeply ingrained systems that shield officers from scrutiny, make it difficult to remove them and portend roadblocks for reform efforts, according to an examination by *The New York Times*." Kim Barker, Michael H. Keller, and Steve Eder, "How Cities Lost Control of Police Discipline," *New York Times*, January 6, 2021.

of power between police unions and the organized labor union movement and society at large, we must come to understand historic patterns and recognize that calls to reexamine police contracts and collective bargaining are not inherently union-busting efforts.

Labor unions have begun to organize around the issue of police brutality, a phenomenon embedded within the labor movement's own history of police being used to intimidate worker organizing and to break strikes. The organized labor movement must also reckon with labor unions' and labor federations' relationships with police and police unions. Many within the labor movement are demanding that their own union leadership commit to stated values around social justice and protection for all workers by confronting police union affiliates, requesting that police unions work on reform within their profession or potentially face expulsion if they refuse to do so.⁴ For example, in early June 2020, the MLK Labor Council in King County, Washington, asked the Seattle police union (Seattle Police Officers Guild, SPOG) to admit that racism is a problem within law enforcement and agree to address this problem, or else face expulsion from the labor council. Nearly two weeks later, the council voted to expel SPOG.

The labor movement has been an influential sector of the overall movement for social justice. Their concerns and perspectives come from knowledge and experience of the history of organized labor antagonism within the United States. Since 2020, as we saw an increase in labor organizing at the same moment that there is opposition to police power that is organized and sheltered by police unions and other formations, this is a critical moment to explore structures and strategies that challenge police union power.

Challenging police union power

⁴ Elise Takahama, "Seattle Police Officers Guild Expelled from King County's Largest Labor Council," *The Seattle Times*, June 17, 2020.

Over the last several years, there has been increased organizing within the labor sector—from retail workers to journalists to graduate workers to Amazon warehouse employees—to advocate for survival and safety, especially as a deadly pandemic takes its toll on essential workers and all workers struggling to adapt to new conditions.⁵ In 2020, formal labor union membership itself decreased in the private sector while hitting a plateau in the public sector,⁶ but recent events have revealed a growing interest in and support for labor organizing. Results of a 2022 Gallup poll show that 71% of American respondents approve of labor unions, the highest percentage Gallup has recorded since 1965.⁷ In addition to growing public approval of labor unions, there has been an increased effort to organize workers and advocate for worker interests within the past few years. For example, the 2021 effort to unionize Amazon fulfillment workers in Bessemer, Alabama was described as critical, the most important union election of the 21st century, and a watershed moment in tech industry labor organizing,⁸ garnering support from other members of organized labor as well as US lawmakers.⁹ So far, 2023 has seen the federal upholding of a Amazon warehouse’s union certification in Staten Island, New York – the company’s first unionized facility in the U.S.¹⁰ House and Senate Democrats also reintroduced the Protecting the

⁵ Open Society Foundation, “Is the COVID-19 Pandemic Fueling the Rebirth of Labor Organizing?” with Neidi Dominguez et al., livestream event, September 16, 2020.

⁶ “In 2020, 7.2 million employees in the public sector and 7.1 million workers in the private sector belonged to unions. Union membership decreased by 428,000 in the private sector and showed little change in the public sector.” U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Economic News Release - Union Members Summary,” *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics*, January 22, 2021.

⁷ Gallup, “Labor Unions,” *Gallup*, n.d., accessed, January 18, 2023.

⁸ Daniel Medina and Nandita Bose, “‘No Sense of Job Security’: Amazon Union Organizers Tell Lawmakers in Alabama,” *Reuters*, March 5, 2021.

⁹ Annie Palmer, “Democratic Lawmakers Show Solidarity for Amazon Union Vote in Alabama: ‘We Stand with You,’” *CNBC*, March 5, 2021.

¹⁰ Annie Palmer, “Amazon Union Victory at Staten Island Warehouse Upheld by Federal Labor Board,” *CNBC*, January 11, 2023.

Right to Organize (PRO) Act in February 2021, which will bring about extensive changes to the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) if passed, including expanded employee and union protections.¹¹ 2022 saw a nearly 50% increase in labor union elections nationwide compared to 2021, as workers from companies like Starbucks, Trader Joe’s, Apple, and Chipotle, as well as graduate student workers, healthcare workers, and auto workers continued their union organizing efforts.¹²

Given these developments, it is important to raise several questions. Where does the labor movement fit into this discussion of police accountability and police unions? Historic ties between police and labor unions will be explored later in this memo, but how and why is organized labor relevant to this discussion and this work today? Calls from within organized labor to address their police union affiliates and their role in confronting racism and brutality in policing are not an entirely new development. United Auto Workers (UAW) Local 2865, representing teaching assistants and student workers at the University of California, called for the AFL-CIO to end its affiliation with the International Union of Police Associations (IUPA) in July 2015.¹³ Their resolution calling upon the AFL-CIO came after UAW’s Black Interests Coordinating Committee (BICC) penned a letter pointing out the ways police unions work in opposition to the AFL-CIO’s own mission statement, while also highlighting the history of police unions acting to undermine labor organizing and advance racial violence.¹⁴ Nearly five

¹¹ Robert J. Simandl and John A. Rubin, “Labor Law Reform On the Horizon: Ten Things to Watch Under the PRO Act,” *The National Law Review* 11, no. 47 (February 16, 2021).

¹² Andrea Hsu and Alina Selyukh, “Union Wins Made Big News This Year. Here Are 5 Reasons Why It’s Not the Full Story,” *NPR*, December 27, 2022.

¹³ Mario Vasquez, “Univ. of California Academic Workers’ Union Calls on AFL-CIO To Terminate Police Union’s Membership,” *In These Times*, July 27, 2015.

¹⁴ United Auto Workers 2865, “UAW Call On AFL-CIO To End Affiliation With IUPA,” *UAW Local 2865*, June 26, 2015.

years later in 2020, the Writers Guild of America, East (WGAE), another AFL-CIO affiliate, made the same call: disaffiliate from the IUPA.¹⁵

Both groups point out the AFL-CIO's own goals in its mission statement: "To fulfill the yearning of the human spirit for liberty, justice and community; to advance individual and associational freedom; to vanquish oppression, privation and cruelty in all their forms."¹⁶

Members of both UAW Local 2865 and WGAE agree that police unions' actions, throughout history to present day, directly conflict with the AFL-CIO mission statement and harm other members of the labor federation, and for this reason, the AFL-CIO should expel the affiliate union due to the damage they cause to the labor movement.¹⁷

Both police unions and traditional labor unions serve similar general purposes—to protect their workers. However, there has been a stark difference in the rights and privileges afforded to different types of workers. Police unions are seen as special and separate from other labor unions and therefore deserving of unique privilege, gaining powers, protections, and the ability to wield collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) in discriminatory ways—privileges not afforded to non-police unions without significant intervention. In particular, police unions may have collective bargaining agreement/contract rights where other public sector unions do not.

¹⁵ Hamilton Nolan, "I'm Proud That My Union Just Urged the AFL-CIO to Kick Out Police Unions," *In These Times*, June 8, 2020.

¹⁶ These examples are not exhaustive, as other unions have called out racism within policing. While not explicitly calling for disaffiliation, the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, also an AFL-CIO affiliate, drafted a resolution in June 2020 that called for similar action to the MLK Jr. County Labor Council: police unions must agree to actively addressing racism in policing and hold officers accountable, or else face expulsion from the labor movement. Association of Flight Attendants-CWA, "Black Lives Matter," *Association of Flight Attendants-CWA*, June 5, 2020. See also Mario Vasquez, "Univ. of California Academic Workers' Union Calls on AFL-CIO To Terminate Police Union's Membership," *In These Times*, July 27, 2015; Nolan, "I'm Proud That My Union Just Urged the AFL-CIO to Kick Out Police Unions."

¹⁷ Nolan, "I'm Proud That My Union Just Urged the AFL-CIO to Kick Out Police Unions."

There are other reasons that organized labor and labor unions are relevant in this discussion about police unions. Not all police are unionized and the majority of those that belong to unions are not affiliated with the AFL-CIO.¹⁸ However, federations like the AFL-CIO¹⁹ and individual unions like SEIU²⁰ have agreed that police brutality is a labor issue that threatens workers, particularly workers of color, regardless of disagreements among members about how to address police union affiliates and the problems that stem from the policing profession. The intersection of policing with organized labor can also come in the form of police brutality against labor union members outside of a strike context; for example, consider the murder of union member Philando Castile during a police traffic stop.

The power of unions to influence politics and legislation is an additional key point in understanding the important role organized labor can play in police accountability efforts. The MLK Labor Council decision to expel the Seattle police union is one example of the power that stems from organized labor—the council is politically influential, endorses political candidates, and can sway voters during election cycles.²¹ Likewise, labor federations like the AFL-CIO have political influence during municipal, state, and federal elections, as well as the ability to unite a variety of different labor unions under one umbrella to build solidarity and power among different workers.²²

¹⁸ Frida Garza, “‘They Don’t Belong’: Calls Grow to Oust Police from US Labor Movement,” *Guardian*, June 11, 2020.

¹⁹ Garza, “‘They Don’t Belong.’”

²⁰ Service Employees International Union, “SEIU’s Henry: Continued Police Violence against the Black Community Must End,” *SEIU*, August 26, 2020.

