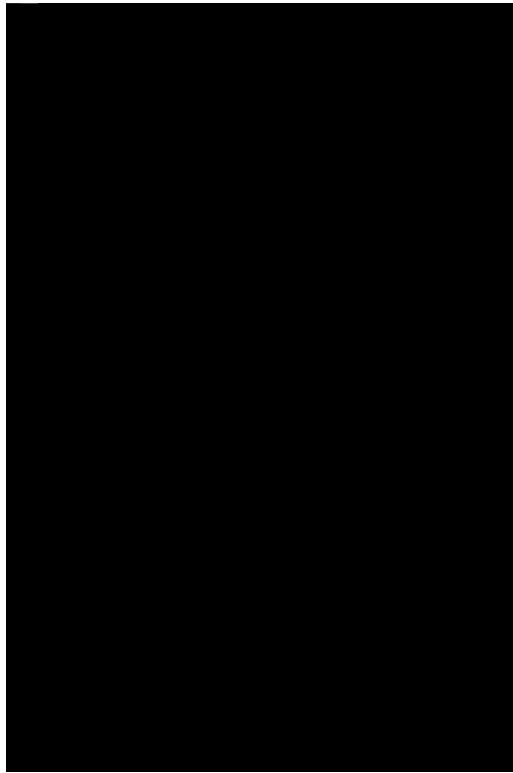


***New Community Organizing of Low-Wage Workers::
A Conversation with Andrew Friedman of Make the Road NY***

by Sharryn Kasmir

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Andrew Friedman

Q: How did Make the Road begin?

AF: Both Mona and I had a background in organizing workers on campus or organizing workers in the garment industry. Apart from activism and advocating in Central America related workers' issues.

Both of us found ourselves in law school - we found ourselves having been pushed by their parents. I went because I was interested in labor systems and change. But upon getting to law school both of us were really committed to not speaking for other people and not even unquestioned the power that lawyers and judges and legislators have but rather trying to use the law and legislation to not represent our own participation more, earn university's public policy or that on as a way to catalyze labor change.

Q: The two of you met in law school and came up with the idea to start the organization together...

AF: We were students and we were very process focused and so not a day we had a reading group then about the relationships between law and organizing. We spent a lot of time in the abstract at a conceptual level. And then we spent a lot of time about issues of process, questions of decision, and non-mercenary work pace.

After about eight months that were very ready and very divorced from anything on the ground - so we said we were why don't we try and do something and even just as a learning exercise we were going to get our hands dirty. We started meeting people in different neighborhoods around the city and saying would you be interested in a partnership? Almost everyone we met with said that we were lawyers. Let's get a ton of work for you.

But a pastor that we knew said: You know people need lawyers because they don't have power - they do need lawyers but what they really need is power. That would be best so actually we could find some organizers. After having had meetings in Bedford Park and up in the South Bronx and in Jackson Heights we were so ecstatic to find a way to share our perspective. He was an experienced

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AF In the Lower East side or many years- of our members new to the because they had come and been supportive to some of the special work pace campaigns that we had done over the years- people had some degree of a party- Most of it was just spending the year on people out and taking serious other concerns and not becoming defensive and talking about concrete things we could do as we structured this as a requirement to work together to respond to those concerns-

Q: How many members does Local 2006 have now?

AF One hundred or so- A decent size- It's certainly not big but it's nine or ten shops and I think there's a real opportunity- employers are also in the process of talking with our organizers and have actually signed a neutrality agreement saying that workers can decide for themselves

AF It's interesting - It's not that the owners work at these stores and the owners who operate are neighbors - It's not so easy, more connected and probably so, the degree of solidarity with the concerns of the workers of the stores - It's not so easy for the poor, migrant workers - It's really something that matters to a lot of us - It's about our dignity - It's about being treated with respect by the employers - It's not so easy for case to make - It's certainly more interested -

Q: Are you thinking about bringing this campaign to Queens?

AF Yeah, we're really interested in trying to replicate the campaign on a commercial strip in Queens like Junction Boulevard or 1st Avenue or Roosevelt Avenue - We're also very interested in trying to do a little bit and soon at some of the mass employers like the Queens Mall, Waldbaum's, and ... employers - They are the beneficiaries of the tax subsidies - So we have, but the leverage points, the employers, the parent corporation that owns the activity or state governments that are involved in the subsidies - There are some exceptions possible - It's a little bit more challenging to steer consumers in the same way - It's a little more heterogeneous population and working population -

Q: Would you use the same union partner there?

AF I think we would - It's been an interesting ... ? ... ? ... ?

A

Q: What do you see as the major issues on the horizon for Bushwick, and how are you seeing the current economic crisis play out in the neighborhood?

AF: In general, most are as usual, but a number of people are observing some things that are happening so that order of day laborers to find work. And then they often see more vulnerability in the neighborhood. They've encountered problems on a job where they've picked up a job on... 100th Avenue in Queens. You know, they don't see a comparable job in the NY D now because of the poisonous tone of the... that debate whereas a couple of years ago they, maybe would have gone to the police.

... of the... in the neighborhood... that a lot of the... that... but... are being replaced by... in... - In that... but... that because... were... that... or abandoned and so that... a... effect... the... number of work opportunities.

In Bushwick there's an increasing corporate employment structure - there are fewer and fewer... and... and... employers and... more... that are run by private equity... the... Donuts... the... Group... as opposed to... owned... - Along... Avenue when we started there were... maybe... stores with... to... don't... in... - there were... own... neighborhood... the... Now... a... a... -

... cuts both ways. In some ways there are some... opportunities when there's... that... are... to... practices... -... stores often... pay people... or... day... street... but McDonalds... tend to pay... the... way... they... have... Even... that... with... labor laws are not paying... benefits and they're... more... in some ways with... exportation -... the... It's better that... up... but obvious... our... the... er... are... -

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