²¹ Takahama, “Seattle Police Officers Guild Expelled from King County’s Largest Labor Council.”

²² Vasquez, “Univ. of California Academic Workers’ Union Calls on AFL-CIO To Terminate Police Union’s Membership.”

In addition to influencing politics and legislation, collective labor actions and strikes are a way for organized workers to leverage power to meet demands for better working conditions, like protection from discrimination and harassment, safe working environments, living wages, and more.²³ These organized labor efforts have occurred throughout US history in an often hostile and anti-worker environment, with police serving as a repressive tool to quell labor organizing. Attempts to focus on the uses and misuses of collective bargaining and contract powers by police unions has caused concern among organized labor members who believe these tactics to be an affront to organized labor everywhere, and who also believe that working with police unions rather than standing against them should be the goal.

This memo explores why this task may be difficult if not impossible, due to the history and cultural aspects of police unions and police as an organized labor force in general. Regardless, labor unions that have taken a stand against police violence must be included in the discussion of the obstacles posed by police union power and how to overcome those obstacles to ensure that efforts for police accountability and strengthened community safety that does not rely on policing do not have unintentional consequences for traditional labor unions.

Background

This section begins with a brief overview of historical examples of police and police unions working against traditional labor unions, as well as times when police unions gained power that was then withheld from other labor unions. Historical information about the relationships between police/police unions and organized labor can serve as a foundation and jumping-off point for current labor campaigns that build support within their unions to challenge police union

²³ Benjamin Sachs, “Police Unions: It’s Time to Change the Law and End the Abuse,” *OnLabor*, June 4, 2020.

power without fears of union busting that could backfire on them. This history is also useful for advocates who call on policymakers to examine the pattern of disparities in treatment of labor unions vs. police unions when making decisions about who gets collective bargaining rights and how they are allowed to use them.

This section will also examine general differences between police unions and labor unions. We will delve deeper into why examining and targeting the differential power sources afforded to police is not inherently a union busting tactic and discuss why it may be difficult to follow AFL-CIO leadership's calls to work *with* police unions to advance progressive social justice goals rather than simply sever ties with police unions.

Historical Relationships between Police, Police Unions, Organized Labor, and Local Governments

To understand the modern context of labor and police union relations, it is important to have a historical understanding of the conflicts between organized labor and the police and police unions. This is an especially important topic given the unique privileges and power afforded to police through their union contracts.²⁴ The information presented demonstrates the way police turn against the very same labor unions and their members who strive to be in solidarity with police and police unions.²⁵ Looking at labor leaders' reluctant responses to calls to disaffiliate

²⁴ I am speaking here in terms of collective bargaining/contract rights as well as the differences in the nature of work of police compared to other labor union members (i.e., police have the discretion to use deadly force as they deem necessary in their jobs).

²⁵ There are, however, some instances of police siding with the striking working class. For example, see the Pittsburgh railroad strike of 1877; Pittsburgh police sided with strikers and defended them against troops ordered in from Philadelphia. United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America, "The Great Strike of 1877: Remembering a Worker Rebellion," *UE News*, June 2002. A review of history, however, shows that instances of police siding with labor unions are exceptions and not the norm.

with police unions²⁶ or take a stand against police union collective bargaining that is tied to police abuse,²⁷ one may think there is a history of kinship between organized labor and police unions. However, from the very beginning of organized labor in the United States, police and police unions have served as antagonists to traditional labor unions.²⁸ Despite police themselves struggling to unionize for better wages and working conditions, their history is fraught with conflict against both organized labor and civil rights activists.

In her 2020 essay for *Vanity Fair* magazine addressing the role of police unions in the U.S., Eve L. Ewing underscores one of Maya Angelou’s most known quotes: When people show you who they are, believe them the first time. Mentioning that the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) specifically and intentionally distinguishes itself not as a union, but as a fraternal brotherhood in order to distance itself from associations with traditional labor unions,²⁹ Ewing notes that historical events show us that police and unionism are incompatible.³⁰

Police themselves began to unionize for the same reasons as traditional labor unions—to improve pay, advocate for safer working conditions, and have some form of control in their

²⁶ Richard Trumka, president of the AFL-CIO until his death in August 2021, has stated that he was against disaffiliation and condemnation of police unions, instead encouraging engaging and educating police union members. Generally, the question of police brutality and racism in policing is rarely discussed among labor leaders. Alexia Fernández Campbell, “As Protests Grow, Big Labor Sides with Police Unions,” *Center for Public Integrity*, June 5, 2020.

²⁷ For example, in San Antonio, TX, collective bargaining rights are only allowed for police and firefighters. Organizers want to target police CBAs that they say shield officers from accountability and block reform. However, some local labor leaders, like the former executive vice president of the national AFL-CIO, Linda Chavez-Thompson, are against taking this right away from police. Joshua Fechter, “Ballot Initiative to Gut San Antonio Police Union Draws Opposition from AFL-CIO,” *San Antonio Express-News*, February 7, 2021.

²⁸ Chicago Lawyer Flint Taylor describes police unions as having a “disturbing history . . . [that] makes it very clear that they mirror and reinforce the most racist, brutal and reactionary elements within the departments they claim to represent and actively encourage the code of silence within those departments. Flint Taylor, “Blood On Their Hands: The Racist History of Modern Police Unions,” *In These Times*, January 14, 2015.

²⁹ Fraternal Order of Police, “A History of the Fraternal Order of Police,” *Fraternal Order of Police*, (n.d.).

³⁰ Eve L. Ewing, “Blue Bloods: America’s Brotherhood of Police Officers,” *Vanity Fair*, August 25, 2020.

employment.³¹ In 1919 Boston, police officers were often expected to work 73 to 98 hours per week, sometimes on duty for up to 17 hours per shift, while also not receiving wages commensurate to a rising cost of living and having to work in unsanitary station houses.³² After facing suspension for affiliation with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), Boston police walked out on strike, seeking recognition for their trade union. This led to citywide riots causing then-Governor Calvin Coolidge to send out troops to break the strike, ultimately leading to multiple deaths and injuries. Businesses and anti-labor groups feared that police unionizing would lead to police striking, which would mean other sectors of employees could attempt to unionize and strike as well, without the police to stop them.³³ The Boston Police Commissioner and his corporate lawyer adviser hoped to squash the police unionization effort due to a concern that organized police “would undermine departmental authority and complicate class loyalties of police.”³⁴ The Boston police were the best organized of city workers, and busting their unionization efforts would serve as an example to all other workers in non-police municipal employment that such worker organization would not be tolerated.³⁵

The example made of the Boston police had a ripple effect on other cities, where police unionization also came to a halt. For example, police efforts to join the AFL were quashed in both New York and Washington, DC, while unionization efforts in the private sector met a similar demise.³⁶

³¹ Catherine Fisk and L. Song Richardson, “Police Unions,” *George Washington Law Review* 85, no. 3 (July 2017), 734.

³² Fisk and Richardson, “Police Unions,” 734.

³³ Fisk and Richardson, “Police Unions,” 735.

³⁴ Gerda Ray, “Police Militancy,” *Crime and Social Justice*, no. 7 (1977), 2.

³⁵ Ray, “Police Militancy,” 42.

³⁶ Ray, “Police Militancy,” 42.

However, despite a defeat of unionizing efforts during this time period, police as a labor sector experienced employment changes unique to many other labor unions at the time. In 1977, scholar Gerda Ray noted the contrast in outcomes for police unionization efforts versus those of the private sector: when private sector unionizing efforts were defeated, those workers continued to deal with low wages and dangerous work conditions. Police were instead rewarded with higher wages, shorter hours, and improved working conditions after their unionization efforts were defeated. Ray notes that even in Boston, the entirely new class of officers hired to replace striking workers actually received the wage increases the union had demanded, and that police generally became among the best paid municipal workers.³⁷ Police unionization efforts in the form of affiliation with non-police labor organizations like AFSCME and the AFL grew once again during the period of 1937-1942, but were again met with opposition from city officials and police administrators, who instead preferred police join autonomous (i.e., non-labor affiliated) or FOP-affiliated organizations.³⁸

It is worth noting that police organizations, such as the FOP³⁹ and the Police Benevolent Association (PBA),⁴⁰ predate the 1919 police unionization efforts. Police organizations emerged as fraternal and benevolent societies that advocated for higher wages, improved working conditions, and retirement benefits for police,⁴¹ not unlike traditional labor unions. These fraternal societies became an important safety net for police to fall back on after unionization efforts failed throughout the early and mid-1900s, as these societies had developed political

³⁷ Ray, "Police Militancy," 42.

³⁸ Ray, "Police Militancy," 42.

³⁹ Fraternal Order of Police, "A History of the Fraternal Order of Police," *Fraternal Order of Police*. (n.d.), <https://fop.net/CmsPage.aspx?id=13>

⁴⁰ The New York PBA (NYPBA) was founded in 1894. Ray, "Police Militancy," 40.

⁴¹ Ray, "Police Militancy," 41.

lobbying skills to achieve goals in the police self-interest, such as increased wages, better pension benefits, and defeat of civilian review boards,⁴² as examples. Ray notes that the defeat of police unionization was beneficial for organizations like the FOP, who became an ally in the police administration quest for increased police budgets.⁴³ Though the FOP prohibits police strikes, the organization does use trade union strategy like work slowdowns to win police contract demands, while framing their demands as professionals⁴⁴ rather than as workers, as an attempt to distance the FOP from traditional labor unions.⁴⁵

In the absence of legal protections for police unionizing and collective bargaining akin to traditional labor unions, police instead honed their political influence skills by negotiating informal agreements with public officials, arguably laying the groundwork for the significant role police unions play in politics to this day.⁴⁶ The professionalization of policing, as researcher Stuart Schrader notes, granted police a monopoly of expertise in the particular social region of crime control.⁴⁷ This asserts that police serve a function and have a knowledge that sets them apart from other sectors of workers. In addition to setting themselves apart as professionals with unique expertise, police were able to develop their organizing skills, becoming a de facto interest

⁴² Ray, "Police Militancy," 41, 43-44.

⁴³ Ray, "Police Militancy," 42.

⁴⁴ A discussion of police professionalization generally is a topic outside the scope of this memo. Police professionalism has origins rooted in attempts in the mid-1900s to reform police into politically insulated departments organized hierarchically and in a quasi-military formation, with commitment to efficient operations, centralized command, technological sophistication, and enhanced training for personnel. In what is considered the "second wave" of police professionalization efforts in the 1950s to early 1960s, police professionalization became a method for enhancing the prestige of the policing occupation. David Alan Sklansky, "Police and Democracy," *Michigan Law Review*, vol 103(7), 2005: 1730, 1772).

⁴⁵ Ray, "Police Militancy," 44.

⁴⁶ Fisk and Richardson, "Police Unions," 736.

⁴⁷ Stuart Schrader, "To Protect and Serve Themselves: Police in US Politics since the 1960s," *Public Culture*, vol 31(3), September, 2019, 603.

group.⁴⁸ This developed policing's political power to create what Schrader refers to as a structural trap, where police captured resources (i.e., money) and ideological support from elected officials, due to police ability to convince leaders that more resources would mean less crime—despite this being untrue.⁴⁹ Since 1968, while fiscal austerity shaped local budgets across the US and organized labor union density shrank, many local police forces managed to resist these major trends, unwilling to let go of their “competitively realized gains,” prioritizing their self-interested advocacy over the theoretical mission of crime control.⁵⁰

Government is responsible for the expansion of policing in the US, but not the sole cause. Schrader notes that local police became active in their own self-interests via organizing.⁵¹ Some collateral consequences to this phenomenon include lack of information on the number of police killings and the ability to sustain oversight and accountability efforts. Schrader identifies police organization efforts and the ability to leverage this collective organization to pressure cities for more resources (despite lack of evidence that more police resources effectively reduce or eliminate crime) as a profiteering outlook.⁵² He concludes that any critique of policing that fails to address this phenomenon is “destined to fail politically in its quest to shrink the power of police.”⁵³

While police themselves isolated their profession from other workers, so too did those in the ruling class. For example, Sidney Haring documents historic points in time where those in power made decisions favoring policing at the expense of the working class in both Buffalo,

⁴⁸ Schrader, “To Protect and Serve Themselves,” 602.

⁴⁹ Schrader, “To Protect and Serve Themselves,” 603.

⁵⁰ Schrader, “To Protect and Serve Themselves,” 610.

⁵¹ Schrader, “To Protect and Serve Themselves.”

⁵² Schrader, “To Protect and Serve Themselves,” 620.

⁵³ Schrader, “To Protect and Serve Themselves,” 620.

New York, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Harring specifically notes late 1800s Buffalo as an example of police expansion under a well-organized local ruling class, with police becoming a tool for intervening in class struggle on behalf of the ruling class. By 1884, Buffalo police had begun to use their role as strikebreakers to demand more resources from the city government, which meant the hiring of more officers.⁵⁴ Similarly, the late 1800s in Milwaukee were marked with efforts by the ruling class to exercise their power against the working class via policing. When unable to secure power on the city level, Wisconsin Republicans were able to push through police legislation on the state level, doing so from 1885 to 1910.⁵⁵

Ewing also notes that the most formative years of the organized labor movement, as workers struggled to assert their rights as union members, are marked with police violence as a reaction to these exercises of worker power.⁵⁶ Similarly, the rise in popularity and entrenchment of police unions in the late 1960s was a reaction to the Civil Rights movement and its calls for police reform and accountability.⁵⁷ The graphic below highlights several incidents that demonstrate the volatile relationship between police and organized workers. The incidents reveal a pattern of policing as a tool of state opposition to organized workers that runs through policing's own history, including up to and through the formation of police unions that represent and continue to

⁵⁴ Simply put, police administration put its argument for more men in terms of strike control needs, which those in power granted. Sidney L. Harring, *Policing A Class Society: The Experience of American Cities 1865-1915*, 2nd ed., (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2017), 75-76.

⁵⁵ Harring notes that by 1885, the rising level of strike activity in Milwaukee meant the ruling class would strengthen the institution of policing by expanding their size and specifying their function and organization. This expanded Milwaukee police department became the first police force in the US to gain civil service protections, namely job security and better pay. Sidney L. Harring, *Policing a Class Society*, 89.

⁵⁶ Ewing, "Blue Bloods."

⁵⁷ Katherine Bies notes that police officers during the Civil Rights era were known for using strikes or strike alternatives (such as work slowdowns or sick callouts) as well as racism and fear tactics as political strategies. Police unions grew more isolated, emphasizing solidarity among their members as they became more hostile to a public that demanded reforms and accountability. Katherine J. Bies, "Let the Sunshine In: Illuminating the Powerful Role Police Unions Play in Shielding Officer Misconduct," *Stanford Law & Policy Review* 28 (May 2017), 120–26.

protect police officers who engage in violence against labor union members and the public at large.

| Historical Incidents of Police Harm Against Organized Labor | |
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| 1886 Haymarket Affair (Chicago, Illinois) | Striking in support of an eight-hour workday, demonstrating workers were met with police repression, which included the death of one person and injury of others. Labor leaders gathered to protest this police brutality and were once again met with police repression; an unidentified individual threw a bomb and police responded with random gunfire. Multiple people died, including police and civilians, and many more were injured. ⁵⁸ |
| 1886 Great Southwest Railroad Strike (Arkansas, Illinois, Kansas, Missouri, and Texas) | Opposing cost-cutting policies affecting their jobs, workers went on strike at the beginning of March and shut down railway lines in five states. Striking workers were met with police force in Missouri and Texas and many were arrested. By the end of March, struggles between striking workers and police resulted in gunfire that killed and injured multiple people. ⁵⁹ |
| 1874 Tompkins Square Blood or Bread Riot (New York City) | During a period referred to as the Great Panic, workers in New York City, many of them immigrants, found themselves unemployed and thus made demands for local government to fund job creation programs. Organizers obtained a permit to rally at Tompkins Square Park on January 13, 1874 but did not realize in time that the police had pressured the Parks Department to revoke the permit. Over 7,000 workers arrived to the rally where mounted policemen proceeded to beat them with billy clubs, resulting in many injuries and 46 arrests. ⁶⁰ |
| 1909 Uprising of 20,000 (New York City) | Considered one of the largest strikes by women in American history, this moment involved more than 20,000 Yiddish-speaking immigrants, mostly young women who launched an 11-week general strike in the shirtwaist industry of NYC with demands around wages, hours, workplace safety, and sexual harassment and invasions of privacy in the factories. Manufacturing companies hired people to abuse strikers, often with aid from policemen who then arrested strikers on trumped-up charges of assault. ⁶¹ |
| 1911 Cleveland Garment Strike (Cleveland, Ohio) | Garment workers walked off the job to strike after their employer refused to listen to working condition demands. The strike resulted in riots and police action that involved beating people with clubs and arresting picketers, mounted police chasing crowds of picketers while |

⁵⁸ Britannica, “Haymarket Affair” accessed, April 27, 2020.

⁵⁹ Bureau of Labor Statistics and Inspection of Missouri, *The Official History of the Great Strike of 1886 on the Southwestern Railway System* (Jefferson City, MO: Tribune Printing Company, 1886).

⁶⁰ Gemma Solomons, “7 Protests That Shook Lower Manhattan,” *Tenement Museum*, January 19, 2018.

⁶¹ Tony Michels, “Uprising of 20,000 (1909),” in *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, Jewish Women’s Archive.

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| | brandishing clubs, and private guards hired by manufacturers in the city committing arson and blaming it on the striking workers. ⁶² |
| 1933–1934 Milwaukee Amalgamated Transit Union Local 998 Battle for Union Recognition (Milwaukee, Wisconsin) | In 1933, workers in Milwaukee negotiating for union recognition were met with refusal and thus began to strike by 1934. By June, picketers were met with force and tear gassed by police, though many resisted. Over the course of two days, 58 people were arrested and 16 injured, including seven policemen. ⁶³ |
| 1937 Memorial Day Massacre (Chicago, Illinois) | Spurred by the police killing of 10 demonstrators during the Little Steel Strike of 1937, hundreds of people gathered in support at the Steel Workers Organizing Committee (SWOC) headquarters in Chicago on Memorial Day. As the crowd began to march, they were stopped by Chicago police, who fired on the crowd and pursued people as they fled. As one young demonstrator recalled, police had told her to “get off the field, or I’ll put a bullet in your back.” ⁶⁴ |
| 1990 Century City Justice for Janitors March (Los Angeles, California) | On June 15, 1990, janitors gathered to protest and march against stagnated wages and loss of benefits. When workers linked arms to cross the street, police officers confronted them by beating them with batons, injuring dozens of marchers. ⁶⁵ |
| 2000 Republican National Convention (RNC) Puppet Warehouse Incident (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) | Four state police officers posed as union carpenters to infiltrate a group of organizers planning to demonstrate against the criminal justice system at the RNC. They gathered intelligence and used it to issue a search warrant that led to the raid of the puppet warehouse used for organizing and preparation in West Philadelphia. In an affidavit, cops stated that they believed that the organizers were communists receiving funding support from sympathetic trade unions. ⁶⁶ |
| 2011 Wisconsin Capitol Building Occupation Against Act 10 (Madison, Wisconsin) | In 2011, union members and supporters rallied at the state capitol building and the surrounding area in protest of a bill that aimed to strip public sector unions of their collective bargaining rights. The protesters were joined by a small group of off-duty police officers who also opposed the bill. Within a few days, police cleared out the protesters and arrested 59 people. ⁶⁷ The president of the state police union, the Wisconsin Law Enforcement Association (WLEA), personally opposed the bill as well. But when interviewed by journalists, he noted that he and his fellow officers would still don riot gear and follow their orders to |

⁶² C. E. Ruthenberg, “The Cleveland Garment Workers’ Strike,” *International Socialist Review*, September 1911.

⁶³ Amalgamated Transit Union Local 998, “A Walk Through the History of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 998,” *ATU988*, accessed December 7, 2020.

⁶⁴ Illinois Labor History Society, “Memorial Day Massacre,” *Illinois Labor History Society*, n.d.

⁶⁵ Natividad Quintana and Maria Estrada, “When police beat janitors—but janitors won justice.,” *SEIU*, July 12, 2015.

⁶⁶ Dan McQuade, “Remembering the 2000 Philadelphia RNC: Puppets, Police and The Rock,” *Philadelphia Magazine*, February 12, 2015.

⁶⁷ Kristian Williams, *Our Enemies in Blue: Police and Power in America*, 3rd ed. (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2015), 185.

break up the protest, if that is what then-Governor Scott Walker wanted them to do.⁶⁸

The contentious relationship between police and organized labor remains to this day. Organized workers attempting to unionize must still deal with police intimidation,⁶⁹ police brutality, and the protection that stems from police contract power—not to mention, the murders of children of labor union members⁷⁰ and of labor union members themselves at the hands of police.⁷¹ It is important to both explore the relationships between traditional labor unions and police unions and to address how they can be leveraged in the struggle for police accountability and community safety. The next section provides a brief overview of what police and labor unions look like and what functions they serve.⁷²

⁶⁸ Stephen C. Webster, “Exclusive: Troopers Would ‘Absolutely’ Use Force on Wisc. Protesters If Ordered, Police Union President Tells Raw,” *Raw Story*, February 21, 2011.

⁶⁹ *Truthout* journalists covering union organizing efforts at the Amazon warehouse in Bessemer, AL reported that they were met with police presence for trespassing and filming on public property, despite not standing near the facility. Additionally, Amazon had hired local Bessemer police officers to provide security for the facility at all hours, leading to suspicions that police presence was intimidating workers during the union drive. Madeleine Freeman and Luigi Morris, “Cops Hired by Amazon Are Intimidating Workers and Supporters of the Union Drive,” *Truthout*, March 27, 2021.

In early 2021, workers at the Hunts Point Produce Market in the Bronx, NY voted to go on their first strike in 35 years due to management’s refusal to agree to a \$1 wage increase. During a nighttime picket line, more than 300 police officers in riot gear descended on the strikers and arrested five people for allegedly obstructing traffic. Natasha Lennard, “Forget Biden’s Bust of Cesar Chavez: Hunts Point Strike is the Bold Labor Action the Country Needs,” *The Intercept*, January 23, 2021.

⁷⁰ When addressing the notion of why the labor movement should be involved with the death of Michael Brown at the hands of police officer Darren Wilson, former AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka mentioned that Brown’s mother, Lesley McSpadden, is an AFL-CIO member through her grocery store job. He noted that Darren Wilson is also a union member, remarking, “our brother killed our sister’s son.” Richard Trumka, “Trumka: Our Brother Killed Our Sister’s Son,” speech, St. Louis, MO, *AFL-CIO*, September 15, 2014.

⁷¹ Breonna Taylor, a former EMT murdered by police in Louisville, KY in early 2020, was a member of Teamsters Local 783, according to Kentucky Representative Attica Scott. Mike Elk, “America’s Biggest Unions are Bungling the Current Racial Justice Moment and Failing Their Workers of Color,” *Business Insider*, November 1, 2020. Additionally, Philando Castile, a public-school employee in Saint Paul, MN, who was murdered by police during a traffic stop in 2016, was a member of Teamsters Local 320. International Brotherhood of Teamsters, “Teamsters Mourn the Loss of Local 320 Member Philando Castile,” *International Brotherhood of Teamsters*, July 9, 2016.

⁷² This is not an exhaustive overview and does not go into detail about different police unions for different levels of police officers, school police unions, sheriffs’ unions, or Law Enforcement Officer Bills of Rights provisions, which

Comparing Police Unions & Labor Unions

Generally, the term union refers to a membership organization that represents employees' interests when engaging in collective bargaining and signing contracts that govern working conditions.⁷³ Police unions are organizations that represent police officers. Police are considered unique by the nature of their employment in that they are granted a range of unique powers in society, like the discretion to use deadly force.⁷⁴ The professionalization of police throughout the 1900s also contributed to a political autonomy and insulation of rank-and-file police officers (most often represented by the FOP) that further set police apart from other occupations.⁷⁵

The organizations representing police can have CBA/contract power, meaning the organizations have the power to negotiate contract terms on behalf of their members. This power has resulted in protections for police that inhibit accountability, reform, and invest-divest efforts. A notable example is disciplinary grievance and arbitration procedures where officers who have committed harm can be let off the hook and reinstated to their positions, as well as contract terms that allow for the destruction of disciplinary records after a few years, effectively erasing paper trails on police harm.⁷⁶

There are also many police unions/organizations that do not have contract powers and simply serve an identity or solidarity purpose. This includes race, gender, and sexuality-based police

are state-level legislation that provide similar protections (specifically around investigations into misconduct) that police unions do through collective bargaining and contracts.

⁷³ Fisk and Richardson, "Police Unions."

⁷⁴ As Benjamin Levin notes, "As agents of the state empowered to act out the official monopoly on violence, police appear very different from the teacher or the bus driver." Benjamin Levin, "What's Wrong with Police Unions?" *Columbia Law Review* 120, no. 5 (2020): 1370-1371.

⁷⁵ Schrader, "To Protect and Serve Themselves: Police in US Politics since the 1960s," *Public Culture*, vol. 31(3), September, 2019, 605

⁷⁶ For more information on contract terms, see the Community Resource Hub's previous police unions memo: Kelcey Duggan, "Police Unions and the Obstacles They Pose."

unions such as the National Black Police Association (NBPA), the National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives (NAWLEE), Gay Officers Action League (GOAL), etc.

Police unions that do not have CBA/contract powers may still have political influence⁷⁷ through political action committees (PACs).⁷⁸ Some police are represented either in their CBA/contract negotiations or politically⁷⁹ by non-police unions, like the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT)⁸⁰ or the National Association of Government Employees (NAGE),⁸¹ or they are members of a non-police labor federation, such as the AFL-CIO affiliate International Union of Police Associations (IUPA).

Non-police unions are divided into either public sector unions or private sector unions. Private unions represent workers who exist in non-governmental industries, whereas public sector unions represent government workers like teachers, post office employees, police, and more.⁸² Public unions negotiate wages and employment terms with state and local governments.⁸³ The framework for regulating public unions varies by state, and some states (e.g.,

⁷⁷ Discussions of political influence and the ability to leverage identity-based police unions against racism, bias, and violence supported or carried out by police unions with contract powers is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁷⁸ Fei, Weaver, and Zhang, “Police Money in US Politics under Scrutiny as Calls for Reform Grow.”

⁷⁹ For example, the Atlanta Police Department (APD) does not have a collective bargaining/contract with the city but is otherwise represented by the International Brotherhood of Police Officers (IBPO) when it comes to protections, concerns over work conditions, and political influence. Noelle Du Bois, “Arresting Law Enforcement Abuses Begins with Police Unions,” *Georgia Public Policy Foundation*, August 21, 2020.

⁸⁰ The IBT represents municipal, county, state police (general police, state police, school police, housing police, highway patrol officers, etc.). International Brotherhood of Teamsters, “Who We Represent,” *International Brotherhood of Teamsters*, accessed March 9, 2021.

⁸¹ The NAGE is affiliated with Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and includes the International Brotherhood of Police Officers (IBPO) under their representation, as well as the Coastal Florida Police Benevolent Association (CFPBA). National Association of Government Employees, “Our Union: Who We Represent,” *National Association of Government Employees*, accessed March 9, 2021.

⁸² Stephen Koppekin, “Public vs Private Unions: What’s the Difference?” *Stephen Koppekin*, July 25, 2017.

⁸³ Stephen Koppekin, “Public vs Private Unions.”

North Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin) grant few or no CBA rights to public workers,⁸⁴ often giving exceptions to police and firefighters.⁸⁵ Private sector unions are governed by federal law and collectively bargain with their employer, not the government, and can negotiate wages and working conditions.⁸⁶

Much like police unions, labor unions also have political influence and can wield that power in city and state politics when they are aligned on an issue.⁸⁷ Labor councils bring a variety of labor unions together, typically in a specific geographic area. For example, the MLK Labor Council in Seattle, the Southwest Washington Central Labor Council, Eastern Piedmont Central Labor Council in North Carolina, and the San Mateo County Central Labor Council in California connect various labor unions and workers in an area or region to communicate and take action on issues of concern to workers, promoting solidarity among the different unions.⁸⁸ Labor councils can be an important source of consolidated power among organized labor, not only for protecting

⁸⁴ Sernatinger, Andrew. “Understanding Unions in the United States.” *Tempest*, January 14, 2021.

⁸⁵ “When it comes to state labor law, police unions often look quite similar to other public-sector unions. Five states—Virginia, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee—explicitly forbid police from bargaining collectively. But those same states also forbid public school teachers and (with the exception of Georgia) firefighters from bargaining collectively. Similarly, 48 states treat police and teachers the same when it comes to the legality of collective wage negotiation. There are exceptions: Texas, for example, forbids public-sector workers from bargaining collectively, but makes an exception for police officers.” Benjamin Levin, “What’s Wrong with Police Unions?” *Columbia Law Review* 120, no. 5 (2020):1357.

While it is true that there has been legislation that aims to weaken public sector union power that specifically excludes police, there have been a few instances where police unions align with non-police unions. For example, a 2017 Pennsylvania bill that aimed to prohibit public sector union members from donating to their unions’ PACs had a version that excluded police, corrections, and fire unions, but the Pennsylvania Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) declined their exclusion to stand with the targeted non-police unions. Ultimately the bill did not pass. Juliana Feliciano Reyes, “Philadelphia’s Labor Movement Faces a Reckoning over the City’s Powerful Police Union,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 17, 2020; Steve Esack, “Pennsylvania House Rejects Bill Targeting Unions’ Political Activity,” *The Morning Call*, December 12, 2017.

⁸⁶ Southwest Pipe Trades Association, “Not All Unions Are Created Equal,” *Southwest Pipe Trades Association*, August 16, 2019.

⁸⁷ Reyes, “Philadelphia’s Labor Movement Faces a Reckoning over the City’s Powerful Police Union.”

⁸⁸ Southwest Washington Central Labor Council, “Who We Are: What Is a Labor Council?” *Southwest Washington Central Labor Council*, accessed March 10, 2021.

and advocating for workers, but also for advancing social, racial, and economic justice efforts.⁸⁹

Police organizations like the FOP have their own labor councils, which are solely focused on representing members of FOP lodges in specific states, not members of other labor unions, by providing resources for contract negotiations and grievances.⁹⁰

“Isn’t Challenging Police Unions Just Union Busting?”

A common response when discussing challenges to the power of police unions to block reform and impede accountability is that any challenge to police union power, particularly by targeting their collective bargaining rights, is a threat to all labor unions and their collective bargaining rights. This is an understandable concern. However, a closer look at the status of police unions in the US reveals an already existing disparity between police unions and labor unions, most notably in legislation that directly attacks labor union power but explicitly carves out exceptions for police and firefighters.

Police Unions Are Not Traditional Labor Unions

The 2020 uprisings against police brutality following the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others led to renewed calls on the labor movement to address police violence and affiliations with police unions. This in turn led to many traditional labor union members, especially those in leadership roles, taking a stance in support of police unions and arguing for discussion and not isolation.⁹¹

⁸⁹ “The MLK Labor Story,” *MLK Labor*, accessed March 10, 2021.

⁹⁰ Illinois FOP Labor Council, “About Us,” *Illinois FOP Labor Council*, accessed March 22, 2022; Michigan FOP, “Fraternal Order of Police Labor Council,” *Michigan FOP*, accessed March 22, 2022; Fraternal Order of Police Labor Council, “Fraternal Order of Police Labor Council New Jersey – FOPNJLC,” *Fraternal Order of Police Labor Council*, accessed March 22, 2022.

⁹¹ Benjamin Pu and Charlie Gile, “National Labor Groups Mostly Close Ranks to Defend Police Unions,” *NBC News*, June 21, 2020.

As previously mentioned, police unions have a history of distinguishing and distancing themselves from traditional labor unions by opting to use names such as fraternal orders, associations, and protective leagues. The police forces they represent also have a history of violence against (other) labor unions through strikebreaking or police killings of labor union members or their family members. Little news coverage or academic research exists on how police unions explicitly feel about labor unions, and whether they reciprocally support the labor unions who have stood with them. The information that does exist on this topic points to a general lack of solidarity on the part of police and police unions with other labor unions.

Paul F. Clark, a professor at Pennsylvania State University, wrote in a 2020 op-ed that the absence of police unions affiliating with other labor unions under the AFL-CIO—the largest labor federation that unites all unions in the United States—is an indication that they do not view themselves as part of the labor movement.⁹²

In cities like Philadelphia, *Philadelphia Inquirer* reporter Juliana Feliciano Reyes reports that labor union members view the police union, the Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 5, as an island separate from the rest of the local labor movement.⁹³ Kristian Williams, in his book *Our Enemies in Blue*, examined the rise of police union power as well as the history of police in their role as strikebreakers. He addresses the argument that police are working class members who have a history of struggle for unionization, and that attempts to demand police accountability can veer into attacks on working people and labor unions at large. Williams notes that police occupy a

⁹² Clark does note, however, that the exception is the International Union of Police Associations (IUPA), which represents 2.7% of American police. Paul F. Clark, “Why police unions are not part of the American labor movement,” *Salon*, August 28, 2020.

⁹³ Reyes does note one specific example of the state-level FOP standing with labor unions by refusing to have police unions carved out of 2017 legislation that aimed to limit public sector unions’ ability to collect political action committee donations. Ultimately, this legislation did not pass. Reyes, “Philadelphia’s Labor Movement Faces a Reckoning over the City’s Powerful Police Union.”

dual position in society: workers *and* overseers charged with protecting the interests of the ruling class (e.g., political leaders, those who owned capital, etc.), often at the expense of other workers. Furthermore, over the course of history, the ruling class increasingly treated police differently than other workers, effectively separating them from the labor movement through policy decisions (historically and currently). The division was further spurred on by the growing presence of police unions that used labels like “association” and “fraternal order” instead of union.⁹⁴ While police and the labor movement have similar histories riddled with struggle, violent and non-violent, and similar goals for unionizing, ultimately it is the police who distinguished and isolated themselves as different from other labor unions, leading to a disparity in treatment and power of police unions versus traditional labor unions, especially around accountability for misconduct as serious as sexual assault,⁹⁵ promoting white supremacist beliefs,⁹⁶ or murder.⁹⁷

The Double-Standard Problem

Fear of government union-busting efforts as it concerns limiting union power is not unfounded. As long as organized labor has existed, it has been met with opposition from

⁹⁴ In one example, Williams highlights that a court decided the NYC Patrolman’s Benevolent Association was legally able to operate as a union (by organizing officers and negotiating contracts) because it was labeled an association and not technically a union. Williams, *Our Enemies in Blue*, 220–22.

⁹⁵ For example, the ability to add contract provisions that allow for destruction of records relating to sexual assault and misconduct, erasing a pattern of harm. Reade Levinson, “Across the U.S., police contracts shield officers from scrutiny and discipline.” *Reuters Investigates*, January 27, 2017.

⁹⁶ Social media posts gathered over a period of years showed Philadelphia police officers posting offensive and racist content to their profiles. The FOP spoke out against discipline for these officers. Chris Palmer, “Philly police union: Any firing over Facebook scandal would be ‘completely out of bounds.’” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 20, 2019. As of 2021, at least one officer has been reinstated to his job with back pay after a grievance arbitrator ruled in the officer’s favor. Associated Press, “Philly Police Officer Fired Over Facebook Posts Reinstated, Given Back Pay,” *NBC Philadelphia*, June 6, 2021.

⁹⁷ Kimbriell Kelly, Wesley Lowery, and Steven Rich, “Fired/Rehired: Police Chiefs Are Often Forced to Put Officers Fired for Misconduct Back on the Streets,” *Washington Post*, August 3, 2017.

members of the ruling class who often feel threatened by this organized power among workers. The United States has a history of legislation and policy that weakens labor union power over working conditions and wages, so it is not a stretch to be concerned that aims at collective bargaining rights, even for the police, are a potential threat to other labor unions' collective bargaining rights.⁹⁸ However, the difference comes in the details of many already existing legislation and policy efforts that afford (or aim to afford) police unions special privileges that other labor unions do not have access to. In some jurisdictions, police are the only public agency that have formal collective bargaining rights, while other public unions such as teachers' unions or sanitation workers unions do not have those same rights.⁹⁹

For example, Texas state law does not allow collective bargaining between public sector unions and cities, except for police and firefighters, who are allowed collective bargaining rights if voters in a specific city agree to it. In San Antonio, TX, only police and firefighters are allowed collective bargaining rights with the city; all other public unions can only engage in a process called "meet and confer."¹⁰⁰ The city government does not have to participate in or agree to as they are required to do with collective bargaining agreements.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ From the AFL-CIO: "Collective bargaining is the process in which working people, through their unions, negotiate contracts with their employers to determine their terms of employment, including pay, benefits, hours, leave, job health and safety policies, ways to balance work and family, and more. Collective bargaining is a way to solve workplace problems." AFL-CIO, "Collective Bargaining," *AFL-CIO*, n.d.

⁹⁹ The *Janus v. AFSCME* 2018 Supreme Court decision affected all public sector unions. Ultimately, the decision does not allow public unions to mandate financial payment in order to be represented by the union. In regard to policing, the police union, where it exists and where it has collective bargaining/contract negotiation rights, must represent non-union members in that negotiation regardless of whether they pay union dues or not. A deeper dive into how this affects the police vs. non-police public sector unions, if at all, is beyond the scope of this paper. Fraternal Order of Police, "Janus Decision."

¹⁰⁰ The term "meet and confer" was historically used when public employees began unionizing but had not yet won collective bargaining rights under the law. Meet and confer discussions are not legally binding like a contract reached through collective bargaining. Erik Gunn, "Union Organizers Aim to Thread Act 10 Needle," *Wisconsin Examiner*, January 28, 2020.

¹⁰¹ Fechter, "Ballot Initiative to Gut San Antonio Police Union Draws Opposition from AFL-CIO."

Similarly, some states have written labor laws specifically to shield police (and often firefighters) from attacks on collective bargaining rights. In 2017, Kimberly Quick, former senior policy associate for The Century Foundation, highlighted the disparity in attitudes and treatment towards teachers' unions specifically as compared to police unions, noting that teachers' unions often receive the most pushback, especially from conservatives.¹⁰² Beyond the compare and contrast of teachers versus police unions, Quick also notes a few state-level examples of legislation and policy that took aim at public sector unions while purposefully excluding police unions. Quick's examples include the following:

- In 2011, Wisconsin passed Act 10, a law that massively reduced public sector union bargaining power within the state that led to 10% pay reductions, except for the police and firefighters excluded from this law.¹⁰³ Ten years after the passage of Act 10, the exclusion for police meant that cities throughout Wisconsin have had to struggle to keep up with the rising costs of policing and its impact on city budgets.¹⁰⁴
- In 2021, Michigan "right to work" laws aimed to weaken public sector unions, but notably exempted police unions from this effort.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Quick highlights remarks made by former New Jersey governor Chris Christie, former GOP presidential candidate John Kasich, former Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos, and hedge fund manager and Success Academy chair Daniel Loeb, who all described teachers' unions as destructive, self-involved, and discriminatory. Kimberly Quick, "The Double Standard for Public-Sector Unions," *The Century Foundation*, October 17, 2017.

¹⁰³ For example, the union for state patrol troopers was able to secure a 17% pay increase for its members. Quick, "The Double Standard for Public-Sector Unions."

¹⁰⁴ Riley Vetterkind, "10 Years Later: Wisconsin's Act 10 Has Produced Labor Savings, but at a Cost," *The Wisconsin State Journal*, February 7, 2021.

¹⁰⁵ Quick, "The Double Standard for Public-Sector Unions."

- Iowa legislators proposed a bill in 2017 that aimed to eliminate most collective bargaining rights for public union employees; however, legislators were able to exclude police and firefighters from this bill by organizing public employees into two different categories: public safety and non-public safety.¹⁰⁶
- Former Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner proposed cuts to pensions for public employees in 2015, notably excluding police officers and firefighters from this cut because of his personal belief that they deserved to be treated differently from other workers.¹⁰⁷
- In Louisville, Kentucky, 2021 collective bargaining agreements between city government and the FOP included a provision that prohibits layoffs of police officers for the duration of the contract—in the past contracts typically lasted for five years. This is not a common contract provision¹⁰⁸ and a provision that, as organizers point out, is not afforded to other workers, such as the public library, which includes non-police public sector workers.¹⁰⁹

Differences Between Police/Police Unions and Organized Labor

Another common response to demands for organized labor to cut ties with police unions is that labor unions should not isolate police and police unions, but instead work with them to

¹⁰⁶ Quick, “The Double Standard for Public-Sector Unions.”

¹⁰⁷ Noam Scheiber, “Public Pension Cuts Exempt Police and Firefighters,” *New York Times*, March 19, 2015.

¹⁰⁸ Ariana Levinson, “Louisville’s Police Contracts Must Be Revised,” *LEO Weekly*, May 5, 2021.

¹⁰⁹ “[The no layoff provision] means that there can’t be layoffs for the duration of the agreement, which may, consistent with past contracts, extend for five years. This is NOT the same in any other CBA. Ex: the library agreement does not include this clause and as a result, layoffs have occurred.” The490Project (@The490Project) Twitter, July 29, 2021, 9:55 am.

reform policing.¹¹⁰ Research into police union culture shows that any efforts of reform-minded labor unions to align with police unions may be difficult, if not impossible. As mentioned in a previous Community Resource Hub memo,¹¹¹ police unions often engage in fear-mongering and defensive measures when challenged. It is likely that calls from organized labor to make police union contracts more transparent and accountable to the communities that they serve would be met with the same reactionary measures.

Police unions themselves do not see their organizations as labor unions. Kristian Williams, author of *Our Enemies in Blue*, asserts that police unions/associations are not members of the labor movement, but are instead semi-autonomous parts of the state.¹¹² For those police unions that historically referred to themselves as anything but a union (association, fraternal order, league, etc.), this meant that police unions developed in relative isolation from the rest of the labor movement. Some police unions, like the New York PBA broke off from association with other city employees (e.g., fire, corrections, sanitation).¹¹³ This allowed police unions to develop their own culture of shared identity around the unique function/status/position of police, aligning their values with their institutional interests (law and order, social control) rather than aligning their values with class interests like the rest of the labor movement (e.g., equitable wages and

¹¹⁰ In a June 9, 2020 statement, the AFL-CIO General Board stated the following in response to calls to disaffiliate from police unions: “We believe the best way to use our influence on the issue of police brutality is to engage our police affiliates rather than isolate them. Many of our unions have adopted a code of excellence for their members and industries that could and should be applied to those who are sworn to protect and serve. We believe the labor movement must hold our own institutions accountable. A union must never be a shield from criminal conduct.” AFL-CIO, “AFL-CIO General Board Recommends Police Reform, Calls for Defense Secretary, Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff and President of Minneapolis Police Union to Resign,” *AFL-CIO*, June 9, 2020.

¹¹¹ Kelcey Duggan, “Police Unions and the Obstacles They Pose,” (Community Resource Hub, 2020) <https://communityresourcehub.org/resources/police-unions-and-the-obstacles-they-pose/>

¹¹² Williams, *Our Enemies in Blue*, 230.

¹¹³ Williams, *Our Enemies in Blue*, 223.

better working conditions for all workers regardless of job industry, and anti-racism and anti-discrimination values). In modern times, this culture that prioritizes institutional interests over class (worker) interests can be summed up by the Blue Lives Matter phenomenon wherein police have created their own class of citizens—police or “blue lives”—and their own symbols, flags, and behaviors to uphold this culture in response to the Black Lives Matter movement.¹¹⁴

Researchers at York University challenged the notion that police unions can redeem their public image and become progressive agents for reform by building solidarity with social justice groups and the wider labor movement.¹¹⁵ The authors note that the kind of solidarity, which they label “blue solidarity”—built within police unions and through the Blue Lives Matter movement—is a highly exclusionary form of solidarity. It pits police union interests as unique from the interests of other labor unions and social justice groups and in turn works to undermine the interests of labor unions and social justice groups and instead protects the interests of the police union.¹¹⁶ The proliferation of Blue Lives Matter attitudes among police unions has increased tensions between police unions and other labor unions that have aligned themselves with the Black Lives Matter movement, illustrating that blue solidarity conflicts with and at times directly aims to undermine the forms of solidarity within the working class.¹¹⁷ For example, in 2016

¹¹⁴ Mark P Thomas and Steven Tufts, “Blue Solidarity: Police Unions, Race and Authoritarian Populism in North America,” *Work, Employment and Society* 34, no. 1 (February 1, 2020): 134.

¹¹⁵ Thomas and Tufts, “Blue Solidarity,” 129.

¹¹⁶ The authors note that not all police unions operate on solidarity built solely from a Blue Lives Matter culture, specifically referring to identity-based police unions like those that seek to build racial solidarity within policing, such as the National Black Police Association (NBPA); Thomas and Tufts, “Blue Solidarity,” 129. It is important to clarify, however, that identity-based police unions often do not have collective bargaining power and do not have as much power in shielding officers from discipline and accountability.

¹¹⁷ Thomas and Tufts use the example of the 2016 American Federation of Teachers’ participation in Black Lives Matter protests of the police murder of Philando Castile. The AFT participation was publicly condemned by two Minnesota police union leaders who referred to the Black Lives Matter movement as one of “radical activists hell-bent on destabilizing our communities.” Thomas and Tufts, “Blue Solidarity,” 136.

members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) participated in Black Lives Matter protests of the police murder of Philando Castile. The AFT participation was publicly condemned by two Minnesota police union leaders who referred to the Black Lives Matter movement as one of “radical activists hell-bent on destabilizing our communities.” Ultimately, calls from labor union leaders to work hand-in-hand with police unions to enact reform, rather than challenge police unions through expulsion from affiliations or labor councils, will have to reckon with the inevitable obstacles posed by the blue solidarity present within police unions.

Penn State professor Paul F. Clark points out that police unions are like other labor unions in that they fight for their members but that is the extent of the similarity. Police unions protect the interests of their members (and of the institution of policing generally) without consideration for other workers, whereas traditional labor unions operate in a context of a larger movement that benefits all workers,¹¹⁸ not just a single occupation. Furthermore, Clark highlights the role the AFL-CIO plays in unifying organized labor in the US, where only one police union—the IUPA) representing only 2.7% of US police—is an affiliate. Overall, there is a lack of police solidarity with organized labor historically and currently in both police behavior and in police union affiliations with organized labor. This begs the question: why should organized labor love or support something that does not love or support them back?

Police unions also differ from labor unions in the ways they have engaged in discrimination and the ways that they wielded their collective bargaining and representation power. Historically, police associations barred Black members and police departments refused to hire Black police officers. Often, Black officers would be restricted to only working in Black neighborhoods or

¹¹⁸ Paul F. Clark, “Why police unions are not part of the American labor movement,” *Salon*, August 28, 2020.

forbidden from arresting white people or from wearing a police uniform.¹¹⁹ Lawsuits against police unions include instances such as when Black officers with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) sued the Police Protective League in 1995 for discrimination, describing the police union as white supremacist.¹²⁰ In Minneapolis, Minnesota, Black officers filed suit against the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) in 2007 for discrimination, citing racist retaliation to their hiring and xenophobic remarks made by officer Bob Kroll, who went on to lead the local police union until his retirement in 2021.¹²¹

Lynda Williams, president of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), has also pointed to “a blanket of systemic racism in policing.”¹²² Police unions like the FOP, charged with representing and protecting Black officers, have a history of differential treatment of Black officers, public figures, and police reform advocates.¹²³ The FOP is not the only police association that has spoken out against accusations of racism within policing and police union function. Vince Champion, the south-east regional director for the International Brotherhood of Police Officers (IBPO), a member organization of the National Association of Government Employees (NAGE) labor union, once stated that his police organization does not see color and does not see race, only seeing “blue” (meaning a fellow

¹¹⁹ Williams, *Our Enemies in Blue*, 227.

¹²⁰ Williams, *Our Enemies in Blue*, 227.

¹²¹ Kroll continued to be involved in controversy, such as through his open support for former president Donald Trump, defending officers accused of murder, and referring to the firing of officers involved in George Floyd’s murder as a “terrorist movement.” Allana Akhtar. “The Battle between the Minneapolis Chief of Police — Who Once Sued the Department for Racial Discrimination — and the City’s Bombastic Union Leader Is a Showcase in How Cops Resist Reform.” *Business Insider*, June 6, 2020.

¹²² Isidoro Rodriguez, “Stop Turning Your Head: Black Cops Speak Out Against ‘Blanket of Racism,’ *The Crime Report*, March 2, 2021.

¹²³ During the 2020 protests, the president of the Chicago FOP threatened officers with expulsion from the organization and additional charges if they showed support for protesters of police violence. As a result, both a Black woman officer and a Hispanic woman officer both faced charges of failing to promote fraternalism after they were seen kneeling with protesters. Rodriguez, “Stop Turning Your Head.”

police officer).¹²⁴ Members of The Marshall Project note that Black officers often have no choice but to join police unions due to mandate or because they need the benefits that come from the police union's collective bargaining power, yet these officers repeatedly must watch as police unions defend white officers who have committed violent acts against Black people.¹²⁵

When other labor unions historically used collective bargaining powers to discriminate against Black workers by barring them from employment or relegating them to inferior jobs, those labor unions faced legal punishment that forbade them from wielding collective bargaining power in this manner, police unions have not often faced legal punishment for the variety of ways they've engaged in misconduct or abused or misused their collective bargaining power to discriminate against officers who are not white.¹²⁶ Additionally, recent research on the rise of collective bargaining rights for law enforcement officers in Florida demonstrated a positive correlation between securing collective bargaining rights and increases in police brutality.¹²⁷

Given the US history of staunch opposition to organized labor, concerns about challenging police union power as having a collateral negative impact on other labor unions are understandable. Ultimately, differences in the treatment and rights of police unions compared to other labor unions, as well as a demonstrated history of police antagonism toward labor unions,

¹²⁴ Eli Hager and Weihua Li, "White US police union bosses protect officers accused of racism," *The Guardian*, June 10, 2020.

¹²⁵ Hager and Li, "White US police union bosses protect officers accused of racism."

¹²⁶ Benjamin Blake, Jennifer Eidson, Erin Berry, and Jennifer Wachtel, "A House Divided: African American Workers Struggle Against Segregation," Unions Making History in America, online exhibition, University of Maryland University Libraries Special Collections and University Archives.

¹²⁷ Researchers focusing on collective bargaining rights for sheriffs' deputies in Florida after a 2003 court decision found that the adoption of collective bargaining rights led to a 40% increase in violent incidents of misconduct among sheriffs' offices, concentrated among unionized sheriffs' offices. Dhammika Dharmapala, Richard H. McAdams, and John Rappaport, "Collective Bargaining Rights and Police Misconduct: Evidence from Florida," *The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization*, December 28, 2020, 33.

suggests that targeting the sources of police union power that allow for obstacles to reform and accountability are not inherently an attack on all labor unions. Labor unions do not have the same career functions as police and police unions, such as the ability to decide when to use lethal force nor the same safety net, such as police union contract provisions and disciplinary grievance arbitration procedures. Policy that focuses on police accountability and invest-divest efforts does not have to be an affront to all unions. Labor unions whose members have joined the calls to remove police union affiliates and challenge police union power or whose members have themselves been victims of police brutality, should feel confident in committing to mission statements that highlight social justice values for the labor movement at large without feeling constrained by the potential blowback from police unions and/or anti-labor government decisions for wanting police accountability.

The Modern Era: What Are Labor Unions Doing for Police Accountability?

While hesitation exists among labor leaders and labor union members to expel police unions from affiliations or to take a public stance against police unions, there are factions of the organized labor movement and the police accountability movement overall that are working to address the obstacles posed by police unions and their contracts and influence. Two recent notable efforts include:

- **San Antonio, Texas** A coalition of police reform activists from the organizations Fix SAPD and the Texas Organizing Project introduced a ballot initiative to strip police of their collective bargaining rights—which other public unions, except firefighters, in the city do not have. Organizers note that these collective bargaining rights are key to

blocking accountability and punishment for police misconduct.¹²⁸ Though these efforts narrowly failed at the ballot box in 2021, the work of Fix SAPD stoked discussion and raised awareness of the power to evade discipline and accountability within the police contract. Nearly 50% of voters supported the measure to repeal the police department's CBA power¹²⁹, highlighting a relatively new shift in attitudes among the public to support the confrontation of police union power in the city. Fix SAPD has since evolved into ACT 4 SA.

- **Seattle, Washington** The MLK Labor Council leveraged an ultimatum for their police union member, the Seattle Police Officers Guild (SPOG), to either commit to addressing racism within policing or face expulsion from the council. When time passed and SPOG had not responded, the labor council kept their word and voted to expel the police union.¹³⁰

Despite hesitance from some members and leaders in organized labor, other labor union members continue to organize around challenging police unions' power to block accountability and reform and to challenge labor leaders to take a stand against police unions. Specific labor union chapters, such as the Writers Guild of America, East are making public statements condemning police unions and the tendency of organized labor to stand in solidarity with police unions.¹³¹ Beyond this, there are also campaigns and organizations within labor unions that have

¹²⁸ Fechter, "Ballot Initiative to Gut San Antonio Police Union Draws Opposition from AFL-CIO."

¹²⁹ Iris Dimmick, "She 'listens first, acts second': ACT 4 SA's Ananda Tomas won't stop pushing for police reform," *San Antonio Report*, January 29, 2023.

¹³⁰ Takahama, "Seattle Police Officers Guild Expelled from King County's Largest Labor Council."

¹³¹ Writers Guild of America, East, "Writers Guild of America, East Unanimously Passes Resolution Calling on the AFL-CIO to Disaffiliate with the International Union of Police Associations," *Writers Guild of America, East*, June 8, 2020.

emerged to discuss challenging and expelling police unions from the labor movement. This includes [SEIU Drop the Cops](#), [Cop-Free AFSCME](#), [Labor Against Racist Terror](#), and the [National Lawyers Guild Labor and Employment Student Committee](#).

Conclusion

Organized labor continues to be an important and influential sector when it comes to social justice and politics, especially on a local level. Labor unions, labor federations, and regional labor councils have the potential to leverage their power in the struggle to hold police accountable for brutality and misconduct through a variety of means. One of the most important ways they can do so is by demanding police union affiliates (where applicable) commit to addressing problems within policing or else face expulsion from formal organized labor environment—as the MLK Labor Council did in Seattle.

Members of the public and labor unions throughout the US have recognized a longstanding history of police antagonism against workers and the ways in which police unions stand separate from other labor unions, both on their own volition and in their treatment by policymakers. However, despite these differences in function and treatment of police unions compared to other labor unions, some labor leaders and academic researchers have called for police accountability advocates (both in labor unions and in general) to work together with police unions rather than isolate or alienate them by expelling them from affiliations with the organized labor movement at-large.¹³² At the same time, academics have begun to examine the rise of Blue Lives Matter

¹³² Fechter, “Ballot Initiative to Gut San Antonio Police Union Draws Opposition from AFL-CIO.” Cunningham, et. al. note that challenging police contract and statutory provisions is a difficult and politically risky task, citing recommendations from other researchers to try instead to incorporate police unions in the work to develop and implement police reform. Jamein Cunningham, Donna Feir, and Rob Gillezeau, “Overview of Research on Collective Bargaining Rights and Law Enforcement Officer’s Bills of Rights,” December 3, 2020.

culture within policing and police unions and how that culture of blue solidarity serves to undermine broader goals for social justice, including those goals of the organized labor movement.¹³³ The rigid blue solidarity specifically entrenched in police unions would make alliances between labor unions and police unions to advance social justice and anti-racist goals a difficult, if not impossible, task.

However, calls to disaffiliate police unions from other labor unions and to challenge police union power by targeting police collective bargaining rights have largely been met with silence or reluctance on the part of organized labor. Such wariness is not unfounded—throughout history, US leadership has crafted legislation that inhibits workers from organizing and building power. There is a recurring fear that by targeting police unions’ collective bargaining/contract privileges, other labor unions can be caught in the crosshairs. But police unions, both in their own decisions and attitudes and specifically in their treatment by local and state governments are a unique type of union. Police are considered unique by the nature of their employment, due to their power of discretion to use lethal force and the historic pattern of police professionalization that insulated the institution from other sectors of workers. Legislation that has harmed organized labor often deliberately carves out protections for police unions. Organized labor’s misuse of collective bargaining to further discriminatory means was met with legal punishment that forbade unions from abusing their collective bargaining powers. Yet the misuse of collective bargaining by police—to shield officers from accountability for committing harm, to demand more and more of city budgets that are often already stretched thin, to rehire officers fired for acts as egregious as sexual assault, promoting white supremacist beliefs, or murder—has not yet

¹³³ Mark P Thomas and Steven Tufts, “Blue Solidarity: Police Unions, Race and Authoritarian Populism in North America,” *Work, Employment and Society* 34, no. 1 (February 1, 2020)

been adequately challenged enough to eradicate these problems in policing. If police can be carved out of consideration when crafting policy and legislation that weakens organized labor power, the opposite should be true when attempting to create policy and legislation to get rid of the obstacles to reform, accountability, transparency, and safety that exist within many police union contracts.¹³⁴

If labor unions, labor federations, and labor councils have stated missions and goals around solidarity and equality for all working people to live free without oppression, these values are fundamentally at odds with the acceptance of and solidarity with police unions who often do not share these values.¹³⁵ Police violence and police oppression of members of the labor movement and members of society at-large is reinforced, validated, and strengthened by police unions. This problem will not be solved if left unaddressed.

Key Recommendations

For Advocates and Labor Organizers

Below are two key recommendations for working with members of organized labor, either as members of organized labor yourself or as outside advocates focused on police accountability and challenging police union power.

- **Public education is a key starting point for advocacy.**

When engaging in conversations with traditional labor unions about challenging police

¹³⁴ Thomas and Tufts note, however, that because EMTs and firefighters are often tied to police when it comes to legislation/policy exceptions, they will likely also be alienated when challenging police collective bargaining powers enshrined in legislation/policy. Advocates, organizers, and policymakers will need to explore ways they can reform police union contracts without negatively impacting firefighters and EMTs. Thomas and Tufts, “Blue Solidarity.”

¹³⁵ Here, this means that Blue Lives Matter culture is at odds with Black Lives Matter culture, which organized labor often aligns with. For more analysis, see Thomas and Tufts, “Blue Solidarity.”

union power, meet people where they are in their understanding of the problem and take time to address concerns they may have about the potential negative impacts on organized labor.

- Confront potential misunderstandings or concerns around the relationships between police unions and traditional labor unions. For example, critics of expelling police unions from labor federations often cite that an attack on the police union is an attack on all workers.¹³⁶ Work to address these concerns and build strategies to ensure that police accountability efforts focused on police unions do not unintentionally harm other non-police labor unions.
- Review historical events as an important component of public education. For example, develop lessons that discuss the dangers that police and police unions posed to labor unions throughout history. Examine how police and police unions continue to be a danger to labor unions through police brutality against striking workers, police murders of union members, etc.
 - An excellent public education tool is the MPD150 comprehensive timeline of policing in Minneapolis, Minnesota that includes the historic tensions

¹³⁶ President of the New York City Police Benevolent Association (PBA) Patrick Lynch penned an op-ed in June 2020 stating, “Our brothers and sisters in the labor movement should be very careful. If they support a successful campaign to strip police officers of our union rights, they will see those same tactics repeated against teachers, bus drivers, nurses and other public sector workers across this country.” Patrick J. Lynch, “Police Unions Protect Us All: The Head of NYC’s PBA Defends His Embattled Organization,” *New York Daily News*, June 21, 2020.

Even critics of police unions worry about the collateral damage effect of targeting police union power and their collective bargaining agreements as the same critique of police unions’ power and costs to cities have been leveled against public sector workers such as teachers and nurses: Aaron Bekemeyer, “The Long Tie between Police Unions and Police Violence — and What to Do About It,” *Washington Post*, June 9, 2020. As Michelle Chen notes, “It’s difficult to argue against police unionization in theory, if you adhere to the principle that everyone who works has a right to organize.” Michelle Chen, “Police Unions Don’t Serve the People. Can the Labor Movement Force Them To?” *The Nation*, January 9, 2015.

between police and organized labor.¹³⁷ These materials can be used with traditional labor union members as well as with the general public.

- Eve L. Ewing’s 2020 article for *Vanity Fair*, “Blue Bloods: America’s Brotherhood of Police Officers,” is a good introduction to the history of police unions. Ewing gives a concise overview of police as antagonists to the labor movement, citing both the Fraternal Order of Police and labor historians.¹³⁸

- **Demand that labor federations and unions reconcile their stated mission and values with their allegiances to police and police unions.**

Given the historical context and the current growing movement of labor organizing, labor federations like the AFL-CIO and labor unions like SEIU must reconcile their stated missions and values with their allegiance to police and police unions.¹³⁹

- Affiliated members of the AFL-CIO, including the United Auto Workers Local 2865 and the Writers Guild of America, East have referred to the mission statement of the AFL-CIO when calling upon leadership to cut ties with the police union—the International Union of Police Associations—that falls under the AFL-CIO umbrella.¹⁴⁰

For Academic and Policy Researchers

¹³⁷ MPD150, *Enough Is Enough: A 150 Year Performance Review of the Minneapolis Police Department*, (Minneapolis: MPD 150, 2020).

¹³⁸ Ewing, “Blue Bloods.”

¹³⁹ Despite declines or stalls in union membership, labor organizing both inside and outside of unions has risen in the past decade, as workers fight for better wages, job security, and better working conditions as well as fighting for racial, economic, gender, and climate justice. Andrea Dehlendorf, “The Future of the Labor Movement,” *The Forge*, September 8, 2020.

More research is needed on building relationships with police unions as a strategy to impact police accountability. A common remark by both researchers and advocates who are challenging police union power is that organized labor and social justice activists should work *with* police unions to build allyship as they work for police reform. Very little formal research into building these kinds of relationships exist, but of what does exist, findings indicate that the Blue Lives Matter culture of police and blue solidarity has created a seemingly impenetrable wall around police and that efforts to build allyship between police unions and reform advocates will likely be futile. Police reform and police accountability advocacy would benefit from research into ways to continue pushing for their goals without spending time and energy on building relationships that may not ultimately prove helpful. Such work could include:

- **Research to support amending police collective bargaining power without negative effects on the collective bargaining power of labor unions.** This could include data gathering, review, and analysis of collective bargaining agreements and their impact on police misconduct; the impact of collective bargaining agreement reform on both public and private labor unions, and specifically on police unions and associations; and policy research on the role of local and state law to limit collective bargaining agreements with police unions and increase police accountability.¹⁴¹
- **Research on ways to advance invest-divest goals in the face of police union political power and police union contract provisions.** This could include surveys of efforts to allocate portions of city budgets to community resources rather than disproportionately funding policing.

¹⁴¹ This specifically means provisions within police contracts that block accountability, transparency, safety, etc. For more on this topic see the previous memo in this series, Duggan, “Police Unions and the Obstacles They Pose.”

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Additional Resources

Labor union members continue to organize around challenging police unions’ power to block accountability and reform and to challenge labor leaders to take a stand against police unions.

- **Cop-Free AFSCME**

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) rank-and-file members and labor activists committed to fighting racial and economic injustice. This organization provides a template resolution for AFSCME local leaders to endorse the Cop-Free AFSCME campaign, provides further resources and statistics relating to police, police organizations, and organized labor, and ways to get involved.

- **Labor Against Racist Terror**

A Twitter page dedicated to uplifting resources and information about police violence and accountability efforts. “We believe that our unions must address the ongoing crisis of killings & other violence against people of color, with solidarity and direct action.”

- **National Lawyers Guild (NLG)**

The NLG has hosted webinars with the Labor and Employment Student Committee as well as the City University New York (CUNY) Labor Coalition and CUNY NLG on the topic of police organizations and unions' relation to the labor movement and traditional labor unions. These events bring experts and organizers from across the labor movement together to discuss ways to challenge police union power as a member of organized labor.

- **SEIU Drop the Cops**

A rank-and-file member-led campaign to disaffiliate cop unions from Service Employees International Union (SEIU). This group provides demands, hosts events, and connects workers across the labor movement to advocate for disaffiliation from police unions and stand against police violence.

For more resources, news, and ways to get involved in community safety and police accountability work, visit the Community Resource Hub's website.